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At present, Iryna Morozova supervises a multi-year project of syntactic profiling human speech by using Gestalt approach. She does research in the following spheres: sociolinguistics; psycholinguistics; cognitive, communicative, applied linguistics; germanistics; general linguistics; theory and practice of translation; intercultural communication. She is the author of four monographs (Structural and organisational role of the English simple sentence in different functional styles and registers, 1998; Speech signals as a specific technique of optimising interpersonal communication in Odesa linguistic school: Integrative approach, 2016; Paradigmatic analysis of the elementary communicative units: Structure and semantics in the light of the Gestalt-theory in modern English, 2009), four grammar books recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine for university students majoring in

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Iryna B. Morozova actively participates in international conferences and projects, with reports and papers presented in Ukraine and abroad (among those conferences in the UK, the USA, Belarus and the Russian Federation etc.). She also served as a reviewer for IAFOR conferences. Iryna Morozova is a member of dissertation defence boards in Ukraine and works as a reviewer and/or editorial board member for Ukrainian and international linguistic journals.

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Editor's Introduction

It is our great pleasure and my personal honor as new editor to introduce Volume 8 Issue 1 of the *IAFOR Journal of Literature & Librarianship*. This issue is a selection of papers received through open submissions directly to our journal.

In September 2019 I was invited to step in as editor by the journal's Executive Editor, Dr Joseph Haldane, CEO of IAFOR, and Chairman of its Board of Directors. I thank him for entrusting me to oversee the title in this exciting period of transition.

First of all, gratitude needs to be expressed to the journal's former editor, Dr Richard Donovan from Japan's Kansai University, who has published many excellent issues since 2012. Thanks also to the IAFOR Publications Office and its manager, Nick Potts, for his support and past help while I acted as editor of the *IAFOR Journal of Education* (11 issues beginning 2014), and one issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Language Learning* in 2018.

Hitting the ground running is never easy for a new editor and my first tasks was to strengthen the journal's Editorial and Reviewers' Boards and many scholars were invited to join the freshened team. I would like to welcome and thank all the new academics coming on board for their professionalism and their expeditious reviews. We now comprise of 26 scholars from more than 15 countries, yet we hope the journal will become more international in time and still welcome teachers and scholars from various regions of the world who wish to join us.

We are all looking forward to 2020 and will be making some exciting announcements about the future direction of the journal in the next few months. Please see the journal website for the latest information and to read our past issues: <https://iafor.org/journal/iafor-journal-of-literature-and-librarianship/>.

Finally, we would like to thank all those authors who entrusted us with their work. Manuscripts, once passing initial screening, were peer-reviewed anonymously by at least four members of our team, resulting in eight being accepted for this issue.

With this wealth of thought-provoking manuscripts in this issue, I wish you a safe and educative journey through the pages that follow.

Bernard Montoneri

Editor

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Negotiating Identity: Sexuality and Gender in Olumide Popoola's *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017)

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Abstract

“Sexuality” and “gender” are two cultural indexes regarded by gender and culture theorists as well as their allied feminist critics as fundamental to the construction of the Self. It could be observed however that, the spaces and platforms for the construction of identity are diverse and complex when viewed from the psychosocial platform. In this discussion, I elect to interrogate Olumide Popoola’s *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) as a textual space where sexuality and gender indexes are yoked within psychosocial experiences to complexly negotiate personal identity. I engage the concepts “sexuality” and “gender” with the aim to use these as tools to examine the construction of an identity for a transgender African in diaspora in the novel. “Place of negotiation” and “self-discovery” are analytical variables understood in this discussion as inherent in “the analytic third” espoused by the psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden, illustrating also “the third space of enunciation” explained by the postcolonial theorist, Homi K. Bhabha. Thus, standing on a fair blend of mainstream psychoanalytic and postcolonial critical platforms, I read *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) as a postcolonial diaspora text-space where identity becomes a phenomenon emerging through a psychosocial process for the diasporic African person. In this novel, the protagonist's identity emerges through a process that unfolds within a space of complex dialectic tensions between his sexuality consciousness, his gender category unconscious, and the sociocultural environment. In this essay I conclude that sexuality and gender, as they play significant role alongside the protagonist's experience of cultural dispersal, are fundamental indexes for mapping his identity and self-discovery as an African in a diasporic space.

Keywords: self-discovery, gender, identity, sexuality, the analytic third, the third space

Introduction

The idea of an African diaspora, particularly when understood in the context of its connection with the people of African descent through Pan Africanism, has been located within the discourse of either transatlantic, internationalism, or transnational studies (Palmer, 2000; Zeleza, 2005; Edozie, 2012). Even though the key word “diaspora” in this phrase has been contested, in terms of its methodological constituents and “conceptual difficulties” (Zeleza, 2005, p. 2), “diaspora” has been used in contemporary postcolonial discourse within the understanding of transnational or global geographic dislocation and cross-cultural displacement. Fundamentally, diaspora discourse provides the platform to reflect on the developments in cultural and human evolution across civilizations. Scholars such as Rogers Brubaker, on the strength of global culture, have for instance considered “diaspora” to mean “Boundaries crossing people” (Adamson, 2008).

In the context of diaspora studies, knowledge about the exemplifications of the diasporic individual or group experiences draws attention to the interdependent relationship between culture, identity, sexuality and gender conflicts, and the spaces for their reconciliations and or (re)negotiations. This knowledge about the diverse (often complex) meaning of Diaspora is what I take in this discussion as fundamental to understanding postmodern perspectives about the discourse of identity construction. My basic premise is that, through studies and reflections on the idea of diaspora, culture, gender, and sexuality issues thrive properly with the subject of postcoloniality. By this I therefore propose to expand the discourse by calling attention to the postcolonial body as crucial in the context of the cross currents highlighting the intersections between the experiences of colonialism and migration. To argue this, I have elected to interrogate Olumide Popoola’s coming-of-age novel *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) as a textual space where sexuality and gender indexes are yoked with cultural and social experiences to negotiate identity in complex ways. In other words, I engage the concepts “sexuality” and “gender” with the aim of using their significations to interrogate the construction of identity for a transgender body of the African diaspora protagonist, Karl, of the novel.

The Context of *When We Speak of Nothing* as a Diaspora Novel

The immediate socio-cultural context of the diasporic novel are the cultural exigencies triggered by globalism and globalisation. With the rise of globalism, particularly its social and cultural dimensions, understanding the complexities surrounding the idea of a global culture has led scholars to espouse postmodern approaches that, while seeking to clarify the concept of identity, have only made it even more problematic. In a sense, part of the problem created by globalism is how it has itself facilitated the presence of diasporas, across the global spaces, whose experiences have been marked by destabilization and fragmentation of homes, communities, nations and most significantly the idea of identity. The growth of globalism, when specifically applied to diasporic experiences, complicates the representation of cultural experiences as a result of the blurred boundaries that have emerged which trouble ideas of nationalism, individual or group identity. By its constant-assumed and expanding position with new complexities (Gonzalez, 2010, p. 34) globalism has culminated in what SeyhanAzade in *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001) observes as creating opportunities for diasporas to emerge, survive and thrive. Indeed, for Azade the dynamics of globalism and globalisation harness a broad spectrum of ideas concerning the platforms where the encounters between “the self” and “the Others” who are distant from one another are determined by mutual alterity (2001, p. 18). Diasporic experiences compel the re-organization of nations and the sense of nationalism by

being instrumental to (re)configuring, for instance, the intersections of sexuality and gender with self-identity and citizenship. To be sure, the ideas of origin, home, and place of belonging, as it turns out in the process of the creation of global diasporic cultural realities and identity or identities, have become central to diasporic experiences because they can be deployed to interrogate the sense of “in-betweenness” that individuals and groups often find difficult to communicate. To put it succinctly globalism, transcending the physical border crossing, maps out a complex cultural space where the notion of identity is negotiated or renegotiated, which examples of the diaspora novel have used as a template to develop their narratives.

The Norwegian Anthropologist, Fredrick Barth submits that identity can be mapped not only by discarding of home/local culture to assimilate the culture of the locals, by emphasizing/dwelling on the similarities between the new and the old culture, disregarding the differences, but also by forging an “identity” through the differences suggested by the old and new experiences (p. 34). From this, one can discern that many diasporic individuals are constantly in a state of identity flux, since they are often forced to consciously or unconsciously express different types of self-awareness as dictated mostly by the participant's “new culture”. There is no doubt that diasporic individuals are in a constant state of identity flux, one that is experienced psychosocially through their quests for the expression of self by negotiation or renegotiation. An important point here is how the dominant culture will often dictate the status for self-identification. It is in the midst of expressing the identity flux experience that many diasporas discover how the tangent cultural structure has come to be responsible for the walls of conflicting ideas that propel the creation of a space that must be negotiated; space within which the individual self can be constructed.

Culture, according to Anthony P. Cohen in “Culture as Identity: An Anthropologist View” (1993) is the vehicle through which individuals and groups make meaning of the self (p. 197). In Cohen’s view, particularly his linking of symbols with the means of disseminating culture, the role of linguistic reconstructions (as symbols) in the evaluation of what is drafted into the formation and acceptance of self becomes fundamental. After all, the complexities trailing the use of symbolic terminologies and concepts as a result of cultural differences and variations play a vital role in the psychology of cultural reconciliation and acceptance by individuals and groups. A similar inference to Cohen's view can be drawn from Winnicott's position that an individual is often torn between the true self and the false self, which translates to the resultant desire for a defense; especially in an environment that does not accommodate it (Winnicott, 1960, p. 582).

The views emerging from the body of knowledge about the relationship between globalism, globalisation, and culture cumulatively understood, provide us with the context of the argument in this essay that the diasporic individual projected in Popoola’s *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017), Karl – the protagonist of the novel – is captured to exist in a state of “in-betweenness” (which refers to the “Third”, a self). It is argued here that the author created a process of dialectic cultural tension through which Karl's identity emerges. These tensions are facilitated by his quest for the proper knowledge of his identity, gender, and his African roots. Not only that, Karl’s quest for proper knowledge about identity, it is observed, contextualises the delineation of the social condition that validates his experiences of cultural dispersal while sojourning in Africa and living in London.

By and large, the discourse of diasporic prose narrative has come to entail the literary projection of diverse postmodern experiences. These experiences have been sometimes expressed cumulatively as “culture shock.” William Safran in his work “Diaspora in Modern Societies:

Myths of Homeland and Return” identifies six features of diaspora which are useful for the discussion of any diasporic focused text. These features are dispersal, collective memory, loss and exile, alienation, respect and longing for homeland (Safran, 2018, pp. 65–67). Safran's observations emphasize the crucial shift of interest from the physical to the psychosocial nuances that highlight diasporic experiences of individuals in many diasporic-themed novels. The diasporic African prose fiction has seemingly placed a premium on aspects of these African diasporic experiences, thereby serving as a text-space for interrogating the ever-unsettled debates about the true representation of the African experience. In other words, a good number of African diaspora novels represent tangible and intangible psychosocial realities confronting Africans living as part of a diasporic community. Amongst other things, African diasporic writers have struggled to project experiences that not only bare links with African colonial experiences but also project the playing field of sociocultural events happening beyond those experiences. Many of these writers have shown how race, gender, ethnicity and social class have taken a towering space amidst the realities that affect the psychological perceptions of the identities of most diasporic characters. Positioned as historical and socio-cultural concepts, gender, race, ethnicity and social class are constructed in many diaspora text spaces against the background of the realities facing the individual in a globalised world that aims at a collective yet dispersed identity. Indeed, as this article reveals through an analysis of the lead character's experience of the concepts of gender and the body in *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017), the African diasporic novel has a penchant for interrogating the psychosocial journeys individuals have to embark upon in their quest to fit in; men and women who are looking for a space of belonging and to have a sense of self and identity in a “new” place.

When We Speak of Nothing (2017) tells a compelling story of two boys, Karl and Abu who live in the inner city estates of London. On the surface, the story captures the experiences of Karl's and Abu's common struggles to cope with racism and gender conflicts. Alongside these intriguing themes, the novel tangentially explores the issue of restricted economic opportunities in London on the part of their parents. Karl, on whom the narrative takes a special focus, is a transgender teenager whose mother is an African migrant and an emotionally unstable character. Karl's struggles with gender and identity discrimination in a transnational space as well as how various cultural categories figure in his journey towards self-discovery provide the narrative context for the novel's concerns with the experiences of sexuality, gender, and identity. Abu, Karl's best friend whose parents are migrants from the Middle East, battles with self -identity in the process of a quest towards wholeness in the midst of peer and racial pressures.

The story begins with a scene in which Karl and Abu are harassed and bullied by “three wannabe guys they knew from sixth form” (*When We Speak of Nothing*, p. 7). This scene projects the social stigmatization that both boys suffer in the streets of London. Abu prides himself as the manlier of the two friends with a self-ordained obligation to protect Karl from the bully wannabes. Karl's feeling of insecurity, with himself and with the social milieu; particularly his internal gender conflict and his feeling of incompleteness with how he eventually negotiates these experiences to reach a stage of self completeness as a growing adult are also narrated across the text. The feeling of gender incompleteness coupled with the sociocultural pressure in the city of London drive him to latch onto an opportunity to go to Africa. This opportunity is provided to allow him to meet his father, Adebajo for the first time since he was born and it comes as he discovers a letter from Uncle Tunde, his father's brother. This communication and connection is facilitated by Geoffrey, his guardian and allotted social service caregiver, who is appointed to manage Karl through his sex change process. Port Harcourt, Nigeria becomes the space where his anticipation of attaining cultural wholeness

begins to germinate. This is at first a nightmarish experience for him as Adebajo rejects Karl's transgender body. Adebajo is expecting to see a girl but is disappointed by what he sees; a boy. It is only through his encounter and social meetings with other characters in the novel including John, his father's driver, Uncle Tunde, Janoma, and Nakale, that he is able to forge a sense of self. Through these characters his quest for sexuality and identity wholeness is completed towards the conclusion of the narrative.

Negotiating Identity through the Body, Sexuality and Gender Indexes in *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017)

The question of the malleability of identity in the conflict of self-construction and negation, as informed by the cultural and other dialectic tensions projected in the diasporic space, has engaged the interest of both the literary critic and literary theoreticians. In paraphrasing Barth's argument on this, Adelaida Reyes (2014) notes that:

... perceptions set off the interplay between human actors who enact their differences and, in so doing, create a boundary between Self and Other, between belonging and non-belonging. The Self is thus defined through differentiation from an Other, in an environment or a context in which their perception of each other as different is articulated, communicated and enacted (p. 3).

Identity creation in any diasporic environment such as the London environment in *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) is projected as transcending any form of cultural assertions that might be instigated by a straightforward case of migration. One way in which this is observed in Popoola's novel is to pay attention to how sexuality and gender have been implicated as fundamental cultural indexes in the construction of Karl's body. As cultural ideals, sexuality and gender have become fields of exploration in diasporic prose, they are often projected within the purview of the body. This is particularly the case when identity construction is projected for gender negotiation or renegotiation. It is in this light that the issue of identity in *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) is explored within the framework of the psychosocial relationship of sexuality, gender and the body, leading theoretically to the unraveling of how these concepts are constructed and negotiated. This is a plausible theoretical argument that has been imaginatively engaged in many diasporic novels. Thus, in this novel Karl's sexuality and gender are assumed to have been propelled by the dynamics of cultural oppositions or of the foreign structures underscoring the reality of his body. The body, it is shown in the case of the protagonist responds to, or more appropriately, resists the assaults of neocolonialism, affirming the position that the body is a result of an effect rather than a terminus.

In *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) Popoola conceptualizes, with the delineation of Karl's character, the idea of bodily negotiations as a process rather than as a condition for understanding identity. Indeed, the protagonist's body takes on formed relationships and socio-cultural structures that encompasses much more than what might be normally assumed in cultural discourses. This process leads to the full realization, the completeness of his gender category and ultimately his identity. The postcolonial transgender body which Karl parades in *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) is stereotypically a queer space. Thus, the idea of transgender itself is traded within the province of a combination of biological and psychosocial essentialisms in the novel. Karl's internal conflict develops out of the prevailing psychosocial challenges and this significantly affects the sort of relationship and bonding he eventually shares with his family members and his friends. Geoffrey, Karl's mother, in addition to his

friend Abu, and Abu's parents are also supportive of his transformation. The implication of the support Karl receives from those close to him in his immediate social life help to resolve his internal conflict concerning the acceptance of his body and his choice of biological gender category. Karl's body becomes a point of tension, placed as core in the delineation of his transgender character and the process of the discovery of his identity. *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017), to this end, imaginatively insinuates the fluidity of sexuality and bodily representation as against the definition of the body as "The entire physical structure of a human being" (p. 133). It is important to reiterate the fact that the conflict of perceptions, which trails Karl's body in the novel, is geared towards validating the dynamics of social construction and not stemming in biological essentialism. The question remains, however, as to whether there is a part of Karl that is still largely female owing to his display of traditionally feminine behavioral patterns.

Karl's reluctance towards Janoma on their first sexual encounter is evident of his conflict with himself. With him and Janoma alone in Janoma's aunt's small shop, for the first time in his life, his true sexual self is triggered when he finds his "body switched on, head burning up":

And the burning in his throat. The burning that just wouldn't leave since Janoma had taken his hand a few days ago when they were sitting together in the taxi. The burning that had returned when she leaned on him at Nakale's party (*When We Speak of Nothing*, pp. 170-171).

This encounter is fundamental in the discussion of the process of the negotiation of both his body and his sexuality to arrive at the construction of his identity. The encounter can be regarded as his moment of transfiguration because it reflects a moment when he ceases to see himself as a "freak" but rather as a human being- a man. The warmth with which he is accepted by Janoma in Port Harcourt goes a long way to concretize Karl's conviction that Nigeria is a country where he can be himself without discrimination or segregation. Indeed, he comes to the full knowledge of himself; Nigeria becomes a cultural space of reconciliation after his encounter with Janoma and other people.

Furthermore, the moment captures the point of self-recognition (in a psychosocial sense). This form of self-recognition itself becomes a diasporic space where the self requires reconciliation in order to assume a relatable position in the process of achieving complete wholeness in society. The narrator therefore comments on, and captures, this experience thus: "The roads we travel on in the end have to get to one point or the other, otherwise it would be levitating." (*When We Speak of Nothing*, p. 177). Karl's sexual relationship with Janoma transcends a stage of uncertainty to an experience of confidence in a way that translates into positive acceptance of his other relationships. He is subsequently able to confront his mother about his father and about the insecurities he feels about being a transgender person on the streets of London without a mother to give him emotional support. The scenario – Karl's sexual encounter with Janoma – similarly reveals the space of the Body politics and negotiation that the postcolonial body is opened to in the process of self-formation. Critically, this scenario is playing out in a diasporic space where subjects are fluid and unstable and individuals are free to choose who they want to be. It must be reckoned therefore that, the freedom of choice open for Karl to choose is both liberating and troubling. It is liberating in the sense that it provides a room for him to attain self-realization but troubling because of the increased emotional distress, insecurities and the time for him to analyze the available choices and to minimize the risks associated with those choices. One can say also that, this freedom is what Karl utilizes to allow

him confront the internal conflict of self, and consequently the resolve to threads of being a nonconformist. As he says when he speaks with his father about his being transgender, “once you make dramatic statements with your body, you have to go there, all the way” (*When We Speak of Nothing*, p. 135).

Frenk (2011) is of the opinion that,

By self we mean the fundamental manner in which reality is subjectively experienced [...] by models of self I mean the understanding people have of themselves as individuals as there are manners in which to experience and interpret reality (p. 19).

According to Frenk, the search for the true self implies that the individual gradually loses connection to the framework within which to locate the Self and this has psychological cost (2011, p. 20). Thus, Karl sorts out his own self in tandem with the idea of Thomas Ogden’s psychoanalytical prescription that “the analytic third” is a subject that has to be sorted out. Karl’s body encompasses the complex contentions that influence his formation of the self and the discovery of his gender. He romances and embraces the concept of his body in a new environment, a place where he could be without the knowledge of his conflicted body announcing his presence.

For the first time in my life I’m able to walk around and just be. No hassle, no questions. No pity or sympathy or harassment or being beaten up. Just me...Bloody fucking me. *The first time* (*When We Speak of Nothing*, p. 142)

Surprisingly, it is in Nigeria that, that knowledge of his negotiated or constructed body is received with normalcy. Mena, the woman who sells food at John’s house, deduces Karl’s secret and she does not treat him as a lesser person because of it, nor does Nakale and most importantly, Janoma, with whom he explores his sexuality and forges a self-identity. In other words, Karl discovers a fundamental part of himself in Nigeria amidst the relationships and bonding he forms with some unexpected characters. He finds Nigeria a place where he could be himself, “without the bloody streets telling me otherwise” (*When We Speak of Nothing*, p. 209).

The position from which the diasporic individual makes claims to the construction of a perceptive, identifiable self has been variously called the “third space” by post-colonial theorist Homi. K. Bhabha, the “analytic space or third” by Ogden. Another term is the “liquid space of Slippage” used by Gayatri Spivak. Within these variations, the fluidity of the self-space remains constant at the point of negotiation from the angle of postcolonial theorists. Yet, the identity of the individual discovered within this space can be created and re-created to reflect a cause and effect relationship when viewed from the psychoanalytic perspective. Thus, as a psychoanalyst, Ogden in *The Location of the Subject* (1991) refers to this construction process as the interplay between the conscious and the unconscious:

It is the experience of doing battle with one’s static self-identity through the recognition of subjectivity (a human I-ness) that is the other to oneself...the perception of the other I-ness once perceived will not allow us to remain who we were and we cannot rest until we have somehow come to terms with its assault on who we have been prior to being interrupted by it (p. 2).

Theoretically, the formation of the self, in Ogden's view refers to the self and the “subject” as a decentered psychoanalytic subject whose formation process goes through a dialectic interplay between the conscious and the unconscious. Ogden's proposition sufficiently exposes the varying angles of identity negotiation and realization, where socio-cultural structures are confronted towards the creation of individuality and the true self. In *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) this, in fact, goes beyond fixed and pre-determined point within the cultural structures experienced by the protagonist in the process of his travelling from London to Nigeria. Karl's willingness to embark on a journey to meet his biological father creates the very opportunity needed to both consciously and unconsciously realize self-discovery and self-identity; to locate affirmation as a transgender person. Yet, the fluidity of the space between Karl's conscious and unconscious mind situates him appropriately in a queer category of identity. His encounters with people and their reception of his physical body provoke his re-evaluation of popular beliefs and the cultural and social values expressed by the majority, which ultimately harnesses the cultural fault lines in his perceptions about himself as a transgender individual into a single minority sexual category. Moreover, it contributes to the structural build of his identity in social, physical and psychological terms.

The ground upon which the novel ultimately makes demand of self-discovery is therefore beyond biological, political or economic contingencies. Rather, it is psychological and social simultaneously, translating to and revealing a more personal experience of the process of gendering than a communal one. Judith Butler, postulating on the performativity of both gender and sexuality has, after all, call attention to the allowance provided for the negotiation of these ideas in the space of socio-cultural interactions (1993, p. 101). Similarly, Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) believes that gender as sex is constructed; that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one and can also assume another gender” (p. 109). Butler further observes that the body is a situation, a passive medium on which cultural meanings are ascribed, redefining femininity and masculinity as instruments through which an appropriative and interpretive will determine a cultural meaning for itself (1993, p. 101). The body is thus represented in *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) as Butler conceives of it; an untouched foundation all the more powerful for interpretations outside culture (1993, p. 101).

No doubt *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017) explores the potential relationship between love and sexuality. But what makes this relationship more interesting, in this example, is the way in which Popoola captures the process of Karl's and Abu's attainments of self-discovery. Karl and Abu are both troubled teens who find a sense of accomplishment and self when they each fall for their respective love interests in the novel. Karl's personal conflict about his gender, his unemotionally available mother, a father that throws out the idea of bonding with him because of his gender identity and the pressure of street bullies all contribute to the evolution of his true self. Abu stays back in London when Karl goes in search of his father in Port Harcourt. While Karl is in Nigeria, Abu, is pressured by a new group of friends as he desperately desires an image that is street credible. His emotional divorce from his parents and friends stems out of his need to have a sense of belonging. The narrator informs us: “His face wasn't just stubborn: there was hurt there. Something that everyone seemed to miss had bubbled up to the surface” (*When We Speak of Nothing*, p. 124). He fights the urge to be himself in the midst of the chaos and is eventually tied to activities that spiral out of control after the killing of Mark Duggan, a black man who was shot dead by the police in Tottenham. Eventually, he begins to build a relationship with Nalini when they work on Mary Prince for a term paper. His growing love for Nalini prompts him to work towards being a better person and it is only after he comes out of the hospital that their relationship takes form. His relationship with Nalini positively takes him away from the demand of the streets; of a basic desire to be all muscle but no emotion.

Similarly, Karl's metamorphosis starts off a relationship with Janoma. In Nigeria, she guides him into embracing his sexuality in such a way that he does not feel the need to doubt himself:

Karl would leave wherever he was, hit the asphalt and let it lift him up and off the ground because he needed air. Air between his body and the world so his body could leave the dirt underneath. The stuff that fit nowhere. (*When We Speak of Nothing*, p. 191)

On Karl's return to London, he is trailed by changes that are built up in him, changes from his stay in Port Harcourt. When Janoma talks to him, she too confirms that he has changed, becoming more assertive, confident and precise with things that are of concern to him. He understands himself beyond his father and unflinchingly tells his mother about Janoma. Karl's relationship with Janoma has expanded his view beyond the junction, to see beyond the conflict of his gender to the discovery of himself because "Junctions are not made for all-round visions but for choosing the way ahead" (*When We Speak of Nothing*, p. 82).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the body as a queer space works along with the structure of a diasporic tension to aid the process of self-discovery and identity in *When We Speak of Nothing* (2017). Sexuality and gender in the novel adopt a psychosocial position that goes beyond mere social assertion to an individual quest. Though the societies and structures with which the characters interact are not dismissed, sexuality and gender are put in the spotlight as indexes for determining the wholeness of identity. The concepts "sexuality" and "gender" are deployed as the fundamental indexes in the exploration of the concept of identity such that the social, physical and psychological positioning of the characters becomes the priority. The idea of the body and sexuality are thus fundamentally embedded in the relationship of the characters within spaces that can be (re)negotiated.

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**Riding the Centaur Metaphor from Past to Present:
Myth, Constellation and Non-gendered Hybrid**

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Abstract

Tracking the ancient centaur as myth and metaphor through cultural history to the twenty-first century reveals how humans have begun to reconceive animal-human relations. Its origins are open to question, but at least date from pre-classical and early Greek history, when nomadic tribes with superior horsemanship skills appeared. Associated with the astronomical constellation Centaurus, the centaur metaphor was initially gendered. The hybrid embodied human and equine qualities, both negative and positive (for example, the bestial classical centaur and the supra-human Spanish conquistador). After examining the history of the centaur metaphor as well as relationships between horses and humans in the pre-twentieth century Western literary tradition, this research focuses on five texts: Monty Roberts' *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (2009); Tom McGuane's *Some Horses* (2013); John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* (1945); Jane Smiley's *Horse Heaven* (2000); and Gillian Mears' *Foal's Bread* (2011). It argues that contemporary nonfiction and fiction demonstrate a change in the way in which the metaphor has been used, reflecting a will to reshape relationships between species, grounded in empathy as well as respect for alternative communication strategies. The centaur metaphor as non-gendered hybrid appears when riders feel one with their horses through harmonious partnerships inherent in teamwork. They feel as if they have become the centaur, literalizing the metaphor within themselves.

Keywords: Centaur, horse-human relations, metaphor, interspecies communication

Introduction

The centaur is a mythological being, a constellation and a metaphor that occurs in ancient cultures, which developed diverse understandings of its significance. Always referring to a hybrid that possessed both human and equine attributes, representations of the centaur denote humanity's conceptualisations of its relationship to the natural world, both positive and negative. Tracking this being primarily through the Western tradition, from antiquity to the modern age, reveals how writers have manipulated the centaur, initially to emphasise differences between human and nonhuman animals and then to suggest synergies between species. This essay asks how contemporary nonfiction and fiction demonstrate a change in the way in which the centaur metaphor and associated tropes have been used. The texts explored here, focused on horse-human relations, present equines as discrete beings, reflecting a will to reshape relationships between species. The harmonious partnerships possible for all genders, embodied in refreshed centaur metaphors, are grounded in empathy and respect for alternative communication methods. They suggest that each individual can benefit through interspecies exchange, as it promotes physical and psychological well-being. Humans and equines find they might be able to develop untapped talents and strengths through teamwork. The centaur therefore signifies respectful human interaction with another species, which can lead to a positive fusion or transcendence above the limitations of each¹.

After defining the centaur in pre-classical and classical times, the essay identifies examples in Western literature that illustrate cultural attitudes toward the centaur, noting its implicit appearance in histories of the Spanish conquistadores. It provides evidence of how horses have been deployed metaphorically and literally either to confirm human superiority or to critique human society up to the nineteenth century, where literary texts began to consider if not employ the horse's point of view. This change paved the way for twenty and twenty-first century reinvigoration of the centaur as a metaphor to embody a hybridity that signifies harmony between species, often conceived of during movement as "flow." Sociologist Eva Linghede says that "human-horse engagements are meshworks; complex interweaved series of intra-action that shapes and reshapes both humans and horses ... [so that] subjectivities are not fixed, but develop and take shape through multispecies and multicategorical encounters" (2019, p. 12). These intra-actions emphasise unity or symbiosis, which can alternately be called interdependence, co-dependence or hybridity. The texts selected for analysis speak to these intra-actions possible through riding or "flow," with a concomitant loss of the sense of an individual self as human beings feel themselves merging with the Other – becoming a centaur.

Nonfiction texts analysed are Monty Roberts' autobiography *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (2009) and Tom McGuane's book of essays, *Some Horses* (2013). Among the fiction are John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* (orig. pub. 1945), Jane Smiley's *Horse Heaven* (2000) and Gillian Mears' *Foal's Bread* (2011). Characters who come to horse companionship through diverse avenues in these texts learn about themselves through nonhuman animals. They consider equine response, noting how human behaviour influences them, so that they too alter, for better or worse. Mid to late twentieth-century natural horsemanship proponents, such as Monty Roberts, known as "the horse whisperer," lay the groundwork for understanding the dynamics of interaction by drilling down to a practical level, proposing nonverbal communication

¹ My survey of Centaur metaphor origins owes a debt to my 2018 article, "The horse-human bond as catalyst for healing from sexual or domestic abuse: Metaphors in Gillian Mears' *Foal's Bread*." Here I have expanded and rephrased, including new sources, and treat a broad range of literary texts.

methods based on gesture and sound. When people learn “Equus” (Roberts 2009, p. 79)², they cement the horse-human bond. Tom McGuane expresses a similar philosophy, highlighting human responsibility to reach out to understand the Other: Horses “are as distinct as people, but they are a herd” (McGuane, 2013, vii).

Research by sociologists, gender theorists and leisure theorists, such as Keri Brandt (2005, 2006), Lynda Birke and Keri Brandt (2009) and Katherine Dashper (2018), illuminate how a willingness to be open to alternative modes of being underpin the way in which centaur tropes appear. Birke proposes “kinaesthetic empathy” (Shapiro, 1990, p. 192, as qtd. in Brandt, 2006, p. 146) based on physical and emotional contact, while Eva Linghede speaks about “co-joint actions” (Linghede, 2019, p. 8) in teamwork. In sum, these researchers suggest that openness to other species’ frames of reference facilitate the production of a hybrid body, whereby riders can experience a sense of unity (Ann Game, 2001) – what can be termed the “Centaur effect” (Barclay, 1980, p. xi, as qtd. in Game, 2001, p. 3).

Although there has been critical discussion of the centaur as employed in specific literary texts, this research broadens the discussion within the context of a history of the centaur metaphor. In the past, writers predominantly emphasized its binary nature, which relegates equines to an inferior position. This research now argues that many contemporary incarnations of the centaur metaphor as a non-gendered hybrid suggest an enhancement of both species through a unity that maximizes potential. Along with authors Roberts and McGuane, characters in the Steinbeck, Smiley and Mears’ novels who learn equine communication strategies strengthen relationships with them. Those male and female characters most successful at forging strong horse-human bonds usually experience “The Centaur effect” (Barclay, 1980, p. xi, as qtd. in Game, 2001, p. 3).

Origins of the Centaur

The Centaur is the most harmonious creature of fantastic zoology. ‘Biform’ it is called in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but its heterogeneous character is easily overlooked, and we tend to think that in the Platonic world of ideas there is an archetype of the Centaur as there is of the horse or the man. (Jorge Luis Borges, 1970, p. 56)

The concept of fusion between animals and humans dates back beyond recorded records, appearing in extant primitive art and expressing various cultural preoccupations (Morris, 2011). For Egyptian civilization, hybridity was positive and non-gendered, embodied in their pantheon of gods and goddesses, who took the shape of hybrids: “... in Egyptian thought and art, hybridity was a mark of power of the divine” (Morris, 2011, p. 190). In pre-classical and early Greek history, the centaur was not aligned with the divine, but it did not appear to be a negative, springing from a perception that humans with superior horsemanship skills possessed mastery if not full understanding of another species.

Jorge Luis Borges’ opening to the centaur in *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (1970) highlights the harmonious combination of the attributes of a nonhuman and human animal; it is not a monster or an accident, therefore, but expresses a need to capture the essence of each. Whether his summary of the diverse origins of the centaur is accurate or not, they indicate embeddedness in human cultures since before the classical age. He identifies centaur-like beings in the

² Despite nonverbal animals being unable to consent to work or play in human terms, they certainly indicate preferences by their behaviour for certain activities and “the human partner believes [their pleasures] are shared, at least to some extent” (Cochrane & Dashper, 2015, as qtd. in Dashper, 2018, p. 2).

Gandharvas in Vedic myth (ancient Sanskrit Hindu scriptures), which he describes as “minor gods who drive the chariots of the sun” (Borges, 1970 p. 56).

In early classical culture, he notes encounters between “Greeks of Homeric times ... [and] the first Scythian horseman they came across [who] seemed to them all one with his horse” (Borges, 1970 p. 56). In *The Iliad*, Homer speaks of “mare milking milk eaters (Il.13. 3-6) as well as the figure of Ancharsis, known to Herodotus ... as a Scythian prince” (Meyer, 2013, p. 25). Warlike nomadic warriors whose civilization arguably dates back to “the second half of the seventh century BC” (Salgaraev and Zulpikharova, 2017, p. 251), Scythians hailed from Eurasia, and relied on their horses to cover vast distances. They selectively bred horses, “invented leather armor with metal or gold plates, as well as the first saddle, which made it possible to ride freely on the back of a horse and not on the thighs, as was done previously” (Salgaraev and Zulpikharova, 2017, pp. 263-64). These facts account for the respect and awe that they inspired in cultures that either did not possess horses or their consummate riding skill. Centaur stories, identifying the hybrid as a horse and man, appear throughout Greek and Roman mythology, art and astronomy. Centaurus or the Centaur is of course also a constellation, which has the advantage of being “the best globular cluster, the nearest star to the Solar System, the third-brightest star in the sky” (Inglis, 2004, p. 86), suggesting why it has exerted such an influence on human culture.

At some point in cultural history, the balance between positive and negative perceptions of hybridity shifted so that, for Greeks and Romans, “it is largely presented as negative or ambivalent” (Morris 2011, p. 190). Recent dictionaries of classical mythology reinforce the evaluation of the centaur as a species tainted by animality. They were beings “feeding on raw flesh ... and had natures to match their monstrous forms: as a race they were wild, brutal and lascivious” (March, 2014, p. 116). Their anatomy is variously described: “In art they are usually depicted with the body and legs of a horse, and growing from their shoulders the torso, head and arms of a man” (March, 2014, p. 116). Portrayed as belligerent beings who lacked self-control, body ruling mind, they over-indulged in drinking and sex. Oral and written mythology as well as visual art interpreted the union between the natural and untamed and the civilized as a struggle between opposing forces. Morris says that the hybrid’s physical form, however, was not stable: “Mutability of the animal-human boundary is also expressed by the melding of the two into composite creatures that share a horsey nature, centaurs and satyrs” (Morris, 2011, p. 193). At first, centaurs can appear as “a fully human body ... conjoined at the buttocks with the body and rear legs of a horse, though later all four legs become equine” (Morris, 2011, p. 193). The satyr possesses a different physique, “tak[ing] mainly human form but with the important additions of the ears and tail of a horse, though in later Hellenistic and Roman times the satyr can be more goatlike ... he belongs to the convivial world of Dionysius and is thus highly visible on painted pottery” (Morris, 2011, p. 193).

Centaur origin stories are varied too. Borges notes three: they are “the offspring of Xion, a king of Thessaly, and a cloud ... they were the offspring of Centaurus, Apollo’s son, and Stilbia ... they were the fruit of the union of Centaurus and the mares of Magnesium” (Borges, 1970, p. 56). March notes the third origin; they are “the offspring of Ixion’s son Centaurus when he copulated with wild Magnesian mares on the slopes of Mount Pelion in Thessaly” (March, 2014, p. 116).³ It is not uncommon for mythic characters to have multiple origins appearing in oral and written birth narratives, which frequently contain a cautionary lesson. Whatever the story, however, the centaur as an “overall package” (Morris, 2011, p. 193) comes to represent

³ March capitalizes names that appear in other places of the dictionary, but to avoid confusion I have not done so here.

social transgression in Greco-Roman mythology.

This ambiguous or indeed negative attitude toward the lascivious and drunken hybrid centaur is demonstrated clearly in “the battle of the Greek Lapiths against the centaurs ... a stock theme in Greek temple art” (Morris, 2011, p. 194) and in various classical texts. This battle is known as the Centauromachy. Invited to the wedding of Xion’s son Peirithous, the centaurs became drunk: “They seized the Lapith women ... and a violent and bloody battle broke out” (March 2014, p. 116). The tale was significant enough to adorn the Parthenon, as Borges notes (1970, p. 197), “the West Pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, and the frieze from the Temple of Apollo at Bassae” (March, 2014, p. 116). Morris summarizes the moral for Greco-Roman civilization by asserting that the battle is “one of a number of ways of expressing the idea of Greek civilized, socially ordered behavior in contrast to the barbaric and disorderly world of ‘the other’” (Morris, 2011, p. 194).

In this context, the centaur’s appetites and weaknesses illustrate moral lessons. Reducing the hybrid in this way denies the positive aspects of his animal nature and does not accord him respect as a being in himself. This manipulation comments on human behavior and has similarities with *Aesop’s Fables*. Animals have no individuality or subjectivity aside from what can be turned to exemplify the bestial or animal, of which humans need to beware; or, alternatively, what virtues they should cultivate. Those virtues, however, are relevant to humans, not animals, whose points of view are missing. As Jacques Derrida argues, this type of exploitation of animals depends on “focalization ... remain[ing] an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication. Always discourse *of* man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man” (Derrida, 2008, p. 37). Fables do not consider animal natures in themselves, therefore, something that begins to receive its due in twentieth-century texts.

Nevertheless, as Greek civilization matured, some mythologies were rehabilitated, and the good centaur appears in the form of Chiron, “the rational hybrid horse-human” (Karen Raber 2013, p. 75), whom Apollo taught medicine among other arts, enabling him to tutor centaurs as well as notable heroes, among them “Achilles, Jason, Asclepius, Aristaeus and Actaeon” (March 2014, p. 124). Chiron or Cheiron’s birth narrative foregrounds his superior nature. He is “the immortal son of the Titan Cronus and the Oceanid Philyra” (March 2014, p. 123). In the myth, Cronus wants to seduce or rape Philyra,⁴ so takes the form of a horse to fool his wife Rhea. Chiron is the offspring. Homer’s *Iliad* (1973, Book Eleven) names him “Cheiron, most righteous of the Centaurs” (p. 250), praising him for wisdom and temperance. In classical art and literature, Chiron enjoys a “special status ... from other centaurs ... [He appears with] human forelegs and [given] the dignity of a tunic or cloak” (Morris, 2011, p. 194; March 2014, p. 124). Although initially immortal, he desires death because of the suffering caused by an untreatable wound. Prometheus exchanges his death for immortality and Chiron is allowed to die, although Zeus immortalizes him by placing him among the stars as Sagittarius (March 2014, p. 125).

European Literature Before the Twentieth Century

Greco-Roman mythology depicting centaurs and similar hybrids⁵ continued to inspire Western

⁴ In the introduction to her dictionary, Jennifer March cautions against reading classical myths with a contemporary bias. The sexual union of both gods and goddesses was sometimes violent and at other times not.

⁵ Borges devotes a section to Ichthyocentaurs or “Centaur-Fish” (Borges, 1970, p. 61), rarely mentioned in classical literature but frequent in Greco-Roman iconography: “They are human down to their waist, with the tail of a dolphin, and have the forelegs of a horse or a lion” (Borges, 1970, p. 61). Since they have been classified as “among the gods of the ocean, close to the sea horses” (Borges, 1970, p. 61), they are also known as “Centaur-Tritons” (Borges, 1970, p. 61).

culture in literature and visual art. Although the essay does not have space to identify examples from every century, the following are some of the most notable that speak to the gradual alteration in the way in which centaurs or, on a broader level, horse-human relations, were perceived. In the Middle Ages, Dante Alighieri included Chiron in his *Divine Comedy*, according him some status and setting him apart from sinners in the *Inferno*. Canto XII, “generally known as the ‘Canto of the Centaurs’” (Borges, 1970, p. 58), shows Chiron with pride of place, as it were, as master of the centaurs who guard a boiling river of blood with bows and arrows, keeping the damned submerged according to their sins (Dante, 1974, pp. 142–146). As a nonhuman without a human soul, however, he can never ascend to a higher plane according to Christian doctrine, no matter how virtuous his life has been.

In European culture, from the Middle Ages on, religion was also an impetus for New World conquests. It is a commonplace that many of the great expeditions from Europe were driven not only by a quest for wealth and political power but also by the desire to spread Christianity. The sixteenth-century Spanish conquistador expeditions provide useful examples (Hoig, 2013). Priests accompanied the military to offer pastoral care and to convert the natives if possible. Spanish colonialization reinvigorated the idea of a horse-man, embodied in the physical confrontation between European civilization and both the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru. Sophisticated culturally and economically prosperous, they nevertheless had no knowledge of Europeans (Wood, 2003, p. 56). A number of historians and explorer diaries testify to the effectiveness of their horses:

The Indians, who had never seen horses before, could not think otherwise than that horse and rider were one body. Quite astounded at this to them so novel a sight, they quitted the plain and retreated to a rising ground. (Diaz, 1844, 1568, p. 76)

This reaction recalls the awe Scythian horsemen inspired in the Ancient Greeks.

Bernal de Diaz’s *Memoirs* (1568) records not only first contacts, but minute particulars about the Spanish mounts, including color, temperament, bravery and stamina, understanding that the conquests depended on them. Cortés grasps at once that the size, power and shock of something heretofore unknown could maximize their advantage (Wood, 2003). If the Indians believe that the invaders can integrate with their horses, they have accorded the Spanish a super- or supernatural superiority. The emphasis here is on the power of the humans, not that of the horses. An astute military strategist and politician, Cortés turned this reaction to his advantage by demonstrating his ability to control. He “terrified ambassadors and rulers through his domination of horses, supposedly ‘taming’ a stallion, by hiding a mare in season nearby and then having her removed” (Diaz, 1844, p. 79). Spurring horses to gallop down a beach intimidated the Indians as well (Wood, 2003, p. 34). Whether one with or separate from his horse, a conquistador remained the superior being.

In Renaissance literature the ideal of the horse-man, made possible by horsemanship skill and adherence to a chivalric code, was promoted (Raber, 2013). In *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture*, Raber proffers Sir Philip Sidney’s character Musidorus in *Arcadia* (1590 as evidence of “the more generalized image of the rider-as-centaur ... where the centaur’s hybrid nature expresses human triumph in appropriating and exploiting animal power and grace through the aristocratic arts of horsemanship” (Raber, 2013, p. 75). In equitation texts of the period, however, authors assert that the experienced horseman recognizes that horses are Other, and riders need “the willing cooperation of a creature that ... has its own agenda, its own sensations

and its own character” (Raber, 2013, p. 85). This sensitivity accords with the chivalric code. Raber nevertheless confronts the complexity of Chiron as “the rational hybrid horse-human” (Raber, 2013, p. 75) by acknowledging that other literature of the period focuses on the horse’s animal nature, which debases the human. She raises the Centauromachy – the battle arising from centaur behavior at a wedding discussed previously – pointing to cultural confusion about the centaur myth, which for so long focused on the hybrid as self-indulgent, aggressive and lascivious.

By the eighteenth century, horses still represent brutish animal nature. Jonathan Swift’s Book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) ridicules his contemporary society by inverting human and nonhuman animal qualities. If reasonable, temperate behavior makes for a moral, civilised being, then the Houyhnhnms are superior, having created a peaceful, just society, impressing the narrator because they are “so orderly and rational, so acute and judicious” (Swift, 1776 in Greenberg (Ed.) (1970), p. 183). On the other hand, the Yahoos – or humans – are inferior, more bestial in terms of their habits and vices. When the narrator is forced to leave the land of the Houyhnhnms, and return to so-called English civilization, he is distraught, not only by being forced to tolerate Yahoos or humans, but because he knows he is one of them. He prefers the companionship of two horses he keeps, rather than imperfect humans. This satiric reversal only reinforces the conventional division between human and nonhuman animal nature, because Swift is not concerned with exploring what equines might be in themselves, but only with using his portrayal to expose human follies and vices.

In the nineteenth century a shift occurs in portrayals of horse-human relations and the anthropomorphic perspective weakens. Anna Sewell’s popular *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse* (1877) advocates for the horse rather than for human owners. The use of autobiography in the title strengthens this intention, maintaining the fiction that the horse speaks for itself. Although Beauty was trained with patience and kindness, with touch and voice rather than force, some of his subsequent handling amounts to torture. Characters reveal their moral natures, therefore, by the way they treat Black Beauty, who cannot defend himself but who nevertheless believes that animals are meant to serve humans. Its depiction of Beauty’s suffering because of the cruelty of human characters, who use and abuse him for their pleasure, evoked sympathetic responses in audiences of the time. B.H. Beierl (2008) calls *Black Beauty* “a benchmark in the heightening empathy for both humans and animals in England and America” (p. 214). What George T. Angell called “the equine Uncle Tom’s Cabin” (Beierl, 2008, p.214) led indirectly to the founding of societies against cruelty to animals in both the United States and Great Britain. The pairing of humans and animals is instructive here, as it suggests that treating one species with respect and sensitivity encourages similar behavior toward other species. That concept reoccurs in the contemporary literature discussed later.

Black Beauty is a work of its time, framed as a conventional narrative. To a contemporary audience it might appear sentimental and unconvincing for several reasons. For one, the horse sounds like a well-spoken, polite human; for another, it does not engage with the question of how a human – in this case the author – can know what occurs in a nonhuman animal’s mind. Contemporary researchers such as D. J. Haraway (2008) and M. DeMello (2013) debate issues such as animal subjectivities and nonhuman species in the Anthropocene (Wolfe, 2013), which would not have occurred to Sewell, whose narrative does not aim at verisimilitude. It reads something like a nineteenth-century sermon from the horse’s mouth about how treating animals proves a person’s moral worth.

A decade later Leo Tolstoy attempts something similar by presenting the horse’s perspective

in “Strider: The Story of a Horse” (1886). Although he uses a third-person omniscient narrator, rather than first person, Tolstoy frequently narrates events from Strider’s point of view, tracing the vicissitudes of the horse’s life to analyze human vanity, greed, jealousy and cruelty as Sewell’s text does. Strider is passed from owner to owner, who consider him property, rather than a sentient being that should be respected: “Suffering for the pleasure of others is nothing new to me” (Tolstoy, 1886, p. 127). If he cannot be used for breeding, he must race; if he cannot race, he must work. As Black Beauty, Strider suffers but endures, as if that is an unavoidable fate. The text has similarities with Book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels* in the way in which Swift applies the concept of animal baseness to the Yahoos. It is horses who are the moral beings. Tolstoy gives Strider this insight about human nature: “I became convinced that not only as applied to us horses, but in regards to other things, the idea of *mine* has no other foundation than a base animal instinct in men, which they call the feeling or right of property” (Tolstoy, 1886 p. 142). Unlike men, horses do not seek to acquire possessions purely for status or image and this difference sets them apart. Strider comments: “... in the scale of living creatures we stand higher than man” (Tolstoy, 1886, p. 142).

Despite often taking the horse’s point of view, the story’s narrative focus is inconsistent, because the text at times gives human motivations to horses and in particular reveals them as proud and as inconsiderate as humans, bullying and tormenting in their own way. Youngsters in the field revel in their energy and strength, buoyed by an “aristocratic sentiment” (Tolstoy 1886, p. 134) born of their lineage. There is a slippage here between human and equine behavior. As in any herd, the dominant mare disciplines the young, but in Tolstoy’s narrative this takes the form of her informing the colts and fillies of Strider’s past glory, of which he is still proud.

The conclusion also slips between pity for Strider and the implication that he endures the fate of any elderly being. When no longer useful, he is expendable. The cynical picture of the circle of life shows the lame horse’s throat slit. But at least his body and bones can be recycled, the narrator comments, the former feeding wolves and birds, the latter providing material for peasants. Deceased human bodies cannot be put to any good use, but an individual’s pride in possessions outlives him. Strider’s favorite owner’s death comes soon after the horse’s own. His expensive burial reinforces the text’s emphasis on human waste. Although Tolstoy’s story attempts to treat Strider as a sentient being who deserves respect and empathy, its thrust is also to satirize human vanity and selfishness, diluting the portrayal of a discrete life worthy of understanding on its own terms.

In early to mid-twentieth century, although narratives attempted to present the animal point of view more consistently, authors usually did not engage with the issue of writing a nonhuman species (McHugh, 2011; DeMello, 2013). Even an award-winning anti-war novel such as Michael Morpugo’s *War Horse* (1982, reissued 2014; adapted for stage and film), which celebrates the bond between horses and people, adopts the convention of speaking for a nonhuman animal in a human (and formal) voice.

The Centaur Effect in Twenty and Twenty-first Century Nonfiction and Fiction

The twenty and twenty-first century nonfiction and fiction texts discussed below illustrate the transition from an anthropomorphic perspective to a more inclusive one that does not try to speak for equines but acknowledges their “otherness.” It does this without denying the possibility of understanding through respect and empathy. Humans are responsible for making the effort to move beyond their own points of view to learn alternative communication

strategies by studying the behavior of other species. In this way they can gain trust. The explicit or implicit manipulation of the centaur metaphor expressing the possibility of union with another species embody this position, highlighting the mutual benefits of a horse-human bond that transcends gender.

Monty Roberts and Tom McGuane clearly formulate a philosophy of cross-species interaction in their nonfiction that underpins this essay's treatment of the novels. Roberts' autobiography, *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (2009), is at once a personal story about overcoming adversity and a legitimization of his training methods. According to Roberts, the impetus for writing the book came from the English monarch, for whom he demonstrated his training regime.

It was Her Majesty's suggestion that I give an account of my experiences and methods in communication with horses, and it is largely due to her influence that I started out on the long and difficult task of remembering what happened to me in my life, and how I came to love horses so much that I was led to try to reach out across the divide that separates our species from theirs (Roberts, 2009, p. 13).

Roberts is among a group of practitioners who advocate what is known as natural horsemanship. They study equine nonverbal means of communication as a way of establishing trust. Closely observing herds in the wild, Roberts realized that equine language was "predictable, discernible and effective", and included "body language" (Roberts, 2009, p. 101). Observation came first, then "listening" to how horses behave individually and as herd animals, and then acting on that knowledge.

I believed the horses were telling me something and, most importantly, I learned hardly ever to believe the people connected with the horse. It's not that they were lying, but simply that they weren't listening (Roberts, 2009, p. 31).

Roberts emphasizes human responsibility in cross-species transactions, which has previously been noted as a mid-twentieth century development that transcends gender. This insight forms the basis of his training methods:

In order to gain a horse's trust and willing co-operation, it is necessary for both parties to be allowed to meet in the middle. However, it is the responsibility of the man, *totally* of the man (I'm speaking generically, to include women) to achieve this, and to get to the other side of this hurdle (Roberts, 2009, p. 85).

He offers one of his first mounts, Brownie, as a case in point. Although cruelly broken by his father, Roberts trained the horse himself: "It was almost as if I wanted to be a horse myself, so thoroughly had I taken their side; these horses weren't only Brownie's brothers and sisters, they were mine also ..." (Roberts, 2009, p. 82). This assertion suggests that Roberts wants to be part of the family. He treats horses as he would like to be treated. Victimized by his father, Roberts refuses to do this to horses. As a result of this approach, he develops new terminology. Breaking horses becomes "starting" (Roberts, 2009, p. 90); training becomes "joining up" (Roberts, 2009, p. 108). Brownie and Roberts go on to have a long, successful relationship: "He'd become as close as a brother to me and we lived and breathed the same air" (Roberts, 2009, p. 139). Implicit in this description of a familial bond is that Roberts has crossed the species divide.

Tom McGuane's polished essays, *Some Horses* (2013), nominated for the American National

Book Award, reinforces the sense that a productive and mutually satisfying relationship with horses comes from respect for and understanding of the species' communication methods. They embody McGuane's belief that humans and animals share behaviors, needs and emotions. Empathy for animals of all types also fosters self-knowledge. At the same time, he underlines in what ways animals are, if not superior, more honest and defined as personalities. While Roberts emphasizes that horses can't lie, McGuane emphasizes behavioral coherence: 'Like animals, we like to eat, breed, travel, sleep, and sun ourselves, but we lack their clarity' (ix). McGuane speaks of being "present" (McGuane, 2013, p. ix) with a horse, "quiet and consistent, firmly kind, and, from the horse's point of view, good listeners" (McGuane, 2013, pp. 10–11).

Each essay in McGuane's book circles around individual horses that have taught him something about them as well as himself. Although set in the American West and the culture of the rodeo, the book's insights apply to horse communities globally. This wide-ranging perspective is apparent in the first piece, simply titled "Horses," which focuses on the animal-human bond, but, as well, the manner in which humans manipulate the Other metaphorically to reflect something in themselves: "Those who love horses are impelled by an ever-receding vision, some enchanted transformation through which the horse and the rider become a third, much greater thing" (McGuane, 2013, p. 1). The centaur as entity is implicit in this description, recalling the Renaissance ideal of "the rider-as-centaur" (Raber, 2015, p. 75), but without the necessity of human domination. The transformation is rooted in love rather than self-aggrandizement, an ideal symbiotic partnership that pushes toward transcendence, where "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (McGuane, 2013, p. 20). This letting go, of surrendering to the experience, leads to "harmony ... You have to reflect that horse's energy, and he has to reflect yours" (McGuane, 2013, p. 97). This sense of unity echoes the centaur effect described next.

In "Riding: Embodying the Centaur," Ann Game (2001) makes explicit how the centaur trope encapsulates the positive aspects of the horse-human bond: "different species attune to each other, *live* with and through each other" (Game, 2001, p. 2). When riding reaches a certain level, echoing Eliade she says, "our bodies know the centaur" (Game, 2001, p. 3). A key term she defines is entrain, or "learning to be carried along in the flow, learning to become in tune with or in the train of So, in living the image of the centaur, we entrain with it" (Game, 2001, p. 3). Both McGuane and Roberts in their differing ways express the necessity of reading the other species' movements and motivations. This insight is transformed imaginatively in the fiction this essay now turns to, as characters who know horses reach across the species divide. Whereas the nonfiction I have discussed comes from a practitioner perspective, the fiction offers multiple points of view: child, adult, male and female. Each novel presents an array of characters who define themselves by the way in which they treat horses. Some approach them as property to be manipulated for human gain; some learn through interaction and grow personally by respecting them; some heal psychically through horse companionship; and some achieve a rare transcendent connection whereby they feel as if they have joined with the Other.

John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* (1945) is a transitional work that shows a movement away from a masculine culture where humans are dominant to a more empathetic and gender-inclusive one. The novel expresses the mid-twentieth century ethos of the American West by concentrating on the passage of ten-year-old Jody Tiflin from innocence to experience. The pony, Gabilan, initiates the process, but cannot facilitate its completion, as he dies by the end of Part I. Jody has only begun to establish a relationship with him, learning about horse-human communication – "The pony talked with his ears" (Steinbeck, 1992, p. 16) – as well as responsibility and empathy, but he never has the chance to ride. Jody has, however realized

that a rider has more status than ordinary men, being literally and figuratively above them according to the culture in which he has been raised.

To compensate for the pony's loss, Jody's father sends a mare to a stallion to be bred and tells Jody he can train the resulting colt. His father, a stereotypical inarticulate male, uncomfortable with emotions, does not want to entertain the possibility the foal will be female. With no experience yet of practical horsemanship, Jody fantasizes about the bond he will forge. In his mind he has named the colt Black Demon and once on his back he will be a man: "Jody was not a boy anymore, and Demon was not a horse. The two together were one glorious individual" (Steinbeck, 1992, p. 70). Jody dreams of winning rodeos, capturing bandits and being lauded by the American President, reflecting the West's masculine culture. He has not had the chance to meet another species on their own terms. Recalling the Indian response to the Spanish conquistadores, Jody envisages he and his mount as a terrifying hybrid. Demonic to others but dominated by him, Jody would use Black Demon for his own benefit.

The lone voice in the novel possessing practical knowledge of horses belongs to Billy Buck, the hired hand. He counsels respect, kindness and patience in training a nonhuman animal and wants to ensure the colt is handled so he is willing, not fearful. Readers never learn if Jody successfully trains the foal, and whether Billy Buck's attempts to alert him to fortune's vagaries have made an impact. Nevertheless, the text suggests by the conclusion that Jody has gained insight at least into human nature. By listening to his grandfather's story of how he lost his purpose once he completed his great task of bringing a wagon train westward, he has proven he has the capacity to be more empathetic than his father. The novel often implies that sensitivity to one species can lead to empathy for another.

Jane Smiley's *Horse Heaven* (2000), published more than fifty years later, demonstrates a broader perspective where characters of diverse genders, races and socio-economic backgrounds learn about themselves and their human relationships through interactions with horses. A comprehensive picture of American thoroughbred racing, it opens with a Cast of Characters (like a *Dramatis Personae*) that includes equines and humans. There are racehorse owners (and spouses), trainers, exercise riders, grooms, jockeys and an animal communicator. Only equines, however, are foregrounded in the Prologue, "Who They are" (Smiley, 2000, pp. 3–7), introducing horses all born in the same year. Readers follow their fortunes in the novel.

The text portrays various manifestations of empathy and affection between those who care for horses as well as those who ride them. For example, there is the masseur, Luciano, whom the horses love for his gentleness and habitual quietness; Tiffany, a young black owner, who wants nothing more than to touch them and share their space; William Vance, one of the few black trainers in America who saves a horse's life through expensive surgery even though he might never recoup his investment; exercise riders who enjoy their grace, power and spirit; jockeys who marvel at their strength, tenacity and speed; and some well-known trainers who care as much for equine welfare as for money.

The mutual benefit and healing potential of a person giving oneself over to understanding another is exemplified by Joy Gorham, a former dressage rider and mare manager at a stud ranch. Bipolar and emotionally vulnerable, Joy is urged to exercise a horse nicknamed "Wow" (official name: Limitless), who is happiest moving rather than standing still. Riding Limitless transforms her, letting her experience the centaur effect, even though that metaphor is implicit.

As soon as she rode Limitless for the first time, the looseness of his back had loosened hers ... His mouth carried exactly the weight of the bit, a few ounces,

his tailbone flowed out of his spine, then curved gracefully downward, and the breeze picked up the silken hairs and completed their metamorphosis into effortless motion. (Smiley, 2000, p. 522)

.... She had had a dressage teacher once who had told her something impossible, that he could feel the horse's every breath. But with Limitless, now, there were times when she could feel not only his every breath but his every heartbeat, at least at the trot. (Smiley, 2000, p. 523)

Joy experiences something similar when she gallops a retired racehorse, Terza Rima or Mr T, feeling what the next gear is like – at the gallop, all four feet in the air – that simulates the centaur effect. Horses can move freely and confidently when their riders “go with the flow,” or follow their motion rather than dictating it.

A Mexican-American jockey, Roberto, exemplifies the professional empathetic rider who becomes one with his horse. In fact, his race position requires him to fold over the horse's neck so he can achieve maximum speed, which visually suggests the union between species of the centaur. Roberto has sensitive hands and does not resort to the whip. His first ride is on an old hand, a horse named Justa Bob, and Roberto senses at once that his only job is to give himself over to the pleasure of motion, letting the horse take charge.

There he was, right in front of you, and you did now know, from déjà vu, or dreams, what your horse looked like—a long shining dark neck in front of you, two unique ears, and the feel of his mouth, his personality, really, right there in your hands. (Smiley, 2000, p. 49)

When Justa Bob is ridden by jockeys who can “listen,” he wins or places, remaining relaxed and good-natured. In her analysis of Jane Smiley's *Horse Heaven*, Jopi Nyman (2016) emphasizes that the horse-human dyad means species' boundaries are crossed, benefitting both: “[T]he novel suggests that the identities of horses and humans are mutually transformed through their encounters, leading occasionally to hybrid and joint identities” (Nyman, 2016, p. 237). Empathetic trainers and riders in *Horse Heaven* connect by respecting equine individuality.

Gillian Mears' novel, *Foal's Bread* (2011), set in Australia between the world wars, manifests a similar approach to animal-human relations. Opening in 1926, this historical novel focuses on a now defunct industry – Australian high jumping – and revolves around two protagonists – Noah Childs Nancarrow and Roley Nancarrow. They meet at a horse show and marry, but it is through their horses that their emotions are fully expressed. Both genders eventually understand that only through trust and kindness can they can maximize horse and rider abilities. Mears manipulates the centaur metaphor throughout the novel, employing it explicitly and implicitly, and applying it to each protagonist. With perfect balance and sensitive touch, Roley has been able to jump virtually any horse without cruelty, evoking awe and admiration in competition audiences.

The tragedy in the novel is due to a quirk accident that destroys him physically. Struck three times by lightning, Roley has been afflicted by gradual paralysis and, unable to move let alone ride, he starves himself to death. Once performing like a centaur, he dies despairing and alone in a sleepout, but the text reinforces the pathos of his fate by returning to the image of him as a hybrid horse-man. His daughter Lainey and his mother realize he has died when they look at

the sky and see Centaurus:

So that there, there, there, Lainey and her Nin, as if their gaze was for a moment joined, saw what could only be described as a ring of light in the sky, like a huge halo as big as a showground over One Tree. Although there was the feeling that her father was galloping away from the mess of his emaciated body lying in the sleepout of One Tree, it was also as if the starry horse which carried him was streaming down along the dark blue air of morning towards the thick mist along the creek. Lainey felt the very ground beneath her feet seeming to curve up into the shape of a bold horse jumping. She saw a starry mane flying east before it disappeared. (Mears, 2013 p. 236)

Especially in the southern hemisphere, Centaurus is visible at times to the naked eye. The figurative centaur sums up Roley Nancarrow's relationship to horses and his *raison d'être*, which he loses when he is cut off from them.

Roley's wife, Noah, also has perfect balance and empathy with horses, which she begins to lose because of emotional and sexual frustration. Abused by her uncle as a child, and trying to cope with her husband's degenerative condition, she struggles with alcoholism. She has established a bond with an unruly piebald mare, Magpie, and although at times mistreats her, finally admits that she needs to take responsibility and not to abuse a horse that has given her so much. In despair near the conclusion, like her husband, and after missing a showjumping competition because of drunkenness, she attempts to scale an eight-foot ruined bridge that she feels somehow will redeem her. This act puts the horse in danger, but the text suggests that it is in Magpie's nature to seek challenges to test herself, although Noah does not try to fathom "the mystery of Magpie who'd never baulked for her" (Mears, 2013, p. 339).

She glanced again at the bridge. Almighty: the word sprang unbidden into her mind and she thought how the shape of any high jump is a holy one, so gigantically calm in what it was standing there asking horse and rider to do. (Mears, 2013, p. 337)

Only if rider and horse are in perfect synch, reading each other's gestures and intentions, can they scale a jump of that height. They must imitate if not become the centaur. The horse must be willing and the rider give herself over to the other: 'For one last time horse and rider were becoming part of air not earth' (Mears, 2013, p. 337). The two unite in a tragic apotheosis that allows them to achieve what seemed impossible. Clearing the ruined bridge, they land on unstable ground and die in the attempt.

Conclusion

This research has considered the history of the ancient centaur in literature beginning primarily with its classical manifestations. By tracing its development from a mythological figure into a metaphor, it has demonstrated that, by the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the centaur has transformed from a binary hybrid, whose animal nature was deemed inferior to the human, into a non-gendered entity that expresses interspecies empathy. Previous critical discussion of the centaur has not identified this general trajectory in contemporary literature. This research therefore contributes to an understanding of how respect and empathy are key to building empathetic partnerships, embodied in the centaur metaphor, which suggests a broader trend to renegotiate relationships between humans and nonhuman animals.

Horse trainers Monty Roberts and Tom McGuane champion equine communication strategies to redress this previous species imbalance, whereby humans prioritised their needs over those of nonhuman animals. In a similar way, characters in the Smiley and Mears' novels who respect alternative ways of being achieve mutual enjoyment in partnerships with horses. These benefits are not restricted by gender or socio-economic status, as Eva Linghede discovered interviewing Swedish male riders, who felt as if their horses were "both soulmates and bodymates ..." (Linghede, 2019, p. 8).

The strongest horse-human connections are forged by riders of both genders who, like successful "dance partners" (Ford, 2013, p. 101), can perform as members of a harmonious team. By "go[ing] with the flow" (Bizub, et al., 2003, p. 81), they open themselves to experiencing what sociologist and gender theorist Keri Brandt (2005) names "human-animal interembodiment" (p. 95). She expresses the idea of "oneness" [as] ... a moment in time when horsewomen [and horsemen are] feeling like they are one with their horses, as if there exists only one singular subjectivity shared between two beings" (p. 85). These contemporary manifestations of the centaur metaphor emphasize unity, according equal status to each species, which have their own talents and strengths, making possible the maximizing of the potential of each, so that, as McGuane says, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (2013, p. 20). In other words, human partners who lose self-awareness in motion do not simply feel like the centaur, but, experiencing "'the Centaur effect'" (Barclay, 1980, p. xi, as qtd. in Game, 2001, p. 3), literalize the metaphor within their own bodies; they "know the centaur" (Barclay, 1980) by becoming it.

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The Politics of Space and Heterotopia in the Works of W. G. Sebald

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Abstract

This paper will attempt to read how history and space are informed and transformed by each other specifically in the prose narratives of the German writer, W. G. Sebald. In the course of reproducing history in a non-synoptic manner in these prose narratives, there are several ways in which space and history are connected with each other. This paper will explore these myriad relations and connections between space and history. Drawing from these links, the paper will go on to demonstrate how various incompatible elements of history and space are juxtaposed on one particular site creating a heterotopia. Sebald's innovative fiction is exceptional in its narrative technique, employment of sources and incorporation of the multiple points of views of the narrators along with their interlocutors. The specific mode of narration Sebald employs, this paper contends, treats neither space nor history as foundational categories but instead tries to posit a historico-geographical framework within which many volatile moments of heterotopia develop. The paper begins with an analysis of how history and its constituent, memory, are related to space and spatial encounters. Having established the nexus between these two categories, it goes on to examine how Sebald's narratives offer a critique of cartographic space and how identities are established through a politics of space. All these arguments culminate to demonstrate that these narratives are constituted by heterotopic moments due to the juxtapositions and multiplicities that arise from the historico-geographical scheme Sebald brings into play.

Keywords: history, space, heterotopia, W.G. Sebald, prose narrative

Introduction: Space and Heterotopia

The work of W. G. Sebald marked a significant departure in the tradition of novel and fiction writing. His four major works, *The Emigrants* (1996), *The Rings of Saturn* (1999), *Vertigo* (2000) and *Austerlitz* (2001) – interspersed with grainy monochromatic photographs – rest between the form of documentary writing and pure fiction. Sebald (2011) himself referred to his form of writing as prose narrative and was inspired by 19th century German prose, which has “prosodic rhythms that are very pronounced, where prose is more important than... social background or plot in any manifest sense” (Sebald, 2011, 56). He strived to experiment with a representation of history – that is, an organisation of events in the past – which would counter the prevalent synoptic view of it. All four of his prose narratives abound in digression, meanderings and musings to portray a narration of history which is fragmented but not disjointed, which focusses not simply on a witness-based account of history but history in terms of “forensic phenomenology” which “took into account the very lacunae, the repressions and the partial amnesias that are the reality of lived life” (Self, 2010). His accounts of history are intricately webbed into diverse space – to landscapes and architecture and cognitive mappings and meanderings.

The idea of space as a determining factor in social and cultural relations and transactions has gained currency over the past few decades. With interventions from scholars and philosophers from various entry points, space is now seldom understood as a passive container inhabited by miscellaneous aspects of society and sociality. Space is not a homogenous entity; it both constructs and is, of course, constructed. It is not a mere background upon which social and historical processes take place but it is actively involved in the processes of social existence (Soja, 1989). In evoking space Edward Soja refers to Henri Lefebvre’s *l’espace vécu* or “lived spaces”, that is, understanding space as “actually lived and socially created spatiality, concrete and abstract at the same time, the habitus of social practices” (Soja, 1989, p.18). Soja goes on to theorize space in a kind of a triangle of social, physical and mental or psychological spaces, within which spatiality is socially produced and exists as both concrete spatialities and as a “set of relations between individuals and groups, an ‘embodiment’ and medium of social life itself” (Soja, 1989, p.18). Spatiality is produced by the interconnections and overlapping of social spaces consisting of social actions and relationships, physical space of material nature or actual human geography and mental space of cognition and representation which include “personal meaning and symbolic content of ‘mental maps’ and landscape imagery” (Soja, 1989, p.18).

With the changing notion of being and time, our understanding of space has been changing. The long glacial times of the 19th century is now a matter of past; ours is the epoch of spaces, writes Michel Foucault (1986). “We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are in a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein” (Foucault, 1986, p.23). Space in our era, according to Foucault, is defined by relations of proximity and relations among sites. We, thus, inhabit what are essentially sets of relations “that delineate sites which are irreducible to one another”. In distinction to these everyday spaces that we occupy, Foucault mentions the heterotopia – the sites or spaces that “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault, 1986, p.24). He notes several principles that characterize heterotopias. What emerges from these principles is the notion that heterotopias often function as sites upon which several varying and incompatible spaces are juxtaposed. He evokes the example of the Persian

gardens which can be perceived as a microcosm of different vegetation from across the world. It is only a small part of the world and yet it symbolizes the totality of the world. Using the example of the cemetery, he points out how the changing perception of death and after-life in the course to modernity has changed the geographical location of the cemetery from the heart of the city to the outer extensions of it. As people's faith in the after-life dwindled, the "atheistic" civilization started paying more attention to the remains of the dead on earth. The cemetery, thus, becomes that other space where "each family possesses its dark resting place". Heterotopias can also "create a space of illusion that exposes every real space" (like the brothels) or they may be spaces really created as attempts at perfect, meticulous spaces in contrast to the existing chaotic and disorderly spaces.

This paper will attempt to tease out how Sebald's rendition of history is related to space. It will examine how the various elements that constitute history and space in the narratives are juxtaposed to form various heterotopic moments. This construction of a heterotopia which is never entirely stable or constant has the potential of re-reading and re-producing history in different ways and to better understand one's engagement with space as something which is not dead, fixed, undialectical or immobile (Foucault, 1980). In the process of juxtaposing certain incompatible elements of space and time, Sebald creates certain moments (and sites) which defy the foundations of both history and geography, and can only be understood when analysed through the critical category of heterotopia. This is mainly because synoptic history proves insufficient to portray the themes that preoccupy Sebald's work. The digressive history, that his prose narratives depict, engages with space and elements of space to open up the possibility of the conception of a more radical historico-geographical framework within which both history and space play critical roles to expose the sets of relations that define the life and time that has survived the brutal and bloody excesses of the twentieth century.

Space and History

The landscape and spatial setting in the works of Sebald are usually spaces of dilapidation. In *The Rings of Saturn*, as the narrator walks through the county of Suffolk, he encounters various sites of destruction and devastation. He comes across run-down towns which once thrived as centres of trade or culture and almost-deserted countryside which once housed grand estates of the highest echelons of British society. The narrative reflects the narrator's movements and these movements evoke various memories, incidents and experiences from the past. In doing this, the narrator often blurs the lines between the objectivity of history and the subjectivity of memory. Sebald often draws out on memories, of the narrating subject or figures in history, to (re)present a particular episode in history. While narrating a short memoir of Stendhal (in *Vertigo*), who had participated in the transalpine march crossing the Great St Bernard Pass in the force of Napoleon in 1800, the narrator points out an aberration in the writer's recounting of the raid of the fortress of Bard. We learn that the position which Stendhal had claimed to be at, could not have afforded him the view that the writer reproduces in a sketch. Had Stendhal in fact been standing at the spot that he claimed for himself, he could not have been viewing the scene he reproduces in that precise way (Sebald, 2000, p. 7). Such discrepancies between memory and objective historical truth provide a scope of a retelling of history and question the apparent unbiased objectivity of history. The narrator goes on to mention how disappointed Stendhal had been when he realized that another memory of a scene of a town from the days of the war that he remembered was in fact an exact copy of a famous engraving. Stendhal, thus, advises "not to purchase engravings of fine views and prospects seen on one's travels, since they will displace our memories completely" (Sebald, 2000, p. 8).

In *Austerlitz*, Sebald (2001) further complicates the difference between memory and history. The protagonist of this novel having suffered almost a kind of effacement of his early childhood memories, brought about both by his cruel displacement from his home and the denial and neglect of his past by his foster parents, goes through a traumatic yet gratifying (although never entirely fulfilling) journey. Austerlitz's desire to trace his past is triggered by a series of sporadic incidents which eventually lead him to seek out his deep buried memories. One such incident was a momentary flash of a memory from his childhood. One day in London, he found himself being led into the Liverpool Street station, to which he claimed to be always irresistibly drawn, by an impulse and disjointed thoughts. He started walking around and found himself in a part of the station which seemed to be abandoned and which, he suddenly remembered, was exactly the place where he was waiting to meet his new guardians half a century ago on his first arrival to London.

Disorientated by this sudden recollection, Austerlitz realizes how hard he had worked to keep his memories suppressed. Austerlitz's recollection of this incident, as is evident from his recounting of it to the narrator, is brought about by his spatial memory. Memories are as spatial as they are temporal. Austerlitz, as the narrator informs us, harboured a great fascination for grand architectural designs and had – what he described to the narrator as obsession with railway stations. He was studying the architectural history of Central Station in Antwerp the first time the narrator met him there. Introducing the readers to Austerlitz's fascination with history foreshadows the journeys of both protagonist and narrator. This incident at the station is followed by another revelation a year later at a bookstore where he hears on the radio two women talking about their experiences of their relocation to England on Kinder transport during the Second World War. It is at this moment that Austerlitz realizes his origin. In the past, all the hints and clues of his past afforded to him were his birth name (which was handed over to him written on a piece of paper much like an artefact of history), and fleeting, abstruse memories.

This abrupt eruption of a memory eventually translates into a historical account of a devastating period in the history of twentieth century. An event or a thing at a point in space, as David Harvey (2004) points out, cannot be explained by what exists only at that point; it depends on many other things going on around. "A wide variety of disparate influences swirling over space in the past, present and future concentrate and congeal at certain point to define the nature of the point" (p. 274). Memories, which Harvey calls a relational temporal concept, and – drawing from Walter Benjamin – refers to as a potentiality that can "flash up" uncontrollably at times of crises to reveal new possibilities. They defy the kind of fixed narrative that history tries to impose on space. The spatio-temporality of the resurfaced lost memory of Austerlitz sets him on a journey of recovery of his past. However, recovering the past cannot be an easy task. Apart from coming to terms with the trauma that he, along with a whole generation of people, had been subjected to, unearthing the history that was lost to him, through all the instabilities of the past, would also have to face the challenges of building his story without concrete documented "evidence". While the episode of Jewish genocide has been brought to the knowledge of the world from various sources, to uncover his particular past and story, Austerlitz would have to rely on his own disjointed memories, memories of others (like his parents' friend, Vera) and snippets of information he gathers in this journey of his. His story cannot be mapped in history; all he could do was to follow the faint, and often absent, trails that history and space had left.

In stark contrast to Austerlitz's story, is the segment ('Il Ritorno in Patria') in *Vertigo* about the narrator's return to his childhood home after an interlude of thirty years. The conflicting feelings of the narrator between the memories of his homeland and his present response to this

journey of his return are conveyed through a seamless movement from his recounting of his memories, his conversations about the past with Lukas Ambrose and his current reliving of the spaces where he once dwelled, and through which he once travelled, as a child. In his “complicated” and “contradictory” explanation to Lukas for the reason of his return, he mentions how hard he tried to make sense of many incidents and feelings from his childhood in the remote provincial backwaters of W. Now, that he was here, things were getting only more convoluted. “The more images I gathered from the past”, he writes, “the more unlikely it seemed to me that the past had actually happened in this or that, for nothing about it could be called normal: most of it was absurd, and if not absurd, then appalling” (Sebal, 2000, p. 212). Unlike Austerlitz who had to excavate his past through joining loose, sometimes invisible, threads, the narrator in ‘Il Ritorno in Patria’ wrestles with his memories which perhaps concur with “historical facts” and yet leave him distraught and think of his past as absurd.

The revisiting of their pasts by Austerlitz and by the narrator in *Vertigo*, as inquirers investigating contingent historical facts to understand the “truths” of their existence in the history that their modes of thinking has afforded them, is not simply a journey of self-realization. Sebal’s narrative exercise seems to be an amalgamation of the Foucauldian archaeological and genealogical modes of understanding and writing history¹. Austerlitz’s attempt is, in effect, an attempt to create a counter-memory that Foucault’s genealogical method creates which consists of “multiple crosscurrents of circumstances and often discontinuous events in which conflicts, impositions, new problems and networks of practices and values form instable assemblages of identity and authority” (Scott, 2014, p. 167). The protagonist tries to trace the formation of his self as a subject starting at the specific site of his childhood. However, his exploration is also archaeological since his very attempt to unravel his own story (from a tumultuous time in Europe where perhaps many had similar stories) rejects the idea of a transcendental subject. Clearly, his focus is on “uncovering unconscious structures of thought” (Gutting, 2014, p. 15) and to understand what were, or are, the restrictions imposed on his conscious thinking by various historical and political contingencies. The incongruence of the memories of the narrator in *Vertigo* similarly complicates the kind of history which overlooks the various constraints that a discursive formation of the specific time period dictate.

By questioning the very forms of cognitive authority, Sebal’s narrative continuously attempts to topple historical discourses that ignore alternate possibilities. Both archaeological and genealogical explorations of history in the texts are consistently undertaken through the various spatial encounters of the narrators and characters in the prose narratives. Foucault’s projects of archaeology and genealogy remain incomplete by focussing only on the restraints of time. The relevance of space in discursive formation becomes prominent in Sebal’s texts; almost all memories, incidents, events are interfaced with spatial references and experiences. Foucault himself (on some coaxing) comments that “the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 70).

Space and Cartographies of Narratives

The four prose narratives of W. G. Sebal, distinct as they are in their scheme of narrative, have a shared feature of the travelling narrator who reminisces, muses, recollects, investigates and recounts. These acts of the narrator, more often than not, work towards evoking various moments in history and all such evocations are a result of a phenomenological response to

¹ Charles E. Scott points out in his definition of “genealogy” that in Foucault’s view the concepts of “archaeology” and “genealogy” are not mutually exclusive; “in their different emphases, they can be mutually supportive as well as interwoven”.

space. The kind of history that Sebald seeks to write and narrate is one without a specific origin, or a middle, beginning and end. His critique of history ensues from a narrative which ‘maps’ space. Sebald’s narrators, ambulating and wandering through the course of the narratives, perform a cognitive and emotional mapping of the spaces they traverse, all the while recovering and recounting snippets from history through association. These associations are at times contiguous, sometimes overlapping and at times absolutely disparate. The narrators’ acts of recounting and recovering history seem to offer a critique of a synoptic view of history through what Macfarlane (2007) calls “story maps”, which are “forms of spatial expressions that embody our personal experiences of the environment and contribute to creating a deep understanding of places” (p. 142), places which are constituted by and consist of various historical moments. Sebald’s narrators attempt to unpack the palimpsest of the historico-geographical points through a narrative which abandons scientific incisiveness in favour of imaginative associations, emotive experiences, creative conjectures and parallels. In an interview, Sebald once remarked that a walker’s response to his surroundings is a phenomenological one unlike a scientist’s, whose is objective and incisive.

The world, or space, for Sebald and his narrators is “hidden as an indefinite multiplicity of reciprocal relations”² which the narrator as a subject undertakes to unravel through his movements and mapping. Sebald’s rendition of history seems to be pitted between a spatial expression through experience, narrative, imagination and perspective, and a functionalist grid map which trains the imagination to perceive and think in so-called “scientific” ways that purport to be objective (Macfarlane, 2007). The history, which emerges from such functionalist (and supposedly objective), grid maps reflect de Certeau’s remark on the function of maps which have become an authority on ‘place’ where there are sets of rules and plans, streets and architecture, and points of interest, effacing the idea “space” which is the tour, the narrative, the context and the human perspective³. Doreen Massey further elaborates on this. Maps, she writes, integrate time and space; “they produce a cartography which gives the story of the origin of the cosmos of the one producing/creating the map” (Massey, 2005, p. 107). Maps, which aim at stabilization or calibrating one’s bearings in a universe, is the practice of a “hegemonic cognitive mapping” (Massey, 2005, p. 109).

The movement of Sebald’s narrators, however, from one geographical location to another cannot be reproduced on such a map; the narrators’ movement in space are intrinsically bound to their response to places and the resultant evocation of history. While maps, a “hegemonic cognitive” mechanism, aim at stabilization or calibrating one’s bearings in a universe, these narratives persistently disorient the readers. The narrators too often seem to lose their own bearings both temporally and spatially. Such narratives reflect the attempt of situationist cartographers to disrupt the sense of coherence and totality that maps tend to offer. They attempt to “disorient, defamiliarize – to provoke a view from an unaccustomed angle” (Massey, 2005, p. 109) in an attempt to lay bare the incoherencies and fragmentations of the spatial. The spatial, thus, becomes an “arena of possibilities”. Such a cartography runs parallel to the archaeological exercise to reinterpret and rethink historical discourses to explore the possible multiplicities of both space and history.

Such possibilities open up the scope of alternatives to writing and representing history through these narratives which seem to be packed with the potential to interrogate space. Sebald’s narrative technique portrays the same event from different spatial locations and portrays different associative events from the same spatial location. The narrators’ subjective presence

² Sartre qtd in Gaál-Szabó, P. (2012). “Building is Dwelling”.

³ Qtd in Ng-Chan, T. “Mapping out Patience: Cartography, Cinema and W.G. Sebald”.

at a particular space at a particular point of time is often haunted by the presence of other figures from the past or even characters of fiction. Their recounting of events at a certain spatio-temporal location are juxtaposed by events from another time at the same place or at another location at the same time or by similar incidents they had encountered in a different location, creating kaleidoscopic moments. At times, they travel back to the same places and bring forth different experiences and narratives. In the ‘All’estero’ section in *Vertigo*, the narrator, having felt an eerie sense of being stalked, flees Verona which he was visiting to study the works of the renaissance artist, Pisanello. Seven years later, he writes, “I finally yielded to a need I had felt for some time to repeat the journey from Vienna via Venice to Verona, in order to probe my somewhat imprecise recollections of those fraught and hazardous days and perhaps record some of them” (Sebald, 2001, p. 81). During this trip he investigated a series of murders that took place around the last time he had visited Verona. Sebald’s narrator often gives a slightly altered version while narrating a specific event – whether a specific event in history or a personal encounter – from different spatial locations.

Similarly, his account of his immediate spatial location changes with his various forms of associations, experiences and conjectures. What these narratives try to be doing is positing the possibility of the coexistence of different temporalities. Such a coexistence both yields and depends on the dimension of space which – as Massey characterises it – is a dynamic simultaneous multiplicity. Space, along with the possible coexistence of multiple temporalities, makes possible for a heterogeneity of practices and processes – “an ongoing product of interconnections” (Massey, 2005, p. 107). This space of dynamic simultaneity, writes Massey, exists in a flux between that which is constantly disconnected by new arrivals and that which is being determined with by the construction of the new relations. “It is always being made, and always, in a sense, unfinished” (Massey, 2005, p. 107).

The narrators’ movement, it must be mentioned, are not restricted to physical spaces alone. In recounting events and narratives, his location at times shift from real, physical spaces, to imaginative and fictive ones, to the realm of dreams and visions. The various elements that the narrative juxtaposes appear as if they are in a kind of “contradictory emplacement”⁴. When the narrator in *The Rings of Saturn*, in his tour, reaches Dunwich Heath, overlooking the North Sea, he comments on the history of that “melancholy region”, the effect of maritime climate on this region and of the rapid deforestation on earth and goes on to comment on the receding forests of the Amazon basin, forest fires and combustion as a hidden principle behind every artefact created which exists through historical and industrial progression. As he walks around with his train of thoughts, he suddenly finds himself lost in a labyrinthine woods. Struck with a feeling of panic, he struggles to find his way out. He then recounts a dream regarding the same labyrinthine path that he has months after this encounter. Throughout this narrative the difference between the narrator’s two separate spatio-temporal locations – the one taking a walk in the county of Suffolk and the other recollecting, remembering and recounting that particular walk – keep getting blurred. The various invasions of the narrator from his present location are hardly noticeable as incursions from a different point in time and space. What seems to be happening in the narrative is a juxtaposition of varying elements and sites which apparently lack a “common ground on which the meeting of these objects is possible” (Foucault, 1970, p. xvi). Sebald, thus, puts forward the potential to imagine a dynamic geography which could make scope for what Gillian Rose calls “paradoxical spaces”. This is a geography “which is as multiple and contradictory and different as the subjectivity imagining it... which overcomes the distinction between mind and body”, refuses to “distinguish between real and

⁴ The third principle of heterotopia from “Of Other Spaces”.

metaphorical space” or to “separate experience and emotion from the interpretation of places” (Rose, 1993, p. 155).

Sebald’s texts abound in (what seem to be) disparate and elaborate interconnections, aimless and unpremeditated ambulations, and juxtapositions of different temporalities and spaces which are physical, cognitive and imaginative. Such connections, movements and juxtapositions actively bring together the temporal of the “pasts” and “histories” with “elsewheres” and “geographies” through the spatial of “memories” and “contexts” (Massey, 2005). In explaining Dasein’s relation to the specific spatiality of beings encountered in the environment, Dreyfus (1991) explains Heidegger’s employment of the word *Entfernung*. “The literal translation of *Entfernung* is “remoteness” or “distance”, but Heidegger uses the word with a hyphen which, given the negative sense of *ent*, would literally mean the abolishing of distance. He uses it this way to mean the establishing and overcoming of distance, that is, the opening up of a space in which things can be near and far... Dasein brings things close in the sense of bringing them within the range of its concern, so that they can be experienced as near to or remote from a particular Dasein.” (p. 80) This is exactly the spatial frame defined by the processes of relational space-time (that Harvey (2004) has elaborated on) which is constituted of interconnections, contexts and relations.

Space and Identity

Sebald’s narratives, thus, open up the possibilities of both history and space. In defining space, various thinkers have described it as a moment frozen in time. Many have tried describing space as a dimension in opposition to time or that which lacks temporality. Time, it may be said, is effortlessly perceived as abstract, as something inherent and as a product of human experience, while space is accepted as that which is material, an extension which is a given – time as something internal in opposition to space, which is external. Often space has been understood as a set of relations within a closed and interlocked system⁵. This closure, explains Massey (2005), “robs the ‘spatial’ of one of its potentially disruptive characteristics – its juxtaposition, its happenstance arrangement-in-relation-to-each-other, of previously unconnected narratives/temporalities; its openness and its condition of always being made” (p. 39). Through his narratives, Sebald explores the conditions of possibilities of this “always-being-made” aspect of both history and space. This also offers the possibility of wrenching apart of temporalities and narratives. The “disruptive” characteristic of space can dislocate established forms of knowledge and “truth”. Austerlitz’s constructed erasure of his past, for instance, collapses when his spatial encounters incite the resurfacing of his buried memories. The spatial juxtaposition of Sebald’s narratives tend towards an openness of space, opposing a synchronic totality. In these spatial configurations, unconnected narratives are brought together in context, creating a spatial frame of an indeterminate zone consisting of various temporalities, micronarratives and fictive possibilities which constantly seem to be working towards an accommodation, even if it is a volatile one. These juxtapositions are not simply a random “mixing together” of various elements to highlight their possible contemporaneity or even a “rebellion against the over-rationalization of closed structures” (Massey, 2005, p. 112). Instead, they work towards a spatial configuration of the coexistence of multiple, complex trajectories which may result in an open-ended space-time to offer a re-presentation of both history and geography. Such a configuration exceeds the limitations of dialectical resolutions and perpetually try to escape the boundaries set for them by diverse contingencies.

⁵ Space as a set of relations of interlocked system is understood and explained as such most significantly by Structuralists. See Massey (For Space), p. 39.

Like the juxtapositions of what might seem to be random events and situations of space and time, the movements of the narrators through various settings are not simply aimless ambulations of the flaneurs' limited phenomenological response to their immediate milieu either⁶. Sebald is not unaware of his privilege to travel and navigate. "To travel is to encounter the terrorizing force of white supremacy", wrote bell hooks⁷ upon which Derek Gregory (1994) comments that the "freedom to move, to read, to write....is a situated freedom, a 'cosmopolitanism', that is gendered, classed and ironically located" (p. 13). Gregory also points out that Western space has been conceived in the image of a masculine, phallogocentric power that has been more concerned with rationality and space rather than the rationalization of space. "Space itself is represented as the physical embodiment of (masculine) rationality whose structures are to be superimposed over 'non space'" (Gregory, 1994, p. 130). Lefebvre (1979) comments on how space functions by assigning appropriated places to social relations based on gender, age, the specified organization of the family, and to the "relations of production in the division of labour and its organization" (p. 186). The narrator, in questioning the authenticity of his own account and casting doubts in his role as a narrator, through and in his very movements (from real and physical spaces to metaphorical and cognitive spaces) which lead to his task of recounting and narrating, is making a choice not to obscure his subjective position but to consciously incorporate it in his narrative.

The two texts in which Sebald deals with the narratives of both German (in *The Emigrants*) and non-German (in *Austerlitz*) Jews, the narrators are extremely conscious of their own identity and position (of a non-Jewish German) in relating the tales of the Jewish subjects. Stuart Taberner (2005) questions whether it is possible for a German author to commemorate Jewish lives without indulging in a kind of melancholia to address the guilt of the narrator whose forbears were directly involved in the persecution of the Jews. The 1990s, Taberner writes, witnessed a controversial debate in German literature regarding addressing the question of German Jews by non-Jewish German writers. Writers like Matthias Altenburg commented that this was best left to Jewish writers themselves. To this, some Jewish writers took issue, claiming that this was an easy way out for German writers, to both absolve themselves of and to not entirely come to terms with the anti-Semitism that gained force in German lands. Sebald himself resonated a similar anxiety when he mentioned in an interview that a German writer cannot simply go ahead and say, now I write about Jews again (Taberner, 2005, p. 185). Sebald's narrators are careful in keeping their voices distinct from those of the Jewish characters. Katharina Hall comments on lack of resolution in narratives of *The Emigrants* and the use of documentary and imaginative materials in the narratives⁸. The tension that ensues from this technique, according to her, is highly productive as it "keeps open the wounds of a traumatic history and refuses narrative closure" (Taberner, 2005, p. 186).

This open-endedness of the narrative runs parallel to the openness of space that has been pointed at earlier. The simultaneous multiplicity of trajectories could not be clearer than at the end of *Austerlitz* when the eponymous protagonist and the narrator part ways – the former moves on in an attempt to retrieve what he can of his lost past while the latter revisits the Breendonk Fort (which had once served as a Nazi internment and torture camp) which he had visited earlier right after meeting Austerlitz, bringing about a circular end to his own narrative. Taberner points out that if "Austerlitz's dilemma is that he has too *little* evidence of the past, the narrator's is that he has *too much*" (p. 190), the evidence of the spatial evidence ghettos,

⁶ There have been significant criticisms of the figure of the flaneur, most importantly by feminists. See Elizabeth Wilson's "The Invisible Flaneur" and so on.

⁷ Qtd in Gregory, Derek. Geographical imaginations, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination".

⁸ Qtd. in Taberner.

concentration camps and mass graves all across Europe being constant reminders of the actions of his countrymen – a congealing of various elements from the past and present towards a projected future. One cannot escape the burdens of their past. The “situated freedom” of the narrator turns on its head when the narrator tries to come to terms with his own historical trajectory; his freedom of movement becomes marked with anxiety and turmoil. But such distress and agitation are not meant to run parallel with, or in any way reflect, the trauma of the Jewish survivors and figures in the narratives.

With the opening up of history and space, Sebald’s narrator successfully avoids collapsing his narrative with the one whose tale he relates. “We cannot understand the shifting terrain”, writes Harvey, “upon which political subjectivities are formed and political actions occur without thinking about what happens in relational terms” (2004, p. 276). Sebald’s political subjectivity in addressing the problematic question of identification with Jews dispels “a ‘normalization’ of relations between Germans and Jews which serves primarily to allow non-Jewish Germans to feel comfortable” (Taberner, 2005, p. 190). In the course of the narratives, the narrators often bring into question and doubt their respective versions of events as evident from the episode of Vienna (in *Vertigo*) cited earlier. The narrators’ historical and spatial positionality are often brought into question. The narrator’s remark on the Waterloo Panorama in *The Rings of Saturn*, for example, is not simply a metaphor for a temporal aerial view of history but also the geographical location from which history is both written and read. The “place” from which history (and knowledge) is being perceived, represented and (re)produced is interrogated. His criticism is of the synoptic and, at the same time, incomplete view and understanding of history that the spatio-temporality of the moment, in its perception of singular, non-simultaneous and non-contiguous trajectories, is prone to offer.

“Places” must be understood as spatio-temporal events, which are a “moment within power-geometries, as a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space” (Massey, 2005, p.131). What emerges out of a particular moment in space can never be accepted as conclusive since that very moment in space-time is always under production, a perpetual part of various processes. The idea of “place”, must therefore act as a challenge to the negotiations of the “here” and “now”. And Sebald’s narratives challenge, expose and unpack the power-knowledge nexus that this spatio-temporality is uncritically associated with.

Conclusion: The Politics of Space

Through such a technique of narration Sebald seems to refuse to hold on to any foundational categories – either of history or space. This directly echoes Samuel Beckett’s insistence on the need to consider ourselves as inhabiting an indeterminate zone without access to any fundamental certainties and his rejection of all facile conceptions of place (Prieto, 2012). Maurice Blanchot (1995) too, in his essay, “The Conquest of Space”, urges the need to sever the affective bonds that tie people to places. Discussing Yuri Gagarin’s flight to space, he remarks that rationalism and science have resulted in the loss of a common ground on which we have traditionally stood. This is a condition that one should embrace and push to its logical conclusion. This severing of the bond between the people and place will make possible a new spatial science – one that will reframe the old ways of understanding human spatial existence as local subsets of universal laws (Prieto, 2012, p. 82). Blanchot claims that “truth is nomadic” (1995, p. 271). Truth cannot be determined by spatial or historical fixities. Neither space nor history can be conclusively determined or be perceived as a stabilization.

The juxtaposition and coequality of multiple trajectories – the dynamic simultaneity of space –

can also make scope for the chance of space. Massey (2005) explains this chance within the “constant formation of spatial configurations, those complex mixtures of pre-planned spatiality and happenstance positions-in-relation-to-each-other” (p. 116). The happenstance of juxtaposition, she writes, offers the possibility of surprise (which, she criticizes, Certeau claimed is eliminated by spatialization) through the impossibility of closure, the indeterminacy that is resulted, the unpredictability and the unforeseen and the possibilities of alterity. The instability and the potential of the spatial, according to her, make all space a little accidental, and all having an element of heterotopia. This, however, makes an over-generalization of heterotopias. The kind of innovative spatiality Massey’s work offers does indeed reflect the idea of heterotopia very closely. While it is true that any given moment in space-time has the potential to translate into a heterotopia, Foucault’s conceptualization of it is characterized by its transformative promise.

Foucault (1986), in “Of Other Spaces”, describes heterotopic spaces through a set of relations giving the readers hints of the political and social dynamics that operate within such spaces. What interests Foucault is that heterotopias (and utopias⁹) are sites that “simultaneously represent, contest and invert” the sets of relations of the society or civilization that they constitute. While describing heterotopia, Foucault begins with categorizing such spaces as crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation. Crisis heterotopias, existing in what is believed to be primitive societies, are places that are reserved for certain group of people believed to be in a state of crisis. The crisis heterotopias have been replaced by places of detention, rehabilitation and curability – called the heterotopias of deviation – for those who do not comply with social codes and standards of behaviour, morality or even health. The function of heterotopias does not stay constant according to Foucault. It can change as the society within which the particular heterotopia is placed changes. Foucault attempts to create a metaphor like the heterotopia for certain spaces which are, at once, “mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live”. Heterotopias function as distinct alternatives to our diurnal lived spaces. David Harvey (2000), even while dismissing the concept of heterotopia as inadequate, describes it as a potential alternative which “might be explored and can take the shape and from where a critique of existing norms and processes can most effectively be mounted” (p. 184). While Sebald’s narratives strive towards an opening up of space and history, heterotopias are those momentary events with subtle yet definite boundaries. These boundaries are, of course, permeable and unstable. The limits of heterotopias are in a constant flux of crystallization and disintegration. Foucault explains, “heterotopias begin to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with traditional time”. Heterotopia comes into play as and when Sebald juxtaposes various elements which seem to lack a common site. Such a juxtaposition produces a kind of volatile space – the heterotopia – which has the potential to function as a counter-site which can “simultaneously represent, contest and invert” the set of relations which inform history writing and narration as well as an order of space. Heterotopias consist of juxtapositions and simultaneity which can offer a critical awareness. This is exactly what Sebald’s narratives exemplify¹⁰. Heterotopia becomes that tool of discourse for Sebald through which his narrators challenge the nexus of space and history,

⁹ Utopias, much as heterotopias, function to neutralize or invert the very set of relations that they seem to reflect. Yet they are essentially non-existent places- only ideas that cannot be realized in lived spaces.

¹⁰ Kevin Knight in his doctoral thesis, *Real Places and Impossible Spaces*, posits that Sebald’s narratives are a critique of heterotopia because of their inadequacy of representing the unique “unimaginability” of the spaces and sites of the Holocaust. While this is a significant and credible claim to make, Knight seems to be holding on to a rather narrow definition of a heterotopia and applying it specifically to representations of those spaces that are geographically linked (or in contrast) to the Holocaust. My focus, on the other hand, is to examine and stretch the possibility of the transformative potential of heterotopias. Knight professes that Sebald critiques heterotopias. My claim, however, is that Sebald employs heterotopia to critique certain, apparently unquestionable, manifestations of space and history.

power and knowledge. Edward Soja calls for the need of a significant restructuring of critical social thought, “a recomposition which enables us to see more clearly the long-hidden instrumentality of human geographies, in particular the encompassing of spatialization of social life that have been associated with the historical development” of society (Soja, 1989, p. 24). Sebald’s mode of narration challenges the notion of a dead, fixed, undialectical, and immobile space. His narratives put forward the idea that space should be seen as a “product of interrelation...always under construction” (Massey, 2005).

Spatiality in the novels is defined as a dynamic process which is essential to an alternative representation of history. In the course of challenging both the physical spatial limits and the history that this location usually produces, a mechanism of heterotopia comes into play. It is in these volatile moments in space-time in the narratives that we can read recalcitrance and resistance. Sebald’s narratives, in contesting the notions of space and history, create volatile moments of discursive heterotopias. These moments are a “collision of future and past”; a point in space where the past, present and future come together (Stuart, 2002, p. 45). These moments of collision create illusions of freedom. They perform as counter-sites which are “simultaneously mythic and real contestations” (Foucault, 1986). If a particular kind of mix of order and chance is integral to spatial (re)configuration in an open space-time (as Massey calls for), heterotopias are those moments which are “disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy syntax in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also the less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to but also opposite one another) to hang together” (Foucault, 1970, p. 48). Sebald’s narratives and (re)presentation of history thus cease to be simply narratives or histories but dynamic processes constituted by various heterotopic spatio-historical moments which make scope for knowledge to be “analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a source of power and disseminates the effects of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 69).

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Hindi Haiku: A Study of Shifts in Moods

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Abstract

Making a grand breakthrough in the eighth century, Japanese poetry remains one of the earliest boons for the world of literature. Indian poets are some of the many writers who have been influenced by Japanese poetry. This article analyses haiku composed in the Hindi language. The analysis is based on a thematic and critical study of the works of selective haiku writers of the Hindi language. The benefits that Hindi haiku has created for Hindi literature is seen in how it adapts itself culturally, socially and philosophically which is elucidated here. The Hindi haiku poets, through restriction of syllables, gave rise to images that forced us to dwell upon their reflections. Those who deviated from its strict syllabic form also gave rise to innovative poetic compositions. This study explores the philosophical inclination, formative deviation and cultural variation of haiku as it travelled from Japanese culture to the Indian culture.

Keywords: haiku, Hindi literature, Japanese philosophy, Japanese poetry, Weltanschauung, Zen thought

Introduction

Haiku is a Japanese imagist poetic form of five-seven-five syllables that allows the writer to form reflections through images. This quality can be seen in almost all forms of Japanese poetry. According to Robert Brower, the poets of Japan utilised both personal and impersonal patterns. They needed to bring their personal lyricism into balance with such impersonal, social concerns as relations between the poet and public affairs. Work also had to be brought into balance with larger concerns of broader humanity, the world of nature and religion. These polar opposites of the personal and impersonal were essential for each other, and everything was to be gained by their popular harmony. Some critics think that a poem remains a poem only if it is able to evoke our senses and calm our mind by its rhythmic flow. This is not the case with haiku. Haiku creates rhythm through images. Regarding this statement, Brower (1975) has asserted that:

The haiku has rhythm, but it is not protracted enough to give a sense of melodic movement; it consists almost entirely of images related by juxtaposition rather than, by a coherent placement in a syntactical, rhythmic flow (p. 11).

The beauty of this poetic genre lies in the enigma it embodies within itself. The use of five-seven-five syllables is prevalent in haiku; until now. The reason behind the restriction of syllables is described by Kenneth Yasuda who wrote how:

Consequently, the length of a verse is made up of those words which we can utter in one breath. The length, that is, is necessitated by haiku nature and by the physical impossibility of pronouncing an unlimited number of syllables in a given breath (in Verma, 1983, p. 51).

This fact is equally applicable for the Hindi language. According to Verma (1983), the Japanese language is very similar to that of Hindi. He puts forth:

Japaani varnmala ki dhvaniya atyant seemit hain aur we devnaagri me suvidhapoorvak yatha-uccharan likhi jaa sakti hain (p. 64).
[Translation¹] The sounds in Japanese language are similar to Hindi, and they can be written with ease and clarity of pronunciation in Devanagari font².

A majority of haiku poets adopted a rigid syllabic rule due to this reason. Yet according to Satyabhusham Verma, some deviated due to the intensity of the required theme, a desire to break norms, a sense of a loss of creative ability and a concern that the theme they wanted to deal with could not fit in the five-seven-five restricted syllabic count of a haiku (Verma, 1983, p. 53). Many of the Japanese poets did not follow the syllabic norms of haiku. One of the reasons behind this was an eagerness to experiment with the structure and form of a genre. As First Name Otsuji remarked: “When we try to express our emotions directly, we cannot know beforehand, how many syllables will be needed” (in Yasuda, 2001, p. 38).

This research argues that the power of a poet lies in their ability to express something accurately or allusively even after a constraint is put on the work. There is always a rationale behind placing a restriction upon a written form. A valid reason behind the giving of Japanese haiku a limitation of seventeen syllables has been offered by Yasuda who has asserted:

¹ All translations, unless specified otherwise, are the work of the author.

² Script used in Hindi language.

The mental state of the tension of the poet during the kind of experience [in haiku ...] durates one-breath length, for as the poet exhales, that in itself draws the haiku moment to its close, and his vision is completed. (2001, p. 40)

Therefore, a traditional haiku, conforming to its restrictions, involves the expression of one image, and this expression has to be uttered in a single breath.

Philosophical Impacts on Haiku

If we talk about the structure of haiku, we are talking about what a thousand words could not say, and how something is expressed in the three lines of haiku. Precise yet deep, this poetic form through convention, adaptation and trans-creation has been elevated to a highly privileged position among the literature of other languages. The grandeur of haiku is so profound that the poets of many other countries – east and west – have adopted this form of poetry. India is one of these countries. India and Japan have been exchanging ideas and culture through Korea and China, for centuries. Buddhism is the leading religion of Japan, the origin of which lies in India. For this reason, Japanese people became internally “Indianised” without marking the gradual changes in their life and culture. According to Satyabhushan Verma, the Japanese word zen is an adapted form of Indian (Sanskrit) *Dhyan* (meditation). The basis of *zen* thought is to incarnate the Buddhist, or *Mahayana*, way in daily life (Uchiyama, 2004, p. 235). Over time Buddhism was absorbed into Confucian thought and Taoism which, together, has flourished as a natural religion in China.

The Sanskrit word *dhyan* was pronounced as *jhan* in Pali, *chan* in Chinese and the same as *zen* in Japanese. Japan came under the influence of zen thought during the seventh and eighth centuries, but its unavoidable impact was felt and realised later in the twelfth century. Gradually a zen view became part and parcel of Japanese life. It pervaded across all aspects of Japanese life and culture including architecture, painting, craft, gardening and poetry (Abe, 1997, p. 240). Zen ascetics looks at every situation in life – including grief, happiness, emotion, joy and sorrow – indifferently. There is an instinctive sympathy for the entire creation, animate and inanimate alike. There is, too, a keen awareness of the ever-changing and transitory aspects of nature. Of especial note here, many zen ascetics were also poets. Japanese poetry, particularly haiku, is indebted to zen thought. Concentration, neutrality, frugality in the use of words, has generated a brevity of structure, a terseness of style and ordinariness of content for which haiku is now known worldwide and is also now known to have been derived from the same source (Verma, 1983, pp. 30–35).

Hindi Literature: A Short History

A brief understanding of Hindi literature is essential in order to understand Hindi Haiku. The variation and diversity of poetic forms in Hindi literature have evolved through ages. With the evolution of many great literary works, poetry dominated Hindi literature until the 1850s. Starting with the journey of poetic grandeur in the fourteenth century and *veergathakaal* (the period of warrior song, eleventh to the fourteenth centuries) involved prominent writers such as Vidyapati and Amir Khusro. The real journey of Hindi literature is thought to have begun with *Bhaktikaal* (the period of devotion, fourteenth to eighteenth centuries). Kabir, Jaayasi, Soordas, Tulsi, Raidas and Meera are some of the better-known poets of this age. According to Vishwanath Tripathi, this age was called an age of devotion because of the attack on and the respective victory of Mughals in India. Due to various frustrations, Hindu poets started seeking solace in their devotion and the outcome of this devotion was *Bhaktikavya*. Importantly,

Hajariprasad Dwivedi calls this age as an outcome of the preconceived notion of incarnation and a belief in God (Tripathi, 2012, pp. 11–12). Some critics find Hindi haiku similar to bhakti poetry, primarily because of the shared themes and structures across between haiku and bhakti poetry. Bhakti poetry, like haiku, makes use of couplets and triplets, and involves *dhyana*. In *Reetikaal* (the age of tradition, eighteenth to twentieth centuries), the poets adopted literary techniques and devices to enhance their poetry (Shukla, 1946). The poetry of this age was enriched with *Sringar rasa* (essence of beauty). Some of the prominent poets of this age are Keshavdas, Senapati, Bihari, Dev, Bhushan and Gang. Several poets like Ghananand, Alam, Thakur and Guru Gobind Singh deviated from *reeti* (tradition) and carried their own theory of poetry (Tripathi, 2012, pp. 54–70).

With the approaching of modernization in 1850, the writings in Hindi became prose-dominant due to the rise of different ideologies, but poetry was not devoid of enrichment. *Chhayavaadi Kavya* (beginning in 1920) involved the use of images, nature, ideology, women, curiosity and other aspects of humanity. This school of poetry induced thoughts of national freedom and power which sometimes also reached the point of patriotism. Jaishankar Prasad, Nirala, Panth and Mahadevi Verma belong to this school of poetry (Tripathi, 2012, pp. 127–33). *Chhayavadottar Kavya* (post *Chhayavadi* period of poetry) followed the concerns related to the poor; their pitiful condition and dismal living conditions were reflected in the poems composed under this symbol of social concern and thought. Nirala, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, Makhanlal Chaturvedi and Shubhadra Kumari Chauhan were the chief poets of this trend. *Pragatisheel Kavya* (progressive poetry) began to be written around 1930. According to Tripathi, it shared a rebellion against exploitation and saw the power of the exploited. The beauty of toil and inequality of class is depicted in many of the works written during this period by poets including Nagarjun, Kedarnath Aggarwal, Trilochan Shastri and Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh who adopted the progressive thought (2012, p. 143). Along with the Indian poetic genre such as Doha, kavita, Chaupai and Kundaliya, several imported poetic forms emerged in Hindi literature and moulded themselves into the nature and culture of Hindustan (Sagar, 2017, p. 12). Ghazal, Rubai, elegy, sonnet and haiku are some of these imported forms.

The Advent of Haiku in India

The attraction of the poets towards *nayi kavita* (new poetry) in around 1943 (Sagar, 2017, p.12) further facilitated the acceptance of haiku in Hindi. The advent of haiku is actually a comparatively recent development in India. According to Verma, the journey of this genre began, in India, in 1919 when Rabindranath Tagore returned from a tour in Japan and wrote a book entitled *Japan Yatre*. In this work Tagore discusses his appreciation for the short Japanese poem haiku without mentioning this genre by name. Moreover, he also translated some of the haikus written by Basho from Japanese into Bengali in a collection entitled *Sfuling*, which still remains unpublished (85-86). Later on, several poets started adopting and moulding this poetic form. Agyeya and Satyabhushan Verma are some of the initial followers of this genre. Interestingly, poems consisting of three lines were present in Hindi literature well before Tagore visited Japan; only the five-seven-five syllabic use of sounds were not considered until 1919. Verma maintains:

Hindi me laghu muktako ki ek lambi parampara hai. Vedic kaal se lekar sampurn madhyakaal ka bhartiya saahitya muktako ke vishaal bhandaar se bhara para hai [...] maahiya ya tappa teen panktiyon ke Punjabi geet hain jo roop-vidhaan me haiku ke bahut nikat hain. (1983, p. 88)

In Hindi, there is an old tradition of short poems. The era starting from Vedic

period to medieval period is full of the great treasure of short poems [...] *maahiya* or *tappa* are the Punjabi songs consisting of three-lines which are very near to haiku in structure.

The impact of Western literatures on Hindi that led to the rise of haiku cannot be underestimated. Westerners have left an obvious impact on Indian people. The techniques and forms used by Western writers are mostly appreciated by Hindi poets (Trivedi, 2007), but it was the introduction of haiku in Europe that gave Hindi literature a term for a new genre: haiku. Verma maintains:

Pshchim me, vishesh roop se angreji me, haiku ki charcha se hindi kavya jagat aprabhavit nahi reh sakta tha. Chhathe dashak ke ant tak haiku hindi me aparichit chhand nahi raha tha. (1983, p. 89)

Due to the discussion of haiku in west, especially in English, the Hindi world of poetry could not remain indifferent. Until the end of 1960, haiku was not an unknown poetic form in Hindi.

Ezra Pound in America, Seferis in Greece, Tablada in Spain and many other poets from different countries have adopted the haiku form while writing their compositions (Verma, 1983, p. 84). Many readers of English literature would be familiar with the following haiku by Pound:

In a Station of Metro
The apparition of these faces in the crowd
Petals on a wet, black bough (1913, p. 6)

Unlike English haiku poets, the poets of Hindi haiku favoured the use of an appropriate syllable count. The Hindi language is a syllabic language. In Hindi haiku one akshar (comparable to an alphabet or letter in English) is considered to be equivalent to one syllable. Bhagwatsharan Aggarwal says:

Japani haiku ke saman, shilpa ki drishti se paanch-saat-paanch akharon ki kramwali, 17 akshariya atukant tripadi rachna ko hi hindi ke haikukaron ne sweekara hai. Isme matraon aur ardh-vyanjano ki ginti nahi hoti. (2009, p. 144)
Like the structure of Japanese haiku, three lined verse of 17 sounds including five-seven-five sound sequence has been accepted by Hindi haiku poets. *Matra* (addition of a, ee, i, u, oo, et cetera in a sound) and *ardhavyanjana* (half sounds) are not counted.

Some of the Hindi poets strictly follow the five-seven-five framework of haiku, while others go on allowing their poetic license to interweave words playfully in a striking manner. Even after going by a strict syllable limit, these poets do not fail to achieve the desired expression and impression. Aggarwal, a present-day practitioner of haiku, for example, has written:

Boond mein sama
Saagar aur soorya
Hawa le uri (2016, p. 10)

Mingled in one drop
Sea and sun
Swept away by wind

This haiku has various interpretations. The impressionistic reading of these three lines yields the theme of nature, but further meanings reveal themselves as the layers of the poem are explored. Whether the sweeping away of the drop is to be lamented or celebrated, is left to the readers; the meanings that we see are both degenerative as well as regenerative. This is where

the beauty of haiku lies.

Haiku utilises the images of nature to form reflections. These reflections give rise to a number of themes. Most obviously, the inclusion of nature in haiku has seen some critics consider Hindi Haiku as nature poetry. Regarding this Verma has put forth:

Haiku ko kuch paashchatya sameekshako ne prakriti kavya bhi kaha hai. Parantu haiku me prakriti ka roop, pashchim ki kavita me jise prakriti kavya kaha gaya hai, use nitant bhinna hai. Haiku me prakriti ka paryavekshan hai jo nirantar parivartansheel aur nashwar hai. Jeevan ki kshanbhagurta ko haiku-kavi prakriti ke gateman, nashvar roop me dekhta hai. Haiku-drishhti manushya aur prakriti me bhed nahi karti. Weh manushya aur prakriti ko ek ang ke roop me dekhti hai. (1983, p. 35)

Some western critics have called haiku as a poem on nature. However, the way nature has been used in haiku differs from the way it has been used in western nature poetry. In haiku, there is an observation of nature which is variable and frangible. The ephemerality of life is seen by a haiku poet as movability and destructibility of nature. The vision of haiku does not consider difference between human and nature. It views human and nature as the same organ.

Haiku is not restricted solely to nature. Human pain, love, happiness and mortality have been reflected in haiku. The seasons of nature, sunrise, sunset and phases of the moon have also been portrayed by haiku poets. This is where the tradition of Japanese and Hindi haiku gets overlapped. Haiku written in the West does not have the same intense representation of natural surroundings getting affected due to seasonal changes.

Regarding this lack of seasonal variation in west affecting the creative faculties of haiku writers, Haruo Shirane puts forth:

Significantly, the Haiku Society of America definition of haiku does not mention the seasonal word, which would be mandatory in Japan for most schools. Maybe half of existing English-language haiku have seasonal words or some sense of the season, and even when the haiku do have a seasonal word the usually do not server the function that they do in Japanese haiku (2000, p. 61).

The representations of nature in haiku sees this type of poetry act as vehicle to convey both human predicaments as well as joys. While doing so, personification remains a dominant technique in its composition. Hindi poets have also given different names to haiku with *tridal* (leaf pointed on three sides), *bilvapatra* (wood-apple leaf), *triveni* (river with three streams) and *trishool* (Trident) being some of these.

Hindi Haiku: From Images to Reflection

In contemporary India, thousands of poets have been successfully composing haiku resulting in several haiku magazines and anthologies being published. After this genre was introduced by Agyeya in Hindi literature, several poets started adopting this method of expression. Aditya Pratap Singh (1929–2013) from Reeva, Madhya Pradesh is one of these poets. The credit of taking haiku as a movement in India is attributed to this Singh who started various haiku clubs and believed in writing pure (that is five-seven-five syllabic count) haiku. The revealing of

social issues and the unravelling of nature are his main concerns. Bhagwatsharan Aggarwal (1930–), unlike Singh, believes in writing haikus in free form and it is, perhaps, due to this stylistic preference that these two poets are considered rivals of each other. Neelmendu Sagar (1936–), a poet from Begusarai, Bihar writes haiku with the dominant themes of nature and its concerns. Shail Rastogi (1927–2007) from the Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh has also utilised nature to convey human emotions and follies. The analysis of Hindi haiku bears various interpretations. The theme of nature and time has been conventionally carried from Japanese haiku into Hindi haiku. Sometimes the Hindi haiku poets also reflect on the degradation of culture, nature and religion in their works. The surface reading of most of these haikus do not give us pleasure. Yet the more we delve into this poetic form, the greater is the pleasure. This pleasure arises from the image that a haiku creates before our eyes (Stephenson and Rosen, 2015). The generation of the image gives rise to the generation of theme. This article deals with the haikus written in both strict as well as deviated forms.

Table 1: Chronological presentation of Thematic Journey of Haiku (from Japan to India)

Time Period	Japan		United States		India	
	Poet	Theme	Poet	Theme	Poet	Theme
1670-1700	Basho	Nature, seasons, ephemeral concept of time	-	-	-	-
1700-1800	Buson, Ryota	Nature (like sun, moon, water bodies, flowers), seasons	-	-	-	-
	Issa	Nature, humanity, human emotion, misery	-	-	-	-
1800-1900	Shiki	Iconoclasm, anti-tradition	-	-	-	-
1900 to present	Kyoshi	Traditional sense of representation of beauty, propaganda	Ezra Pound	Imagination, modernity	Agyeya, Verma	Nature, seasons
	Soju	Human life	Jack Kerouac	Beat-poetics, protest	Singh, Sagar, Rastogi, Verma	Time, nature, seasons, human misery
	Sheishi, Shuoshi	New forms, rebelliousness, romantic self-expression	Richard Wright	Nature	Aggarwal, Verma, Sagar	Existence, Human predicament

The journey of haiku in India is one of deviation to the realization of its own form. Table 1 depicts the thematic journey of Haiku, which shows shifts of mood from images to reflections. One of the early experimenters, who once unknowingly wrote a poem similar to haiku, was Agyeya (1911–87). The echo of haiku in Hindi poetry was seen for the first time in his anthology of poems entitled as *Aree O Karuna Prabhamaya* (1959). Being an explorer by nature, he looked at the technique of haiku, and translated a famous haiku of Basho to Hindi:

<i>Sookhi daal per</i>	On a dry twig
<i>Kaak ek ekaki</i>	sits a lonely crow
<i>Raat patjhar ki</i> (1959, p. 76).	in the night of autumn.

At first glance, the haiku reflects on the ongoing of nature, but once we move a layer deeper, old age becomes its prominent theme. *Sookhi daal* (dry twig) connotes something old and worn-out. The word *ekaki* (lonely) further hints at loneliness that the old age brings with itself and *patjhar* (autumn) acts as a universal symbol of death. Similarly, the poem quoted below by the same poet arouses a similar image, however with a different mood:

<i>Urr gayi chiriya</i>	The bird flew
<i>Kaanpi, fir Thir</i>	Trembled, again
<i>ho gayi patti</i> (1959, p. 118).	Still was the leaf.

This poem entitled “*Chiriya ki Kahani*” (“A Bird’s Story”) records a momentary experience of the poet. The bird sat on a leaf, guessed the presence of the poet nearby and flew away at once pushing the leaf. Due to this movement, the leaf trembles and becomes firm again. These seemingly different activities are not really very different. They are indivisible parts of a single activity happening in a single moment. The poet, while writing the poem, thought that it was incomplete. The whole thing could be described in a single sentence, but the poem appeared before him in four short lines as cited above. Agyeya admitted in his *Atmanepad* (1960) that he tried to improve upon this poem, thinking it to be not a complete composition, but he failed to do so. Perhaps because he was not well acquainted with haiku at the time. Later, in 1957, when he visited Japan and became well acquainted with Japanese poetry and its aesthetics, he realised that his short poem “*Chiriya ki Kahani*” is actually a complete work in its own way (Agyeya, 1958 p. 51).

Soon after Agyeya introduced haiku into Hindi literature, hundreds of poets started adopting this poetic form. Singh, noted above, wrote multiple influential haikus. He followed the strict five-seven-five syllable (sound or *akshar* in Hindi) rule while writing haiku with his poems of this type dominated by natural imagery:

<i>Chaandani jhuki</i>	The white rays of moon bent
<i>Phool ke othon per</i>	on the lips of the flower
<i>Doodh bhari maa</i> (2016, p. 17).	like a mother about to feed her infant.

The poet, with the help of metaphor, makes the readers imagine as well as visualise the petals of a flower when the white rays of moonlight fall upon them. Like the poems of William Wordsworth, the haikus composed by Singh throw light on the difference between an indifferent and a sensitive eye while observing the surrounding atmosphere. Similarly, one of his remarkable haikus:

<i>Sitaron beech</i>	Amidst the stars is
<i>hansiya fenk gayi</i>	throwing the sickle
<i>khet ki saanjh</i> (2016, p. 17).	this evening of the field.

The composition quoted above acts as a *mélange* of various literary techniques folded gracefully into three lines. The act of throwing the sickle when the farmer is about to leave his field in the evening, has been compared to a half-moon shining between the stars. Through natural imagery, the poet delves even deeper into the link between nature and time:

<i>Oon ka gola</i>	A ball of wool
<i>Jaga, bhaga sahsa</i>	woke up and suddenly started running
<i>Arrey shashak</i> (2016, p. 17).	O, hare.

Here the sun becomes ‘*oon ka gola*’ (a ball of wool) for the poet. The movement of the sun has been compared to a hare which has all of a sudden awoken due to sunrise. Time could be seen as the hare since the movement of sun and time are closely interlinked, and time has been called as a product of the movement of sun.

What could be a more accurate depiction of reality than this image of a poor child struggling from the dogs to get the leftovers? Another haiku by the same poet depicts the pain and mental agony of old age:

<i>Chirchirata</i>	Irritated
<i>Tendoo ka koyla re</i>	like the coal of tandoor
<i>Akela boodha</i> (2016, p. 17).	is the lonely old man.

The word “irritated” (*Chirchirata*) has been linked with coal because the coal (*Koyla*) of tandoor sparkles with heat before it is extinguished; it makes a crackling sound (*chirchirana*) and its cracks are visible before its life ends. This act of extinguishing in this poem symbolises death. The lonely old man is irritated due to his fear of loneliness; his loneliness further gives rise to his decreased sense of self-worth. Coal could be seen as something insignificant and futile, and this is why the poet compares the old man with it. Some haikus of this poet also have a double meaning (Blasko and Merski 1998). The haiku quoted below exemplifies Singh’s skill in offering readers with dual meanings.

<i>Chubhta aah:</i>	Stinging ah:
<i>Toota kaanch khilouna</i>	The broken toy of glass,
<i>Bacchi ki yaad</i> (2016, p. 17).	like the remembrance of girl-child.

The first line creates an ambience of causticity (*chubhta*) and bitterness of pain (*aah*). The use of colons denotes the continuity of thought from the first line through to the next two lines, however lying at an interval. It seems as if the bitterness of pain stings the poet who sees it as the smashing of a glass-toy which is very dear to a girl child. The agony received when a very dear object breaks, like glass, tears the skin of its owner. The poet uses the expression *bacchi* (girl child) further intensifying the ambiguity. The remembrance (*yaad*) of the girl child bears several connotations. A girl lives two lives: one before her marriage and the other after it. She has to give up her dreams, her birthplace and every object associated with her childhood, when she enters into her other, new, life. This shattering of a dream and its associations has been linked to the loss of the poet. Moreover, this haiku creates a sense of nostalgia. Perhaps, it is the daughter who is away from the speaker, and this lack of presence makes him lament.

Aditya Pratap Singh, as already mentioned, followed strict syllable count; however, some of his fellow poets neglected the syllabic concept of haiku. Considered as an invective of Singh, Aggarwal believed in adopting a syllable-free technique while composing haiku. According to him, a Hindi haiku creates images through words. He espouses this view in the Encyclopaedia of Haiku-Poetry:

Weh (haiku poet) apne kavya ke madhyam se apni samvednaaon ko is prakar prasut karta hai, jisse ki uska hubahoo chitra Pathak ya shrota ke samne ubharta jaaye (2009, p. 112).

A haiku poet, through his poetry serves before us his emotions in a way so as to evoke a pictorial image in front of the readers or listeners.

Along with the creation of images, Aggarwal also offers before us a *weltanschauung* (perspective of world). This worldview is represented by him in a manner so as to lead us to a greater perspective: the ideology and philosophy of life. This haiku by Aggarwal utilises the theme of home and modifies it in more complexities:

<i>Mere ghar me</i>	My abode contains
<i>Chheh jane, char disha</i>	Six people, four directions
<i>Nabh aur mein</i> (2016, p. 10).	Sky and me.

In the following haiku, the use of the word *mere* (mine) connotes possession. However, as we move, the flow of the composition reveals itself to be universal. The speaker considers the whole world to be his home. Therefore, *ghar* (home) becomes the world further giving rise to themes of both home as well as homelessness.

Along with the evolution of haiku, ambiguity started being considered as one its ornaments. The journey of haiku in Hindi began with the personification of nature, and in this sense, the haiku poets romanticised various images by playing with words:

<i>Nabh gunjaati</i>	Mother cloud
<i>Neer- gire shishu pe</i>	Echoes and hovers around her child
<i>Mandrati maa</i> (2016, p. 10).	made wet by water.

In this haiku by the same poet, the earth becomes the child (*shishu*), and the clouds making the sky thunder (*nabh gunjaati*) becomes the mother, reminding us of the romantic poets. These lines create before our eyes the image of a mother who, after hearing the thunderbolt, runs to pick up her infant on whom rain drops are falling. Such countryside images hint towards the rustic nature of Hindi haiku. The dominance of nature on various creatures of earth has been shown here. The next haiku draws a poignant picture of estrangement and momentariness of existence:

<i>Aansoo hi kab</i>	When do even tears
<i>Saath dete vyatha mein</i>	remain with us, at the time of anguish
<i>Chhor bhagte</i> (2016, p. 10).	They run away.

Everything in life does not remain eternally with anyone. Tears, considered as the partner of anguish, flows away while we suffer. Similarly, everything and everyone leaves us. The poet has tried to show the nothingness of life through this haiku.

<i>Ret pe bas</i>	On sand
<i>Likhoon mitaaon naam</i>	I write and erase name
<i>Aur kya karoon</i> (2016, p. 10).	What else should I do.

This haiku laments the condition of a lover who after separation, is not able to forget his love. It also shows the futility of life (“what else should I do”). Here, the speaker is dependent on a part of nature (“sand”) in order to find solace (or further intensify his grief). Haikus of this kind discuss the philosophy of life and nature and show the relationship of the two.

This poetic form could not remain constricted by natural imagery. Urban, social and political themes soon started being introduced within this genre. Neelmendu Sagar (1936–) is one of the poets to have introduced other themes to this genre. One of his haikus tells a thousand words to its readers:

<i>Bhaari gatthar</i>	Heavy burden
<i>Kandhe chadhi thakaan</i>	tired, drooping shoulders
<i>Ghirti sham</i> (2016, p. 14).	evening hovers.

This haiku hints at the predicament of old age, the age in which the burden of being old forces a person to continue doing his work even when his “shoulders” do not support him. Further, the word *gatthar* (a package made up of clothes) connotes poverty in this mechanised and modern era. It seems as if the person carrying this burden has to move because there is no time to rest. These expressions remind Uda Kyioko’s experience of spending time around *satoyama* (a celebrated local rural commons, evolved from centuries of agricultural use), with scarcity of essential commodities due to the devastations of war (Kiyoko, 2004). The utilisation of metaphor as a technique by the poet, reaches the zenith of beauty in the haiku quoted below. This haiku reflects on the nothingness of time and life:

<i>Saarthak lage</i>	Seemingly relevant
<i>Paani ke bulbule</i>	the bubbles of water
<i>Chhoote hi toote</i> (2015, p. 57).	popped off when touched.

The “bubbles of water”, like an illusion that seems to be true, breaks off after a moment. The bubbles are attractive, but they end the moment our fingers touch them. It also generates the meaning that when a “seemingly relevant” and attractive thing or condition is approached, then its reality or futility is revealed to the attracted viewer. Another haiku by the same poet tells us about the journey of a writer while he is creating:

<i>Khojta tumhe</i>	While trying to find you
<i>Shabdon ke jungle me</i>	in the forest of words
<i>Khud kho gaya</i> (2015, p. 27).	I got lost.

When a writer is writing their imagination can struggle to find the right words. While doing so, he forgets himself and goes on with his voyage. It is this journey that Sagar has referred to. If seen from another perspective, this haiku is also paradoxical. Here the finder becomes the lost one. The word “forest” connotes something dense because the speaker has become lost while looking for the object. When a person struggles with his way in a forest, he compares different ways to locate the way that he must seek the way to his destination (rightful words). An accurate depiction of the journey of a writer from his existence to the existence of the written art form has been shown by the present poet. The next haiku reflects on the keen sense of observation needed in the composition of this genre:

<i>Baal Vidhva</i>	Child widow
<i>Akeli mombatti</i>	is the lonely candle
<i>Jali pighli</i> (2016, p. 14).	burning and melting.

The flame of a candle, when seen from nearby, has a blue parting-like shape within it from the very moment it begins to burn. This parting has been compared to that of a widow by the poet. The flame of the lonely candle burns and makes its wax melt by itself, in the same way as the thoughts of a widow, whether it be bodily or worldly, are restricted to herself. Moreover, the act of burning and melting of the candle hints at the manner in which the thoughts of a widow burn and melt.

This theme of burning has been used by Dr Shail Rastogi (1927–2009) in a different and personified manner in the following work:

<i>Jale alaa</i>	burning is the bonfire
<i>haath taapne lagi</i>	warming her hands
<i>kubri raat</i> (2016, p. 13).	is the crooked night.

Here *alaa* (bonfire) refers to the sun above which evening bends to warm her hands and converts itself to night, *kubri raat* (crooked night). The haiku quoted below brings in the theme of temporality:

<i>Andhiyare ki</i>	Peeling off
<i>Faliyan chheelati ha</i>	the pods of morning
<i>Kone me bhor</i> (2016, p. 13)	is the dawn in the corner.

The poet depicts the arrival of morning in a different and striking manner. The act of peeling is done so as to unravel and explore something. In this haiku, dawn has been compared to the peeling of a pod, which brings before us the seeds of night. It is broadly through nature, that various other themes are evoked in the works of these *haikukars* (Hindi haiku poets). Human nature with its nuances has been shown by her in the haiku quoted below:

<i>Umra chiraiya</i>	Age is a bird
<i>Idhar se udhar</i>	from here to there
<i>Dhoondhati disha</i> (2016, p. 13).	finding her way.

The poet tries to capture the emotions and insecurity of old age. With her growing age, she wants to secure her life and in doing so her mind roams from one direction to the other. This act of seeking her way is seen by Shail Rastogi as the act of a bird trying to find her direction in order to go to her safe shelter. The haikus written by this poet, therefore reveals the ephemeral aspects of human existence and the elements associated with it.

Conclusion

Haiku, a Japanese imagist poetic form of five-seven-five syllables allows us to form reflections through images. Japanese is a pictorial language whereas in Hindi, pictures are created through words. Hindi haiku forms images through a careful choice of words. Several short poetic forms were present in India much before the advent of Hindi haiku, but the inclusion of haiku in Hindi poetry has led to the addition of something new in the field of Indian literature.

Hindi haiku underwent several shifts from the essential nature of Japanese haiku. Social, cultural and personal variations of the haiku poets have been reflected in their creations. Due to the differences in *weltanschauung* of the Haiku poets, the basic thematic aspects of haiku have also differed. The readings of selected haikus by a handful of poets suggest that Hindi haiku has enriched Hindi literature. It cannot be called as something separate from the mainstream Hindi poetic forms. Some critics call it Hindi nature poetry. This article has argued that putting a constraint on the thematic aspect of a genre, hinders its further development. Steve McCarthy gives the viewpoint of the Japanologist Donald Keene stating the criteria for authenticity of Haiku:

What makes a haiku authentic, in the view of this author, is when sudden changes in nature reflect deep transformations in oneself. A haiku poem is not only written but lived, with the experience preserved in verse and the perspective opening a window for the reader (2008, p. 64).

In contemporary life of mechanisation, a poet is not solely dependent on nature for their poetry. Machinery and urbanisation have separated us from greenery.

There remains an ongoing debate on the syllabic aspect of haiku. The syllabic rule in Hindi haiku can be achieved with a bit of daily practice. Many poets follow a rigid syllabic pattern while writing haiku, as they call it, but their imagination seems to be superficial. Due to this surface vision, they write meaningless lines. Those Hindi haikus that deviate from a rigid syllabic norm, but evoke the required mood through the formation of an image, lie on a much higher pedestal than the works of those poets that stick to its syllabic norm, but overlook its thematic and imagistic aspects. Whether the future of Hindi haiku is secure or not, cannot be answered. Certainly, hundreds of poets in contemporary India are adopting this poetic form. Writing haiku has become a fashion in the field of Hindi literature. The beauty of a haiku remains in the evocation of the reflection of a meaningful image, achieved by the use of apt words interlocked in five-seven-five syllables. It is by the achievement of this purity in Hindi haiku, that a poet becomes a *haikukaar*, the creator of haiku.

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Subverting the Traditional Elements of Drama in Henry James's Fiction: Upturning the Spectacle and Boosting the Female Acting

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to reveal Henry James's subversion of the traditional order of the dramatic elements as defined in the main male literary canon, not in his plays but more interestingly in his fictional works which deal with the world of theater and acting. In his fiction, James questions the norms and reacts against the literary and cultural absolutes set by the same male authority symbols through his elevation of the status of the spectacle from which women should not be excluded. Aristotle seems to be replaced by a modern feminist counterpart who destabilizes the classical theory of drama by jumbling the order of its components in favor of the nineteenth-century emerging figure of the actress as a basic constituent of the spectacle. His new drama theory reserves a space for female performers and fosters woman's talent and artistic competency. James provides a positive image of actresses and shows that acting for women translates their commitment to a political quest for selfhood rather than an engagement with exhibitionism.

Keywords: drama, theatre, performance, spectacle, actress

Introduction

The American writer Henry James is seen closer to literary modernism than to realism because of his break with the main literary traditions and violation of the major rules of the canonical literature. Critics mainly analyzed his innovative techniques in fiction but generally neglected his reform of the dramatic theory and his desire to revive the theatre. In fiction, James believes in the priority of the character and the workings of the human mind while discarding the traditional focus on the plot. Likewise, he disrupts the Aristotelian arrangement of the dramatic elements in the following order: theme, plot, characters, language, music, and finally spectacle; and reconstructs a new classification of those components. It is a new theory that can be extracted from his fictional works, especially those that take acting as their major theme. He deems the spectacle vital for the play and thinks that the actor is the chief constituent of drama and the first responsible for the success of the play. In parallel with his rejection of the classical dramatic rules, James brings to the fore the role of the female performer on the stage in a process of discarding the patriarchal ideology which excluded woman from the realm of art and deprived her of a fair public visibility.

James's subversion of the drama theory which is based on a hierarchical thought and set by the same authoritative Father who excludes women from literary production and artistic creativity goes hand in hand with his positive representation of the female performers in his fiction. James upends the order of Aristotle's hierarchy to invalidate the male standards of literature which was positioned as "the norm" presented as if it were literature with capital 'L', somehow representative of all 'great writing'" (Goodman, 1996, p. ix). He reacts against the main literary canon, described by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1989) as "a long masculinist tradition that identifies female anatomy with a degrading linguistic destiny" (p. 82). His rebelliousness in the field of drama targets the Aristotelian theory which privileges the theme over the spectacle, the character over the actor, and certainly the actor over the actress. In order to reveal his objection to such a hierarchical thought which reflects the binarism that underlies the patriarchal ideology, James engages with a literary project that would demonstrate woman's artistic talent, display her skills and competencies and defy the commonly-held low opinion of actresses. He aims at sublimating the spectacle which can include the female presence, believing that it is the spectacle that breathes life into the plays and it is the actor who entices the audience to be a regular theatre-goer.

The theatre offers the space for women to express their desire for the desertion of their domestic cages and involvement in public life. Performance becomes a sign, a set of messages transferred to people, it is a means of interaction between actresses and their observers, an opportunity for women to show their artfulness, challenge their confinement and assert their dignity. For James, female acting becomes a journey of self-confirmation, a trip for self-discovery. He fashions a subversive image of the female public performer while representing her as active, intellectual, competent and conscious of the gender roles. In his fiction, the actress is a pragmatic philosopher who conquers the stage in order to deconstruct the inherent codes of culture. She shows up as emancipated, narcissistic in her love of herself, proud of her corporeality and powerful with her femininity.

James seems to be fascinated by female acting, for the protagonists and characters of a number of his works are actresses. This choice could refer to the fact that "acting was becoming a more acceptable, and certainly a more popular profession for women during the second half of the [nineteenth] century" (Sanders, 1989, p. 118). Miriam Rooth, the protagonist of *The Tragic Muse*, Blanche Adney in "The Private Life" and Violet Grey in "Nona Vincent" incarnate

woman's eagerness for cultural change through their invasion of the stage as a symbol of the public world and the antithesis of the home or the private world. In addition to its artistic function, the participation of women in public performances can bear a political dimension. The fact of having a woman present at the center of a public space, addressing a mixed audience and celebrating her emancipation can be a positive message. Goodman (1997) talks about the political use of the theatre as a space through which the actor can convey messages to his audience, claiming that: "[A] double consciousness is embedded in the process of theatre, to reach an audience the theatre 'text' becomes a public event mediated by a range of technological and social considerations, manipulating a larger public consciousness of the social function or 'role' of theatre" (p. 197). In the nineteenth century, the theatre was popular enough to appeal to outstanding talents and invite a large public.

Background

The reasons behind James's concern for the theater and female performance in his fiction were historical and cultural, especially that the contemporary era was one of extravagant staging with a new emphasis on the actor as celebrity and the director as a theatrical professional. Technological innovations on stage in the 1800s, 1820s and by mid nineteenth century contributed to the rise of the theater and the proliferation of the dramatic material. James's obsession with the theater made him develop a network of friendships and acquaintances with actresses, playwrights and actor managers. His connections included Elizabeth Robins, Ellen Terry, Fanny Kemble, G. B. Shaw, A. W. Pinero, William Arker, George Alexander, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Edward Compton, Augustin Daly, and Harley Granville-Baker (Carlson, 1993, p. 409). His care for female genius on the stage made him admire and befriend the famous actress Fanny Kemble who had made her first *début* in 1829, fourteen years before his birth. He was engrossed by her art and fond of her as a person; he describes her as "one of the consolations of [his] life" (as cited in Karelis, 1998, p. 3). The appealing images of actresses in his fictional works were therefore inspired by his female acquaintances in the domain of theater.

James's deep interest in the theater made him an expert critic and efficient observer where his devoted play-going almost to the end of his life resulted in an adept spectatorship. He often theorizes about stagecraft and acting; he for example thinks that the architectural changes of the stage are necessary to sustain the illusion of reality. His study of contemporary theater gave birth to "a body of dramatic theory," as suggested by Allan Wade (1957, p. xxiv) who collected James's essays on theater in a book entitled *The Scenic Art: Notes on Acting and the Drama 1872 – 1901*. As a critic and theorist, he wrote thirty-two essays on the English, French and American theater and on actors and playwrights from 1872 to 1901.

James appreciates male and female performances and develops a sharp critical eye for them, yet he gives more room to the criticism of the female recitations than to the male ones. His veneration for Mademoiselle Aimée Desclée, for instance, in one of his essays on the Parisian stage is obviously declared through his description of her as "the first actress in the world" and high evaluation of her rendition in *La Gueule du Loup*, when he says: "She has been sustaining by her sole strength the weight of [that] ponderous drama." (1957, p. 9). He wrote a whole essay about Madame Ristori in which he comments on "the abundance of her natural gifts [which] makes the usual clever actress seem a woefully slender personage, and the extreme refinement of her art renders our most knowing devices, of native growth, unspeakably crude and puerile" (p. 29). In another essay on the Parisian stage in the same book, he classifies Madame Judic as the favorite actress of the day before Céline Chaumont (p. 46). He calls

Mademoiselle Favart “a great talent” in *Le Théâtre Français* and states that she seemed to him “a powerful rather than interesting character” (p. 87). As far as Madame Plessy is concerned, he claims that she has “a certain largeness of style and robustness of art” (p. 90).

In London theaters, he prefers Mrs Kendal who is “the most agreeable actress on the London stage. This lady is always pleasing and often charming” (1957, p. 108). Ellen Terry appears to him an exception in her feminine side on the English stage; he claims that she has a “remarkable charm” and is “very natural” (p. 142). As a comedian, Mrs Marie Bancroft is described as a “delightful actress with an admirable sense of the humorous, an abundance of animation and gaiety, and a great deal of art and finish” (p. 149). The criteria of his judgment of female performance are related to the degree of cleverness, powerfulness, naturalness, charm and femininity. He cries out for an actress who unfetters her talents and stops bridling them for the sake of conventions and criticizes the actress who trivializes her skills in order to conform to the norms. He comments on London actresses, saying: “The feminine side, in all, the London theatres, is regrettably weak, and Miss Terry is easily distinguished ... to represent the maximum of feminine effort on the English stage” (p. 142).

As a reformer and a feminist, James asks actresses for more enthusiasm, audacity and liberation for the representation of their own sex. This reformist spirit is made clear when he avers: “The actresses are classically bad, though usually pretty, and the actors are much addicted to taking liberties” (1957, p. 76). In his novel *The Tragic Muse* (1890), James may have aimed at creating the ideal actress through the portrayal of its protagonist Miriam Rooth as a successful celebrity and complete artist. He also appears to condemn the performers’ destructive weakness and lack of determination when he makes the feeble Verena Tarrant, the heroine of *The Bostonians* (1886) bury by her own hands her oratorical gifts and performative power and consequently let her feminine charm deluged by the flood of conventions.

James’s dramatic criticism affected his fictional work not solely in the choice of his characters’ occupations and structuring of their psychology, but also in the general use of the dramatic form in his novels (which often function as comedies and tragedies) and the specific use of the scenic method within his texts. James introduces the “dramatic scene” in the novel as related to the emotional development of the character. According to Stephen Spender (1987), James’s dramatic style is a revolution with which “the novel has, of course, in the presentations of passions, never broken quite away from the tradition of the theater... in the description, we see the alignment of characters; in the scenes we witness the release of emotions, the expression of passion” (p.104). The theater allowed James to explore “the self as performance, to give himself up to what he called ‘different experiences of consciousness’” (Wilson, 1998, p. 41). The Jamesian fictional works, from which a new dramatic theory can be extracted, transcend themselves the genre boundaries where the dramatic principle is injected into the fictional carcass. In *The Bostonians*, many big scenes mark the development of the action climaxing in the big theatrical scene of the conclusion set up in a theater while arousing the same theatrical emotional effect. In *Henry James and the Experimental Novel*, Sergio Perosa (1983) describes these scenes as “sensational, melodramatic scenes – coups de théâtre – rather than dramatic scenes” (p. 26). *The Tragic Muse* similarly contains intense and compressed scenes, articulating sequences and showing actions through dialogues. In *The Art of the Novel*, James (1984) describes its narrative method as follows: “the whole thing has visibly, from the first, to get itself dare in dramatic, or at least in scenic conditions” (pp. 89–90). He uses the dramatic method within the framework of the pictorial style; in *The Literature of the American People*, Clarence Gohdes describes the work as “a series of rich prose pictures of scenes” (as cited in Perosa, p. 21).

In the novels of the following decade, the narrative method will rely more and more on dramatic presentations of little actions and minor events. Preserving the dramatic style, James relies on the march of action through the application of limited point of view and scenic form aiming at “synthetic compression” (Perosa, 1983, p. 48). *The Awkward Age* (1899), for instance, is one of his avant-garde novels of that period; it is theatrically structured around dialogues and trialogues. It is modeled upon the play script where each of the “acts” is divided into numbered units or “scenes” which are evenly distributed among the ten-character-named books of the novel. James is so tempted by drama that he loses the genre motif in his writings and establishes what he calls a “contact with the DRAMA, with the divine little difficult, artistic, ingenious, architectural FORM that makes old pulses throb and old tears rise again” (Carlson, 1993, p. 411).

After instilling the dramatic techniques into his fiction, James moved to the writing of plays as a self-sufficient genre. Following his first period extending from 1865 to 1882 in which he discovered his cosmopolitan subject and developed his international theme, James shifted to realistic political themes as concretized in his two long novels: *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima*. Then he closed this second phase with the world of art tackled in *The Tragic Muse*. The years between 1890 and 1895 are labeled by Leon Edel James’s “dramatic years” in which he sought to revive his fortunes by turning to the theatre. James’s disastrous attempt to conquer the stage brought into being seven plays which encountered public humiliation because of their overliterariness that led to their unstageability. Carlson (1993) classifies James’s dramas into three clearly defined time periods, starting from *Pyramus and Thisbe* (1869) to his dramatic years when he wrote *The American* (1890) and *Guy Donville* (1893) for example, and ending with his later plays like *The Saloon* (1908) and *The Other House* (1908). Some plays are theatrical adaptations of his own fiction like *Daisy Miller*, *The American*. Others like *The Other House*, the scenario for the play preceded. However, if James fails as a playwright, he succeeds as a theorist by rebelling against the old rules of the game and delivering an innovative view towards drama theory through his fiction.

Highlighting the Spectacle

James gives a primary importance to performance as a way to revise the Aristotelian order of the dramatic elements. He redefines the dramatic principle by giving primacy to the spectacle in contradiction with Aristotle who thinks the spectacle is the least artistic of all the parts of tragedies and cannot be compared to the art of poetry. Although Aristotle recognizes the emotional attraction of the spectacle, he argues that the power of the tragedy is not fully dependent on its performance and that the inner structure of the play rather than the spectacle is able to arouse pity and fear. The Aristotelian view is a part of a long tradition that sees theatrical representation as a supplement to the written text; it stresses the ontological primacy of scripts over the performance, hence reinforces the authority of authorship and echoes the patriarchal hierarchical spirit. Even though James does not deny the significance of scripts, he believes that acting remains crucial and very artistic. As a reaction to that marginalization of performance, he presents a kind of a radical revision of the critical literary theory that has neglected theater as a genre and covered only drama, and tries to fight the old anti-theatrical prejudice by insisting on the role of the performer in the success of the play.

James was unique among his contemporaries in his belief in the importance of the role of the actor in the representation of the dramatic play. Unlike James, William Dean Howells, for example, does not grant the actor a creative role in the process of representation and thinks that acting is “a thing apart and a subordinate affair; though it can give such exquisite joy if it truly

interprets a true thing” (Murphy, 1990, p. 33). James, on the other hand, “consider[s] the actor’s art an integral part of the aesthetic process” (Murphy, p. 33). He moves away from the dictatorship of the author to the collaborative work and from the prioritization of writing over speech and of script over performance to an integrated process of representation. He was an *avant-gardist* who called for the unification of effort between the dramatist, actor and director. That cooperative spirit was actually realized towards the second half of the twentieth century:

[C]ollaborative working methods replaced the hierarchy of dramatist-director-actors. No longer working in isolation, the author lost creative independence, and the notion of the text as the intellectual property of the writer was rejected as not analogous to class divisions, but associated with the male power of structure (Innes, 1992, p. 451).

The decentralization of the author and the destruction of his authority constitute a sign of James’s feminist pattern of negating the singularity of reign. That departure from the old aesthetic values which call for the domination of certain elements over others goes hand in hand with James’s call for gender equality and translates his feminist thought.

James denies neither the role of the dramatist nor that of the director, but he asks for a more comprehensive gratitude for the efforts of the actor. In their valuable book *The Theatre as a Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance*, Elaine Aston and George Savona (1991) argue that “everything which is presented to the spectator within the theatrical frame is a sign” (p. 99). If the dramatist is the originator of the “linguistic sign-system” and the director is responsible for the “theatrical sign-system” (Aston & Savona, p. 100), “the actor is therefore shown to be a site for the transmission of auditive signs relating to text..., as principal site of visual signification” (Aston & Savona, p.106). Performance as a theatrical representation is a necessity for the dramatic script where the actor functions as a link between the dramatic and the theatrical.

James’s main theme in “Nona Vincent”¹ (2001), originally published in 1892, is drama’s doubled status as text and performance in the process of representation. The short story describes the attempts of a dramatist to get his work staged and shows how he gets disillusioned with his own belief that the script of his play is the noblest and most important among the other dramatic elements. After facing the reality of the stage, Wayworth discovers the prominence of the performance and recognizes the role of the actress who will play the heroine of his work: “He felt more and more that his heroine was the keystone of his arch” (James, “NV”, p. 9). After his first experiments with the theater, he admits the vitality of the theatrical representation for the play, saying: “I can only repeat that my actress IS my play” (“NV”, p. 13).

Nona Vincent, the female protagonist designed by Wayworth in his drama cannot remain a mere character in a script, but should be represented and concretized as a flesh-and-blood character on the stage. Wayworth becomes convinced that the visual sign produced by the performer is vital to make the work come to light. This idea obsessively haunts him that he is visited by the *living* ghost of his heroine: “Nona Vincent, in face and form, the living heroine of his play, rose before him... She was not Violet Grey, she was not Mrs Alsager...” (“NV”, 2001, p. 17). The physical presence of the heroine in the dream stands for the necessity of concretizing her on the stage; the dramatist is delighted to see his imaginary character manifesting before him: “She filled the poor room with her presence, the effect of which was

¹ Hereafter referred to as “NV”.

as soothing as some odor of incense... If she was so charming, in the red firelight, in her vague, clear-colored garments, it was because he made her so . . . she smiled and said: “I Live-I live-I live” (“NV”, 2001, p. 17).

Nona Vincent uses all the human senses to prove that she is living; she stimulates Wayworth by playing on his visual, auditory and olfactory senses; the same stimuli used by the performer on the stage to fascinate his/her audience. The reiteration of the phrase “I Live” reawakens Wayworth and shakes his mind about his arrogant theories on the singular effect of dramatic scripts. When he asks his landlady whether she saw a woman in his room, Wayworth shows a confusion between reality and dream, a (con)fusion which symbolizes the need of an artistic merger between the text as dream and performance as reality.

James attempts once again to invert the Aristotelian order of the dramatic elements since he lays all the responsibility on the performer. When Aristotle places the character second in importance after the plot, believing that characters represent their moral qualities through the speeches assigned to them by the dramatist, he maintains the sovereignty of scripts and thrusts aside the role of the performer in the representation of the character. Contradictorily, “James believed that the actor, like any other artist, must be granted his *donnée* – in this case, his conception of the character he was to play. It was the actor’s task to come up with a conception of the role that wasactable” (Murphy, 1990, p. 33). He more interestingly reverses the dramatic principle by situating performance on the top and argues for the ontological primacy of the actor over the character.

In the nineteenth century, “the script tended to be so conditioned by the personalities of the particular performers that the roles became transferable” (Innes, 1992, pp. 451–2). The fact that the dramatists “fitted parts to actors and not actors to parts” (Booth, 1973, p. 145) was considered by some critics as weakness in the English drama and one of the major accusations against playwrights. In critical essays on the performers of the London theater, it is maintained that the author’s “principal design in forming a character is to adapt it to that peculiar style of the actor, which the huge farces have rendered necessary to their existence” (as cited in Booth, p. 145). When it comes to James, he thinks that the actor is a determining factor for the script and believes in the dependence of the dramatist on the actor and not the opposite. He even goes further when he sees the actor able to raise the status of the author the way that Violet Grey constructs the success of Wayworth’s play and creates his fame. He places the actor in a superior position and shares the view that “the seemingly gross defects of the author are transformed by the magic of the theatre into the triumphs and glories of the actor” (Booth, p. 153).

James believes that the characters are most of the time inspired by figures in the author’s mind and designed according to the available actors; otherwise the role may fail by the failure of its representation given that the success of the work depends on the actor’s understanding of the role. In “Nona Vincent”, James focuses on Mrs Alsager as the woman who inspires Wayworth in the creation of his protagonist and shows how he pleads with her to act the role: “She has your face, your air, your voice, your motion, she has many elements of your being” (“NV”, 2001, p. 6). All through the short story, there is a triple identification of the same woman who haunts Wayworth’s mind. Nona is molded around the mysterious character of Mrs. Alsager and Violet collaborates with Mrs Alsager to produce a successful representation of Nona.

In the same vein, James denounces the singularity of the dramatic text and the fixity of its meaning. He makes it supple in the hands of performers who provide their own reading of the

characters they will represent. Violet Grey or “the interpretress of Nona” (“NV”, 2001, p. 12) gives her own interpretation of the heroine until Alsager visits to her and leads her to a different reading. The difference between Violet the actress and the character of Nona is that the first “was terribly itinerant, in a dozen theatres but only in one aspect” while Nona Vincent “had a dozen aspects, but only one theatre” (“NV”, p. 7).

James fights the singularity of meaning, believes in the multiplicity of interpretations and considers that performance is always a deviation from the original text. The performer’s rewriting of the play within the process of representation becomes inevitable and thus sanctioned; Julie Rivkin (1996) confirms that “What drama with its performative supplement is emphasizing is that the artistic ideal can never live or be made present in any pure form but must instead depend on some medium of representation that necessarily deviates from it” (p. 17). The idea of the performer’s interpretation of his/her role is re-emphasized in *The Tragic Muse*² (1978), originally published in 1890, when Gabriel Nash assumes that Madame Carré, the great actress, “had to interpret a character in a play, and a character in a play... is such a wretchedly small peg to hang anything on! The dramatist shows us so little, is so hampered by his audience, is restricted to so poor an analysis” (*TM*, p. 50). As an artist, he insists on the inevitability of the rebirth of the text where the reader replaces the author and sets him apart: “What we contribute is our treatment of the material, our rendering of the text, our style” (*TM*, p. 120). James’s desire to deconstruct the authority of the text and decenter the authorship in the dramatic field is in harmony with his attempt to involve the reader in the process of writing. He shores up the connecting grounds of writer-reader interaction and encourages the reader’s participation in his narratives.

The performer’s interpretation of the character in the script is considered by the dramatists as a distortion of the original text. They think that their texts should be faithfully transmitted to the audience and they consequently lose their confidence in performers. They underestimate their renditions because they think that they cannot conform to the original script. The arrogance and dictatorship of dramatists create a kind of phobia of theatrical performance. Alsager who is the source of Wayworth’s heroine, along with Wayworth, reckons that Violet is incapable of representing her: “She does what she can, and she has talent, and she looked lovely. But she doesn’t SEE Nona Vincent. She doesn’t see the type - - she she doesn’t see the individual - - she doesn’t see the woman you meant. She’s out of it—she gives you a different person” (“NV”, 2001, p. 16).

Although James is convinced that the actor is required to understand the role, he objects to the belief in the oneness of meaning and thinks that the presence of the actor on the stage is significant. Wayworth is afraid that Violet may alter the image of his dramatic figure; he wishes to see Alsager in the role because Nona is a duplication of her: “Certainly my leading lady won’t make Nona much like You” (“NV”, 2001, p. 10). James seems to recognize the difficulty of the performer’s task to approximate the image of the character to the audience. Violet herself is nervous and afraid of the first performance: “She was even more nervous than himself, and so pale and altered that he was afraid she would be too ill to act” (“NV”, p. 103). Wayworth is aware of her fear; he “guessed, after a little, that she was puzzled and even somewhat frightened - - to a certain extent she had not understood” (“NV”, p. 9). Violet knows the challenges of her profession and the difficulty of her task; that is why she keeps inquiring about the character: “She asked him [Wayworth], she was perpetually asking him” (“NV”, p. 9). Violet ultimately succeeds in the role and proves that performance is crucial to the accomplishment of the

² Hereafter referred to as *TM*.

dramatic work due to her perseverance, determination, tenaciousness and ambition.

Externalizing the Qualities of the Female Performer

Actresses, in James's fiction, are endowed with personal qualities that further their success in the theatrical field. Their talent twinned with ambition reflects their unflinching determination and proves their outstanding capability to reach their goals. They feel responsible for the success of the role and seem aware of the difficulty of satisfying the audience. Just like Violet who appears agitated in her first performance of the play, Miriam displays the same fear when she is first tested by her future coach Madame Carré: "She began to speak; a long, strong colorless voice came quavering from her young throat. She delivered the lines of Clorinde, in the fine interview with Célie, in the third act of the play, with a rude monotony, and then, gaining confidence, with an effort at modulation" (*TM*, 1978, p. 89). Miriam and Violet do not make good in their first representations of their characters because of their anxiety about success and obsession with the desire to convince. Miriam's attachment to her hopes for a great career makes her strive to convince Madame Carré; her only concern is to please her coach who can give her the epitome of her experience and teach her the principles of acting: "She had been deadly afraid of the old actress, but she was not a bit afraid of a cluster of *femmes du monde*, of Julia, of Lady Agnes, of the smart women of the Embassy" (*TM*, p. 100). Miriam pays no attention to her bourgeois viewers but only manifests obsession with acting. All what she demands is the satisfaction of her patroness who is her unique source of knowledge. The young lady "was always alive... She had a great deal to learn – a tremendous lot to learn" (*TM*, p. 331).

That tendency to learn presents actresses as ambitious women in James's literary works. Miriam's surrender to Madame Carré, despite the latter's offensive stiffness, indicates her patience and solidity of purpose. The narrator insists on "the brightness with which she submitted, for a purpose, to the old woman's rough usage" (*TM*, 1978, p. 134). The young apprentice draws her itinerary and sets her goal from the outset; she pointedly tells Peter: "I will, I will, I will... I will succeed-I will be great" (*TM*, p. 110). The reader is able to perceive "the bright picture of her progress" (*TM*, p. 375) from her debut till the fulfillment of her dream of playing Shakespeare. Miriam is in a perpetual quest; the secret of her success is that she gets never satisfied. Despite her glories, she still looks for better and new roles that publicly elevate her status: "Miss Rooth moreover wanted a new part... she had grand ideas; she thought herself very good-natured to repeat the same thing for three months" while she was playing the romantic drama *Yolande* (*TM*, p. 329).

James insistently reiterates the same idea of the endless ambition of successful actresses in "The Private Life"³ (1893), originally published in 1892. In the story, the actress Blanche Adney is still in need of a greater part despite her advanced age. When she plans with the narrator to make an assault on the private sphere of Clare Vawdrey, the dramatist, she is motivated by her longing for a great script. The interdependency between scripts and performance always occupies James's thought: just as that Wayworth needs the right actress for his play, Blanche needs the right play to exteriorize her performing abilities. She "had the old English and the new French, and had charmed for a while her generation – but she was haunted by the vision of a bigger, chance, of something truer to the conditions that lay near her. She was tired of Sheridan and she hated Bowdler; she called for a canvas of a finer grain" ("PL", p. 107).

³ Hereafter referred to as "PL".

Like Miriam, Blanche refuses to repeat herself for years; she is dynamic and ground-breaking. Her insistence and firmness of purpose make Vawdrey give her the part for which she has immemorially longed. The age is not an impediment for change: “She was forty years old- this could be no secret to those who had admired her from the first... It gave a shade of tragic passion – perfect actress of comedy as she was – to her desire not to miss the great thing” (“PL”, 1983, p. 106). In her plan, Blanche shows a more vivid determination than the narrator who turns to be a loser. In the end, although she produces the play, “she is still [...] in want of the great part” (“PL”, p. 132). James insists that the actress, who evidently symbolizes the new working woman, is in a permanent search of herself as an essential part of society. In order to preserve her freedom, she should never step back into the ages of passivity and surrender.

Success, ambition and determination should be motivated by talent; woman’s recognition of her artistic competencies fosters her desire for learning. James joins ambition and talent in the character of Miriam; it is in Miriam’s utterance “I want to play Shakespeare” (*TM*, 1978, p. 94) that James shows the actress’s two qualities by commenting on the histrionic manner by which she expresses her ambition: “Her voice had a quality, as she uttered these words” (*TM*, p. 110). Miriam’s ambition is validated by her talent in acting; her success is due to the interaction of these two values in her personality: “Miriam had her *ideas* [emphasis added] or rather she had her *instincts* [emphasis added], which she defended and illustrated, with a vividness superior to argument” (*TM*, 1987, p. 336). Her ideas are in harmony with her natural gifts; she resolutely defends her capabilities and confidently seeks progress in her profession. James endows his female performers with high qualities; they appear powerful, independent, and self-confident. He describes Miriam as “perfectly sure of her own” in the preface of *The Tragic Muse (The Art of the Novel*, 1984, p. 94). In “Nona Vincent”, the narrator highlights Violet’s self confidence in her second performance: “She WAS in it this time; she had pulled herself together, she had taken possession, she was felicitous at every turn” (“NV”, 2001, p. 18). With James, talented actresses prosper because they are aware of the value of their gift and feel determined not to get it wasted.

In contrast to what domestic novels plotted, James redefines woman’s position in society through the characterization of competent and powerful female figures. In her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong (1987) surveys the history of the novel and studies the rise of the domestic woman in fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She claims that certain writings assumed that the ideal woman “had to lack the competitive desires and worldly ambitions that consequently belonged – as if by some natural principle – to the male” (p. 59). In such fiction, one can see a whole culture in the process of rethinking, at the most basic level, the dominant aristocratic rules for sexual exchange. Most of these works were conduct books which reinstated the cultural rules and taught women the domestic economy. Armstrong shows that these authors produced the historical conditions that have made modern institutional power seem natural and humane, desirable as well as necessary.

Within this bulk of domestic fiction in which the image of woman echoed a desire for what was called the Angel in the House, James emerged as a writer who privileged woman in his fiction and provided her with the qualities of which she had been deprived in other fiction. Rivkin (1996) thinks that “Nona Vincent” is “an old tale... for women to be comforted for their exclusion from various forms of artistic production with the line that their beauty is art incarnate” (p. 20). The short story can be read as an allegory of the dependence of art on representation, and of men who were taken as the artists par excellence on women who were seen invalid in the domain of art. Mrs Alsager is the savior of Wayworth; she is portrayed as “even more literary and more artistic than he” (“NV”, 2001, p. 1). She revises his work: “You

must leave it with me, I must read it over and over,” then encourages him to stage it: “And now - -to get it done, to get it done!” (“NV”, p. 4). Alsager is sensitive to the dramatic art in particular; “she liked the theatre as she liked all the arts of expression, and he had known her to go all the way to Paris for a particular performance” (“NV”, p. 2). Contrary to the traditional archetype of woman produced in literature, Alsager “loved the perfect work- she had the artistic chord...she could understand the joy of creation” (“NV”, p. 2). Her portrait changes the ideal of perfection from the angel ideology to art. She does not apply to the ideals of True Womanhood since she is liberated and childless; she fails in procreation but succeeds in making Wayworth creative in his dramatic art.

Yet, James distinguishes between the conception of the dramatic theory and the artistic talent. Mrs. Alsager, for instance, “had not the voice – she had only the vision” (“NV”, 2001, p. 2); she has an artistic taste but not the talent. When Wayworth regretfully tells her: “Oh, if YOU were only an actress!”, she replies: “That’s the last thing I am. There’s no comedy in ME” (“NV”, p. 5). James portrays Mrs Alsager and Violet as two female artists; the first has the vision and the second has the talent. Their portrayal takes us back to the character of Olive Chancellor in *The Bostonians* as a script designer and Verena Tarrant as an eloquent speaker. Meditating the gallery of the Jamesian female characters, we can draw a comparison, for example, between the talent of Verena and the faculty of Miriam. If Verena has the verbal power to convince, Miriam is able to change very flexibly from one character to another: “the plastic quality of her person was the only definite sign of a vocation” (*TM*, 1978, p. 92).

However, contrary to Verena whose performances are controlled by her script writer, Olive, Miriam goes towards “controlling her own performances” (Allen, 1984, p. 114) to represent both vision and talent. She perfectly manipulates her voice and articulates her intonation to fit for the role. What she mainly does in her second performance in front of Madame Carré is “reproduce[ing] with a crude fidelity, but with extraordinary memory, the intonations, the personal quavers and cadences of her model” (*TM*, 1978, p. 132). The narrator describes her outstanding performing abilities on the stage, saying:

the powerful, ample manner in which Miriam handled her scene produced its full impression, the art with which she surmounted its difficulties, the liberality with which she met its great demand upon the voice, and the variety of expression that she threw into a torrent of objurgation. It was a real composition, studied with passages that called a suppressed ‘Bravo’ to the lips and seeming to show that a talent capable of such an exhibition was capable of anything (*TM*, p. 226).

James highlights Miriam’s talent in the text in a poetic manner: “She was beauty, she was music, she was truth; she was passion and persuasion and tenderness... And she had such tones of nature, such concealments of art, such effusions of life, that the whole scene glowed with the color she communicated” (*TM*, p. 455). By labeling Miriam “a muse”, James uses a natural concept to describe her talent. The positive image of the public performer provided in James’s fiction is used at once as a tool to subvert the masculine dramatic traditions and question the cultural norms and to weaken the authority of authorship and of the patriarchal Father.

Conclusion

James strives to revive the glory of the theater and questions its former neglect as a genre. He contributes to “a serious attempt to raise the status of theater and to create a ‘legitimate’ and

respectable stage divorced from the world of variety and music hall” (Gardner, 1992, p. 7) in the nineteenth century. Although his plays were not successful, he could enrich the theatrical field by his dramatic critical contributions and his fictional works which unfold his theories and attitudes about the theater and drama. He accords a great importance to the theatrical performance as a public representation and explores the relationship between the performers and the observers, with a special focus on female performers. While subverting the male standards of drama in his narratives, he displays a fierce advocacy of actresses as independent, ambitious, talented and dignified women against the hostile societal view to them as ignoble courtesans and immoral women.

James presents a total revision of drama and culture in his fiction through the destruction of the authority symbols in literature and in society. In his fiction he revisits the classical theory of drama as a cultural form which contributed to the empowerment of the male authority and the exclusion of women. Despite his reactionary recovery of the spectacle as rudimentary in drama, he decentralizes the dramatic elements through his call for the collaborative interaction between the dramatist and the performer. In unison with that philosophy, He intends to destroy the patriarchal centers and defy the old notions of woman’s incapability and incompetence in the public world. He rejects the collective thought by arguing for woman’s artfulness, intelligence and intellect. He represents her as a substance, as a subject which acts, affects, manipulates and decides. When he focuses on woman’s physical presence on the stage, he means to connect her materiality with creativity and not with sexuality. The female body becomes a crucial means of artistic expression. By questioning the masculine literary theories, James changes the female body from a source of humiliation to a magnanimous medium of art. He deconstructs the traditional view of woman’s body as responsible for her suffering, inferiority and oppression and reconstructs it as a site for creativity, signification and liberation.

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**Urban Malaise: Women and the Discourse of Desire in
Pan Xiangli's Shanghai**

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Abstract

This paper deals with the portrayal of contemporary Chinese middle-class urban women in fictional works by the writer Pan Xiangli. Most of the stories are set in present-day Shanghai and describe the female universe against the backdrop of the metropolis. By focusing on the psychology of her characters, on the feelings that arise from their personal experiences while they work hard in their pursuit of brilliant careers, and by illustrating their particular perspective on romance and marriage, Pan Xiangli provides the reader with a unique insight into the collective imagination of Chinese women in an urban environment and reflects upon the issue of gender consciousness in time of globalisation. Her fiction suggests that a latent sense of discontent and malaise is connected to modernity; even though materialism and consumerism drive the actions of her characters, they are also closely related to feelings of disappointment and failure. Through the analysis of some short stories by Pan Xiangli, which not only mirror the new values and ambitions of China's emerging metropolitan middle-class after the turn of the century, but also illustrate the challenges women are confronted with in the context of the city, this paper will show that female characters go through a process of reinvention and renegotiation of their individual sphere, whilst dealing with unprecedented competition in the job market, loneliness, and misunderstandings caused by their own emancipation. They are therefore compelled to find new ways of establishing personal and social relationships. Pan Xiangli's works are examined in the context of 21st century Chinese literature written by women and new urban fiction.

Keywords: new urban literature, Chinese metropolis, white-collar fiction, 21st century Chinese women writers, middle-class women, Shanghai literature

Introduction

In the constantly evolving landscape of present-day Chinese metropolises, the rise of the middle-class,¹ with its specific culture and values,² is inevitably intertwined with the discourse of women's emancipation and with the growth of contradictory feelings of urban identity and belonging. In her fictional works, writer Pan Xiangli, merges these three features and develops a singular perspective on Chinese urbanisation that quietly subverts the conventional poetics of desire, which constituted the literary counterpart of consumerism in the late 1990s and over the following decade.³ Pan Xiangli, whose main sources of inspiration are Shanghai's urban atmosphere and the Chinese women who work in this bustling metropolis on a daily basis, resolutely moves away from the celebration of materialism which characterises “desire writing”: although her female characters are able to afford all the status-symbols necessitated by their stylish life in the dazzling city, they seem to be looking for something more and are certainly not willing to give up on themselves in order to settle for a compromise with mainstream values. She looks deep into the human spirit, with particular consideration towards the contemporary well-off female subject. She does not propose hedonism as a means of liberation and her protagonists pay a high price for being independent, emancipated women and often come up against the misleading side of wealth. With its strong individualist stance, Pan Xiangli's literature can be symbolically situated within the temporal space of Chinese global modernity and the existential sphere of the female universe. Through her unique style, she conveys a vision of a completely modernised metropolis, which is, contrastingly, narrated using an elegant and refined language, with occasional classical hints, which we can also appreciate, for example, in her short stories *Yongyuan de Xie Qiuniang* (The Eternal Xie Qiuniang; Pan, 2016b) and *Bai shui qingcai* (Vegetables in white water; Pan, 2016a). The use of this language also reveals the influence of the *sanwen* (literary prose), a genre Pan Xiangli has often used since the beginning of her career.⁴

Born in 1966 in Quanzhou, Pan Xiangli⁵ moved to Shanghai in 1978, where she has lived ever since, meaning that she therefore has first-hand experience of bourgeois women's constraints within the restlessness of the contemporary city. Furthermore, having been born in the 1960s, she belongs to the last generation with personal memories of the Cultural Revolution: her representation of young urban women reveals a lucid awareness of the generation gap between people born before and after the 1970s. While young women, such as the frivolous protagonist of *Wo ai Xiao Wanzi* (I love Maruko-chan; Pan, 2016c), are totally immersed in a consumerist lifestyle, always following the latest fashions and keeping up with the latest trends, older

¹ In 21st century globalised Chinese cities, the widening gap between the rich and the poor results in the emergence of an urban middle-class, formed by relatively wealthy people, mostly white-collar workers or professionals, and new lower social strata, mainly constituted by migrant workers and the suburban population. For further reading on this topic, see: Wu & Webster (2010).

² In China, the inequalities between hinterland and coastal cities and among urban areas of different tiers make it difficult to formulate an unequivocal definition of middle-class (Ekman, 2014, p.10).

³ The “writing of desire” (*yuwang xiezu* 欲望写作) is very common in the Chinese urban literature of the 1990s, as it is connected to the introduction of the market economy and the spread of consumerism (Chen L., 2007, pp. 245–7) of which it is, in some cases, critical. Zhu Wen, Qiu Huadong, He Dun are among the writers who followed this trend (Cheng, 2005, pp. 300–60).

⁴ Among Pan Xiangli's *sanwen* collections: *Chunzhen niandai* (The age of purity, 1998), *Jubu youshi you wanmei* (Partial sometimes is perfect, 2009).

⁵ Pan Xiangli 潘向黎 graduated in Shanghai in 1991, started her literary career in 1988. She has worked as an editor for many journals, beginning with *Shanghai Wenxue* (Shanghai Literature). She studied for two years in Japan (1992–94), and is the author of many collections of short stories, such as *Wu meng xiangsui* (No dreams to follow, 1998), *Shi nian bei* (Ten years' cup, 2000). For further details about Pan Xiangli's biography: Jin Y., Zhao P. (2018).

women, like the main character of *Yongyuan de Xie Qiuniang* (The eternal Xie Qiuniang; Pan, 2016b), seem to be gifted with an inner strength which comes directly from their connection with the past. Furthermore, young women in Pan Xiangli's fiction do not have any experiences of political clashes, but they do get degrees from prestigious universities, and grow up with an individualist attitude, appreciating the material aspects of life (Liu, 2009, p.104).

Unlike other 21st century women writers (for example, Wu Jun, Sun Huifen, Xu Yigua, Ye Mi), who focus on the depiction of suburb dwellers that belong to the lower classes, Pan Xiangli explores the mindset, the emotions and the everyday existence of supposedly fortunate women who are wealthy and live what would appear to be perfectly satisfying lives, in their glamorous apartments, with influential acquaintances who are the envy of others. These women are fashion lovers, as indeed is Pan Xiangli herself, but do not follow fashion merely as a consumerist pastime; they consider it, rather, as a tool of emancipation, an emblem of their independence that somehow defines their personality and allows them to distinguish themselves from the male universe (Sun, 2017, p. 85). Moreover, they all have enough money to enjoy urban life and belong to the category of white-collar workers, they are well-educated, and have high-profile careers in a cosmopolitan environment (Huang, 2013, p. 17). Nevertheless, beneath their success lie feelings of unease and irresolution. The well-to-do wives and businesswomen described by Pan Xiangli are not trying to figure out who they are: their well-defined personality is, in fact, their Achilles heel and is emblematic of the system they cannot escape from and the origin of a crisis which, in a broader sense, symbolises the failure of capitalism. This may well be the reason for a comment in *Wo ai Xiao Wanzi*, when one of the protagonist's colleagues says: "To be a white-collar is like being a prostitute: it is our professional ethics to smile at people" (Pan, 2016c, p. 94).

The cultural space of the middle-class, in a globalised metropolis, is characterised by a hybridism that is exemplified by the proliferation of goods related to everyday Western life (Liu, 2004, 78): one of them is coffee and a well-known coffeehouse chain even promotes its bars as a "third space" which generates serenity (Tong, 2015, 29). In Pan Xiangli's works, coffee is often mentioned: a seemingly innocuous detail which actually highlights Shanghai's international atmosphere and recalls other contemporary stories set in the same city.⁶ In her *Mi cheng* for example, we read: "Except drinking large amounts of coffee every day, I almost do not have any other bad habit" (Mi city; Pan, 2007a, p. 126). Coffee was introduced into Shanghai at the time of the foreign concession and is now a fashionable drink that urbanites, especially young people, buy in order to look trendy.

Though frequently identified as urban fiction,⁷ Pan Xiangli's works go far beyond the limits of this kind of writing: she deals with the troubled inner reality and conflicting selves of modern women, revealing aspects that are normally concealed beneath a glittering facade. Her depiction of the female urban world is unparalleled within the wide panorama of 21st century fiction precisely because, by disclosing the real feelings of women who are considered paragons of success, she unravels the inconsistency and the illusions of the Chinese dream of economic prosperity from the point of view of those who have actually attained this goal. The defeat endured by Pan Xiangli's female characters is, above all, a psychological one: they cannot come to terms with an intense awareness of inescapable disillusionment, which luxury and money cannot prevent. However, they are also winners: they rebel against the deforming influence of society and remain faithful to themselves.

⁶ In Anni Baobei's *Goodbye Vivian* (2002) coffee is mentioned more than 15 times.

⁷ In Chinese, *chengshi wenxue* (literature of the city) or *dushi wenxue* (literature of the metropolis). For a detailed explanation of the ambiguity of these definitions see: Song (2016, p.327); Chen X. (2007, p. 3).

21st Century Middle-Class Women and the City: Theoretical Framework and Critical Literary Perspectives

It is not uncommon, especially in Chinese mass-media, for the 21st century to be labelled as “her century” (*Ta shiji* 她世纪) to highlight the importance of women as consumers (Jiang & Liu, 2009), but also because of the ground that they have gained within intellectual circles, including literature. Chinese women, in the globalised city, enjoy more freedom and mobility than ever before and nurture new ambitions; the relationship between men and women is affected by these changes, with an overthrow of the traditional notion of marriage and romance. In Pan Xiangli’s singular outlook on love, which reflects these new tendencies, the contradictions around which the plot evolves, take place within the male-female dialectic; female characters seem to be looking for the meaning of their feelings, caught between the ideal sentimental life they dream of and the unsatisfying reality (Huang, 2013, p. 17). The 21st century has also been tagged as the “century of the metropolis”, due to a rapid increase in the rate of urbanisation, which is unprecedented in world history⁸ and has transformed the cultural domain on multiple levels. The main trends of Chinese culture nowadays mirror social expectations, consumer-driven needs and the daily choices of the burgeoning urban bourgeoisie, a category made up of mainly white-collar workers (*bailing* 白领),⁹ which began to emerge after 1978 and can now be considered as the main constituent of the urban population, the subject of China’s economic development and the engine of consumerism.¹⁰ The rise of the middle-class epitomises the radical changes that have occurred within Chinese society over the last four decades, along with the implementation of the Opening Up and Reforms policy: in fact, there was no class stratification throughout almost thirty years of Maoist rule, during which peasants, workers, soldiers and intellectuals were meant to make up the proletarian class, which the concept of capitalism was directly opposed to (Ekman, 2014, p. 7).

The relationship between women and the urban fabric is a recurring focal point of representation in Chinese fiction of the 1990s and over the following decades. In the 1980s women writers such as Zhang Kangkang, Zhang Jie, Can Xue, Tie Ning, Wang Anyi, to name but a few, consciously embarked upon a journey of enlightenment, focusing on the female condition and gender consciousness. Most of them, though, firmly refused to define themselves as feminists: they did not want to blindly endorse a standpoint that was imported from the West (Wu, 2010, p. 407) and were mainly concerned with female roles within family and society. In the 1990s the so-called “private writing” of Chen Ran, Lin Bai, Xu Kun and others, generated reflections on female inner feelings and desires, and in their works the city was taken into consideration from a radically subjective point of view. At the end of the 1990s, the body and the sexual experiences of female characters whose existence was deeply rooted in the metropolis and their materialistic attitude, constituted the core of the urban narration in the

⁸ In China, the urban population has outnumbered the rural population since 2011. The same had already occurred on a worldwide scale in 2008 (UN, 2018).

⁹ According to Ekman (2014, p. 9), the term “white-collar workers” includes people born in the 1980s with higher education qualifications who work for private enterprises. Commonly, though, the definition has a broader scope. Sociolinguistic studies show that Chinese white-collar workers even acquire their own language by appropriating transnational Chinese spoken all over the world to build up a cosmopolitan Mandarin which helps to shape their cosmopolitan identity (Gao, 2017, p. 3).

¹⁰ For more insights into China’s urban middle-class and its spending power, see: Farrell, Gersch, Stephenson (2006).

fiction of the so-called “beauty writers”.¹¹ The discourse of desire, as a matter of fact, is expressed in women’s literature as a yearning for both material objects as well as sexual experiences (Cheng, 2007, pp. 45–6): the former expressing a temporary reaction to the lack of commercial goods before the introduction of capitalism, and the latter expressing the need for Chinese women’s sexual emancipation. The shifts that occurred in Chinese literature at the turn of the century ushered in a new dimension in the narration of women in the metropolis and allowed writers to rethink literature within a global and transnational context. A deeper awareness of social issues, realism, the growing importance of women in intellectual circles, and the pluralist culture of the metropolis are just some of the new elements.

Zhang Qinghua (2007, p. 19) suggests that, as a result of the social polarisation determined by capitalism, 21st century Chinese literature reflects two main trends, carnival and sadness: the first is an expression of hedonistic culture and consumerism, while the second is the result of anger caused by social problems conditioned by globalisation. In the 1990s, literary portrayals of middle-class young women, in most cases, focused on their hedonistic life-style, their favourite pastimes, and the time and care they spent on their appearance. Female urban fiction published during this decade can be considered one of the symbols of a flourishing consumer-driven culture and of the collective craze for materialism that characterised this period. By describing the real ambitions of Chinese city dwellers, these fictional works also focused attention on conflict with old-fashioned values (Cheng, 2007, p. 47) and, therefore, allowed women to break with “tradition”, and to fight for their emancipation. After 2000, however, many authors began to relate the stories of subaltern characters from the most disadvantaged social groups, such as migrant girls, factory workers, caregivers or even prostitutes (for example, “subaltern fiction” and “workers’ literature”). Others, instead, focused on the middle-class: “workplace fiction” describes the life of white-collar workers who strive for economic success or suffer because of fierce business competition. This literary trend which focuses on the middle-class implies that the existence of a global middle-class with Chinese characteristics is a real possibility (Wu, 2017, p. 318). Nonetheless, Pan Xiangli goes beyond these tendencies, digging into women’s emotional and psychological processes, wondering how they handle everyday life, trying to grasp the constraints that they have to endure whilst faced with the new values of consumerism and competition, in spite of their apparent freedom.¹² As opposed to the urban novels of the “beauty writers”, for Pan Xiangli, the body and sex are not tools to illustrate the metropolis, but rather an aspect of the psychological balance of her characters.

Pan Xiangli’s descriptions of the city, inspired by Shanghai,¹³ betray romanticism and are connected to women’s identity. Shanghai’s cosmopolitan imagination has a long history in 20th century literature; its culture was a symbol of elegance and prosperity in the decades spanning from 1920 to 1940.¹⁴ The representation of Shanghai is somehow dominated, in the post-Maoist period, by women writers (Song, 2016, pp. 332–33): Wang Anyi, for example, is not only Shanghai-based and obsessed with the description of the city, but often identifies it with a female character,¹⁵ who embodies its allure and its decaying beauty. As pointed out by Vivian Lee (2005, p. 134), in fiction written at the beginning of the 20th century featuring Shanghai,

¹¹ It is a pejorative definition with which writers do not identify. Examples of this trend are novels by Mian Mian and Zhou Weihui or Zhou Jieru’s and Anni Baobei’s “petit bourgeois” fiction (Xin, 2011, pp. 41–54). For further reading on the relationship between urban consumer culture, female literature and the private space, see: (Chan, 2007).

¹² Wang (2019) analyses this topic in some women writers’ fiction, including that of Pan Xiangli.

¹³ Regarding Pan Xiangli’s fiction’s relationship with Shanghai, see: Zhao (2010a).

¹⁴ Shanghai’s literary representation during the pre-Maoist period is the focus of many critical studies. See: Zhang Y. (1999); Leo (1999).

¹⁵ For example, Wang Qiyao in *Song of everlasting sorrow* (Wang A., 2008).

Western values, from a Eurocentric perspective, were identified as being “superior”; therefore, the modern woman was portrayed as being “Westernised”, independent and sexually emancipated, especially in literary works by male authors. The modern woman in the cosmopolitan environment of the May 4th period was, in other words, objectified. Shanghai’s middle-class female subject, as imagined by Pan Xiangli, however, is well aware of her condition within the new context of the 21st century metropolis, in which Shanghai has partly retrieved its role of channelling western values, but the representation of the city has been totally liberated from a Eurocentric vision of modernity. Vivian Lee (2005, p. 156) also maintains that since the 1980s, novels set in Shanghai have revived the image of this metropolis as a seductress: she analyses the cases of Wang Anyi’s *Song of everlasting sorrow* (2008) and Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* (2002), as expressing two different conceptualisations of the metropolis, through the features of their female protagonists. Regarding this metaphor of the personified metropolis, in Pan Xiangli’s works Shanghai can be seen as an illusory seductress: its splendour and its sparkling lights offer a fleeting promise of happiness that never actually materialises, while female characters fail in their attempts to be seductresses.

In Search of Emotional Survival in the Cosmopolitan City

Traditionally, Chinese women lived within large families, where they were controlled and restricted by the menfolk; they had no economic independence and, according to Confucian values, they had to submit to the authority of men.¹⁶ Despite the fact that this situation has been overturned in modern times, women still face problems related to the gender gap. The three works that are examined in this section tell stories of strong, independent women who refuse to compromise when it comes to their identity. In order to achieve this goal, however, they are obliged to set aside their own emotions and to allow rationality to guide their decision-making. In the short story *Yongyuan de Xie Qiuniang* (The eternal Xie Qiuniang; Pan, 2016b) the protagonist, whose name appears in the title, is a very talented, beautiful, elegant middle-class woman. Her timeless beauty, in spite of a troubled past and a hard life, represents the everlastingness of her uncorrupted self. Her immutable youthful appearance, which others cannot help but notice and admire, also symbolises the weight of time and the burden of history (Li W., 2005, p. 46), from which Qiuniang will never be able to free herself:

People only remember that she’s looked like this for a very long time. She was barely 22 or 23 when she began to dress like this. All year round, no matter what the season, she always wore a classic *qipao*, which was made of neither brocade nor silk, just simple cotton cloth, usually violet [...]. Looking at her from behind, she seemed to be a student from the 1920s or the 1930s (Pan, 2016b, p. 135).¹⁷

Her youthfulness also means that she does not follow passing fashions, because her values are untouchable. Qiuniang knows that she can only rely on herself: since childhood she has endured hardships that have opened her eyes to the hypocrisy of people around her. Nevertheless, the richer and consequently more independent she becomes, the more she is psychologically isolated and this loneliness of hers could be interpreted as symbolic of the condition of the modern urban subject in the capitalist society; it would appear to be the case that as overall wealth increases, so does a sense of isolation of the individual.

¹⁶ For further reading about the Confucian idea of women’s roles: Gao, (2003).

¹⁷ The quotes from Pan Xiangli’s stories that will be cited from now on are taken from the original Chinese texts, except for the three short stories *A miracle Rides on a Sleigh*, *The Way of her Rragrance*, and *Lady Boss*, which have been selected from the English translation.

Quiniang's father was a musician and her mother a ballet dancer: with gifted parents who deeply loved each other, the protagonist experiences the pain of losing them because of the brutality of the Cultural Revolution:

An ideal couple, a match made in heaven, with a beloved daughter. They unexpectedly found themselves in difficulties, a good family smashed into pieces. Publicly criticised, humiliated and denounced, their belongings were confiscated and they were threatened with eviction. How could her father have endured all this? He looked for a high building far away from there and jumped to his death, he didn't want his wife and daughter to be frightened anymore. But unfortunately her mother was as stubborn as a mule and the following day she swallowed a whole bottle of sleeping pills and joined him (Pan, 2016b, p. 137).

Left to fend for herself in turbulent times, Quiniang is forced to earn a living singing in a karaoke bar. She gradually becomes cold and emotionless, and this is another reason why she does not seem to age. She then marries a diplomat, but her new life abroad does not protect her from suffering and, after a while, they get divorced and she goes back to China, attempting to rebuild her life by opening her own restaurant. This restaurant that she builds up all by herself, soon becomes very popular thanks to the exquisite food and the welcoming atmosphere. However, while her business is booming, she becomes more and more lonely and unreachable. Even when a wealthy lawyer named Han Dingchu falls in love with her, she is unresponsive and numb. When this man is killed in an accident, her brief emotional reaction is to smash the cup he used to drink from. However, she then returns to her daily chores, impassively, in front of the astonished restaurant staff. The apparent composure of Pan Xiangli's female characters when facing the challenges of life bespeaks their great dignity and self-esteem (Liu, 2009, p. 106). Another example of this is the behaviour of the protagonist in the next story examined here: *Bai shui qing cai* (Vegetables in white water; Pan, 2016a) takes its name from the simple, homemade and apparently unique soup that the protagonist, an efficient yet dissatisfied housewife, usually prepares for her husband's dinner and this soup is, in fact, the cornerstone of the whole story. The dish, throughout the narration, becomes the symbol of the couple's love and of its subsequent slow decay. The names of the two protagonists are not mentioned in the story: they represent, in fact, the average bourgeois couple (Huang, 2013, p. 18). Pan Xiangli here narrates an everyday tale of a marital crisis, which is brought about by the husband when he unexpectedly falls in love with a younger woman. The married couple, we are told, first met as children when they were at school. They were both beautiful, charming and were each other's first loves; they married soon after university, had a child and formed an ordinary well-to-do family: "Theirs was a platinum family that everybody else envied. The meaning of platinum is they owned money and belonged to the white-collar category..." (Pan, 2016a, p. 4). Boredom and normality weigh heavily upon the female protagonist, since she decided to stop working to take care of the family, while her husband gradually becomes a powerful man and is busy furthering his brilliant career:

He first worked as a government official, with a good salary and benefits. After a while, he did not want such a subservient role [...], he soon became a businessman, dealing in different sectors and finally made his fortune in real estate. Afterwards, he managed a website and a private school for the wealthy. His career was relentless, like a frightened wild horse (Pan, 2016a, pp. 4–5).

The plot starts by providing a cross section of the couple's routine, a recurring scene which communicates both monotony and intimacy: the husband comes home from work, he finds his wife cooking in the kitchen, and takes pleasure in the smell of the lovingly prepared food. Even the description of food underlines their bourgeois identity: she only uses a very expensive brand of rice, which is guaranteed to come from organic plantations. This information may seem inconsequential, but it clearly makes the reader associate these people with westernised values and the fashionable habits of urban dwellers. When the husband embarks on an affair, the wife reacts by freezing her emotions, showing total indifference (Huang, 2013, p. 19). Once he has left the marital home, meals become a problem for the male protagonist. The act of eating loses its pleasure and he now sees mealtimes as a necessary chore, since his new girlfriend usually buys fashionable, but unhealthy food at fast-food joints, such as KFC sandwiches or pizza (Pan, 2016a, p. 8.). When Dudu, the husband's lover, takes the initiative to go to his wife's apartment to meet her and ask for the recipe for the "famous" soup, she's astonished to find out that such a simple dish requires hours of cooking and numerous ingredients. Through this episode the author compares two completely different kinds of urban women and highlights the striking contrast between the fleetingness of consumerist values, symbolised by the junk food, and the refinement of tradition, symbolised by a dish that can only be prepared with great patience and dedication. Only one month after this occurrence, the man goes back home, and the wife lets him in for dinner. However, when he eats the beloved soup, to his disappointment, he discovers that he can no longer appreciate its taste; in fact, everything has changed, and there is no going back. Even his wife is not the same person, and she makes it clear that she no longer wants to be a housewife:

"From now on, we need to hire a cleaner for our home, I've just found a job and there's so much to do here!"

He was startled: "A job? What kind of job?"

"I'm going to teach in a cooking school".

"You? A cooking teacher?"

"Maybe you forgot that I have a teacher's degree. And I also passed my cooking exams", she said.

Suddenly, that soup, already quite unpleasant to eat, seemed to stick in his throat ... (Pan, 2016a, p.18)

The female protagonist refuses to compromise and chooses to put her own dignity first: her unfaithful husband's actions are irrelevant; she decides to reclaim her place in society.

Nü shangsi (*Lady Boss*; Pan, 2016d) is the story of the successful and powerful Zhong Keming, who is respected and feared by her subordinates and admired as a very beautiful, independent woman, with a happy family. This perfection is shaken by her husband's affair with a younger, rather plain-looking girl. At the end they will reunite, but this only reinforces her immense loneliness. People at the office talk behind her back and, because of her powerful position, she has no one with whom she can share her problems. One night, after working late, she goes out for dinner with a young colleague and they get drunk while dining in a Vietnamese restaurant. The colleague is also in trouble, as she suspects that she is pregnant and is not sure how she feels about this. When everything returns to normal, the protagonist will regret having lowered her guard and having shared her feelings with this girl.

The "leftover" women mentality, according to which a woman should marry before the age of thirty (Fincher, 2014), burdens the lives of many Pan Xiangli's characters, as we can see from the beginning of *Lady Boss* (Pan, 2016d):

When women approach the age of thirty, age invariably becomes a source of worry. One after another – 27, 28, 29 – the years fly by like a speeding train, and the last stop is within sight. Of course, it's not the last stop of life, but it is the last stop of the prime of life. Only after turning 30 do women realise those precautions and worries were unnecessary – a luxury really (Pan, 2014b, p. 180).

According to Wang (2019, p. 194), Pan Xiangli also reveals the different attitude of the two sexes towards love, depicting men as self-seeking realists. Pan Xiangli's female characters, in fact, have to deal with the contradiction between rationalism and functionalism on one hand, and emotion and romanticism on the other; they must choose between love and freedom (Qi, 2013, p.8). The three protagonists of the stories which have been investigated above cannot allow themselves to surrender to any kind of sentimentalism, in order to maintain their psychological wellbeing and strength.

The Unbearable Loneliness of the Urban Dream: Pan Xiangli's Painful Modernity

The alienated modernist self is a product of the city and there are certainly many novels, in both Western and Chinese literature, which describe a sense of confusion, anonymity and alienation caused by urban life. Pan Xiangli's urban female characters' loneliness, though, is also rooted in their need to safeguard their self and sometimes in their refusal to surrender to social pressures.

Yilu fenfang (The way of her fragrance; Pan, 2016e) depicts the sense of isolation felt by the female protagonist Li Sijin, who works as managing editor for an important magazine: in spite of a fulfilling career and a busy life, she suffers for her inability to realise her sentimental desires and to express her feelings. Moreover, most of her social relationships are somehow work-related, but she seems to have no real friends. She works night and day to pursue her brilliant career, yet has no private life outside the office. She is attracted to her boss, a charming married man named Luo Yi, who appears to be an example of moral virtue. Li Sijin represents the typical values of Chinese middle class women: "I will live in a suburban villa with the man I love. We will be a respectable couple with our wealth and money. We will take strolls on the grass, have afternoon tea ..." (Pan, 2014a, p. 31). When Luo Yi's wife is left paralysed after a car accident, he continues to visit her in the hospital every day, avoiding the company of other women. Finally, after Li Sijin has met her and requested that she do so, Luo Yi's wife selflessly ends her marriage so as not to be a burden on her husband; he, however, does not then turn to Li Sijin, but ends up with another woman, making Li Sijin regret the time and energy she has spent working for him. Li Sijin subsequently accepts the courtship of a younger co-worker, Jiang Liyang, who seems to be the only one who really cares for her. He eventually moves to a smaller city, Chengdu, making her realise how much she actually misses him. She finally gets her priorities right, by choosing the truthfulness of feelings over power, wealth and outward appearances.

Throughout the narration Pan Xiangli highlights the fact that money, famous brands and luxury are a priority in Li Sijin's work environment: she drives a second-hand BMW and Jiang Liyang drives a brand-new Polo (Pan, 2014a, 90); the fragrance to which the title alludes is a Bulgari perfume, always worn by the elegant, stylish Li Sijin:

Her hard-soled shoes clattered across the marble floor, leaving behind a wisp of intense, spicy, and yet subtle aroma. The guard, of course, did not know

anything about Bulgari, but he thought curiously: this is not quite the smell of a flower; perhaps more like the taste of ginger (Pan, 2014a, p. 12).

The young Hai Qing, who Li Sijin sees as a rival, presents her with an expensive gift: “Inside the bag was a beautiful box; in it were beauty soaps and signature body treatments from the Beauty Soup Hot Spring and Spa. Judging from the packaging, the gift was not cheap” (Pan, 2014a, p. 61).

In the short story *A miracle rides on a sleigh* (2014c) the main character is a thirty-three-year-old woman who, in spite of her wealth and vast array of belongings, is extremely unsatisfied and bored with her marriage, and can find little meaning in her life. Her husband is depicted as a loyal, capable man, yet the routine of her life with him is no longer enough for her. On Christmas Day she dresses up and goes shopping, with a vague yearning for something new to happen, because she is feeling depressed and melancholic as a result of the western festivities. Her unhappiness is exacerbated by a sense of boredom and monotony that she has been used to since she got married; a feeling of sameness which both distresses and oppresses her:

As an ordinary person, she never once hoped for any sort of miracle. An ordinary life was simply a series of ordinary events. Then, a very ordinary thing happened: she married an ordinary guy. He was truly very ordinary; when they began dating, she was afraid she would not recognise him in a crowd. But among all the young men, he was the one who pursued her for the longest time, and with the most sincerity (Pan, 2014c, pp. 151–52).

The significance of everyday life in 21st century Chinese fiction goes far beyond the obvious need to normalise the daily routine of ordinary people in order to confer upon it a new dignity, thus opposing the previous literary discourse. In times of globalisation, as Liu Kang points out, “the everyday is not only both global and local (in the sense that it encompasses different temporalities, subjectivities, spaces and public spheres); it may also serve as a site that unravels and critiques the contradictions and fallacies of the age” (Liu, 2004, p. 93). The materiality of objects highlights the steadiness of a typical middle-class life:

She was lucky. Once married, she did not live with her in-laws; she and her husband had their own two-bedroom home. Work-wise, she never went to college, but a family relative who was the assistant principal at a high school offered her a job in the library. The salary was not very high but it was a stable position. She was never dissatisfied with her job, especially when there was constant news of others being laid off (Pan, 2014c, p. 152).

The unexpected thing she has been secretly craving for suddenly comes along when, while sitting in a coffee shop, she meets an old schoolmate who once had a crush on her. After a while, the man’s wife suddenly appears and makes a scene when she finds the two of them pleasantly chatting together. Her old friend was supposed to meet a foreign businessman there, but this man does not arrive until her old classmate has left. She herself has a cup of coffee with the foreigner before going home. At home, the daunting daily routine overwhelms her once more, making her forget the thrill of the afternoon adventure. The following day she receives a very expensive gift from her old friend. When she tells her husband the whole story his reaction is one of indifference.

According to Tong (2015, p. 29), “consumption in post-Mao China symbolises modernity. Acquiring and consuming material goods tastefully has become an intrinsic part of modern living in China and a validation of one’s high social standing”. Pan Xiangli here gives prominence to luxury brands and objects which symbolise modernity and demonstrates the assimilation of the characters into urban life, as well as the influence of western consumerism and fashion: the protagonist is drinking coffee when she meets her old school friend and has just eaten dinner in a Pizza Hut restaurant, feeling particularly proud of the fact that she is still able to use fork and knife. The protagonist is shopping to enjoy the Christmas atmosphere: the assimilation of western festivities mainly concerns the consumerist aspect of the celebrations, but randomly includes the cultural, traditional or religious values from which they originate.¹⁸ In this story the protagonist does not have any significant problems, but her perfect reality is a burden which weighs heavily on her.

Wo ai Xiao Wanzi (I love Maruko Chan; 2016c) attempts to describe the huge generation gap between Chinese people born before the 1960s and those born from the 1970s onwards. This short story differs from Pan Xiangli’s standard format, even though the female first-person narrator, Jiang Xiaojiang, is still from Shanghai, and belongs to the middle-class, in that the story does not focus on her psychological evolution, but rather it has a shallower approach to the character’s description, because she is a normal white-collar worker with no significant problems and an optimistic outlook on life (Huang, 2013, p. 18), who models herself on a Japanese manga cartoon character, Chibi Maruko-*chan*, created by Sakura Momoko. Even though she is a nine-year-old child, Maruko expresses her thoughts using the language of adults. She has many brothers and sisters, and comes from a family that is not particularly well-off; she tries her best to fulfil her dream of becoming a manga artist, but she is very disorganised and clumsy.

The lack of introspection of the character of Jiang Xiaojiang could be a way for Pan Xiangli to assert that, by asking herself no questions and simply accepting her normal bourgeois life, Jiang Xiaojiang has no particular reasons to worry. Her unusual name is emblematic of the vast difference between her generation and that of her parents. Even her beauty differs from the traditional Chinese aesthetic standards: her skin is not pale and she wears clothes inspired by cartoon characters. She works at a design company, she loves to chat online and has virtual friends, she loves shopping and likes flirting. She is the symbol of a new generation of girls who believe in individualism and in fashion.

Conclusion

The psychological dimension of the relationship between the two sexes, and women’s freedom and independence are the key focus of Pan Xiangli’s fiction; the women she describes are from different age groups with different professions, but have a very similar attitude towards life (Qi, 2013, p. 7). By researching the urban universe in her works, from the perspective of female middle-class characters, my purpose is to demonstrate the connection between urban culture and the formation of a new female identity in present-day Chinese society and, above all, to show that the attainment of material wealth and success generates a deep sense of unfathomable dissatisfaction within these characters, as well as contradictory feelings of attraction towards and refusal of consumerism. A superficial perusal of the female condition in the works of Pan Xiangli may initially reveal an image of relatively emancipated women, yet it becomes clear

¹⁸ For the assimilation of Christmas and other western festivities as a consequence of globalisation: Liu K. (2004, pp. 78–79).

that urban women have to ignore and fight against deep-rooted prejudices and outdated cultural legacies in order to become who they really want to be. The analysis also reveals the uniqueness of Pan Xiangli's female characters: in fact, they find singular solutions for the problems they are confronted with in daily urban life. Putting themselves and their own identity first and refusing to compromise is, for them, not so much a choice as an unavoidable necessity.

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Symphony of the Oppressed: Intertextuality and Social Realism in Osundare and Sow Fall's Aesthetics

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Abstract

Among many social theorists and development strategists in Africa, issues of good governance along with a desire for a responsible and accountable leadership class, have been the subject of vigorous debate on several platforms. Literary artists, as a coterie of intelligentsia, are not unaware of their own social importance in this debate. Steeped in the universe of social differentiation, this article draws on comparative studies as a critical tool to discuss and bring into the open ideas of how writers, who do not share the same genre form, use the combined dialectical skills of satire and protest. These skills are utilized to create awareness around the postcolonial conditioning of bad governance, immoral politics and socio-economic inequalities that violate human dignity and threaten people's economic rights. Within the context of social realism, some African writers are portraying greed and tomfoolery of the elites as generating significant collateral damage, resulting into the unbridled propagation of poverty, disease and human suffocation; denying the masses productive lives. Looking specifically at Niyi Osundare and Aminatta Sow Fall, this work goes across genres and intersects national borders, privileging intertextual solidarity of texts to argue that the elitists' culture of impunity and reduction of humanity into ghoulish suffocation through bad leadership and inhuman economic policies favors the rich and the powerful at the expense of the poor and the minorities. This paper takes intertextuality and social realism as conceptual blocks to explore how the texts of Osundare and Fall echo each other. Of particular interest here is how these texts intersect, forming patterns of motifs that rebut the efforts to oppress those not within the ruling class. The purpose of this work is to reveal how writers, using literary knowledge and imaginative scholarship, can be advocates for the humanization of their society and the strengthening of good governance.

Keywords: good governance, intertextuality, social realism, social differentiation, symphony of the oppressed, accountable leadership, immoral politics, propagation of poverty

Introduction

Modern African writing in sub-Saharan Africa is a high-profile activity which began in the late nineteenth century (Kaddu, 2016). As writers traverse the continent into the league of societies with strong written cultures, colonial discourses become an important issue for these writers to address. There is often an immediate engagement in a counter-discourse through a combination of totally rejecting colonialism's cultural absurdity and the re-writing of European narratives that had exoticized and skirted the African peoples using stereotypical effigies and so casting aspersions on the continent's belief systems. For instance, Obiechina (1975) holds that Daniel Defoe's *The Life, Adventures, and Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720) "embodies most of the stereotypes which were to characterize later European writing on Africa" (p. 18). Foregrounding colonial discourse in most early modern literary works is not a misnomer, however, for history records that the British had a colonial presence in Nigeria between 1900 until 1960 when Nigeria gained independence. At the point of making its official separation from Britain, the British colonist had taught the indigenous people about "the superiority of Western practices through setting up of systems of police and courts and legislatures following British laws through sending missionaries to convert natives to Christianity [...] and establishing churches and seminaries and through setting up of schools [...]. And with these ideological exportations came Western 'culture', in the form of music, arts, and literature [...] regardless of the ancient [...] traditions of [...] the inhabitants of those areas" (Kliegs, 2006, pp. 148–49). Fanon (1990) describes colonialism and its devastating effect on its victims thus: "colonialism is not satisfied with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (p. 154).

To most scholars and researchers in the field of colonial discourse, the hegemony is a knowledge production, an active political performance and socio-economic process through which the West intruded on the African world at the late nineteenth century. In the main, the ideology serves as a mirror, a narcissistic projection, on which the West sees itself as a subject and the rest of the world as other. Scholars and experts in political economy hold that "the relationship of economics to politics is the best starting point for unraveling questions about the distribution of power in society" (Ikotun, 2012, p. 33). Most of these researchers have also underscored the economic impact of colonialism to the post-colonial African economic advancement. Aluko (2003) traces the Africa's ongoing economic woes to the colonial conditioning and manipulation, asserting that "a debtor-country is considered credible and entitled to economic assistance, debt forgiveness or debt relief from its creditors only if it pursues policies in accordance with what the market believes to be [...] policies which create the enabling environment for the private sector, and for the efficient operation of the market economy as certified by the Triad and their agents, the IMF and the World Bank" (p. 26). With these conversations already rooted in various genres – the ground was fertile, tilled, and seeded – with written actions and political actions combined, African people fought colonialism for a season. This resulted in independence for several African countries in the 1960s. Many imaginative works of this period started out as seminal books on cultural revival as a form of intellectual crusade against the structure of colonial vestiges, colonialism and western modernity, in particular, which tried assiduously to degrade African ambience.

Though the earliest African writers' rhetorical practice, positioned as a postcolonial discourse, was built around politics and cultural revivalism from the rampaging westernization of the continent, they also attacked head-on the dysfunctional governance seen post-independence. Thus, the political landscape of the immediate post-independence era in Africa largely informs

the writers' aesthetic settings and inspires the imaginative idioms of their creative scholarship. They have accused the political elite of a lack of creative leadership and of standing in the way of achieving good governance systems, denying the people what had been promised throughout the campaigns for independence. Writers, as this article demonstrates, have – in their disillusionment with the post-independence outcomes – sided with the masses.

Steeped in the universe of social differentiation, this article utilizes comparative studies as a critical tool to discuss and bring to light how writers who do not share the same genre form can use the combined dialectical skills of satire and protest. These skills are being deployed to create a broad-based awareness of the key issues of bad governance, immoral politics and socio-economic inequalities that violate human dignity and threaten teeth of economic rights of the people. Within the context of social realism, African writers often portray the elites' greed and numerous unruly behaviors as triggers for poverty, disease and human suffocation. Niyi Osundare's poetic imagination "They Too are the Earth" (1986) and Aminatta Sow Fall's prose composition *The Beggars' Strike* (1981) are just two texts in an intertextual solidarity that critique the elitists' culture of impunity and reject the systematic oppression of the masses. The two writers, discussed here, reveal a shared aesthetic flair that highlights inequality and poverty as being a dominant feature of most economic and social development policies in several African countries. This policy-driven disparity exacerbates the tensions between the dichotomous social groups, dashing dreams of true independence and individual aspiration. This article argues that the site of literature, a communicative act, is one of the several avenues for discussion on national development and policy matters.

Relying on a textually based mode of communication, literature enacts the effects of government policies or programs on the people and brings this to the forefront of public consciousness and debate. In this way, literature offers an ensemble of aesthetic structures to serve as continual feed-back on a government's policy priorities, highlighting the inequality and unfairness of those policies. To draw this discursive map, this article takes intertextuality and social realism as conceptual blocks to unpack how the texts of Osundare and Fall echo each other, generating patterns of motifs that highlight some of the many issues facing those who are oppressed. The songs, through an intertextual chorus, come in the form of protest and stirring satire; they are not pleasant to listen to. The two writers are not writing from within the same genre form, yet, they focus on the same subject matter; their musical notation seeming to agree on the fact that the poor and the disempowered are groaning under the burdensome greed of the elites and the unkind policies of the powerful. The main concern of this work is to unpack the specific nature of the inequalities being experienced by people in Africa, to expose the exploitation and to demonstrate how oppression is odious. The article achieves this through examining the work of contemporary African writers; writers who have given us a symphony of the oppressed. These writers are, as this paper shows, committed to a post-colonial discourse and are responding to Frantz Fanon's "native intellectuals" in his theories of resistance. Fanon identifies these people as the "writers and thinkers educated in colonial schools who not only use their education in the struggle against the colonialists but also remain vigilant in the postcolonial era prepared to denounce an indigenous ruling class" (pp. 166–9).

In the final analysis, we apparently see how writers, using literary knowledge and imaginative scholarships for advocacy purposes, humanize their society and strengthen the debate for good governance. It is what Adeoti (2015) refers to as "the close affinity between art [literature] and politics in its polemics" (p. 3).

Intertextuality and Social Realism: ‘Intersectional’ Relationship, Conceptual Bifurcation

“A writer is first a reader”, Cardin (2006) claims in *Intertextual Re-creation in Jamie O’Neill’s at Swim, Two Boys*. “And is necessarily affected by his readings which leave traces on his works” (p. 24). The legacy of writings having influence on other writings or writers is a growing discussion in literary parlance. This influence, perceptible through identical structures, motifs or styles, implies a filial relationship in literary creation. Nowadays, this notion of influence seems to be too restrictive to deal with transtextual connections and this is why the more comprehensive notion of intertextuality is often preferred. Intertextuality is an inevitable phenomenon insofar as any given text derives from other texts. As a result, there is an intense degree of cross-fertilization in any literature.

The development of interest and scholarships around intertextuality seems to begin with Kristeva who offered the coinage after her extensive readings of Bakhtin works (Haberer, 2007, p. 56). However, attempts at mainstreaming an acceptable definition for the concept have remained largely elusive as scholars and experts have shown more of variations and differences about the term than convergences. While working within the spectrum of the concept, however, experts seem to conform with the general thesis that intertextuality means the displacement of critical interest away from the author, which according to Haberer, Eco has dealt with more explicitly when he says that, “it is not true that works are created by their authors. Works are created by works, texts are created by texts, all together they speak to each other independently of the intentions of their authors” (Haberer, 2007, p. 57).

Realism is founded on the assumption that there exists the individual sensory perception. This was a challenge to traditional literature that made use of plots from mythology, history, legend, and so on, the novel form’s use of realism meant that the individual’s experience was the focus. The writer had to “convey the impression of fidelity to human experience”, so that the plot was always original (Watt, 1957, p. 13). As opposed to “general human types”, Watt asserts that the novel had characters that were individualized and their backgrounds were developed. These characters were such that they appeared as individuals who existed in the contemporary environment. Characters now had both a name and a surname. This individual could be located to a specific space and time. The approximation to reality was successful because of the use of a time scale: the novel’s closeness to the texture of daily experience directly depends upon its employment of a much more minutely discriminated timescale than had previously employed in narrative (Watt, 1957, p. 22).

The effect of literature on a society cannot be underestimated, especially with regard to realist works. Fischer (1959, p. 207), describing the nature of literary compositions, states that “born of reality, it acts back on reality [...] a discussion about the characters and situation in a novel stirs up decisive problem of social life and philosophy. Art [Literature] and the discussion of art [literature] are a forward-thrusting part of life in the socialist world”. Thus, born of socio-political condition, realism depicted the struggles of the working class and Europe’s socio-economic inequality. Realism “reflected the positivist belief that art [literature] should show unvarnished truth, realists took up subjects that were generally regarded as not important enough for a serious work of art” (Stokstad, 2008, p. 1017). Ousmane once said that “what I want to represent is a social realism” (As qtd. in Schipper, 1989, p.139). Thus, as Eustace Palmer observes, Ousmane’s novels are an embodiment of a working-class perspective presented through realism. Ousmane also states “the idea of my work derives from this teaching: to keep as close as possible to reality and the people” (Schipper, 1989, p. 136).

The Aristotelian concept of man as a social being seems to be closely adhered to in all realistic texts. Georg Lukacs argues that this dictum is applicable to all great realistic literature (1956: p. 19). The focus of such texts is on society, rather than the individual. As a Marxist proselyte, Lukacs glowingly agrees with the realistic tenets to the extent that he sees it as “the basis of literature; and that all styles even those seemingly most opposed to realism originate in it or are significantly related to it” (As qtd. In Abd Al-Salam and Morsy, 2017, p. 26). The Lukacsean advocacy for realist literature is formed out of Georg Lukacs’ political experience during the 1920s. Explaining Lukacs’ political career and theoretical postulation further, Abd Al-Salam and Morsy (2017) observe that Lukacs felt that “realist literature would be the best alternative that could enable the working class to achieve the required social change”. Thus, as one of the most influential Marxist critics, he decided to examine literary works sociologically to address the problematic issues caused by capitalism because he “believes that Man in modern societies suffered alienation and self-fragmentation due to the oppressive capitalist division of labor; a crucial problem that can prevent progress in any society” (p. 27).

The belief in the function of literature/art, as a reflection of its society as well as its age, in the progress of human life has been an inherent belief since ancient times, and is regarded as one of the most important approaches in the history of literary criticism. Admitting such ingrained relationship between art/literature and social reality, thinkers and intellectuals of the 20th centuries decided to inaugurate what is known as sociology of literature. Proponents of such approach, accordingly, perceive literature as a document that records or reflects circumstances and changes within any society. Adeoti (2015, p. 3) sharing his thoughts on the future performance of literature in socio-cultural, economic and political vortex of the continent offers that “literature is one of the knowledge tools designed by man from ancient times to dissect and straighten the crooked ribs of a society [...]. It is a vintage observatory from where the writer is strategically placed to observe the goings-on in the society. (S)/he may distort or realistically re-present the picture to create awareness and effect changes where necessary for social transformation”.

We know that imitation and intertextuality explore how the relationships between texts produce “tones” that resonate in new and often unexpected ways. Social realism and intertextuality are well-equipped to uncover the polyphonic qualities of texts because they both begin with the observation that texts are not isolated literary units but complex productions that exist in relation to other texts. Through these relationships, texts do not retain a uniform meaning but are constantly resignified by readers who approach the material from new perspectives. It is the dynamic process of re-hearing how texts relate to one another that social realism and intertextuality seek to decode. Kristeva’s significant contributions to a definition of intertextuality relate to the intertextual presence of the social. In “Bypassing Intertextuality”, Mai (1991) offers a useful analysis of certain passages from Kristeva’s essay, “The Bounded Text”:

the literary scholar’s intertextual task would be to define ‘the specificity of different textual arrangements by placing them within the general text (culture) of which they are a part and which is in turn, part of them’. The intertextual procedure would, ‘by studying the text as intertextuality, consider it as such within (the text of) society and history.’ Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality here resembles very closely a sociological theory of literature. The important difference is that Kristeva no longer conceives of society/history as something outside the text, some objective entity over against the text, but partaking of the same textuality as literature (p. 40)

Thus, Kristeva sees society and history as texts that function in the same way as other texts. Intertextuality becomes the means by which society and history are filtered through texts.

Intersectionality as a conceptual discursive polemic in women's studies or postcolonial studies springs from a need to identify multiple and interconnected forms of inequality and oppression. Nash (2008, p. 9) posits that it is used to study "multiple marginalized subjects"; hence the concept has been used specifically in trying to theorize black women's experiences of oppression. As an analytical practice, intersectionality is, to this day, still within common academic use, considered to focus upon the marginalized, multi-burdened and oppressed. But the feminist theorists' patent on the concept has been reduced to combine and interconnect the complexities of lived experience. For this paper, we embrace intersectionality as a more general approach, looking to constantly identify and challenge the shifting discourses within which power dynamics develop and change. Thus, we reframe the tool to accommodate the analysis of privileged ruling elite in African literature.

Symphony of the Oppressed, Advocacy for the Poor in Niyi Osundare's "They Too Are the Earth"

This is a poem with social vision which focuses comprehensively on the subjects of social differentiation and subalternity. It is a song of woes and symphony of collapse of humanity. The poet makes a clarion call for advocacy purposes, a helpful protest for the redemption of the teeming masses that are voiceless and remained largely in ghoulish existence in the dialectics of the ruling elites' scarcity of positive leadership characters. The poet showcases the life of the poor masses as antithetical to the profligacy of the rich or "ruling/ruining" class, who inflicts intolerable suffering on its people; the resultant of its incompetence, greed and gross opportunism. The political leaders and their cohorts are clueless, rape the treasury and the people "groan" (Osundare, 1986, p. 45) under their unrestrained psychiatric stealing and kleptomaniac looting. Viewed within the space of contest of text and context, the poet seemingly communicates the realities of the Nigerian state in the present democratic space. For instance, Ikotun (2012), while focusing on the problem of leadership in Nigeria and its collateral impact on the economy and good life of the masses quoted Sagay (2010) thus: "in spite of the dismal standard of living, poverty of the country and low income per capita of Nigeria, Nigerian legislators in Abuja have awarded themselves the highest salaries and allowances in the world. In other words, the Nigerian law makers in Abuja are the highest paid in the world" (p. 244). Furthermore, the legislative rascality of the Nigerian legislators is statistical noted as follows: "in 2009, a senator earned N240,000,000.00 in salaries and allowances, while his house of Representatives counter-part earned N203,760,000.00. In other words, a Senator earned about \$1.7 million, and a member of the House of Representatives earned \$1.45 million, per annum. By contrast, an American Senator earned \$174,000.00 and a U.K. Parliamentarian earned about \$64,000.00 per annum". According to the analysis, the cruelty of the legislators pay is much more revealing when the incomes per capita of these countries are placed side-by-side with their Parliamentary pay as follows:

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of per capita income of three countries

Country	Income per Capita	Legislative Pay
USA	\$46, 300. 00	\$174, 000, 00
UK	\$35, 468. 00	\$64, 000. 00
Nigeria	\$2, 249. 00	\$1, 700. 000. 00

Source: *The Punch* (August 18, 2010), p. 8.

As a poem of social vision, the poet, using his personal insight, finds the socio-economic condition of the post-colonial Nigerian masses intolerable; therefore, he conscientizes the masses on their oppression. Again, the poet's illumination of disillusionment relieves the African writers' reason for the bitterness against neo-colonialism and the political actors who shattered the dreams of the struggle against colonialism after the independence of most African states. Kehinde (2005) may have given this clue when he offers that "the indigenous ruling class simply replaced the colonizer and began to rule with scorpion where the colonizer had ruled with whip" (p. 91). From every line of the poem, the poet seems to argue that the African elites are using the various institutional structures to punish their subjects rather than use them in the interest of the African societies. Achebe, in his practiced eye as a novelist and critic, seems to urge writers in Africa to engage their arts to imbricate the authentic African life (short of romanticism) and present "human condition". Thus, as cited by Ojinmah (1991), Maduka (1981) writes that to Achebe and "most African writers ... there is a direct relationship between literature and social institutions. The principal function of literature is to criticize these institutions and eventually bring about desirable changes in the society" (p. 5). Osundare appears to have demonstrated this command in his poem under focus. The poetry of life, as shown in his poetical composition, laugh to scorn the realities of the African states in the new millennium that privileges loudly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of vain hope and yawning propositions for prosperity and de-escalation of the colonies of the poor. The poet's stirring satire and condemnation of the establishment ideology aligns with the Marxist view that "the suffocating influences of the capitalist manipulation of economic resources, [...] perpetually make the masses socially and economically depressed" (Afolayan, 2011, p. 2). Having said this, a Marxist reading of the poem as indicative of African sociopolitical dystopianism appears to be a possibility. Looking at the idea of Marxist's utopianism, it manifests itself as 'a welfare state' (Afolayan *ibid*, p. 2). And that "a utopian society strikes one as a society which maintains a wide range of social services, and this guarantees for all its citizens a certain standard of living" (Buah, 1978, p. 122, as qtd. In Afolayan, (2011, p. 2). The welfare state is one of the spin-offs from Karl Marx's analysis of human predicaments within various political institutions. To the Marxist's practiced eyes, the bulk of world's population is people who are often the impoverished, whose misfortune has always been "to work for their master, and to remain poor, earning just enough to keep bone and flesh together. In ancient times, they were the slaves: in the middle Ages, they were the serfs; and in the modern capitalist countries, they were the wage earners often called the working classes. In advanced books they are often referred to as the proletariats" (As qtd. In Afolayan, 2011, p. 6).

Osundare appears to capture the scenes of life of the impoverished people, working under strenuous conditions which require their inborn strength for their existential survival in our society in the motifs of exploitation and dehumanization. Most of them are involved in jobs that are so energetic and less than lacking in life-fulfillment. They are, according to the poet, "the millions hewing wood and hurling water [...] muddy every pore like naked moles" whose existence is typified by "unrest" (Osundare, 1986, p. 45). Our cities are packed full of alarm-clock workers who hardly see eye-to-eye with their children during the week. They rise early

to work in order to avoid the dreadful traffic snarl only to sleep, most often, in the same quagmire when going back home. These are workers who are constantly harassed by inflated bills for power supply that is always in short supply or not available at all; payment for the environment that is always filthy and inhabitable; charged for phone services which they struggle with to make their calls through, and so on. We hear their “distant groans [...] as they are being buried alive in hard unfathomable mines”. The societal structures Buah outlines as cited by Afolayan above is a portrayal of capitalist economic system and this seems to capture Osundare’s thoughts in the poem thus: “the swansongs of beggars sprawled out in brimming gutters [...] under snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tyres” (p. 45). Affluence, exploitation and the profit motive are the notable features of the society which the poet appears to observe and in which he lives. The rich are affluent enough to have several and choicest cars to go in for rather ostentatiously expensive lifestyle and not to deny themselves any bodily satisfaction. On the other hand, the poor are really poor and are shamelessly exploited – variously suffered from different forms of racketeering – the defenseless man, with no influence, came off worst every time. When the poor could not contribute to the rich they are simply ignored and left to be broken. Money-making and personal covetousness ruled the land. Men live for their offices; the rulers live for frivolity. Osundare’s symphony of the poor goes beyond the strict composition of metrical lines. He assuredly showcases his literary genius and concern for the masses and society in his play *The State Visit*. The play is an indictment of military rule in Africa. Osundare, using the latitude of the theatre, carpets the military for the gluttonous attitudes of the army Generals and the civilian club members, their warped psychology, larceny and profligacy engender misrule and elongation of poverty among the populace. The play encourages the masses to rise to freedom and liberation on the rights issue of their capacity to raise insurrection that can allow responsible leadership for the prosperity and abundance of life for all.

In his essay entitled “The Trouble with Nigeria”, Achebe is credited to have stated categorically that the trouble with Nigeria is “simply and squarely a failure of leadership” (As qtd. in Ikotun 2012: 236). While agreeing with Achebe, we can extend the frontier of this brutal truth to imbricate the condition of leadership class in Africa. That is, as Akinnaso (2011) holds, the “motives and motivation behind political struggles in Nigeria [...] (is) the absence of neither partisanship nor ideology, political struggle in Nigeria is motivated by personal, ethnic, regional and religious struggles”. Further to this, Ikotun (2012) seems to capture all when he states that Nigerian politicians merely join whichever political party that best facilitates the exploitation of these fault lines in their political struggles. The Nigeria political environment is a cyst of culture of impunity; where absence of standards creates room for laws to be breached; and “above all, where endemic official corruption is unabated, political offices provide quickest access to wealth, more so when that wealth follows from poorly-regulated oil wells” (Ikotun, 2012, p. 236).

However, Osundare contrasts the oppressed with their oppressors, people “who fritters the forest and harry the hills, who live that earth may die”. These are people who live the life of pleasure, debauchery and plunder. The oppressors are really living the life of profligacy and wantonness, no doubt, as Sagay (2010) seems to explain about the National Assembly leaders of the Nigeria’s Fourth Republic that “in 2009, the Federal legislators received a total of N102.8 billion comprising N11.8 billion as salaries and N90.96 billion (non-taxable) as allowances”. Having stated this, the Lawyer-social-commentator then asked the following questions:

- Is the tax payer getting value for this colossal sum in the current democratic dispensation?

- Should 5 per cent of Nigerian's annual budget be spent on 109 senators and 360 House of Representative members?
- In other words, should 469 Nigerians gulp 5 per cent of the country's budget, leaving the remaining 150 million Nigerians to receive about N1000.00 each?

Oby Ezekwesili, a one-time Nigeria Minister of Education and now a World Bank official shares her thoughts on understanding the basic economic fundamental that “the wealth and poverty of nations inexorably depend on their domestic productivity and relative competitiveness”. Furthermore, she says that “the economic welfare of every citizen can only be guaranteed by nation-states that are governed by people who understand his basic economic thought. No nation that has developed did so by having leaders who remained complacent in the face of the stark reality of every poor and declining performance of national productivity and competitiveness indices” (Ikotun, 2012, p. 250). Having offer this expert thought to challenge the political leaders to embrace positive leadership which is genuinely transformative but unyielding, again, Ezekwesili surmises that “the Nigerian political and public sector space a ‘less than elite bunch’ that had established a world record of omnivorous and parasitic attitude to the public treasury” (Ikotun, 2012 p. 253).

Osundare's aesthetics, serving advocacy purpose, brings social issue to the front-burner of the nation's consciousness driving conversations that birth social change. While in the poem under discussion, the poet raises issues around the socio-economic life of the masses, he as well extends the frontiers of the conversation to include the global debate around environmental degradation. The heavyweight of damage to the biosphere, according to the poet is the deforestation of the environment which is the after match of modernity and capitalists groveling for wealth. The poet blames the policymakers for the rape and abuse of the environment. Thus, in his preface to the anthology, he holds that “in a land where vision and humanistic sympathy have taken leave of the ruling class, hardly is there any policy aimed at stopping the parlous depletion of our natural being. Hardly is anyone aware that today's profit (for them) is tomorrow's irreparable loss for universal humanity” (Osundare, 1986, p. xi). It is also the loss of vision that makes the elites consider the masses as insignificant and consequently, keeping them in abject state of exploitation and dehumanization.

Quest for Positive Leadership and Good Governance in Aminatta Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike*

Many challenges of the post-independence era, mostly on governance and socio-economic issues, have orchestrated thematic shifts of notable significance in representational scholarships in African writings. Losambe (1996, p. xii) holds that “African prose narrative has grown in form and content in parallel with major [...] developments in the continent”. Novelists like Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, and so on, have all represented neo-colonial leadership failure and disappointment and followers' cynicism and hypocrisy in the most fervency of aesthetic crafting and dialectical skill in many of their works. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah records the Nkrumah's Ghana as being entirely morally deficient. Awosika (1997, p. 7) observes that “members of the low classes are avaricious, dubious, vain and ignorant. Bribery is rife among the fairly educated working class while the political elite are plain”. Sow's fictional universe, *The Beggars' Strike*, is a testimonial text on the culture of impunity and anomalous political chicanery among the political elites in African states and the followers' feeble resistance to their waywardness because of their own moral absurdity. The story centers on Mour Ndaiye, the Director of Public Health and Hygiene. An order came from the Presidency through the Minister of Health that

the high ways and the streets – the city should be swept clean of beggars, lepers, the crippled – all forms of human oddities. Mour Ndaiye, as usual, hands over the task of cleaning up the streets of these “wretched of the earth” to his honest, loyal and hardworking assistant, Keba Dabo to carry out. The exercise was successful. The beggars and other unwanted freaks are forcefully ejected from their popular lay-outs – the intersections, traffic-light boulevards, hospitals, banks, markets and Houses of God. Virtually, all places, which these “parodies of humanities” held in captivity, are delivered from them. Thus, the President himself is very happy about the result of the cleaning exercise such that he personally congratulates Mour Ndaiye in a nationwide broadcast.

Thereafter, the President announces to the generality of the people his desire to reshuffle his cabinet; specifically, to appoint a Vice President. Ndaiye, still reveling in the air of presidential accolades and the lust of general-goodwill of the people for virtuoso performance becomes swollen-headed. The funny idea of his possible consideration for the post of Vice-president begins to take foot-hold in him. He thus begins to scheme and search for help, within and without, to increase his fortune and chances of emerging as the next Vice President. Ndaiye sends his devoted, but gullible wife Lolli to his trusted marabout Sergine Birama who often advises him thus: ‘let him have no fear; [...] he can only go forward. He is made to be a leader; it is written in his star’ (p. 4). On a day that Lolli even goes to Birama, to specifically ask about Ndaiye’s chance. The marabout claims, “what I see is very clear. A star which shines, which shines... prosperity, happiness, Mour could have a very great surprise... (p.5). Further to this, Birama asks him to sacrifice a ram. But who will bell the cat? Who will quench the fire of blind ambition that has lighted the soul of Ndaiye which make him emit heat? Thus while appreciating the comforting good-will message which the marabout sent to him, Mour Ndaiye is not satisfied with the advice of his trusted Birama, he requires a specific answer and which must be in affirmation of his desire. Ndaiye, needs to come down to Birama himself and he tells his ambition to Serigne: “A few months ago, the President said he was going to select a Vice-President. I would like you to pray for the President to think of me...” (p. 18). His marabout, Birama, speaking with benefit of insight replies him “That which you desire is in God’s power to grant you. And I think that He will grant it [...] You shall have your wish, if it so pleases God” (p. 19). He therefore asks Ndaiye to make sacrifice of five white ram, which should be slaughtered and distributed to beggars.

With this simple storyline, *Sow Fall* seems to expose the worst side of men of power and the vanity of the governed in the post-independence African states. If, as stated above, realistic texts portrayed the struggles of the working class in Europe’s socio-economic inequality, in African states, the situation is less than welcoming; people contend with the loss of excitement, mirage of hope and acidity of desire for good governance which was believed would have led to development and prosperity of the continent. This is the crux of disillusionment in African literature; and, novelistic form has been a capable outlet in the hands of the writers, as intelligentsia, to express their frustration, disappointment and alienation. Rockwell (1974) argues that “social facts may be revealed by fiction” (p. 117). African writers appear to have bought into this possibility. Many of the writers and critics of the art have loudly view literary compositions as having contributory values to the fortune of the continent through realistic portrayals of historical events, socio-cultural and political conditions. Achebe (1964), Abiola (1991), Gbileka (1997), Umukoro (1994), Adebayo (1987) have all enunciated on the redemptive values of writers and their arts on African continent. Akhuemokhan (2014) citing Echenim, holds that some writers see their vocation as “a sacred mission which characterize society, and thereby creating social and political awareness in their readership” (p. 147).

The public acknowledgement of Mour Ndaiye's achievement by the President in his New Year address to the Nation does not however, suggest that everybody is happy with him. A significant reference is the Minister of State in Ndaiye's ministry who feels threatened by Ndaiye's rising profile and his rumored chance of becoming a Junior Minister in the Ministry while the incumbent Minister of State might have his appointment terminated. Thus, this sickly ambitious and desperate politician begins his own campaign of hatred and falsehood against Ndaiye in the public eye. Ndaiye himself feels unsafe in the atmosphere of the often gently-rendered assurances and advice about fate and belief in God by Birama. He also realizes that many other people in high places in the country are equally strategizing for the post. He begins to look for another marabout. Ndaiye's diligent scouting eventually gets him Kifi Bokoul who has an intimidating track record of spirituality. He thus sets aside Serigne Birama's idea of praying "to God and wait [...] with equanimity for the glory with which the creator would soon summon him" (p. 55).

The new marabout, Kifi Bokoul stays indoor for "seven days and seven nights" (p. 58), asking in the spiritual realm what the fate has for Ndaiye. At the end of the retreat Bokoul gives his findings:

You will have what you desire and you will have it very shortly. You will be Vice-President. To achieve this, you must sacrifice a bull whose coat must be of one color, preferably fawn. The ground must be soaked with the blood of this bull which you must slaughter here in the courtyard of this house; then you must divide it into seventy-seven portions which you will distribute to battu-bearers" (p. 58).

The spiritualist gives further instruction thus:

this sacrifice ... Must not be limited to one district of the town only. You are destined to be appreciated in the four corners of the town, in the four corners of the country; you will be a man of fame: this fame must be symbolized by the manner you distribute the meat from the sacrifice: offer this meat throughout the city, the beggars in every district of the city (p. 58).

The sacrifice also includes "three times seven yards of white, non-silky material as well as seven hundred kola-nuts" (p. 59). Should Ndaiye follow these instructions meticulously, the end product is that, he "will be Vice-President a week later". Thus, the meat of a bull needs to be shared out "*not later than a week*". Filled with joy and thought of certitude of the pronouncement of Bokoul, Ndaiye fails to realize the enormity of the task ahead of him. The "Battu-bearers" are the beggars that he has successfully evicted from the streets, through the indefatigable efforts of Keba Dabo and on whose misfortune he has risen to stardom, as a celebrated administrator. Ndaiye's attitude here is short of cleverness; his desperation to realize his ambition, thus, fails him to immediately detect the irony of fate that has just befalls his circumstance.

As often characterized of politicians and bureaucrats who, on the wings of Providence, are catapulted into stardom, Ndaiye, on the stretch of his rising to estimation in the eye of the public has started to build a harem by marrying another woman, a modern lady unlike Lolli, who is a product of traditional life. Lolli feels the pain of this debauchery and loss of her husband to another woman, but her traditional background neither supports hysterical outburst nor any attempt to challenge her husband's decision. She remembers her mother's warning:

Do you want to be responsible for my death, Lolli? You must know that if Mour divorces you, you will be covered with shame. When a woman has got eight children, some of them old enough to be married, she can't allow herself of behave like a child; Mour is your husband. He is free. He doesn't belong to you. (p. 33).

Lolli's self-effacement however fetches her only rejection from her daughter, Raabi. Raabi's resentment of her mother's stupidity at not rising to defend her marriage fell through because they are products of different times and strokes. To this extent, when Ndaiye brings his marabout, Kiffi Bokoul to the house he has abandoned his wife and her children for long, Lolli still receives him with open arms.

The unassuming instructions of Koffi Bokoul and complexity surrounding its actuality later become the hoist of Ndaiye's petard. To perform the sacrifice, he realizes that the beggars need to be in their natural habitat. But they have been evicted by the man who needs them. What a laugh of fate? Ndaiye becomes more troubled. He thinks of counting on Keba Dabo's support to ask the beggars to return to the street for at least a day to perform the sacrifice. Keba Dabo rejects this unintelligent and self-serving request and, calls off his bluff. Out of expediency and desperation, Ndaiye approaches the beggars at the resettlement village. Salla and Sarr, the two outspoken members of the "parodies of humanities". His entreaties fell on deaf ears when the beggars are unbending in their demands and strongly resolved to have their own pound of flesh from the man they considered as the pillar of their unfortunate eviction from their places of livelihood. All in all, as the sacrifice cannot be made, Ndaiye and Kouli, his driver, are exhausted and went back. Just then the President announces Toumaner Sane and the Vice President of the country.

The thrust of this narrative goes beyond the simplicity of its plot structure and the earthy language of Sow. The text is a prototype of sociology of everyday life of the marginalized, the voiceless in the society. What the writer embarks upon here is the need to free the society of human suffocation which we intermittently create. Thus, just as the writer condemns the attitudes of the rich, the elite and the politicians in the society and their crooked ambitions and misgovernance, she equally lambasts the weaklings, the invalids and the poor who take advantage of their natural and unnatural state or predicament to become social nuisance. The beggars, themselves are a group of people who exploit their natural and unnatural misfortunes to cheat on their patrons. They know very well that their patrons do not give alms out of charity, but rather in furtherance of their own fortune. The speech made by Nguirane Sarr, one of the beggars, while trying to organized a protest against their considered unfair treatment by the state declares that:

we're not dogs! [...] Listen, we can perfectly well get organized. Even these madmen, these heartless brutes who descend on us and beat us up, even they give no charity. They need to give alms because they need our prayers – wishes for long life, for prosperity, for pilgrimage; they like to hear them every morning to drive away their bad dreams of the night before, and to maintain their hopes that things will be better tomorrow. You think that people give out of the goodness of their hearts? Not at all. They give out of an instinct for self-preservation (Fall, 1981, p. 22)

The beggars thus indulge in their undignified business to soar the dependence of their patrons on them. The rebellion of the beggars, however, seems to lack profound moral basis outside its

mere reactionary posture against their offensive and intolerable dehumanization. Invariably, the moral essence of their struggle is of equivalent to murder in the Cathedral. Ideological underpinning lost its steam; the beggars crowded themselves out of something substantial, scrambling for inanity; they fail to epitomize good governance as the highest energy of democratic norm. To this extent, they raise the bar of items to be collected as gifts from their patrons or clients when they are evicted from the streets and lodged at Salla's hide out. They upend the idea that beggars can't be choosers. There is therefore a reversal of role here; the beggars begin to demand what they want and not what their patrons bring with them.

The beggars' knowing conspiratorial hypocrisy together with their clients/patrons is a type of corruption. Corrupt practices, as we know, is one of the festering issues undermining developmental agenda and growth in Africa. As the action of the beggars reveals to us, it seems to conform to the generally held view that in Africa, there is no segment of the society that is corruption-free. It is an insanity that is troubling and embarrassing. Political corruption is characterized in the portrayal of Ndaiye's desperation and clumsy farce. His actions sum up Pogson and Maduabuchi (2013)'s view that "political corruption takes place at high levels of the political system, when politicians and agents of the state entrusted with the responsibility of making and enforcing laws in the name of the people, are using this authority to sustain their power, status and wealth" (p. 190). Nonetheless, the moral of the fictional narrative, according to Sow, in *The Beggars' Strike*, is that being handicapped is not a license to deepening one's indignities. The writer makes us to realize that the beggars are fully conscious of their significance in the society, though what they crave for is to be "treated as citizens with full rights like everyone else. But, it is difficult for them in a society where they are variously demarcated as "derelicts", "parodies of human beings", "dregs of society", "human pollution", "conglomeration of humanity", "running sore" (Fall, 1981, pp. 1–2). These stereotypical categorizations raise the discourse of disability as a social construct and the politics of its spiritual manipulation for hypocritical behavior as well as the proliferation of mass poverty and disempowerment. However, the beggars' immoral attitude is also a type of political corruption. This is because political corruption, as enunciated in the action of the beggars, affects the way in which decisions are made and manipulates political institutions, distorts the rules and procedures of institutions of government.

Another reading of this narrative is Sow's desire for good governance and positive leadership in African states. Citing Fagbenle (2011), Ikotun (2012) holds that good governance is about the people being governed; it starts with the people and ends with the people. It is about the consuming passion of the government to add value to the lives of the masses, to make life easier for them by an ever-thoughtful process of helping to ease their pains and give them the opportunity to come out of their best – each and every one. Good governance and positive leadership walk together. It is a synergy that is proactive; it not only thinks about today, it thinks about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow; about ten, twenty, fifty years hence. More importantly, good governance starts from a leadership that thinks, thinks about the people and about making their lives better. It is about leadership that inspires and dreams big dreams. In Nigeria today, the country is faced with a myriad of challenges: the president and the governors must be able to think through them for solution.

Conclusion

The moral and aesthetic nature of the texts under consideration demands the theoretical reading paradigm intertextuality. Intertextuality informed by poststructuralism is a theoretical approach that enables one to read the moral and aesthetic elements of a work in a productive way.

Osundare's poetic virtuosity and Sow Fall's fictional narrative are augmented by their representation of failure of governance in post-independence African states. By locating the texts within the national space of the writers, Osundare shares his many disappointments about unequal distribution of economic opportunities in Nigeria; it seems to be a clear indication of poor leadership on the part of the elites who are fond of taking care of themselves at the expense of the majority of the people. Similarly, Sow Fall appears to condemn the loss of national values in the face of unbridled corruption and over-estimation of economic interest over and above the well-being of the poor and the challenged in Senegalese society. From the foregoing, the writers portray socio-economic societies that are unfair and unjust in the distribution of political power and economic rights of the people.

African literature, beginning from the early morning of its creation is political. The volume of works around the re-construction of colonial ideology and stirring protest against neo-colonialism attest to this observation. The engagement of intertextual theory in the discussion of the "They too Are the Earth" and *The Beggars' Strike* has reflected the idea of literary works' interrogation of life. Hence, the reading of realism as not only a narrative technique but also a recreation of life that projects a vision of life that is clearly absurd to the writers' expectation.

The two writers, while engaging in intertextual conversation invite us to see, in realistic terms, the implosion of politics without principles and upend the consequences of poor governance in the materiality of social dislocation occasioned by unfair and unequal socio-political environment on its victims. For instance, Osundare appears to make us aware that while exploitation and oppression, the Siamese twins of injustice and bad governance are on the prowl, good reason waited and justice watched. There are striking balances in the texts which encouraged the paradigm of intertextual interrogation. One, the writers choose unfair and unjust socioeconomic situations as the setting of their texts. The writers, taking literary creation as a weapon of social criticism lambast the poor leadership that encumbered the life of the majority of the people; they also show that lack of political power of the masses as the epitome of their loss of economic rights. Furthermore, having observed that the people have almost lost their political value, the writers as the conscience of the societies protest through writings the low hanging tree of opportunities offered the poor and the challenged in most African states. It can be argued, in this connection, that the texts under discussion optimize the intertextual connection that exists between them in the sense that the writings focus on the use of state power by the elites to favor the rich and the influential members of the societies, most often, at the peril of the poor. This insight, the echo of social decadence, corruption, abuse of power and culture of impunity and its impact on the masses, therefore, suggests the claim of symphony of the poor in this paper. Barthes (1981), writing on textuality holds that:

[A]ny text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognisable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it. [...] Epistemologically, the concept of intertext is what brings to theory of the volume of sociality (p. 39).

Barthes view on the "volume of sociality" is brought to the text by means of intertextuality.

The writers, using several of the paraphernalia, the stock-in-trade, of their arts seem to agree with Aristotle's theory of leadership since 350 BC which remains relevant in its timeliness and simplicity that a good leader must have ethos, integrity and moral character which confers on

him/her the credibility to ask for followership; that is, a good leader must have pathos or emotional connection with his/her followers. Good leaders must also have logos – they must be able to give solid, compelling reasons for their actions in relation to the common good, to persuade people to follow them.

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**Creation, Creator and Causality:
Perspectives from Purānic Genre of Hindu Literature**

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Abstract

Inspired by a growing recognition of the need for an interdisciplinary approach in dealing with science and religion, this article aims to decode the nature of the causal relationship between creator and creation as epitomized in a few select scriptures of Purānic genre of Hindu Literature. The present study is part of an overarching effort to understand how ancient Indian knowledge and culture have supported profound metaphysical inquiries amidst flourishing religious practices. The nature of this work requires the utilization of a research protocol that combines the exploratory interpretation of scriptures and an explanation of causality. Notably, there is a consensus among the Purānas on the fundamental tenet that a primal creator is the eternal cause of the cycle of creation, sustenance, dissolution, and re-creation. Working from this premise, Purānas depict the primal creator as imperceptible, enigmatic, and absolute; hence, a thorough understanding is impossible. With this underlying principle, Purānas provide a metaphysical basis for the Hindu Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra), the quintessence of Hindu Theology. This research paper concludes that the Purānas chosen for this study (a) point to a relational causality of creation of this universe that manifests from the unmanifest creator, and (b) proffer an intriguing description of how equilibrium-disequilibrium among gunas influence the cycle of cause-effect.

Keywords: primal creator, creation, relational causality, avyakta (unmanifest), brahmānda (cosmic egg), guna (attribute), Purāna

Introduction

How did the universe come into existence? Did God create this universe? What will be the universe's fate?

Such profound questions on cosmic origins and its destiny have been an essential part of human history across cultures (Miller, 2001a). Inquiries like this resulted in various cultures developing their understanding of how everything came into existence (Primack, 1997). Creation myths of world cultures have aligned with either or both of the two cosmogonic theories that were prevalent many centuries before scientific cosmology became mainstream (Novello & Bergliaffa, 2008 and Paulson et al., 2015a). In one of them, the universe emerges in a single instant of creation, and in another, the universe is eternal, consisting of an infinite series of cycles (Wolchover, 2018). Despite inherent complexities and geographic limitations associated with such primal myths, they have had an intricate relationship with religious beliefs, traditions, and sanctity (Paulson et al., 2015b).

Over the past few centuries, myths have taken a backseat giving way to measurements. With the advancement of empirical techniques and tools, mythical cosmic thoughts have evolved into scientific cosmology (Miller, 2001a). As probable answers to cosmic quests go through methodical scrutiny with observable data, constraints of sectoral views have vanished, and global perspectives have emerged. This transformation from the religious domain into a full-blown scientific exploration has naturally brought Religion and Science together on an interdisciplinary dialogue on Cosmology (Drees, 2007). There are three noteworthy examples of this pioneering endeavor of integrating two domains. These examples have not only set ground-breaking guidelines for engagement but also have opened up more prospects.

First example is the conference on “Cosmic Questions” sponsored by the AAAS Program of Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion held in 1999 at the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Subsequently, proceedings of this conference were published in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* (“Cosmic Questions,” 2001). This conference brought together in a public setting scientists, philosophers, historians, and religious scholars to explore contemporary efforts to answer such questions. Some of the questions deliberated at this conference were: Did the Universe have a beginning? Does it matter, religiously? Was the universe designed? What is the Religious reflection on design? The conference recognized the complexity (Miller, 2001b) in dealing with cosmological theories and religious understanding.

Two key takeaways from the conference are (1) with access to far greater observational data, we are better equipped today than our ancestors to investigate the cosmic questions for more comprehensive answers, and (2) religion-science dialogue on cosmology have more reasons to continue.

The second example is a series of events on “The Big Bang and the interfaces of knowledge,” organized by Wilton Park in partnership with CERN in 2012, 2014, and 2015. For all these three events, leading experts were invited to examine the different worldviews of science, philosophy, and theology on the Big Bang and consider what they share in terms of understanding. The first event held in 2012 (Big Bang, 2012) focused on “towards a common language.” The second event held in 2014 (Big Bang, 2014) focused on “towards a common understanding of Truth.” The third and final event in this series, held in 2015 (Big Bang, 2015), focused on “towards a common understanding of Logic.”

Two key takeaways from the series of events are (1) pursuing the dialogue for making critical linkages between scientific discovery and religious narratives, and (2) continue the conversation so the next generation of scientists, theologians, and philosophers can articulate a more robust combined interdisciplinary knowledge.

The third example is an intriguing three-part series on “Beyond the Big Bang: Searching for Meaning in Contemporary Physics” organized by Nour Foundation in 2014–15. Subsequently, the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences published the deliberations from this series (“Beyond the Big Bang,” 2015). This series brought together a wide array of leading physicists, philosophers, historians, and writers to explore the multiple scientific and philosophical dimensions suggested by modern physics, with an emphasis on understanding how recent scientific advances impact our enduring search for meaning (Rass, 2015). Two essential topics deliberated in the series included: (1) The Origins of the Universe: Why Is There Something Rather than Nothing? (2) The Unification of Physics: The Quest for a Theory of Everything.

Two key takeaways from this series are (1) science could renew and revive a more inclusive approach to fundamental cosmic questions, and (2) exploring metaphysics as it involves examining inquiries such as the origin.

While the three examples presented a great model for engaging Science and Religion on a broader setting amidst a range of experts to deliberate on fundamental questions of our existence, one could infer there was limited focus on examining how Hindu tradition has considered Cosmic Questions, except for one research paper (Balslev, 2001) presented at the AAAS conference that covered perspectives from Hindu cosmology. This paper focused on the notions of “beginning” and “beginninglessness” in the discourses associated with Indian and Hindu philosophical and religious thought as they relate to cosmology. In this work, the author highlighted how different genres of Hindu literature from vedic to upanishadic to darshana shastra (Indian philosophy) represent cosmology. Further, this paper also briefly mentioned about creation myths and cosmological time cycles in the Purānic genre of Hindu literature. Notably, author also talked about the causality of creation in darshana shastra with specific reference to sankhya and vaishesika.

In fact, outside the broader setting of the three examples presented here, Hindu religious literatures have enchanted several researchers who have interpreted its origin myths, exposition on the nature of ultimate reality, and often have correlated religious thoughts with scientific theories. The paper (Humphrey, 2015) focused on cosmogonic perspectives in rig vedic nasadiya sukta and chandogya upanishad. Another paper (Aggarwal, 2011) highlighted the cosmology, cosmic time scales, and cycles of vishnu Purāna and presented a correlation with the scientific model. According to this paper (Kak, 2001), Purānic cosmology illuminates many ideas of space and time in addition to astronomy and cosmic cycles. Causality of creation as a research theme is primarily used in darshana shastra literature such as sankhya, yoga, mimamsa, and nyaya (Sutradhar, 2018; Buxton, 2006; Shaw, 2002; Perrett, 1998). Regardless of the complication associated with Hindu cosmology due to the lack of a central institutionalized authority and one founder to ordain what is acceptable belief and what is not (Raman, 2012), these research papers conclusively demonstrate the immense potential of Hindu religious literature for interdisciplinary conversations with science. Perhaps, not having an institutionalized authority could have helped Hinduism, by making it a living tradition capable of not only augmenting well with individual proclivities in experiencing the divine but also adapting to the intellectual evolution (Edelmann, 2012).

In this context, after carefully considering the research potential derivable from the topics deliberated in the three examples, reflecting on the key takeaways and reviewing the available relevant literature, this paper intends to take forward the discussion on how Hindu religious literature have contemplated on the Cosmic Questions. The premise in which this study seeks to achieve this objective is by decoding the nature of the causal relationship between creator and creation as epitomized in a few select works of Purānic genre among the vast corpus of Hindu religious literature (hereafter, referred to as scriptures). This research work envisages, by exploring such aspects of scriptures, society can get an opportunity to recognize how ancient Indian knowledge and culture have encouraged metaphysical inquiries to coexist with religious traditions harmoniously.

Scope of Research Study

The Sanskrit word “Purāna,” although as a single syllable, means “ancient,” it can be etymologically derived from two words “Purā” and “nava,” meaning “long ago” and “new.” There is a famous epithet “purā api navam iti purānam” supporting this derivation. It means “though old, Purāna is also new.” This epithet implies that although Purānas contain ancient texts, can be interpreted again freshly and has relevance in the present context. Such an inference seems to be more apt than just “ancient,” considering the interest the Purānic texts have generated among scholars in the past many decades (Coburn, 1980). This argument also suggests the flexibility Purānic genre of literature affords, supporting the core of Hinduism, not having a single authority, thus supporting the co-existence of multiple traditions. Despite supporting different traditions with at least two traditions formally distinguishable and appreciation of many-faced nature of truth, Purānic texts do not endorse any comparative superiority (Coburn, 1980). This underlying notion, combined with different ways of interpreting Sanskrit language, in which Purānas are developed, present incredible scope for research. It is further strengthened by its size (about 400,000 verses) and a mix of exciting and varied contents.

Purānic genre of scriptures are popularly known for their encyclopedic nature that weaves the nucleus of Vedic and Upanishadic concepts (Coburn, 1980) with dramatic narrations on cycle of creation and dissolution of the universe, genealogy of gods, life history of royal dynasties, lineages of rishis, earth’s geography and significance of Hindu pilgrimages (Rocher, 1986; Katz, 2000). There are eighteen Maha Purānas that are typically classified as per the gunas.

For this research study, a typical classification based on gunas does not help; hence, a sectarian scheme (Rocher, 1986; Katz, 2000) is used. The sectarian scheme is based on whether a Purāna has specifically glorified one of the Hindu Trinity or more than one as the Supreme God or none. Although no classification scheme can be rigidly applied, the sectarian scheme appears more apt in the context of elucidating the connection between creator-creation.

Accordingly, six Purānas chosen for this work are two non-sectarian Purānas namely Brahmānda and Markandeya; three sectarian Purānas namely Brahma, Vishnu and Linga; and one cross-sectarian Purāna, namely Kūrma. All these Purānas offer enormous scope for this research aim and contain cosmogonic notions conducive for answering some of the fundamental Cosmic Questions. They contain both the sarga-primary creation and pratisarga-secondary creation phases (Aiyar, 1916) that are primarily useful for explaining cosmic timescales (such as yugas and kalpas – similar to epochs and eons). This research study focuses more on “sarga” and not on timescales.

Brahmānda Purāṇa is famous for its views on cosmogony, detailed narrations of the process of creation, and universal time cycle that covers minor to major duration scales. Additionally, the name “Brahmānda” is quite riveting as it means “cosmic egg” – a term quite familiar to ancient creation myths.

Markandeya Purāṇa is said to be named after Rishi Markandeya, contain both the sarga and pratisarga that are explained through a dialogue between rishis. It is known for narrative of legends, less religious tone and invocations, and includes some texts on yoga and emancipation. Brahma Purāṇa, apart from focusing on primary creation, has detailed narratives on Sun and the solar system (in particular earth with its continents and oceans), where Sun god is glorified. It also has a compilation on the significance of pilgrimage sites.

Vishnu Purāṇa is an essential text for Vaishnavism tradition, in addition to sarga, pratisarga, Vishnu theology, and also has portions on yoga and meditation. Its creation description has parallels with Sankhya philosophy.

Linga Purāṇa is an important text for Saivism tradition and adore Shiva as Supreme Lord in both alinga (form-less) and linga (form but not of anthropomorphic) shapes. Linga Purāṇa also discusses the idea of “ardhanārīśvara” (ardha is half; nara-man; nāri-woman; īśvara is the manifest form of Shiva as Rudra), a form of Shiva with one-half male and one-half female body, dual body in one spirit, symbolically implying emancipation from the matter world of dualities.

Kūrma Purāṇa, although named after one of Vishnu’s avatar (kūrma means tortoise), is considered as a cross-sectarian (Rocher, 1986; Katz, 2000). Kūrma, symbolically represent the animal that which can withdraw its limbs, implying the importance of control of senses for liberation. It contains Ishvara Gita, similar to Bhagavad Gita, but presented by Shiva instead of Krishna.

Accordingly, this study, while setting out to analyze six Purāṇas for notions on the process of creation, aims to unravel the nature of the causal relationship between creator and creation as envisioned in the Purāṇas. This research work aspires to supplement the ongoing religion-science interactions through meaningful contribution to the interdisciplinary knowledgebase.

Methodology

The current work intends to provide an idiographic causal explanation using a qualitative approach involving two key steps: (a) interpretation of six Purāṇas for its contextual meaning and (b) making suitable inferences to decode causal relationship between creation and creator. Therefore, this work requires the utilization of a research protocol that combines the exploratory interpretation of scriptures and an explanation of causality.

Consequently, this work needs a two-dimensional methodology with the first step using “pramaanas” (Chandra, 1988; “Epistemology in Classical Indian Philosophy”) as means of knowledge for scriptural epistemology and second step involving explication of a causal pattern between creation and creator. The former method relies on an exploratory design that enunciates religious perspectives, whereas the latter leans on an explanatory scheme that uses scientific causal patterns.

First step requires applying relevant “pramaanas,” namely, *pratyaksha* (direct perception); *anumaana* (inference); *tarka* (inquiry, reasoning, speculation); *yukti* (reasoning from circumstances); *prayojana* (motive or purpose); *arthaapatti* (presumption); and *upamaana* (analogy). There may be an intrinsic element of subjectivity in scriptural interpretation despite using *pramaanas*.

The second step entails a prudent consideration of various causal patterns (such as linear, cyclic, spiral, relational) and identifying the most appropriate that helps in decoding the specific pattern from the description of creator and creation in *Purānas*. Although causality as an explanation method applies to “empirically observable cause and effect” and not to incomprehensible subjects such as creator God, current work proposes to deduce a causal inference using a qualitative method, philosophically. This paper contends that using scientific concepts in this manner to appreciate theological and metaphysical aspects of scriptures, can offer pioneering vantage points to interdisciplinary research.

Terms and Meanings

This research study sources the e-text of English transliteration of select *Purānic* texts from The Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (“GRETIL”) and non-abridged English translations of *Brahmanda*, *Markandeya*, *Brahma*, and *Vishnu Purānas* from online (“Wisdom Library”). Sources of English translation of *Linga Purāna* (Shastri, 1951) and *Kūrma Purāna* (Bhattacharya, 1972). While there are references to translation, wherever possible, this paper attempts a contextual interpretation of select transliterated texts and associated keywords relevant to the purpose of this work.

adhyavasāya – apprehension, perturbation; *ādhāra* – foundation, support; *ādheya* – being contained; *ādaya* – that which feeds and sustains; *adhikā* – superior; *ādi* – beginning, primeval; *aja* – unborn; *ajñeya* – unfathomable; *aliṅga* – markless (*liṅga* is having mark); *anādy* – without beginning; *antam* – end; *anuvratāḥ* – attached; *anvayā* – association; *asāṃprata* – not belonging to the present time; *asat* – nonbeing, non-living; *ātman* – the supreme soul; *avikāra* – immutable; *avyakta* – unmanifest, unapparent, indiscrete; *brahmānda* – cosmic egg; *dhāraya* – holding; *hiranyagarbha* – golden fire and golden womb – symbolic of *Brahma* as procreator who is one among the Hindu Trinity; *jagad* – dynamic creation; *kāla* – time; *kāraṇa* – cause (*kārya* – effect); *kṣobhya* – agitation; *pralaya* and *laya* – dissolution/ annihilation; *mahābhūtaṃ* – magnificent creation; *mahat* – vastness and abundance of subtlety; *mūlaṃ* – root, origin; *nitya* – eternal, invariable; *nivṛtta* – recede, cessation; *paraṃ* – supreme; *parasparā* – mutual; *paricchinna* – confined; *pṛthvya* – earth; *pradhāna* – primeval source; *prakṛti* – creative fundamental force of nature; *puruṣa* – supreme soul; *sāmye* – equilibrium, balance (*asāmye* – disequilibrium, imbalance); *sanātanam* – primeval and perpetual; *sarga* – creation; *sat* – living, being; *saṃkalpa* – conception; *sarvavyāpinam* – omnipresent; *sūkṣmaṃ* – subtle; *svayaṃbhu* – self-existing; *triguṇa* – three innate qualities (*sattva*-goodness, *rajas*-active, *tamas*-darkness); *upajīvināḥ* – interdependent; *utpanna* – components born; *vigraha* – expansion, various forms; *vikāra* – transformation, disorder, agitation, mutable; *viśeṣā* – discrete objects with their own characteristic features and diversities; *vyakta* – discrete; *yonim* – source

Analysis of Select Texts from various Purānas

Reference to transliterated Sanskrit texts of various Purānas used for this research paper are presented in Appendix.

Nature of Creator

Brahmānda Purāna (BndP) conceptualizes the nature of primal cause as unmanifest and calls it Brahman (creator). Brahman has neither beginning nor end; is unborn and subtle; is unfathomable; is the absolute beyond perishable living and non-living entities; is the source and destination of the entire creation and is not belonging to the present time, hence primeval. Strikingly, BndP also proclaims Brahman has three attributes (gunas). BndP describes unmanifest cause as self-existing, and time instigates the effect of manifestation of creation of this universe and its dissolution. Thus, BndP asserts the unmanifest cause is incomprehensible in the context of time. Expression “srjāmīti viniścayaḥ” that appear only in BndP among the Purānas analyzed for this paper can be interpreted as “with certainty, creation originated from the unmanifest cause.”

Markandeya Purāna (MarkP) concurs with BndP on the nature of creator but clarifies that not only Brahman’s beginning, attributes, and ending are imperceptible and immutable, but it is perceptible in its manifested state. MarkP adds that Brahman is immeasurable, self-dependent, source of this manifest universe, remains unchanged by the power of the three gunas, and pervaded this universe before creation began, during its sustenance and after its dissolution. Brahma Purāna’s (BrP) description of primordial cause overlaps with BndP and MarkP but names it as Hiranyagarbha. BrP epitomizes the creator as MahaPurusha, supreme soul of this universe who is self-creating and self-existent. BrP adds that the unmanifest while being a single source of everything expands to infinite diversity as manifest effect. Interestingly, BrP recognizes that MahaPurusha is synonymous with many names and is described differently in Samkhya and Yoga, which belong to the Darshana Shastra genre of Hindu literature that forms the basis for Indian Philosophy.

Vishnu Purāna (ViP) glorifies the supreme imperishable Brahman as Lord Vāsudeva, purest and supreme form of Vishnu, who exists as Pradhāna as indiscrete eternal cause, Purusha as the supreme soul, Vyakta as discrete effect and Kāla as time. ViP explains that these four forms in due proportions cause creation, sustenance, dissolution, and re-creation. Pradhāna has three Gunas that remain in equilibrium before creation and after dissolution. In this way, ViP expounds Lord Vishnu is the source for both cause and effect, implying the effect is preexistent as a potential in the cause but does not manifest until the time of creation.

Linga Purāna (LiP) reveres the supreme soul as Maheshvara, the Lord of Pradhāna, and Purusha, from whom Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra proceed. LiP describes the supreme soul Maheshvara as both unmanifest cause and manifest effect. LiP extols the supreme Lord as sabda-brahman – imperishable, eternal, and primitive sound AUM (ॐ). In this manner, LiP implies the nature of the primal creator as incomprehensible hence symbolizes as sound and embodies in the form of linga. With this description, LiP connects the supreme Lord to three Vedas (commonly referred to as “Sruti” literature where sound is crucial), namely Rig, Sama, and Yajur. Like the concept of Purusha and Prakṛti being intrinsically present in the supreme Lord Vishnu as explained in Vishnu Purāna, Linga Purāna forwards the idea of Siva and Saivi as an essential part of the supreme Lord Maheshvara. Further, LiP adores the unmanifest as unborn, who endowed with Gunas, becomes manifest at the beginning of the creation.

Kūrma Purāna (KūrmP) presents a similar narrative on unmanifest as present in other Purānas considered for this research work. However, there are a couple of essential additions to the nature of the primal creator. KūrmP venerates the Brahman as the (a) Supreme Consciousness, which has a direct connection with the Upanishadic notion of the Supreme Brahman and (b) as the regulator of everything.

Nature of Creation

BndP alludes to an unmanifest creator as the eternal cause of this creation that began with vastness and abundance of subtlety and ended with discrete objects. BndP describes the feature of this created universe as dynamic and magnificent with myriad forms of living being and nonliving things. BndP explicates the nature of the causal relationship between creation and creator. The mutable effect (i.e., creation – this universe) dwells in the immutable cause (i.e., unmanifest creator) and is ready to manifest at the time of creation – suggesting that effect is preexisting as a potential in the cause. Equilibrium-disequilibrium among gunas activates such a relationship between cause and effect. BndP elaborates that the relationship between immutable cause and mutable effect is of the nature of supporter-supported, hence interdependent and is equally applicable to how the creation works. Likewise, constituents of this created universe (like galaxy sustain stars which sustain planets which sustain moons) sustain mutually. Earths having entered the sphere of something superior are fed, supported, and confined by that.

MarkP refers to the primal creator as the upholder of the moveable and immoveable universe. Brahman, whose origin is inscrutable, is the cause of every aspect of creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the created universe. MarkP narrates the nature of constituents of this universe with a multitude of created things of various shapes, possessing different characteristics and existent as if appearing perpetual but only temporary.

BrP recounts an intriguing aspect of unity in diversity in the context of the causal relationship between creator and creation. The unmanifest supreme soul remains by itself, and when singleness withers away, diversity begins to manifest yet remains omnipresent. Remarkably, BrP mentions the three gunas of the unmanifest supreme soul are also present in this dynamic manifest creation. Although creation is varied and vibrant, they retain the attributes of the single supreme soul, thus reflecting unity in diversity.

LiP avers that the non-characterized primal creator is the root of this characterized creation. Hence, implying that we could never possibly see the root. Like the notion of supporter-supported described in BndP, LiP supports the idea that manifest effect is preexistent as a potential in the unmanifest cause. LiP declares “brahmand” that contains the manifest creation is born of the avyakta.

According to the KūrmP, this creation, the cosmos, is the effect caused by the pure unmanifest. Purāna adds that Pradhāna and Prakṛti are the primal source of all matter in this creation which contains numerous worlds filled with matter (aṇḍā) is used in the Purāna to symbolize world within the universe, which is symbolized by brahmaṇḍā) due to omnipresence of primordial supreme soul.

Occurrence of the term “sadasadāt” in all six Purānas chosen for this work look to be significant both in literary and metaphysical context. From a literary angle, the term used to describe the unmanifest appear baffling as it means “nature of the unmanifest cause consists of both being

(sat) and nonbeing (asat).” Moreover, use of these phrases together may as well seem paradoxical at first glance, as Purānas elucidate the incomprehensibility of the unmanifest.

Nevertheless, this paper contends that “sadasadāt” may metaphorically imply unmanifest cause as the source of both living (sat) and non-living (asat) things. Representation of “sat” as living and “asat” as non-living is possible through pratyaksha, direct perception of the creation. Therefore, this term has direct implication that omnipresence of the Supreme Soul both as unmanifest creator and in manifest creation. Hence, providing a backing to the unique core concept of Hindu scriptures of viewing the creator and the creation as inseparable, perhaps a state of “unity consciousness.”

Did Anything Exist Before Creation Was Triggered?

BndP has an intriguing account on what was the nature of unmanifest cause before effect came into existence, that is, triggering the process of creation. Before manifestation of effect (i.e., universe coming into existence), there was only darkness which was pervaded by the soul of unmanifest cause where three gunas were in a state of equilibrium. BrP reinforces BndP’s impression with an explanation of the event at the time of dissolution when all mobile and immobile beings perished at the outset, and only primordial (unmanifest) remained when everything was enveloped in darkness till the re-creation was triggered again.

ViP takes this discussion forward with commentary that uses the method of nullification for the description of the creator. Purāna says there was neither day nor night, nor sky nor earth, nor darkness nor light, nor any other thing, except for one, inapprehensible by intellect, the supreme Brahman in an unmanifest state. It adds that cognition is possible only when gunas attain disequilibrium. ViP declares that “Kāla,” the Lord of Time, is without beginning, and its end is unknowable. Kāla controls the cycle of creation, sustenance, dissolution, and re-creation. KūrmP postulates that the unknowable (unmanifest) existed at first before manifestation began.

Trigger for Creation

BndP suggests that gunas became uneven due to loss of their equilibrium, triggering this magnificent creation (universe), which began with the evolution of vastness and abundance of subtlety – the fundamental attribute of this creation. Agitation conceived loss of equilibrium of gunas within the unmanifest cause, prompting creation. Initially, the unmanifest cause enveloped the subtlety, but creation proceeded gradually and eventually ending with discrete objects of matter.

MarkP forwards the idea of linking agitation of Pradhāna with the birth of Brahma, one of the Hindu Trinity. When Pradhāna is agitated, disturbing its gunas, Brahma manifests and contained within the cavity of the cosmic egg (brahmānda). Despite Pradhāna being the birthplace of the universe and devoid of gunas, it assumes the nature of Brahma with rajas guna and engages in creation. Such a captivating idea culminates in the revelation that Pradhāna is the agitator at first, is the thing to be agitated, and is present in the stages of both contraction and expansion.

ViP exalts the role of Vishnu as Hari, the supreme soul, and ruler of this creation, who of his own will, agitated the mutable (matter) and immutable (spirit) principles triggering creation. Such a description on the trigger for creation underlines the Purānic thought that effect preexisted as a potential in the cause. ViP praises Vishnu as Purushottama, who is both the

agitator and the thing to be agitated. Purushottama is present in the essence of all matter while remaining as the supreme soul and is extant in both contraction and expansion.

According to the LiP, Mahesvara penetrates Pradhāna and Purusha, agitating them through yoga, resulting in an imbalance of gunas. By entering Prakṛti, the primal source of matter, agitation is triggered, manifesting as contraction (withdrawal during dissolution) and expansion depending on Kāla. From this agitation, universal germ is created that grows in the cosmic egg resulting in creation.

KūrmP's narrative on the trigger for creation combines the sketch of ViP and LiP but points to mahat as the universal germ.

Relationship of Gunas and the Cycle of Creation and Dissolution

BndP vividly explains how gunas are related to various stages of progression of the universe, starting with creation. As much as disequilibrium of gunas triggers creation, when gunas move towards equilibrium, triggers dissolution. So, the cycle of creation-dissolution means the cycle of imbalance and balance of gunas. This premise also implies a cycle of unmanifest cause as creator when gunas are in balance and manifest effect as creation (i.e., universe) when gunas have imbalance. Domination of rajo guna triggers creation, sattva triggers sustenance and progression of the universe through expansion, and tamo guna triggers dissolution through contraction. BndP mentions both expansion and contraction proceed gradually. During expansion, worlds rise from water, whereas during contraction, fire engulfs all worlds from above and sides.

While remaining five Purāṇas have narrations similar to that of BndP but do not have a detailed explanation except for few inclusions. ViP adds the dimension of time as Kāla Purusha in this relationship of gunas and cycle of creation-dissolution. ViP recognizes that various Purāṇas call the state of equilibrium of three gunas by different names such as prakṛti (primal nature of unmanifest), hetu (primary origin of everything), karana (cause) and param (supreme). LiP highlights that the equilibrium state of gunas is identical with darkness, implying the incomprehensibility of unmanifest. This premise is profound for the notions of creator-creation and their causal connection.

Mutual Relationship among Gunas

While describing the relationship between gunas, all Purāṇas considered for this study concur that gunas are mutually associated, attached, interdependent, activated, do not forsake each other even for a moment, and always uphold one another. Gunas work to attract one another at the time of creation.

Hindu Trinity

BndP outlines how the unmanifest primal creator conceives the Brahma. Four-faced golden Brahma (symbolically as Hiranyagarbha) appears in the cosmic egg. Brahma is the procreator and one among the Hindu Trinity. Further, unmanifest cause perceives the Hindu Trinity from gunas that are intrinsic. Among the Hindu Trinity, sattva guna is synonymous with Vishnu, rajas with Brahma, and tamas with Rudra. Thus, they are manifestations of gunas that are intrinsic to unmanifest cause and conceived separately due to agitation.

MarkP furthers this explanation. As Rudra, the unmanifest dissolves this creation with tamas and goes back to inertia where all gunas are in equilibrium. Although the primal creator possesses three gunas yet is destitute of them. MarkP also makes a significant point that brahma, visnu, and rudra are merely appellations of one imperishable entity.

BrP, while making obeisance to Hindu Trinity, remarks that the unmanifest is both the cause and effect and connect creator-creation to action-consequences of action. LiP, in its outline of Hindu Trinity, also includes consorts of Vishnu and Brahma as Lakshmi and Sarasvati, respectively, with all four conceived from the unmanifest supreme creator. LiP associates Kāla (the Lord of Time) with Rudra and describes Vishnu as thousand-headed (probably based on the Rig Vedic hymn named Purusha Sukta). KūrmP links the Hindu religious symbol of applying holy “tripundra” mark on the forehead, with the Trinity.

Discussions

As explained in six Purāṇas, the causal relationship between unmanifest creator and manifest creation is dependent on how gunas interact with each other. Imbalance or balance among three gunas triggers an effect. If we consider gunas as three variables, their dominance controls the cycle of unmanifest-creation-sustenance-dissolution. Moreover, all three gunas are present both in the cause and in effect, albeit in different conditions. Such a connection between creator and creation aligns best with the scientific concept on Relational Causality, where the relationship among three gunas causes the effect, and neither the single variable is the cause by itself nor looking at one aspect of their equation gives a holistic view.

Moreover, this reasoning on relational causality is consistent with the Purāṇic description of the creator as “absolute” and creation as “relative.” It implies the relationality of gunas in the manifest effect of this created universe. This study infers such a notion has an esoteric implication in the sense that all aspects of this universe have an inherent relativity, dependent on the observer or inquirer.

Although relational causality is the best fit for the scenarios analyzed, Purāṇic illumination that one guna dominates at a specific stage in the cycle, linear causality is entirely plausible. Moreover, in furthering the idea of an iterative unmanifest-manifest-unmanifest, cyclic causality may also be applicable. Based on these factors, a pictorial representation is summarized in Figure 1.

Further, this study argues that the simultaneous causality of creation does not seem applicable in this context as Purāṇas presume creator is eternal. Additionally, there is an inference that concepts envisioned in Purāṇas may perhaps appear analogous to Big Bounce (Wolchover, 2018) model of physical cosmology.

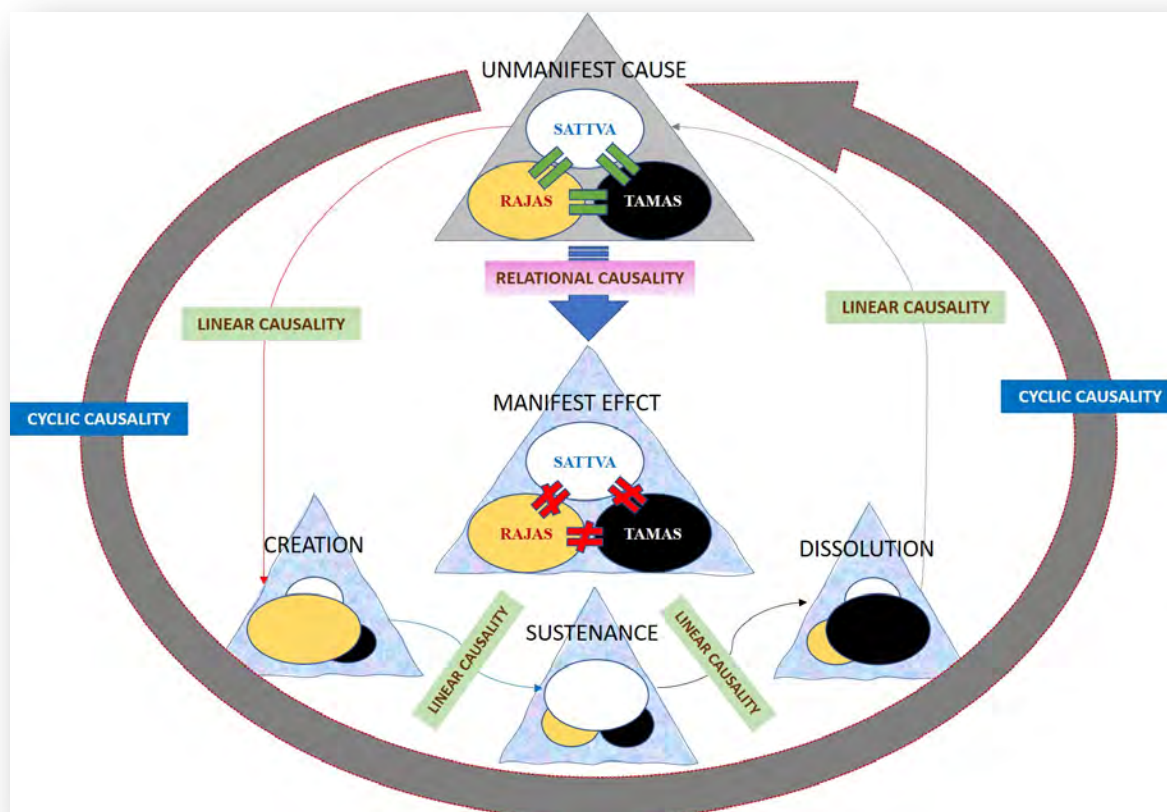


Figure 1: Purāṇic notion on Creator, Creation, and Causality

Conclusions

This research paper concludes that the six Purāṇas analyzed for this research work afford a strong case for relational causality between creator and creation.

Based on scriptural texts examined, Purāṇas establish “nothing can come from nothing,” and there was “something” as unmanifest before the universe came into existence. All six Purāṇas analyzed for this work asseverate a vital notion that equilibrium-disequilibrium of gunas initiated by agitation, hold the key to the cycle of unmanifest cause as the absolute-manifest effect as relative, vis-à-vis, the relationship between creator-creation.

Further, this mechanism bolsters the idea that manifest effect as the universe is identifiable with disorder, and orderliness is synonymous with unmanifest so that the cycle could be order-disorder. With creation, disorder begins and continues through sustenance. Disorderliness reaches pinnacle just before triggering dissolution, so orderliness restores with the state of unmanifest.

In the light of depicting “brahmāṇḍa” as “cosmic egg,” Purāṇas visualize an elliptically curved universe, probably representing the prevalent view among the society of that era.

By reinforcing the theory of preexistence of effect as a manifestation potential in the cause, Purāṇas align with the Samkhya’s philosophical concept of “satkaryavada,” as the theory of

causation. However, this paper argues that Purānas ratify parinamavada, where the transformed effect is real, but not the vivartavada, where transformation itself is illusory.

In propounding creator as the eternal cause, Purānas assert that the creator is inexplicable on a scale of time. Hence, an accurate and complete understanding of what preceded and what caused the creation of the universe may never be possible. Metaphorically, Purānas represent this view as darkness pervaded everything before creation. Purānas present a profound metaphysical concept on gunas for easy grasp by associating gunas with Hindu Trinity, thus providing a metaphysical basis for theological belief.

Another noteworthy inference is that Purānas espouse the idea of an immutable creator who has expanded to this mutable and dynamic creation that comprises of ungraspable subtlety and discernible entities in myriad forms. By the same token of the supporter-supported relationship between creator and creation, the constituents of the created universe sustain mutually. Possibly, such description is comparable to current scientific understanding that galaxies sustain stars that sustain planets that sustain moons.

Six Purānas chosen for this research study have many insights that are conducive to the theory of causality and drawing parallels with theological and scientific concepts is possible. Moreover, Purānic scriptures embrace a unique core concept of viewing the creator and the creation as inextricable and demonstrate their acquiescence towards cogitation. Conspicuously, the scriptural contents analyzed for this paper establish that ancient culture has indeed encouraged profound metaphysical and causal inquiries amidst thriving religious practices and entrenched those intellectual thoughts in an incredible literary format. Notably, many of the thoughts presented in the Purānas look to be appealing and relevant for further engagement with Science. This study asserts that without such a daring mission, the scholarly heritage will remain masked by the traditional didactic view of Hindu religious literature.

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Appendix – Select transliterated texts from six in-scope Purānas

Source: “GRETIL”

Nature of Creator

BndP_1,3.11; 1,4.30 || MarkP_5.11; 44.24; 45.33-34 || BrP_30.58-61; 30.68-70; 30.76-79 || ViP_1,2.12-13; 1,2.16-17; 1,2.20-21 || LiP_1,1.1; 1,1.18-21; 1,3.11-14 ||
KūrmP_1,1.77; 1,1.92; 1,48.19-21; 1,4.5

Nature of Creation

BndP_1,1.42; 1,3.10; 1,3.36; 1,19.181-182 || MarkP_45.20; 45.27-30; 45.32 ||
BrP_1.33; 23.34; 30.76-77; 237.19 || ViP_1,2.19 || LiP_1,3.1-3; 1,70.61; 1,70.84 ||
KūrmP_1,1.93; 1,4.6; 1,48.16;

Did Anything Exist Before Creation Was Triggered?

BndP_1,3.12 || BrP_33.3 || ViP_1,2.23-24 || KūrmP_1,4.9

Trigger for Creation

BndP_1,3.13-14; 1,3.16 || MarkP_46.11-13 || BrP_23.31 || ViP_1,2.29; 1,2.31 ||
LiP_1,70.76; 1,70.84 || KūrmP_1,4.13-16

Relationship of Gunas and the Cycle of Creation-Dissolution

BndP_1,4.3-5; 3,1.156-159 || MarkP_45.35-37 || ViP_1,2.27; 1,2.33-34; 6,4.34 ||
LiP_1,70.7-10; 1,70.72-73 || KūrmP_1,4.10

Mutual Relationship among Gunas

BndP_1,4.10-11 || MarkP_46.19 || LiP_1,70.60; 1,70.79-80

Hindu Trinity

BndP_1,3.26; 1,4.6 || MarkP_45.19; 46.14-15; 46.17-18 || BrP_37.19-22 || LiP_1,1.22; 1,2.6-8; 1,70.62-63; 1,70.81; 1,70.85-87; 1,70.90-92 || KūrmP_1,2.89; 1,2.102-4; 1,15.235; 1,25.63; 1,49.45-46

Guide for Authors

Article Structure

Title

Ensure that your title accurately reflects the contents of your paper and is free of errors.

Abstract

A concise and factual abstract is required (maximum length of **250 words**). The abstract should state briefly the purpose of the research, the principal results and major conclusions. An abstract is often presented separately from the article, so it must be able to stand alone. For this reason, references should be avoided, but if essential, then cite the author(s) and year(s). Also, non-standard or uncommon abbreviations should be avoided, but if essential they must be defined at their first mention in the abstract itself.

Keywords

Immediately after the abstract, provide a minimum of 3 and a maximum of **6 keywords**.

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Present purposes of the study and provide background for your work.

Literature Review

Include a pertinent literature review with explicit international connections for relevant ideas. Discuss the findings of published papers in the related field and highlight your contribution.

Methodology and Methods

Provide sufficient detail to allow the context of the work to be thoroughly understood and/or for the work to be reproduced. Provide sufficient detail for readers to understand how you engaged in your inquiry. Clear descriptions of your context and participants along with strategies used to collect and analyze data should be described.

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This section should explore the significance of the results of the work, not repeat them. Combining your results and discussion into a single section may be suitable. Returning to relevant literature from the introduction should show how your work connects with or interrupts already published literature.

Conclusions

The main conclusions of the study may be presented in a Conclusions section, which can include the main findings, the implications, and limitations.

Appendices

If there is more than one appendix, they should be identified as A, B, and so on.

Acknowledgements

Collate acknowledgements in a separate section at the end of the article before the references and do not, therefore, include them on the title page, as a footnote to the title or otherwise. List here those individuals who provided help during the research (e.g., providing language help, writing assistance or proof reading the article, etc.).

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Footnotes should be used sparingly. Number them consecutively throughout the article, using superscript Arabic numbers.

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Please ensure that every reference cited in the text is also present in the reference list (and vice versa). APA style to be used.

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Text: Citations in the text should follow the referencing style used by the American Psychological Association (APA). References should be arranged first alphabetically and then further sorted chronologically if necessary.

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Full DOI's need to be added, where available, to the referenced work (please see below).

Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(3), 148–164.
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- * Page numbers at the bottom center of each page
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