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EDITOR

ASSOC. PROF. DR. GÜLNAZ KURT

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE REPRESENTABILITY OF TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

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## Introduction

In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, the uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (1996, p. 11). She also maintains that trauma is “understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (1996, p. 3). Trauma concerns an unexpected event in the past that is not fully owned, cannot be fully explained, or cannot be placed in any form of prior knowledge. A traumatic experience can be something as simple as a fall from a bicycle, or as violent as being in a hot war. The experience of trauma can have a profound impact on an individual’s life. It can lead to physical and emotional problems including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health issues.

Trauma is a wound that is “inflicted by an emotional shock so powerful that it breaches the mind’s experience of time, self and the world” (Eyerman, 2013, p. 42). The most common psychological reaction to the trauma of the culture is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a condition that develops after an individual experiences a traumatic event. The symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, depression, and avoidance of people, places, and activities that remind the victim of the trauma. The symptoms of PTSD can last for years and lead to social and emotional problems.

Partial traumas might accumulate to form a larger traumatic effect. When an individual experiences several partial traumas, these traumas might lead to a larger, more devastating traumatic impact. This is often seen in cases of child abuse, where a child might experience multiple traumas that cumulatively have a devastating impact. The initial trauma emerges in a symptom that lasts for a short time and is then passed off. Succeeding experiences might restore the original symptom. Even when the partial trauma includes only one experience, it might arouse a strong future reaction. Whether the trauma includes one or more than one experience, the memory of the trauma dominates the mind. Accompanying feelings stay alive and, in most cases, they are connected to the first incident. The repressed memories carry on displaying their depressive impacts since it is hard to challenge the feelings that have been aroused.

Trauma prevents victims from feeling their emotions and physical pains in some circumstances. This case also makes victims remain silent and isolated from the world around them. Gibbs (2004) claims:

Persons with PTSD may feel numb; have less interest in events around them; have less ability to feel emotions, especially those related to intimate involvement with others, and may end up detached from other people and with a sense that they have no future (p. 153).

The past of an individual can influence the likelihood of developing PTSD after the exposure to a traumatic event. For instance, individuals who have already been exposed to violence are more likely to develop PTSD if they believe that violence is justified. An individual who experiences a traumatic event in a context where he/she does not feel safe or supported might be more likely to develop PTSD. One's belief system might influence his/her understanding of what happened to him/her, and how he/she reacts to a traumatic experience.

Both Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth argue that trauma is a deferred action and it has a delayed impact that causes the victim to experience blindness, latency and denial. Parallel to Freud, Caruth regards trauma as a delayed process in which the traumatic event "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). In this context, the victim is haunted by the ghostly recurrent event or something related to it although he/she recognizes the traumatic event only belatedly, as "through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (Caruth, 1995, p. 8). Therefore, the traumatic experience can only exist after it occurs, in the middle of forgetfulness and unconsciousness.

Caruth focuses on the amnesic and unspeakable quality of trauma. She suggests that "survival itself can be a crisis" (1995, p. 9). Traumatic experience cannot be easily interpreted since the event is already distorted in the victim's mind. The distortion of a traumatic experience in the victim's mind can make it difficult to accurately communicate what has happened. This can also make it difficult for others to understand the full impact of the traumatic event and can hinder the victim's ability to seek help or support. Caruth suggests that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a case that involves "repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that might have begun during and after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to stimuli recalling the event" (1995, p. 4).

### **The Reflections of Trauma in Contemporary Fiction**

Robert Eaglestone (2013) explains the meaning of "contemporary" in global context as follows:

Traditionally, literary periods take their dates from watershed historical moments. In Western Europe, for example, the period of the contemporary might begin in 1945. Yet, even within Europe, there are differences: in Spain, the contemporary might begin with the death of Franco in 1975; in Germany with the end of the Cold War in 1989 or reunification in 1990. Outside Europe things are very different again: contemporary might mean the end of the USSR in 1991 in Russia or independence from Britain in 1947 in India (p. 23).

Here Eaglestone claims that different communities perceive the beginning of the contemporary in various ways. Moreover, the velocity of historical and technological transformations not only pushes the past further away but also undermines the coherence of historical communities that define themselves through specific dates. Consequently, these specific dates might not be very useful. Furthermore, it seems significant to associate a literary period with an event outside the realm of literature, regardless of its significance. It takes time for historical events to be reflected in literature and for literature to provide an understanding of these events. In this context, Eaglestone (2013) concludes that “instead, perhaps the ‘contemporary’ might mark the end of a previous literary age: the contemporary comes after modernism, perhaps, or postmodernism” (p. 23).

In the realm of contemporary fiction, the notion of traditional form becomes obsolete. Understanding conventional novels that present realism with a reliable narrator is mostly related to understanding the writer's own ideas and life story. However, in contemporary fiction, the reader might even rely on the author personally to explain the meaning of the novel. With this uncertainty, resorting to the details of a novelist's life or viewpoints offers a framework of certainty which is a feeling that facts are being disclosed or a clear understanding comes true. Grasping how a novel fits into a broader context, finds its place within a larger framework, offers a more insightful and provisional type of knowledge. Yet, the most profound understanding comes from delving into the world of that novel and deciphering what it conveys. This is the most authentic way of comprehending contemporary fiction.

The two World Wars left profound impacts on the collective consciousness of several nations. Terms such as shell-shock and PTSD originated directly from the harrowing experiences of soldiers in the trenches during World War I; and the effects of war trauma extended beyond the individual soldiers and sustained vivid in the narratives that were passed down through subsequent generations. Roger Luckhurst suggests that soldiers of the World Wars “not only suffered memory gaps but also repeatedly re-experienced extreme events in flashbacks, nightmares and hallucinations months or even years afterwards”

(2007, p. 500). The re-experiencing and repetition of the traumatic experience are important ways that are used to cope with PTSD: “the traumatic return represents the mind’s attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place” (Caruth, 2013, p. 4).

Similar to individual trauma, collective trauma exhibits various degrees and types. Notable examples include the Holocaust, wars, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and American slavery, all of which leave devastating wounds. Therefore, certain collective traumas might have immediate and profound impacts during the experience although others such as the Civil War or the Great Depression might have long-lasting impacts on the social domain. Similar to how individuals struggle to cope with psychological traumas, societies also strive to manage collective traumas. Marten deVries (1996) explains the role of culture in the course of trauma as follows:

Culture [...] buffers its members from the potentially profound impact of stressful experience. It does so by means of furnishing social support, providing identities in terms of norms and values, and supplying a shared vision of the future. Cultural stories, rituals, and legends highlighting the mastery of communal trauma, the relationship to the spiritual realm, and religion itself are important mechanisms that allow individuals to reorganize their often catastrophic reactions to losses. Culture, as a source of knowledge and information, locates experience in a historical context and forces continuity on discontinuous events (pp. 400-401).

Paul Connerton (2014) states that “Memory is not an individual faculty but a collective or social phenomenon. Across generations, different sets of memories, frequently in the shape of implicit background narratives, will encounter each other” (p. 48). Since memory and trauma are interrelated, trauma is not an individual phenomenon either. For instance, a traumatic war experience can be passed to the next generations and might become a collective war trauma. Eyerman (2010) defines collective war trauma as “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (p. 61). Such a collective war trauma is important for the survivals of the World War victims since many of them returned home with invisible and incurable scars. This case gave birth to the concept, ‘shell-shock’: “In the 1920s shell-shock was universalised in British culture to become the symbol of the war’s suffering and futility” (Whitehead and Stern-Peltz, 2005, p. 8).

The experience of collective trauma might both harm and enforce a society, or it might result in a blend of both outcomes. The shared experience

of collective trauma has the potential to set up connections among individuals who were previously unacquainted. A bond is formed through exchange in a traumatic experience; it functions as a shared thread among victims. This bond serves as an emotional initiator of the process of recovery.

### **Cathy Caruth's and Sigmund Freud's Perspectives on the Representability of Trauma in Contemporary Fiction**

Cathy Caruth claims that "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (1996, p. 85). In order to unravel the enigma of trauma, one needs to know what exists after the trauma. She claims that what remains after the trauma is its memory. However, she does not refer to the memory of the actual event, which societies share, but to the memory of what societies cannot remember. According to Caruth, this is a different kind of memory; it is the memory of the trauma itself. This memory can only be accessed through the symptoms the victim experiences after trauma.

"A central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity" (Balaev, 2008, p. 149). This speechless fright that is created by trauma might leave individuals feeling disconnected from themselves and their memories, leading to a fragmented sense of identity. The traumatic experience can become so overwhelming that it might create a chasm within the individual's sense of self, hindering his/her ability to fully process and integrate the experience into his/her personal narrative. As a result, victims of trauma might struggle with expressing themselves, both verbally and emotionally, further exacerbating the feeling of disconnection and damaging their sense of identity. The traumatic experience can also leave deep-seated emotional scars that influence the victim's future experiences and relationships, further complicating their sense of self. Ultimately, the impact of trauma on identity is important and long-lasting, challenging the individual's ability to make meaning of his/her experiences and understand who he/she is.

A possible way to access a traumatic history is to situate it in a contextual framework. This framework can provide a framework for understanding the event or experience as well as a way to connect it to other aspects of an individual's life. In addition, the framework can offer a means of exploring the event or experience from different perspectives. Caruth states about traumatic history as follows:

The history that a flashback tells [...] is, therefore, a history that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood. In its repeated imposition as

both image and amnesia, the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence (1995, p. 153).

Trauma does not occur only once; there are stories of trauma. Caruth defines the story of trauma as the narrative of a belated experience. She states: "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (1996, p. 7). In this context, she suggests that traumatic experiences and traumatic memories have a deep impact on the minds of individuals. Caruth claims as follows:

[Trauma] cannot be defined in terms of a distortion of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it. The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished (2013, pp. 4-5).

According to Caruth, traumatized individuals "carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (1995, p. 5). Henry Krystal (1978) maintains that "in contrast to the infantile traumatic state [...] the adult catastrophic trauma state is determined by the presence of unavoidable danger" (p. 80). In a traumatized society, people are affected by the events in their environments and suffer the consequences. Caruth argues that trauma is a response to an event that one cannot process or integrate into their life; and an individual can become traumatized when he/she cannot control the event or how he/she responds to it.

Caruth follows three main conceptual dimensions in her understanding of trauma theory. The first dimension is connected to Freudian psychoanalysis in that a traumatic event is rarely remembered or expressed in a direct way. She underlines Freud's notion of "deferred action" that addresses that trauma has a delayed impact, and constitutes an inescapable blindness. Trauma is the only thing that cannot be forgotten. Therefore, Caruth's notion of traumatism, as a product of memories, is mostly focused on the idea of the return of the repressed. "Trauma is a return of the repressed." (Caruth, 1996, p. 88)

To understand the return of the repressed, one has to realize that trauma is the result of the experience of terror, of the experience of a threat to one's life.

Victims experience trauma since they cannot bear the experience of the terror that would destroy them. Repression is the condition that protects individuals from the terror of trauma; however, at the same time, it is the mechanism that causes the trauma to return. The terror is the terror of death, the terror of victims' own annihilation. The experience of trauma is the experience of the death of the self, the experience of the destruction of the self.

Caruth's second understanding of trauma is connected to Derrida's deconstructionist theory that suggests that the textual representation of reality is never straightforward. It is rather provisional and even impossible. Parallel to Caruth's idea, Dominick Lacapra (2001) claims that "trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence" (p. 41). He maintains: "the study of traumatic events poses especially difficult problems in representation and writing" (p. 41). Besides psychoanalysis and deconstruction, Caruth's third understanding of trauma theory is the Nazi Holocaust, the traumatic "watershed of our times" (Felman and Laub, 1992, p. xiv). Miller and Tougaw (2002) also suggest that many historians "assign the Holocaust a privileged place as the paradigmatic event of unspeakable human suffering" (p. 3).

Caruth claims: "psychic trauma involves intense personal suffering, but it also involves the recognition of realities that most of us have not begun to face" (1995, p. vii). According to Caruth, the traumatized individual's suffering is the result of the recognition of the existence of "unacknowledged and unarticulated realities" (1995, p. viii). Trauma results from the recognition of the existence of realities that have been repressed because they have been considered too horrible to acknowledge. The victim of trauma is thus confronted with a set of conflicting realities: the reality of his/her own suffering, the reality of the existence of unacknowledged realities, and the reality of the existence of realities that have been denied by others. In the face of this conflict, the traumatized individual suffers from a loss of faith in the existence of reality itself. This loss of faith leads to a sense of isolation and disconnection from others. The traumatized individual feels alone in the world since he/she is the only one who is aware of the existence of the unacknowledged realities.

Caruth's approach seems to be more psychological since she asserts that trauma is not only about the event itself; rather, the traumatic experience changes the way in which the victim lives. She discusses the fact that trauma can change the way that a person lives. She states: "the events of trauma, in their very extremity, cannot be assimilated by the ordinary structures of knowledge, of memory, and of self-identity" (2013, p. 6). Caruth also seems to be interested in the idea of the universal experience of trauma. She claims that

“trauma is an experience of a singular disaster that has the character of being overwhelming and is not simply an experience of oneself, but an experience of oneself in a particular relation to the world” (2013, p. 6).

Freud argues that a traumatic experience might find its sources in nature or in the man-made world, and even in a realm of imagination. That is, the traumatized person or the traumatized group were not even born when the traumatic event or events occurred; these traumatic experiences are inherited. In these cases, there is a transmission of experience, wherein the storyteller becomes a passer who transmits one form to another. These transmissions are sometimes employed to burn the flames of hatred and conflict, or in some cases, psychic healing can be the goal. The next generations are subjects of inheritance.

Freud believes that when traumatic events are not properly processed, they can become trapped in the unconscious mind. Over time, these events impact a victim's mental and emotional well-being, causing him/her to experience symptoms of trauma. The mind tries to protect itself from the trauma by forgetting it. However, the trauma does not go away; it remains in the unconscious mind. The symptoms that the victim experiences are the mind's way of the attempt to recall the traumatic experiences.

Freud (1920) suggests: “Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright” (p. 13). In other words, the repetition of traumatic memory through dreams addresses the unpreparedness of the victim; the belatedness of trauma is only experienced when it occurs. Caruth comments on this case as follows:

The return of the traumatic experience in the dream is not the signal of the direct experience, but rather of the attempt to overcome the fact that it was not direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place [...] For consciousness then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and the impossibility of threat to one's life (1996, p. 62).

According to Freud, a traumatic event that provokes symptoms might not be even real. It changes nothing considering the victim. Freud (1920) states as follows:

[People] think the fact that the traumatic experience is forcing itself upon the patient is a proof of the strength of the experience: the patient is, as one might say, fixated to his trauma [...] I am not

aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with thinking of it (p. 13).

The traumatized individual often needs for a redemption for the past. The need for redemption might be in the form of a quest. The quest might be for justice or revenge. It might be for a new life or a new beginning. Van der Kolk and McFarlane (2004) suggest that trauma is not based on “mysterious, well-nigh inexplicable, genetically based irrationality, but people’s inability to come to terms with real experiences that overwhelmed their capacity to cope” (p. 488).

All in all, Caruth’s approach to trauma is based on the work of Sigmund Freud. She borrows from Freud the idea that trauma is an event that is so overwhelming that the mind cannot process it. According to Freud, trauma is triggered by some original events that might not have been experienced as traumatic at the time of occurrence and that might be completely forgotten. These events might be related to either physical or emotional abuse, or they might be related to a major event, such as the death of a loved one or a divorce. Some later event, can restore the memory of the original event and make the forgotten experience traumatic.

### **Conclusion**

Trauma is a psychological illness, as stated in the definitions above; and it usually emerges as a result of a large amount of stress that surpasses an individual’s ability to cope with the emotions connected to this traumatic experience. Carlos A. Sanz Mingo (2019) states that “trauma brings the best and worst of human nature; [...] Some people want to re-enact traumatic experiences of past situations. In these re-enactments, they could be the victimizer or the victim” (p. 56). Since traumatic events usually occur as a result of social pressure in the social world, trauma can have deep-rooted political, ethical, and historical dimensions.

The exploration of trauma through the lenses of Cathy Caruth and Sigmund Freud reveals a complex interplay between memory, identity, and the representation of traumatic experiences. Caruth’s emphasis on the enigmatic nature of trauma, its amnesic qualities, and the subsequent impact on individual and collective identity provides a profound insight into the enduring effects of traumatic events. Her integration of Freudian concepts such as deferred action and the return of the repressed enrich our understanding of how trauma manifests and persists over time. Furthermore, Caruth’s exploration of trauma within the context of historical events, particularly the Holocaust, underlines the universal and enduring nature of traumatic

experiences. Through her analysis, she highlights the profound psychological and existential challenges faced by trauma victims.

Similarly, Freud's explorations into repression, deferred action, and the role of memory shed light on the complexities of trauma and its lasting impact on the psyche. Overall, the synthesis of Caruth's literary trauma theory with Freud's psychoanalytic framework offers a comprehensive understanding of trauma as both an individual and collective phenomenon. By acknowledging the enduring legacy of traumatic experiences and the challenges they pose to memory, identity, and representation, we gain valuable insights into the human condition and the complexities of psychological healing. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary approach deepens our appreciation of the profound and multifaceted nature of trauma, while also highlighting the importance of empathy, understanding, and support in the process of trauma recovery.

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# **CHAPTER 2**

## **OLD ISSUES IN THE NEW CENTURY: INVISIBILITY, DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS, AND FEAR IN JASON MOTT'S HELL OF A BOOK**

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*“Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the colorline.”*

*W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Souls of the Black Folk”*

## INTRODUCTION

The period of Reconstruction after the Civil War lasted for more than a decade and revitalized such deferred dreams of African Americans as freedom, citizenship, and suffrage with the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments that were added to the Constitution of the United States throughout the period. Still, the cultural hierarchy which prevailed particularly in the Southern region, prevented African Americans from executing their basic civil rights. Black codes, poll taxes, literacy tests, Jim Crow laws, and the Ku Klux Klan were only several aspects that restrained and terrorized the lives of black people. The counterforce became the Freedmen’s Bureau (1865) and later the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1909) established by a group of activists and intellectuals, among whom W.E.B. DuBois was one of the most prominent names. The primary target of these and similar institutions was to ensure economic, social, and political equality for African Americans and to struggle against racial discrimination and segregation on every level. Thus, although American society seemingly progressed on the technological front and stepped into the 20th century in an assertive mood, on the social front the country continued to regress. David Levering Lewis analyzing the atmosphere in which DuBois wrote his famous essay states:

It was, then, the ethos, science, and propaganda of racial dehumanization as much as Bookerite compromises that unsettled and finally drove DuBois into the ranks of so-called civil rights radicals. It was grim enough that his people were being lynched in the South and ghettoized in the North, but there now loomed the even more horrendous prospect that such brutalities could cease to be deplored (however formally or hypocritically) as un-American and become, in the regime of the emergent ideology, officially sanctioned instruments of racial subjugation. (1993, p. 275-76)

The author counts the ideas of anthropologists, biologists, psychologists, physicians, criminologists, and eugenists who developed various theories to physically, as well as psychologically, subordinate recently liberated people who already struggled with the legacy of slavery.

On the other hand, the idea of “double consciousness” or divided identity was already rendered by several intellectuals and writers but DuBois’ concern about this type of internal crisis added a different perspective on the African-American identity and its social condition within American society. “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness,” states DuBois:

this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body... (1987, p. 364-65)

Stressing the imposed identity as the source of the psychological pressure that turns the life of an African American into a constant “strife to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self” (p. 365), DuBois reveals the major battle of every black person who tries to climb on the social ladder of the society so deeply infiltrated by white supremacy.

Throughout the 20th century, several critical moments in history determined the future course of the African-American people within the United States. The outbreak of World War I exerted an indirect but profound influence on the demographic and cultural landscape of the United States. One notable consequence of this global conflict was the initiation of the Great Migration, a substantial movement of African Americans from the Southern regions to the Northern states. This demographic shift, driven by a merging of socioeconomic and political factors, triggered a transformative era in African-American culture and intellectual expression, commonly referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. On the other hand, World War II and its aftermath eventually initiated the period of the Civil Rights Movement that gave birth to such prominent leaders as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. This revolutionary period witnessed the cohesion of various sociopolitical forces that thrust African Americans and other marginalized communities towards a vigorous pursuit of racial justice and equality.

Such momentums in history produced various literary works that focused on an identity crisis caused by the ideology and prejudice of the white community. The initial example of such a story, which also became a prototype for the future characters, indisputably is Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940). The author projects the life of a young boy, Bigger Thomas, which, according

to Wright, is an inevitable product of a society that dictates the rules and determines the physical as well as mental frames for black people. On the other hand, Ralph Ellison in his *Invisible Man* (1951), which was written a decade later and is also known as one of the cornerstones of the American novel of the 20th century, centralized on the concept of invisibility and a struggle of a black man to find his place within the society. Hence, the concept of invisibility in the middle of the 20th century emerged as a desire to be realized and understood by the ignorant and apathetic public that persistently rejected the idea of equality between two races. However, in the 21st century, the evolution of the idea into the necessity of being unseen in order to stay safe reveals the enduring character of racism veiled by the fear and prejudice towards black Americans. Thus, more than a century after the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1904), where Du Bois identified the problem of the twentieth century as the problem of “colorline,” Jason Mott speaks to the reader from behind that line and tells his story to break once more the “dangerous and reverberating silence” (Baldwin, 1998, p.19). The silence that James Baldwin acknowledged, and Jason Mott endeavors to disrupt is the implicit truth of race brutality, “It is a story which otherwise has yet to be told and which no American is prepared to hear” (p.19).

*Hell of a Book* (2021) received the National Book Award the same year and gained a wide appreciation for the problems discussed by the author. Mott’s full title for the book, which is *Hell of a Book or The Altogether Factual, Wholly Bona Fide Story of Big Dreams, Hard Luck, American-Made Mad Kid*, projects the “old issues” of hard survival for African Americans within the white American society that is lately so frequently shattered by the police violence against black citizens. Numerous tragic events that finalized with the death of African American citizens, among whom Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and Elijah McClain are only a few to be mentioned, flaunted a deeply rooted hatred and fear within the American society. One of the culminating points of the first two decades of the 21st century became George Floyd’s death in 2020 when a police officer strangled him for eight minutes and forty-six seconds in the middle of the day in front of the bystanders. Hence, the last words “I can’t breathe,” first used by Eric Garner and also uttered by George Floyd before he died, turned into an outcry of the social and political movement known as Black Lives Matter (BLM).

Therefore, a century after DuBois tried to express the desire of his people to become a healthy and equal part of the American community, it is still possible to say that problems of identification, security, misrepresentation, and marginalization continue to exist in the United States of America. Analyzing the evolution of invisibility into the state of survival, double consciousness as a cause of an identity crisis, and fear as a determinant force in African Amer-

ican life within Mott's novel will help to reevaluate the social and psychological intimidation in the life of African Americans and the aforementioned "problem of colorline" that is still prevalent in American society today.

### **The Evolution of In/visibility**

To understand "in/visibility," which appears to be one of the central themes on which Jason Mott bases his novel, it is essential to trace back the concept and how it evolved throughout the decades. Even a brief retrospective analysis of the historical events vividly reveals three major phases of invisibility concerning African American people: physical in/visibility, cultural in/visibility, and political in/visibility. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century African American slaves continued to be counted as property items rather than human beings. The manifestation of their physical marginalization is evident in a multitude of practices and legal enactments that represent the predominant character of a society dominated by white supremacist ideologies. Numerous examples from historical records can be provided to prove this physical invisibility of the African American people. For instance, in 1787 to determine the correlation between the population and taxation process, the founding fathers of the USA came up with a *compromise* known as the Three-Fifth Clause according to which "each slave would be counted as three-fifths of a free person in determining the basis for both representation and direct taxation" (Brinkley, 2016, p. 136). Hence, an enslaved black person was not even counted as an individual human being to determine a state's representation in the House of Representatives or the distribution of taxes. Among other notorious historical decisions *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) case also showed how the marginalization and dehumanization processes prevailed even in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this landmark Supreme Court case, the court ruled that African Americans whether free or enslaved, were not considered citizens under the U.S. Constitution and therefore could not sue in federal court, thus proclaimed them as non-persons in the eyes of the law. Similarly, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Black Codes (1865-1866), Jim Crow Laws (late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century), and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) legitimized segregation and discrimination thus fostered the physical invisibility of African Americans.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, eager to fight for their constitutional rights, African American citizens were still facing serious challenges and constructed obstacles on their way to equality. However, despite all of those, a cultural renaissance that emerged within the community also demonstrated how cultural visibility can serve as a powerful tool for political and social change. The Harlem Renaissance, which flourished in the neighborhoods of Harlem, New York, manifested a significant cultural and intellectual expression among African Americans. While struggling with legal marginalization,

writers like Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay as well as several prominent musicians, artists, and intellectuals proclaimed their humanity and reclaimed their voices via their cultural productions. Thus, for example, Langston Hughes in his poem “I, Too” which was published in 1926 writes “I am the darker brother./ They send me to eat in the kitchen/ ... / Tomorrow,/ I’ll be at the table/ .../ They’ll see how beautiful I am...” (1995, p. 46). The idea of being seen, which usually is a natural notion in the life of a human being, became a *raison d’être* for many African Americans who were deeply disturbed by *the status quo*. Challenging in this way current stereotypes and celebrating the richness of African American culture brought them to the stage of mainstream American culture and made them culturally visible which will influence future generations at a great scale.

Interrupted by the Great Depression and the Second World War, this movement for social and cultural acknowledgment will reignite after the war once again with another significant parameter. This time the Civil Rights Movement specifically centralized on the political invisibility of the African Americans. Although with the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments black Americans were granted legal rights like freedom, citizenship, and suffrage, the reality of segregation and racism prevailed even through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X led a new wave of protests and demands to end discrimination and voting rights restrictions that excluded from political power and representation which established the basis for political invisibility. The breakthrough came with legislative victories such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which dismantled segregation and finally brought solid solutions to these vital aspects. Nevertheless, the struggle lasted on other fronts like housing discrimination, police violence, and economic inequality. However, from that point, the African American community succeeded in asserting its visibility and voice from physical, cultural, and political perspectives.

After so many years of struggle to be visible, how have black Americans arrived in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to the point where they are teaching their children to be “invisible”? Jason Mott in his *Hell of a Book* projects a tragic story of a family that tries to teach their boy to be invisible and “the unseen.” The opening chapter of the novel describes an ordinary house somewhere in Carolina where five years old “dark-skinned” (2021, p. 3) boy (Soot) hides from his parents who keep up with their child’s hide-and-seek game because their major task is to teach him how to be invisible. “For three years now, his mother and father had been trying to teach him to become invisible, to become ‘The Unseen’, ” “unseen and safe” (5). Mott depicts a mother and a father who desperately work on their child apparently from the moment he learned how to walk to be able to “escape” problems that would inevitably appear due to the

color of his skin. Here it becomes obvious that the idea of recognition or acknowledgement is overshadowed by the necessity for safety due to the hostile environment. In the third chapter of the novel author portrays an already ten-year-old Soot who struggles on a school bus with a white bully Tyrone Greene and the internal struggle of a young character unfolds in its depth:

Again he wished to be invisible. Again, shamefully and persistently, he continued to not be invisible but to only be his impossibly dark-skinned self. Of course he knew he was black. Not dark-skinned, but black. Black as shut eyes. Black as starless nights. Black as stovepipe soot. (p. 31)

Devastated by the racist attitude of his peers, Soot turns inward and isolates himself from the rest of the world. Although his father says “One day, you’re going to have to learn to love who you are” (p. 34) the whole life of the boy turns into a struggle for survival. One of the central assertions of Jason Mott for his novel is that it is a love story, by which the author refers not to a romantic relationship between the characters but to the internal journey of a human being who has to learn to love himself despite the environment that pushes him into the opposite direction. Therefore, Soot’s journey toward self-love begins in a Southern state, the author’s home state, where the challenging environment transforms invisibility from a feeling of scarcity and burden into a necessary shield for safety.

On the other hand, throughout the novel, a recurring motif appears in the form of news reports detailing the shooting of a young boy and the ongoing investigation. This thematic detail becomes a significant reminder of a broader concern and reflects the target of the author who wants to show in what kind of surroundings Soot and other black Americans are living. “You see, the thing those fablers don’t get is that certain kids don’t get a fair chance to chase the dream. The world murders them first. Murders them, but fails to kill them. So these kids, they die young and grow a little more mad every day from then on out” (p. 205) states the protagonist whose childhood obviously was identical to Soot’s or other black boys. Hence the author, beginning his novel with the scene of invisibility practice, shows that the environment, where African Americans are targets of police violence and systematic injustice, pushes these parents to teach their children not to be *too visible* to stay safe and alive. Thus Soot’s father:

...would talk about reality instead of the fiction that had been sold to him. He would say to his son: ‘Treat people as people. Be color-blind. Love openly. Love everyone.’ And then, in the same breath, he would have to say to his son: ‘You will be treated differently because of your skin. The rules are different for you. This is how you act when you

meet the police. This is how you act growing up in the South. This is the reality of your world.'

With each word, his son would be capable of a little less love, capable of a little less imagination, capable of a little less life. It was the bonsai of a child. His own child. (p. 84)

Navigating their children through their experiences and complexities of racial injustice, African American parents cannot prevent that identity crisis that unfolds under such pressure. That is why the author adds to the story a second character who vividly projects to the reader the psychological state of such a "bonsai child" who had grown up denying, suppressing, or ignoring his own identity.

### **Double Consciousness as a Cause of an Identity Crisis**

To strengthen his thesis and add a postmodern manner, Mott chooses fragmentation and metafictional narration. Hence, the second major character of the novel becomes the author himself and the story continues in turns. On the one hand, the story of Soot shows a period of coming of age for a youngster who learns how to deal with life that is somehow predestined by society due to his physical appearance, while on the other hand, the reader meets the author who seems dysfunctional and psychologically ruined despite his success with the novel that he has just published. Traveling from one place to another to promote his book (which is titled *Hell of a Book*), the author displays an unbalanced psyche which eventually is explained by Soot's childhood. The fragmentation of the novel at some point makes the reader question whether Soot represents the author's childhood or the Kid, who is an imaginative character who follows the author during the trip. Still, as the author later explains the major idea of the novel is not to show a chronologically correct life story but to stress the ambiguity and prove that what happened to these characters can happen to any "dark" boy in America. In this context, the author's dedication of the novel to "all the other man kids" approves the case.

Growing up with the necessity of being invisible to stay safe turns into a complete denial of identity according to Mott's plot. Introducing himself the author says that he has a *condition*, "I've got several conditions, actually. The most interesting one is this thing I got where my mind runs away with itself. It's like daydreaming except it doesn't really go away when I want it to. It lingers... The end result of it is that reality is a very fluid thing in my world" (p. 19). Creating an imaginative world frequently becomes a solution for people who prefer to escape the reality that won't accept them as they are. As for black Americans, this kind of adaptation to the imagination is not a novelty but a way of survival apparently for many years. Even Richard Wright in the

middle of the 20th century dedicated his *Native Son* to his mother and stated “My Mother who, when I was a child at her knee, taught me to revere the fanciful and the imaginative” (1991, p. 446). This idea of embracing imagination in order to be able to cope with the outer world reflects the post-traumatic stress disorder of people who have to deal with a coercive environment on a daily basis. Hence, the author throughout the novel practices this “escapism” and even tries to teach this way of surviving to the Kid who also questions the environment as well as his existence:

...I’m going to show you the key to getting through this life, Kid. I’m going to show you the trick to really being happy and really being able to take in reality and make it something you can stand up to day after day after day for all the years of the rest of your long and happy life. (p. 116)

Distancing himself from the real world and fantasizing about a different reality eventually brings the author to an extraordinary level because he realizes or *recollects* that he is black, and was black throughout his life, amidst the novel. On the one hand, he obviously benefits from this kind of mentality since he became a successful writer who travels across the country and is welcomed to TV shows and interviews. However, on the other hand, we see a man who is deeply disturbed by his situation, and the way he internalizes his constructed identity reflects the magnitude of trauma buried within him.

This double self is projected by Mott from the very beginning of the novel when he starts with dialogue as an epigraph that goes as follows: “When you see yourself in the mirror, do you like what you see? – I try not to look. I think a lot of people like me are like that. – When you say ‘people like me,’ what do you mean?” (p. 2). Lawrie Balfour in her “A Most Disagreeable Mirror” centralizes precisely on this fragmented identity. Leaning on Baldwin’s essay about race consciousness and DuBois’s concern about double consciousness, Belfour also projects how it generates a fragmented sense of self for African Americans, leading to internal clashes and a struggle for identity. Moreover, she underlines the “less developed story of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folks*” and displays how the concept of double consciousness is reciprocally related to white people as well:

This second story is that of the impact of ‘the swarthy spectre [that] sits in its accustomed seat at the Nation’s feast’ (*Souls*, 7). For white Americans, whose place at the table is unquestioned, the ghostly presence serves as a constant reminder of hands that will never be clean. (1998, p. 350)

This perspective is vividly exemplified by Mott in his novel when the agent of the author asks him not to write about race so that the white reader won’t be

irritated by the truth. “Specifically, don’t write about being Black. ... Being Black’s a curse – no offense – and nobody wants to feel cursed when they read something they finished paying \$24.95 for. ... Nobody wants their monstrosities brought up” (Mott, p.107). Hence, the author’s internal conflict over his identity and the way he approaches it reflects the prevailing social restraints as well as expectations, which by the way represents another dilemma for the author. Being a black writer automatically brings a kind of responsibility or obligation to write about the black “condition” which is also an imposed reality according to the author. If a white writer can write about anything he or she wants why does an African American writer have to “struggle” for this “black condition” or is s/he “allowed to be something other than simply the color of my [his] skin?” (p.78). That is why, the author chooses to distance himself from the problems, either by trying to be invisible or seemingly ignorant, which eventually lets the protagonist cross that colorline and see the life behind it. “And when you spend enough time in a world that’s likely just your imagination, you tend to not care as much about the anomalies that you see” states the character (p. 97). In this context, frequently accused of being “too white” or ignorant, particularly by Renny, the author eventually reveals the burden carried by him throughout the years. We learn about the tragedy of his father, we realize his longing for his mother, and we can trace every scar left by his childhood so that we can understand and justify his attitude and perspective. Still, despite all the obvious problems within society he tries to show the crucial side of the process of survival:

... I think learning to love yourself in a country where you’re told that you’re a plague on the economy, that you’re nothing but a prisoner in the making, that your life can be taken away from you at any moment and there’s nothing you can do about it – learning to love yourself in the middle of all that? Hell, that’s goddamn miracle. (p. 318)

Highlighting the pervasive reasons for the double consciousness and asserting the significance of self-love in such a hostile environment the author reflects the extraordinary effort of African American people who are devalued and dehumanized by such societal narratives.

### **Fear as a Determinant Force in the Life of African-Americans**

While self-esteem and personal evaluation are affected by psychological manipulations and domineering stereotypes, the course of life of African American characters in the novel frequently is determined by *fear*. Usually, the concept of fear is attributed to the white part of the society. The roots of fear of black lie deep in the past and unfortunately “is not a thing of the past. In many respects, it is safer to talk about the past than the present, but what

former president Theodore Roosevelt described as ‘the superstition and fear of the darkie’ continues,” states Barbara Harris Combs (2018, p. 45). Such myths like “black bogeyman,” “rebellious Negro,” or the “super-predator” continue to affect the perspective of the society, particularly white part of it, on the African American citizens:

These racist tropes of a black criminal subclass are now so ingrained in the fabric of American society that science long ago confirmed the existence of a pervasive, unconscious, and largely automatic bias against dark-skinned individuals as more hostile, criminal, and prone to violence. (Fields, 2019, p. 934)

Tracing the roots of these stereotypes and myths reveals an authentic and equally significant detail which is the exclusion of the black fear from this grand narrative while there were and still are dozens of reasons for African American to be afraid. Brittany L. Jones, an Assistant Professor from the University at Buffalo, in her article “We Don’t Teach Enough About Black Fear in U.S. History” reveals the reason behind the exclusion of Black fear (fear experienced by Black people) and says that it contradicts the prevailing narrative of American progress. “The narrative of progress in U.S. history suggests that over time, conditions have improved for everyone, and the goal of this narrative is to distance the present from the oppressive systems on which this country was founded” (2023, para.4). Stressing the necessity of teaching black fear because this would highlight black humanity, and project the persistent racism as well as resistance to it, she shows the significance of the racialized emotions and manipulated consciousness.

On the other hand, the influence exerted by the persistent experience of fear in an individual’s life unquestionably becomes a determining factor because “The routinization of fear undermines one’s confidence in interpreting the world” (Green, 1994, p. 230) Besides the fear of being recognized and misunderstood or becoming “visible” in the wrong place and time, the fear of turning to an incompetent and insufficient individuality determines the life of several characters in the novel. Hence, for example, the author’s father struggles throughout his life with numerous fears that permeate his existence and shape his daily life and choices:

Fear of being a bad father. Fear of being a bad husband. Fear of being arrested. Fear of being called skinny like when he was a kid. Fear of being poorer tomorrow than he was today. Fear of giving too much of his life to swing shift and not enough to his son. Fear of cops. Fear of lawyers. Fear of getting injured. Fear of dying. Fear of living. Fear of a past that he couldn’t change. Fear of a present that was always out to

get him. Fear of a future that might turn out to be nothing more than the present with more gray hair. ... Every day he wore his fears just like he wore those Dickies of his. (Mott, p. 126-127)

These various concerns and anxieties, starting with parental competence and extending to physical safety, manifest in the daily life of this man. Recollecting how he was watching TV with his old man, the author mentions his father's admiration of the men in the suits because those suits represented "the certainty about their world" and "The lack of fear" (p. 126). Eventually, the author states that those fears were the actual reason behind his father's death and not the cancer, the "cancer just took the credit" says he (p. 132).

Finally, Mott by integrating the Black Lives Matter movement into his narrative, underlines the most recent crisis of the American society, a community fearful for their future. At the time of the publication, according to the statistics provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, the total number of race, ethnicity, or ancestry single-bias incidents had risen from 3,963 (in 2019) to 5, 227 (in 2020)<sup>1</sup>, the majority of which is the anti-black cases. In this context, describing a BLM march the author states, "They hold up poster board photographs of Emmett Till and Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, George Floyd, and all the other names that will be added to America's list between the time I write this and the time you read this" (p. 73-4). Underlining that the track of the events, names, and numbers has been already lost, Mott still prefers to finalize his novel on a positive note and assures the Kid, who asks whether they are going to be fine, that they will continue trying.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is necessary to underline that in *Hell of a Book* Jason Mott skillfully projects both the immediate and enduring problems of American society. Constructing his narrative on the concepts of invisibility, double consciousness, and fear, the author succeeds in reflecting on the daily struggle of black Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, tracing back the evolution of invisibility from a desire to be recognized to the wish to be unseen unveils the tragedy of prevailing racism and prejudice as well as rising violence against black citizens. On the other hand, the author shows that while the notion of invisibility may offer a sense of security, its downside lies in the loss of identity and voice, echoing the concept of double consciousness, which refers to the internal conflict experienced by individuals who feel they must navigate between their authentic selves and how society perceives them. Hence, this mental tension manifests as an enduring inner clash marked by identity fragmentation or negation. In this context, through the life stories of his major

1 <https://www.justice.gov/crs/highlights/2020-hate-crimes-statistics>

characters, Mott presents a process of construction of the “mad kids,” children who from the early stages of their lives are deprived of the opportunity to embrace their true selves. Moreover, in a society where issues of identity, race, misrepresentations, and marginalization persist, it appears fundamental to address and eliminate fear, caused in particular by police violence during the last two decades. Nevertheless, Mott towards the end of the novel undertakes a didactic purpose and shows that it is vital for African Americans to face the cruelty and obscenity of the real world and continue their struggle. Thus, once again shedding light on a century-old “colorline” Jason Mott skillfully shows his reader what it is like to be a black person in America.

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# CHAPTER 3

## **E. J. W. GIBB'S *A HISTORY OF OTTOMAN POETRY*: AN ORIENTALIST CONSTRUCTION OF OTTOMAN LITERARY IDENTITY**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

British Orientalist Elias John Wilkinson Gibb's *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, published in 1900-1909 in 6 volumes, is an important book that has been tremendously influential in the construction and perpetuation of a pejorative Ottoman literary identity since the beginning of the twentieth century. The first volume of the book was published in 1900 when Gibb was alive, but because he died in 1901, the remaining five volumes were edited and published posthumously by his close colleague and friend Edward Granville Browne. Why did Gibb write his *History*? In what socio-cultural context did he write it? How was his work received? How did he represent Ottoman poetry? What is the legacy of his work? Why should one spend almost 20 years of his life on writing a book about the literature of a people he considers "singularly uninventive"? (Holbrook, 1994, p. 19) This paper aims to address these significant questions, explore how the identity of Ottoman poetry was constructed by Gibb in his *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, and discuss how this identity has become almost 'canonized.'

As Jorge Luis Borges states, "A book is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships" (1983, p. 214). Shedding light on the axis of relationships of Gibb's book will obviously contextualize both his work and his views on Ottoman poetry. To illustrate, in an excerpt from an article published in the 1911 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Gibb claims:

In all literary matters the Ottoman Turks have shown themselves a singularly uninventive people, the two great schools, the old and the new, into which we may divide their literature, being closely modelled, the one after the classics of Persia, the other after those of modern Europe, and more especially of France. (as cited in Holbrook, 1994, p. 19)

Speaking from a superior position, he defines Turks and Turkish literature as if they have an ontologically unchangeable character characterized by 'imitativeness' and 'unoriginality'. The implication is that there is a great difference between 'us' Europeans and 'them' Turks (or Orientals); 'we' are the most evolved form of humanity and civilization, and 'they' are still in an underdeveloped and imitative phase.

This essentialist discourse of Orientalism demonstrates the epistemological and ideological context in which Gibb's mindset was formed. As Victoria Holbrook's incisive critique of Gibb's essentialist remarks above demonstrates: "One could partition English language and literature into Greek, Latin, French components and announce that the British "have shown themselves in all literary matters a singularly uninventive people," but such a view would not go

far, for the British would not allow it” (Holbrook, 1994, p. 19). Unfortunately, no voice that defended Ottoman literature against such Orientalist judgments as Gibb’s could be heard when his book was published.

## 2. ORIENTALISM: A SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

According to Edward Said’s insightful description of Orientalism in his seminal book *Orientalism*:

Orientalism...is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—indeed, made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture. (Said, 1995, p. 6)

Accordingly, Orientalism is a system of knowledge and power that predominantly shaped and determined how people living in the nineteenth century thought and behaved. Evidently its heritage is still alive today, especially when we consider Ottoman culture and literature.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, which is when Gibb lived, Orientalism had acquired such a powerful status that it had become “a system of truths” (Said, 1995, p. 203). This is why, “every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric” (Said, 1995, p. 203). Consequently, even Karl Marx could say for Orientals that “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (as cited in Said, 1995, inner cover & p. 293).

In such a context, the identity of Ottoman poetry constructed by Gibb in his *History* is a product of this “system of truths” based on essentialist notions. Adhering to the Western imperialists’ strategy of using nationalism for dismembering the Ottoman Empire and colonizing its territories, Orientalists used notions of cultural and racial essentialism to carry out the same dismemberment in the realm of representation. This is why, Gibb and other Orientalists took “language as the bearer of national identity” and considered “the assimilation of Arabic-Persian-Islamic literary culture as a foreign influence” (Holbrook, 2002, p. 81).

Instead of accepting the Ottoman Empire as a multicultural, multilingual and hybrid entity, treating the languages and ethnicities that constituted the

“Ottoman interculture” (Paker, 2002) as essentially separate entities would, of course, serve the European imperialistic purposes perfectly well. According to Victoria Holbrook:

Independence movements within the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century were a focus of European imperialist aspiration, and here an analogy may be drawn between complementary scholarly and political strategies. Both Ottoman literature and Ottoman polity came to be treated as composite; analysis into parts was as convenient to philological as to military goals. (1994, p. 16)

The parallelism Holbrook has drawn between the political and scholarly purposes of European imperialists is quite interesting. It points to the fact that Orientalism, as a system of knowledge and representation, has actively contributed to the separation of many ethnicities and languages from their common intercultural realm. As is known, there were many nation-states that emerged on the stage of history as a result of those independence movements and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Most of those states “determined themselves in contradistinction to the empire they participated in for centuries, and all of them, including the Republic of Turkey declared in 1923, have had reasons to marginalize the Ottoman cultural past in their histories” (Holbrook, 1994, pp. 1-2).

Not accepting the Ottoman culture and literature as part of their repertoire, the Turkish modernizers in the last period of the Ottoman Empire and those in the republican period left it to oblivion and negligence because they considered it as a symbol of “failed empire” (Holbrook, 1994, p. 30). Consequently, in the twentieth century not much was produced in the scholarly domain on Ottoman literature except a few studies which were all somehow influenced by Gibb’s *History* and his Orientalist views on Ottoman poetry. Ironically, the legacy of Gibb’s work gained more impact and popularity than Ottoman poetry itself.

### 3. GIBB’S UNQUESTIONED AUTHORITY IN THE RECEPTION OF OTTOMAN POETRY

Before Gibb’s *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, the only comprehensive and important work on the history of Ottoman poetry was the Austrian Ottomanist Josef von Hammer-Purgstall’s four-volume *Geschichte der Osmanischen Dichtkunst (History of Ottoman Poetic Art)* (1836-8). Gibb, in the introductory part of the first volume of his *History*, compares Von Hammer’s *History* to *tezkires* (Ottoman biographical dictionaries of poets) which do not, according to him, in any way involve analysis. He argues that his own book is different

because it carries out what is lacking in Von Hammer's work. In other words, he tells us that he has tried to make a systematic analysis of Ottoman poetry.

Gibb's work is imbued with Orientalist views and notions. Even the way he examines the different periods of Ottoman poetry from its so called 'origins' to modern times carries the touch of Orientalism. Accordingly, he divides Ottoman poetry into two main periods: the Old or Asiatic School and the New or European School. The Old School covers a period of 550 years from 1300 to 1850 whereas the New School covers the period after the *Tanzimat* in the second half of the nineteenth century. Such grand generalizations are typical of essentialist and Orientalist thought.

According to Gibb, the Modern period is like the Renaissance of Ottoman Turkish Poetry (5). It is a "great awakening" (Gibb, 5, p. 3). Referring to the publication of Şinasi's collection of translated poems from French in 1859 and Abdülhak Hamid's "first original Turkish poems written in [Western] style" (Gibb, 5, p. 133) under the title *Sahra* in 1879, he exclaims in delight: "In 1859 the Turks were still practically a medieval community; in 1879 they had become a modern nation" (Gibb, 5, pp. 20-21). In other words, in the Old period, Ottoman poetry had been completely under the influence of Persian poetry, and now it is under the influence of the 'glorified' European literature. By turning its face to the West, the Turkish poetry has suddenly "become for the first time natural and personal" (Gibb, 1, p. 134). Such apparently naïve comments are quite telling.

The way Gibb conceptualizes the identity of Turks tells us much about what kind of literary identity he has in mind for Turkish poetry:

That great race to which the Ottomans belong, that race which includes not only the Turks both Western and Eastern, but all the so-called Tartars and Turkmen as well as the Mongols, has not produced any religion, philosophy or literature which bears the stamp of its individual genius. This is because the true genius of that race lies in action, not in speculation. The Turks and their kinsfolk are before all things soldiers. The societies which they formed in early times, before the introduction of Islam into Central Asia, were almost exclusively for military purposes. (Gibb, 1, p. 6)

According to this point of view, Turks are a race that has an essential, fixed, and stable character. That character never changes. They are forever courageous and loyal in every domain of their lives including literature (Gibb, 1). That is why, they have always imitated others in literature and in many other fields except in military. The language of Old Ottoman literature may

be “beautiful”, “brilliant” and “harmonious”, but it is essentially “artificial” (Gibb, 1, p. 31).

In the preface of his first volume, Gibb explains that his main purpose in writing his book is not to produce a work for Orientalists but to introduce ordinary English readers to Ottoman poetry. He states that although the English readers are somewhat familiar with Arabic and Persian literature, they do not know much about Ottoman Turkish poetry to the extent of thinking that “Turks have no literature,” and that he aims to put an end to this misconception (Gibb, 1, pp. vii-viii). This may be one of the reasons, but one must consider the dominant position of Orientalism in the nineteenth century. In this respect, Said’s statements such as “almost without exception, every Orientalist began his career as a philologist” and “By the middle of the nineteenth century the Orient had become, as Disraeli said, a career, one in which one could remake and restore not only the Orient but also oneself” (1995, pp. 98, 166) deserve attention.

As to how Gibb’s work was received in England, we know that “the first volume of *A History of Ottoman Poetry* did not meet with universal acclaim” (Woodhead, 2004). The first reason seems to be the pejorative identity he had constructed in his *History* for Ottoman poetry, and this had led readers to regard Ottoman poetry as “a largely worthless literature” (Woodhead, 2004). Moreover, Gibb’s book was criticized for its strategy of translation, which was a kind of literal translation that did not aim at readability and accessibility.

Since almost no significant critique of Gibb’s work has been produced, and no noteworthy history of Ottoman poetry that could compete with it has been composed until recent times, the identity of Ottoman poetry constructed by Gibb’s book has been taken for granted for so long. Towards the end of the twentieth century, two exceptional studies that challenged this stereotypical identity were published. The first of these studies was Walter Andrews’ *Poetry’s Voice Society’s Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (1985), and the second was Victoria Holbrook’s *The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romance* (1994). Nevertheless, not much has changed, and “In the West and especially the English-speaking West, the most powerful preserve and definitive “source” for Ottoman poetry has been Elias John Wilkinson Gibb’s *History of Ottoman Poetry*”, and as such, it “has dominated the reception of Ottoman poetry to the present day” (Andrews, 1997, p. 6).

Because “most modern opinion regarding Ottoman poetry has repeated the assumptions of Gibb’s century-old literary history” (Holbrook, 1994, p. 17), those assumptions have become almost natural truths. Moreover, although “In Turkey, in most literary histories written after Gibb’s, Gibb and his work are mentioned” (Mengi, 1999), his views have not in any way been critically

dealt with. Consequently, Ottoman poetry has been very easily labeled as difficult, imitative, unoriginal, uninventive, artificial, etc. These labels are part of the rhetoric and clichés that have become commonplace both in the West and Turkey. As Holbrook states, “The rhetoric of difficulty”, “influence”, and “originality” determine “theory of Ottoman poetry implicit in most of the writing about it” (1994, pp. 13-14). Similarly, Andrews points out that Gibb’s work “preserves Ottoman poetry indeed, but ironically does so in a form that authoritatively rationalizes its invisibility” (1997, p. 6).

Now, just to illustrate how Gibb has dealt with the poets he examined in his work, let us take look at a famous poet as an example. That poet, called Fuzuli, is one of the most important and illustrious poets of *Divan* literature. Gibb’s Orientalist discourse is at work in the case of Fuzuli as well, and the issue that comes up again is that of ‘originality’:

Fuzuli of Baghdad, illustrious by virtue of the originality of his genius, may well represent the sun flashing with his own underived splendour in the east, while Baqi of Constantinople, most gifted of the Persianising poets of his people, may stand for the westering moon shining with a borrowed light. (Gibb, 3, p. 70)

Accordingly, Fuzuli is the sun and Baqi is the moon. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun and is not the direct source of light, Baqi is not original but just reflects the light of the original Fuzuli. What we see is the forever recurrent Orientalist obsession with origins and originality. The following quotation points to the same issue, albeit in a different fashion:

Fuzuli found his inspiration in the pages of no poet, Turk or Persian, but in his own heart; guided by the light of his own genius, he found a new pathway for himself, a pathway untrodden by any predecessor, and which none of all who followed him could rediscover. He stands alone in old Turkish literature as the Poet of the Heart. (Gibb, 3, p. 79)

Here, at last, we have a poet who is absolutely ‘original’. He was inspired by no predecessor and surpassed by no successor. Is such a thing really possible? Is there anyone who can transcend the socio-cultural context in which s/he lives? A meaningful answer to these questions is Jacques Derrida’s perspicacious statement: “There is nothing outside of the text” (2016, p.172). In other words, all things in the language exist in chains of signs and texts, not in a vacuum. In this regard, Derrida also maintains that there is nothing outside the trace (2016). All signs and texts invariably carry traces of some previous signs and texts in an infinite chain, which means that there is the

trace at the origin. All in all, all this signifies that there is nothing outside the context (Davis, 2001).

#### 4. A NON-ORIENTALIST CONSTRUCTION OF OTTOMAN LITERARY IDENTITY

Gibb tells us that Fuzuli wrote “with equal ease and elegance in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic” and that his poems in all the three languages were read with great delight (3, p. 73). This indicates that Gibb is indeed aware of the trilingual Ottoman interculturalism which is “the overlap of three languages and cultures, a locus of literary-linguistic mediation, emulation or imitation in which Ottoman poets and translators practiced their art” (Paker, 2006, p. 333). It goes without saying that this interculturalism is a great source of creativity and richness in Ottoman literature. However, the ‘system of Orientalist truths’ which has shaped Gibb’s mindset and thinking dictates him to stick to essentialist (mis)conceptions and trivialize Ottoman literature.

Interestingly, when one looks beyond these essentialisms, one may easily see that in most cases the truth is just the opposite of all these Orientalist misconceptions. As Andrews maintains:

it seems eminently reasonable, in the light of the evidence, that Ottoman *divan* poetry thrived and flourished for approximately five hundred years primarily *because* it spoke eloquently, meaningfully, and directly to important concerns of a broad and large audience. Far from having nothing to do with “real” life, it most likely had *everything* to do with the life of the culture and society that produced it. (1985, p. 17)

How else could Ottoman *divan* poetry have lived for five hundred years if it had not appealed to and met the expectations of its audience? Obviously, it was at the heart of the life of the Ottoman culture and society that produced it.

Looking at human experience through a non-essentialist perspective can enable us to see that no culture, language, nation, and ethnicity is pure. On the contrary, all cultures, languages, nations, and ethnicities are hybrid and have been made up of already hybrid elements. The nature and degree of hybridity changes from culture to culture. In this respect, the Ottoman concept of hybridity and multiculturalism is different from that of the Western imperialist countries. While Western imperialism and colonialism have destroyed millions of people and tons of cultures, languages, and literatures throughout their bloody history, the Ottoman Empire has embraced all the cultures under its sovereignty with a protective approach and considered them as integral components of the richness of the Ottoman culture and society.

Evidently, the constructive Ottoman idea of hybridity and multiculturalism is based on Islam and its holy book the Quran. One of the main foundations of this idea is verse 13 of Surah Al-Hujurat from the Quran: "O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware." Thus, according to this verse, there is no hierarchy between peoples and cultures; the only criterion of superiority is moral righteousness, and the *raison d'être* of peoples and tribes is to "get to know one another." All in all, Gibb's forced division of the Ottoman multicultural society into separate nations and cultures and his considering Turks as an uncreative people perpetually imitating the literature of other cultures is a wrong idea stemming from his Orientalist agenda.

Within the broad multicultural structure of the Ottoman society, there is also a hybrid interculture based on the main Islamic languages of the Ottoman society such as Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and Urdu. Within this Ottoman interculture an Ottoman poet transcends all cultural and linguistic identities and "responds to a poem in Persian precisely as one responds to the poem of another Ottoman poet. The scope of "Ottoman Turkish" and "Ottoman culture" includes and subsumes Persian (and, later, Urdu culture), just as Persian (and Urdu) culture includes and subsumes Ottoman" (Andrews, 2002, p. 33). Thus, this is the genuine identity of Ottoman poetry that needs to be seen and espoused. Adopting such a perspective will undoubtedly help us to reinforce a non-Orientalist construction of Ottoman literary identity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper has discussed why and how the stereotypical Ottoman literary identity constructed by E. J. W. Gibb's *A History of Ottoman Poetry* has been almost canonized. In this respect, it has demonstrated that the socio-cultural and historical context in which Gibb lived was under the hegemony of Orientalism, and therefore, the representation of Ottoman poetry he has generated in his book was shaped by Orientalism. This representation and the identity constructed through it are based on essentialisms and stereotypes that have turned Ottoman literature into everything that it is really *not*. These have created false perceptions and images on Ottoman literature in the minds of the English readers. In the final analysis, English culture and literature have considerably missed the opportunity of being enriched by one of the greatest literatures of the world. As a matter of fact, this can be said for the whole world literature.

Obviously, Orientalism has at large encoded and constructed the Ottoman cultural and literary identity as ‘backward’, ‘outmoded’ and ‘unimportant’ in order to serve the interests of Western imperialism. Undeniably, the Orientalist (mis)representations of Ottoman culture and literature are still powerfully alive today because they have not been subjected to enough critical evaluation. As Walter Andrews argues, “the most substantial and virtually unquestioned victory of Western imperialism in its guise of “Orientalism” has been the reconstruction of Ottoman culture as an entirely negligible phenomenon” (1992, p. 35).

These misrepresentations of Ottoman literature are a kind of “degradation of knowledge” (Said, 1995, p. 328). Not to fall to such traps, we need to “go beyond coercive limitations on thought towards a non-dominative and non-essentialist type of learning” (Said, 1995, pp. 336-337). Thus undoubtedly, “a non-dominative and non-essentialist” way of thinking is a must for a non-Orientalist construction of Ottoman literary identity. In fact, according to Matthew Arnold’s famous definition of literary criticism as “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world” (Arnold, 2001, p. 823), this is a moral responsibility on the shoulders of any person dealing with any kind of literature. Perhaps and hopefully, such an approach will enable us to enjoy Ottoman literature just as the Ottomans themselves did and enrich us profoundly.

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# CHAPTER 4

## **JULIAN BARNES'S MEDITATION ON OLD AGE AND DEATH IN *THE LEMON TABLE* AND *NOTHING TO BE FRIGHTENED OF***

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## Introduction: Age Studies and Literature

The term “age studies” has been employed by cultural gerontologists since the 1990s to denote the interdisciplinary domain dedicated to cultural perspectives on age and ageing. This field is characterized by its multidisciplinary nature, incorporating a diverse array of academic disciplines and methodologies. It provides valuable perspectives on the social, cultural, and individual aspects of ageing, thereby aiding in the formulation of policies and frameworks aimed at enhancing the welfare of elderly people. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, scholars in this field develop an understanding of ageing and its effect on individuals and communities, and encourage positive ageing practices. “Literary age studies” involve the examination of how ageing and old age are represented in literature across different genres and cultural contexts. This field explores various themes such as memory, identity and mortality, and provides valuable insights into the experience of ageing. Through the analysis of literary works, scholars have achieved a better understanding of how ageing is perceived and experienced by individuals and societies, and how it is shaped by cultural and historical factors.

Henceforth, numerous scholars in the arts and humanities in North America and Europe, engaged in the examination of age and ageing within cultural texts, have embraced the term “age studies” as a deliberate distinction from biomedical discourses that rigidly conceptualize ageing within the dichotomy of decline versus successful ageing. The interaction between age and conventional literary paradigms, including gender, class, race, and ethnicity, presents a fertile area of scholarly inquiry capable of encapsulating the intricate nuances embedded within diverse ageing experiences. Literary gerontology has embraced a broad spectrum of genres, spanning drama and performance, fiction, autobiography/biography, and poetry, thereby facilitating a comprehensive examination of ageing phenomena.

Although, for several decades, age remained notably marginalized within the scope of literary studies, literary fiction assumes the role of an “epistemological tool,” as stated by Woodward (Falcus, 2015:58) by experiencing characters’ lives and stimulating affective responses. This transformative potential extends beyond altering cognitive perspectives to encompass modifications in people’s actual living practices. Sarah Falcus acknowledges the seminal contributions of key figures in the field of literary age studies, notably Kathleen Woodward, Margaret Gullette, Barbara Frey Waxman, and Anne Wyatt-Brown. Drawing from the traditions of the humanities, these scholars rigorously scrutinized representations of ageing in literature through various methodological frameworks such as psychoanalysis, feminism, genre studies, and biography. Their scholarly interventions continue to exert

considerable influence and are recurrently cited in contemporary academic studies. Falcus maintained that “from early work on midlife and older age re-imaginings of the Bildungsroman, to more recent scholarship on science fiction and ageing, the connection between genre and the narrative expression of ageing is central to Age(ing) Studies” (Falcus, 2023: 7).

Three of the earliest publications on literary age studies were written and produced by Kathleen Woodward. In her books, *Aging and the Elderly: Humanistic Perspectives in Gerontology* (1978); *Memory and Desire* (1986); and her monograph *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (1991), she elaborated on the problems, such as why we repress issues such as ageing and death in our daily lives and how images of ageing in fiction may be read alongside psychology and Freud. The latter study is a critical examination of cultural paradigms regarding ageing and the role of psychoanalytic theories in shaping our understanding of the ageing process. Woodward argues that cultural representations of ageing are often based on negative stereotypes and ageist assumptions that deny the complex realities of ageing. She criticizes the ways in which psychoanalytic theories have contributed to these stereotypes and suggests alternative ways of thinking about ageing that acknowledge the diversity and complexity of older adults’ experiences. She writes that the ageing body in literature is “the bedrock of the real, in Lacanian terms” (Woodward, 1991: 19). Woodward’s work reads some literary texts of Proust, Woolf, Beckett, Barthes, Eva Figes and Freud, sharing the idea that psychoanalysis has a rich framework for thinking about ageing in literature. In *Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of the Emotions*, which Woodward published in 2009, she clarifies the interdisciplinary approach to age studies as follows: “Just as the capacity for wisdom has been linked with old age, specific emotions have been linked with certain stages of life in the twentieth century in disciplines ranging from psychoanalysis and psychology to cultural studies. If the emphasis in psychoanalysis and psychology is on the trans-historical nature of the emotions, in cultural studies it is on the cultural construction of the emotions” (2009: 62). Woodward further comments on wisdom which is associated with old age commenting that “throughout the history of Western thought, wisdom has been associated with coolness of reason and evenness of judgement, with detachment and balance” (Woodward, 2009: 65), and she adds that older people can offer a strong reason and sensible judgement with a clear and calm view.

Regarding the construction and reconstruction of the self, in both literature and psychology, narrativity is seen as constitutive of selfhood. Jerome Bruner proposed that “life as led is inseparable from life as told – or more bluntly, a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (Bruner, 2004:708). Hence, making sense of our lives depends on how

we narrativize those lives however, ironically, this process is threatened by the significant loss of memory that dementia causes in old age. As Bavidge underlines, remembering must also follow a meaningful story: it is not the “odd memories of the distant past,” often retained in dementia, that are seen to count, but “the ability to integrate past events into a meaningful progressive pattern of experience” (2006: 42). On the other hand, Elizabeth Barry, in *Literature and Ageing* (2020), claims that even in the absence of memory, some remaining tastes, habits and skills “encompass certain kinds of verbal utterance, complicating the distinction between mind and body, purposeful language and instinctive response” and “produce situational humour, tease, clown, and follow quite complex conversational conventions, even in the absence of autobiographical memory” (Barry, 2020: 133-4).

### **Julian Barnes and Old Age**

Julian Barnes emerges as a preeminent figure among contemporary English writers, distinguished for his keen critique and substantial contributions to the growth of British high postmodernism during the 1980s. Renowned for his innovative literary works, which encompass both groundbreaking narratives and compelling detective fiction, Barnes also commands attention through his reviews and critical essays. Following the publication of *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), literary critics have positioned Barnes as a central figure within the milieu of British high postmodernism, owing to the novel's multilayered exploration of various thematic concerns. Indeed, Barnes's skepticism toward claims of absolute truth underscores his alignment with postmodernist sensibilities. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that Barnes transcends mere categorization as a postmodernist writer; many critics and literary historians endeavor to recontextualize his body of work beyond the confines of postmodern artifice, situating his writings within diverse literary traditions and new critical frameworks. While categorizing Barnes solely within the confines of postmodernism may be overly simplistic, his works frequently engages with the existential dilemmas characteristic of the postmodern condition, including issues pertaining to historiography, selfhood, reality, and the interplay between life and art, as well as old age and ageing. His earlier work, *Talking It Over* (1991), grapples with the theme of fabricated or imaginative memory, while his later oeuvre, spanning titles such as *England, England* (1998), *Arthur & George* (2005), *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), *The Noise of Time* (2016) and short story collections, *The Lemon Table* (2004), *Pulse* (2011), delves into the complexities of retrospection, recollection, and remembrance, illuminating how these processes inexorably shape our understanding of past, present, and future realities. Furthermore, Barnes's talent for seamlessly adapting his narrative voice to diverse genres and settings underscores his considerable literary skill. By traversing across different

genres and settings, he not only underscores the distinctions between various literary forms but also embarks on multifaceted explorations of narrative experimentation and modes of representation.

In *The Lemon Table* (2004) and *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* (2008), Julian Barnes, by deploying a narrative voice of melancholic meditation, presents the experience of ageing, old age and death – topics that Barnes develops comprehensively in his elderly writing career. Paradoxically, while explaining his obsession with death and his fear of it, Barnes never loses his self-mocking humour. In *The Lemon Table*, he introduces eleven stories that feature old people with their ageing experiences and he contemplates how they create meaning for their past lives. Moreover, in some of the stories the characters reinvent their own lives and make sense of their own narratives across old age. In addition to his characters, Barnes, as a writer older than 70 years, shares the experience and sense of ageing in these narratives of decline. This study examines both *The Lemon Table* and *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* in connection with age studies, and argues that the increasing vulnerability, weakness and dependence of characters, as well as their invisibility and loneliness in their social contexts, are the main issues that constitute these life narratives.

A writer who is mostly engaged with the issues of memory and remembering, Barnes published *The Lemon Table* (2004) which is a collection of eleven stories dealing not only with memory but also with other human sensations, such as love, disappointment, lust, pain, frustration, and most of all, difficulties of ageing. Barnes focused on eleven characters to scrutinize ageing by giving voice to their fictional life narratives. Many of the protagonists of the collection are in their sixties, seventies, or eighties and share stories following a wide variety of different settings and structures. In this sense, Maricel Oró-Piqueras draws attention to “literary gerontology” which “contributes to the questioning of culturally established representations of ageing based on negative stereotypes within a narrative of decline, and opens up the possibility of perceiving ageing and old age as an accumulation of experiences that involves both gains and losses, as is the case for any other human experience” (2020: 852). Sarah Falcus further maintains that “Stories of age do not provide answers to questions about ageing. They do not illustrate gerontological concepts. They can offer comfort, inspiration and possibility. . . Telling and reading stories of age does open up debate and embrace complexity, and may challenge our ways of thinking” (2015: 53).

In the collection, the first four stories, share topics such as, love, desire and friendship that combine the story lines and, with those feelings, the characters cling to life. The protagonists of the last four stories, on the other hand, reinvent their life stories. Although they experience greater losses and

health problems, by narrating their experiences, the characters recognize what they have lived through emotionally. The first story, “A Short History of Hairdressing,” includes a character called Gregory Cartwright and his experiences at the barbers at three separate times: as a child, as a student, and as a mature man. His image in the mirror is a noticeable reminder of the ageing process accelerated at each appointment. The second story, “The Story of Mats Isrealson” is set in Sweden in approximately 1900 and describes the unsuccessful efforts of Anders Bodén to express his lust for Barbro Lindwall who were married people on those days. Years later, only when Anders was dying of cancer could he express his desire for Barbro: “the pain of cancer, the pain of dying, would drive out the pains of love. It did not seem likely” (Barnes, 2004: 51). Nevertheless, it does not help: when the lovers meet at old age, they long for the missed chances of happiness and love. Another story that reunites two old friends at breakfast at different times is the third story “The Things You Know”. The widows Janice and Merrill talk about their dead husbands each time they meet. All of these characters find support and companionship—mainly because they share the same feeling of growing vulnerable during their mature age.

The fourth story, “Hygiene,” tells Jacko Jackson’s trip to London, who is an old military officer. His mistress, Babs, is a reminder of youth—except that she is ageing just like Jacko is. Both Jacko’s wife and mistress connect the protagonist’s personal story to both his present and future selves: his wife serves as a reminder of their time spent together as a family and in business; on the other hand, his lover, a witty and vivacious woman, helps him in picturing a future free of the feelings associated with ageing, such as lack of passion, monotony and isolation. In “The Revival”, an elderly Turgenev—the Russian author—develops feelings for the actress who played Verotchka in one of his plays: “This is safe. The fantasy is manageable, his gift a false memory” (Barnes, 2004: 98). The danger that love poses, the narrator states, “is of pain. Renunciation means the avoidance of love, and hence of pain” (Barnes, 2004: 110). Another story “Vigilance,” which tells the story of a man who becomes progressively aggressive to avenge others who cough or act rudely at the concerts he attends, deals with self-justification and the arrogances that grow ingrained as one gets older. In the next story, “Bark,” Jean-Etienne Delacour becomes a member of a subscription loan scheme to build the municipal baths. The last man surviving will acquire the capital amount. Delacour becomes increasingly neurotic about his food and lifestyle in an attempt to live the longest. All of these stories share the theme of renunciation in older age, but still in different ways.

The following stories revolve around the themes of miscommunication, past secrets, and things left unsaid, including the husband’s confused mind who has Alzheimer’s disease in “Appetite”, or the family secrets in “The

Fruit Cage,” which is told by the son. Whatever the story reveals, the attitude that Barnes establishes is always ironical. The “The Things you Know” and “Knowing French” focus on female protagonists: Sylvia Winstanley in “Knowing French” is in her 80s, and Merrill and Janice in “The Things you Know” are in their 60s. All these characters have noticed that an elderly woman is almost unnoticed in society. Interestingly, Barnes appears in the story “Knowing French” in Miss Winstanley’s letters, who stays in a nursing home and writes to him. She is working her way through the alphabet at her local library: “Having done Barnes, I move onto Brookner, Anita, and blessed if she didn’t appear on the Box that very day” (Barnes, 2004: 142).

In her essay “The Double Standard of Aging,” Susan Sontag critically examines prevailing social perceptions of ageing, delving into the entrenched norms and expectations that often characterize the ageing process. She scrutinizes the stereotypical views and prejudices associated with ageing, emphasizing the pervasive narrative that frames ageing as a decline in value and productivity. Moreover, Sontag explores the gender disparities inherent in social attitudes toward ageing, investigating how expectations and judgments differ for men and women, thereby illuminating inequalities and biases within the cultural discourse on ageing: “Women, more than men, are adjudicated in terms of their sexual appeal, an appeal dependent on youthfulness, a double standard that leads feminist author, Cynthia Rich” (Sontag, 1975: 39) who refers to the “twice unseen” (Rich, 1984: 84) condition of old women – unseen because they are old and they are women. Sontag argues that with one or two exceptions (for example, physical strength and sport), masculinity – associated with “competence, autonomy, self-control” – is not necessarily threatened in older age, whereas femininity – aligned with “incompetence, helplessness, passivity, noncompetitiveness, being nice” – is not improved with ageing. Like Simone de Beauvoir before her, Sontag maintains that for “most women, ageing means a humiliating process of gradual sexual disqualification” (Sontag, 1972: 39).

The existential dimension of ageing is also a focal point with Barnes reflecting on mortality and the social response to individuals becoming more aware of their finite time. Within this contemplative framework, the collection serves as a call for a comprehensive reevaluation of social attitudes toward ageing. Barnes imagines a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of elderly people, challenging readers to reconsider prevailing stereotypes and fostering a cultural shift toward a more equitable perspective on the ageing population. He also problematizes the cultural constructs of beauty and social worth, particularly in how these constructs influence the perceptions of elderly individuals. The stories consider ageing a process that challenges conventional notions of beauty, success and wisdom prompting a reflection on the psychological and emotional aspects of growing old. In this

context, Barnes explores issues of identity, self-perception, and the emotional challenges individuals face as they go through the ageing process.

In the last story of the collection, “Silence”, Sibelius—the Russian composer—conforms the anecdote about “the lemon table” as “I go out by myself to dine alone and reflect upon mortality. Or I go to the Kämp, the Societetshuset, the König to discuss the subject with others. The strange business of *Man lebt nur einmal*. I join the lemon table at the Kämp. Here it is permissible—indeed, obligatory—to talk about death. It is most companionable” (Barnes, 2004: 206). For the protagonist, accepting death is also accepting life; as a result, life is a journey that culminates in death, or as the protagonist puts it, in “silence”: “The day was heavy with clouds, but for once the cranes broke from the flock and flew directly toward me. I raised my arms in acclamation as it made a slow circle around me, trumpeting its cry, then headed back to rejoin its flock for the long journey south. I watched until my eyes blurred, I listened until my ears could hear nothing more, and silence resumed” (Barnes, 2004: 213), he added, “Cheer up! Death is around the corner” (2004: 232). As Barnes imagines him, Sibelius feels superannuated as he grows older; of younger composers, he thinks that “[y]ou want to be a father figure to them and they don’t give a damn” (2004: 230). He has become a drunk man for whom composing is an agony: “How dreadful old age is for a composer! Things don’t go as quickly as they used to, and self-criticism grows to impossible proportions” (Barnes, 2004: 236).

In *The Lemon Table*, Julian Barnes suggests including the concepts of ageing and death in daily conversations. Death would definitely become less frightening if it were more prevalent in our lives, but more significantly, it would provide us with the means to deal with the physical decline that could come with old age. One of the reasons why Barnes’s persona, in *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* (2008), believes that both his parents and himself were unprepared to deal with his parents’ increasing physical weakness is the rising invisibility of old age and death. Published in 2008, when Barnes was in his sixties, *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* is a semi-autobiography and an unconventional memoir. Barnes indicates that the book “is not, by the way, my autobiography. Nor am I in search of my parents. [...] Narratively, they survive in the memory, which some trust more than others” (Barnes, 2008: 34-35). He further maintains that: “Whatever the writer’s aesthetic—from subjective and autobiographical to objective and self-concealing—the self must be strengthened and defined in order to produce the work” (Barnes, 2008: 88). Likewise, Barry and Skagen draw attention to the relation between old age and life writing, either in factual or fictional form. They state that “ageing as an experience also becomes prominent along with the rise of life writing: the move of autobiography or autofiction from margin to centre of literary

production sees an increase in literary reflection on the life course and the possibilities and challenges of its narrativization” (2020: 4).

As a writer of fiction, Barnes suspects the authenticity of recollected emotions: “My philosopher brother distrusts the essential truth of memories. I distrust the way we colour them in” (Barnes, 2008: 29). “Memories”, says Barnes in *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, “appear to the young brain as exact simulacra, rather than processed or coloured-in versions, of what has happened. Adulthood brings approximation, fluidity and doubt, and we keep that doubt at bay by retelling that familiar story, with pauses and periods of a calculated effect, pretending that the solidity of narration is a proof of truth” (Barnes, 2008: 37). Unfortunately, he points out the feeling of unreliability: “We talk about our memories, but should perhaps talk more about our forgettings” (Barnes, 2008: 38). For the concept of memory, Paul Ricoeur, in his famous book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, writes that “there are two dimensions of memory: these are a cognitive and a pragmatic one, which correspond to the Greek notions of *mneme* and *anamnesis* (2004: 21). Following Aristotle, Ricoeur asserts that memory marks our access to the past” (Atilla, 2014: 431). The unreliability of memory and of records of either public or private history are the main concepts that seem recurrent in Barnes writing.

Julian Barnes’s exploration of memory finds its roots in the influence of modernist European philosophers, including Descartes. This interest is largely motivated by the social upheavals precipitated by the aftermath of the two World Wars, which engendered a loss of both future vision and trust in historical narratives. Indeed, these changes in the society reverberates within the works of numerous post-war novelists, Barnes among them, given the pivotal role memory plays in shaping interpretations of the past, present, and future. Memories serve not only to elucidate realities but also to seek explanations, while simultaneously embodying selective, suppressed, or even wholly imaginative sides. His portrayal of memory is intricately interwoven with the notion of alternative narrative modes, particularly evident in his concept of ‘generic fabulation’. Contrary to the notion that memory faithfully captures the past, Barnes’s fiction suggests that recollections are inherently imaginative constructs, shaping current identities and, conversely, being shaped by them. Recognizing the mutability, selectivity, and variability inherent in memory, Barnes underscores its essential role in understanding his literary works. Moreover, in *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, Barnes explores the existential difficulties of memory loss, linking it to questions of personal identity and annihilation. Here, Barnes’s fascination with memory extends beyond its factual accuracy to encompass its creative and flawed dimensions, mirroring the imaginative aspects inherent in the act of fictional creation. Thus, memory, for Barnes, emerges as a dynamic reflection of the past,

exerting profound influence on both inner and outer realms, transcending temporal boundaries.

One of Barnes's discussions in *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* is exactly the fact that the relation between ageing and death is problematic. The novel blends facts with fiction, personal experiences with impressions on the studies and quotations of famous writers who have written on death and grief as a part of the human condition. Although *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* can be categorized as memoir, Julian Barnes experiments with different genres, as Maricel Oró-Piqueras comments, "In fact, Barnes plays with the idea that any book is the result of the interplay between one's background and knowledge and one's subjective interpretation of memories" (2021: 3). Furthermore, Oró-Piqueras comments: "Barnes is not only very aware of the artificial element in the memoir genre, but he actually exploits that part in order to enrich his own descriptions and reflections of the events that have marked his experience, while commenting on those cultural beliefs and values that have delineated contemporary Western society" (2021: 3).

Autobiographical writing offers a reassembled version of one's memories filtered by time and experience. Self-discovery and self-creation are complex processes. In this regard, a coherent life narrative actually has a positive effect on the ageing process. For Barnes's persona, writing is a way of maintaining this integrity. This kind of narrative is always subject to modification and reinterpretation: it is a process of rewriting the self or even remaking sense of who we are. Similarly, Woodward defines memoirs as reminiscences "of familiar past events", which are both "generative and restorative" (2012: 4). Woodward further defines memoir as "a reflection on experience and a shaping of that experience into a narrative, a discovery of meaning and a creating of meaning that can rise to a poetics of expression and understanding through the plot of a story and the texture of words, yielding thought inextricably intertwined with feeling" (2009: 9). Thus, *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* responds precisely to this act of recollecting past memories that Woodward has pointed at. Hence, Barnes acknowledges memory as a means by which not only one's fear of death, but also death itself, can somehow be overcome.

Julian Barnes shows the complexity of understanding death, life and ageing, as well as the level to which our perceptions of these issues are a product of both social and personal beliefs. Thus, he writes that, as a result of his family's agnostic background, his brother and himself devoted their lives to philosophy and literature, respectively, as he states, "I left philosophy to my brother and returned to literature, which did, and still does, tell us best what the world consists of" (Barnes, 2008: 151). He concurs with Elias in the idea that "[n]owadays we make death as invisible as possible" (Barnes,

2008: 133). Thus, according to Barnes, one possible way of actually surviving an inevitable death is through memory. For Barnes, individual or collective memory is vital for survival as an individual and as a community. As he states, “[m]emory is identity. I have believed this since – oh, since I can remember. You are what you have done; what you have done is in your memory; what you remember defines who you are; when you forget your life you cease to be, even before your death” (Barnes, 2008: 140).

Barnes believes that narrative, whether it be in the form of philosophy, literature, or self-narrative, becomes a powerful tool for finding meaning in one’s existence and leaving an imprint for later generations after one’s death. Nevertheless, he questions the reliability of memory in both his memoir and many of his previous novels. Thus, through his memoir, Barnes not only challenges his own fear of death but also tries to ascertain the extent to which people remain alive after death, by demonstrating how both family inheritance and creativity—whether in the form of positivist writing or through fictional writing—contribute to putting death within the context of life. Barnes writes: “what if you lived to sixty or seventy with half an eye on the ever-filling pit, and then, as death approached, you found that there was, after all, nothing to be frightened of? What if you began to feel contentedly part of the great cycle of nature?” (Barnes, 2008: 111).

*Nothing to Be Frightened Of* was published when Julian Barnes was in his sixties and portrays himself as a writer and a person who wanted to create meaning in his own life. We read Barnes as a narrator who wants to overcome his fear of death, his own extinction and the loss of his parents. He imagines the scene in which he tells the doctor: “Tell me straight, Doc, I need to know. How long?” “How long? I’d say about 200 pages. 250 if you’re lucky, or work fast” (Barnes, 2008: 100). For Barnes, the only plausible way of dealing with death is through art or religion. Thus, he imagines different farewell notes that could announce his death. One would be “LONDON MAN DIES. NOT MANY HURT” (Barnes, 2008: 178). Briefly, Barnes is able to consider death from several angles when it is largely invisible in our daily lives by commenting on it through writing and irony. Although not a philosopher, the narrator Barnes, “by raising different discussions such as fear of death, belief or disbelief in God or the other world, [...] presents death in contrast with Derrida and Levinas as a concrete and graspable thing and mentions it around childhood memories, discussions about art and literature, and life experiences of famous writers”, and he refers to “old age, deterioration of the body and the anxiety of people about the future” by “creating a discourse of death” (Atilla, 2014: 433).

## Conclusion

As literary studies progressed, novel approaches to the examination of ageing in literature emerged. Sarah Falcus delineates several significant trends, including a paradigm shift from mere analyses of literary representations to more contextualized interpretations that scrutinize power dynamics within and surrounding literature as a cultural practice (2023: 7-9). Additionally, there has been a transition from treating age as a singularly pivotal difference to adopting an intersectional approach. Consequently, the recognition of age as a category of analysis has opened up new trajectories in literary study. The ensuing question pertains to the unique contributions that literature contributes to age studies and gerontological research. Specifically, this inquiry seeks to understand the potential implications of literature for the development of theories related to age and ageing, as well as its role in providing insights into the cultural, personal, and embodied meanings associated with older ages. Such insights hold the potential to inform and drive policy changes aimed at understanding and improving the lives of older individuals.

In particular, literary critics have played a pioneering role in establishing what has evolved into the interdisciplinary field of age studies. This field, now inclusive of scholars from diverse disciplines such as history, visual age studies, philosophy, and other humanities domains, emerged during the 1990s. Simultaneously, scholars from sociological, gerontological, psychological, anthropological, and related disciplines have engaged in inquiries into the meanings of ageing across the life course. This concurrent development broadened the landscape for cross-disciplinary exchange, fostering collaboration and enriching the understanding of ageing from multiple perspectives.

A secondary argument revolves around the discerning role of the professional reader, typically a literary scholar. Such a scholar possesses a unique capacity to elucidate the functioning of texts within society and to critically interrogate ageist discourses within these texts. Through practices of resistant reading, characterized by reading against the grain, professional readers can identify and challenge ageist elements while preserving the inherent literariness and dialogic nature of the texts. This intervention is crucial for preventing the undue imposition of theoretical gerontological models on literary works, ensuring that these texts not only reflect but also contribute to the constitution of society. Importantly, this argument recognizes that age, as a focal category within literary age studies, remains a fluid boundary that is continuously shifting. Consequently, the study of age necessitates particular attention to perceived differences and definitions, whether within an individual's life or within broader cultural conceptions.

Despite these contextual nuances, age, as a categorical construct, universally shapes and structures our understanding of life. Thus, the support for literary age studies in its diverse manifestations asserts its potential to not only resist but also transcend the constraints imposed by intellectual, cultural, and social boundaries.

Woodward states that in her recent scholarly endeavors, she has demonstrated a fondness for autobiographical literature, driven by a curiosity to apprehend the contemporary articulations of ageing experiences. Redirecting her scholarly focus, she aims to explore fictional narratives that construct social frameworks governed by diverse age structures, thereby facilitating the expansion of our imaginative faculties beyond conventional paradigms. She asserts: “If today I were to develop an undergraduate or graduate course on age, I would begin with contemporary fiction as a way of meeting people where they are, of drawing them into the immersive, multifaceted, and slow experience that is the reading of world-building novels” (2019: 375). She believes that by anchoring discussions around contemporary fictional works that illuminate age as a pivotal dimension of ideology and identity, subsequent exploration of literature from different historical periods acquires enriched significance for students.

In the afterword of *Literature and Ageing*, Margaret Morganroth Gullette comments on the concept of ageism, as one must consider the following proposition: “all of life is relational. Life itself often depends on this fact. Social support must start with the newborn infant, and as the COVID-19 era of excess deaths in later life painfully reminds us, must continue throughout life to the best possible end” (2020: 189). She further maintains that “without adequate support, no human being can form a self, maintain selfhood, or make progress however defined at any age”. In this regard, Gullette redefines “selfhood” as the existential value of “the self-in-connection” and concludes that “to be human is to need support; to be human is to offer it” (2020: 189). Furthermore, it is important to use a more sophisticated vocabulary when discussing ageing and the various stages of life, and we consider both the individual and social/cultural aspects of these phenomena. Negative stereotypes about ageing are not only incorrect but also damaging because they contribute to a culture of ageism in which older adults are devalued, excluded and marginalized. We should acknowledge that ageing is a dynamic and continuous process that involves growth, change, and adjustment rather than a static and unchanging condition. As Julian Barnes in his fiction proposes, when we challenge misconceptions, myths and stereotypes about ageing and appreciate the complexity and diversity of older adults’ experiences, we can create a more rightful and reasonable society that values people of all ages.

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# CHAPTER 5

## POSTCOLONIAL READING OF GODDESS OF FIRE BY BHARTI KIRCHNER

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## INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States and various European nations had a tremendous influx of immigrants, notably originating from countries such as Pakistan, India Afghanistan. Immigrants setting foot in these new lands, ineluctably begin the process of synthesizing aspects of their own culture with those of the countries to which they have immigrated. This cultural synthesis led to the creation of diverse communities where individuals bring their own traditions while also adapting to the new ones. Nevertheless, this phenomenon has given rise to a myriad of obstacles and clashes due to the intersection of diverse values, beliefs, and customs.

The phenomenon of migration is observed through two separate avenues, namely, internal migration within a nation and international migration to foreign countries. It may be motivated by a wide range of factors, including personal motivations, economic opportunities, political unrest, and environmental catastrophes. Migration not only brought about negative experiences but also fostered a multiethnic community that deepened our awareness of the ways in which other people live. In one way or another immigrants' identity undergo a transformation as a result of moving. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all immigrants assimilate in the same way. For some, it may cause a feeling of loss and estrangement as they leave behind their home culture. This feeling can be further intensified by the challenges of adapting to an unfamiliar environment and navigating different way of life and cultural norms. The process of assimilation can be overwhelming for them and it leads to a disconnect between their old and new identities. Thus, they are often faced with questions about who they are and what their place is in. However, for others, the process of assimilation is gradual. While still maintaining their native culture, they also adopt certain aspects of the host culture. Others may choose to adopt the cultural norms of the host country quickly. They effortlessly embrace the new surroundings and their new identity. Despite facing various challenges in their new surroundings, they view these challenges as opportunities to contribute to their personal growth and to expand their worldview. Thus, the quest for identity can lead to both personal growth and challenges as they try to reconcile their own desires and beliefs with social expectations.

In postcolonial literature, each author's adherence to and yearning for their motherland is expressed in their writings to varying degrees. These various perspectives in the postcolonial novels represent the authors' relationship with their native country. On the other hand, some writers may portray a sense of nostalgia and yearning for their homeland, while others may criticize and challenge social norms and traditions. Especially, today's

diaspora authors often highlight the positive aspects of migration and convey a strong sense of belonging and adaptation in their work. They illuminate the joys and challenges of welcoming diversity. Through their work, they hope to combat the preconceived notions and foster a more tolerant community. The literary works of diaspora writers demonstrate the incredible fortitude of those who ventured to foreign lands. This article examines migration as a constructive process that contributes to the formation of new identities via the lens of an Indian woman character. Through her experiences, Kirchner portrays the transformative power of migration by shedding light on the challenges faced by immigrants such as the issue of discrimination, negotiation between different cultures, and the search for belonging. By addressing these themes, Kirchner highlights the complex process of identity construction in an unfamiliar society. Through the protagonist's journey, Kirchner highlights the need to be adaptable, persistent, and open to new experiences to successfully assimilate into a new society. This study intends to explore the role of cultural adaptation on an immigrant's identity formation and the strategies she employs to adapt to cultural norm. Furthermore, it aims to explore how these strategies influence the immigrant's self-confidence and cultural integration. This immigrant character's story serves as a powerful testament to the resilience and determination of those who dare to venture beyond their homeland.

The work of theorists such as Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak will provide a theoretical framework to analyze the female character's experiences and examine how her identity is shaped in a foreign culture. Fanon's concept of colonized subject, Bhabha's notion of hybridity and third space, and Spivak's subalternity concept will contribute a deeper understanding of the the protagonist's journey of assimilation.

Through this novel, Kirchner, as a diasporic writer, highlights the beauty and challenges of living in a multicultural society. She demonstrates the challenges and rewards of embracing a new cultural identity while still maintaining connections to her roots through an Indian female character.

### **1. Post-Colonial Criticism as a Theoretical Background**

This postcolonial literature often reflected the political and social realities of the time and was used as a tool for promoting national identity and unity. It also functions as a means of expressing cultural values and traditions that had been suppressed under colonial rules. Writers in this period criticized colonialism and imperialism, while in others they celebrated the traditions of their newly independent nations. Post-colonial scholars argue that had a profound effect on the way individuals and societies understand themselves

and their place. Identity and culture are two of the most contentious postcolonial concerns. In this regard, Fanon and Homi Bhabha are two eminent postcolonial scholars who made important contributions to the study of colonial identity and culture. His essay “The Fact of Blackness” provides an essential basis for comprehending the long-term impacts of colonialism on the psyche of historically oppressed communities. Through his analysis, he focuses on the experiences of black people and the harsh realities faced by them. He argues that the black man is consistently subject to the gaze of whites rather than being recognized as a fully developed human being. For him, the reason why the colonized people are inferior is because they are subjected to the oppressive ideologies of the colonizers. The colonizer’s sense of superiority is directly related to the colonized sense of inferiority (1967:69). In this view, the colonizers’ racist mindset perpetuates the sense of inferiority upon the colonized. With their belief in their superiority, the colonizers dehumanize and rob of their dignity. He argues that the discrimination black man faces strips him of his value and worth as an individual (1967:73). According to Fanon, the colonized individual’s only option is to assert their presence and voice. Making his presence felt is one way the colonized strives to redefine his social roles and gain equal status with the colonizer. The act of self-expression becomes a form of resistance, paving the way for an urgent need for a change in society.

We must work and fight with the same rhythm as the people to construct the future and to prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already springing up.... A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence..(1963:233)

In this quote, Fanon emphasizes the need of active engagement and solidarity in determining the future. He is of the opinion that individuals must cooperate and fight side by side to build a better society. Thus, it is possible for us to cultivate a sense of belonging and strengthen the ties that bind us together as a nation if we appreciate the significance of our common history and culture.

Bhabha, one of the pioneering theorists of the postcolonial period, considers identity to be fluid and constantly evolving. He argues that diaspora communities are not fixed or static, but rather dynamic and shaped by multiple influences, including globalization. He also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the agency of individuals in shaping their own identities. He has several significant concepts related to postcolonial theory,

including mimicry, hybridity, and third space. One of them is mimicry. Mimicry refers to the act of imitating or copying the culture, language, and behavior of the colonizer. This concept is frequently observed in postcolonial societies in which the colonizer's culture is viewed as superior and desirable, resulting in the colonized people embracing the practices of the colonizer. However, mimicry can also be a form of resistance against the dominant culture as it enables the colonized to assert their own identity while adapting to their new environment. It becomes apparent that the colonizer has fears, and these fears are what are supposed to pave the way for the colonized to fight their own identities. This anxiety of the colonizer stems from the fear of losing power and control over the colonized people. It is important for the colonized to recognize this anxiety and use it as an opportunity to challenge colonialism and assert their autonomy. Thus, Bhabha states: "Mimicry is at once resemblance and menace"(1994:86). As he claims, mimicry both confirms the colonizer's superiority over the colonized and has the potential to be subversive. Thus, mimicry can be seen as a two-way exchange in which both the colonizer and the colonized are transformed.

Bhabha's idea of imitation leads him to propose a place where differences can meet and negotiation between cultures can take place. The term "third space" describes the location of cultural exchange between colonizers and colonized people. This concept has had an impact on postcolonial studies, helping to define discussions about cultural identity. Bhabha argues that this third space is essential for cultural hybridity and the creation of new forms of cultural expression. In his book *Location of Culture*, he clarifies it: "Cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or purity of cultures are untenable"(Bhabha,1994:37). In other words, Bhabha suggests that cultural expressions are not fixed but rather constantly hybridizing through their interactions with other cultures. Thus, the notion of one culture being superior to another is flawed and ultimately meaningless in this space. This third space enables the coexistence of different cultures and perspectives, leading to a diverse society.

Hybridity is another key concept in the third space where individuals merge elements from various cultures to create flexible identities. The third space also encourages individuals to embrace the differences existing among them. Thus, it serves as a bridge between various communities by challenging conventional notions of race, ethnicity, and nationality. This concept has been used to criticize the idea of fixed and essential identities, while simultaneously celebrating the diversity and fluidity of human experience. He describes it in his *The Location of the Culture*:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces, and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects (1994:112).

Bhabha's theory is predicated on the idea that the colonizer and the colonized should not have a hierarchical relationship, in which the former dominates while the latter is subdued. Instead, it proposes that it is based on mutual mutual respect where both parties can learn from each other and benefit from the exchange.

### **1.1.Postcolonial Feminism**

In the framework of postcolonial studies, the exploration of female identity is critical as it throws insight into the experiences and challenges women faced within the colonial system. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's article "Can the Subaltern Speak" highlights the subjugation of women and the silencing of their voices. In Spivak's discussion, the term "subaltern" refers to people who are subjected to social and political marginalization ; within the postcolonial context, women can be seen as part of this group. As a postcolonial discourse , this term underscores the significance of social critique by shedding light not only on the subjugated communities in India but also broads its focus to socio cultural constructs like gender. According to Spivak,gender ideology serves as a powerful tool for maintaining male dominance and suppressing the voices and histories of subaltern women. She argues that the female subaltern experiences even more oppression if they are female (Spivak 1998:287). In her book Spivak focuses on the cultural practise of sati, an ancient ritual observed in India in which a widow sets herself on fire on the funeral of her husband as a testament to their devotion and loyalty towards their deceased spouse.Upon British colonialists arrived in India, the practise of sati was accepted as an inhumane tradition and barbaric tradition by them. Thus, the assertion made by Spivak in her book that white men were the saviors of brown women justifies Britain's exploitation of India. Ostensibly, the liberation of brown women is facilitated by the British colonial power but Spivak interprets it as inherently imperialistic. Spivak suggests that British colonialists viewed the protection of women as a symbol of their efforts to establish a good society. She argues that by outlawing the sati practice, the colonial Powers saved women from oppressive tradition and ensure legal treatment under the law

(Spivak,1988:298). Thus, the British used the practice of sati as a means to conceal their imperialist intentions.

Spivak also highlights the interconnectedness of patriarchy and imperialism, asserting that the third woman becomes marginalized and erased within these power structures. These subaltern women are consequently caught between the demands of white males and the constraints of traditional cultural norms. Spivak brings this subaltern women to light by arguing that we should reevaluate our knowledge of Western sexuality history (Spivak,1998:307).

## 2. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

From the outset of the story,the impact of colonialism is evident in the way cultural beliefs and practices are challenged and questioned. The sobbing of a little girl who is about to undergo sati practice serves as the novel's opening scene. Through this introduction, Kirchner highlights the oppressive norms the little girl is forced to experience.

An Indian girl named Moorti screams: "Please let me go! I will live as a ghost in my parents' home. I am only seventeen."(Kirchner,2015:15). Her choice of words gives the impression that she would like to keep living her life as a widow rather than becoming a sati. Women in Indian culture often set themselves on fire after their husbands die as a sign of eternal devotion to them. According to Courtright, women who entered the fire out of devotion and confidence in rebirth and self-sacrifice are fit to be worshipped by the witnessing society (1994:27-53). However, the fact that this young woman is making an effort to avoid being sati demonstrates that she does not consider this to be a sacred ceremony. Moorti's refusal to participate in sati practice demonstrates her wish to live and not succumb to social pressure. Kirchner, on the other hand, is determined to improve the deplorable position of women in Indian society and is adamant that she would not let the young girl fall victim to the sati custom. This is made very evident in the scene in which she is miraculously saved from being the victim of sati by white males at the very last moment. She heads to a new life in England. The girl's voyage to England also represents a new beginning and a chance for her to escape the harsh traditions of her homeland. Upon arriving in England, Moortie underwent a significant transformation, adopting a new name Maria. Maria commenced her employment as a cook for a British Indian company. She experiences a great deal of challenges while working for the English East Indian Company. Through Maria's experiences, Kirchner sheds light on the challenges encountered by those who do not integrate into mainstream society. Especially, the feeling of being an outsider is a recurring theme in this

novel and is used to explore the issues of identity, race, and culture. Besides Maria, other culinary staff are employed in the kitchen and they formed a close relationship with each other. Together, they shared stories of their homelands and experiences in a foreign country. However, they were exposed to racist remarks from their white masters, which made them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in the workplace. To give an example, in the novel, Maria's difficulty begins with her exposure to minimal pay in the company. Maria and the other crews under the command of English Sahibs are subjected to long hours of hard labor with no breaks. Kirchner writes: "[The company] run(s) a profitable operation, keeping expenses as low as possible, even if that meant exploiting the poor servants" (Kirchner, 2015:31). The reader is not provided with specific information about the earnings of the employees; but, based on these sentences, one may infer that the workers are not paid very well. Kirchner also calls attention to the negative repercussions of white supremacy on colonized people with this statement. Idris, one of Maria's coworkers and a longtime English resident warns Maria about the oppressive nature of English Sahibs especially Tariq who is the master of the company. "Tariq, who is our supervisor, monopolizes the sahib, so he'll always be more powerful than us. If he sees you as a threat, he'll make your life miserable. They're cruel authoritarians. Here you belong to the dark race and you thought to be inferior" (Kirchner, 2015:46). This quote highlights a power imbalance and the potential consequences for those who surmount it. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism can be applied to this statement. According to Said, the colonizers, in other words, Western Powers portray themselves as superior and responsible for educating and guiding the inferior races, which serves to justify colonial domination. He also argues that the colonizers created a system where the colonized are viewed as mere children and easily manipulated (Said, 1993:XVIII). Hence, one can understand that Sahib's belief in their superiority over the dark race is as a result of Orientalist ideology.

Through the character Idris, Kirchner also argues that the capitalist system perpetuates the oppression of immigrants and reinforces class inequality, leaving them with little hope of escaping poverty. Life in England is not easy, especially for immigrants like them who have to work hard to make a living. He says "...Maria, you are a servant, a mere shadow. You have no past, no family ties, and no future. You are what you do for your master" (p.66). He implies that Maria's identity and worth are solely based on her role as a servant to her master. She has no autonomy or agency in her life and her existence is defined by her servitude. Thus, he cautions Maria about the discrimination and mistreatment she may face as a woman and an immigrant in this new environment.

The language barrier was another challenge she encountered in England.

She found it difficult to communicate with the English Sahibs. The way she talks and the words she uses to make her look foolish not only in British society but also among people of her own race who can speak English well. To illustrate, in one scene, when she says “afternoon good” instead of “good afternoon,” her face flushes crimson with embarrassment at the stupid error she made. Job Sahib, another white master in the company, also corrected her pronunciation, advising her to say “cheap” instead of “ship. Whenever she tries to speak to Job Sahib in English, “The rest of the words lodged in [her] throat. [She] did not to squander [her] chance once more”(Kirchner,2015:71). Maria’s previous bad experience left an impression on her, as evidenced by this comment. Her earlier unfavorable experience potentially hinders her communication with Job Sahib and creates a barrier in their relationship. Maria realizes that her language skills are holding her back. Maria realized that she had to find a way to prove her worth and show that she was capable of so much more. The famous words of Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* come to mind in this context: “ he must demonstrate that a Negro exists” (1963:212). She realizes that language is a powerful tool to be taken seriously by British society. For her, the only way to strike a middle ground between the standards of native culture and the expectations of Western society is to adopt the strategy of mimicry. Thus, when the English master offers her to assign a tutor, Maria eagerly accepts, hoping to improve her language skills and her chances of success in this new environment. With these remarks, she expresses how eager she is to learn English and develop herself. “If I speak English better, it will not only help me but also the Factory.”( Kirchner,2015:74). She starts to rectify the flaws in her English skills by means of diligent practice. She eventually undergoes a spectacular linguistic transition in which her accent changes, she learns numerous new terms, and her pronunciation improves. In addition, the lessons she received from a native speaker and the effort she exerted to practice English with others during her brief breaks from culinary work have greatly improved her English. However, with time and effort, she became more immersed in the culture and she began to adopt the mannerisms of the dominant culture to fit and to be better understood. Eventually, her English improved and she became more confident in her communication skills.

Her self-assurance and bravery are on full display when the English company asks her to act as an interpreter. For the British company, she engaged in negotiations with Chand, an Indian broker. Chad, being a shrewd businessman, not only displays the common textiles but also requests a wide range of pricing for each one. Maria feels like she needs to do something so she doesn’t wish to betray those who saved her from sati practice. Maria decides to confront Chad and negotiate a fair price for the fabrics, while also reminding him of the ethical responsibility that comes with doing business on behalf of a British company. In the novel it is shown: “You showed us more

ordinary weavings, bhai?” In our region, we treated each other as relatives, addressing even a stranger as ‘brother’, ‘uncle’, or ‘cousin’. I hoped to soften Chand’s attitude” (Kirchner,2015:190). Kirchner’s character in the novel is struggling to balance her desire to assimilate into English society and her need to preserve her cultural heritage. She recognizes the importance of honoring and upholding her traditions while also trying to negotiate a new culture. However, Chand attempts to convince Maria that working for Rani Mata, the queen of India, would be more profitable than working for the barbaric British. He also points out the possibility of a better future under Rani Mata’s rule. Maria does not wish to be on the side of either her own culture or the British; rather, she seeks to unite the two cultures. The following words clearly reflect it:

The English East India Company is a venture already more powerful than you can imagine. They have traders who cross many treacherous seas, islands you have never heard of, and countries as far away as China. They return to our shores with goods we’ve never seen, tea, porcelain, lacquerware. Wouldn’t it be wise to make a partnership with them, even if you have to go through a tough negotiation, even if you have to lose money at the outset? (Kirchner,2015:190).

Maria’s desire to unite the two cultures springs from her belief that both of them have something valuable to offer. For her, they can expand their trading network and gain access to exotic goods by forming a partnership with the English East India Company. She aims to bridge the gap between the two worlds and promote understanding. Her efforts to find a middle ground between the two cultures are indicative of her struggle to identify who she is outside national boundaries. Maria was successful in the end in her attempt to get Chand to settle for a more acceptable sum. As is seen, translation plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between different cultures. Maria’s ability to negotiate a compromise shows the importance of building an effective community. Her confidence grows as she gains fluency in English. Her bilingualism allows her to express herself in both languages, creating a space for cross-cultural interaction and hybridity. In this regard, Homi Bhabha’s statements are quite noteworthy.

The migrant culture of the ‘in-between’, the minority position, dramatizes the activity of culture’s untranslatability; and in so doing, it moves the question of culture’s appropriation beyond the assimilationist’s dream, or the racist’s nightmare, of a ‘full transmission

of subject matter'; and toward an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture's difference. (1994: 224)

Maria's success in conducting business with Chand, as well as her attempts to familiarize herself with the culture of another country, have earned the praise and admiration of Job Sahib. He expresses these words: "You negotiated well in male company. A woman! A Hindustani woman at that! A two-tongued one!"(Kirchner,2015:194). His confidence in her English and business abilities make Maria a perfect choice for conducting business on behalf of the company. As a result of her hard work and dedication to the company, she got promoted to the status of Apprentice Factor in the company. This situation clearly indicates that she is able to navigate in a society that was hostile towards her race by employing a method of mimicry. Maria's ascent to a higher social rank demonstrates that the white man, Job Sahib, does not hold any sort of advantage over her. The power relation that exists between Maria and Sahib brings to mind Homi Bhabha's statements regarding the mimicry strategy. "the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority"(Bhabha, 1994:88). Maria challenges the colonizer's power by achieving a similar level of authority and power. Thus, it is conceivable to say that there is no power hierarchy between them.

Her culinary skill is another tool she employs in the battle to establish her place in society. Throughout the novel, Maria uses her Indian culinary skills to prepare exquisite meals, leaving a lasting impression on white society. According to Nyman, culinary memory has an important place in shaping one's identity. The recollections linked to food are profoundly embedded in personal experiences like home and childhood, which play a key part in the construction of identity. For those who navigate between two worlds, culinary memories create a space where they can embrace their identity (Nyman, 2009:284). It suggests that for Maria who oscillates between two worlds, culinary skills become a powerful tool to establish a sense of belonging. Especially, during the feast hosted by the English company, Maria manages to win over and enchant several white guests. Sahib's comments reveal it: "A splendid job, Maria, far beyond what I'd expected. I must extend my compliments to you personally. You and the other kitchen workers have impressed our guests"(Kirchner, 2015:127). By her skills, Maria establishes herself as a subject who straddles between two worlds. Her cooking is a bridge between Indian and white society and in this way, she asserts her presence in both communities.

Along with hybridity and mimicry, this novel also addresses interracial

marriage. Kirchner also shows that love and shared cultural values are two of the most important aspects of a harmonious interracial union through the characters of Maria and Sahib. Sahib and Maria share a similar understanding of Bhabha's theories on hybridity and the third space. They go beyond just their surface-level differences in language and culture. As they continue to communicate, they also learn to appreciate and respect their differences. Maria's marriage to Job Sahib, a white man, shows her willingness to embrace diversity and adapt to new ways of life. Maria's transformation into a hybrid character, reflecting her newfound appreciation for her host culture, is demonstrated by the following quotation: "Despite a different language, upbringing, and manners, and a distance measured in months at sea, the English were like us in many ways, I thought with pleasure. I had secured a foothold of my own in this foreign habitat" (Kirchner, 2015, p.183). As she states, despite the cultural differences and physical distance, she was able to find common ground with the English people she encountered. This realization brought her a sense of comfort and belonging in an unfamiliar environment. Sahib also begins to shed his colonial mindset and embrace a more empathic attitude towards the culture of Maria. "Painful as it is for me to admit it, I saw the beauty of Hindustan but made the mistake of underestimating the people. From now on, we shall have to deal with them as equals." (Kirchner, 2015:260). This realization marks a significant turning point in his character. He expresses his regret for underestimating the people of Hindustan and his commitment to treating them as equals going forward. His empathic attitude towards Maria's culture shows a willingness to learn and understand, which is crucial for building positive relationships and promoting cultural diversity. These words also clearly indicate that his identity is not fixed and has changed based on his own experiences and interactions with Maria. Through Maria, he broke free from the constraints of binary thinking. Thus, Bhabha's following statement encourages us to embrace this fluidity and reject the rigid categories. "We may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (Bhabha, 1994:39). Both Maria and Sahib's marriage serves as an example of how individuals can bridge cultural differences and create a new identity that transcends traditional boundaries. The novel concludes with Maria and Sahib reaching their destination at the third space. Maria and Sahib's journey towards the third space serves as a powerful message of hope for a world that often seems divided by race and culture.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The story revolves around a female Indian girl who struggles to find her place in a new place while dealing with personal challenges and conflicts. Bharti Kirchner highlights the power of resilience and adaptation in overcoming adversities and finding a sense of belonging in a foreign culture. In the novel,

Bharti Kirchner highlights the various strategies adopted by the protagonist to navigate the challenges of cultural assimilation and integration. Maria's newfound appreciation for the host culture is a result of her experiences living and interacting with people. Despite the initial obstacles of adapting to her new surroundings such as language barriers and discrimination, Maria is able to navigate these challenges through her sense of resilience and adaptability. Through interacting with different cultures and perspectives, she enriches her understanding of the world. She proves herself a bilingual individual in white society and becomes a part of a new society. She now embraces the differences and similarities between her own culture and the host culture, creating a unique identity that is a blend of both.

Maria's transformation into a hybrid character is not only a personal journey, but also a reflection of the growing trend towards cultural fusion in a globalized world. As she navigates between her own cultural identity and the new one she has adopted, Maria represents a new generation of individuals who are embracing multiculturalism and celebrating diversity.

Ultimately, this novel serves as a powerful reminder of the beauty and richness of diversity, and the need for greater tolerance and respect in a global world.

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