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Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü
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The Department of Western Languages and Literatures and the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Boğaziçi University are pleased to announce the launching of a new journal: METAFOR: The Boğaziçi University Journal of Literary Studies.

Our mission is to issue an academic periodical of the highest standards, one that provides a forum for innovative discussions in the field of literary studies and literary criticism. The journal accepts submissions of original essays, book reviews, interviews and short commentaries.

We especially welcome contributions that take an interdisciplinary and comparative approach. METAFOR will be a semi-annual journal, accepting submissions in Turkish and English. All submissions will be peer-reviewed by referees assigned by the editorial board.

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“Or in the Incestuous Pleasure of His Bed”: An Eco-Feminist Approach to Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*

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Abstract

In his autobiographical account of “the growth of a poet’s mind”, *The Prelude*, Wordsworth portrays Nature as a mother and a nurse, both giving birth to and feeding his soul with best nourishments. But then, by the end of the poem, we witness the poet praising his Imagination for its power to govern the relations of things in Nature and to far transcend Nature’s capacity to create. This is a story that almost overlaps with that of Gaia and Uranus, where the son rapes the Earth-Mother and establishes his own rule over her. “The Stolen Boat” and the “Snowdon” episodes are often interpreted along this line, pointing to the virile desire directed at Mother Nature. The child poet who fails in his first attempt succeeds in the end. But there is another passage that seems somehow to have escaped the attention of the critics: the episode about crossing the Alps, where the poet, -now a young man- though he fails again, comes very close to realizing his dream. Apart from contributing to the readings of the much discussed two passages, the present article introduces this intermediary episode as an eco-erotic passage that connects the two assaults and gives coherence to Wordsworth’s story of growing out of dependence to self-sufficiency.

Keywords: Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Eco-Feminism, Nature, Imagination

“Onun Günah Yatağında Hazlar İçinde”: Wordsworth’ün *Prelüd*’üne Eko-Feminist Bir Yaklaşım

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Özet

Bir şairin zihinsel gelişimini konu alan otobiyografik eseri Prelüd’de Wordsworth Tabiat’ı hem kendisini doğuran bir anne hem de en besleyici gıdalarla doyuran dadı olarak resmeder. Ancak, şiirin sonunda İmgelemine Tabiattaki varlıkların ilişkilerini belirleme gücünden dolayı göklere çıkarır, hatta bunun Tabiat’ın yaratma kapasitesinden de üstün bir güç olduğunu iddia eder. Bu hikâye oğulun Toprak-Ana’yı iğfal ederek ona hükmettiği Gaia ve Üranüs efsanesine benzer. “Çalınan Kayık” ve “Snowdon” bölümleri çoğunluk bu doğrultuda yorumlanır, bu dizelerdeki Tabiat Ana’ya yönelmiş eril arzuya işaret edilir. İlk denemesinde başarısızlığa uğrayan çocuk şair sonuncusunda amacına ulaşmaktadır. Ama eleştirmenlerin nasılsa gözünden kaçmış bir bölüm daha var ki, burada, -artık genç bir erkek olan- şair yine hayal kırıklığına uğrasa da, rüyasını gerçekleştirmeye epeyce yaklaşır. Çok tartışılan söz konusu iki bölümün okumalarına aynı yönde yapacağı katkılarının dışında, bu makale, iki saldırıyı birleştirerek Wordsworth’ün bağımlılıktan kendine yeterliliğe varışına dair hikâyesini bütünleyen aradaki bu eko-erotik pasaja dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Wordsworth, *Prelüd*, Eko-Feminis, Tabiat, İmgelem

Wordsworth's view of oneness of man and Nature is, in many ways, revolutionary. However, there are also reasons to criticize him for falling into the same old trap of hierarchically organized value dualisms concerning culture and nature, mind and body or man and woman, in which the second of each pair can only serve as auxiliary to the first. Hence, according to Sharon R. Yang, remembering Wordsworth's plans in his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads", "to bind together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society" Virginia Woolf suggests that he failed because of his too firm attachment to the patriarchal system.¹ In support of this view, Yang says,

The narrator [of *The Prelude*] holds up the mother of the illegitimate child of Book 7 for our admiration for not being contaminated by experience despite her 'fall'. He celebrates her for living her life like a pastoral innocent, while devoting herself entirely to her child. Thus Wordsworth seeks to redeem her by confining her within two traditional roles: inexperienced child/woman or motherly Angel in the House.²

This angel for Wordsworth is his sister Dorothy, the embodiment of Natural innocence who remained untainted thanks to her exclusion from the male world of education, power and art, which the poet sees as both her and his salvation. Making this point, Yang concludes that "Rather than kill the Angel in the House, as Woolf asserted in 'Professions for Women' that all women must do, Wordsworth presents her preservation as a boon to men."³ This valorizing of man over woman is not only a gender-related matter but has wider implications, and means that, by doing so, Wordsworth was at the same time holding up culture and mind against nature and body, as is best seen in his *The Prelude*, published posthumously.

In this autobiographical account, Wordsworth, who lost his mother at an early age, expresses his gratefulness to Nature, which he portrays as a mother and a nurse, both giving birth to him and feeding his soul with best nourishments. But towards the end of the poem, we witness the poet praising Imagination (a faculty of the mind) for its power to govern the relations of things in Nature and to far transcend Nature's capacity to create.

Wordsworth's attempts to redeem nature –to integrate it with the rhythms of his own consciousness- finally led him to a vision of self-in nature, which all but obscures the conventional imagery and existence of the natural world, turning that world rather into an almost abstract

¹ Sharon R. Yang. "Subversion of 'The Prelude' in *Jacob's Room* or the Woolf Who Cried Wordsworth" *Midwest Quarterly* Vol.45 (2004): 332.

² Ibid., 334.

³ Ibid., 335.

principle of otherness, of alternate resistance and support to the life of the mind, whose sensory qualities are important mainly for their functioning within this eternal give and take.⁴

In a poem about “the growth of a poet’s mind”, this change of attitude might be explained as a necessary step for the poet to reach maturity and claim self-sufficient existence. According to Onorato: “Wordsworth was unconsciously seeking to free himself from his obsession with the mother and from the very bondage to Nature he was celebrating”.⁵ However, to be able to achieve that, he first has to fight against the maternal grip, overcome that and even subdue the mother. Hence, Sitterton identifies the famous “Stolen Boat” episode in Book 1 (lines 357-388) and the “Snowdon” episode in Book 14 (lines 28-76) as “scenes themselves about mastery”,⁶ which doubtlessly involve sexual overpowering, as “although love of nature may not be the same as love for a woman, Wordsworth overinvests his libido upon the natural world as compensation for losing his mother”.⁷ The former attempt by the child poet is a complete failure but the latter one by mature Wordsworth ends with success. These two passages easily lend themselves to such a reading. However, there is another passage equally laden with incestuous desire that almost comes to fulfilment but that seems somehow to escape the notice of critics: the episode about crossing the Alps. This episode in Book 6 (lines 570-590), connecting the two attempts reveals that the poet’s struggle against maternal domination is a continuous effort and completes the story, which immediately calls to mind the myth of Gaia and Uranus. Gaia was the Mother Earth born out of Chaos, emptiness. Without any male intervention, she gave birth to Uranus, who later raped his mother and began to rule over her. With this parallel in mind, this paper aims to do a close reading of the eco-erotic passages (namely the Boat Stealing, Crossing the Alps and Snowdon episodes) and argue that, despite all his Nature worship and his generous eulogy for his sister Dorothy in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth fails to form with Nature a relationship that passes beyond the patriarchal pattern.

Boat Stealing

⁴ Frank D. McConnel, *The Confessional Imagination: A reading of WW’s Prelude*. (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 5.

⁵ Richard J. Onorato, *The Character of the Poet*, quoted in Joseph C. Jr. Sitterton, “Oedipus in the Stolen Boat: Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity in ‘The Prelude’”. *Studies in Philology*, 86, no.1 (1989): 96.

⁶ Joseph C. Jr. Sitterton, “Oedipus in the Stolen Boat: Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity in ‘The Prelude’”. *Studies in Philology*, 86, no.1 (1989): 96.

⁷ Wilson, Douglas B. *The Romantic Dream: Wordsworth and the Poetics of the Unconscious*. (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 64.

One summer evening (led by her) I found
 A little Boat tied to a Willow-tree
 Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
 Straight I unloosed her chain, and, stepping in,
 Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
 And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
 Of mountain-echoes did my Boat move on,
 Leaving behind her still, on either side,
 Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
 Until they melted all into one track
 Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
 (Proud of his skill) to reach a chosen point
 With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
 Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
 The horizon's utmost boundary; for above
 Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
 She was an elfin Pinnacle; lustily
 I dipped my oars into the silent Lake,
 And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
 Went heaving through the Water like a swan:
 When, from behind that craggy Steep, till then
 The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
 As if with voluntary power instinct
 Upreared its head. -- I struck, and struck again,
 And, growing still in stature, the grim Shape
 Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
 For so it seemed, with a purpose of its own

And measured motion like a living Thing,
 Strode after me.⁸

These lines are often interpreted as the expression of a crime and the feeling of guilt that follows, as in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The boy is around 10 at that time, just at the threshold of sexual awakening, when

⁸ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, the four texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995). (All the references are to the 1850 version unless stated otherwise.)

he begins to grow curious of adult pleasures. And in line with Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, by "an act of stealth," he tries to unite with the mother, here symbolized by the boat, whose shape is reminiscent of female genitals. He begins by stating that he was "led by her" that is by Nature, (In fact, in the 1805 version line 372, he says "surely I was led by her") just like a boy being taught the adult ways by an experienced woman. All the while, he is worriedly cognizant of the seriousness of his crime. And therefore, his eyes are fixed "Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,/The horizon's utmost boundary," expecting any time something to follow behind him. This fixed look in his eyes is also akin to the blank, mesmerized fixation that can be observed in someone completely concentrated on masturbational satisfaction. In psychoanalytic theory, water is female and the oars dipping into the lake unmistakably mimic sexual intercourse. The fact that the boat glides in water smoothly like a swan tells us that all is fine with the forbidden play of the youngster only until the third party of Freudian theory, the envious father bursts into the scene to catch the boy in the act. The huge black peak that uprears its head is the enraged father. The repeated "I struck and struck again" is expressive of the boy's hurry to finish as soon as possible. Deeply saturated in guilt and fear, the boy, in the end, takes the boat back to its place. In short, as Friedman also agrees, "The episode of stealing the boat...offers the clearest example of felt paternal retribution for childish egotistic desire, desire in part for the mother..."⁹

Another time-spot, a floating piece of epiphanic moment, seems to support such a reading based on the Oedipal conflict: In this part, (Book 12, Lines 289-311) Wordsworth describes a scene on a crag, where he is waiting for the horses their father will send to take him and his two brothers from school for Christmas. When the horses delay, he wishes for their earlier arrival. When his father dies a short time after, David E. Simpson comments, "The thirteen year old made the fallacious connection that children often make between family tragedy and their own behaviour: that some trivial disobedience on their part is the cause of the disaster," and then his wish "comes to seem as if it involved also a wish that the moment of bereavement should come sooner".¹⁰

Crossing the Alps

The only track now visible was one

⁹ Michael H. Friedman, *The Making of a Tory Humanist* quoted in David Ellis, *Wordsworth, Freud, and the Spots of Time: Interpretation in The Prelude*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 40.

¹⁰ David. E Simpson, "The Spots of Time: Spaces for Refiguring" *William Wordsworth's 'The Prelude*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 141.

That from the torrent's further brink held forth
 Conspicuous invitation to ascend
 A lofty mountain. After a brief delay
 Crossing the unbridged stream, that road we took,
 And clomb with eagerness, till anxious fears
 Intruded, for we failed to overtake
 Our comrades gone before. By fortunate chance,
 While every moment added doubt to doubt,
 A peasant met us, from whose mouth we learned
 That to the spot which had perplexed us first
 We must descend, and there should find the road,
 Which in the stony channel of the stream
 Lay a few steps, and then along its banks;
 And that our future course, all plain to sight,
 Was downwards, with the current of that stream.
 Loth to believe what we so grieved to hear,
 For still we had hopes that pointed to the clouds,
 We questioned him again, and yet again;
 But every word from the peasant's lips
 Came in reply, translated by our feelings,
 Ended in this, -that we had crossed the Alps.

It seems that the union with nature, which could not be realized in the boat-stealing episode again evades the poet when he is a young man, and the lines above express a displacement of sexual disappointment in Freudian terms. First, he interprets the way leading to the lofty mountain as a "conspicuous invitation", as if by a woman who tries to tempt a man. The fact that the road lies behind an "unbridged" river is a warning that this road is not used very often and so the assumed woman is not tamed, which must increase the excitement of the love game. Hence the poet and his friend climb with "eagerness", which reminds us the boy in the boat episode who rows "lustily", both acts requiring muscular effort. But not long after, when they "still had hopes that pointed to the clouds," they learn from a peasant that they must actually go down the path rather than climb up. The clouds here with their color and potential wetness might be taken to represent the semen produced at the climax of sexual satisfaction the young poet hopes to have at the top of the mountain. But the arousal is left incomplete when they are diverted from their route. Though male, considering the possibility that spirits of the Earth might take any form they like, the peasant must be aligned with Nature. The fact that rather than saying "we met a peasant," Wordsworth says, "a peasant met us" seems to support such a reading that imagines this man as an active agent of Mother Earth, trying to defend herself. They don't want to believe what they

hear from the peasant's "mouth", but every word that falls from his "lips" disappoint them more. It is important that although he never uses these words in his 1805 version, Wordsworth focuses his attention in the 1850 version of "The Prelude" on the mouth and the lips of the peasant. Rather than accidental, this must be a conscious choice increasing the corporality of the experience. What the peasant further says induces grief in the young men as they find out that they had crossed the Alps without realizing it, because being aware of the experience is important to Wordsworth, as *The Prelude* is "an exemplary Romantic text which considers the fully self-knowing and fully imaginative subject an attractive phantasy of omnipotence".¹¹ Yet, according to *Borderers*, a play by Wordsworth, "genuine consciousness of self [...] is born of betrayal, is linked to the unwitting commission of a crime, a crime essentially against nature; and is a stage (however dangerous) in the growth of the mind [...] in its passage toward individuation, or from a morality based on 'nature' to one based on the autonomous self".¹²

Their feeling of dismay is understandable since love making is an act of the mind as much as the body, and it is the consciousness that increases the pleasure. When they were hoping to reach the peaks of pleasure overlooking the whole body of the mountain from her tops which they would have conquered, they were led to the plain through short cuts. In "we questioned him again and yet again", there is a parallel repetition to the rowing boy's "I struck, and struck again", which is also reflected in the grammar with the omission of the subject (in both) in the second part of the utterance so as to charge the line with more energy. However, the three verbal structures used consecutively in the lines that follow absorb all the life force of the sentence, which - as the youth come to the realization of what happened - terminates in a lethargic whimper: "But every word from the peasant's lips / Came in reply, translated by our feelings, / Ended in this, -that we had crossed the Alps". The word "ended" used for the peasant's reply also refers to the ending of the young men's vigor. Wordsworth defines this feeling as "the melancholy slackening that ensued/Upon the tidings by the peasant given" (lines 617-618), but in our sexual terminology, this is a premature orgasm that falls far too short of the sublime experience a perfect union might bring and that is the melancholy of aborted expectations.

Not surprisingly, just as a lover who feels he is lacking in bed seeks comfort in his intellectual merits, the poet recites a long eulogy to his Imagination

¹¹ Sitterton, "Oedipus in the Stolen Boat: Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity in 'The Prelude'", 98.

¹² Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* (London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 128-129.

immediately after the above passage. "Imagination...That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss/Like unfathered vapour." The fact that this vapour is unfathered points to the parallel between Imagination and Uranus, who is also born of Gaia without the mediation of a father, a parallel which supports Warren Stevenson's comment that Wordsworth's "deepest desire was to become his own father and patriarch, the better to replace and paradoxically identify with the Orthodox God with whom he was, throughout much of his life, consciously or unconsciously in contention".¹³ Wordsworth addresses Imagination with the words "I was lost; / Halted without an effort to break through;/But to my conscious soul I now can say /'I recognize thy glory.'" Nature deceives, it does not lead to eternal heights. It is through the Imagination that man can reach infinity.

Snowdon

The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean; and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the solid vapours stretched,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the main Atlantic, that appeared
To dwindle, and give up his majesty,
Usurped upon far as the sight could reach.
Not so the ethereal vault; encroachment none
Was there, nor loss;

.....save that through a rift—
Not distant from the shore whereon we stood,
A fixed, abysmal, gloomy, breathing-place—
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice!

Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour,
For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens.

.....

¹³ Warren Stevenson, *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime* (London: Associated University Press, 1996), 62

There I beheld the emblem of a mind
 That feeds upon infinity, that broods
 Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
 Its voices issuing forth to silent light
 In one continuous stream; a mind sustained
 By recognitions of transcendent power,
 In sense conducting to ideal form,
 In soul of more than mortal privilege.

One function, above all, of such a mind
 Had Nature shadowed there, by putting forth,
 'Mid circumstances awful and sublime,

That mutual domination which she loves
 To exert upon the face of outward things

In this episode, we see the poet eventually having reached the state to which all romantic poetry aspires, and that is the highest point of the earth from where you can connect to the skies opening up to infinity. In Hartman's words, "Man at Snowdon is not [...] a microcosm redeeming his alienated (macrocosmic) part. He is a mesocosm: at the boundary of all realms, and himself their boundary".¹⁴ There, Wordsworth sees the *naked* moon, the *vapours* again, the hills with their *backs upheaved*, *headlands* and *tongues* ..., all these intertwined bodily organs attributed to Nature turning the whole scene into an orgy. The rift, the abysmal, gloomy, breathing place with roaring waters is full of sexual connotations, like the sacred river Alph gushing forth in thick pants as in the poem "Kubla Khan" by Coleridge. Just as there is a dome over Kubla Khan's pleasure palace, here is the heavens covering all below, serene but still feeling all that passion down there. In this scene, the poet observes a "mutual domination". But how much does the text support this mutuality? Up on the summit, the poet sees "the emblem of a mind/that feeds upon infinity that broods/upon the dark abyss intent to hear/its voices." That is, he identifies the mind with the male skies rather than the female earth, where with the dwindling mists, there is loss of majesty. On the contrary, in the ethereal skies, such "encroachment none/was there, nor loss..." "The whole passage culminates in his vision of the God-like mind of the poet brooding over the abyss which opens up at his feet, like the mind of God moving on the face of the waters in the act of Creation in Genesis I".¹⁵ Interestingly, Wordsworth, whose poetry is famous

¹⁴ Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry*, 198

¹⁵ Alan G. Hill, "The Triumphs of Memory: Petrarch, Augustine, and Wordsworth's Ascent of Snowdon". *The Review of English Studies* 57, no. 229 (2006): 256.

for being free of abstractions, prefers here to see the whole natural scene not for what she really is but as a symbol of his own mind, and in fact, as “only one function” of it. This “function” is nothing but the capacity of the mind to remember, making memory an endless source for creativity. Hence, Hill says: “As he returns down the mountain side by the light of the full moon, and writes his letter in ‘a quiet corner’ or his inn, he is overpowered by the realization that, however wonderful external nature is, it is nothing compared to the wonders of the human mind and what can be achieved by the power of memory- a very Wordsworthian conclusion in fact”.¹⁶

The Prelude is the story of a mind growing from dependence to self-sufficiency through its imaginative power. And for the mind to mature from a helpless child to an autonomous adult, the yoke of the mother has to be overthrown. A close analysis of the three passages selected for this article reveals Wordsworth’s continuous efforts to overcome his mother-fixation by gaining mastery over Nature, which he seems to be celebrating as his surrogate mother. And when he finally did manage that, he must have begun to feel guilty for his cruel treatment of her. That might explain why he obsessively revised it and could never come to publish *The Prelude*.

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Eleştirinin Büyübozumu: Aşk Romanına İlişkin Eleştirilerin Sorgulanması

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Özet

Elif Şafak, *Aşk* romanına dair açıklamalarında “zıt gibi görünen karakterleri olan tasavvufi aşk ile dünyevi aşkı evrensel bir öz arayışı” içinde buluşturmak istediğini ifade etmiştir. Bu ifade genel olarak yazarın, manevi aşkı, dünyevi aşkın nesnesi kılarak yeniden yazmak istediği biçiminde yorumlanmıştır. Buna karşın, bu çalışmada inceleyeceğim eleştirilerin temel meselesi, *Aşk*’ın inanç deneyimi ile dünyevi aşk arasında bir geçişkenlik olduğuna işaret etmesi değildir. Asıl mesele metnin bu geçişkenlik üstüne ortaya koyduğu iddia edilen yorumudur. Eleştirmenlere göre, bu yorum Sûfî aşkını bütünüyle dünyevî bir deneyimin aracı kılarak değersizleştirmektedir. Fakat eleştirilerde, bu yorumun metinden hareketle değil, yazarın biyografisinden ve açıklamalarından çıkarsandığına işaret eden sayısız örnek vardır. Bu nedenle Düccane Cündioğlu, Şükrü Argın ve Mehmet Tekin tarafından kaleme alınan eleştirilerde, eleştiri nesnesinin nasıl belirlendiğine, eleştirinin dinamikleri üzerinden bakarak incelemek gereği duydum. Bu incelemeyi sonuçlandırırken aydınlatmış olmayı umduğum asıl konu, *Aşk* romanına yönelik eleştirilerde “dünyevileştirmenin” neye tekabül ettiğini aydınlatmak ve bu eleştirinin nasıl yazarın ortaya koyduğu “niyet” üzerinden okunduğunu göstermektir. Çünkü kurmaca içindeki ideolojiyi görünür hale getirmeye koşullanan edebiyat eleştirisi her zaman eleştirdiği nesnede belirlediği yanlışlığı yansılayarak ideolojiyle ilişkilenmekle tehdit edilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Elif Şafak, tasavvufi aşk/dünyevi aşk, Düccane Cündioğlu, Şükrü Argın, Mehmet Tekin.

The Disenchantment of the Criticism
Questioning of the Critiques Regarding the Novel of *Love*

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Abstract:

Elif Şafak, in her statements regarding to the novel *Aşk*, expressed that she wanted to bring together the kinds of love of opposite characters as the otherworldly Sufi love and worldly, corporeal love. in the quest of attaining universal essence of love. It was interpreted generally in the way that she aims to rewrite the Sufi love as the object of worldly love. Albeit, the critiques I have engaged in this research, the transivity between the experiences of Sufi love and worldly love in the novel is not accounted as the basic issue. The issue is the comment of the text that is claimed to be made on the Sufi love. As much as it is seen to the critics, such a comment trivializes the transcendent love as a total worldly experience. But there are countless examples indicating critics' arguments do not follow the text, but directly act upon the author's biography and explanations which were engaged with the novel. For this reason, I feel the urge to examine how the object of critique is determined through the dynamics of the literary criticism in these critiques. The point that I hope I would have illuminated as I concluded my research, how the subject of this criticism is not deduced from the text but it is determined by the hypothetical authorial intention. Because a literary criticism that is actually aimed to make visible the ideology is always threatened by imitating mimetically the mistake in the critical object and therefore related with ideology.

Keywords: Elif Şafak, sufi/corporeal love, Dücan Cündioğlu, Şükrü Arın, Mehmet Tekin.

Charles Taylor'ın ünlü kitabı *Sources of Self: The Making of Modern Identity*'de bahsettiği modern birey figürünü bir an için gözümüz önüne getirelim¹. Kozmik düzenle ya da mutlaklıkla bağı kesildiği için kriz değilse bile kafa karışıklığı içinde seküler ve kaotik bir dünyaya anlam vermeye çalışan bir insan durur karşımızda. Bu betimleme, bireyin evrenle harmonisini kaybettiği, dünyevi kaygıların öne çıktığı seküler dünyada yeni pozisyon alımını gösterir bize. Modern anlamda birey nosyonunun kaynağı böyle bir kendilik algısından çıkmakta ve tasavvufi bir deneyimin kavranmasını temelden güç bir mesele haline getirmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Elif Şafak'ın romanı *Aşk*; “ilahi aşk”, “modern zamanlar”, “kutsal şahsiyetler” ve “roman anlatısı” gibi farklı kavramları yan yana getirerek bu güçlüğü meydan okumaktadır. Yazar, aynı zamanda, Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî ve Şems-i Tebrizî gibi tarihi şahsiyetleri, romanın kurmaca dünyası içine çekerek muhtemel tepkileri de bir bakıma peşinen göğüslemiştir. Çünkü bu şahsiyetler tasavvuf gibi kadim bir geleneğin öncüleri sayılan kutsal şahsiyetlerdir ve kutsalın temsili, sanat aracılığıyla temsilin karmaşık ve tartışmalı yapısına ilaveten sorunlu bir süreçtir.

Hristiyanca bir anlamlandırma biçimi olan tipolojik simgesellikte, kutsiyet atfedilen şey ya da kişi, sözlü kültürden başka bir medyuma taşınırken anlatı indirgenmek zorundadır. İmgeleştirme sürecinde anlatının muğlaklığını ve çok yönlülüğünü zedeleyen bir eksiltme vardır. Daha ziyade kutsal şahsiyetleri betimlemek bir yöntem olarak kullanılan tipolojik simgeleştirme, gerçeklikle ve sanatla kurulan ilişkiyi sorunlu hale getirir.² *Aşk* romanının yayın aşamasındayken neden olduğu tepkinin ve kitabın yayınlanmasının ardından yağın eleştirilerdeki hassasiyetin yöneldiği adres, bir bakıma bu tarihi şahsiyetlerin yaşam hikâyelerinin romanın kurmacalığı içinde anakronik bir bakışla biçimlendirilmiş olmasıdır. Ancak bununla birlikte, dünyevi bir deneyim olduğu düşünülen tensel *aşkın* metaforu olarak, uhrevi bir deneyim olarak tanımlanan tasavvufi/ilahi aşkın seçilmiş olmasıdır.

Aşk romanı etrafında gelişen tartışmalarda eleştirmenlerin çıkış noktasın belirleyen yazarın açıklamaları olmuştur. Mesela; bu romanda tasavvufun, tensel aşkın metaforu olarak kullanıldığı argümanı öncelikle yazar tarafından dile getirilmiştir. Burada önemli olan ayrım metnin değerlendirilmesinde yazarın niyetini mi temel alacağız sorusudur. Çünkü bilindiği gibi metnin, yazarsal niyeti aşan bir fazlalığı vardır. Dolayısıyla yazarsal niyeti denklemin dışında bırakmadan yapılacak bir değerlendirme salt yazarsal niyeti eleştirmek ile bu niyetin metnin içinde nasıl temsil edildiğine bakmak arasındaki eleştirel yaklaşım farklılığını da ortaya koymaktadır. Bu fark, aynı zamanda metnin

¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press: (1989) 512.

² Landow, George P., *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, Yale University Press: (1979) 88.

kendisine yönelik beklentilerin bir tasarımı olmanın ötesinde, belirli bir toplumsal deneyim etrafında oluşan dile ve edebiyata içkin sınırlara ve metnin temsile direnen niteliğine de işaret eder. Böylece Edward W. Said'in bahsettiği eleştirel bilinç (*critical consciousness*) taşıyan dinamik bir eleştirinin potansiyellerini gösterir. *Aşk* romanına gelen eleştirilere bu bilinçle baktığımızda akla pek çok soru gelmektedir. Bunlardan bazıları şunlardır:

Antoine Compagnon'nun "okur" ve "metin" kavramlarını dışarıda bırakarak edebiliği kavramaya çalışan bir eleştiri, edebî eleştiri alanında nasıl konumlandırılabilir? Yazarı metnin nihai sahibi olarak görmeden bundan bağımsız bir eleştiri nasıl kurulabilir? Baskın dili kullanmaksızın hâkim kültürün getirdiği taleplerin baskılarına direnerek dinamik bir eleştiri üretilebilir mi? Bu sorular çoğaltılabilir ama temeldeki sorun eleştirinin hangi kavramlarla ve nasıl bir bakış açısıyla düşünülmesi gerektiği olarak kalır. Bu soruların yanıtını ararken Michel Foucault'nun "yazar" kavramı ile Said'in her iki anlamıyla yani; "eleştirel bilinç" in bir gereği ve metinsel deneyimin bir özelliği olarak kullandığı "dünyevilik" kavramlarının sunduğu bakış açısından destek alınacaktır.

Elif Şafak'ın kendi yapıtına dair açıklamalarının metnin önüne geçerek edebî eleştiriyi nasıl belirlediğini gösterebilmek için öncelikle eleştirmenler tarafından eleştirinin temel malzemesi yapılan yazarın kendi yapıtına dair değerlendirmelerine yer verilecektir. Bu bağlamda yazarın, kitabının tanıtım söyleşilerine bakılacaktır.

Bu söyleşilerde yaptığı açıklamalardan en çok dikkat çeken "zıt gibi görünen karakterleri olan manevi (tasavvufi) aşk ile dünyevi (tensel) aşkı evrensel bir öz" arayışı içinde buluşturmak istediğini söylemesi olmuştur:

Bu romanda okura yüreğimi açtım. Tasavvuf benim sırrımdı, o sırrı aşıkâr ettim. Şems ve Mevlana hakkında bir kitap yazayım arzusuyla kaleme aldım bu kitabı. Ben "aşk"ı anlatmak istedim. Buydu çıkış noktam. Hem dünyevi hem manevi boyutlarıyla aşkı yazdım. Zıt gibi görünen karakterleri yan yana getirerek evrensel bir öz yakalamayı arzuladım. 2008 senesinde Boston'da yaşayan üç çocuk annesi mutsuz bir Yahudi kadın için Mevlana ne ifade ediyor, bu sorunun cevabını kovaladım.³

Yazar tarafından dile getirilen bu beklenti, sanki bir taraftan diğerine geçilebilen bir eşikte; deneyimler arasındaki farklılıkların silinerek tasavvufi ve tensel aşkın birbirinin içine geçmesi ile yakalanacak yeni ve evrensel bir öze gönderme yapmaktadır. Bu ifade; yazarın, İslam'ın Allah inancına özgü olan "tasavvufi" aşkını "yeniden yazarak" evrensel bir deneyime dönüştürmeyi tasarlamış olduğu şeklinde yorumlanmıştır. Ancak irdelenecek Dücan Cündioğlu, Şükrü Argın ve Mehmet Tekin'in eleştirilerinde, yazarın yapıtını "tasavvufi roman" değil

³ Elif Şafak, "Aşk Kitabı Çıktı", Zaman Gazetesi, 10 Mart 2009.

“içinden tasavvuf geçen” roman olarak tanımlaması, tasavvufun romandaki kullanımına yönelik itirazların da temellendirildiği bir nokta olmuştur. Bu nedenle, bu eleştirilerde, tasavvufun romana kendiliğini veren bir unsur olarak değil de bir dekor olarak araçsallaştırıldığı, evrensel bir öz arayışının nesnesi yapıldığı argümanı sıkça yer verilir.

Görüldüğü gibi inceleyeceğim eleştiriler, romanı inanç deneyimi ile dünyevi aşk arasında bir geçişkenlik olduğuna işaret etmesini değil; daha ziyade bu geçişkenlikte bir tarafın ağır basarak yekdiğerini bastırmasını tartışır.⁴ Bu yorum, ilk eleştiri noktasını ortaya çıkarır: “İlahi aşkın yekpare dünyevi bir deneyime tercüme edilmesi”⁵. Metafizik ve fiziksel düzlem gibi birbirinden farklı boyutlarda tecrübe edilen bu deneyimleri buluşturabilecek metaforik bir “eşik”in tahayyül edilebileceği tek yer edebiyattır ve bu, Elif Şafak’ın ifade ettiği gibi kendi icat ettiği ya da uyguladığı yeni bir şey değil; edebiyata içkin olan bir unsurdur. Graham Ward’un “*How Literature Resists Secularity*” adlı makalesinde işaret ettiği gibi, edebiyatın bir türlü tam olarak dünyevileştirilemeyen metafizik bir ufku (*horizon of transcendence*) ve durdurulamayan bir yönelimi vardır⁶. *Aşk*’ta olduğu gibi kutsal ya da tarihi konuları, şahsiyetleri ele alırken mevcut gerçeklik edebiyat aracılığıyla yeniden yazılır. Nitekim tasavvufu ele alan bir romanın Sûfi aşkını edebiyat yoluyla yeniden yazması, roman türü göz önüne alındığında neredeyse bir zorunluluktur; zira roman tarihi şahsiyetleri veya toplumsal olguları konu alıyorsa onları kaçınılmaz olarak yeniden yazıp dönüştürür. Ancak bu yeniden yazım aktarılan gerçekliği dünyevileştirecek diye bir kaide de yoktur; çünkü Ward’un da belirttiği gibi edebiyatın gayb’a gizeme açılan pencereleri vardır ve bu açıdan kestirilemez bir dönüştürme kapasitesi vardır. Dolayısıyla yazarın iddialı açıklamalarına dayandırılan bu eleştiri kendi kendinin altını oymaktadır.

İlk eleştiri noktasının bir sonucu sayılabilecek ikinci temel eleştiri noktası; tasavvufun vermek istenen mesaj yoluyla araçsallaştırıldığını iddia eder. Ancak eleştirmenlerin bu yorumu metinden hareketle değil, daha ziyade yazarın biyografisinden ve kitap tanıtımlarında yaptığı açıklamalardan çıkarsadıklarına dair önemli bulgular vardır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada, *Aşk* romanını eleştirmek üzere yazılmış üç ayrı metinde, eleştiri nesnesinin nasıl belirlendiğini, eleştirinin dinamikleri üzerinden incelemek gereği duydum. Dücane Cündioğlu, Şükrü Argın ve Mehmet Tekin’e ait makalelerin yan yana değerlendirilmesi, ideolojik yaklaşımlar ve otomatik/kişisel yargılara bağlı kalınarak yapılan eleştiriyi, edebi

⁴ Nitekim herhangi bir romanın bu geçişkenliğe işaret etmesi yeni değildir, Fuzuli’nin “Leyla vü Mecnun”u ve diğer pek çok klasik anlatı aşkın dönüşümü temasına yer verirler.

⁵ Vurgu bana aittir.

⁶ Graham Ward, “*How Literature Resists Secularity: Literature and Theology*” (2010) 73–88,

eleştiri alanında konumlandırmanın güçlüğüne göstermesi bakımından önemli görünür.

Antoine Compagnon *Literature, Theory and Common Sense* kitabında edebîlik kavramının işaret ettiği çoğulcu teori, okurun alımlama biçimini işe koşacak ve biyografik yazardan tümüyle bağımsız işlemeyen bir süreçten bahseder⁷. “What is an Author?” makalesinde okurun pozisyonunu deşifre eden Foucault da; okurun metni alımlayışının, yazarın nasıl algılandığından ve nasıl bir söylem kurduğundan bağımsız olmadığını belirtir⁸. Bu durumda; biyografik yazardan, yazarın üretim süreçlerinden ve bunun dönemin okuru tarafından nasıl algılandığından ayrılmayacak edebî bir anlamlandırma süreci olduğuna işaret etmektedir. Edward Said bu anlamlandırmanın “metnin dünyeviliği”ni göz önüne alarak mümkün olacağını söylemektedir⁹. Metnin dünyeviliği, metnin içinde biçimlendiği dünyanın, yani, yazarın yazma anının ya da biyografisinin etkilerinin bir bileşkesini, romandaki hikâyenin de taşıması demektir. Böylelikle metin, mesela *Aşk*’ın metni, kurmaca dünyasında metinselleşen tasavvufi tahayyülden bağımsız bir oluştan sahip olur. Bu kavram Compagnon ve Foucault’nun “edebîlik” ve “alımlama” kriterlerine ilaveten yazarın yazım anının üretim şartlarıyla birleştiği bir gerçekliğe gönderme yapmaktadır. Okurken ve eleştirirken üretim şartlarının belirlediği bir dünyanın ve edebi yapının içinden çıktığı bir bağlam olduğunun farkında olmak iki açıdan önemlidir. Bu farkındalık hem metin ile eleştirel bir mesafe kurabilmeyi hem de otomatik yargılarımız ve ideolojik pozisyonumuzla hesaplaşabilmeyi sağlar. Bunun önemi bahsettiğim eleştiri metinlerini okurken daha iyi anlaşılıyor.

İncelenecek eleştirilerden ilki; Düccane Cündioğlu’nun *Yeni Şafak*’taki köşesinde seri halinde kaleme aldığı makalelerde yer almıştır. Yukarıda bahsi geçen her iki eleştiri noktasını da içinde barındırmaktadır. Bu makale yoluyla öne sürülen temel argüman “*Aşk*’ta tasavvufi mecazın yazarın elinde bir hakikate dönüşmüş” olmasıdır.¹⁰ Bu eleştiri, aslında yazarın tensel ve ilahi aşkın deneyimini roman dünyası içinde buluşturan “eşik”e yapılan bir itirazdır. Çünkü edebiyatın muğlaklığının mümkün kıldığı metaforik eşikte aynı aşkınlık (transandant/müt’eal) düzeyinde buluşturulan ve metnin içinde yeniden yazılan bu deneyimler arasında yaşanan etkileşim, ayırt edici özelliklerin silinmesine yol açmaktadır. Romanda bir metafor olarak kullanılan ilahi aşkın, bilinen yegâne deneyim olan dünyevi aşka dönüşmesi ise yazarın yönelimini yansıtır. Örneğe

⁷ Antoine Compagnon, *Literature, Theory and Common Sense*. Princeton: (Princeton University Press 2004), 4.

⁸ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”, 1969 <http://english.colorado.edu/>

⁹ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Harvard University Press: (1999.) 23-50.

¹⁰ Düccane Cündioğlu “Mevlana, Şems ve Aşk”, *Yeni Şafak* Gazetesi, 25, 2009,8.

Fuzuli dünyevi aşkı uhrevi bir aşka dönüştürmüştür. Cündioğlu'nun en bu deneyimlerin yan yanılığıdır, ancak bunun yanı sıra, Mevlânâ, Kerra, Şems ve Kimya Hatun gibi tarihi kişiliklerin hayatlarını çarpıtarak “sadece hakikati değil sanatı da incitmiş” olmasına tepkilidir.¹¹ Ancak makalesinin henüz başında, özyaşamöyküsünde Şems'in etkisine değinen Cündioğlu'nun bu tür metinlere manevi bir deneyimi aramak üzere yöneldiği anlaşılmaktadır:

Ne de olsa şiirdi, romandı sanattı...mecazdı. Bunlar sözüm ona kanatları (ilmi) güçlü olanların semasıydı...Şems'in ışığı onlara hangi hakikatin açıklamasını göstermişti? Sonuç gayet acı vericiydi. Çünkü ortada hakikat değil, hatta hakikatin edebiyatı bile değil; hakikatin edebiyatının edebiyatı vardı.¹²

Bu ifadenin üstüne düşünöldükçe anlamsızlaşması, Cündioğlu'nun edebiyat için öngördüğü gerçekliğin, “tasavvufi hakikat anlayışı” olarak adlandırdığı akideyle temelde aynı olmasından kaynaklanır. Yazar, bu tür romandan beklentisini şöyle ifade eder:

Hakikatten yoksun ve samimiyetten! Ferd planında çekilen ıstırabın kokusu duyulmuyor; ne şahsi bir hesaplaşmanın ne gerçek bir acının! İlâhi aşk, beşeri aşk...Hepsi de nâdan edebiyatı! Hepsi de birer dil oyunu! Evet hepsi de yaşanmamış bir aleme öykünmenin ürünü!¹³

Halbuki Cündioğlu'nun bu yapıtın kullandığı temsil mekanizmalarına getirdiği eleştirilerin hepsi, başka bir açıdan bakıldığında, modernist edebiyatın unsurlarını oluşturur. Mesela “yaşanmamış bir dünyaya öykünmek”, Peter Brooks'un bahsettiği “olası dünyalar” (*possible worlds*) arasından birini seçerek bunu kurgulamak anlamına gelir ve modernist anlamdaki gerçekçiliğin bir edimidir¹⁴. Yahut “dil oyunları” yaparak görünen gerçekliğin altını oymak modernist edebiyatın vazgeçemediği bir unsurdur. Mesela, Oğuz Atay, ünlü romanı *Tutunamayanlar*'ın bütün metnini aslında bir dil oyunundan, metin parçalarının parodize edilmesinden oluşan tek bir metin olarak kurgulamış olduğu yorumu genel olarak da paylaşılır¹⁵. Dolayısıyla Cündioğlu'nun hezeyanının arkasındaki mantık düşöndürücüdür; zira her romanın ya da tasavvufi romanın böyle bir deneyim yaşatma gibi bir zorunluluğu yoktur.

¹¹ Aynı Adlı Eser, (a.a.e.), 4.

¹² A.a.e., 9.

¹³ A.a.e., 10.

¹⁴ Peter Brooks, *World Elsewhere*, Oxford University Press: (1999), 54.

¹⁵ Nurdan Gürbilek, *Vitrinde Yaşamak*, Metis Kitap: (1999), 82.

Edward Said, analizinde, edebî olmayan ya da dominant dil(ler)i kullanmayan metinlerin kanon dışı kabul edildiği tespitinde bulunmuştur¹⁶. Cündioğlu'nun eleştirisi de tasavvufi bir kanon ile bağdaşır olma kriterini temel alır ancak, bu bağlamda, Said'in belirlediği netlikte hâkim bir tasavvufi edebiyat kanonu olup olmadığı, varsa bunun hangi eserlerden oluştuğu görelî ve oldukça tartışmalı meselelerdir. Buna karşın, Cündioğlu üzerinde genel bir uzlaşım olmayan bir kanona uymadığı için -Said'in analizi böyle bir kanon olsa bile bunun bir değerlendirme kriteri olmasına itiraz eder- esere otomatik bir ön yargıyla yaklaşmaktadır. Örneğin, eğer bu eser özelinde Cündioğlu tarafından varsayılan tasavvufi eser olma teamülleri yerine getirilmiş olsaydı; eleştirilemez olacaktı. Eleştiri noktası bu olduğunda akla, yazarın eleştirisinde geniş yer tutan “*Aşk* romanı bu şahsiyetler yerine başkalarını kullansaydı eleştirmen için böyle bir “sorun” ortaya çıkar mıydı?” sorusu da takılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla eleştirmen, estetik anlayıştan ibaret kıldığı ve kendi hakikat anlayışını dayattığı kültürel unsurların belirlediği bir edebîliği esere dayatmaktadır. Bu noktadan hareketle, Düccane Cündioğlu eleştirilerinde, eleştirel bilincin gerektirdiği kişisel yargılardan bağımsız bir eleştiriye kapısını baştan kapatmıştır, denebilir.

Şükrü Argın'ın *Aşk* romanına dair eleştirisinde Cündioğlu ile kıyaslandığında kurmacanın hakikatle olan ilişkisini önemli oranda tartıştığı ve eleştirisini romanın türsel nitelikleriyle temellendirdiği görülür. Buna rağmen, romana karşı “öfkesini” gizlemeyen eleştirmenin Şafak'a karşı hakaretamiz ifadeler kullanmaktan çekinmediği görülür. Argın'ın eleştirisinin Cündioğlu'nun eleştirisiyle birleştiği ve ayrıldığı yerler vardır. Cündioğlu, Kuran-ı Kerim'in yorumlanmasında “anakronizmler” yolu ile propaganda yapıldığını dile getirirken, Argın da karakterizasyon açısından romanı anakronik bulur. Ancak romanı içerik değil biçim üzerinden tartışması, Argın'ın eleştirisini Cündioğlu'nun eleştirisinden ayırıştırır. Argın, bir romanı “inandırıcı” kılan üç temel hakikatten birini; dış gerçekliğe işaret eden hakikati kurmadığı gerekçesiyle *Aşk*'ı eleştirir ve romanı, diğer hakikatleri kurmak noktasında da başarısız bulur. *Aşk*'ın ne iç tutarlılığı sağlayan hakikati, ne de büyük harfle yazılan ve Kafka'nın *Dönüşüm* adlı eserinin sezdirmediği epistemolojik hakikati kurabildiğini öne sürer. Eleştirmenin ele aldığı metni “*romance*” ve “*para-roman*” kavramlarının etrafında tartışarak, okur ve piyasa bağlantılarını kurduğu bir kültür endüstrisi içinde konumlandırma çabası, ilk bakışta akademik bir tartışma izlenimi bıraksa da, yapıtı konumlandırma biçimi ve yaptığı edebî/türsel ayrımlar tartışmalı görünür. *Aşk* romanını, *para roman* ile *pop roman* kavramlarının kesişim noktasında konumlandıran Argın, yazara merkezi bir rol biçerek okuru denklemin dışında bırakan bir taksonomi kurar. Örneğin “tür

¹⁶ Edward Said, “*The World, the Text and the Critic*”. Harward University Press: (1999.) 22.

romanlar” dediği metinleri, “edebî romanlar” dediği metinlerin altında sınıflandırır ve bunlar arasında dikey bir ilişki kurar ama bu sınıflandırmayı hangi kriterlere göre yaptığına dair bir dayanak göstermez. Edebiyatın son kertede hayal ve hakikat ile ilgili iken bir “tür roman” olan *pop romanın* fantezi ile ilgili olduğunu belirterek yaptığı sınıflandırmayı nihâileştirir. Elbette, her metin eleştirilebilir olmalıdır ama eleştirinin gittiği yer, yüksek/alçak edebiyat kategorilendirmesi ise eleştirileni değil; önce bu eleştirinin dayattığı hiyerarşinin ardındaki mantığın sorunsallaştırılması gerekir.

Argın’a göre *Aşk* romanının edebiyat âleminde konumlanmasının en önemli nedeni “çengel attığı” ya da daha doğru bir ifadeyle dünyevileştirdiği “tasavvuf, tarih ve maneviyattır”¹⁷. Eleştirmen, bu bağlamda çerçeve hikâye olarak nicel anlamda çok daha az yer işgal eden ve daha özensiz çizilmiş olduğunu düşündüğü Aziz ile Ella’nın aşkının neden Mevlana ile Şems’in yer aldığı gömülü hikâyeden daha hegemonik bir konumda olduğunu sorgular. Aziz ile Ella’nın hikâyesinin baskın olmasının nedenini, bunun *romance* türüne has özellikleri kendinde bulundurması ile açıklar. Argın’a göre, yapı olarak da birbirine açılan hikâyeler arasındaki ilişki, yazarın kutsallık deneyimini, romantik aşka açılan ve onu dünyevileştiren bir güzergâh olarak kullanması ile kurulmaktadır. Bu bağlamda eleştirmen, “yerinden koparılarak kutsanan aşkın söyleminin yeni romantik aşk teolojisi olarak baştan aşağı yeniden biçim”lendirilmesini, romandaki aşk temasının değişimiyle (uhrevi aşktan dünyevi aşka) paralel okumaktadır¹⁸. Eleştirmene göre, “Aziz ile Ella’nın aşk hikâyesinin sorgulanabilir ahlâksallığına rağmen gömülü hikâyedeki Mevlana ile Şems’in müte’al aşkına baskın olmasının nedeni, ilahi aşkın büyü bozumu”dur. Bu noktada, Argın’ın “sorgulanabilir ahlâksallığı olan aşk” yorumunun üstünde durulması gerekir. Yazarın kutsallık/dünyevilik ayrımı etrafında tartıştığı aşkları, moral değerler üzerinden karşılaştırması ilginçtir. Bu yorum eleştirmenin muhafazakar yönelimini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca aşkın dünyevileştirilmesini roman dünyasına ait bir edim olarak tespit etmiş olması da hayli tuhaf görünür; zira bu boyutta kavrayamadığımız bir duygulanımı dünyevileştirmek roman türüne yeni bir işlevsellik yüklemektir ve bunun tartışmalı olacağı açıktır. Argın’ın romanın edimlerinden birini böyle tanımlaması, Cündioğlu’nun rasyonel algılarımızla bazı gerçeklikleri (tarihsel, sosyolojik ya da kadim insani) kavrama teşebbüsümüzün yetersizliğine dair yaptığı tespit ile örtüşür. Her iki eleştirmen de bunu belirttikten sonra, *Aşk*’taki yazarın niyetini bahsini ettikleri romana ait edimden ya da insani bir perspektif kaybından kolaylıkla ayırt ederler. Bunun ideolojik ya da pazar amaçlı olduğunu ileri sürerek, metne hiçbir gönderme yapmaksızın tartışır ki böyle bir eleştirinin kendisi ideolojiyle

¹⁷ Şükrü Argın “Umutsuz Ev Kadınlarına Sufiyane Tavsiyeler”, *Cumhuriyet*, 30,09, 2009.

¹⁸ Aynı Adlı Eser (A.a.e.).4.

ilişkilenmektedir. Çünkü yazarın kimi açıklamalarından çıkarsanabilecek bir niyetin metnin içinde gerçekleşip gerçekleşmediğini, öyleyse nasıl olduğunu incelemek gereğini duymazlar.

Mehmet Tekin, Cündioğlu gibi yapıtın biçimine değil içeriğine dönük bir eleştiri getirir. Eleştirisinde özellikle dikkati çeken *Aşk*'ı Susan Rubin Suleiman'ın ortaya attığı tezli roman kategorisi içinde değerlendirmeyi önermesidir. Bu argüman potansiyel bir eleştirinin yolunu açabilecekken Tekin, *Aşk* romanının tezini belirlemekte güçlük çeker. Karakterlerin dine yaklaşımındaki anakronik bakışından hareketle bu metin aracılığıyla işlenenin “dinler arası diyalog” ya da “medeniyetler ittifakı” olduğunu iddia ederek bir komplo teorisine prim verir. Oysa makalesinde öne sürdüğü başka bir argüman romanı konumlandırmak için kilit noktadır. Tensel aşkın “tasavvufi aşk söyleminin yerine ikame edilmesi ile elde edilen evrensel aşkın insanı ve dünyayı değiştirebileceği tezi”nin romanda işlenip işlenmediğine dair bir tezli roman tartışması yürütülebilir¹⁹.

Tekin'in de temas ettiği gibi Ella, Tanrı'dan hakiki bir aşk ister ki; bu, ilahi aşktır. Ancak niyaz edilen ve peşinden koşulan aşk, tamamen dünyevi ya da tensel bir aşktır. Okurda tamamen ilahi düzeyde yaşanacak bir aşk sunacağı beklentisi uyandıran *Aşk* bir illüzyon yapar ve okuru aslında ters köşeye yatırır. Bunun en somut örneği romanın sonunda karşımıza çıkar. Anlatıcı, “Ella için (...) bu erkeğin bedeni bir bedenden fazlası, bir mabetti” der²⁰. Ancak ters köşeye yatan yalnızca okur mudur, bilinmez; zira metinde Ella'nın, Aziz Zahara ile gayrimeşru ilişkisi ve tasavvufa vasıl olma olgusunun iç içe geçirilmesi söz konusu değilse de bu yönde bir çaba hissedilir. Mesela, Ella “Aziz yoksa sen Şems misin?” diye sorar.²¹ Buna karşın Aziz yaşarken ve tensel aşkın öznesiyken, doğrudan ona atfedilmeyen ilâhîlik ölümünden sonra daha belirgin bir biçimde ima edilir. Kefaretini çekerek ölen Aziz, böylece kelimenin asıl manasıyla bir “aziz” olarak betimlenir. Dolayısıyla ilahi bir aşk arayışının son bulduğu yer, Leyla ile Mecnun'daki gibi tensel aşk değil; ancak onsuz varılan bir nokta olur.

Tasavvufi romanın ulvi bir deneyime dönüşmesini bekleyen Cündioğlu'nun da, edebiyatı eğlenceden mutlak olarak ayırıp, mistik anlatının ancak sanatın sunduğu kutsal edebi deneyim içinde kavranabileceğini söyleyen Argın'ın da, romanın bir tezi olduğunu iddia eden ancak bunun ne olduğunu ortaya koyamayan Mehmet Tekin'in de eleştirilerinin odaklandığı yer, yazarın niyetidir. Said'in bahsettiği “eleştirel bir bilincin” önünü açabilecek yol, metnin içindeki dünyanın farkında olmak ve yazarsal niyeti, hâkim ideolojinin sunduğu verili, ahlaki kodlarla yargılamadan değerlendirmeyi gerektirir. Yazarsal niyeti

¹⁹ Mehmet Tekin, “Tuhaf Bir Tezli Roman: *Aşk*”. Türk Edebiyatı Araştırmaları Yayınları: (2009) 37.

²⁰ Elif Şafak, *Aşk*, (İstanbul:Doğan Kitap, 2007), 371.

²¹ Aa.e., 278.

sorgulamanın ötesine geçemeyen bir edebi eleştiri derinlikli bir analize yapamaz. Nitekim böyle bir okuma, bu eleştirilerde metin incelemesinin yetersizliğine koşut bir biçimde, hem metnin temsil mekanizmalarını inceleyen bir yakın okuma, hem de metin ile okur arasındaki etkileşimden ortaya çıkan manaya dair bağlamsal bir okuma yapılmasıyla mümkündür.

Aşk üzerine çıkan eleştiriler, muhafazakâr bir kültürün edebiyat alanı üzerindeki etkisi ve hısım bağlarını yeniden üreten gücünü ortaya koyar. Bu eleştiriye kışkırtan, genel toplumsal tahayyülde dünyaya ait olmadığı düşünülen tarihsel varlıkların roman türünün dünyeviliğine boyanmasıdır, ya da bahsi geçen eleştirmenlerin dediği gibi “yanlış boyanmış” olmasıdır. İlk süreç, roman türünün kendinden menkul tasavvuf etiketine ya da şahsiyetlerine aldırmandan metnin dünyevilik (*wordliness*) halini sonuna kadar taşıması ile ilişkilidir ve bu bütün romanlar için geçerlidir. Nasıl boyandığı ise söylenildiği gibi yazarın yetkinliği/yönelimiyle ilintilidir.

Eleştirmenlere göre *Aşk*’ı başka bir açıdan dünyevileştiren diğer süreç bu eleştirmenlerin eleştirilerini belirleyen asıl nokta olmuştur. Manevi bir deneyim olan müte’al aşkın, tensel aşkın bir unsuru haline getirilmesine yönelik eleştiri, *Aşk* romanına baştan sona hâkim olan tensel aşkın gelişmesi sürecinde manevi bir deneyimin araçsallaştırıldığı iddiasına dayanır. Bu durumda, bu önermenin karşılığını doğrudan metinde görebilmemiz gerekirdi. İlahi unsuru, dünyevi aşkla temsil ederek evrensellik yakalamayı hedeflediğini söyleyen bir yazarın bunu metinde ne ölçüde gerçekleştirmiş olduğu sorusu, eleştirinin odağını yazarsal niyetten metne kaydıran bir sorudur ve bu bakımdan önemlidir. Eleştirmenlerin gerekçelendirmelerinde tutarsızlık ve yetersizliğin ortaya çıkmasının nedeni de bulur. Edebi eleştirinin temel gereği olan metni dayanak gösterme, metin odaklı bir okumada ortaya çıkan veri analizinin sonuçlarını karşılaştırarak ortaya konulması ile gerçekleşir. Bu eleştiriler, kritik süreçlerin atlandığını ve yazarsal niyetin metin üzerinden sorgulanmasını ortaya koymaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, üretim şartları ve temsil mekanizmalarıyla *Aşk* seküler bir anlatı olarak dünyeviliğini, bu dünyeviliğin ne tür unsurlar içerdiğini ve bunların ne anlama geldiğini açık eden bir metindir. Bu yapının ürettiği edebi anlam, metinden hareket eden bir eleştiri tarafından ortaya çıkarılmayı ve tartışılmayı beklemektedir. *Aşk*’ın yayınlandığı dönemde muhatap olduğu eleştiriler, eleştirinin büyübozumudur. Metnin dünyeviliğini reddeden bir eleştiri, dünyevi olan ve olmayan veçheleri taşıyan metinle ilişki kuramaz ve bu ise eleştiriye kaçınılmaz olarak yazarsal niyeti sorgulayan kişisel önyargıların devrede olduğu bir alana hapseder. Çünkü metnin, yazarsal niyetten taşan bir fazlalığı ve çok yönlülüğü mevzuudur. Buna bigâne kalmak, yukarıda incelenen eleştirilerde görüldüğü gibi, eleştirmenin eleştiri nesnesi ile ilişkisini tek taraflı ve ideolojik bir hale getirmesiyle sonuçlanır.

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In Search of the Ghosts of Postcolonial Gothic: Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*

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Abstract

This article offers a reading of the British-Guyanese writer Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) as a postcolonial Gothic text, which is the name given to texts that make use of Gothic motifs to address the unresolved conflicts and traumas of the colonial past. The purpose of this article is to show that *Feeding the Ghosts*, which presents a fictional retelling of a real atrocity that took place on a British slave ship in the late eighteenth century, employs the Gothic motif of the ghost in order to explore the haunting legacy of slavery. The novel focuses on a slave woman called Mintah who remains haunted by the ghosts of her fellow slaves that are ruthlessly killed during the Middle Passage, i.e. the voyage between Africa and the Americas. This article argues that the ghosts that haunt Mintah represent not only her own traumatic past, but also the past of slavery in general. In *Feeding the Ghosts*, the relationship between the past and the present, the dead and the living is depicted as a haunting that emanates from the cultural trauma of slavery whose reverberations continue to the present day. This article also undertakes to show that the novel's emphasis on the persistence of the past within present, which is actually one of the defining characteristic of the postcolonial Gothic, is in line with Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology, which stresses that there cannot be a living present that is not haunted by the traces of what has gone before as well as what is to come.

Keywords: Postcolonial Gothic, ghost, slavery, cultural trauma, Middle Passage, hauntology

Fred D'aguiar'ın *Feeding the Ghosts* Romanında Postkolonyal Gotiğin Hayaletleri

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Özet

Bu makale Guyana asıllı Britanyalı yazar Fred D'Aguiar'ın *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) romanını, kolonyal geçmişe ait travmaları ve çatışmaları Gotik motiflerden yararlanarak dile getiren postkolonyal Gotik bir metin olarak ele alıp incelemektedir. Bu makalenin amacı, on sekizinci yüzyılda Britanyalılara ait bir köle gemisinde yaşanan gerçek bir katliamın kurgusal anlatımını sunan romanın köleliğin süregelen etkilerini irdelenmek amacıyla Gotiğe has bir unsur olan hayalet motifine başvurduğunu göstermektir. Roman, Ara Geçiş adı verilen Afrika ile Amerika kıtası arasındaki yolculuk sırasında acımasızca katledilen köle kaderdaşlarının hayaletlerinden ömrü boyunca kurtulamayan Mintah adlı köle kadına odaklanır. Bu makale, Mintah'a musallat olan hayaletlerin sadece kendi yaşadığı travmatik deneyimleri değil, kölelik tarihindeki bütün travmaları temsil ettiğini öne sürer. Romanda geçmiş ile şimdi, ölü ile diri arasındaki ilişki, hayaletlerle ilintili bir kavram olan "musallat olma" haline benzetilir ve köleliğin sebep olduğu kültürel travmanın etkilerinin günümüze dek sürdüğü vurgulanır. Böylece *Feeding the Ghosts* postkolonyal Gotiğin belirleyici özellikleri arasında yer alan geçmişin şimdinin içinde varlığını sürdürdüğü fikrinin altını çizer. Bu makale, romanın bu yönüyle geçmişin ve geleceğin izlerini taşımayan bir şimdinin olamayacağını vurgulayan Jacques Derrida'nın musallat-bilim kuramıyla uyum içinde olduğunu göstermeyi de hedefler.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Postkolonyal Gotik, hayalet, kölelik, kültürel travma, Ara Geçiş, musallat-bilim

“*The past is never dead. It’s not even past.*”¹

The Gothic and the postcolonial both share an interest in the haunting legacies of the past that continue to exert their hold on the present. Like the Gothic, which evolved in eighteenth-century Europe and told chilling tales set in haunted, feudal castles overshadowed by dark family secrets involving past crimes, the postcolonial is characterized by a logic of haunting. Since postcolonialism denotes the period after colonialism, postcolonial experience is inevitably haunted by the colonial past, or by what John Thieme aptly calls “the Gothic trace of colonialism.”² More often than not, postcolonial narratives portray the present as haunted by the traces of a history characterized by colonial violence, loss, pain, humiliation, dispossession and exile. This tendency is nowhere more evident than in postcolonial Gothic, where Gothic horror intersects with the horror of colonialism. Postcolonial Gothic, which “has become increasingly prevalent since the early 1980s,”³ can be defined as a type of postcolonial writing that makes use of Gothic motifs, such as ghosts, haunted ruins, mysterious and uncanny events, in order to address the unresolved conflicts and traumas of the colonial past.⁴ As Punter and Byron put it, postcolonial Gothic narratives “deal with the impossibility of escape from history, with the recurrent sense in Gothic fiction that the past can never be left behind, that it will reappear and exact a necessary price.”⁵

The Gothic motif of the ghost, in particular, holds considerable appeal for postcolonial writers who, in their attempt to reconfigure the Gothic in such a way as to suit their own agenda, tend to deploy the ghost as a means of addressing such themes as the lingering presence of pre-colonial cultural heritage, colonial oppression and the unspeakable crimes perpetrated by the colonialists that return to haunt the present. Thus, as if in confirmation of the claim that “[h]aunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony,”⁶ in postcolonial Gothic, ghosts emerge as the natural byproducts of colonial oppression. As a general rule, the ghosts of postcolonial Gothic have a mission to fulfil, which usually consists in notifying us of undocumented instances of colonial violence that are rendered invisible under dominant cultural discourses, hegemonic ideologies and official

¹ William Faulkner, *Requiem For a Nun* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 69.

² John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 91.

³ David Punter and Glennis Byron, “Postcolonial Gothic,” in *The Gothic* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 54.

⁴ For more information on postcolonial Gothic, see Punter and Byron as well as Wisker.

⁵ Punter and Byron, “Postcolonial Gothic,” 55.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 46.

histories. The British-Guyanese writer Fred D'Aguiar, who, along with Caryl Phillips and David Dabydeen, belongs to the younger generation of black British and Caribbean authors, "is in line with other postcolonial writers who invoke spectres and ghosts to represent the devastating effects of colonization and slavery."⁷ This article, which offers a reading of Fred D'Aguiar's 1997 novel *Feeding the Ghosts* as a postcolonial Gothic text, undertakes to show that D'Aguiar's novel makes recourse to the Gothic motif of the ghost as a means of foregrounding the persistence of the past within the present and of the dead within the living in such a way as to shed light on the haunting legacy of slavery.

Slavery is a subject rarely addressed by the older generation of Caribbean and black British writers, not least because Britain's involvement in the slave trade has generally been obscured owing to the fact that "unlike the United States, Britain has never had slave societies in the 'motherland'" since "Britain's slavery took place in the Caribbean."⁸ Yet, the transatlantic slave trade between Africa and the Americas, in which Britain played a leading role in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, figures prominently in D'Aguiar's writings. As a writer of Caribbean descent born in London to British-Guyanese parents, D'Aguiar seems to have an acute awareness of his slave ancestry: "My first awareness of history was of my place in it as the descendant of slaves."⁹ As a matter of fact, "D'Aguiar's texts expose his profound struggle to suggest ways of remembering slavery,"¹⁰ which also holds true for *Feeding the Ghosts*, where the notorious voyage of a British slave ship in the eighteenth century provides the starting point for exploring the horrors of slavery. *Feeding the Ghosts* is the fictional account of a real event that took place in 1781, when the Captain and crew of the British slave ship *Zong* massacred 131 slaves by throwing them into the ocean over the course of three days.

It is worth noting that such atrocities as killing captured slaves by throwing them overboard were by no means uncommon practices at the time, particularly in order to quell the threat of insurrection. In fact, such practices were not legally defined as murder because slaves did not have the legal status of human beings; they were nothing other than chattel, or cargo. Nonetheless, the *Zong* massacre gained notoriety due to the sheer number of the slaves massacred and helped focus public attention on Britain's role in the transatlantic slave trade, showing it in a very unflattering light. During the court case that followed, the Captain of

⁷ Justin D. Edwards, *Postcolonial Literature* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 119.

⁸ Abigail Ward, *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar: Representations of Slavery* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2011), 3.

⁹ Fred D'Aguiar, "Further Adventures in the Skin Trade," quoted in Ward, *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar*, 131.

¹⁰ Ward, *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar*, 133.

the *Zong* claimed that he had resorted to this drastic measure as a necessary precaution against the outbreak of contagious disease among the slaves, but it was much more likely that the greed for profit rather than necessity had led the captain to such a horrendous undertaking. According to the British law in effect at the time, the death of slaves by natural causes including disease was not covered by insurance, but if the slaves were killed in order to preserve the health and safety of everyone on the ship, the insurers were liable for the damages. So, “the court case was concerned with assessing whether or not the captain was correct to jettison his property – it was not a murder trial.”¹¹ Nevertheless, the *Zong* massacre served to “galvaniz[e] abolitionist support and a parliamentary bill was passed in 1790 which ruled out insurance claims resulting from slave mortality.”¹²

In *Feeding the Ghosts*, D’Aguiar makes a point of stressing that what drove Captain Cunningham,¹³ the captain of the *Zong*, to throw the sick slaves overboard was his intention to increase profits by collecting insurance money rather than his concern over the outbreak of disease. “Do you not see my solution as manifest economic sense?”¹⁴ the Captain asks his first mate Kelsal, who initially seems unwilling to carry out the Captain’s orders. However, it does not take the Captain very long to convince the crew that dumping sick slaves into the sea is the more profitable option, for even if they survived the voyage, ailing slaves would not fetch a good price at the slave market anyway. The Captain is sure that he can slaughter as many slaves as he sees fit with impunity, for “[u]nder English law it was stated that every slave bought and sold in the trade was categorised as stock. As such, an owner could do with his stock whatever he pleased.”¹⁵ Most of the crew have no qualms about carrying out the Captain’s orders, for they, too, look upon the slaves as “stock, cargo as delicate as horses and calves but chattel all the same.”¹⁶ D’Aguiar’s novel demonstrates that the Chief Justice who presides over the trial, which is described at length in the second part of the novel, also regards the slaves in a similar light. In fact, the Chief Justice seems more concerned with what he will have for dinner than with the case before him and is already inclined towards ruling in favour of the investors and the Captain of the *Zong*.

¹¹ Ward, *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D’Aguiar*, 156.

¹² Gail Low, “The Memory of Slavery in Fred D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts*,” in *Post-Colonial Literatures: Expanding the Canon*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 1999), 107.

¹³ D’Aguiar has changed the Captain’s name from Collingwood to Cunningham probably because the latter name contains a play on the word “cunning.”

¹⁴ Fred D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts* (London: Granta, 2014), 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

Bracketed by a prologue and epilogue that establishes a link between the past and the present, *Feeding the Ghosts* focuses on a fictional character named Mintah, the one hundred and thirty-second slave thrown overboard the *Zong* who miraculously survives by climbing back into the ship. Mintah is a slave girl¹⁷ around the age of eighteen who is literate in English, having been educated at a Christian mission near her hometown in Africa. Unlike the other slaves, Mintah is not thrown overboard because she is sick, but rather because – as the only slave who can speak English – she cannot help expressing her outrage at the barbarity of the crew as she witnesses her fellow slaves, including women and young children, being “grabbed and hurled overboard, each one struggling and shouting to no avail.”¹⁸ So, it is Mintah’s insubordination that causes her to be dispatched along with the sick and the infirm. After climbing up the side of the ship by catching hold of a dangling rope, Mintah manages to avoid capture for some time with the help of a friendly crew member, i.e. the cook’s young and simple-minded assistant Simon. When her attempt at staging an insurrection by freeing the rest of the slaves fails, Mintah is recaptured and severely punished. By the time of the trial, Mintah has already been sold into slavery in America, but not before she has entrusted Simon with a journal that she has secretly kept on the *Zong*. Mintah’s journal bears witness to the fact that the Captain’s actions were unnecessary since the slaves were not as sick as the Captain claimed and could have recovered with a little care. However, Mintah’s journal is not admitted as evidence and dismissed by the court as a fabrication because it is deemed impossible that a slave could have written it.

Feeding the Ghosts makes use of the notorious case of the *Zong* to bring about a confrontation with the violent history of slavery which has been systematically suppressed in Western history and subjected to historical amnesia. “The sea is slavery” declares the narrator in the opening sentence of the prologue referring to the Atlantic Ocean, the main slave trade route between Africa and the Americas which has become associated with enslavement, pain, death and the unspeakable horrors of the Middle Passage, forming the basis of what Paul Gilroy calls the Black Atlantic culture.¹⁹ During the notorious transatlantic voyage known as the Middle Passage, enslaved Africans in chains and shackles were heaped onto slave ships, where many of them perished due to overcrowding, starvation, disease and maltreatment. The novel presents a

¹⁷ As noted by Abigail Ward, in reality, “it was a male slave who managed to climb back into the ship,” which shows that “D’Aguiar does not limit his story by conforming to historical accuracy” (156).

¹⁸ D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 46.

¹⁹ As Paul Gilroy asserts in his book *The Black Atlantic*, the Atlantic Ocean plays a pivotal role in the formation of black cultures all over the world, including both African and black diaspora cultures. See Gilroy.

realistic portrayal of the appalling conditions of the slaves stacked in the ship's hold, which is described as a dark, overcrowded place permeated with death and the unbearable stench of sweat, vomit, urine and faeces. The slaves, who have hardly enough room to lie on one side, are chained wrist to wrist and ankle to ankle in twos so that "[a]ll seem one miserable, tangled mass of humanity [...] indistinguishable from one another."²⁰ On top of everything else, female slaves are under the constant threat of rape by the ship's crew who are in the habit of "descend[ing] into the female slaves' partition armed with loaves of bread and chunks of cheese" to bribe them into sex. The women know that "if they refused they would be taken by force anyway."²¹ No less devastating than the physical and sexual abuse is the psychological impact of the slaves' violent uprooting from their home and loved ones.

Feeding the Ghosts elucidates the ways in which "the Middle Passage was crowded with ships full of ghosts, some still alive, some already drowned, some no doubt passing through those contortions of mind and body that Harris describes as the 'limbo gateway.'"²² Accordingly, the *Zong* is portrayed as a ship full of ghosts – some in the throes of illness, waiting their turn to be dumped into the sea; others suspended in a psychological limbo, lost in dreams of their long-lost homeland. It is implied that even those slaves who can make it to the new world will be condemned to a ghostly existence for the rest of their lives: "they would be lost forever but not dead, lost but never to be found."²³

Throughout the novel Mintah herself is recurrently referred to as a ghost, first by her fellow slaves on the *Zong*, who mistake her for a ghost that has returned from the dead after her miraculous survival. Initially, the slaves assume that it is "her spirit on board roaming the ship."²⁴ Only when they get a chance to touch Mintah are they convinced that she is made of flesh and blood. Mintah's journal is described more than once as a ghost-book "penned by a ghost."²⁵ However, what makes the *Zong* "a true 'ghost ship' of mythic proportions"²⁶ are undoubtedly the 131 slaves who are dumped into the Atlantic ocean, whereafter their restless souls are stuck in the Limbo with no chance of finding peace:

So, it is from the sea that all 131 souls are to be plucked. [...] One hundred and thirty-one souls roam the Atlantic with countless others. When the wind is heard it is their breath, their speech. The sea is therefore home.

²⁰ D'Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 19.

²¹ Ibid., 74.

²² David Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), 67-8.

²³ D'Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 27.

²⁴ Ibid., 90.

²⁵ Ibid., 169.

²⁶ Ward, *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'Aguiar*, 155.

[...] They would lie in unsanctified ground, ground untrodden by any ancestor, not laid to rest but left in limbo. Each spirit would have to find its way home over this sea, over a scattered road of bones.²⁷

According to Mintah, the dead slaves cannot rest in their graves, for they have no graves. Consequently, their spirits are doomed to roam the sea until they find their way back home. It is stressed in the novel that the ghosts of the 131 graveless slaves condemned to roam the Atlantic Ocean without ever finding peace are merely a small fraction of the unrecorded millions who perished at sea during the Middle Passage and that the Atlantic Ocean is a sea full of dead Africans: "The *Zong* rose and dipped over their bones, and the sound of the sea was the bones cracking."²⁸ Thus, D'Aguiar uses Gothic imagery to stress that "the genealogy of the Black Atlantic is filled with ghosts. Mintah, then, speaks not only for herself, and the victims of the *Zong*, but also for the many other Africans who were lost in transit or in the aftermath of slavery itself."²⁹

The third part of the novel, which is set almost fifty years after the *Zong* massacre when Mintah is living as a free woman in Jamaica in 1833, the year when slavery was abolished in the British colonies, shows that Mintah has been haunted by the ghosts of the dead slaves throughout her life. Thus, in *Feeding the Ghosts* "the relation between the dead and living is conceived of as a haunting, the living will have to be a witness again to the middle passage."³⁰ Such a conception of the haunting of the living by the dead resonates strongly with the ideas put forward by the poststructuralist theorist Jacques Derrida, whose 1993 book *Specters of Marx* established him as the ur-theorist of spectrality, or "hauntology" as Derrida calls it. Derridean hauntology, which contains a play on the words "haunt" and "ontology," is a theoretical framework centered upon the figure of the ghost that serves to deconstruct the binary oppositions between "presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life."³¹ For Derrida, the ghost's liminal status as a figure suspended between life and death, presence and absence, past and present, signals a new way of thinking that takes into account the invisible, the lost and the disappeared that go unacknowledged within scientific-rationalistic paradigms. In a way that accords with Derridean hauntology, *Feeding the Ghosts* shows that the drowned slaves continue to live on as a ghostly "trace," which is a term used by Derrida to refer to the residual, spectral presence of an absence. Survival or living on are important concepts for Derrida, who stresses that there cannot be a living present that is not haunted by the traces of what has gone before as well as what is to come. Derrida defines

²⁷ D'Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 4, 37.

²⁸ Ibid., 176.

²⁹ Edwards, *Postcolonial Literature*, 123.

³⁰ Low, "The Memory of Slavery in Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*," 112-3.

³¹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 13.

hauntology as a “being-with specters” that is also “a politics of memory, of inheritance, of generations.”³² So, Derridean hauntology is also associated with the concepts of responsibility and justice in that paying attention to ghosts is necessarily a question of responsibility to the dead:

If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain others who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of justice. [...] no justice [...] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism.³³

In a way that is in keeping with Derridean hauntology, *Feeding the Ghosts* demonstrates that paying attention to ghosts is a moral responsibility inextricably linked to the question of justice. From the outset, Mintah feels burdened with the responsibility of remembering the victims of the atrocious massacre that she has witnessed. Indeed, what grieves Mintah most is that no trace of the slaves will remain once they are dead, not even a name to remember them by. The dead slaves will vanish from history without a trace except for the 131 strokes in the Captain’s ledger. “Your name! What is your name?” shouts Mintah to a woman who is dragged to the side of the ship, about to be hurled into the sea. “Why? How will it save me?” asks the woman, whereupon Mintah replies: “I will remember you! Others will remember you!”³⁴ Remembering the injustices that were suffered by the victims of social violence is our foremost duty to the dead according to Derrida, who stresses that our responsibility is not limited to those who are living in the present but extends to those that continue to haunt the living present as specters.

That Mintah feels a strong obligation to fulfil her duty to the dead is evident not only from her wish to remember the names of the massacred slaves, but also from her attempt to produce a written record of the massacre by keeping a journal. In the third part of the novel we are told that every moment of Mintah’s life has been dominated by the memory of the drowned slaves, who have not ceased to monopolize her thoughts even fifty years after the massacre. For instance, Mintah

³² Ibid., xviii.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 126-7.

says that when she played an active part in the Underground Railroad³⁵ by helping fugitive slaves escape North to freedom, she liked to imagine that she was saving the souls of the dead from the bottom of the sea: “For every one thrown to the sea I multiplied by two in Maryland when I acted as guide. [...] I imagined those men, women and children rising from the sea into air.”³⁶ In fact, the ghosts of the dead slaves are like hungry spirits feeding on her life, and Mintah has devoted all her life energy to trying to placate these ghosts: “Ghosts needed to be fed. She carved and wrote to assuage their hunger.”³⁷ In order to placate the ghosts, Mintah has carved small wooden figures in the shape of men, women and children. There are 131 of them in total, each representing a slave lost at sea:

The shape of each piece is pulled from the sea of my mind and has been shaped by water, with water’s contours. People say they see a figure of some kind, man, woman or child reaching up out of the depths. I keep them in my home like guests who will not leave and whom I eventually cannot bear to part with. [...] From their shapes they appear to breathe like me. Each has a name, a likely age [...] They named themselves through me.³⁸

Hence, by carving these wooden figures, which “house the souls of the dead,”³⁹ Mintah seems to have taken heed of Derrida’s injunction to learn to live with ghosts. In point of fact, Mintah’s living with ghosts can be likened to the state of melancholia⁴⁰. For Derrida, melancholia has an ethical significance in that it entails maintaining a sense of responsibility to the dead whereas mourning is a means of effectively relegating the dead to forgetfulness. Derrida, who claims that “to remain haunted is to remain partial to the dead,”⁴¹ regards completed mourning as not only undesirable, but also impossible, since it would mean exorcising the present of the ghosts of the past – a virtually impossible undertaking. In effect, Mintah’s haunting by the ghosts of the dead slaves can be

³⁵ Underground Railroad is the name given to a secret network of abolitionists who helped fugitive slaves escape to freedom in the US in the nineteenth century.

³⁶ D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 209.

³⁷ Ibid., 222.

³⁸ Ibid., 208-210.

³⁹ Ibid., 208.

⁴⁰ Melancholia is defined by Sigmund Freud as a kind of failed mourning that stems from the inability to deal with loss. In contrast to Freud’s definition of mourning and melancholia as normal and pathological processes respectively, Derrida valorizes melancholia, investing it with a positive meaning while denouncing mourning.

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, “Foreword,” in *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxxi.

interpreted as a metaphorical rendering of what Derrida calls “mid-mourning,” i.e. an interminable, inconclusive mourning process which is not geared towards the acceptance of loss.⁴² Mid-mourning can never be completed and thus is equivalent to being perpetually haunted by the ghosts of the past.

It can be questioned to what extent Mintah’s learning to live with ghosts is actually her own choice, given that her haunting by the dead resembles the symptoms manifested by trauma survivors in the aftermath of trauma. Indeed, the traumas that Mintah suffers on board the *Zong*, which include attempted rape, violent beatings, and above all being a witness to the massacre of her fellow slaves, and being thrown into the ocean herself, leave Mintah traumatized for life. Traumatic memories keep returning to Mintah in recurrent dreams even fifty years after the massacre. Sometimes she sees a phosphorus glow on the river which she takes to be “the spirit of a slave thrown into the sea,”⁴³ at other times she feels as if the winds from the sea are carrying the spirits of the dead to her door. Nevertheless, *Feeding the Ghosts* is not so much a novel about Mintah’s personal traumas and their psychological aftermath as about the haunting repercussions of the cultural trauma of slavery. Cultural trauma, which can be defined 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,”⁴⁴ results from violent histories like slavery, war, genocide, colonialism or state terror. Just as psychic trauma is subjected to repression, violent histories associated with cultural traumas tend to be suppressed in collective memory even though their repercussions still continue to be felt like the barely perceptible presence of a ghost. Thus, cultural traumas pave the way for “cultural hauntings,” which is a term coined by Kathleen Brogan to describe those ghost stories that “share the plot device and master metaphor of the ghost as go-between, an enigmatic transitional figure moving between past and present, death and life, one culture and another.”⁴⁵ Indeed, in the novel, the *Zong* massacre functions as the traumatic core that generates a cultural haunting whose reverberations continue not only throughout Mintah’s life but up to the present day. As David Punter notes,

[t]his is not a voyage that can be consigned to the sea of history, that can be placed neatly within a sequence of historical facts. It has to be seen more in the uncompromising terms of trauma, as a kind of epicentre from

⁴² Jacques Derrida, “Freud’s Legacy,” in *The Postcard From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 335.

⁴³ D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 206.

⁴⁴ Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African-American Identity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 2.

⁴⁵ Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 6.

which implications, memories, forgettings, continue to ripple out, to reverberate through the present and, no doubt, the future too. These ghosts, the slaves themselves, the captain and crew, even the participants in the long trial scene that comes towards the end of the book, all of these are reincarnated in the pages of the novel. But there is, again, more to it than that. The ship *continues* to sail; its voyage, like the sea, is unending.⁴⁶

In *Feeding the Ghosts* D'Aguiar successfully interweaves individual and cultural trauma, deploying ghosts as metaphors for a traumatic past which refuses to go away and is doomed to repeat itself over and over again. In her writings on trauma, Cathy Caruth draws a parallel between the personal and historical dimensions of trauma with her claim that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is symptomatic of psychic trauma, "is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history," adding that "the traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess."⁴⁷ Thus, it can be argued that Mintah, too, carries an impossible history within her, as she is haunted by ghosts which represent not only her own traumatic past, but also the past of slavery in general. In the end, Mintah's attempts at placating the ghosts by feeding them into wood fails, and we are left with a haunting without end. Even when Mintah's house burns down at the end of the novel along with her in it, the ghosts are not exorcised; instead, the spirits housed within the wooden figures fly into the woods.

Feeding the Ghosts ends with an epilogue narrated by an unidentifiable narrator who states that:

We were all dead. The ship was full of ghosts. [...] The *Zong* is on the high seas. Men, women and children are thrown overboard by the captain and his crew. One of them is me. One of them is you. [...] There is only the fact of the *Zong* and its unending voyage and those deaths that cannot be undone. [...] The ghosts feed on the story of themselves.⁴⁸

Thus, in the epilogue, the *Zong* is presented as a ghost ship that still keeps sailing on while the trauma of the *Zong* massacre is endlessly repeated. The narrator addresses us directly for the first time, telling us that we are all caught up in this endless cycle of repetition. It is implied that even telling their story does not put the ghosts to rest, for as long as its memory continues to live on, neither the *Zong* nor slavery can ever be a thing of the past. "How can [slavery]

⁴⁶ Punter, *Postcolonial Imaginings*, 67-8.

⁴⁷ Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1995), 5.

⁴⁸ D'Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 229-230.

be over,” asks D’Aguiar “when it lived, still lives, in me? And not just in me. In the names of streets, in the graveyards, in the literature of public and private libraries...”⁴⁹ Thus, the haunting legacies of slavery, epitomized by the unending voyage of the ghost ship *Zong*, result in what Derrida calls “a disjuncture in the very presence of the present,”⁵⁰ by effacing the distinction between the past and the present, the dead and the living.

To conclude, in *Feeding the Ghosts*, D’Aguiar employs the rhetoric of haunting and the Gothic motif of the ghost in order to explore the unacknowledged history of slavery which continues to influence the present even though it has been systematically rendered invisible in the Western imagination. In the end, we are left to ponder over the image of a ghost ship that sails on a sea full of dead Africans whose ghosts demand a reckoning.

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⁴⁹ Fred D’Aguiar, “The Last Essay About Slavery,” quoted in Ward, *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D’Aguiar*, 151.

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**Turkish Passions: Gendered Stereotyping and Postcolonial
Fetish in Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* and Antonio Gala's *La Pasión
Turca***

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Abstract

The paper compares two novels, Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* and Antonio Gala's *La Pasión Turca*, from the perspective of the (post)colonial stereotype, and, more specifically, Bhabha's concept of the stereotype as fetish. Both novels feature a Western European protagonist who seeks adventure in a heavily Orientalised Istanbul, and who embark upon an ultimately disastrous affair with a Turkish character; the childlike yet erotic harem girl Aziyadé and the attractive, aggressive yet ultimately powerless tour-guide Yamam respectively. In this sense, the characters of Aziyadé and Yamam are both heavily based on Orientalist stereotypes, and, in their ambiguity, can be understood in terms of the stereotype as fetish. However, it is arguably not only the Western protagonists' obsession with the exoticised Other that leads to their destruction; Loti and Desi's self-identification with the fetishized Oriental Other, as Khushfian (2012) proposes, also has a destabilising influence on their identity, ultimately contributing to their downfall.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Stereotype, Loti, Gala, Fetish.

Türk Tutkuları: Pierre Loti'nin *Aziyadé*'sinde ve Antonio Gala'nın *La Pasión Turca*'sında Cinsiyete Dayalı Steryotip ve Sömürge Sonrası Fetiş

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Abstract

Bu makale, iki romanı, Pierre Loti'nin *Aziyadé* ve Antonio Gala'nın *La Pasión Turca*'sını, (post)-kolonyal steryotip perspektifinden, daha somut olarak, Bhabha'nın fetiş olarak steryotip konsepti ile karşılaştırıyor. Her iki romanda, Batı Avrupalı roman karakterleri katı bir şekilde Doğululaştırılmış İstanbul'da macera aramaktadır ve Türk bir karakterle yıkıcı bir aşk ilişkisine girmektedir: çocuksu fakat erotik harem kızı olan Azyadé; çekici ve agresif ancak güçsüz bir tur rehberi olan Yamam. Bu bağlamda, Azyadé ve Yamam karakterleri genellikle oryantalist basmakalıplara dayanıp, ikilemleri içinde steryotip olarak fetiş açısından anlaşılabilir. Bununla birlikte, yıkımlarına sebep olan yalnızca Batılı kahramanların egzotikleşmiş Öteki ile olan saplantıları değil, aynı zamanda fetiş haline getirilmiş Oryantal Öteki ile özdeşleşmeleri, Khushfian'ın (2012) öne sürdüğü gibi, kimliklerinde dengelerini bozan bir etkiye sahip olup, ve nihayetinde çöküşlerine katkıda bulunmaktadır.

ASnahtar Sözcükler: Sömürge sonrası, Steryotip, Loti, Gala, Fetiş.

This paper aims to compare two novels set in Istanbul, Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* (1879), and Antonio Gala's *La Pasión Turca* (1993), from the perspective of the (post)colonial stereotype and, more specifically, Bhabha's conception of the stereotype as fetish. Despite the almost hundred-year gap between their publication, and the different genders and nationalities of their protagonists, the two novels share many similarities. Both novels are written in the form of journals, both involve protagonists who, bored with a seemingly monotonous, over-regulated life in Western Europe, seek passion, excitement and adventure in an exotic, heavily Orientalised Istanbul. In this context, both protagonists embark on passionate, obsessive and ultimately destructive affairs with Turkish characters, Desideria Olivan, the female protagonist of *La Pasión Turca*, with the violent, erotic tour-guide cum drug-dealer Yamam and Pierre Loti,¹ the protagonist of *Aziyadé*, with the mysterious, exotic slave-girl Aziyadé.²

In this context, it is argued that the characters of Yamam and Aziyadé, although seemingly very different, can both be understood in terms of Bhabha's concept of the stereotype as fetish. Both characters are heavily stereotypical and 'Orientalised'. However, in line with Bhabha's theory, these stereotypes are seemingly contradictory in nature, and involve a complex mixture of desire and despal; Yamam, for instance, is depicted as simultaneously a sexual object of desire, dangerous, violent and weak, while Aziyadé is not only passive and meek but also sexually licentious and passionate.

While Bhabha argues that the stereotype as fetish allows the Western subject to construct an identity based on superiority and difference from the fetishised Oriental Other, Krishnan (2011) puts forward that the ambiguity at the heart of the fetishised stereotype can also lead to an attempt, on the part of the Western subject, to *identify* with the Eastern Other, an identity that is at risk of collapsing into abjection. As argued in the final part of this paper, both Loti and Desideria veer between identification with and rejection of the Eastern Other, an ambiguity which eventually contributes to their downfall and death.

1 The (Post) Colonial Stereotype: From Said to Bhabha

According to Said, Europe has long defined its identity in contrast to a primarily Middle Eastern 'Other'. This image of the Orient is, however, largely created in the Western imagination rather than being grounded in reality. As Said argues, the Orient is "the place of Europe's oldest and richest colonies, the source

¹ Pierre Loti is the name both of the author and of the protagonist of *Aziyadé*. While the author, whose real name was Julien Viaud, was French, however, the character Loti is an English naval officer.

² The character of Aziyadé was based on a real lover of Loti's, Hakidjé, whom Loti attempted to bring to France after their affair threatened her safety (de Burgh 2005, 55).

of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant and one of its oldest and most recurring images of the Other.”³

While Said defines Orientalism in the context of French and British colonisation of the Middle East and India, he emphasises that Orientalist attitudes have much deeper roots. As Said argues, then: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”⁴ Thus, as Orientalism essentially originates out of the need to establish the Other, the self-image of European cultures as rational, morally upstanding and progressive was developed in contrast to an East which was depicted as backward, depraved, immoral and irrational. Orientalist representations of the Western ‘Self’ and the Eastern ‘Other’, then, are diametrically opposed; as Said notes, “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”⁵ In Orientalist discourse, then, Europe is described as;

...essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active, creative, and masculine, while the Orient (the East, the “other”) (a sort of surrogate, underground version of the West or the “self”) is [...] irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine, and sexually corrupt⁶

While Bhabha in large part concurs with Said’s thesis, he does in fact take issue with several aspects of ‘Orientalism’. For Bhabha, as for Said, “The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and establish systems of administration and instruction.”⁷ However, for Bhabha, this aim is never fully met; he emphasises the existence of ambivalence at the heart of colonial discourse. On the one hand, he argues that the colonised subject is construed as radically Other, beyond the comprehension of Western culture and civilisation. On the other hand, the discourse of colonialism attempts to domesticate and ‘civilise’ this perceived radical difference; in a contradictory fashion, then, the colonised subject is also perceived as knowable and open to Westernisation.

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (London: Penguin, 1995), 1

⁴ Ibid., 1

⁵ Ibid., 1

⁶ Alexander Lyon Macfie, *Orientalism: A Reader*. (London: Pearson Education, 2002), 86-87

⁷ Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” in *The Location of Culture* (Oxon: Routledge, 1994), 70

The stereotype, in this context, serves to make the colonised subject more comprehensible to the colonisers, but also to maintain a sense of difference between the colonisers and colonised: in this case, stereotyping “facilitates colonial relations” in that it ‘sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural opposition in terms of which colonial power is exercised.’⁸ In this sense, the stereotype is a means through which the metropolitan subject attempts to assert his superiority through masking his inadequacy.⁹ However, due to its ambiguity “the stereotype is never fully stable, never ... fully confirmed”, and thus needs to be constantly repeated.¹⁰ For Bhabha, then, this constant repetition of stereotypes, as well as their often terrifying nature, is symptomatic of the ambiguity at the centre of colonial discourse:

...the same old stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish must be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time ... Nor would it be possible, without the attribution of ambivalence to relations of power/knowledge, to calculate the traumatic impact of the return of the oppressed-those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust, and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire, in colonial texts.¹¹

Thus, according to Bhabha, we find both derision and desire in stereotypical discourse; the stereotype may therefore be understood in terms of the *fetish*. In this way, the (post)colonial fetish, like the Freudian fetish, is a simultaneous disavowal and acceptance of difference, in this case, differences of race and culture;

Fetishism is always a ‘play’ or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity - in Freud's terms: ‘All men have penises’; in ours ‘All men have the same skin/race/ culture’ - and the anxiety associated with lack and difference - again, for Freud ‘Some do not have penises’; for us ‘Some do not have the same skin/race/ culture’¹²

⁸ Ibid., 112

⁹ Madhu Krishnan, “Abjection and the Fetish: Reconsidering the Construction of the Postcolonial Exotic in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48 no.1, (2012).

¹⁰ Derek Hook, *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* (New York: Routledge: 2012), 13

¹¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 112

¹² Ibid., 107

In this sense, what is fetishised is always both loved and despised, explaining “the wide range of the stereotype, from the loyal servant to Satan, from the loved to the hated.”¹³ In Bhabha’s view, then, this multiple belief structure of fetishism is actually embraced and made use of in colonial discourse;

The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces. In each case what is being dramatized is a separation ...¹⁴

The stereotype as fetish, then, serves to underscore the identity of the Western subject as fundamentally superior through (temporarily) keeping ambivalence at bay. However, as Krishnan argues in her discussion of exoticism, it may also lead to the Western subject’s identification with the fetishised object, a precarious position that threatens abjection through his “dependence on the negative image which legitimizes his own, positive self.”¹⁵ This leads to abjection in that it results in “a complete implosion of the subject into the ambiguity of the object whose boundaries it may no longer perceive, illuminating the always prior foundation of his own subjective capacities.”¹⁶ In this sense, then, the division between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ loses its clarity; as Kristeva argues, they “push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.”¹⁷

2 Stereotype as Fetish in *La Pasión Turca* and *Aziyadé*

Both novels are set in a heavily Orientalised, exotic and chaotic Istanbul, which contrasts with a Western Europe which is depicted as stifling, over-regulated and colourless. According to Gundermann, the West in *Aziyadé* is constructed as “the symbolic realm after (Lacanian) castration, the regulated and mediated domain that has removed the subject from the imaginary, unmediated

¹³ Ibid., 113

¹⁴ Ibid., 82

¹⁵ Krishnan, “Abjection and the Fetish: Reconsidering the Construction of the Postcolonial Exotic in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*”, 29

¹⁶ Ibid., 30

¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press: 1982), 18

self-identity that the Orient symbolizes.”¹⁸ Describing England to his Turkish friend Achmet, the protagonist Loti emphasises that;

Everything is pale there, and all colours are dim ... All houses are square and exactly alike; the only prospect is one's neighbour's wall, and often that flatness is suffocating ... Everyone wears a uniform, a grey overcoat. Everything has been planned for, is regulated; there are laws about everything and rules for everybody.¹⁹

Similarly, at the beginning of *La Pasión Turca*, the Spanish protagonist Desideria is trapped in a passionless marriage to a man, Ramiro, whom she finds boring, does not satisfy her sexually and lives what she insinuates is a drab bourgeois life full of routine and pretension:

The relentless monotony which would eventually swallow me up fell on me straight away. Ramiro and I went to mass at half past eight or nine ... at the end of each day he made the sign of the cross on my forehead – ‘Sweet dreams’ – before giving me a fraternal kiss.²⁰

For both characters, Istanbul at first appears as an exotic, Orientalist fantasy.²¹ Looking out of her hotel window after arriving in Istanbul, for example, Desi is enchanted by the view across the Golden Horn, a view which for her is full of exotic minarets and painted in the soft, feminine colours of the Orient.²² For Fraticelli, Desi's stereotypical, heavily Orientalised impressions of Istanbul can be explained by her intellectual limitations, which render her incapable of creating her own, original images of the city, leading her to recreate those she has already encountered in other authors.²³

In contrast to the peaceful image of Istanbul described above, Desi experiences the Grand Baazar, where, later in the novel, she helps her lover

¹⁸ Christian Gundermann, “Orientalism, Homophobia, Masochism: Transfers between Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* and Gilles Deleuze's “Coldness and Cruelty”, *Diacritics* 24 no. 2/3, (1994): 162

¹⁹ Pierre Loti, *Aziyadé*. translated by Marjorie Laurie. (Hants: Kri Paperbacks, 1989 [1927]), 198

²⁰ Antonio Gala, *La Pasión Turca*. (Barcelona: Planeta, 1993), 34-35

²¹ As Fraticelli points out, since the days of Cervantes and Lope de Vega, Spanish authors have long been fascinated by Istanbul, described as exotic, mysterious and luxurious, and which represented ‘the gateway to a distant and marvellous Orient’ (2015): 152

²² Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 125

²³ Barbara Fraticelli, “La Imagen de la Ciudad de Estambul, entre Realidad, Metáfora y Sueño”. *Romance Quarterly* 63 no.3, (2015): 152

Yamam with his business, as a kind of Eastern hell populated by tortured, unfortunate beings; the blind, the physically and mentally handicapped who try to beg a meagre living from the shop owners; she, in turn, is a guardian angel sent from the Occident in order to rescue these poor creatures.²⁴

Similarly, recently arrived in Istanbul, Loti's Istanbul is also heavily Orientalised. He experiences the overwhelming chaotic energy of the city, which is described almost as an assault on the senses;

The busy quarter of Taxim, on the high ground of Pera. The carriages and dresses of Europe jostling the costumes and vehicles of the East. Burning heat; a blazing sun; a warm wind stirring up the dust and the yellow leaves of August; the scent of myrtle; the cries of the fruit sellers; the streets heaped with grapes and watermelons. These are the impressions my first glimpse of Constantinople has left upon my mind²⁵

For both characters, in line with the Orientalist stereotype of the unchanging, backward East, travelling to Istanbul is like travelling in time to an earlier, pre-rational era. For Loti, for instance, the Turks are defined by love of the old and a dislike of change;

Eski, a word uttered with reverence, means 'antique', and is equally applicable in Turkey to old customs, old fashions in dress, and old materials. The Turks have a passion for the past, a passion for stability and stagnation (1989, 73)

Moreover, the East and its inhabitants are characterised by fatalism and superstition rather than a 'Western' belief in scientific rationality. In both novels, the Turkish characters appear to apprehend portents of doom, Yamam apparently reading Desi's suicide in her coffee cup,²⁶ and Aziyadé and Achmet sensing impending disaster when an owl circles their boat at night.²⁷ Similarly, during an eclipse both Aziyadé and Achmet find Loti's attempt to explain the phenomenon in scientific terms ridiculous, believing instead that it is caused by the moon fighting a dragon.²⁸

It is in this atmosphere of Oriental timelessness and mystery that both Desi and the Loti character meet the objects of their passions. Desi quickly falls in love with Yamam, the exotically attractive tour-guide, while Loti encounters the beautiful, childlike and mysterious slave-girl Aziyadé. Both encounters develop

²⁴ Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 219

²⁵ Loti, *Aziyadé*, 33

²⁶ Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 196

²⁷ Loti, *Aziyadé*, 93-94

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 87-88

into passionate affairs which end, effectively, with the self-destruction of the protagonists. The depictions of both Yamam and Aziyadé are, as discussed further below, heavily influenced by Orientalist-type stereotypes of 'the Turk' which, in line with Bhabha's conception of the stereotype as fetish, are often ambivalent in nature.

Yamam appears to exemplify the 'fear and desire' that, for Bhabha, underscore postcolonial texts; he is depicted as sexually desirable yet violent and destructive. Yamam is a passionate, sexually charged creature, capable, unlike Desi's 'Occidental' partners, of abandoning himself completely to the animal joys of the body unencumbered by guilt or reason. He is a notorious womaniser, although he also indulges in homosexual intercourse.²⁹ In this context, his depiction arguably draws heavily on the Western stereotype of 'the Lusty Turk', "half-envied, half despised for their assumed athleticism and subtle cruelties in the bedchamber."³⁰ Yamam's sensuality in bed is compared positively through Desi's eyes with the performance of her almost impotent husband Ramiro and with her other European lovers, Denis and Ivan. This comparison, while perhaps apparently unfavourable to the European males, throws into relief the Orientalist dichotomy between the self-controlled, rational European and the Oriental, debauched and unable to control his lust.

Thus, in the novel "Western civilization is placed in direct opposition to the animal forces of the body, sexual potency and fertility";³¹ indeed, as Gilmour points out,³² Desi herself explicitly associates sexuality with non-European cultures;

I know better than other women the incompatibility of a regulated, model, or at least reasonable life with the violence of the call of sex, with its African abyss, irrational and sweaty.³³

In this context, Yamam's attitude to Desi, too, can also be regarded as stereotypically 'Oriental'; he is violent and aggressive towards her, even beating her from time to time, and generally expecting her to behave in a submissive,

²⁹ Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 204

³⁰ Andrew Wheatcroft. *The Ottomans: Dissolving Images*. (London: Penguin, 1993), 210

³¹ Nicola Gilmour, "Turkish Delight: Antonio Gala's *La Pasión Turca* as a Vision of Spain's Contested Islamic Heritage", *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 10 no.1, (2006): 83

³² Gilmour discusses *La Pasión Turca* in terms of 1990s Spain's identity crisis *vis à vis* its Muslim past (2006). For further discussion of developments in Spanish literature in the post-Franco period see, for instance, Öztunalı (2010).

³³ Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 131

passive fashion.³⁴ This depiction, then, arguably draws on the stereotype of the terrifying, destructive ‘Terrible Turk’.³⁵ Moreover, despite his jealous nature, Yamam puts pressure on Desi to prostitute herself in order to secure an important deal or placate a creditor. In this way, then, Yamam expects Desi to be passionate and available in bed as well as passive and submissive, like a stereotypical Oriental woman.

In addition, Yamam, in Orientalist fashion, is profoundly dishonest. This is not only limited to his major deceptions – his marriage and children, his drug-dealing, his womanising – but, as Desi points out, he cannot be trusted even on details. His ethnic origin appears to vary with his mood, as do his political opinions and even his life story.³⁶ When Yamam tells Desi about his time in Spain, for instance, she points out that “The dates, as I confirmed when, as always, I reconstructed his narration, didn’t match either with his age or with the facts he referred to.”³⁷

In this sense, then, Yamam appears to be the typical Oriental ‘baddie’. Indeed, Said’s description of Hollywood Arab villains could almost, in fact be referring to Yamam:

In the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed degenerate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low. Slave trader, camel driver, moneychanger, colourful scoundrel: these are some traditional Arab roles in the cinema³⁸

However, in a seemingly contradictory fashion, Yamam is also characterised by weakness and helplessness, another stereotypical feature of the Oriental. We learn that he is actually nothing but a petty drug dealer, low in the pecking order and at the mercy of both the police and his ‘bosses’. Worse, Yamam’s mother dominates him completely, deciding who he should marry, that he should not get divorced. It is she who disapproves of his relationship with Desi and forces her to have an abortion and a hysterectomy. In this sense, then, the character of Yamam, simultaneously dangerous and weak, controlling of and controlled by women, arguably displays the ambivalent nature of the colonial stereotype as put forward by Bhabha

In contrast to the violent character of Yamam, Aziyadé is described by Loti as childlike and innocent as well as being erotically alluring; she is “a vision, a

³⁴ Ibid., 236-237

³⁵ Wheatcroft, *The Ottomans: Dissolving Images*, 231-247

³⁶ Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 172

³⁷ Ibid., 145

³⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 286-287

spectre of romantic Turkish mystery.”³⁹ In this context, the depiction of Aziyadé draws on the common Orientalist stereotype of Oriental women as naïve and subservient eternal children on the one hand, and as immoral and libidinous temptresses on the other. As Said argues, in Orientalist writing, “women are usually the creatures of a male power fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing”⁴⁰

As Yeğenoğlu notes, “the Western subject’s desire for its Oriental other is always mediated by a desire to have access to the space of its women, to the body of its women and to the space of its women.”⁴¹ This can be explained by the fact that the Orient itself is seen in feminine terms by the coloniser; it is simultaneously racialised and feminised. While the masculine, Western subject is discursively constructed as rational, ordered, powerful and dominant, the Orient, like the female sex, is depicted as possessing contrasting characteristics such as exoticism, eroticism, passivity, weakness, depravity and irrationality. Thus, it is the metonymic association between the Orient and its women that has made Oriental women a particular source of fascination for male Western travellers.⁴² In this sense, as de Burgh points out, Loti essentialises Aziyadé; she is rendered a superficial element of her culture. Loti’s ‘falling in love’ with Aziyadé, then, implies that he has also fallen in love with the culture that she represents.

Notably, the Oriental woman was often defined as passive and indolent. In the gaze of the Western narrator, Aziyadé herself appears idle, quiet to the point of being almost inaudible, while giving off an air of Oriental mystery;

Aziyadé seldom speaks, and, though she often smiles, she never laughs. Her step is without sound; her movements are supple, sinuous, unhurried and inaudible... There is a dreamlike quality about her and she seems to cast a radiance whithersoever she goes. You look to see an aureole floating above that serious and childlike countenance...She is idle, like

³⁹ Hélène De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 60

⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 207

⁴¹ Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards A Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 72-73

⁴² *Ibid.*, 73

all women brought up in Turkey. But she can do embroidery, make rose-water and write her name...^{43 44}

In addition to being childlike, self-effacing and indolent, the Oriental woman is also stereotypically characterised as immoral, erotic and exotic. As Flaubert, for instance, mentions after his travels in the Orient, “The oriental woman is no more than a machine: she makes no distinction between one man and another man.” (quoted in Said 1995, 187)⁴⁵ In de Burgh’s view, however, while Aziyadé fulfils the role of Baudelaire’s “divine prostitute, in that she links Loti to other men and to the social life of Istanbul, her sexuality is, although present, unarticulated. It is precisely this lack of a defined sexual role which leaves Aziyadé in ‘a state of ambiguity and potential slippage’”⁴⁶

The harem, in particular, functioned as an image of Oriental mystery and intrigue, barbarism and eroticism and harem women were described “simultaneously as objects of pity, deprived of liberty, but also possessing a ‘libidinous nature,’ and whose licentiousness was endorsed by their husbands and masters”⁴⁷ Loti arguably deflates the Orientalist mystery of the mysterious exotic space of the harem through Aziyadé’s description of the rather hum-drum nature of her daily life there.⁴⁸ However, he also describes harem women as

⁴³ Aziyadé’s role as a cultural symbol is also illustrated in the scene of Loti’s rejection of Seniha hanım, who appears wearing Western clothes, and presents herself as sexually available. While Loti’s rejection of Seniha can be explained by his being overcome with love and pity for Aziyadé (Loti 1989, 114), then, Seniha hanım’s Westernised appearance means that she does not fulfil his criterion of the Oriental woman as cultural symbol. In this sense, then, she is not ‘Other’ enough, unsettling Loti’s sense of being a dominant Self (De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, 58).

⁴⁴ While Loti’s homosexual affairs are never overtly described in the novel, the homoerotic subtext of *Aziyadé* has frequently been emphasised, perhaps most famously by Roland Barthes (1973). In this sense, the relationship between Loti and Aziyadé is read as acting as a ‘smokescreen’ for the ‘real’ homosexual action of the novel, i.e. the affairs that Loti has with Samuel, then with Achmet. As de Burgh argues, ‘while Aziyadé represents Loti’s emotional connection to Turkey, the relationship that he creates with Samuel partially represents the erotic element within Turkish culture’ (De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, 125).

⁴⁵ Gustave Flaubert, “Letter to Louise Colet” quotes in Said, *Orientalism*, 187.

⁴⁶ De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, 57

⁴⁷ Thisaranie Herath, “Women and Orientalism: 19th century Representations of the Harem by European Female Travellers and Ottoman Women”, *Constellations* 7 no.1 (2015): 32

⁴⁸ De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, 62

fundamentally Other, as and incomprehensible according to Western rules of behaviour;

These little girls, fatherless and motherless, reared in the shadow of the harem, may well be forgiven their outrageous notions. *Their actions cannot be judged by the laws that govern Christian women*⁴⁹

In this context, Loti describes the women in Aziyadé's harem, and indeed Turkish women in general, as sexually free and unfaithful to their husbands. As Loti points out, "Like all Turkish *hanums* of noble family, who think nothing of ogling every European male they see in the streets in the most seductive and challenging manner, these ladies conducted themselves most outrageously."⁵⁰ In this context, just like Yamam in *La Pasi6n Turca*, the stereotypically cruel, despotic lord of the harem is revealed as simultaneously weak, powerless and are easily duped by his womenfolk, hence the need for strict surveillance:

Turkish women, great ladies in particular, make little account of the fidelity they owe their lords. ... Had I chosen, I could have made my house a trysting place for all the languishing beauties of the harems⁵¹

3 The 'Colonising Subject' and Colonial Ambivalence: The 'Eastern' Side of Desi and Loti

As both Said and Bhabha emphasise, racial/ethnic stereotyping tells us at least as much about the Western/colonising subject's attempt to construct a superior identity as it does about the Oriental target of the stereotypes. However, for Bhabha, as has been noted, this identity is far more ambivalent than it is for Said. Thus, according to Bhabha, the subject's identity is always challenged by the ambivalence at the heart of colonial discourse;

The fetish or stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it... For the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primal fantasy - the subject's desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division, for the subject must be gendered to be engendered, to be spoken.⁵²

⁴⁹ Loti, *Aziyadé*, 147 (my own emphasis)

⁵⁰ Ibid., 111.

⁵¹ Ibid., 112.

⁵² Ibid., 107.

While the Western subject uses stereotyping in order to construct its identity through asserting its difference from the fetishised object, however, Krishnan argues that the links of identification between subject and object are inherently unstable.⁵³ In other words, rather than constructing an identity based uniquely on superiority to and difference from the fetishised, stereotypical Other, the Western subject may instead identify with it, becoming “as a self, ... another fetish of his own creation”, a situation which inevitably leads to abjection.⁵⁴ For Krishnan, then, “unlike Bhabha’s framework, this exotic relationship is not one which the subject may stand outside of; like the exotic Other, the metropolitan self is another object in his self-created chain of connections, always under the threat of collapse.”⁵⁵

In this context, both Loti and Desi have a relationship with the fetishised Orient that is more complex than a simple dichotomy between the (supposedly) superior Western subject and inferior Oriental Other would suggest. In fact, neither character takes a fixed position *vis à vis* the Orient; instead their subject positions appear to vary between a self-perception of being a superior outsider and an identification with the East.

For the Loti character, this split literally takes the form of a divided identity. While he never fully rejects his identity as Loti the English officer, he creates an Ottoman alter-ego, Arif, who dresses in Turkish clothes and, for all intents and purposes, appears to be a Turk.⁵⁶ However, in a novel characterised by ‘contradictions, uncertainties and instabilities’ Loti/Arif’s position is ultimately untenable; “Loti delights in his ability to oscillate between Effendi and sailor, but ultimately he denies himself the security of being in either position and only serves to confuse us about who Loti really is”⁵⁷

Despite his fascination with the Orient and his attachment to Aziyadé, however, when faced with the possibility of becoming a naturalised Ottoman subject, Loti opts to reject both his alter-ego Arif and the possibility of a life with Aziyadé to return to his life in England. Deserted by Loti, Aziyadé soon dies,

⁵³ Krishnan, “Abjection and the Fetish: Reconsidering the Construction of the Postcolonial Exotic in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*”, 30

⁵⁴ Ibid., 30. According to Kristeva, “The foreigner is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious—that “improper” facet of our impossible “own and proper ... To discover our disturbing otherness, for that indeed is what bursts in to confront that ‘demon’, that threat, that apprehension generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid ‘us’ (Kristeva 1991, 191-192).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁶ Arif is not the only Ottoman alter ego that Loti creates throughout the course of the novel; he also attempts to pass himself off as an Armenian and a Jew called Marketo.

⁵⁷ De Burgh, *Sex, Sailors and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, 260

probably of a broken heart. However, in the end, Loti is unable to forget his 'Eastern' self and his love for Aziyadé and/or Istanbul; when he learns of her probably suicidal death he enlists in the Ottoman army, leading to his perhaps desired death in action at the end of the novel.

Desi's relationship with the Orient is also ambivalent; here, her (partial) sense of belonging to the East can be read as symbolic of Spain's complex attitude to and relationship with the Orient; according to Gilmour, "the relationship of the protagonists in the novel can be read as an attempt to construct a Spanish national identity via what is ultimately a fetishistic Orientalist fantasy."⁵⁸ Indeed, on an earlier trip to Syria, Desi attributes this sense of identification with the Orient to a 'call of the blood' originating from her own supposed Moorish ancestry;

I noted something decisively fraternal in that trip. As if the Andalusian Arabs murmured incomprehensible prayers inside my veins. Nothing dies completely; forgetting doesn't exist. I believed then, and I continue to believe today, that we are made of that which we appear to forget.⁵⁹

She also ponders her own putative Moorish ancestry when examining herself in the mirror: "Where do these dark eyes come from, that unusual fold of the eyelids, that voracious mouth, this blackest of hair, this fervour for staying alive despite all the difficulties?"⁶⁰

In this context, with undissimulated pleasure, at Yamam's side, Desi throws herself into the role of the lusty yet passive Oriental woman, in effect fetishising herself. As time passes, however, Desi becomes increasingly disillusioned with everything Oriental and, more specifically, Turkish,⁶¹ and she also begins to define herself according to her *differences* from stereotypical Turkish women. Thus, she starts to become dissatisfied with her role of waiting in Yamam's shabby apartment for the 'Sultan' to come home; "I rarely leave the flat apart from to do the basic shopping. My life is like that of a harem woman except for my trips to the Baazar, which don't even amount to half a dozen"⁶²

Desi's harem is, however, a notably unglamorous one:⁶³ as she notes; "Who would have thought that my daily view of this city, so dreamed of, so full of an

⁵⁸ Gilmour, "Turkish Delight: Antonio Gala's *La Pasión Turca* as a Vision of Spain's Contested Islamic Heritage", 81.

⁵⁹ Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 77.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁶¹ Adriana Raducanu and Catherine MacMillan, "Istanbul – the Palimpsestic City in Cornelia Golna's *City of Man's Desire* and Antonio Gala's *The Turkish Passion*" *Gender Studies* 8 no. 1, (2009): 105-118.

⁶² Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 170

⁶³ Fraticelli, "La Imagen de la Ciudad de Estambul, entre Realidad, Metáfora y Sueño", 155.

aura of majesty and mystery, the most coveted of all the cities in History, would be a parking lot?”⁶⁴ Thus, Desi decides to look for a job, pointing out to Yamam that “I’m not made to hang around all day waiting for the sultan... I’m not a Turkish woman who settles for getting fat while her man goes around the world.”⁶⁵

However, she also fears that, as a brunette, she is also not exotically Occidental enough in Yamam’s eyes to maintain his interest indefinitely; she complains to him, prophetically, that he will find a blonder woman one day. Indeed, he eventually begins an affair with a French woman, Blanche, who is blonde, and, as her name suggests white-skinned,⁶⁶ thus perhaps a more suitable object for a fetish of Yamam’s own.

At times, however, Desi uses her ambiguous identification with the Western Self and the orientalist Other to her advantage; at a dinner party with other Europeans, for instance, she attempts to play up the exotic, Orientalised appeal of her Spanish background while simultaneously attempting to make Yamam feel the inferior Oriental outsider: “That was my purpose: to make it understood that ‘we Europeans’ were kindred spirits and had a good time together”⁶⁷

However, her destabilised identity, in addition to her inability to overcome her attachment to the fetishised object, in this case the violent, unfaithful and domineering Yamam, eventually leads to Desi’s suicide, which takes place in an Istanbul hotel room after she is evicted by Yamam from his flat in order to make room for her rival, Blanche. In this sense, her end arguably resembles that of the harem girl Azyadé, who dies of a broken heart after her desertion by her lover Loti, even more than it does that of Loti himself.

4 Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to draw attention to the importance of the stereotype as fetish in both *Azyadé* and *La Pasión Turca*. In both novels, the Western protagonists’ Turkish objects of passion, Yamam in *La Pasión Turca* and Azyadé in the eponymous novel, are depicted in heavily Orientalised, stereotypical terms. However, these stereotypes differ widely according to the gender of the Turkish characters, and, as predicted by Bhaba, are extremely ambivalent, in the sense that they appear to be almost self-contradictory, and reflect the fetishistic combination of fascination and repulsion inherent in the stereotype.

⁶⁴ Gala, *La Pasión Turca*, 156

⁶⁵ Ibid., 189

⁶⁶ Ibid., 129

⁶⁷ Ibid., 269

Both Western protagonists are, then, ‘swallowed up’ by their stereotypical Eastern world of dream and nightmare. Thus, while partially retaining a Western outsider’s Orientalist attitude of superiority, both Desi and Loti begin to identify themselves with the fetishised Other. Arguably, it is this self-fetishisation which, in addition to the ambiguous passion engendered by the fetishised love interest, destabilises their sense of identity, eventually driving both Loti and Desi to the abyss of abjection.

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Hey-day in the Blood and Mutiny in the Bones: The Body Image in *Hamlet*

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Abstract

Hamlet has often been regarded, until recent times, as a play exploring the mind and the psyche of its main character; however, this essay aims to argue that it is equally a play about the body. Hamlet seems to be on the verge of a phenomenological crisis. His hopeless calls for his mind to control the body seem to be undermined by the rest of the play. By utilizing phenomenological discussions of the lived body and viscosity as well as Renaissance representations of the human body in philosophical, and literary texts, this paper aims to argue that *Hamlet* presents us a body image, which seems to have a will of its own and is not yet mechanised.

Keywords: Body, Lived body, Viscosity, Phenomenology, *Hamlet*

Kanda Taşkınlık, Kemikte İsyân: *Hamlet*'te Beden İmgesi

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Özet

Hamlet yakın zamana kadar sıklıkla baş karakterinin zihinsel ve ruhsal durumunu irdeleyen bir oyun olarak algılanır. Ancak, bu makale oyunun bir o kadar da beden hakkında olduğunu savunur. *Hamlet* oyun boyunca bir fenomenolojik krizin eşiğinde dolaşmaktadır. Baş karakterin bedeni kontrol etmesi için zihine yaptığı ümitsiz çağırıların altı oyunun geri kalanı tarafından sürekli oyulur. Bu makale, insan bedeninin Rönesans dönemi edebi ve felsefi metinlerdeki temsillerinin yanı sıra yaşayan beden ve derin beden gibi fenomenolojik kavramları kullanarak *Hamlet*'in okuyucuya henüz mekanikleşmemiş, adeta kendi iradesi olan bir beden imgesi sunduğunu göstermeyi amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelime: Beden, Yaşayan beden, Derin beden, Fenomenoloji (Olgubilim), *Hamlet*

...What is a man
 If his chief good and market of his time
 Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
 Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
 Looking before and after, gave us not
 That capability and godlike reason
 To fust in us unus'd.¹

With its roots in Platonic discourse,² the body and mind dichotomy dates back to Classical antiquity. However, this issue gained a new dimension with Descartes in the seventeenth century. Cartesian dualism is considered to be the building block of the modern man. Various critics, since the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, considered Hamlet as one of the earliest examples of the modern man: a man of endless reasoning and meditation. *Hamlet* was celebrated as a play exploring the mind and the psyche of its main character;³ however, this essay aims to argue that it is equally a play of the body. 'Born' on the threshold of Cartesian mechanism, Hamlet seems to be on the verge of a phenomenological crisis. His hopeless calls for the mind to control the body seem to be undermined by the rest of the play. The play presents us with a different image of the body, which seems to have a will of its own and is not yet mechanised. Accordingly, this paper will seek to explore the body image in *Hamlet* in connection with the Renaissance representations of the human body in philosophical, religious, and literary texts.

¹William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), IV.iv.33-39.

² Indeed the idea that the body is a prison-house for the soul can be traced even before Plato, back to ancient Orphic cult (c. 6th or 7th century B.C.). It considers the physical body as a 'prison-chamber' or a 'tomb' for the psyche and aims to transcend the physicality of the body through extremely physical ecstatic orgies; however, it was Plato's idealism and rejection of the body that served as the foundation of body-mind struggle throughout the ages.

³ For a survey of when and how *Hamlet* came to be regarded as a play of thought see Margreta De Grazia's "Hamlet's Thoughts and Antics," *Early Modern Culture*. 29.01.2002 *Early Modern Culture* e-Journal Vol.2, 20.10.2017 <http://www.babienko.net/CollegePrep/Assignments/Hamlet/HamletCrit/degrazia.html>.

1 Renaissance Body

The body in the Renaissance had not yet become the modern “Cartesian corpse,”⁴ the automaton without any will power of its own. The body-interior was more complex and chaotic with a mystic nature. For instance, Renaissance medical jargon represented the body as a newfound land whose unknown—and often hostile—depths and caverns were waiting to be discovered and named. While Christopher Columbus was naming discoveries in the New World, anatomists were doing the same in their journey into the body.⁵ The body of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was a territory which expressed, in miniature, the divine artistry of God, as it was the microcosmic reflection of the universe. The mechanistic view, which considers the body as a highly intricate machine and the mind, or sometimes the soul, as the governing force of this machine, had a few more decades to be fully established. This, however, does not mean that there was no distinction between body and mind, but rather the relationship between the two was based on different terms.

Through Neoplatonism, the age-old body-mind/soul struggle resided in the Renaissance understanding of the body. The body was assumed to function as a “vessel of containment” for the “anima,” the essential thinking entity or the soul.⁶ However, this vessel was not a pleasant place of residence for the soul, as it prevents the soul from reaching the celestial realm or, in Platonic terms, the realm of ideas. The body, by its corporeal existence, binds the soul to the physical world, which is only a reduced copy of the ideal world. Thus, on the one hand, the soul tries to tame and control its container; while on the other, it is in a constant effort to escape.

The body was supposed to obey the soul that resided within it; yet in philosophical, religious, and literary representations⁷ of the Renaissance, it is

⁴ For a detailed discussion of how Cartesian idea of the body came about and how it still is the normative understanding of the body in modern medicine see Drew Leder, “A Tale of Two Bodies: the Cartesian Corpse and the Lived Body,” *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998) 117-129.

⁵ For a further discussion of the colonised body leading into the idea of mechanistic body see Jonathan Sawday *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 22-32.

⁶ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 16.

⁷ Even political discourses used this struggle as an analogy of the relationship between the rulers and their subjects. The head was always threatened by the potentially rebellious body. The seventeenth century political theorist, Thomas Hobbes explains his governmental theories with this analogy in *Leviathan*. For one of Shakespeare’s several uses of this political analogy see *Coriolanus* act one scene two.

constantly presented with the ability to disobey. The very claim that body and soul were at war, gave the body an attribute as 'equal' enemy to the soul since it was powerful enough to wage war and serve as a prison-house for the latter. Jonathan Sawday points out, both Neo-Platonic philosophy and Calvinistic theology emphasised the "division between the realm of the body and the realm of the soul" by equating it with the distinction between the transitory and eternal lives.⁸ And thus, the theological discourse turned the disobedience of the body from a metaphysical concern into a daily concern that belonged to the "sphere of all civil life."⁹ Similarly, literary representations of the issue seem to attribute to the body a sinister and a rebellious power. For instance, the imagery that Andrew Marvell employs in his "Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body" illustrates the battle in graphic detail. The human physiology evokes the torture dungeons of the inquisition:

Soul O who shall from this Dungeon, raise
A Soul enslav'd so many wayes?...
A Soul hung up, as t'were, in Chains
Of Nerves, and Arteries, and Veins.¹⁰

The body seems to have a will and power of its own. Not only does it refuse to obey, but it also holds the power to captivate and torture its supposed master. The 'hostile' nature of the body becomes clearer in extreme cases such as illnesses. Sawday, in *The Body Emblazoned*, discusses Donne's encounters with his own illness recorded in Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*. Sawday illustrates how Donne regards his body in a state of "treasonous desire to destroy itself as nobody was capable of understanding what was happening inside his body."¹¹ Though it is acknowledged more clearly in times of crisis, the Renaissance body seemed generally to "live by its own animalistic desires... alien to the sensibility [i.e. the soul] which inhabited it."¹² The key word seems to be "live;" the lived body is on the one hand an entity through which the soul perceives the world; on the other, an entity that refuses to cooperate with reason and is guided by a will of its own.

⁸ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 17.

⁹ Ibid., 17

¹⁰ Andrew Marvell, "Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* Vol.1. 7th edn. (New York: Norton, 2000), 1687-8.

¹¹ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 32-36.

¹² Ibid., 24.

2 Lived Body

Twentieth century arguments about the lived body present a similar concept from a phenomenological point of view. The notion of the “lived body” initiated by Husserl, and developed by Merleau-Ponty considers the body as the indispensable medium of all perception, as “organ of the will and seat of free movement.”¹³ Even though Husserl, as Don Welton suggests, “is not a philosopher of the body but a philosopher of consciousness,”¹⁴ his discussion on the lived body became a seminal argument in the critique of the Cartesian split. Following Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, argues that “...the psycho-physical event can no longer be conceived after the model of Cartesian physiology... the union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence.”¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, in his discussion of intentionality, suggests that intentionality arises from “being-in-the world” that is being involved in the world and we do it through our body.¹⁶ Husserl’s “lived body” or Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of intentionality of the flesh attributes the body surface a consciousness arising from its ability to be simultaneously subject and object, the perceiving and the perceived. However, even though the psychic and the physiological are closely intertwined in the discussions of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, both thinkers still build their arguments on the idea of two realms.

It is Drew Leder who carries the argument a step further. In her essay, “Flesh and Blood: a Proposed Supplement to Merleau-Ponty,” she argues that an underlying dimension of Viscerality should be added to Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of flesh. She suggests that Merleau-Ponty’s flesh refers generally to the sensorimotor functions of body surface, and cannot represent the whole body. There is, however, another dimension of vegetative functions inside the flesh that have great impact on the working of the sensory organs. She calls this dimension the “Visceral” and associates it with blood. Leder claims that “the Visceral cannot be properly said to belong to the subject: it is a power that traverses me,

¹³ Edmund Husserl, “Material Things in Their Relation to the Aesthetic Body,” in *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 29.

¹⁴ Don Welton, “Soft, Smooth Hands: Husserl’s Phenomenology of the Lived-Body” *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings* ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 39.

¹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “*Phenomenology of Perception*.” Trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 102.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112-171.

granting me life in ways I have never fully willed or understood.”¹⁷ Visceral dimension is not under the control of the conscious ‘I,’ hence, phenomenologically distinct from “the body-as-visibility.” Yet, it is intertwined with the latter through its life giving functions. Leder emphasises the uncanny nature of the visceral in similar terms with John Donne’s experience of his treasonous body when she argues that “a world of organic, autonomous powers circulate within my visceral depths. Their otherness haunts the ‘I,’ surfacing at times of illness or approaching death.”¹⁸ Leder’s explanation of the blood dimension of the ‘lived body’ has the uncanny characteristic that haunted the Renaissance soul. It exists and functions according to its own will, evading the grasp and control of the conscious ‘I,’ whether that ‘I’ is the ‘I can’ of the lived body or the ‘I think’ of the Cartesian cogito.

3 Unruly Body in *Hamlet*

The body image in *Hamlet* seems to have a will of its own controlling and manipulating reason instead of being supervised by it. Hamlet seems to be experiencing an almost Cartesian crisis due to his inability to accept a body that lives under the yoke of its animalistic desires, especially if that body belongs to his mother. Hamlet’s obsession with his mother’s body and her sexuality seems to dominate the play more than his father’s murder and his revenge. Indeed, he often considers murder and incest as a single crime merged into one another. Hamlet cannot come to terms with Gertrude’s marriage. The sexual relationship between Gertrude and Claudius, labelled as incestuous—thus unnatural—, is described in graphic detail by Hamlet and the ghost several times in the play. Hamlet refers to flesh with disgust and his descriptions are laden with bestial imagery that not only adds to the ‘monstrosity’ of the relationship but also emphasises the lack of the control of reason. In his first soliloquy, Hamlet is enraged about the “wicked speed” that his mother lay on “incestuous sheets” and remarks that “a beast that wants discourse of reason would’ve mourned longer.”¹⁹ In the so-called ‘closet scene’ he verbally attacks his mother violently and expresses his disgust with the grossness of sexuality using similar imagery: “...live in the rank sweat of an enseam’d bed,/ Stew’d in corruption, honeying and making love/ Over the nasty sty!”²⁰ The ghost refers to their marriage in

¹⁷ Drew Leder, “Flesh and Blood: a Proposed Supplement to Merleau-Ponty,” *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings* ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell Publ., 1999) 203.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), I.ii.150.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, III.iv.92-4.

parallel terms: “lust...will sate itself in a celestial bed and prey on garbage.”²¹ The revolting nature of the beast in question has less to do with its lack of reason than its carnal desire that seems to have a life of its own.

Hamlet’s obsession with his mother’s flesh will be reflected on Ophelia and women in general in the so-called ‘nunnery scene.’ In order to not be like women who lure men with their sensual tricks, Hamlet advises Ophelia to be “as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,”²² in other words to freeze her flesh and render it lifeless. Indeed, Ophelia’s chastity is a crucial issue in the play. It is set forth as early as act one, scene three by Laertes’ warnings followed by Polonius’ outburst, which present Ophelia’s virginity as a material commodity. Ophelia’s “chaste treasure,”²³ using a common analogy, is referred to as the bud that can be corrupted by a canker before it blooms, and throughout the play Ophelia and her maidenhead are associated with flowers. When she dies, Laertes suggests an almost grotesque fusion: “Lay her i’th’ earth,/ and from her fair and unpolluted flesh/ may violets spring...”²⁴ In the play’s imagery, while sexual body is bestial, virgin body is vegetative; thus associated with creatures that are supposedly lesser in rank than animals in the great chain of being. Ophelia’s young flesh will disintegrate and breed flowers while Gertrude’s mature flesh, in Hamlet’s perception, is worse than a “beast that wants discourse of reason,”²⁵ particularly because she does not behave appropriate to her age. At her age, her body and sexuality are supposed to be under the control of her reason, her actions should be grounded in reason.

In *Hamlet* the relationship between body and mind is closely related to age. Blood, that represents both life and carnal appetites is supposed to be checked by soul as one gets older. Laertes, when commenting on Hamlet’s love for Ophelia, makes use of the popular Renaissance understanding that blood is the “seat of emotions, of passion as opposed to reason.”²⁶ Laertes calls Hamlet’s love “a fashion and a toy in blood”²⁷ suggesting its transient, trifling and carnal nature. Then he moves onto another common analogy, body as the temple of the soul, to argue that in maturity mind and soul become more in control of the body²⁸ and hence once governed by his reason, the prince will remember his royal duties and leave Ophelia.

²¹ Ibid., I.v.55-7.

²² Ibid., III.i.137-8.

²³ Ibid., I.iii.30.

²⁴ Ibid., V.i.232-3.

²⁵ Ibid., I.ii.150.

²⁶ See notes to the Arden edition of *Hamlet*, 440.

²⁷ Ibid., I.iii.6.

²⁸ Ibid., I.iii.10-4.

Gertrude's sexuality is disgusting for Hamlet not only because it is with her husband's brother, but also because it is unseemly for a woman of her age. Hamlet accuses his mother by reversing Laertes' argument:

You cannot call it love; for at your age
 The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble
 And waits upon judgement and what judgement
 Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have
 Else could you not have motion; but sure that sense
 Is apoplex'd... Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
 Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all...²⁹

Not only Gertrude's eyes, ears, hands and nose, but also her blood and "matron's bones"³⁰ are in rebellion. In other words, both her flesh/body surface and her entire viscera form a creature that needs to be tamed. The way this 'creature' reacts is so inexplicable by natural causality that, she must have been possessed by the devil. Hamlet is sure that she still has sense perception as she has motion; however, the intentionality of motility, supposedly grounded in reason, seems to fail in controlling the blood. The visceral dimension seems to have its own way; it is governed neither by reason nor by wisdom that comes with age. Indeed, the aging body seems to have negative effects on the mind rather than increased wisdom. Hamlet's conversation with Polonius, in act two scene two, draws a grotesque picture of old age: "old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams..."³¹ The body decays and the mind deteriorates in old age. As Leder suggests, in those moments the uncanny "otherness [of the visceral that] haunts the 'I'"³² becomes more visible.

The play is closely concerned with the notion of death and decay, both physical and metaphorical. One aspect of decay in the play is that which "is rotten in the state of Denmark,"³³ in other words, corruption arising from murder and sexual appetite. Another aspect is physical death and the decaying body in the cycle of life. While the conscious 'I' can have some semblance of control over the former, it is utterly powerless over the latter. One of the most striking

²⁹ Ibid., III.iv.68-79.

³⁰ Ibid., III.iv.83.

³¹ Ibid., II.ii.197-200.

³² Drew Leder, "Flesh and Blood: a Proposed Supplement to Merleau-Ponty," *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings* ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell Publ., 1999), 205.

³³ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), I.iv.90.

instances that juxtaposes the two forms of decay is when Hamlet tells Polonius to keep his daughter away from the sun:

Hamlet: For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion—Have you a daughter?

Polonius: I have, my Lord.

Hamlet: Let her not walk i'th' sun. Conception is a blessing,
But as your daughter may conceive—friend, look to't.³⁴

The life giving quality of the sun is, on the one hand, associated with male fertility and on the other, by the analogy of conception, with breeding maggots that will rot the body into a carrion. Moreover, as Harold Jenkins argues in the relevant footnote of the Arden edition, carrion not only refers to the dead carcass but also to live flesh “and especially flesh contemptuously regarded as available for sexual pleasure.”³⁵ Thus, the imagery intricately associates death and decay with carnality. Nevertheless, gruesome as it may sound, the decaying flesh and viscera have the power to breed new life from death.

The play treats death simultaneously as a natural biological phenomenon and as an existential issue. In act four, scene three Hamlet philosophises, like a court jester, on the dead body of Polonius: “A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.”³⁶ On the one hand the passage refers to the physiological transformation of bodies in the food chain; on the other, to the nothingness of social hierarchies, identity roles and worldly existence. The decaying body of “a king [according to Hamlet] may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.”³⁷ Later in the graveyard, among the remains of decaying bodies, Hamlet again comments on the transformation that bodies undergo after death. The graphic details of how bodies disintegrate under the earth and come to acquire a sight and smell that will rise one’s “gorge,”³⁸ increases the morbidity of physicality. The meditation again takes on an existential nature as Hamlet imagines great figures of history turning into loam and being used for our petty daily needs.³⁹

However, death for Hamlet is often a way to escape from the prison of his soul, the flesh which he considers in his first soliloquy as “solid” or “sullied.”⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid., II.ii.181-5.

³⁵ Ibid., 246.

³⁶ Ibid., IV.iii.27-8.

³⁷ Ibid., IV.iii.30.

³⁸ Ibid., V.i.181.

³⁹ Ibid., V.i.200-210.

⁴⁰ Ibid., I.ii.129. There is a discussion among editors on whether the Quarto or the Folio version of this soliloquy is correct as one reads the word ‘solid’ the other ‘sullied.’ Both words seem to be appropriate to reflect his state of mind.

The body is tainted and corrupt and the imagery of solid flesh melting into dew has the effect of getting rid of the material and becoming ephemeral. Similarly, in the famous “to be or not to be”⁴¹ soliloquy Hamlet explores what will happen if we free our minds from the suffering of the flesh. Is it freedom or escape from existence, which is nothing but bearing “the whips and scorns of time?”⁴² Which is a more courageous act: to die and be “no more”⁴³ or to stay and “take arms against a sea of troubles?”⁴⁴

Hamlet’s dilemma can be explained by the Heideggerian notion of Dasein.⁴⁵ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that “Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself.”⁴⁶ In other words, Dasein understands itself in and through the roles that are always already assigned by the culture within which it dwells. Therefore, its being-in-the-world is always an issue for Dasein and its being is always a potentiality of being. What it is and what it will become is based on projections and possibilities. Existence for Heidegger is this self-interpreting way of being. Thus, Dasein is always in a process of becoming and is only fulfilled when projections end, that is when it dies. Hence, being is nothing. Since one cannot cope with this nothingness, one continues to live in this world of possibilities. Dasein has a tendency to “cover up” the fact that it is solely interpretation, understands itself as having an essential nature and grounds its actions upon this understanding. It is when the world touches Dasein—that is in states of trauma, depression and frustration—its everydayness is shattered and nothing seems to make sense. Those are the moments when Dasein is closest to nothingness, hence the truth.

The world has ‘touched’ Hamlet quite seriously.⁴⁷ Coleridge, in his twelfth lecture of 1811-12, presents Hamlet’s situation as thus: he “is the heir-apparent of a throne: his father dies suspiciously; his mother excluded her son from his throne by marrying his uncle. This is not enough; but the Ghost of the murdered father is introduced to assure the son that he was put to death by his own

⁴¹ Ibid., III.i.56.

⁴² Ibid., III.i.70.

⁴³ Ibid., III.i.61.

⁴⁴ Ibid., III.i.59.

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Routledge, 1962), 26-28. Heidegger considers human being as a special entity as it has an understanding of its being; thus, he uses the term Dasein (being-there) for this human way of being.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁷ For a Heideggerian reading of *Hamlet* see Ayşem Seval, “Limit Experiences of Being: Death and Madness in *Hamlet*.” *Studies in English: Proceedings from the 6th International IDEA Conference*. (İstanbul: İstanbul Kültür University Publ., 2012) 300-308.

brother.”⁴⁸ Hamlet’s everydayness has shattered; hence, he constantly problematizes corporeal existence and becomes hostile to flesh. On the one hand, there is a strong desire to escape it as it seems to be unaware of the sufferings of the mind; on the other, an equally powerful desire to master and domesticate the treasonous flesh. Thus, what seems to be the underlying cause of Hamlet’s crisis is a peek at nothingness—or the ‘truth’ in Heideggerian terms. With this experience, the fragility of the self-grounding gesture of an autonomous mind becomes visible. And the resulting anxiety manifests itself as a hopeless attempt to master the lived body which refuses to be tamed.

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⁴⁸ Rhys, Ernest ed. *Coleridge’s Lectures on Shakespeare and Some Other Old Poets and Dramatists* (New York: Everyman, 1914), 475.

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Recovering (from) the Past in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*

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Abstract

V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* juxtaposes imperial history and national present as reflected by the protagonist Ralph Singh's personal history. Singh's identity crisis leads him to find ways to re-connect with the past in the hopes of overcoming the damage created by colonialism. The sense of displacement, being a shipwreck, becomes part of his identity as he is unable to establish a complete sense of belonging either to Isabella or to London. As colonialism separates the individual from his cultural origins through re-location and colonial education, it leads to the emergence of a yearning for imagined lands located in the mythical past or in the imperial center where the individual envisions himself finding the meaning he is looking for. As both these imagined spaces turn out to be out of his reach, either geographically as in the case of India or temporally as in the case of former glorious London Singh dreams about, they only contribute to the frustration of the postcolonial individual who is left in the national space haunted by these imaginings. I argue that, for the postcolonial subject, the re-visiting of the past does not provide comfort or self-assurance due to the geographical and temporal estrangement in these particular circumstances; instead, imagined and superficial connections bring forth disappointment, restlessness and detachment, ultimately leading to a sense of self-alienation.

Keywords: Postcolonial literature, V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, colonization, nation-state, colonial and postcolonial identity

V.S. Naipaul'un *Taklitçiler* Romanında Geçmiş Kurtarmak ve Geçmişten Kurtulmak

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Özet

V.S. Naipaul'un *Taklitçiler* adlı romanı, ana karakter Ralph Singh'in kişisel tarihi üzerinden imparatorluğun geçmişini ve ulusal şimdiyi yan yana getirir. Singh'in yaşadığı kimlik bunalımı, kolonyalizmin yol açtığı zararın üstesinden gelme umuduyla, onu geçmişle yeni bağlantılar kurmaya iter. Isabella adasına veya Londra'ya tam bir aidiyet kuramamasıyla, yerinden edilmişlik, enkaz, hissiyatı kimliğinin bir parçası haline gelir. Kolonyalizmin yer değiştirme veya kolonyal eğitim yoluyla bireyleri kendi kültürel kökenlerinden koparması, bireyin yaşamında aradığı anlamı bulacağını düşündüğü, mitik geçmişte veya imparatorluğun merkezinde yer alan hayali yerlere duyduğu bir çeşit özlem hissi ortaya çıkartır. Tahayyül edilen her iki yer de, Hindistan söz konusu olduğunda coğrafi uzaklıktan ve Singh'in hayalini kurduğu geçmişteki görkemli Londra ise artık sadece geçmişte kaldığından, ulaşılmaz durumdadır ve kendi ulus-devletinin sınırları içerisinde yer alan postkolonyal bireye musallat olan bu hayaller onun yılgnlığını daha da arttırır. Bu makalede, postkolonyal birey için, geçmişe dönüşün, bu özel şartlardan kaynaklanan coğrafi ve zamansal yabancılaşma yüzünden, teselli veya öz güven hissi sağlamadığını ve kurulan hayali ve yüzeysel bağlantıların hayal kırıklığı, huzursuzluk ve en sonunda bir tür kendine yabancılaşmaya neden olduğunu ileri sürüyorum.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sömürge sonrası edebiyat, V.S. Naipaul, *Taklitçiler*, sömürgeleştirme, ulus-devlet, kolonyal kimlik ve postkolonyal kimlik.

Elleke Boehmer, in *Migrant Metaphors*, describes V.S. Naipaul's approach to literature "as a means of laying claim to a British cultural heritage experienced but never fully understood as a colonial schoolboy."¹ Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* presents us the story of a colonial schoolboy who grows up to be a colonial politician only to end up writing his memoirs as an exile in England. While this brief summary does not do justice to the novel's complex treatment of colonization and its aftermath, it nonetheless directs us to a path where the reader can witness not only Ralph Singh's personal sense of displacement and chaos but also the broader disorder that engulfs the society before and after independence. In Naipaul's novel, the protagonist's preoccupation with history, or rather multiple histories, emerges as an effort to overcome the rupture created by both colonial and postcolonial condition. As Singh strives to recover the past that will provide him with a sense of completeness and belonging, the novel highlights the impossibility of this endeavor. The various pasts that he embraces so as to recover the *true* source of his identity, eventually, turn into disappointments and disillusionments from which he is unable to recover. In *The Mimic Men*, the severed link between the past and the present leaves the postcolonial individual in a state of displacement and homelessness, for which neither the imperial metropolis nor the independent nation-state can provide any consolation but only exacerbate the impossibility of feeling oneself whole.

Naipaul's novel represents introspective moments from troubling times, when individuals are trying to find their way in uncharted territory, in other words the transitional period from colonization to independence, and later post-independence. In this turbulent time, Singh strives to locate his identity on the spatial and temporal boundary that separates the island of Isabella from metropolitan London. While the novel deals with history on both personal and collective levels, it – through the protagonist's attempts to reconnect with the past to give meaning to his life – also discloses the broader implications of the rupture that comes with the end of empire and the foundation of the nation-state. At this point, it bears significance to have a brief overview of Naipaul's own position with respect to the imperial and national cultural spheres. Pascale Casanova maps out the different ways a writer can be positioned in relation to the national literary space, and where this national space is located within the world literary space.² When we look at his examples, Naipaul, with his disavowal of Trinidadian identity, fits into the category that "may reject his national heritage, forsaking his homeland for a country that is more richly endowed in

¹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 168.

² Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBovise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004)

literary resources than his own.”³ By embracing British and Indian identities, Naipaul positions himself not as a Caribbean writer – a label that he firmly resists – but as part of the British literary space, which occupies an influential standing in the world literary space.⁴ The novel under scrutiny here is heavily based on Naipaul’s experiences with British colonialism and the following decolonization process, which, inevitably, affects his approach to history and past cultural traditions.

Elleke Boehmer, in her analysis of postcolonial societies, notes that the loss that comes with the colonial condition has generally been described as a destruction of “an essential umbilical cord with history.”⁵ The attempt to recover links between generations and to establish a collective memory constitutes a major theme among post-independence writers.⁶ In this way, nationalist projects aim to recuperate from the damage done by colonization by laying claim to their roots in the past. However, Simon Gikandi, in *Maps of Englishness*, points to problems embedded in the nationalisms of postcolonial societies. He argues that nationalism was not able to offer the “radical rupture from the colonial past” that it had aimed for in the first place.⁷ This condition necessitates a closer look at some of the assumptions of postcolonial theory as well as nationalist projects. According to Gikandi, postcolonial studies, then, should prioritize “demythologiz[ing] the ideology of nationalism – especially the claim that the nation-state in Africa, the Caribbean, or the Indian subcontinent represents a political and interpretative moment in which colonialism is finally transcended.”⁸ When we consider Boehmer and Gikandi’s views together, the post-independence effort to confront and reconnect with the past becomes more problematic as the nation-state has to re-assess its own shortcomings and failures in the process.

³ Ibid., 41.

⁴ Nicholas Laughlin draws our attention to one of the most striking instances of this detachment in Naipaul’s press statement following the announcement of his Nobel Prize for Literature: “‘It is a great tribute to both England, my home, and to India, the home of my ancestors, and to the dedication and support of my agent’” (qtd. in Laughlin 65). What strikes us here is that Naipaul not only leaves Trinidad – the place of his birth – out of the picture but describes England as his ‘home,’ paving the way for more controversy on himself. Nicholas Laughlin, “V.S. Naipaul: The Writer as the Last Free Man” in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, eds. M. Bucknor and A. Donnell (New York: Routledge, 2011), 64.

⁵ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 185.

⁶ Ibid., 182.

⁷ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1996), 7.

⁸ Ibid., 15.

The Mimic Men offers glimpses into the tribulations faced by the protagonist, who strives to understand not only his past but also his present through the past. Singh's narrative reveals both his fantasies where he attempts to uncover links to his ancestors of a glorified past, and his skepticism toward the nationalization project of Isabella in which he actively participates. His act of writing is intended to give meaning and order to his life by understanding his own past within the context of Isabella's history. The novel provides reflections on Gikandi's idea of demythologizing nationalism so as to examine the continuities between the imperial past and the national present. Gikandi's discussion of decolonization and the nation-state illustrates the complexity of nationalism when taken into account with the accompanying modernization projects in the post-independence period. If nationalist projects strive to reach back to a past that will enable them to break their ties with empire, they also "claim to be the true agent of modernity and modernization, a function [they] sought to wrench from the metropolis itself."⁹ Non-European societies' relationship with modernity and modernization, which are generally regarded as European concepts due to having arrived through colonization or cultural influence, reveals the way Europe relates to these societies' modernization process in addition to the societies' own perspective. Dipesh Chakrabarty's elaboration on European historicism and the idea of "first in Europe, then elsewhere" helps us to comprehend the dynamics of the relationship between the non-Western nation-state and modernity and modernization projects.¹⁰ Chakrabarty claims that historicism enabled the establishment of a cultural distance in which Europe appeared as the original site for the emergence of capitalism, modernity, or enlightenment. By assuming this position, Europe finds itself capable of saying "not yet" to non-European societies, in other words implying that colonies are not ready for implementing these ideas in their native lands, at least not by themselves. It is anticolonial nationalism that challenged this understanding by rejecting the historicist progression of modernity as well as inserting the subordinate social classes into political life.¹¹ Thus, through both rejection and appropriation of certain tenets of European modernity, alternative modernities come into being as part of nationalist projects in different parts of the world.

Chakrabarty also notes that, during non-European modernization efforts, integration of subordinate social classes into political life occurs without any prior preparation.¹² The idea of a particular society's unpreparedness for modernization comes up in Gregory Jusdanis's examination of modernization in Greek context in *Belated Modernity*. In this book, Jusdanis states his aim as

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7

¹¹ Ibid., 7-9.

¹² Ibid., 8.

“discover[ing] the implications of purposeful modernization in the cultural realm and the fate of the modernizing project in a society unprepared for it.”¹³ In Naipaul’s novel here, modernization comes to the fore as part of the nationalist project’s attempt to transform the society while the society itself is still grappling with the transition to decolonization. Jusdanis argues that “an-other modernity” comes into being as “an experiment on the margins, which, having internalized the tensions between dominant and minor, periphery and center, prototype and copy, imitates and also creates, follows but resists.”¹⁴ In *The Mimic Men*, this experiment takes the form of mediation between the imperial metropolis and the colonial periphery.

The Mimic Men, composed of three sections, presents us with a non-linear narrative that starts and ends in London, putting the narrator’s Isabella days in between. While the first section consists of Singh’s first time in London and then the return to Isabella with his wife Sandra, the second section focuses on Singh’s childhood and the days leading to his departure for London. The last section is where we are back in Isabella as the narrator becomes active in politics, which eventually leads to his exile in London, where he is writing the memoirs we are reading. The non-chronological ordering of Singh’s life story finds an explanation at the very end of the novel when he realizes what the act of writing has enabled him to do: “to impose order on my own history, to abolish that disturbance which is what a narrative in sequence might have led me to.”¹⁵ It is important to remember that this is what Singh finally realizes at the end of his memoirs, rather than being the motivation behind his writing. The narrator’s intermittent authorial interventions to provide a retrospective look to certain events in his life underscore the desire to eradicate the sense of disorder. Nina Wilson-Tagore states that “Singh’s history had been a reordering of the events of his life as a means of understanding his historical condition and of fashioning order out of a personal chaos.”¹⁶ In order to understand where Singh’s personal history stands in relation to the nation’s history, and the significance of the act of writing in bringing them together, we need to take a look at the beginning of the novel where Singh first explains his motivation to write his memoirs.

The novel opens with the first-person narrator’s recollections of the boarding house and the snow during his first time in London. At the end of these few pages, the reader comes across an image that will haunt the narrator’s life as well as the rest of the novel: “I knew that my own journey, scarcely begun, had ended in the

¹³ Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xi.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

¹⁵ V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 292.

¹⁶ Nina Wilson-Tagore, *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 70.

shipwreck which all my life I had sought to avoid.”¹⁷ Following this sentence is the narrator’s commentary on his own beginning as well as the description of what he has envisioned his writing to achieve: “A more than autobiographical work, the exposition of the malaise of our times pointed and illuminated by personal experience and that knowledge of the possible which can come only from a closeness to power.”¹⁸ Yet, he is far from writing something greater than himself with no political career left. As Singh describes his current life in London, the reader notices the pessimism and indifference that have led him to a state of passivity. Disillusionment characterizes his state of mind: “I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them. All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality.”¹⁹ In a way, the memoir is the recounting of how his hopes for new landscapes and beginnings have turned into lost dreams that only reinforce his long-existing sense of being shipwrecked.

While Singh’s preoccupation with the idea of shipwreck appears to stem from a personal condition, the emphasis on the idea of disorder in a broader context leads us to examine the relationship between his sense of shipwreck and the social, political and historical conditions contributing to it. In fact, he points to colonization as the underlying reason for the general sense of restlessness that deeply affects not only him but all the people of Isabella. “The unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes,” says the narrator, prepares the conditions for a society imbued in chaos and disorder.²⁰ This characterization of Isabellan society indicates the separation from one’s origins and the rupture colonization creates in the personal and collective histories of different peoples. Michael Gorra scrutinizes Naipaul’s general approach to the composition of Caribbean society and argues that according to Naipaul, these people “have failed to form a common culture, have collided without cohering.”²¹ From this perspective, Singh’s writing constitutes an attempt to explore the different repercussions of this lack of common culture among people of Isabella and its consequences on his personal history.

The attempt to read *The Mimic Men* as problematizing its society’s ordeals with history and modernization necessitates a closer look to the social and cultural conditions that shaped the national context as well as the writer’s stance toward them. Nina Wilson-Tagoe’s statement on the relationship between West Indian writers and history provides an important entry point for understanding Naipaul’s

¹⁷ V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 10 (emphasis mine).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

²¹ Michael Gorra, *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 80.

(as well as Singh's) preoccupation with the idea of history in *The Mimic Men*: "Traumatized by history, the West Indian writer is yet continually haunted by its specter and perpetually engaged with redefining it."²² In the novel, Singh, writing his autobiography, is taking over the role of a West Indian writer and engaging with his personal history in order to give meaning or impose order on both his personal history and collective history: "It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder ... it must also be confessed that in that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labor than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied."²³ However, Wilson-Tagoe also cautions us about possible difficulties in West Indian writers' attempts to deal with history and time. Due to the representation of the West Indian as a victim through the history of colonialism and slavery, writers need to confront the dilemma of either struggling "to transcend history and reconstruct new identities or accept the despairing conclusion that displacement and violation have been historically determined and therefore unconquerable."²⁴ This dilemma constitutes the focal point in *The Mimic Men*, where the reader witnesses Singh's repeated attempts to leave Isabella behind, both literally and metaphorically, only to realize the futility of his efforts.

Imre Szeman, in *Zones of Instability*, notes that West Indian authors' writings after the 1960s, in other words after the dissolution of West Indies Federation and the independence of the major islands, were no longer driven by nationalism or showed skepticism toward the earlier national literary projects.²⁵ Naipaul reveals a rather adverse reaction to both the idea of federation in the Caribbean and nationalism in general. While he shares the common view that the West Indies as an entity owes its existence to colonial history and therefore the federation cannot succeed, he also thinks that nationalism cannot succeed in the area.²⁶ This pessimistic view paves the way for Singh's overall disappointment with Isabella and his search for ways to find meaning in London. If we follow Stefano Harney's claim that "V.S. Naipaul has never seen the nation as his home," Singh appears as the wanderer looking for home outside Isabella.²⁷ However, his sense of shipwreck coming from being born on an island like

²² Nina Wilson-Tagore, *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 2.

²³ V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 39.

²⁴ Nina Wilson-Tagore, *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 4.

²⁵ Imre Szeman, *Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism and the Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 66-67.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁷ Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Zed Books, 1996), 10.

Isabella haunts him during his attempts to find a place that would provide him with the sense of belonging and order he needs.

Singh regards his existence on Isabella as accidental, a by-product of the colonial project. For Wilson-Tagoe, Singh's feelings of shipwreck can be traced back to "a Crusoe archetype"; however, it has transformed to include "all the psychological disorders Caribbean people inherit from their condition of displacement and their status as colonials."²⁸ Singh's realization that there might be other people around him who also share the same sense of displacement affirms that it is a shared condition. What the image of shipwreck underscores is a constant search for a place of belonging, a place of return where the individual would feel at home and united with his roots. Gorra, highlighting the impossibility of a return in the context of Caribbean, poses a simple yet illuminating question that explicates the futility of Singh's attempts to find a sense of completeness in the past: "To what past? To whose?"²⁹ The diversity of the inhabitants' ethnic, racial, and historical backgrounds prevents the possibility of a solution on a collective basis; at the same time it makes Singh realize the overwhelming presence of displacement and homelessness.

Stuart Hall describes the Caribbean as "the first, the original and the purest diaspora," which constitutes a particular difficulty in identity politics of both the broader region and the fictional world of Isabella.³⁰ Hall's diagnosis resonates with Gorra's question above; the impossibility of a return to the original homeland – or in fact even adjudicating whose homeland – and the violence that comes with this break with one's roots. Singh's fantasies about his family's past, which I will analyze later on, reveal how the rupture that comes with living in the Caribbean prevents him from forming a healthy relationship with his origins. Geoffrey Kabat, examining the novel's treatment of historical disorder and narrative order, argues that Singh is removed from all three cultures to which he has a connection: India is literally and figuratively out of his reach; London provides a temporary relief but then makes him feel an outsider, and Isabella is the source of original restlessness.³¹ What he experiences is an utter homelessness and sense of non-belonging no matter where he is.

Singh's sense of homelessness and shipwreck takes us to Georg Lukacs's notion of transcendental homelessness and the novelistic hero's struggles with it. Lukacs argues that in the modern world the transcendental bond between the artist or author and "the world of created forms" is disrupted, causing the epic to

²⁸ Nina Wilson-Tagore, *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 60.

²⁹ Michael Gorra, *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 78.

³⁰ Stuart Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities" *New Left Review* 209 (1995):6.

³¹ Geoffrey Kabat, "Historical Disorder and Narrative Order in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*" *Commonwealth Novel in English* 9 (2001):209.

disappear and the novel to trace the search for “an aim that is no longer clearly and unequivocally given.”³² The novel form, as representation of this transcendental homelessness, strives “to uncover and construct the totality of life.”³³ Singh’s desire to impose order on his personal history and overcome the sense of chaos and displacement through the act of writing reminds us of Lukacs’s transcendental homeless and the following attempt to give meaning to a world that no longer operates on the previously established relations. Singh’s search for meaning exacerbates his sense of homelessness. That Lukacs describes the novelistic hero as a “seeker” prompts the reader to think about the ideal places Singh pursues in order to lessen his disillusionment, which, in the end, aggravates his sense of being adrift.³⁴ In this sense, Naipaul’s novel cannot offer the totality of life that Lukacs is after. Indeed, the novel points to the impossibility of attaining a sense of completeness and unity.

When we consider Singh’s preoccupation with the already lost ideal landscapes, the novel’s first section with Singh’s recollections of his first time in London enables us to focus on his expectations from London and the ensuing disappointment. The narrator’s disillusionment with London starts early on as his hope to find “the beginning of order” fades away soon after his arrival.³⁵ Bruce King argues that if *The Mimic Men* is about disorder, it is also about the myths of order; ideal cities which are expected to offer order and a sense of completeness. He states that “there is no ideal city ... [t]here are only ideas of such an ideal.”³⁶ In this regard, Singh’s disappointment stems from the incompatibility between the ideal London he has dreamed of and the London he experiences. His first experience of snow, which he calls “[his] element,” and its beauty are, literally and metaphorically, framed with the dreariness of the city as he looks out of the window of his empty room and sees “brown smoke rising from ugly chimneypots, the plastered wall of the house next to the bombsite,” which leads him to view the city under a new and not-so-magical light.³⁷ Rob Nixon, in *London Calling*, suggests that Naipaul himself had a similar experience with London. The London he arrived in was not the London he imagined and idealized through his colonial education, and Naipaul’s disappointment was a result of his longing for the old imperial capital that he knew from books.³⁸ Singh,

³² Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), 40-41.

³³ Ibid., 60.

³⁴ Ibid., 65.

³⁵ V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 22.

³⁶ Bruce King, *V.S. Naipaul* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 76.

³⁷ V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 8.

³⁸ Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V.S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 37.

who is also a student of colonial education like Naipaul, suffers from the same symptom: the imagined London of the books and the London of the present time. The “pure world” of the books where lively landscapes and cities present themselves to Singh leaves its place to London’s “two-dimensional” life that turns his initial excitement to disappointment.³⁹ As Singh’s expectations from the city wither against the real London, the city starts to lose its allure for him quite fast. Also, the fact that London is unable to present him with the opportunity to overcome his sense of disorder leaves its mark in his memories about London.

Singh’s desire to create a world where he would no longer feel lost or shipwrecked leads him to reach out to previous generations of his family. As Singh’s family history is marked with the tension between his father and the mother’s side of the family, it is noteworthy to see how Singh imagines his maternal and paternal origins as they relate to the identity he strives to establish as an adolescent. The father’s initial superior status, compared to the mother’s lower-class background, is challenged with his father-in-law’s success in business and becoming one of the “Isabella millionaires.”⁴⁰ Indeed, Singh traces the idea of shipwreck to his father: “I used to get the feeling that my father had in some storybook way been shipwrecked on the island and that over the years the hope of rescue had altogether faded.”⁴¹ Given the father’s inferior status in the eyes of the family, it does not come as a surprise that he first tries to lay claim to the mother’s side and creates a vivid image of a previous generation in an ideal landscape: “In my imagination I saw my mother’s mother leading her cow through a scene of pure pastoral: calendar pictures of English gardens superimposed on our Isabellan villages of mud and grass: village lanes on cool mornings, the ditches green and grassy, the water crystal, the front gardens of thatched huts bright with delicate flowers of every hue.”⁴² This superimposition has its roots in the ideal landscapes Singh knows from books. By integrating them into his family history, he strives to create a link between his roots and the ideal lands, in this case England. Indeed, by inserting his grandparents into a British landscape, he strives to embrace Britishness through this fabricated family lineage. That he imagines this scene after the father’s belittling of the mother’s family for selling milk is also interesting. Through its transference to the British countryside, the scene attains a pastoral beauty and elegance. However, when we think of the image, it appears unnatural and unsettling. The combination of two worlds, Isabellan and British, occurs in an artificial manner where one is simply positioned on top of the other, which, in fact, reinforces the impossibility of connecting these worlds. In this manner, it resembles a reverse

³⁹V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 23.

⁴⁰Ibid., 101.

⁴¹Ibid., 107.

⁴²Ibid., 107-108.

version of the history of colonialism in Isabella where the British brought its own world, namely political, social, and cultural structures, which, in the end, leads to the emergence of mimic men who are unable to reconcile the conflicting aspects of their identities as colonial subjects. In the end, Singh's childish fantasy about his grandparents, based on the premise of the arbitrary conjoining of two worlds, underlines his current sense of displacement rather than offering any consolation.

Although Singh seems to disavow his father, his secret fantasies about his paternal origins prove to be more empowering, enabling him to escape to an idealized Indian past where he no longer feels a shipwreck. The Indian past presents him with the opportunity to move beyond his marginalization as an East Indian in the West Indies. In these fantasies, he is where he (thinks he) really belongs, where he is powerful. As he reads about the history of Aryan peoples, he starts to imagine himself as one of them, the long lost leader of Aryan horsemen:

But in my secret life I was the son of my father, and a Singh...I lived a secret life in a world of endless plains, tall bare mountains, white with snow at their peaks, among nomads on horseback, daily pitching my tent beside cold green mountain torrents that raged over grey rock, waking in the mornings to mist and rain and dangerous weather. I was a Singh. And I would dream that all over the Central Asian plains the horsemen looked for their leader. Then a wise man came to them and said, "You are looking in the wrong place. The true leader of you lies far away, shipwrecked on an island the like of which you cannot visualize."⁴³

Here, Singh imagines another ideal landscape that is beyond his reach. As he fantasizes about being the leader of horsemen, he assumes a position of self-importance and confidence which he greatly lacks in Isabella. Indeed, what lies under his attempts to forge a connection to a glorious history is his constant need for self-assurance originating from his colonial subjectivity. However, his romantic recovery of Indian roots through imagination does not provide him any substantial support in his daily life or in his search for a remedy to overcome the sense of shipwreck.

Singh's attempt to create a personality through his fantasies about his familial heritage takes up a different form through his self-naming at school. The transformation of Ranjit Kripalsingh to Ralph Singh occurs as a result of his sense of incompetence as well as a need to compete with those other students who seem to have figured out the ways of the world. He states that, by breaking his surname into two, he revives an ancient fracture, which is preceded by Ralph

⁴³ Ibid., 117-118.

now.⁴⁴ The naming brings forth a number of issues. In the first place, the act of naming points to Singh's attempt to assert authority and take charge of his identity-in-the-shaping. Though he is aware of the deceptive aspect of the fabricated name of R.R.K. Singh, he still manages to have it on written records, thus changing the way he appears on paper. This first instance of having control in the way his name appears in written records becomes rather telling when we think about Singh's preoccupation with bringing order to his personal history through the act of writing, namely on a page. Bruce King draws our attention to the fact that Singh's name becomes "fractured and anglicized" through this transformation.⁴⁵ In addition to this, the fracturing aims to recover a part of his identity that is no longer in Singh's reach, namely his Indian roots. In the act of self-naming, Singh strives to combine two imagined familial lines, Ralph of the superimposed English landscape and Singh of the Aryan horsemen living in India. This rather bizarre mixing conveys his desire to empower himself by bringing together the British, what he regards as the ideal, and the Indian, the ancient mythicized origins. However, it also reveals the dilemma of the postcolonial subject: the yearning to be like the British while maintaining the connection to his roots, which eventually results in the split self that highlights the sense of non-belonging.

If we consider his family as the initial source for Singh's recollection of his childhood as "a period of incompetence, bewilderment, solitude and shameful fantasies," the colonial education he receives constitutes the second, and more influential, source that exacerbates the sense of lack in his life.⁴⁶ That his first memory of school is an edited one reveals the extent of displacement in his early life, where imagination takes precedence over reality: "My first memory of school is of taking an apple to the teacher. This puzzles me. We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have."⁴⁷ An apple from faraway lands replaces an Isabellian orange in his memory, revealing the significance of his later experiences in shaping his memories about childhood. Through his education, Singh's personal feelings of inadequacy gradually turn into awareness about the condition of Isabella in general, that the island is not the true, pure world but an inferior imitation. His yearning for lands that are real and pure prompts his criticism of Isabella: "We, here on our island, handling books printed in this world, and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its

⁴⁴ Ibid., 112-113.

⁴⁵ Bruce King, *V.S. Naipaul* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 72.

⁴⁶ V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 109-110.

reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new.”⁴⁸ Here, the novel draws our attention to the colonial subjectivity that is unable to free itself from the influence of the Old World despite being forgotten by it. Colonial education perpetuates the feeling of inferiority by providing representations of a life not of Isabella but other lands. As the Old World becomes the main reference point for students, it does not come as a surprise that they end up imitating and looking up to the lives they read in books, which only brings more disillusionment with the fact it is impossible for them to belong to the cities and lives they admire. In this sense, Naipaul underscores the colonial predicament that traps individuals in an acute sense of self-awareness where they are conscious of their own condition yet unable to challenge it. It is ultimately this awareness that leads Singh to seek an escape from Isabella.

If Singh is one of the mimic men of the New World in *Isabella*, he becomes another mimic man in the Old World of London by his performance of colonial dandy. Homi Bhabha’s reading of mimicry in Naipaul’s novel focuses on the aspect of “repeating” rather than “re-presenting.”⁴⁹ When we think of Browne’s singing and dancing performances at the school or the Deschampsneufs’ current behaviors within the context of their family history, they both enact and repeat the personas what they have seen as representations of their social roles: the stereotypical black image dating back to slavery and the Creole who takes pride in his ties to European culture and civilization. Singh, on the other hand, gets the chance to perform the personality of his own choosing in the metropolis: “In London I had no guide. There was no one to link my present with my past, no one to note my consistencies or inconsistencies. It was up to me to choose my character, and I chose the character that was easiest and most attractive. I was the dandy, the extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship.”⁵⁰ While he strives to take his past, which is a source of both anxiety and promise, out of the picture in his life in London, his choice of colonial dandy, nevertheless, points to a desire to overcome a sense of insecurity coming from his past. Selwyn Cudjoe claims that Singh, unlike his predecessors, has a better understanding of the colonial process and “he is able, much more consciously, to construct his identity.”⁵¹ Yet, what is interesting here is although Singh has a grasp of colonial process, he does not fight against the pre-conceived colonial notions; instead he chooses to play along the lines so as to fit himself into the role expected from him in London. Thus, as John Thieme states in *The Web of Tradition*, Singh’s awareness of being a product of colonialism does not lead to any attempt that will free him from the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88.

⁵⁰ V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 24.

⁵¹ Selwyn Cudjoe, *V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 100.

colonial paradigms.⁵² In this way, the novel's representation of Singh in London does not suggest a break from the previous tensions that have led to the split self; on the contrary, it points to a stronger sense of displacement as he "finds [himself] longing for the certainties of [his] life on the island of Isabella, certainties which [he] had once dismissed as shipwreck."⁵³ To a certain extent, the performance of colonial dandy in the imperial metropolis leads to a revisiting of his ideas about Isabella.

While Singh's colonial dandy persona does not lead to the sense of order and belonging he has been seeking, his other self-conscious performance, that of colonial politician, underscores the continuity of the sense of displacement in the post-independence Isabella. Singh's involvement in politics starts with writing an article about his father in *The Socialist*, the magazine run by his childhood friend Browne, celebrating the anniversary of the populist movement. Singh's description of this article hints to the reader about the future of his political career: "The essay about my father for *The Socialist* wrote itself.... The irony doesn't escape me: that article was, deeply, dishonest. It was the work of a convert, a man just created, just presented with a picture of himself."⁵⁴ Without any genuine interest and attachment to Isabella, Singh's political career does not go beyond playacting. Bruce King draws our attention to the fact that Singh, who used to fantasize about being a leader of Aryan people, withdraws into passivity and generalities once given the opportunity to be a real leader.⁵⁵ In this sense, independence does not bring any change to his sense of shipwreck. This time, he becomes drawn to another glorious past that is not his, namely the Classical period of European history. As he becomes more and more detached from Isabella in his Roman house, working on his Latin and writing letters to Browne on Pompeii, he can be described as seeking refuge in the past so as to avoid any real contact with the problems of Isabella. In a similar vein, Cudjoe states that "the further Singh moves away from an organic relationship with his society, the further he moves away from understanding his self or his society's truth."⁵⁶ The novel's depiction of Singh, along with the broader nationalist movement on the island, indicates that the nation-state has only exacerbated the long-existing sense of displacement as people, this time, continue their lives as mimic men of independent Isabella.

⁵² John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V.S. Naipaul's Fiction* (Hertford: Hansib Publications, 1987), 124.

⁵³ V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (New York: Random House, 2001), 32.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵⁵ Bruce King, *V.S. Naipaul* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 74.

⁵⁶ Selwyn Cudjoe, *V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 111.

Naipaul's novel embodies the restlessness that starts with the rupture created by the colonial encounter and continues well after the independence of the nation-state. Separated from his original culture, the postcolonial subject experiences an identity crisis as he struggles to find reference points to define his self. However, the novel also discloses the futility of the attempts to anchor one's identity through imagined connections from past. These connections, unable to offer any meaningful contribution to the effort to overcome the split in the self, only underscore the sense of non-belonging and displacement, thus accentuating the impossibility of recovering the past as well as recovering from the past.

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Native American Autobiographical Practices: Louis Owens - A Temporally and Spatially Constructed Subjectivity

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Abstract

In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence.ⁱ

As Adrienne Rich equates language and naming to power, and silence to oppression and violence, likewise Louis Owens in *Mixedblood Messages* remarks on the impossible odds against which the American Indian peoples struggled to have a voice in a world where they were denied not only a voice but also presence. In this ongoing struggle against oppression, the Native Americans have finally wrenched for themselves a niche from which to reclaim their visibility and existence. This site of liberation is the Native American literary canon, the creation of which Louis Owens rightfully acclaims a collective project. In the American Indians' fight against domination and obliteration, their strongest foe was the status of invisibility accorded them by the American meta narrative. Therefore, the American Indian Literature is an act of resistance against the mainstream which has deemed them non-existent and inarticulate.

In analysing the hegemonic relationship between the Native Americans and Anglo-Americans, Owens posits that the ultimate goal of the colonisers is not only to use the absent Other to promote their own ideology, but eventually and actually to replace the colonised, and in this way become entitled to his/her land, as well as his/her selfhood. According to Owens, the foremost objective of the Anglo-American is to take the place of the vanishing Indian since "the Euramerican [is] suffering from Heidegger's Unheimlichkeit, or not-at-

ⁱ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence – Selected Prose 1966-1978*. (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 204.

homeness 'that torments the colonizer...'”ⁱⁱ. Then, Owens argues the deepest desire on the part of the coloniser is to be born afresh in this new landscape. The purity which was lost in conquering the coveted land can only be reclaimed and the Euramerican can only be redeemed in his own eyes through this act of rebirth. And when born again, the coloniser shall be reborn not only in the image, but in the person of the Other, who already has an innate relationship with the land.

In addition to its reclamatory essence, unison and inclusion that characterise Native American traditions have their reflection in the autobiographical practices by American Indian authors. Furthermore, Indian American autobiographical writing, through stylistic hybridisation and the inclusion of visual, textual and critical materials creates its own form alongside an inclusive and enriched content. One of the final works of Louis Owens, *I Hear the Train* provides us with a striking example of such a multifaceted autobiographical text. Uninhibited by Western constraints of linear temporality, the fragmental time provides the author with the freedom to construct the self as part of the larger whole that is the family, the community, and the land. In the process, what is created is a multi-textured text, which is all-inclusive, and one that resists separation, since in Native tradition separation amounts to the loss of selfhood.

Keywords: autobiography, self-writing, Native American, American Indian, space, land, earth, temporality, time, identity reclamation

ⁱⁱ Louis Owens. *Mixedblood Messages – Literature, Film, Family, Place*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 123-124.

Amerikan Yerli Yazınında Benlik Temsili: Louis Owens'ın Özyaşam Öykülerinde Zaman ve Uzamla Kurgulanan Kimlik

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Özet

Dilin ve isim vermenin güce denk olduğu bir dünyada, sessizlik şiddetle, baskıyla eşdeğerdirⁱ” diyen Adrienne Rich’in kurduğu sessizlik ve şiddet arasındaki denklem gibi, Louis Owens da kuramsal metinlerinde Amerikan Yerli halklarının ne seslerinin ne de varlıklarının kabul gördüğü bir dünyada kendilerini temsil için verdikleri zorlu çabadan söz eder. Bu baskıya başkaldırının odağı da, yöntemi de, Amerikan Yerli yazınıdır ve Louis Owens söz konusu direnç ve özgürleşme eyleminin kolektif bir proje olduğunun altını çizer. Amerikan Yerlilerinin hegemoniye karşı duruşlarında, Amerikan meta-anlatısının onlara biçtiği görünmezlik belki de en büyük engeldir. Bu nedenle Owens’ın da altını çizdiği gibi Yerli Yazını, Yerli Amerikalıları sessiz kılan ve yok sayan bir kültüre karşı en etkili başkaldırıdır.

Beyaz Amerikalılar ve Amerikan Yerlileri arasındaki dialektik ilişkiyi analizinde Owens, sömürgecinin asıl amacının yokluğuyla belirgin Ötekiyi kendi ideolojik amaçları için kullanmanın ötesinde, sömürülenin yerini alarak onun hem toprağına sahip çıkmak hem de kimliğine bürünmek olduğunu belirtir. Beyaz Amerikalı “kaybolmakta” diye nitelediği Yerlinin yerine geçmek ister, çünkü “sömürgeciye işkence eden” Heidegger’in tanımı ile Unheimlichkeit, veya yabancılaşma duygusu Beyaz Amerikalı’nın bir türlü

i. Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence Selected Prose 1966-1978*. (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 204.

yakasını bırakmaz”ⁱⁱ. Owens’a göre sömürgecinin en derinlerde yatan arzusu, bu yeni topraklarda yeniden doğmaktır, çünkü sömürgeci saflığını toprağın kazanımı sürecinde kaybetmiştir. Beyaz Amerikalı ancak yeniden doğarak kaybettiği masumiyete ulaşabilir. Sömürgeci bu yeniden doğuşu, toprakla koparılamaz bağları bulunan Amerikan Yerlisi’nin yalnız imgesinde değil, kimliğinde beden bularak, Ötekinin fiilen yerine geçerek gerçekleştirmek ister.

Sözcüklerle kimliğin kurgulanması Amerikan Yerli Edebiyatının temel amaçlarından biriyken, bir diğer amaç da Yerli geleneğinin özünde yatan uyum ve dengenin sağlanmasıdır. Yerli Amerikalıların özyaşam öykülerinde biçimsel çokluluk, görsel, yazınsal ve hatta kuramsal yapıtların tek metinde birleşimi şeklinde kendini gösterir. Louis Owens’ın son kaleme aldığı yapıtlarından olan *I Hear the Train* böyle prizmatik bir otobiyografi örneğidir. Yazar, Batı Edebiyatının temelinde yer alan lineer zaman yerine kullandığı döngüsel zaman sayesinde benliğini aile, toplum ve toprak üçgeninde yeriden üretme özgürlüğüne kavuşur. Üretilen çok-dokulu metin ise bütüncü ve sağaltıcıdır.

Anahtar sözcükler: otobiyografi, özyaşam öyküsü, benlik temsili, Amerikan Yerlisi, Yerli Amerikalı, toprak, döngüsel zaman, kimlik kurgusu, kimlik örüntüsü

ⁱⁱ Louis Owens. *Mixedblood Messages – Literature, Film, Family, Place*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 123-124.

‘[T]he *quotidian* as series and structure ... time as measured but blank ... a field open for self-creation by self-inscription.’¹ Stuart Sherman summarises the characteristics of secular diaries in the Western tradition. Whereas the mundane and the commonplace constitute the core of the diaries in the West; autobiographical writing, which does not constitute a popular genre in contemporary Native American writing, is imbued with the creative importance of the word. Yet, the blankness of time we see in diaries, has an affinity with fragmental time used by Native American authors in terms of its function, since both employments of temporality resist the restrictions of emplotment, that is progressive time, common to linear temporality. The phrase “open for self-creation by self-inscription”, on the other hand, invites a more favourable comparison, since Native American autobiographies are texts through which subjectivities are created by way of textuality. Then, the aim in Native American autobiographical writing becomes not self-exposure or self-narration or even self-fashioning in the Western sense, but the true creation of a subjectivity enabled by the power of the word. This subjectivity created anew by means of the text is one that resists separation and is construed by connectedness of the person and the community that sustains the wellbeing of the person in question.

The unison and inclusion that characterise Native American traditions have their reflection in the autobiographical practices by Native American authors. Hence, Native American autobiographical writing, through stylistic hybridisation and the inclusion of visual, textual and critical materials, creates its own form alongside an inclusive and enriched content. One of the very final works of Louis Owens, *I Hear the Train* provides us with a striking example of such a multifaceted autobiographical text. Uninhibited by Western constraints of linear temporality, the fragmental time provides the author with the freedom to construct the self as part of the larger whole that is the family, the community, and the land. In the process, what is created is a multi-textured text, which is all-inclusive, and one that resists separation, since to quote Allen, “... separation of parts into this or that category is not agreeable to American Indians, and the attempt to separate essentially unified phenomena results in distortion.”²

Louis Owens’ *I Hear the Train* comprises of three sections and is further enriched by photographs, which according to Suzanne Lundquist are “... images of absence rather than presence.”³ The three sections of the work are named “Reflections”, “Inventions”, and “Refractions” respectively. The first section, “Reflections” is made up of autobiographical musings, whereas the second section, “Inventions” covers Owens’ fictional texts. The final section,

¹Stuart Sherman quoted in Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 176.

²Paula Gunn Allen. *The Sacred Hoop*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, 1992), 62.

³Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist. *Native American Literatures An Introduction*. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 136.

“Refractions” constitutes critical works by Owens. Thus, in this autobiographical work, Owens’ self-writing, fiction and critical writing, with the additional component of his and his family’s photographs; “...[of] Native ancestors whose stories are primarily like negatives...”⁴ form parts of the subjectivity that constitutes Owens. Consequently, we have a merging of genres, textuality and images. The three partite structure then, with this triple focus adds up to form the multifaceted self, and ties together diverse parts of the fabric that constitute Owens the person, Owens the author and Owens the literary critic. With the addition of the photographs included in the text, these four parts create the selfhood of the writing subject. Hence, Owens starts the preface to *I Hear the Train* with the following words:

This is a collection of stories, mostly true. Some are stories that arise from memory.... of things that simply happened. Some are stories I’ve told myself in an attempt to fill in the empty places in memory and received history. Some are just stories, inventions, the kinds of fictions we create to make sense of the otherwise uninhabitable world we must, of necessity, inhabit... Some are stories about others’ stories, the sort of speculations we like to call criticism...⁵

In this merging of the autobiographical with the fictional and the critical in textuality, which is further enriched by the visual data, is a subjectivity altered by syncretism, being expressed in a hybrid genre. Furthermore, since Native American stories attain formative qualities, the stories are always active in shaping the reality the subject lives in. Therefore, whether autobiographical or fictional, or as in Owens’ case, critical, the formative element employed in any act of narrativity is the key in creating the ontological domain of the subjectivity in question.

The resultant blurring of the epistemological distinctions and boundaries between the factual and fictive are imminent to Indian American writing. Consequently, the fluidity as exemplified by the merging of the autobiographical and fictional and even critical becomes an imperative in Native American autobiographical practices, since although these texts belong to different epistemological domains; they comprise only the separate parts of the subjectivity being forged. These separate parts should then necessarily be merged to create anew the composite/ syncretic selfhood in the act of re-inscribing the self into the text. Thus the reader is taken along Owens’ path of meticulous search

⁴Louis Owens. *I Hear the Train Reflections, Inventions, Refractions*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 136.

⁵*Ibid.*, xi.

for selfhood and witnesses the weaving of his subjectivity from threads of memory, fiction, family ties, and the land itself.

Owens' quest for wholeness is informed by his sense of urgency to connect the past with the present and the future, thus the past has to be dealt with. The necessity to come to terms with the past stems from the importance accorded by the Native American tribes to the cyclical understanding of time. As a case in point, Christina Hebebrand argues that one repercussion of the cyclical nature of time is that "... historical events not only provide valuable lessons for the present and future, but may also be expected to repeat themselves."⁶ Hence, the epistemic/ informative nature of the past experience, the real necessity to forge connections between the past, present and the future is a direct result of the cyclical understanding of time, in which the past, present and the future are imminently connected in that they are not only co-existent, but co-creative/ co-constructive entities. Consequently, in *Mixedblood Messages* Owens argues that the interconnectedness of the past, present and the future is a key aspect of Native American literary traditions. Owens writes: "What sets Native American fiction apart, however, is among other qualities, an insistence upon the informing role of the past within the present, a role signified by the presence of Native American myth and history reflected in both form and content."⁷

In a similar vein, Paula Gunn Allen in elaborating on the vital importance of myth to the tribal existence posits that mythopoeic vision teaches us that "...past, present, and future are one, and the human counterparts of these – ancestors, contemporaries, and descendants – are also one."⁸ Since the past, the present and the future are inseparable, so are the ancestors, contemporaries and descendants, and experiences of one generation are critical to the subsequent generations that follow. The resultant is the necessity of carrying forward the experiences and stories of the past generations to the future, in order to reach an understanding of not only the self, but also the world at large. Therefore, as a result of the connectedness of time, stories become imminent to identity reclamation, not only as parts of the collective history of the people, but also as crucial components in self-formation. Hebebrand further posits: "Retell[ing] the stories ... will help the people to recreate their own history and thus envision ways to create a future for themselves..."⁹ Hence, without stories of the past and the ancestors, there would be no identity, and the telling of stories is crucial in the formation of consistent

⁶ Christina M. Hebebrand. *Native American and Chicano/a Literature of the American Southwest*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 25.

⁷ Louis Owens. *Mixedblood Messages Literature, Film, Family, Place*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 22.

⁸ Paula Gunn Allen. *The Sacred Hoop*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, 1992), 117.

⁹ Christina M. Hebebrand. *Native American and Chicano/a Literature of the American Southwest*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 25.

and coherent subjectivities that would muster the strength to project a future for themselves.

Yet, this imminence of the connectedness of the past, present and future in identity formation and reclamation attains a personal urgency when we take into consideration Owens' own personal history, since instead of experiences, Owens has holes and gaps in his ancestral past. His memories appertaining to that yet unknown/ unformed past are fragmental at best. However, these lacks and breaches need to be gapped, bridged, and if not, then created anew retrospectively. Thus Owens in his self-writing takes on the difficult but crucial task of creating his own stories/ histories in an act of self-inscription in textuality. "I go backward, look forward," a Swampy Cree storyteller says, "as the porcupine does."¹⁰ In a way, this is what Owens does with historical time, going back in order to be able to look forward. Owens did not inherit stories of his ancestors to help formulate his own subjectivity, and in this respect was denied the opportunity for fashioning a self based on connectedness. Thus, personal lacks in terms of ancestral stories/ memories/ histories are accounted for through the creative power of words, and Owens creates the stories that would help comprise his selfhood.

On the cover of the volume of *I Hear the Train* is an image of Owens' great-great uncle. In Owens' words, this "photo-turned-postcard" is one he had inherited from his elder sister, who had in-turn inherited them from their mother. We read:

I know next to nothing about Uncle August Edward Bailey, my mother's grandfather's brother.... My grandmother, orphaned at age six through means neither she nor we ever understood, could not tell us about this uncle. My mother, product of the worst margins of Uncle August's world and tumbled into a motherless world herself as a child, *imbibed* no stories that would answer such questions. Irish-American with Cherokee blood, American Indian with Irish blood, transient, infinitely motion-bent, poised within the tracks on an America determined to hurl all lies and stories toward a receding horizon, Uncle August and all the rest are particles scattered, the chaos of invasion, coloniality, deracination, and removal embedded in their blood and photographs.¹¹

The solitary man in the photograph is an illustration of absence, a testimony to the filial bonds broken. Owens has no stories passed on about the uncle or his

¹⁰Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance*. (California: University of California Press, 1983), Lincoln 13.

¹¹Louis Owens. *I Hear the Train Reflections, Inventions, Refractions*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), xii-xiii.

other predecessors, since both his mother and grandmother had been orphaned. Paula Gunn Allen, on the other hand, in elaborating on the importance placed on family in matriarchal Native American tribes give the Keres as a case in point. Allen writes: "Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same as being lost – isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from your own life."¹² The family bonds are as sustaining and life giving as the umbilical cord. However in Owens' family the umbilical cords had been severed too soon and this lack had informed generation upon generation in Owens' family. With no mothers, there had been no stories, and no connections with the ancestors or the past. Thus, Owens compares his ancestors to scattered particles, unable to form a whole and stand against the outward forces of invasion, coloniality, and removal that had become the constant in their lives.

Consequently, from mere traces Owens needs to construct his past, out of which will arise his present and future. He writes of his uncle's photograph: "My inheritance, it leaves in the air a trace out of which I will construct history, mirroring consciousness... Like that dollop of sourdough left behind in the bowl to double infinitely into another loaf, it becomes stories that birth others."¹³ For Owens the photograph will become the metaphoric piece of sourdough, the creative principle that will initiate stories ad infinitum, and forge the non-existent connections with the past. Accordingly, Owens resumes:

... [We] make stories in order to find ourselves at home in a chaos made familiar and comforting through the stories we make, searching frantically for patterns in the flux of randomly recorded events, a world in which endings stalk us and we can only keep inventing ways to both explain and forestall closure. Language must be the surest way, as we remain here telling ourselves stories in the dark, spinning webs of language...¹⁴

Owens will create coherence by way of stories in the face of the chaos that life is, and in that he needs the power of the words. This retrospectively constructive act then becomes an act of survival, and in his endeavours to fight against segmentation, Owens harnesses the creative force of language.

In the preface to *I Hear the Train*, Owens elaborates on another family photograph found in the same box he had inherited from his sister. It shows "a

¹²Paula Gunn Allen. *The Sacred Hoop*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, 1992), 209-210.

¹³Louis Owens. *I Hear the Train Reflections, Inventions, Refractions*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), xiii.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, xiii.

strange, shanty-like ‘houseboat’”¹⁵ his maternal grandmother had lived in when she was between six and eight years old. Owens asks: “What story can that picture tell me and my eight brothers and sisters about the labyrinth of memory that should and must be our own. How may we... fill in the empty pages of oral tradition that is all we have from our mother’s world?”¹⁶ Owens’ way of engagement with the void where there ought to have been stories, is the sheer act of writing. The bonds have been long broken between the self and the world of the ancestors, and as such, memory proves to be not illusive but redundant at best. However, Owens is writing to reach back and claim the lost world of his ancestors, while supplementing fiction and fabrication to fill in the void that has been his lot, his inheritance. Owens continues: “Conscious of my own temerity in such an endeavor, I wrote that story and include it here: ‘Blessed Sunshine’, the name of the shanty-boat. Similarly, I have gone back in fiction to the story I call ‘Yazoo Dusk’, to reconstruct, or construct for the first time, a story of the Mississippi my father’s Choctaw-Irish-French family knew.”¹⁷ Therefore, Owens is supplementing fact with fiction, or rather the absence of the factual with the fictive, and thus locating himself into a matrix of stories and reminiscences, where there used to be nothing but the void of memory. Owens’ efforts to fictionalise the past, and construct (auto)biography out of fiction is informed by the desire of a reunion with his family and ancestry, that would result in enhancing or rather creating a patchwork of ties in place of the gaps that constitute memory and concomitantly add up to form a sense of community and continuity.

In the section from *I Hear the Train* entitled “The Syllogistic Mixedblood” Owens writes, “I lay the photograph before me and search for absent origins,”¹⁸ since “[t]he[y] are fibers out of which a tread might be woven, bits of family story, old photographs with scribbling on the backs, but no coherent narrative.”¹⁹ Owens’ creative endeavours do stem from an inner necessity, since the sum total of his writing is constitutive of the self, and to reach the self that is not hidden but in flux and thus in need of constant recreation. He has to forge bonds and bridge the gaps with the past without which there can be no present or future. Owens continues: “Because I cannot do less, I have made these various stories, call them essay, fiction, or criticism. Together, I believe they form a pattern, one turn and twist of the labyrinth leading to another. At the center, of course, is the hybrid monster of self, the ultimate cannibal to which all stories lead.”²⁰ In this act of self-creation in textuality, Owens is reaching out not only to the self now

¹⁵Ibid., xiv.

¹⁶Ibid., xiv.

¹⁷Ibid., xiv.

¹⁸Ibid., 91.

¹⁹Ibid., 97.

²⁰Ibid., xiv.

constructed through the stories but is also enabled to reach back and start to hear the voices of his ancestors. Or as the title of his autobiography clearly indicates, he now hears the train, just as his uncle had heard it. That title echoes the very words of his Uncle August when he in 1913 wrote to his own mother on the back of another photograph “I her (sic) the train so Bee (sic) good tell (sic) I see you.”²¹

Not surprisingly, the first episode in Owens' search for wholeness and self is entitled “Finding Gene,” which is the account of his search for his lost brother. Owens starts his mixed genre autobiographical work with the narration of a loss recovered, that is, his brother Gene, whom he hadn't seen for twenty-nine years. We learn that Gene, a Vietnam veteran “had come back only to vanish,” after “he'd discarded the medals”. Then the medals had become “tangled in the tin trunk with the residue of [their] mother's short life.”²² Therefore Gene's medals had become visual reminders of his absence, taking their place amongst the photographs of ancestors, other mementos of loss Owens had inherited.

Contemplating on their shared past with Gene, Owens writes that since deer hunting was an activity they cherished, pistols and guns “had become... the *petites madeleines* of [their] own remembrance of things past.”²³ However, Owens also muses on the fine line between fact and fiction and the need for the corrective of memory: “... I'd begun to wonder what had actually happened and what my imagination had simply formed into history and truth. Without Gene I had no touchstone to truth, no way of verifying memories. I know that we invent what we need to be true, imagining and rewriting until there is some kind of text that gives us back a self.”²⁴ Thus, the fallible nature of memory needs to be implemented with the memories of others, and the touchstone is his brother Gene. Although invention and creation are the tools by which he would ultimately attain his own selfhood, in his endeavours Owens feels the necessity to reestablish his connection with Gene, a lost and important piece of the puzzle.

Ironically, Owens' reunion with his brother is brought about by another act of textuality. Or in this case - the power of words become explicit and concrete - confirming the Native American faith in the import of words. Owens' fiction changes the course of his life, and his fiction brings about his union with Gene in the real world. We read:

I'd written a novel about my brother. My second novel, *The Sharpest Sight*, was born out of Gene's disappearance, out of the paradox of his nonreturn from that war.... It was a book about Mississippi, about my father's Choctaw ancestors, about the mysteries of identity and story, but

²¹Ibid., xiii.

²²Ibid., 11.

²³Ibid., 8.

²⁴Ibid., 4.

most of all it was a book about a lost brother and a long pattern of loss into which that one seemed to fit....

And then one day, after a quarter of a century of silence, my brother called. He had found a copy of *The Sharpest Sight*, had seen my name and read the book. This was extraordinary, because Gene does not go into bookstores and does not usually read books. But he had read it and had known at once that it was about him, had read past layers of metaphor and myth, through a complex “mystery” plot, to see that I’d written a novel about the loss of my own brother.²⁵

Thus, the gaping hole left empty by lack and loss had been supplemented and filled in by fiction, and the fabricated story had actually created history. Rewriting of a story -that of Gene in the *The Sharpest Sight*- had resulted in Owens and his brother Gene’s history being rewritten and recreated. Consequently, the act of re-imagining a past had literally and physically created a present for Owens and his brother Gene.

Yet, the reunion between the brothers is not only a static event that has repercussions for a short duration, but will prove to be a life-changing event, with clear implications for the future. Through his get-together with Gene, Owens starts re-remembering the past and the changes to memory will actually contribute to a future that will be re-shaped. Owens writes; “old memories had become both more real and changed in the same moment.”²⁶ Through memory jolted by the recovery of Gene, Owens reaches a better understanding of both himself and his past, and he muses on his chances of actualising a similarly enhanced understanding when he says “...I’d like my daughters to meet their uncle. Maybe then they’d know their father better. Perhaps their memories would become more real.”²⁷ Hence, re-forging of connections and learning from the family members and ancestors brings about a better understanding, while shared experience adds to memory, making it prolific.

Owens dwells on Gene’s comment that at Vietnam, troops referred to enemy territory as “Indian Country,” a clear reminder of the Native American’s static image as the ultimate trope, the epitome, the embodiment of *the* enemy in Anglo-American consciousness. Owens’ final words read: “Out there, in Indian country, anything could happen. A person might never get home.”²⁸ Owens’ comment illustrates that in the real Indian country, the enemy cannot be clearly defined, and getting home is not an act of spatial movement but is the recovery of wholeness, and at that not everyone is able to attain this healing balance. Owens

²⁵Ibid., 12.

²⁶Ibid., 14.

²⁷Ibid., 15.

²⁸Ibid., 15.

knows that not only the past/ memories/ ancestors/ family might be lost, but through their loss, selfhood might also get dissolved. As a case in point Gene had lost his selfhood, and although he had come back from the war alive, he had not been able to go back home. Gene had failed in forging connections with his family and the community, and the resultant was utter isolation, alienation and fragmentation. Owens, on the other hand, had not inherited a past of stories or histories but implements his own recovery through textuality, through the creative power of words, supplementing the losses with fiction and thus reaching coherence and cohesion.

Whereas one obstacle in Owens' search for wholeness was the lost stories, histories, memories and family members, another but related difficulty was frequent displacement, and the imminent disconnection with the land of his ancestors. The loss of connectedness with the land is caused by the family's perpetual moving from one location to another, so much so that moving becomes the sole constant in life. Being uprooted time and again, Owens needs to contest the possibility of a dissolution of selfhood, since the repeated pattern of dislocation induces liminality. Owens' state is further complicated by his experience of interstitiality, a result of his mixed blood heritage. However, through forest ranging and fighting forest fires, Owens is able to forge a bond with the land, on an even greater scale than he would have through bonding with one locality only. As a ranger and forest fire fighter, Owens spans the whole continent, from Tucson, to the Glacier Peak Wilderness just south of the Canadian border, and to Arizona. These very physical acts of living and working with the land locate Owens firmly within the natural world. Then, through this constant interaction with the land and nature through farming and hunting, Owens bonds with the earth and the whole continent. Consequently, the earth becomes an anchor of his subjectivity in his refusal to surrender to liminality.

Thus for Owens, interacting with the land and the nature is the panacea for a life of dispossession. Faced with the risk of isolation and interstitiality, the healing powers of the land and the nature provide Owens with a safe haven. In relating his youthful indiscretions, Owens remarks on how he had envied a settled and peaceful life. We read:

...through the window, I saw Mom and dad and Sis sitting on a light-colored couch and a boy about my brother's age in a comfortable-looking chair. They were laughing together at something on the big television. I remember standing on the porch, plainly illuminated by the porch light, watching the family watch television. We did not yet have a TV in our house, and the eight of us could never have watched at the same time if we had owned one. There was a wholeness about the scene, a kind of completeness that I had never imagined in a family before. In my experience families were in constant flux, coming and going, messy and

uncontained. Strange cousins could appear one day and stay for several years with no evident disruption even as additional cousins showed up and vanished. Never had I imagined a family holding a single image in mind or sight even for a moment. The scene inside the picture window opened onto a world I had never considered, one I knew instinctively did not desire my company.²⁹

Owens is confronted with the image of a nuclear family watching television. They are not only surrounded by material comforts but seem very cozy. However, most important of all, the family seems to be enjoying the company of each other. For Owens, the scene exhumes a wholeness and completeness he never knew existed. For him family life is marked by instability and change. Then, it is the togetherness and cohesion of the family that is most striking and desirable for Owens. Feeling himself a stranger to a world perfect in its unity, he leaves unwillingly:

I tore myself away with great difficulty... In the driveway I paused and looked back, and no one had moved. To this very day that family lives in perfect time, balanced in the flickering gray light of a black-and-white television set, forever, as I steal their bicycle. And I still feel the awfulness of the moment in which I broke into that perfect order, violated whatever it was inside the house that I could not understand, and bore an objective portion away into the night.³⁰

Owens feels a keen sense of alienation while watching the perfect family, yet is drawn to it. He knows he has intruded upon the unity of the family, and thinks he has violated and even stolen the precious communality shared by the family members. For that very reason, while his conscience is perfectly at ease with stealing the bike, a mere material possession, he thinks he has harmed the wholeness of the family, and disturbed their peace by his brief presence.

Further on Owens explains that interaction with nature replaces the thrill he used to get from stealing. Nature is the panacea for the fragmentation of the family which had driven him into recklessness. We read: "From that time onward, sometimes with Gene but more often alone, I broke and entered upon nature herself, burgled her hills and oaks, ransacked her solitude for days and weeks and months and years on end, feeling my way toward a door that must exist somewhere."³¹ Thus the people in Owens' life and the landscape that surrounds him would keep changing. Yet, nature not only remains Owens' safe

²⁹Ibid., 81.

³⁰Ibid., 81-82.

³¹Ibid., 89.

haven, but also provides him with an endless source of adventure and experience. The sense of wholeness and communality he lacks will be supplemented by his escapades in the nature. Nature will provide him with hope and comfort, in the constant flux of his life.

“We know at some profound level that we inhabit the future while piecing together the past”³² writes Owens in *Mixedblood Messages*. Approached from this perspective, nature and land acquire sacredness and importance the same way the ancestors do, since by holding the memories of past, the land has an informing role on the present and the future. In a similar vein, Marcia Pablo (Flathead) in her essay “Preservation as Perpetuation” writes: “First Nations of this continent did not have a written history in book form as did the non-Indian peoples who came here. Our history is written in our unique and specific cultural landscapes. These places hold the memories of our ancestors, speak to us in the present, and are crucial to our survival, as Indian people into the future.”³³

Paula Gunn Allen, on the other hand, posits: “We are the land, and the land is mother to us all,”³⁴ a statement which attests to the function of land as the primal life-giving source. Allen resumes: “We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life; the land (Mother) and the people (mothers) are the same. As Luther Standing Bear has said of his Lakota people, ‘We are of the soil and the soil is of us.’ The earth is the source and the being of the people, and we are equally the being of the earth. The land is not really a place, separate from ourselves, where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies...”³⁵ Then, according to Allen the main tenet of Native American existence is oneness with earth, since as Luther Standing Bear has also suggested humanity is the offspring of the earth and the earth is where she/he returns. Thus equating the land and the people, Allen further argues:

The earth is not a mere source of survival, distant from the creatures it nurtures and from the spirit that breathes in us, nor is it to be considered an inert resource on which we draw in order to keep our ideological self functioning, whether we perceive that self in sociological or personal terms. We must not conceive of earth as an ever-dead other that supplies us with a sense of ego identity by virtue of our contrast to its perceived

³²Louis Owens. *Mixedblood Messages Literature, Film, Family, Place*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 201.

³³Marcia Pablo quoted in Christina M. Hebebrand. *Native American and Chicano/a Literature of the American Southwest*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 29.

³⁴Paula Gunn Allen. *The Sacred Hoop*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, 1992), 119.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 119.

nonbeing. Rather, for American Indians... the earth *is* being, as all creatures are also being: aware, palpable, intelligent, alive.³⁶

Therefore, no separation is possible between the Native American and the land, since the land is not a source of life that lies inanimate at the disposal of humanity, but on the contrary, land is as alive as any other being, and in the great scheme of things, the destinies of the land and the people cannot be separated either.

In *Mixedblood Messages* Owens asks, remarking on the ultimate importance of earth to self-definition and identity construction; "...how do we preserve the earth that is so integral to self-definition?"³⁷ Owens' question is another reminder of the all-permeating importance of land in self-formation. Similarly, in "Yazoo Dusk" in *I Hear the Train*, Owens re-creates the story/ history of his father's mixed blood Choctaw family, and equates identity to land, writing: "If they were Choctaw, as if white men from somewhere north could just come and tell people who they were.... Those other Choctaws had been taken away seventy and eighty years before by the government, leaving a handful who wouldn't or couldn't. Torn away, like a piece of flesh caught on a briar and just ripped from the body, except this time it was the body itself ripped away, leaving that bloody piece behind."³⁸ Thus, even after the Removal Act, the American Indians are conned into losing their communal land, in return for individual allotments, putting communal identity at stake. Furthermore, Choctaw identity cannot be determined by the whites, nor replaced by a constructed "Indianness," which infantilises the Native Americans. Owens uses the metaphor of torn flesh in telling us what happens when the bond between the people and the land is severed. People torn from land is like "flesh caught on a briar and just ripped from the body" and land separated in allotments is "the body itself ripped away, leaving that bloody piece behind".³⁹ The imagery herewith employed is a striking testimony to the power of alienation that results from the fissure between the Native American and the land.

Accordingly, land and connections with the earth become prime sites in the creation of Owens' locus of selfhood, as he relates his memories of working in a summer camp, and a mushroom farm, and later as a forest ranger and forest fire fighter, which he dubs "the best time of [his] life."⁴⁰ On one occasion Owens

³⁶Ibid., 119.

³⁷Louis Owens. *Mixedblood Messages Literature, Film, Family, Place*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 22.

³⁸Louis Owens. *I Hear the Train Reflections, Inventions, Refractions*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 174.

³⁹Ibid., 174

⁴⁰Ibid., 57.

travels to the Grand Canyon, and relates its spiritual dimension that makes it incomprehensible to all except to the American Indian. Although the Anglo-Americans had tried to represent the Grand Canyon in words time and again they failed, since inside the Canyon “[s]ignification fails; language did not come into being in the presence of such phenomena and remains utterly insufficient before it.”⁴¹ Owens himself, on the other hand, describes the experience of the Grand Canyon in the following manner: “To enter the air of the Grand Canyon is to breathe differently, measure one's world by new degrees, see past the earth's skin to neither flesh nor bone but something other, an inner form or spirit that requires radical adjustments. To describe the canyon requires the impossible...”⁴² The Canyon is where the earth's spirit lies bare for those who can perceive it. Owens continues:

The center does not hold, the blood-dimmed tide floods at sunset, and all ceremonies of innocence are reimagined and revived. Any falcon swooping those endless and endlessly changing shadows could not possibly hear a falconer. An anarchy of impressions is loosed upon every perception. Only the Native holds the measure of the place, because the Native, the Indian, has had many, many generations in which to learn resistance to the jealousy of measure and voice, the futile desire for words to reach up and over.⁴³

Rephrasing W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*, Owens draws our attention to the way Enlightenment concepts of causality and the Western ideas of order are upset in the face of the Grand Canyon. For the intruder, chaos and confusion reign supreme in this particular landscape, whereas the innate connection between the land and humanity is felt by the adept more clearly here than in any other geographical location. Consequently, it is only the Native American who can understand this landscape, since they have had millennia to come to terms with the land and its significance. The Grand Canyon is imbued with much spirituality, and it is the American Indian who through her/his connections to the land can apprise the primal qualities of this amazing landscape, and touch upon its bared soul.

Thus, the Grand Canyon reverses the epistemically violating relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, described by Edward Said and later Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Inside the Grand Canyon the coloniser loses his hold on the land, since he does not have the adequate tools to understand, describe, verbalise, and thus possess the land. Then the Grand Canyon, in Owens'

⁴¹Ibid., 67.

⁴²Ibid., 67.

⁴³Ibid., 68.

words “where the world speaks to us in its real from, undisguised, sincere, forever”⁴⁴ resists the colonialist in its sheer majesty and grandeur.

Aside from Owens’ own particular uprooting caused by his family’s economic and social circumstances and his complex mixed blood heritage that induces liminality, the failure in truly connecting with the land is the fate of all colonised peoples, since the loss of land endangers the colonised people’s sense of identity. Hence Owens quotes Frantz Fanon on the all-permeating relationship between land and identity: “Fanon writes ‘[f]or a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity’. Above all, Native Americans have been deprived of land, and of the dignity that derives from the profound and enduring relationship with homeland.”⁴⁵ Like Allen, Fanon emphasises the importance of land, which imbues the people with a sense of identity and well being, which is lost when the land is lost. In that sense, Owens connects his own plight with that of all colonised peoples, and in the process bonds with the survivors of colonialism on the nexus of the earth, lost and regained.

Consequently, *I Hear the Train* can be read as a testimony to subjectivity formation through textuality. A mixed genre autobiographical piece, which at first glance appears to be the non-sequential experiences of the single individual, it becomes the tool through which Owens constructs not only his own selfhood, but also a communal selfhood through relationality with his ancestors, and finally the land itself enabled by the cyclical nature of Native American temporality. The text, structurally and temporally fragmented, enables Owens to retrieve/ recreate/ fictionalise and narrate the family ties and the past, and forge connections with the land/ landscape, in an effort to reach wholeness and communality. As the title of this autobiographical work suggests, through the creation of this text, Owens comes to hear the voices of his ancestors, and the voice of the train, just as his great-great granduncle had as he posed for a photo on the railroad tracks in the year 1911.

⁴⁴Ibid., 76.

⁴⁵Frantz Fanon quoted in Louis Owens. *I Hear the Train Reflections, Inventions, Refractions*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 219.

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