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‘Home and Away’: Reconstructing Identity in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*

Eleanor Anneh Dasi

Introduction

Displacement and loss characterise the African diaspora as far as the world of the Atlantic is concerned. Forcibly uprooted from the place of their birth, Africans finally found a new home in the plantations of the New World (the West Indies and the Americas) after over a century of psychic wandering. But even then, living with the knowledge of a cultural and ancestral void in their origins still ensured a kind of psychic emptiness. This was made worse by the constant reminder, due to colonial presence and influence, that the African descendants, especially of the West Indies, had nothing to call their own; nothing to prove beyond doubt that they belonged where they are. Even after what seemed to be a withdrawal of colonial pressures, and the independence of the nation states created in this region, this situation still very much prevailed. Authors from this region of the globe have had to grapple with this dilemma. Edward Kamau Brathwaite particularly notes in ‘Calibans’ that the West Indians did not have anything that was correct because it was not European and it wasn’t African either because [they] were not supposed to have anything surviving from Africa. Africa was dumb. Africa had come speechless from across the Atlantic.¹

What this implied was that everything they could ever have or be was determined by the force of the institution that took them there. Here again, the people had to face the dilemma of a double consciousness, which necessitated a negotiation, whether ideologically or literally, of the implications of the Middle Passage. As evident in their works, most West Indian writers have revisited this question of physical displacement either for the search for psychological equilibrium or for the cancellation of the false labels and judgements on the African people.

Another wave of displacement came after colonialism with the migration of large numbers of people mostly from the colonies to the imperial metropolis. Social, economic and political instabilities that came with the decolonisation processes greatly accounted for this shift. The phenomenon is very common today and influences fields of learning in diverse ways. Naturally, literature has not been left out of this new wave of events. Many emerging postcolonial writers have migrant backgrounds and their personal experiences of migration are translated into their works, which have come to serve as metaphors for identity reconstruction. In addition, these writers focus on the specific contexts that encourage migration, the cold reception the migrants may receive in the metropolis, the continued experiences of racial and class hostilities and the resulting sense of alienation.

In view of the above, the first part of this essay centres on the link between home and exile, with the latter seeming more or less a continuation of colonial experiences. The next section focuses on the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of the colonial enterprise. It is noted amongst other things that the human condition is almost the same everywhere. Thus cultural/class differences are not necessarily indicative of superiority and inferiority. It is this knowledge and understanding that give Lucy the courage to reconcile home with the new environment in order

to remake herself, as discussed in the third segment. Inevitably, the conclusion attests to Kincaid’s success in achieving an identity that cuts across race, class and gender divides.

**Home vs Exile**

Patriarchal and colonial limitations on women have been a major setback to women’s desires to explore themselves and their talents within their communities. Worse still is the fact that traditional womanhood acknowledges complete superiority of maleness thus creating a continuous ideological/generational conflict with modern generations of women. Ironically, therefore, traditional women are custodians of the very cultures that bind them to patriarchy. Women who have had aspirations to make an impact on the social order have rebelled against societal dictates with a view to re-asserting themselves. Others have had to migrate from their cultural environments to find freedom, fulfilment and agency in foreign lands.

Jamaica Kincaid’s 1990 novel, *Lucy*, comments seriously on the theme of migration with an initial impetus from her previous novel *Annie John.* It seems *Lucy* takes up from where *Annie John* leaves off; *Annie John* closes just when Annie boards the ship for England as a way towards a new beginning and *Lucy* opens with Lucy entering the United States where she hopes to work, learn and experience a life different from the one at home. Life at home is seen as insidious, especially with the stifling presence of patriarchal and colonial control. Migration for both Annie and Lucy is the only integral options it offers both escape and an opportunity for a better and fulfilling life.

Lucy’s primary difficulty is that her mother is of the old generation of women who still stick to traditional roles of womanhood, and whose view of life, even with the changing times, is very much fixed. Her intention of raising Lucy to continue the line is the main cause of conflict between them, and eventually becomes one of the motives behind Lucy’s migration. First of all, the birth of three male children after Lucy comes with a significant change in Lucy’s status as a product of her parents’ union. Her mother’s conformity to patriarchy warrants her shifting attention to the boys, for each of them, aspiring greatness and celebrity. She abandons her feminine attributes to acclaim, with humility, satisfaction and a sense of achievement, her sons’ coming into the world. “The absence of red lipstick on her mouth after they were all born” unquestionably speaks to her complicity with patriarchal inclination for males as opposed to females. Being a female, no similar plans are envisaged for Lucy, and she is, on the contrary, expected to work towards ensuring the success of her siblings. The limits that go with the fact of being a female, the mother’s role as agent of such ascribed prejudice and the disagreement that ensues between them about life principles and preferences become a source of frustration to Lucy. She is nonetheless determined to stand out of, and away from that order which the mother represents and makes the first step by moving away. But the fact of leaving home is not a solution in itself for Lucy has to grapple with the longstanding binaries of white/black and male/female. Her encounter with Mariah, her white employer in New York, presents another facet of the limitations women face irrespective of race and class. Though of different backgrounds, Lucy sees (the best and worst of) her mother in Mariah and the master/servant

3 Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990) 130. Further page references to this text will be included in parentheses in the text.
relationship that connects them from the beginning soon extends into a mother/daughter tie. Mariah tries to shape Lucy in her own image much in the same way as Lucy’s mother does, making Lucy treat her with affection and resentment. As their relationship grows, Lucy comes to realize that Mariah’s wealth and privilege do not protect her from female vulnerability as she faces the bitterness of an unhappy marriage. This situation however aids Lucy in her journey to independence and freedom.

Lucy’s job as an au pair, though not altogether fulfilling, sets the arena for a new beginning. The joy of leaving home is marred by unfamiliar climatic conditions which plant in her feelings of dislocation and alienation. The psychological release and freedom that she hopes to get in this distant land become doubtful. Her pessimism is evident in her analysis of the situation, ‘my past – so familiar and predictable that even my unhappiness then made me feel happy now just to think of it – the other my future, a gray blank … I felt cold inside and out, the first time such a sensation had come over me’ (5-6). The comforting welcome embrace that Lucy expects to receive turns into a perplexing sense of loss, loneliness, unbelonging and uncertainty symbolised by the hard winter. She rejects the past yet the present ignores her; thus the future is undoubtedly one of in-betweeness. But before she settles in this new position, she must negotiate her way through the constant intrusions from the past (colonial and patriarchal domination) into the present that threaten the future.

The constant reminders of Lucy’s position as colonial subject fuel her determination to stand firm on her desire to be apart and away from colonial/patriarchal hold. The description of her room in her employers’ house – ‘The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing the room like a box … in which cargo travelling a long way should be shipped’ (7) – simply adds to her desolate and alienated state from which escape seems impossible. Yet this circumstance continues to push her towards her quest for individuality as she consciously or unconsciously responds to this ensnaring description with a vehement rejection, ‘I was not cargo … I was not even the maid’ (7). At this point, she already has a positive perception of herself as being worth more than a commodity and/or a labour tool. Lucy does not allow her job as an au pair to define and mark her socio-economic significance but instead braves her new situation even in her loneliness. This strong detachment from subject position is a conscious engagement in a process of decolonisation of the mind that will help Lucy come to terms with the captive/captor and master/servant binaries.

Besides asserting her human value inside the domestic realm, Lucy also tries to cross over boundaries of race. Kincaid oddly introduces race prejudice not with a black/white divide but rather with a black/black schism. Lucy’s encounter with the African-American maid provides another forum for her to defend herself within the cultural spheres that society has carved out for her. Ironically, both of them have a common history which makes them similar within the racial and political domains of their past and present worlds but the maid assumes a status of superiority and mocks Lucy’s nun-like colonial mannerisms. Her provocative challenge to a dance with Lucy is a way of claiming a civilization that avers supremacy; but which supremacy is inextricably linked to the ‘inferiority’ of other independent civilisations. Lucy’s positive reaction to this taunting degradation demonstrates her ability to transcend the limits of race and difference. While the maid dances to the rhythm of three white singers, Lucy bursts into a typical West Indian Calypso. Displaying a sense of pride in her origins is a way of claiming herself and her history through that origin.
In attempting to recreate her identity, Lucy must also overcome theoretical and ideological clashes. The contradictory interpretations that underlie Lewis’ tale of an uncle who raised monkeys and eventually enjoyed living with them rather than with humans, and Lucy’s dream of Lewis chasing her are a point of focus. Both anecdotes have similar meanings when understood from their native cultural backgrounds (they are intended to bring those concerned close to each other) but when interpreted from the opposite culture, they have varied connotations. Lucy’s white employers understand her dream from an entirely differing perspective, which earns her the apppellations ‘poor visitor,’ and ‘Dr Freud for visitor’ (15). Lucy’s native interpretation of her dream conflicts with Mariah’s Freudian analysis of it and this jeopardises Lucy’s position in, and alienation from both cultures – another driving force for her to seek an independent identity. The superiority and all-inclusiveness of western theory is evident here; laying claim to an ideological stance whose validity can be questioned in given contexts. Lucy definitely would have been scandalised if she were given the interpretation linked to Freud’s theory of the sexual drive (symbolised by her nakedness, and Lewis’ effort to catch her). Her falling into a hole has however been read as a pointer to her entrapment in white ethnocentric standards and the difficulties she will encounter as she rambles her way through to independence.

From her experiences under colonial rule, Lucy develops a critical and disparate perception of the world, other than what generally obtains within the colonising set-up. These colonising bodies assumed a universality of feelings and expressions towards situations which do not have a socio-cultural resemblance. As Lucy continues to interact with Mariah, she becomes increasingly convinced that Mariah intends to impose her vision of life on her, and in this, she sees a continuation of the colonising project. The daffodils scene has been commonly cited as one of such incidents which express a colonial-like determination to completely wipe out whatever differing view of the world Lucy, or anyone like her, may have. Mariah’s love for the beauty of daffodils is contrasted with Lucy’s sad and traumatic memories of them for she was forced to admire them even without having an idea of what they looked like. Seeing the flowers ten years after makes her spell-bound with rage. ‘Lucy experiences a loss of voice narratively and culturally,’ which ‘loss is also inflected historically’ as she comes face-to-face with this cultural marker. It becomes a tacit reminder of a colonial education that ignored features of her native surrounding and history and this explains her hostility towards daffodils. Not only do they convey a history of conquest but they also increase the native’s sense of cultural dislocation under British hegemony. Mariah, with her affluent American upbringing, mistakes Lucy’s reaction for an amazed exaltation of the beauty of the flowers and leans forward to share in it even after Lucy’s bitter account of her recital. The sympathy she expresses is not profound thus indicating a deliberate refusal to understand Lucy’s history and its relationship with her rage. To Mariah, the splendour of the flowers, their natural and timeless beauty, is enough to cleanse any frightful connection with them, but to Lucy, they remain a dreaded cultural signifier that deprives her of cultural agency but which nonetheless aid her search for that agency.

Cultural differences, race hierarchies and the general inequalities that were established during colonialism are simply discarded by Mariah as she tries to replace them with a universal model – one that can prevail over these differences and enable Lucy to see the world through her own

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eyes. Evidently, Mariah’s perceptions do not only stem from the position she holds but also go a long way to assert and exert the power and authority that go with hierarchical privileges. At the beginning of her relationship with Lucy, her love seems so genuine that Lucy begins to think of her as an adequate version of the mother she always wanted. But Lucy soon realises that all is a scam to eventually impose her vision on her: ‘Mariah wanted all of us, the children and me to see things the way she did’ (36). Those same limitations that Lucy experiences with her mother, and which prompt her desire for escape, recur in Mariah’s attitude though Mariah is not as insistent and authoritative as the mother. Mariah is a little tolerant, permitting Lucy’s friendship with Peggy - a friendship that gives Lucy an opportunity for self-development through sexual exploits, which she freely discusses with Mariah. This slight difference that Lucy experiences in Mariah’s mothering as opposed to that of her biological mother becomes vital in the development of a separate identity.

Despite Mariah’s calm nature, she still remains blind to Lucy’s historical memories; hoping to get Lucy share in another of her favourite experiences, ‘spending the night on a train and waking up to breakfast on the train as it moved through freshly ploughed fields’ (28). Once again, another trope of colonialism is implied – plantation slavery. Much like in the daffodils scene, Lucy’s reaction is fiercely sarcastic: ‘Well, thank God I didn’t have to do that’ (33). Already sensitive to this master/slave dichotomy, Lucy notices, with little embarrassment, the racial breakdown of the people on board. The diners are principally white (‘Mariah’s relatives’), while the servants are blacks (‘her relatives’). These symbols of slavery resonate in Lucy’s consciousness for they do not only remind her of her present situation as servant, but also confirm the white master/black servant relationship maintained through race and class hierarchies. Mariah is not conscious of this binary opposition as she remains glued to her ethnocentric outlook.

Mariah’s attempt to claim a kind of kinship with Lucy through Indian ancestry is ridiculous and most embarrassing to Lucy. The assertion may be a attempt to identify with Lucy’s history of suppression and oppression, or maybe as Moira Ferguson suggests, to desire ‘forgiveness for colonial complicity’ but it altogether rings a false signal (‘To look at her, there was nothing remotely Indian about her. …she says it as if she were announcing her possession of a trophy’ [40]). Indian blood or none, Mariah has not known any history of conquest, marginalisation and dispossession; she has all along lived a wealthy middle class Anglo-American life. This knowledge prompts Lucy’s refusal to give in to Mariah’s attempt at repositioning history, and dismisses Mariah’s hypocritical claim with, ‘How do you get to be the sort of victor who claims to be the vanquished also?’ (41). Mariah’s claim to both identities is contradictory on the one hand, and on the other hand it bespeaks her continuous effort to obliterate the disparities between them so that Lucy’s narrative should be maintained within hers.

Significantly, racial, cultural, economic and class differences define Mariah’s and Lucy’s differing perspectives and worldviews but Mariah’s deliberate disregard for this race and power dynamics sums up to maintaining and perpetuating it. What accounts for the lack of sensitivity that Mariah displays in race and class matters is rooted in her almost ideal life: ‘she has never had to doubt … the right thing always happens to her; the thing she wants to happen, happens’

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Lucy on the other hand has had a different kind of life – one of exhausting frustrations; one in which almost every situation she comes across seems more difficult than the previous, but yet, which help her develop a critical insight into the general human situation.

**Historical/Cultural Paradoxes**

Though Lucy has been constantly trailed by history, events gradually unfold to reveal the inconsistencies of colonial idiosyncrasies. Ideas and concepts that negated the colonial subject resurface as commonplace within the colonising setup, thus questioning some motives of the imperial agenda. For example, Mariah’s bitter complaints about the destruction of nature and the countryside, and her devotion to environmental preservation are juxtaposed with her inability to make a connection between her life of affluence and the rape of this very land she is dying to preserve. Undoubtedly, her purpose is phony for she condemns in others what she herself is guilty of. Significantly, she is confronted with this truth by her daughter’s sardonic enquiry, “Well what used to be here before this house we are living in was built?” (72). Mariah’s complicity with colonial expropriation of land is revealed here and the fact that this connection is exposed by a younger generation of white society speaks positively to an eventual re-negotiation of the boundaries of race, class and the conquered/conqueror binary. This will further allow for a reconciliation of old spaces and a reconstruction of new identities.

Lucy’s relationship with her lover Paul plays out another shift in the colonial gaze. He gives her an exotic position from which she watches the other guests leave his party. From this position, she too is able to see, in the same way as she is viewed, through reflections of an ethnocentric gaze. Much more interesting is Paul’s concern for freedom, which gives another perspective to race and class superiority/inferiority. He tells of ‘great explorers who had crossed the great seas, not only to find riches … but to feel free, and this search for freedom was part of the whole human situation’ (129). Though at this point Lucy can only think of the cost of this quest for freedom to the underprivileged members of society, it is implicit that the sophistication of the metropolis does not necessarily provide fulfilment. Pleasure and freedom are more gratifying when obtained away from the everyday and out of the ordinary, living the experience of other cultures and spaces. This is why Hugh can afford to ask:

Isn’t it the most blissful thing in the world to be away from everything you have ever known – to be so far away that you don’t even know yourself anymore and you’re not sure you ever want to come back to all the things you’re a part of? (66)

When Lucy felt stifled by the stringent atmosphere of home, it was her greatest wish to go as far away as possible from home. Here she is, way across the Caribbean waters, on this other side of the Atlantic, meeting people who also express the same wish; people found in an area she hitherto thought provides fulfilment. Migration then becomes a plausible means by which humans shed off the ugly situations that threaten individual liberties both from within and without. It provides a kind of framework for understanding self and other while at the same time, creating new points of interconnectedness and relations. Lucy must fit herself into this fabric to be able to form the identity she so much desires.

Other truths begin to unveil themselves before Lucy, which push her to reconsider her historical past and her family situation as void of the natural human order. One of such truths is the untruth about family life, seen in the relationship between Lewis, Mariah and their children.

Lewis’ cruel injustice to a farm rabbit and his treacherous arrangement of a burial ceremony simply confirm the lack of sympathy inherent in human nature. His treachery continues into his love affair with Dinah, Mariah’s best friend, and it goes unnoticed by Mariah whose rosy existence closes her off from the realities of life. As would be expected, Lewis’ infidelity disintegrates his family and nullifies the picture of an ideal family structure associated with white standards. This is juxtaposed with Lucy’s own family situation in which her father comes and goes between women, fathering children by them and creating rivalry and conflict amongst them. Sexual adventurousness therefore has its roots in the individual mindset and does not respect race, class and gender hierarchies.

This situation further presents limitations in Mariah’s, and by extension, western understanding of gender behaviour. The wife, Mariah, focuses on the happy and perfect side of life so much that the opposite side of it seems almost nonexistent. When Lewis betrays their love, she feels the heavy weight of disappointment. Lucy on the other side sees it before it happens but because Mariah has ready and subjective answers to a situation like this, Lucy does not warn her in advance. To Mariah, the fact that all men behave that way would have been a cliché but women from a colonial background like Lucy understand this cliché well. Lewis’ attitude is an everyday happening to them and this awareness makes them emotionally stronger: ‘a man like Lewis ... would not have cast a pall over a woman’s life’ (141-2). The argument here is that rules are made by males to suit their whims and caprices and this fact is the core of gender bias. It is not surprising that Mariah is unaware of this and even if she were to be told, ‘she would only show ... a book she had ... which contradicted everything ... a book most likely written by a woman who understood absolutely nothing’ (142). It can be judged, from Mariah’s ignorance about gender inequalities, that there are also inadequacies in white ethnocentric interpretations of women’s experiences. However, what one learns from a particular socio-cultural context does not necessarily apply to another. This knowledge helps Lucy in better positioning and redefining her gender identity.

The narrative of the French painter also demands critical inquiries into the ethnocentrically-based opposition between civilised/uncivilised, black/white and European/non-European. He defied the existing order of his time, ‘which he found corrupt’ and definitely constraining, and migrated to an ‘uncivilised’ and exotic land, where he found liberation and attained a high measure of creative inspiration. Lucy identifies with the yearnings of this European as she already understands from her own situation that ‘finding the place you are born in an unbearable prison and wanting something completely different … represents a haven’ (95). Though this painter’s situation is similar to Lucy’s in a way, she finds that they have a major difference; the emotional and psychological release that he experiences in his new place is not readily available to her in New York. One of Kincaid’s primary concerns is to expose systems of binary hierarchies and unequal privileges between coloniser and colonised which she explicitly satirises in her searing non-fiction work A Small Place. The once-colonised regions are used as exotic sites and even the sickening realities of the people of these places are part of the delightful scenery to visiting westerners. On the other side, these lovely places tend to be a source of difficulty to their inhabitants as they experience new forms of imperialism. However, whatever

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their motives for displacement, and the situations they encounter in their various conditions of self-exile, the bottom line is that migrants seek escape from their pasts and opportunities for better lives.

The same holds true for Mariah. The final collapse of her marriage propels her to migrate. ‘She was going away, she said, far away, to live in a place of uncommon natural beauty. Everyone who lived in this place, she said, was filled with love and trust and greeted each other with the word ‘Peace’” (162). This place is suggestive of the West Indies, Jamaica precisely, birthplace of the Rastafarian movement whose holy word is ‘Peace’ (used also for greeting). It is somewhat ironical that Mariah chooses this part of the world as her point of redemption because the philosophy and culture of Rastafarianism which prevails here is born out of mysticism and a Pan-African political consciousness – ideals which would be condemned by the white imperial culture to which she belongs. However, Mariah’s choice of re-location simply confirms the fact that migration blurs linguistic, cultural and national boundaries; while Lucy leaves her native Antigua to America to find a sense of self, Mariah moves from America to the West Indies to find a life of fulfilment. There is an indication here that home is everywhere and anywhere.

Reconciling Binaries and Creating New Spaces

It is necessary that the above truths be revealed to Lucy so that she may be able to make an amalgamation of her past and her present. For this to be achieved, she must first block the gaze that stares at her from over the Atlantic – the shattering look from history epitomised by her mother and her letters. These letters not only remind her of the impossibility of having safety and comfort in an alien land but also carry with them the power, authority and control that home has over her, and which make home un-homely. After one of such letters, which come with a feeling of nostalgia she struggles hard to suppress, Lucy declares:

The object of my life now was to put as much distance between myself and the events mentioned in her letter as I could manage. For I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which that letter came…would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face? (31)

The subsequent letters she receives from her mother remain unopened and eventually destroyed. This translates into her successful reversal of the maternal gaze which threatens her selfhood and thwarts her ambitions. Her experiences with Mariah, Lewis and their class-conscious and affluent friends have also helped her in understanding and negotiating her colonial past. The positive imaginations she holds of white middle class life have been challenged; thus she begins to envisage other options of re-invention and identity affirmation.

Lucy leaves home with an identity that is essentially gender-based and partially colonial. Her female identity is informed by her experiences with her mother and Mariah, and further propelled by the story of the French painter. One of the things that differentiate Lucy’s narrative from this man’s is her feminine gender, and the distance is made more acute by her being from the fringes of the earth, who has the mantle of a servant wrapped around her shoulders (95). From a western perspective, his action will be considered as heroic (‘his life could be found in the pages of a book … the lives of men always are’[95]), while Lucy’s may only be looked upon as ordinary. By virtue of her gender, therefore, Lucy is kept out of certain privileges that men
hold; and although her female body excludes and marginalises her, she still stands a chance of using this same body as a medium of empowerment. She seizes this chance and begins the process of self-discovery through sexual encounters.

Contrary to her mother’s repeated warnings against becoming a ‘slut’, Lucy develops a subjective sexuality. She attests that she ‘had not known that such pleasure could exist, and what was more, be available to [her]’ (113). She attributes her sexual excitement to the fact that she is ‘so far from home’ (67); home goes with control and restrictions from patriarchal order. Whatever the case, this new space allows her freedom for sexual adventuring, which she welcomes with impunity, focusing mostly on her personal enjoyment and unceremoniously calling off relationships as soon as she loses interest. Her declaration that ‘life as a slut is quite enjoyable’ (128) counters her mother’s denial of her own sexuality grounded on the cultural necessity that women should reserve their sexuality for adulthood – adulthood being marriage, and marriage itself being bondage to men. By implication, female sexuality has been controlled by men while they accord themselves the privilege of sexual experimentation and exploration. Displacement from home therefore gives Lucy the opportunity to reject ‘her mother’s sexual prohibitions’ while at the same time ‘claiming her father’s sexual prerogative’ as a way of liberating and asserting herself.

The theory of universal womanhood that Mariah subscribes to and depends on for answers to women’s problems is for Lucy a farce not less than patriarchal domination of the woman. Lucy’s story of her troubled relationship with her mother is responded to with a lecture on ‘women in society, women in history, women in culture, women everywhere’ (132). Of course Mariah is right about the roles and responsibilities of women in the history of humanity but misses out on the fact that women have the right and need to lead their own lives free from men’s demands. Such a choice is guided by self-consciousness and interpretation of reality. As such, Lucy insists that her experiences with her mother are specific and do not necessarily translate into the general situation of women. She stands firm on the fact that her ‘mother was [her] mother … society … history … culture and other women in general were something altogether’ (131-2). As a proto-feminist, Mariah subscribes to the notion of universal sisterhood and assumes that Lucy will find solace as she comes to understand her position as a woman in Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex. But Lucy is disappointed to find that the opening sentence of the book limits the definition of woman to its biological essence and to a figuratively enclosed domestic space. Furthermore, it is evident that this general situation of the woman Mariah talks about has a Eurocentric background in which case there will be a conflict of interests and values based on individual and/or race/ethnic experiences. From this perspective, there is little chance that any category of white feminist discourse can explain and/or interpret Lucy’s experiences under a patriarchal mother and colonial authority. Racial, cultural and economic circumstances contribute to a diversity of women’s experiences, which makes it impracticable for a single ideological standpoint to be used as a framework for interpreting them all. This setback in early feminist discourse was fully exposed by narratives of migration wherein situations like Lucy’s (mother/daughter strife) demanded a completely different interpretation from general notions on women’s experiences. Recent trends in feminist criticism have therefore expanded to include all possible grounds open to the understanding of women’s experiences, as well as the intersections


'Home and Away': Reconstructing Identity in Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy. Eleanor Anneh Dasi.
Transnational Literature Vol. 7 no. 1, November 2014.
of gender. This is why Lucy is resolute to re-invent herself within her own perception of the reality of the gender divide.

Lucy’s insistence on separation from both mother and motherland conflicts with her reluctance to let go of this same past. Her past is her mother and all her efforts at drawing a line between them comes to naught because as she says, she is not only like her mother, she is her mother. Because her identity is rooted in the same space that she seeks to obliterate, her attempts at a separate individuality become complex and ambivalent. Hence, Belinda Edmondson argues that ‘home and away must become the same place to make the [exile] whole’.

8 Katherine Sugg, however, questions the fusion with the past as necessary to define and maintain a selfhood in the future. This assumption, to her, is founded on unsettling patriarchal discourses of women. 9 Significantly, these discourses position even the female exile in the home/homeland sphere to build a cultural identity, but Lucy’s situation necessitates a delicate compromise of cultural and colonial genealogies. Her one-year experience in America prepares her to assert her independence. Her movement out of Mariah’s house to live on her own accordingly turns out to be a big accomplishment. However, when she attempts to write her own script, she only succeeds in writing her name and the statement, ‘I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it’ (164). The constant haunting intrusion of her mother’s love impedes her efforts at building a separate individuality, suggesting therefore that her mother’s narrative must be included in hers.

Finally, Lucy’s names represent an inner stronghold that she must break in order to complete her individuation process. Lucy, Josephine and Potter all symbolise both a matrilineal and a plantation lineage that keep her within the barriers of patriarchy and colonial domination. Josephine is from her maternal grand uncle Joseph, a plantation owner, who, it was hoped, would be her benefactor, but who lost all his wealth and died miserable. Potter definitely comes from the slave owners of her forefathers. Lucy is the name given by her mother which she had never liked and which had considered changing to Charlotte, Jane and Emily (names of British female authors she read). She settled on Enid (after Enid Blyton), but soon finds out that it is the name of the woman who had wanted to kill her mother and her from jealousy over her father. In as much as the choice of the name points to the possibility of metaphorically killing her mother to create a separate identity, Lucy rejects this option when she declares that ‘even to hurt my mother I would not have wanted the same name as the woman who had tried to kill my mother and me’ (150). Moreover, re-naming herself after one of these women would have contradicted her whole cause since it would have meant compliance with empire. Charlotte Bronte, for example, creates a character, Jane Eyre, who lives in a house with a Caribbean woman locked up in the attic, while Enid Blyton is particularly noted for creating ugly blacks preying on white innocent children.

Lucy, a derivative of Lucifer as her mother provocatively tells her, is what Lucy finally claims to represent herself. Though she never liked the name, she develops interest in it when she knows its origin: ‘that my mother would have found me devil-like did not surprise me …. I

did not grow to like the name Lucy … but whenever I saw my name I always reached to give it a strong embrace’ (152-3). Her new identity seems more like an extension of Annie John’s. Annie acclaims herself as a younger version of Lucifer as she leaves her maternal paradise to an endless loneliness and isolation. Kincaid uses this configuration of villainy to fiercely claim independent identities for her young protagonists, as Lucy especially employs its power to resist the emotional ties with her mother. Proof is that only her name ‘Lucy Josephine Potter’ remains on the blank page, the confessions of love having been blurred by tears. At this point, Lucy already has a measure of fulfillment even more so because she obtains final freedom from a patriarchal/colonial language of suppression and oppression as epitomised by the death of her father. On her own terms then, she merges and separates both her cultural and colonial identities from which she devises a postcolonial code that rewrites the colonial patriarchal paradigm. But after succeeding in rejecting all forms of limitations on her individuality, Lucy is unable to continue the script after her name. However, there is every indication that the script will contain her mother’s and Mariah’s alongside hers, all wrapped in the two cultures that identify her so that she can have a unique identity.

Conclusion
Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy undoubtedly proves that migration carves out new spaces for identity reconstruction by creating that interconnectedness with home that permits a negotiation of cultural polarities. After achieving the most desired independence, Lucy brings in another opposition in the words, ‘I realized when I crossed the threshold that I did not think of it as home, only as the place where I now lived’ (156). When the domains of home, belonging and culture are contested, transnational identities are formed outside the limitations of place, gender and race. In an interview with Moira Ferguson, Kincaid posits that ‘people who look like [her] should not cling to their narrow definitions of themselves … what they ought to do is … take … Take Shakespeare. Just anything that makes sense.’ Therefore, any identity that suits individual aspirations should be claimed irrespective of leanings. With migration, hegemonic as well as national discourses are questioned. As a migrant writer, Kincaid herself oscillates between empire and colony, avoiding complete identification with one or the other. She believes that from middle position, she will be able to adopt the language of empire and use it to articulate the voice of the colony. This she achieves in Lucy as she successfully blurs the demarcations of gender, race and culture from an insider/outside position.

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The recipe of the Russian literary Israeli cocktail is this: we take the national Jewish temperament, add a large measure of Soviet mentality, dump into the thick of it a full spoon of zesty immigrant problems, a pinch of normal human vanity, half a cup of the existential prophetic itch, then pour in, without measure, sincere love for the Russian word and culture, heat it up in the scorching Jerusalem sun, shake well, and empty this mixture into various large and small forms...

Dina Rubina, 1999

The break-up of the Soviet Union was perhaps the most important event to shake the Jewish world since the creation of the State of Israel, and has dramatically shaped Israel’s demography, politics and culture. In what has come to be referred to as the Great Aliyah, the 1990s saw over a million Russian-speaking migrants flood into Israel, boosting the Jewish State’s population by over 20% and paradoxically providing perhaps the greatest challenge yet to Israel’s ambition to facilitate an ‘ingathering of exiles’. Indeed in the context of Israeli history, rooted in the pioneering spirit of the near-mythological early Zionist waves of migration, the Great Aliyah of Russian Jewry marks a significant turning point. The Hebrew word Aliyah, used here to refer to Jewish migration to Israel, is an inherently ideological concept, literally meaning an ‘ascent’ to a higher (and hence superior) place, and as such migrants were traditionally expected to relinquish their former cultural identities in favour of absorption into the Hebrew-speaking, Jewish and Zionist dominant culture. This expectation began with the early European Jewish settlers, many of them actually from Russia, who overwhelmingly rejected the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Diaspora and sought to reinvent themselves as strong Hebrews, fashioning what they deemed to be a native Israeli identity rooted in agriculture, secularism and socialist ideals. Every wave of Aliyah since has been encouraged to participate in and strengthen the Israeli national project by adopting the cultural norms of their new homeland, an important part of the Zionist concept of ‘negating the Diaspora’. This was especially damaging for the Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews, who migrated from other parts of the Middle East and North Africa largely in the 1950s. The Mizrahi/Sephardi Aliyah was pressured to relinquish its links to the Arabic culture and language almost immediately, viewed as belonging to Israel’s enemies, and suffered marginalisation and discrimination in the process.

However, by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Israel had already absorbed migrants from a wide variety of backgrounds, and had matured into a confident modern state with its own distinct identity, supported by now deep-rooted nationalist myths and narratives. Unlike previous waves of Aliyah, the migrants of the Great Aliyah were overwhelmingly secular, many ignorant of even the most basic tenets of Judaism, and migrated largely due to economic and social

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2 Larissa Remennick, Russian Jews on Three Continents (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2007) 56.
factors. Their reluctance to go through the Zionist transformation functioned in stark contrast to the grand narrative of a Jewish homecoming which had been at the core of Zionist thought since the movement’s inception. Their arrival marked the point when Israel found itself, perhaps unwillingly, adopting a multicultural model, an important social and ideological shift which has also been evidenced in the most recent wave of Aliyah to Israel from Ethiopia. In defying pressures to assimilate, migrants of the Great Aliyah used the strength of their demography to build a Russian-language cultural enclave in Israel, asserting their unique identity at the expense of a speedier integration into the Israeli mainstream.5

As is the experience of many migrant groups, the Great Aliyah of the 1990s was initially characterised by the trauma of social displacement. Compounding this, the labour and housing markets could not cope with the sudden increase in demand, and many government agencies and services were overwhelmed. The new migrants faced a plethora of challenges, involving everything from financial pressures to military conscription to difficulties in understanding Hebrew and adapting to cultural norms. Typically new immigrants to Israel found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy, and this lack of status reinforced the pressure to assimilate into the Israeli cultural mainstream. However, as Jews of European origin had historically occupied a culturally superior position in Israel over Jews of Middle-Eastern origin, bearers of Russian culture, with its prestigious traditions of literature, music and the arts, were able to subvert this long-standing imbalance, and instead assert their Russian cultural credentials. Many migrants of the Great Aliyah regarded Russian language and culture as being more sophisticated than the local Israeli culture, and their Russian heritage was hence repositioned as a valuable asset which they were reluctant to forsake. Resisting the pressure to adopt Hebrew as a literary language in the spirit of the early Zionists, Israeli-Russian migrants of the 1990s instead developed a vibrant Russian-language literary scene which reflected their unique transnational identity.

As in other multicultural societies, globalisation and the technology revolution have also played a crucial role in the development of the Russian cultural and literary scene in Israel. Improvements in communication technologies and transport infrastructure have enabled transnational migrant communities to maintain strong linguistic, cultural and familial links with their former homelands, which for Israeli-Russians has made the notion of giving up their ties to the Diaspora not only impractical, but also undesirable. The emerging phenomenon of transnationalism has in many ways further reinforced the migrant’s position on the cultural periphery, straddling the divide between identity constructs and blurring the once-sharp dichotomy which existed between home country and host country.6 This process has led to the development of hybrid identities which transcend the boundaries between cultures, or serve to fuse norms and traditions to create new referents of identity; trends which feature prominently in the new genre of Israeli-Russian literature which developed out of the Great Aliyah.

Israel is home to over 300 Russian language book and music stores, several radio and television stations and a media scene which publishes in excess of 20 newspapers and

5 Remennick 58.
magazines, focusing on academic or literary topics as well as Israeli current affairs. vesti, the leading Russian-Israeli daily, in its heyday boasted a readership of 65% of the million-strong Israeli-Russian community. hundreds of new books are published in Russian each year in Israel, however due to lack of interest very few are ever translated into Hebrew, and Russian-Israeli literature receives very little critical attention outside Russian-speaking circles.

Despite this, the Israeli-Russian literary scene is important in that it reflects the unique position of the first immigrant group in Israel to openly reject the Zionist pressure to assimilate and to seek a fusion, rather than a replacement, of cultures. ‘under the auspices of the veteran Israeli society’s lack of interest and under the cover of foreignness,’ Israeli-Russian writers, spurred on by the freedoms brought about by escaping Soviet censorship, have produced a diverse and experimental body of literature. similar to the emerging genre of transnational literature worldwide, much of Israeli-Russian literature is centred on the travails of immigration, and explores themes such as multiculturalism, bilingualism, displacement and belonging. this exploration of the immigrant experience is however firmly positioned within an Israeli geographical, cultural and/or historical context, and in this sense is an inherently Israeli literary genre. however due to its linguistic separation from the cultural mainstream, Russian-language Israeli writing is set apart stylistically from the Hebrew literary canon, drawing its influences instead from Russia. Similarly, Hebrew-language literature written by Russian émigrés also often exhibits features distinctive to Russian literary sensibilities, such as allusions to the Russian classics.

In an effort to examine Israeli-Russian literature in depth this paper will limit itself to an analysis of the work of two prominent Israeli-Russian writers; Dina Rubina, who publishes in Russian, and Ola Groisman, who publishes in Hebrew. Both writers use literature to explore their own personal experiences of immigration to Israel, but an examination of their work can also shine light on the wider challenges involved in understanding and interpreting identity in an era of transnationalism.

A New Israeli Literature

Dina Rubina was born in Tashkent in present-day Uzbekistan, and is probably the most prominent Israeli-Russian writer of the Great Aliyah. Rubina immigrated to Israel in 1990, was able to overcome a difficult period of transition, and began to write novels in Russian about her new homeland. Rubina’s best-known publication in Israel is her 1996 novel Here Comes the Messiah! (‘Vot Idet Messiya!’), which charts the lives of an array of Israeli-Russian characters as they navigate their way through a multi-ethnic and multilingual Israeli society, often grappling humorously with issues of cultural and religious identity.

In Here Comes the Messiah! Rubina explores the predicament of the Israeli-Russian intellectual elite as they attempt to assimilate into mainstream Israeli society whilst retaining their Russian cultural identity. Set in an early 1990s post-Intifada Israel, the novel charts the fate of two female protagonists whose stories converge in the final chapter when the son of the first, the autobiographical Writer N, accidently shoots dead Ziama, the second protagonist, when

7 Remennick 111.
8 Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Building a Diaspora: Russian Jews in Israel, Germany and the USA (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 227
9 Masha Zur Glozman, ‘The Million Russians that Changed Israel to its Core’ Haaretz, 4 January 2013.

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aiming for a Palestinian terrorist. Rubina’s novel is constructed around ‘a series of sentimental, hilarious and sometimes absurd episodes that portray the reality and dreams of the Great Aliyah,’ and works to shatter pre-immigration myths such as that of the Zionist homecoming.

Ola Groisman was born in Moscow, and immigrated to Israel as a child in 1972. Groisman published her first novel in 2009, titled A Suitcase on Snow (‘Mizvada al Hasheleg’), which became an Israeli bestseller. Despite Russian being her mother-tongue, Groisman writes in Hebrew, and like Rubina focuses on issues of identity and belonging in her exploration of the Russian-Israeli immigrant experience. A Suitcase on Snow tells the story of Lana, a young Israeli who returns to Russia for the first time since her Aliyah, and embarks on a journey in search of her roots, and with it her identity. Despite Groisman’s arriving in Israel before the wave of post-Soviet immigration, it is impossible to separate her work from the context of the Great Aliyah. Groisman herself acknowledges the immense societal pressures which encouraged her to assimilate from an early age, and initially bought into the Zionist ethos which still prevailed in Israel of the 1970s. Groisman was only able to reconsider her identity and reconnect with her Russian roots in the wake of the almost million-strong Great Aliyah of the 1990s, which opened the floodgates for the acceptance and celebration of Russian culture in Israel, even if largely restricted to within the community itself. In this sense, the Great Aliyah of the 1990s also facilitated the emergence of Hebrew language Israeli-Russian literature.

In contrast to Rubina’s more sweeping treatment of Israeli-Russian society and group identity, Groisman’s novel explores the immigrant experience on a personal level from a position of emotion and introspection. Groisman’s protagonist Lana struggles to fit in and connect to the people around her, and has a troubled relationship with her mother in particular, prompting her to seek psychological treatment. In line with traditional Zionist discourse, upon immigrating to Israel Lana’s parents refuse to speak about their past, and Lana grew up not knowing about her childhood in the Soviet Union, completely disconnected from and unaware of her extended family who still lived there. Twenty years after her Aliyah Lana is sent to Moscow to retrieve her grandfather’s ashes, and begins to uncover the secrets of her family history, beginning with the discovery of her grandmother’s diary. Lana slowly comes to terms with her roots in the country of her birth, and is able to re-examine her identity as someone who is both local and foreign, with a conflicting sense of belonging both in Russia and in Israel.

Rubina and Groisman’s writings make an interesting contrast, and are in many ways complimentary. Rubina writes in Russian, however her narratives are largely set in Israel, and deal with broad Israeli issues and themes. Groisman on the other hand writes in Hebrew and her novel is largely set in Russia, against a backdrop of the country’s struggles in the post-Soviet era. Rubina strives to present a panoramic snapshot of Israeli-Russian society, whereas Groisman’s novel is more focused on the experiences of the individual. Both Rubina and Groisman identify as Israelis, and their writing functions as a window into a new and flourishing literary subculture which acts as a bridge between two radically different cultural and literary traditions.

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11 From my own correspondence with Ola Groisman, 19 April 2013.
The Israeli-Russian Identity Paradox

One of the core themes of immigrant literature is an engagement with the immigrant’s position on the periphery between identities, torn between identification with traditional norms and a process of adaptation, referred to by Kral as a form of ‘forced amnesia of the homeland.’ This issue is especially complex in the case of Israeli-Russian immigrants, because as Jews many were already to a certain extent perceived as being outside the dominant identity construct of their Soviet ‘homeland.’ Immigration to Israel made many Israeli-Russians aware of their inherent Russianness for the first time, just as it also caused them to re-examine their Jewish identities. Ironically, denied official identification as ethnic Russians in the Soviet Union, Jewish immigrants of the Great Aliyah were only able to realise their Russianness in Israel. This inversion of ethnic identities, coupled with the aforementioned demise of Zionist notions of assimilation, meant that the Israeli-Russian faced being seen as an eternal other on the fringes of the mainstream, whether as a Jew in Russia or as a Russian in Israel.

Both Rubina and Groisman’s work explores the Israeli-Russian immigrant’s struggle to come to terms with this identity paradox in different ways. Nakhimovsky writes that ‘Jews have always been suspect as the bearers of Russian culture,’ particularly in light of the central role the Russian literary canon has had in ‘defining the Russian soul.’ Rubina’s decision to write about Jews in the Russian language hence almost automatically forces her to re-evaluate what it means to be a Jew and a Russian, and whether both identities are compatible or mutually-exclusive.

Several of Rubina’s characters in *Here Comes the Messiah!* grapple with this identity-bind. Rubina’s narrator describes the protagonist Zia, ‘like every member of the Russian intelligentsia,’ as ‘suffering from a split personality’ as she attempts to juggle her role as the editor of a Russian-language periodical with her newly-realised identity as a political Zionist, living in a volatile West Bank settlement. Inverting the typical immigrant-host nation relationship, Zia brags that she has ‘already absorbed both this country and its population’, emphasising that Zia is absorbing her new homeland on her own terms, which include a reluctance to relinquish Russian cultural norms. Zia is intent on resisting the traditional Zionist expectation that new migrants will willingly let go of their former cultural identities in favour of absorption into the dominant Hebrew culture. She is not averse to becoming Israeli, and indeed reinvents herself as a West Bank settler, choosing to live in a caravan in the Judean desert due to her political convictions. However she is reluctant to go through the Zionist transformation completely, clinging to her love of Russian culture and literature, and continuing to associate mostly in Israeli-Russian immigrant circles.

Groisman’s protagonist Lana is faced with similar conflicts of identity, and at first attempts to assimilate entirely into Israeli society, making an active effort to banish any vestiges of her former self. Lana Hebraises her name, changing it to Ilana, after a school teacher told her that with a Russian name ‘you can never be a real Israeli.’ Lana describes her confusion upon

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12 Kral 7.
14 Nakhimovsky x.
15 Dina Rubina, *Here Comes the Messiah!* (Brookline: Zephyr, 1995) 12.
16 Ola Groisman, *Mizvada al hasheleg* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2009) 58. All translations are my own.


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arriving in Russia and hearing people refer to her by her birth name: ‘The name Lana sounds both foreign and familiar at the same time… tears flow from my eyes… am I mourning my lost name?’ Although she makes an effort to be seen as a ‘real Israeli’ Lana cannot seem to entirely shake off her Russianness, and despite ‘trying so hard to fit in’ she found herself ‘exiled to a group of Russians’ during her military service, whom she ironically struggles to connect with due to their speaking Russian and drinking vodka. Lana appears to embody this identity paradox which characterises the Israeli-Russian enclave, however in contrast to Rubina’s Ziama, who tries to find the middle-ground between her two cultures, Lana resists her roots and attempts to wholly assimilate into the Israeli mainstream. This is a painful process which is ultimately unsuccessful, symbolised by her later embrace of her original Russian name. In my own correspondence with Groisman the author admits that A Suitcase on Snow is ‘emotionally autobiographical,’ and that the pressure Lana felt to assimilate reflected her own experience: ‘Most of us changed our names, made Hebrew our main language and embraced Israeli culture to the full’. Groisman notes that this resulted in a feeling that she had been ‘uprooted’, and that like her protagonist Lana, it was a return to Russia some years later which enabled her to ‘reconnect to (her) childhood’ and through it, her ‘lost’ Russian identity.

Rubina charts Israeli-Russians’ efforts to understand and interact with the cultural life of their adopted homeland by peppering her narrative with short anecdotes and asides, recounting stories of culture-clash or culture-shock ranging from the hilarious to the absurd. Various characters struggle to comprehend the behaviour of the locals, who are often described as ‘aborigines,’ a term which both implies cultural primitivism and cements Israelis’ status as natives vis-a-vis newer immigrants. For example, Rubina’s autobiographical character Writer N frequently struggles with her neighbours’ nonchalant attitude to Israel’s security situation, exclaiming: ‘How, surrounded by mortal danger, could they crack seeds, gobble pita and scratch their hairy bellies?!’ In a similar vein, Groisman emphasises the richness of Russian culture and the value Russian immigrants place on education and knowledge, in contrast to the local Israeli population. Lana fondly describes the ‘books covering the walls of my parent’s flat in Haifa’ and reacts with shock when one day, upon returning from the army, she finds her parents in the process of throwing them out. These books come to symbolise Lana’s family’s slow detachment from Russian culture; when Lana protests, her mother quips, ‘What would you need this for? You don’t even read in Russian.’ Lana’s decision to hold on to some of the books, despite never reading them, represents her inability to truly let go of the Russian part of her identity, despite outwardly assuming the role of the Israeli Ilana. Lana arranged them on shelves in her flat in Tel Aviv ‘with ceremony’ and would ‘stop to caress them’ whenever she passed near, lamenting the rich cultural heritage largely lost to her in seeking to replace her Russian identity with an Israeli one.

Rubina’s sharp-tongued narrator often takes aim at elements within the Israeli-Russian community who have the opposite problem – those who fail to assimilate whatsoever, preferring

17 Groisman 189.
18 Correspondence with Ola Groisman 19 April 2013.
19 Correspondence with Ola Groisman 19 April 2013.
20 Rubina, Messiah 289.
21 Rubina, Messiah 122-3.
22 Groisman 155.
to remain completely Russian. One character, Agrippa, an Israeli-Russian tour guide, is filled with rage when guiding a group of pensioners around the historic quarter of Safed:

‘And now he intended to beat them up the way they should be for everything: for the fact that they didn’t know their own history and their own great religion … For their Great Fatherland War, in which they participated, for all of Israel’s wars, in which they had NOT participated, for the fact that they hadn’t dragged their asses here in ’48, or in the 60s, or in ’73. For the fact that they barged in here now- the ambitious riff-raff, for pensions, apartment subsidies and free excursions.’

These accusations are often levelled at immigrants of the Great Aliyah by native-born citizens who bemoan the Israeli-Russian community’s lack of Zionist zeal and knowledge of Judaism, and their perceived resistance to assimilation. Rubina’s transformation of this external critique into an internal one alerts us to a duality of identity within the community, which identifies itself with Israeli concerns and seeks to align its national identity with that of Israel in spite of its continuing affiliation with Russian cultural practice.

The issue of rootedness and historical ties to the land as a marker of identity, with a lack of connectedness to national history seen as a barrier to belonging, also features in A Suitcase on Snow. Lana experiences flashbacks to her time at school throughout the novel, cataloguing her struggle to adapt to the unfamiliar nationalism of her new home: ‘The Memorial Day ceremony at school. They read out the names. Tali cries. Her uncle was killed in one of the wars, and I feel nothing. Nobody in my family has ever been tragically killed or wounded in a war.’ Lana later partially solves this problem by becoming attached to the memory of Eyal, a boy in her school who went on to be killed in the Lebanon war. Lana only shared a fleeting encounter with Eyal, fittingly whilst waiting to read aloud a Rachel poem at a school assembly (this choice of Zionist literary hero further emphasising her desire to become ‘a real Israeli’). Eyal, being ‘the only person I have known who has died’, came to give Lana the sense of rootedness which she lacked; ‘Every Memorial Day I felt the palms of his hands on my back all over again,’ recalling the time when Eyal helped her overcome her stage fright by pushing her into the auditorium.

‘Burdened by a Moderate Load of Russian Culture’

Language is a central component of identity, and the struggle to adapt to a new language is one of the most prominent themes in immigrant literature. Despite Rubina’s decision to continue writing in Russian, in Here Comes the Messiah! there is considerable interaction between the Russian and Hebrew languages. Rubina often relies on word-play and linguistic parallelism to transform Hebrew slang and particularistic Israeli concepts into Russian. For example:

‘Angel-of-Paradise turned out to live in the same shchuna (the Hebrew word for ‘neighbourhood’) as Rabinovich, and very close to him at that. (Of course, shkhuna in Russian means ‘schooner,’ so it’s tempting to compare the Machaneh Rusi shchuna with a

23 Rubina, Messiah 242.
24 Groisman 47.
25 Groisman 23.
Rubina’s Hebrewisms add an element of authenticity to her narrative, but often also function as insider jokes, comprehensible only to her fellow Israeli-Russian readers who are proficient in both languages. These insider jokes act as ‘cues to intercultural and transnational in-betweenness,’ and shed some light on the nature of identity structures in the Israeli-Russian immigrant community. For example, Rubina’s narrator introduces a new rakezet (Hebrew for ‘co-ordinator’) of Russian cultural activities, but intentionally confuses this title with the Russian word koza (a female goat), enabling her to mock this character’s silliness with a wink to her Russian readers who also understand Hebrew. The majority of Rubina’s Russian-speaking readership, who reside outside of Israel, would miss this subtle word-play. Rubina’s Hebrew-enriched Russian dialogues reflect real linguistic developments on the Israeli-Russian street, with the Russian language itself going through a process of adaptation in Israel, incorporating many Hebrew words into its vernacular which reflect a distinctly Israeli reality.

In clinging to the language of pre-immigration but setting her narratives in a post-immigration context, Rubina suggests that the maintenance of language is a crucial component to identity, and key to a promotion of Israeli-Russian culture. Nearly all the characters in Here Comes the Messiah! are engaged in some sort of Russian-language literary or artistic activity. However, they all speak Hebrew and most operate as regular Israelis socially and in the workplace. The motif of the parents’ struggle to teach their children Russian often features in Rubina’s novels and short stories, as do characters who struggle to speak their native Russian correctly, with Rubina in one short story bemoaning the ‘sickly émigré transfigurations’ which characterise the ‘partial losing of one’s native language’. Rubina often employs linguistic errors for comic effect, however it is clear that buried within her satire is a critique of her fellow compatriots, who she perceives as quick to forsake their cultural and linguistic origins.

Groisman is an example of an Israeli-Russian of the younger generation targeted by Rubina, who feels more comfortable in Hebrew than in her mother-tongue, as reflected in her choice to write in Hebrew. Having mastered it from a young age, her character Lana appears to feel at home in Hebrew, however her continued struggle to fit in, despite changing her name and speaking without an accent, illustrates that for Groisman the idea of language as an indicator of identity is only part of the picture. In contrast to some of Rubina’s characters, whose poor grasp of Hebrew often leads to humorous cultural misunderstandings, Groisman’s Lana has become so integrated that she is not entirely comfortable speaking Russian, and has not learnt to read the language. Despite attempting to pass herself off as a local in the city of her birth, she comes across to most Muscovites as a tourist:

26 Rubina, Messiah 77.
I raise my hand and a small red car immediately stops alongside me, battered and scratched and covered in layers of mud like all the cars in Moscow. I open the door and stick my head inside the car. ‘Can you take me to Red Square?’ I ask in Russian, hoping that my Israeli accent isn’t too obvious. ‘Five dollars,’ said the driver, revealing a gold front tooth. The price is inflated, of course he immediately recognised me as a tourist.’

It is clear that a re-embrace of the Russian language is part of the journey which Lana undergoes during her visit to Russia, and for the first time she begins to accept herself as a person whose identity is split between two cultures. In ‘mourning her lost name’ Lana is also able to rediscover her mother-tongue. At the beginning of her trip Lana felt overwhelmed by having to speak so much Russian, however by the end she found the language came to her just as naturally as Hebrew. For example, in recalling the patigusi, or stretching exercises, which her father would make her perform in the morning as a child, Lana struggles to find a Hebrew equivalent: ‘How the hell do you translate patigusi into Hebrew? Maybe metikhusi? ’ This is, of course, a play on words, as Lana is combining patigusi with the Hebrew word for stretches, metikhot. However, the word patigusi itself is Russian slang, and derives from patyagivat which is the true equivalent of metikhot. Such language games recall Rubina’s Hebrew-infused Russian, and further underscore the importance of the dynamic of language in immigrant self-expression. Despite Lana’s proficiency in and preference for Hebrew, she cannot escape the idea that some things are better expressed in her native tongue- one of the subtle messages of Rubina’s narrative focus on the Israeli-Russian literary community.

Rubina’s writing is rich in intertextual references to Russian literary classics. In recalling Russian greats, such as Tolstoy, Chekov, and Bulgakov, Rubina imbues her prose with a measure of prestige and authenticity. Through this she is able to boast of her knowledge of the Russian literary tradition, often through subtle allusions which add layers of meaning to her narrative discernible only to those readers who are also familiar with the Russian classics. For example, in her short story Our Chinese Business, Rubina describes the editors of a community news bulletin in a West Bank settlement, who concoct the names of residents writing-in questions for the leaflet’s Q&A column. Referencing key protagonists in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina: ‘Samuel Vronsky posed questions to Solomon Levin, and Esther Karenina objected to them both. It passed unnoticed.’ In Rubina’s story Marked by Carnival, a humorous exchange occurs between a Yemenite policeman and an Israeli-Russian teen who is brought in for questioning about the whereabouts of a ‘hardened dissident’ by the name of Lensky. The teenager is described as being ‘burdened by a moderate load of Russian culture’ and in thinking the policeman is referring to the protagonist of one of Pushkin’s famous poems, informs him that Lensky was murdered by the villain Onegin. The policeman, ‘not burdened by any load of Russian culture whatsoever,’ promptly starts a murder investigation! Rubina’s reference to Russian culture here as a ‘burden’ is clearly tongue-in-cheek, as a survey of her writings leaves the reader in no doubt as to the esteem to which she holds Russian culture. The simple Yemenite

30 Groisman 26.
31 Groisman 15.
33 Rubina, Carnival 68-9.
policeman is unable to identify Rubina’s elevated literary references, and is also unable to understand or share in the insider-joke being made at his expense. Indeed, it is to his detriment that he is not ‘burdened’ with Russian culture, which is the message Rubina is using humour to subtly convey.

Despite choosing to write in Hebrew, and hence drawing a line between her writing and the Russian classics, a love of and respect for Russian literature nevertheless also features in Groisman’s A Suitcase on Snow. Lana took the books she rescued from her parent’s house back with her to her army base, and afterwards to her flat in Tel Aviv, where she afforded them pride of place despite never reading them. Lana describes her father ‘taking pains to teach me Russian’ as a child, and the time when he ‘pushed towards me a copy of Bulgakov’s Master and Margerita’ in the hope that she would develop an interest in reading it. Lana’s inability to read the Russian classics is contrasted to that of her friend Sonya, who she meets in Russia, and for whom reading literature is the most natural thing in the world: ‘I saw her sitting on the wooden floor of the balcony, cross-legged, in one hand a cigarette and in the other an apple core, and on her lap a thick copy of one of the volumes of War and Peace.’

Groisman herself in our correspondence mentions her frustration that, like Lana, in Russian she ‘cannot write and can read very slowly and only (when) asked to.’ Indeed because of this, Groisman considers Hebrew to be her ‘mother tongue,’ however mentions that she feels, ‘as a Russian person’ that she should still attempt to read the Russian classics, and that her father claims that Lermontov’s A Hero of our Time has influenced her work. This is very possible, given that both novels feature a melancholy anti-hero alienated from the social norms of their surroundings.

In referencing the Russian language and literary tradition in her novel, Groisman is staking a claim to Russian culture, regardless of her choice to write in Hebrew. In this sense, like Rubina with her tales of Israel written in Russian, Groisman is rejecting the long-established Zionist concept of negating the Diaspora. Lana has strived so hard to shed her Russian identity and assume an Israeli one; however, by the end of her stay in Moscow she remarks that when an El Al security guard asks her: ‘Are you Israeli?’ she ‘has difficulty answering the question.’ Groisman’s novel both begins and ends with an image of a suitcase in an airport – perhaps symbolising the lack of permanence and rootedness in the immigrant experience. Her character Lana comes to accept that she is a product of two cultures, and that contrary to the traditional Zionist narrative, this is a blessing rather than a curse.

The Future of Israeli-Russian Literature

The works of Dina Rubina and Ola Groisman, two prominent examples of a diverse Israeli-Russian literary scene, cannot be separated from their Russian cultural and linguistic influences, nor from their contemporary Israeli reality. Rubina’s Russian language, with its Hebrew borrowings, and Groisman’s rediscovery of the Russian language are testament to the
increasingly hybrid linguistics of the Israeli-Russian community in Israel. However, both Rubina and Groisman’s linguistic choices bear witness to an increasing sense of cultural tension over the changing role of the Russian language in Israel, in particular with regards to second generation immigrants. Several Israeli studies have established that Russian-speaking adolescents are going through a process of language shift, with Hebrew replacing Russian as the preferred language of communication, even between those with Russian in common as a mother-tongue. Niznik suggests that in spite of the successful promotion of Russian culture in Israel, the ‘Three Generation Theory’ is still likely to apply to the Israeli-Russian community, who by and large will cease transmitting the Russian language by the third generation after immigration. The sheer size of the Russian cultural enclave in Israel, coupled with the rise of transnationalism, has enabled Great Aliyah writers to continue to promote the Russian-language as a post-immigration means of creative expression. However, in common with many migrant communities throughout the world, subsequent generations will more likely engage with the Hebrew culture of their immediate surroundings at the expense of the Russian culture of their parents or grandparents.

Nevertheless, Israeli-Russian immigrants’ emphasis on preserving Russian culture, as well as their rejection of Zionist narratives of assimilation, have furthered the development of multiculturalism in Israel, forcing the re-evaluation of relations between minority communities and the Israeli mainstream. If given a platform, immigrant literature such as that of Rubina and Groisman could have the power to further affect the national culture, by broadening it and making it more inclusive to modern cultural and demographic realities. As assimilation gives way to multiculturalism, Israel must learn to embrace immigrant narratives, which have the potential to enrich the Israeli cultural scene for the better.

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Humour in Rabindranath Tagore’s Selected Early Short Stories: A Freudian Reading

Mohammad A. Quayum

To date, Rabindranath Tagore’s critics have not adequately addressed the issue of humour in his short stories. In the introductions to the short story sections of two well-known anthologies of Tagore’s work, Amiya Chakravarty’s *A Tagore Reader* (1961/2003) and the jointly edited volume by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology* (1997), there is hardly any reference to humour. There is also no mention of humour in the translated collection of Tagore’s short stories edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories* (2000). If we browse through the indices of recent biographies of Tagore – e.g. Krishna Kripalani’s *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (1962), Dutta and Robinson’s *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad Minded Man* (1995) and Uma Das Gupta’s *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (2004) – we will find that humour is not even listed as a discussed item in any of these books, not to speak of discussion of humour in the context of his short stories. However, William Radice makes a passing reference to irony and humour in the introduction to his translation of Tagore’s short stories, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories* (2005). Commenting on Tagore’s supernatural stories, such as ‘Skeleton’ (Kankal), ‘In the Middle of the Night’ (Nisithe) and ‘The Hungry Stones’ (Khudita Pasan), Radice writes:

Such stories are just as full of pathos, grief, anguish and terror as the more naturalistic tales. They are also full of humour and irony – and this is another aspect of Tagore’s realism that is found in both ‘supernatural’ and ‘natural’ stories.

Radice, however, does not attempt to elaborate on how and where irony and humour can be found in these or in any of Tagore’s other short stories, and, furthermore, neither Radice nor Sukanta Chadhuri has included the stories that are most often considered to be genuinely funny or humorous.

In my recently edited and translated volume of Tagore’s short stories, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories*, I also briefly point to the aspect of humour in Tagore’s short stories. Referring to a letter in which Tagore explains how he was in the habit of reading humorous stories to his family every evening and had asked a publisher friend to obtain a few new books of the genre for him as he had finished telling stories from the ones he currently had, I argue:

It is important for readers to keep this side of Rabindranath’s personality in mind while reading the stories, especially the ones I mentioned earlier – ‘The Path to Salvation,’ ‘The Professor,’ ‘Privacy’ and ‘The Auspicious Sight’. While he was essentially a serious writer, often writing in the vein of an acute observer, mindful of human sufferings (especially the plight of the socially deprived classes as well as women and children), seeking to improve their lot; he was also, at the same time, capable of a good laugh now and then at the inherent weaknesses and shortcomings in the human personality, including himself. This is what brings poignancy, variety and colour to his stories, adding to their

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richness of theme as well as their mood and atmosphere, making them ever so intriguing, stimulating and appealing to his readers.2

The objective of this essay is to explore this idea further by delving into the four short stories mentioned above: ‘The Path to Salvation’ (Muktir Upai), ‘The Professor’ (Addhyapak), ‘Privacy’ (Sadar O Andar) and ‘The Auspicious Sight’ (Subhadristi).3 These are stories from the first phase of Tagore’s writing career, when he was living with the simple people of East Bengal to look after the family estate there, and therefore his fresh and youthful mind was still capable of observing life in its fullness and in all its myriad aspects, characterised by both mirth and gaiety as well as sufferings and sorrows. ‘Happily I had no social and political problems before my mind when I was quite young. Now there are a number of problems of all kinds and they crop up unconsciously when I write a story,’ Tagore explains in an interview in 1936.4 This unencumbered state of mind in the earlier stage of his writing career, when he was still free to document human nature as he saw it, and write stories for the sake of ‘story telling’ – rather than for addressing issues in the wake of Lord Curzon’s heinous act of partitioning Bengal in 1905, which planted seeds of eventual break-up of the subcontinent into two rival nation states, Pakistan and India, on religious grounds, ignoring the historical one-identity of the people of the land; or the mind-boggling devastations of World War I, which exposed the darker and uglier side of human nature more explicitly than ever before; or the well-intentioned Swaraj and Satyagraha movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi in the early 1920s, which made the people of the subcontinent more self-aware about their political freedom from the British Raj but, at the same time, made the overall social and political environment in the country more turbulent and unstable – helped to keep Tagore’s stories more simple, spontaneous and true to life. This is evident in the stories listed above, which, by reflecting the lighter side of life with their joyous emotions and artless laughter, act as veritable mirrors of life.

In a recent video posting on YouTube (by the Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia), Sugata Bose, eminent Bengali historian and Tagore scholar, made the following observation about Tagore’s sense of humour:

Oh, there is tremendous humour in many of his writings … and, well, humour of different sorts … he had a sense of self-deprecation … but also he had many many humorous sketches and plays … one line in one of his compositions went, ‘If you wanted to know what is my wish, I would say “whisky.”’ This is caricature of a particular kind of Bengali gentlemen … so there is a lot of humour in Tagore … he took life seriously but not always.5

Bose is obviously right: Tagore had a tremendous sense of humour. He wrote as many as seven comic plays, which are all full of rollicking fun and laughter, created through the intermingling of jokes, puns, witty remarks and repartee, or, as Asit Bandyopadhyay suggests, ‘scintillatingly

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3 These stories were published in between 1892 and 1900, when Tagore was a resident on his family estate in Shelaidah, Kushtia, which now belongs to Bangladesh; ‘The Path to Salvation’ was published in 1892, ‘The Professor’ in 1898 and both ‘Privacy’ and ‘The Auspicious Sight’ in 1900.

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witty dialogues, incongruity of dramatic situations and other interesting dramatic devices’. Tagore was a master of both ‘high’ and ‘low’ comedy – he was deft in evoking ‘intellectual laughter’ by highlighting the follies and foibles in human nature, or their pretentiousness and incongruity in behaviour, but at the same time capable of arousing amusement, or even belly laughs, through jokes, gags and slapstick humour. It is no surprise, therefore, that several of the characters in his short stories, such as the protagonists in ‘The Editor’ and ‘The Professor,’ engage, and even excel (at least in their own imagination), in the writing of farce.

Tagore’s unique sense of humour also resonates in several of his personal letters, especially those written from his family estate in East Bengal to his niece, Indira Devi. These are letters which Nirad C. Chaudhuri aptly describes as ‘Great works of literature [which] reveal [Tagore’s] character and personality with unadorned truth.’ Several of them are in fact given to self-mockery or self-deprecation, in which the humour is elicited at the expense of some oddity or pretentiousness in the author himself; while in others, Tagore describes his relationship with his tenants on the family estate in a vein of light humour.

As a zamindar, Tagore had to often meet, greet and entertain British officials, such as magistrates and engineers. He dreaded these occasions, but had to put up a genial face in order to be polite and courteous. This disparity between the outer and the inner, appearance and reality, his actual feelings and the pretentious hospitality from a sense of propriety or social obligation, would make the occasions funny or comical for him. Tagore describes one such occasion by mixing indignation with self-caricature in a letter written on 25 January 1890. It begins by describing the author sprucing up for the formal occasion of meeting the magistrate, and then stepping into a palanquin with several visiting cards in hand and, after a series of events, reaching the magistrate’s tent. Once there, he feels obliged to invite the officer for dinner, but feels ‘inwardly exultant’ the moment that the sahib says he has another business to attend the next day. However, his mood changes in a flash to one of discontentment as the officer adds that he will be free the following day – but, of course, the author hides his actual emotion for the sake of protocol. This situational irony in which the author is trapped in a condition against his wishes but has to keep playing his role to meet the social expectation, is the source of laughter in the episode. Paradoxically, it gets worse for the author as he ends up having to host the magistrate on the very night when the latter’s tent gets blown away by a storm in the evening; again, he is compelled to invite the magistrate to spend the night with him out of propriety, although his soul does not rejoice at the prospect.

In a second letter to Indira Devi, written on 19 January 1891, Tagore recounts two hilarious episodes from his experience with his employees and tenants. The first is with one of his clerks

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6 Asit Bandyopadhyay, ‘Rabindranath: Poet and Dramatist,’ Studies on Rabindranath Tagore edited by Mohit Kumar Roy, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2004) 34. Tagore has also left behind scores of humorous stories and short humorous plays for children, which were finally collected under the titles Hasyakoutuk (Fun and Laughter, 1907) and Byangakoutuk (Satire and Laughter, 1907). The second collection included both stories and plays. For further details, see Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings for Children edited by Sukanata Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2002).

7 Quoted in Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology edited by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997) 134. Tagore himself considered his letters as serious works of literature. In a letter to W.B. Yeats, written on 17 June 1918, he explained, “They [the letters] cover those very years which were most productive for me and therefore they act like a footpath in my life history, unconsciously laid by the treading of my thoughts. I feel sure these letters when published, will present to you pictures and ideas concerning me and my surroundings more vividly and truly than anything I have yet written” (Dutta and Robinson, Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1997] viii).
who comes to plead for a salary increase, particularly needed as he is planning to get married, and goes on repeating his case while the author is immersed in writing the letter. Finally, when the author reminds the clerk that repetition of the same story won’t make his case any stronger, the clerk outwits him by saying that he (the clerk) was only speaking as a child opening his mind to his parent. This puts the author in a fix as he does not know how to come up with a suitable reply to the comment, or handle the unexpectedly new relationship that he finds himself in. This is how the author narrates the incident, spicing his tone of a conscientious zamindar with jest and levity:

As I began to write to you, one of our clerks here came and chattered away about his sad state of poverty, the need for an increase in his wages and the necessity of a man getting married – he went on talking and I went on writing, until finally I paused and briefly tried to get him to understand the idea that when a sensible person grants someone’s petition it is because the petition is reasonable, not because it has been repeated five times instead of once only. I had imagined that such a wise and wonderful remark would render the fellow speechless, but I saw that in fact it had the opposite effect. Instead of falling silent he asked me a question – if a child does not open its mind to its own parents, who will he talk to? This left me stumped for a satisfactory reply. So once again he started chattering and I for my part continued to write. To be nominated a parent out of the blue and for nothing is quite a trial.8

In the second episode, Tagore recounts an event from the previous day when a group of boys had come to him to ask for some furniture for their school. One of the boys gave a pompous speech in a formal, declamatory language, describing the benches and stools as ‘wooden supports’, and went on with the speech even after the author had granted his request. Tagore found it all very funny that the boy should use such high-flown language for a simple request and insist on finishing his speech even after the request had been approved. What added to the fun was that the rest of the villagers saw nothing untoward in the incident, and instead of laughing at the boy’s affected behaviour found it an object of envy. Amused and bemused by the whole thing, Tagore narrates the incident as follows in the last paragraph of his letter:

In due course I interrupted and said, ‘Well boys, I shall arrange for the required benches and stools.’ Undaunted, the boy took up where he had left off and, despite my having spoken, finished to the last word …. He had lavished such pains over his learning by heart. Had I refused to supply the seats he probably would not have minded, but had I deprived him of his speech – that would have struck him as intolerable. Therefore, though it kept more important matters waiting, I gravely heard him out. If someone with the right sense of humour had been about, probably I would have jumped up and turn next door to share the joke. But a zamindari is simply not the place for a humourmonger – here we display only solemnity and high learning.9

I have discussed the two letters in some detail and quoted at length from the second letter to show that humour was an innate aspect of Tagore’s personality; indeed, it was a native ingredient of his genius. He could see and relish the oddities and drolleries in human nature and behaviour, but, as he reveals in the last sentence of the passage quoted above, being a zamindar –

8 Tagore: An Anthology 141.
9 Tagore: An Anthology 142.
and one who was revered by his contemporaries and compatriots as a kabiguru (teacher-poet), gurudev (master-teacher) and bishwaskabi (world-poet) – he often had to restrain his humour in order to display his ‘solemnity and high learning’. But, of course, he never forsook humour altogether, and continued displaying it in many of his writings. For example, Mausumi Sen has compiled several anecdotes from Tagore’s life to show that despite his serious temperament, he was always capable of hearty laughs through improbable and exaggerated statements and/or caricatures of himself as well as of others. In fact, he was so fond of humour that he declared in one of his poems:

Never in my life will I grow so old
To dismiss a laugh or a joke as frivolous.\(^\text{10}\)

Humour is the predominant sentiment in the four stories I intend to discuss in this essay: ‘The Path to Salvation’, ‘The Professor’, ‘Privacy’ and ‘The Auspicious Sight’. They are characterised by what Freud would call ‘innocent’ humour that ‘is an end in itself and serves no particular aim’\(^\text{11}\), as opposed to ‘tendentious’ humour which gravitates towards being either ‘hostile’ or ‘obscene’\(^\text{12}\) and exploits ‘something ridiculous’\(^\text{13,15}\) in another person or others with the purpose of wounding, insulting or exposing the individual or group. Humour, in this second category, according to Freud, is not ‘an aim in itself’, but it serves as a disguise ‘to [access] sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible’.\(^\text{14}\) Freud further makes a distinction between ‘innocent’ or ‘non-tendentious’ humour and ‘trivial’ humour by saying that while trivial humour lacks in substance, non-tendentious or ‘abstract’ humour, in spite of its lack of a definite purpose except for giving pleasure, could still be ‘of great substance [and] assert something of value’.\(^\text{15}\)

Another characteristic of ‘innocent’ humour is that its ‘pleasurable effect … as a rule [is] a moderate one; a clear sense of satisfaction, a slight smile, is as a rule all it can achieve in its hearers … A non-tendentious joke scarcely ever achieves the sudden burst of laughter which makes tendentious one so irresistible’.\(^\text{16}\)

Freud’s main contribution to the theory of humour appears in his book Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious which came out in 1905. He developed on the topic further in his essay ‘Humour’ published in 1928. In this essay, Freud suggests that in addition to giving pleasure, which has a liberating effect on the individual, humour also has a ‘grand and uplifting’ quality about it in that it allows the ego ‘to assert itself against the disfavour of real circumstances,’ or to find a ‘defence against the possibility of suffering’.\(^\text{17}\) He also suggests that there are two ways of experiencing humour; it is either through the individual’s own humoristic attitude towards himself, in which ‘the humorous process is accomplished within his own person and clearly brings him a certain satisfaction,’ but also giving pleasure to the ‘uninvolved listener’ at the same time; or by adopting a humorous attitude towards another, ‘when, for


\(^{12}\) Freud, Jokes 97.

\(^{13}\) Freud, Jokes 103.

\(^{14}\) Freud, Jokes 103; italics in the original.

\(^{15}\) Freud, Jokes 92.

\(^{16}\) Freud, Jokes 96.

example, a poet or story-teller describes the behaviour of real or invented people in a humorous fashion.

In either instance, the person who adopts the humorous attitude behaves towards the subject of his or her humour ‘as an adult behaves towards a child, by recognising the nullity of the interests and sufferings that seem great to the child, and smiling at them’, thus placing him or her in the superior position of an ‘adult’ or a ‘father’, vis-à-vis the subject of the humour, who is reduced to a ‘child’. In the case where the individual ‘directs the humorous attitude against his own person’, it is his superego that adopts the role of the adult while the ego is reduced to the child.

In light of these ideas from Freud, I would like to argue, firstly, as mentioned above, that these stories are characterised by ‘innocent’, ‘harmless’ and ‘non-tendentious’ humour in which Tagore employs gentle irony and sympathetic tone to playfully criticise certain inherent human weaknesses such as excessive piety, self-righteousness, vanity, jealousy, impetuosity and overweening arrogance, and that there is no strident, abrasive or scornful quality in the narrative. In other words, Tagore’s intention in the stories is not to ridicule or express indignation against any of his characters or their practices, but rather to laugh light-heartedly at the ridiculous and the ludicrous in their behaviour, with the intention of providing pleasure or comic relief to his readers. Any tendency to moralise or instruct remains carefully disguised and is not allowed to overshadow the objective of diverting or entertaining the readers. My second argument is that, as pointed out by Freud in the case of ‘innocent’ humour, the quality of pleasure derived from these stories is ‘moderate’ or ‘non-intense,’ as they are more likely to evoke ‘a slight smile’ in the reader, than a ‘sudden burst of laughter’ as in the case of ‘tendentious’ comedy. Finally, I would like to suggest that although much of the humour in the stories occur from the author’s representation of ‘real or invented people’ in them, in which the author acts as an ‘adult’ vis-à-vis the characters who are treated like ‘children’, in ‘The Professor’, in making fun of his own adolescent writerly self, Tagore allows his superego (or adult self) to take charge of the ego (or adolescent self) and treat it like a child.

Of the four stories, ‘The Path to Salvation’ was the first to be published. It came out in 1892, and Tagore liked the story so much that he later developed it into a comic play, which was published in 1948, seven years after the poet’s death. The story is about a Hindu mendicant ascetic or a hermit, who renounces his family and society to find salvation, but ironically finds salvation only through the intervention of his wife when he is trapped in the life of another family owing to an error of identity. The hermit’s name is Fakirchand (or Fakir, which literally means a spiritual mendicant); he is excessively sombre and, although young, he likes the company of old men. He is averse to fun, humour and all worldly pleasures, and is so spiritually inclined that he forces his fun-loving adolescent wife, Haimabati, to read the Bhagavad Gita every night. If she is found reading a novel, Fakir heckles her and makes her cry all night. In this way, he shatters the wife’s youthful exuberance and peace of mind, and eventually brings her to what he thinks is the right path.

As the story progresses, we see Fakirchand absconding from society in search of God and going to a neighbouring village. There, as he is singing heartily sitting under a tree absolved of all worldly responsibilities and worries, he suddenly sees his father who has come there to look

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18 Freud, ‘Humour’ 561.
19 Freud, ‘Humour’ 563.
20 Freud, ‘Humour’ 564.
21 The term is however used more frequently to describe Muslim mendicant ascetics.
for him. To avoid his father he takes shelter in a nearby house which coincidentally is the house of a person, Makhanlal, who too has left his family. Fakir and Makhanlal are very different from one another; their physical appearances, personalities and temperaments are all different; yet the moment Fakir steps into Makhan’s house, he is taken for Makhan by the latter’s father and gradually forced by the villagers to accept the role against his wishes. The rest of the story is Fakir’s unsuccessful attempts to come out of that role, until he is rescued by his wife at the end.

This role reversal between Fakir and Makhan is what makes the story humorous, turning it into a situational comedy, in which Fakir finds himself in the state of a fish out of water. Fakir is a serious person, while Makhan is frivolous; but now Fakir has to fill Makhan’s shoes; and the man who left his own family of one wife and two children because he saw them as an encumbrance to his quest for God now has to deal with Makhan’s family of two wives and seven children. Besides, the wives are fierce compared to his own wife and are in a competition as co-wives, which makes Fakir’s circumstance even more difficult. He repeatedly tries to come out of this precarious situation, but the more he tries the more people force him into accepting the role, accusing him of hypocrisy and deception for not acknowledging that he was in fact Makhan. It is amusing to see how Fakir struggles to cope with Makhan’s family and his villagers, who not for once question that there could be a mistake. This irrationality of the villagers also contributes to the story’s humour, as we see how people can be so rash and blind in their conviction.

However, although the story is funny, it is not outrageously comic; throughout we enjoy Fakir’s unwieldy situation and the way he tries to wriggle himself out of it. It evokes a sustained smile in the reader but not a hearty laughter. What adds to the humour, however, is that the ‘holy’, puritanical Fakir himself has no sense of humour; therefore, what could have been merely an odd situation turns out into an excruciating ordeal for him. Freud says, ‘Incidentally, not all people are capable of the humorous attitude. It is a rare and delightful gift, and many lack even the ability to enjoy the pleasure of humour conveyed to them.’ Sombre, solemn and single-mindedly religious, Fakir certainly is one of them.

Freud said, only tendentious comedy is capable of achieving a ‘sudden burst of laughter [which is why it is] so irresistible’. ‘The Path to Salvation’ obviously does not belong to that category because it is not written in the vein of satire or in a spirit of hostility, but rather in a playful manner in which Tagore is making fun of those who believe that to find divine joy one has to shun worldly pleasures and espouse a life of renunciation, self-abnegation and austerity. In fact, Tagore’s father, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, a sage and saint in his own right, adopted a similar view in his youth, sharing an aversion to wealth and an equal enjoyment in renunciation. His spiritual hunger often took him to many places away from home, including the Himalayas. It is believed that, overcome by the feeling that ‘the world is too much with us’, he had left for the Himalayas at the end of 1856, to spend the rest of his life there in penitence and meditation and not come back to the family any more. But he changed his mind and returned home when he heard a voice within him that said, ‘The truth thou had gained, the devotion and trustfulness thou has learnt here, go, make them known to the world.’ Later Tagore’s father

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22 Freud, ‘Humour’ 566.
23 Freud, Jokes 96.
25 Kripalani 31.
came to accept that ‘Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.’

It is quite possible that in the portrayal of Fakirchand, the misguided mendicant, Tagore is affectionately teasing his god-intoxicated father in the latter’s youthful days, as well as many such spiritually inclined people in the subcontinent, who genuinely believe that piety requires one to disavow work, wealth and family. Tagore himself didn’t believe in such a philosophy of escapism. His view was that it should be perfectly possible to attain godhead by keeping one’s feet firmly planted on the earth; spiritual bliss did not require one to be impractical, dreamy, other-worldly or to deny one’s own family and social ties. Unlike the popular image of the mystic and the romantic in the subcontinent, Tagore was deeply immersed in the affairs of the world; he was actively involved with the practical problems of education and rural reconstruction in India. As Aldous Huxley once said, ‘Tagore’s enormous merit consists in this, that he was at once a great idealist and a practical man of action.’

His view that one need not forsake family and society for the sake of God is expressly articulated in the following poem, entitled ‘My Religion’:

In the deep of the night, the man averse to worldly pleasures said,
‘I shall leave home to seek my desired God.
Who is it that has kept me here, tied?’
God said, ‘It is I,’ but the man paid no heed.
Clasping the sleeping infant to her breast
The loving wife lay at one end of the bed in deep slumber.
The man said, ‘what are you all – the trickery of illusion?
‘It is I,’ said God. No one paid any heed.
Leaving his bed, ‘Where are thou, my Lord?’
God said, ‘I am here!’ Still His words were not heard.
The child cried out in his sleep hugging his mother;
God said, ‘Turn back.’ But His words were lost.
God heaved a sigh and said, ‘Alas! Deserting me,
Where goes my devotee to find me.’

However, if in ‘The Path to Salvation’ Tagore is playfully taunting the excessive piety of his father during the latter’s youthful days, in the next story, ‘The Professor’, the author seems to be laughing at the exaggerated image of himself as a writer during his own adolescence. Thus, in the Freudian perspective, if Tagore is the ‘adult’ author in ‘The Path to Salvation’ smiling at his father in his younger years as the ‘child’, in ‘The Professor’, he is playing the role of both the ‘adult’ and the ‘child,’ treating his younger self as the ‘child,’ while at the same time, using Freud’s expression, ‘playing the role of the superior adult towards the child’.

‘The Professor’ is about a young writer, Mahendrakumar, who is extremely full of himself. He is so big-headed, ostentatious and vain – so abounding in bravado – that he keeps comparing himself with great Western writers such as Shakespeare, Goethe, Carlyle and Lowell, as well as

26 Kripalani 29.
29 Freud, ‘Humour’ 564.
such Indian legendary figures as Dushyanta, Vikramaditya (or Chandragupta II) and Vidyapati. His ‘overshooting’ and ‘tall talks’ create, using Imanuel Kant’s words, ‘strained expectations’ in readers, which by the end of the story transform ‘into nothing’.30

The story’s protagonist, Mahendrakumar, is a 21-year-old college student, dreamy, arrogant and outspoken. He writes poetry and plays and gives speeches that he thinks have a hypnotic effect on his audience. He believes that he is revered by all his fellow students for his literary talents, but in fact he commands their respect merely because of his brash and cocky ways – that is, of course, until the arrival of his arch-nemesis, whom he derogatively and dismissively dubs as ‘Bamacharan Babu’ and ‘Brahmin demon,’ but who, ironically, appears as the title character, or the professor, in the story, and similar to the eiron in Greek comedy eventually triumphs over the alazon, the self-deceiving, pompous young writer, Mahendrakumar. It is the professor who exposes Mahendrakumar’s exaggerated image of himself by revealing that he is not a true writer but instead excels by copying from the literary greats. After he is thus humiliated twice by the professor, his confidence is shaken and his following among the students begins to dwindle. Nevertheless, it is not enough to bring Mahendrakumar back to his senses. In the meantime, he has also sat for his BA examination and his father has invited him to return home and get married. However, instead of acceding to his father’s advice, he characteristically seeks to avenge his critic the professor by deciding to ‘write something sublime [on the theme of universal love] either in prose or verse, and provide a spectacular feast for the indulgence of Bengali critics.’31 This is the kind of high-flown language Mahendrakumar habitually uses to describe himself, his ideas and his intentions, thus giving rise to profuse verbal irony in the story.

With this towering objective in mind, Mahendrakumar withdraws from his usual habitat in Calcutta to a solitary village by the river Ganges.32 There, instead of writing the splendid piece, he whiles away his time in laziness. After a month, realising that such a literary feat is quite beyond his reach, he writes an acrid farce vilifying the love-life of the professor and then prepares to return home. Right then, at a restless moment, he catches a glimpse of a beautiful girl next door who, ironically, is the teen (she is only sixteen) the professor is in love with, and whom Mahendrakumar had unknowingly maligned in his farce. This results in structural irony in the story, since we as readers can see the author’s tongue-in-cheek intention in tangling his fallible narrator with the latter’s young neighbour, something that remains totally unknown to the speaker till the very end; it results in a triangular relationship in which, again, the professor emerges as the victor and the hapless Mahendrakumar has no choice but to accept defeat.

However, as the story progresses, Mahendrakumar falls head over heels in love with Kiron, who also has sat for her BA examination. Although he often sees Kiron with a book in hand or surrounded by books, he takes a condescending attitude towards her, regularly giving grandiose lectures or highfalutin advice with the intention of educating her in philosophy and literature. He thinks that Kiron is not intelligent enough or sufficiently cultivated in her tastes, but that in time

31 Tagore, Selected Short Stories ed. Quayum 82. Further references to this volume will be included in parentheses in the text.
32 In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Tagore reminds us that he himself wrote much of his early work ‘in utmost seclusion in the solitude of an obscure Bengal village by the river Ganges in a boathouse.’ (Rabindranath Tagore, The Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Gitanjali and a Collection of Prose Translations Made by the Author from the Original Bengali Manuscript [New Delhi: UBSPD, 2004] 292).

Humour in Rabindranath Tagore’s Selected Early Short Stories: A Freudian Reading. Mohammad A. Quayum.
Transnational Literature Vol. 7 no. 1, November 2014.
he will be able to ignite her soul with his own effulgence. This male arrogance boomerangs on Mahendrakumar and becomes a further source of humiliation for him, as he eventually comes to know that he is the one who has failed in his examination while Kiron has passed with flying colours in both philosophy and literature. To add insult to injury, he also discovers that the beautiful girl of his desire actually belongs to his rival, the professor, and is correspondingly the same girl he had vilified earlier in his farce. With this reckoning, that he has no luck in writing or in love, he finally burns all his works and returns home to get married. Thus we see that by the end of the story, Mahendrakumar’s illusive bubble has broken, prompting him to return to reality. What is remarkable, however, is that although Mahendrakumar turns out to be a failed writer, the story he narrates in his own voice reads most elegantly and eloquently. This makes the reader wonder as to how much of Tagore there is in Mahendrakumar, and if, like his creator, he too holds the potential of coming out of his doldrums and becoming a great writer sometime in the future.

The story is superbly humorous because of the wide incongruity between Mahendrakumar’s grandiose words and his lacklustre actions. He thinks greatly of himself, but his feats are slight; he wants to write a grand poem on the theme of universal love, but his mind remains constantly trapped in his own narcissistic self; he criticises the professor for his inconsistency in opposing child-marriage and yet having an affair with a young girl, but he himself gets entangled with the same sixteen-year-old girl; he thinks that he is the most intelligent man on earth – ‘The rare scholarship involved in our discussion was far too difficult for Kiron; who knew how high she had to look when she sought a mental measure of my mountain of knowledge’ (91), he brags at one point – yet it is he who fails in his BA examination while Kiron, the girl he always underrates and wishes to enlighten with his deft touch, obtains a first class. However, Tagore’s intention behind creating such an erratic and eccentric character, a braggadocio, is purely humorous, and he explores all the comic possibilities in the story without expressing any contempt or malice towards the young, boastful writer, or any intention of demonising him through the use of invective or ‘aggressive wit’.

As I mentioned earlier, Tagore is perhaps laughing at his own adolescent oddities in the character of Mahendrakumar. Mahendrakumar appears as a lazy person; he spends his day lounging under a banyan tree, hoping that the epic he wants to write will suddenly emerge from his mind in a mysterious way. Besides, he likes to borrow or copy, and his most favourite theme is ‘universal love’. He is also vain and arrogant. These are some qualities that Tagore himself shared in his earlier life. For example, one of Tagore’s favourite anecdotes about himself is how he was once reproached by a tribal woman, who used to work for him, for spending his whole day sitting lazily by a window, gazing outside. Irritated by the poet’s behaviour, the woman marched up to him one day and demanded, ‘Babu, why don’t you work at all? I have been noticing you for the last seven days! Whenever I see you, I find you stationed by the windowside looking at the skies and wondering! Men at your age should keep on working, you know!’ Moreover, acknowledging his tendency to borrow from other poets in his earlier writings, Tagore once explained, ‘What little of matter there was in it was not mine, but borrowed from other poets. What was my own was the restlessness, the seething tension within me’ – not far from what the professor has to say about Mahendrakumar’s writing habit in the story. Besides, recalling the effusive nature of his writing both in adolescence and adult life, Tagore wrote the

33 Sen.
following words self-deprecatingly in *My Reminiscences* – words which are, again, likely to bring the image of Mahendrakumar to mind:

> It was the product of an age when the writer had seen practically nothing of the world except an exaggerated image of his own nebulous self. So the hero of the story was naturally a poet, not the writer as he was, but as he imagined or desired himself to seem. … In it was a great parade of universal love, that pet subject of the budding poet, which seems as big as it is easy to talk about. … When I blush to read these effusions of my boyhood I am also struck with the fear that very possibly in my later writings the same distortion wrought by straining after effect lurks in a less obvious form. The loudness of my voice, I doubt not, often drowns the thing I would say; and some day or other Time would find me out.

These parallels should indicate that the story is written in a comic rather than a sarcastic vein; that it is designed to make readers laugh lightheartedly, rather than to share any disdain or vitriol directed against its main character, Mahendrakumar. In Mahendrakumar, Tagore is merely taunting his earlier self in a harmless spirit of jest, not ridiculing the overbearing nature of Mahendrakumar in a harsh, caustic tone. In other words, this story too belongs to Freud’s category of ‘abstract’ or ‘innocent’ humour, which ‘serves no particular aim’ except to give pleasure to the reader, as opposed to tendentious comedy which is always written with a specific purpose, and in a spirit of ‘aggressiveness, satire, or defence’.

Like ‘The Path to Salvation’ and ‘The Professor,’ ‘Privacy’ and ‘The Auspicious Sight’ are also written in a light, humorous vein. The two stories read like romantic comedies in which love relationships are interrupted momentarily by complications but are resolved at the finish for a happy ending. In both stories there is a shadowy third person whose passive presence results in an invasion of the relationship of the story’s main characters – in ‘Privacy’ between Chitta Ranjan and Basanta Kumari, and in ‘The Auspicious Sight’ between Kanti Chandra and his newly wedded wife, Sudha – but by the end, the ‘lovers’ manage to overcome this momentary hiccup and reunite with the possibility of living a happily married life ever after.

‘Privacy’ is a story about a married couple, Chitta Ranjan, a zamindar, and his wife, Basanta Kumari, who are happy in their domestic life. After winning a court settlement, Chitta Ranjan decides to set up an amateur theatre company with the extra wealth he has acquired, and invites Bipin Kishore, a handsome young man with certain musical skills, to join his entourage. Bipin Kishore was once wealthy but has become poor and homeless after having squandered all his money. He therefore joins Chitta Ranjan’s group and becomes a sheltered guest at his house. Soon, Chitta Ranjan develops a liking for Bipin Kishore and his music, and begins to spend much of his time in the latter’s company. Previously Chitta Ranjan lived a routine life, having meals and going to bed at fixed hours. Now, however, his obsession for Bipin has overtaken his routine, and this infuriates his wife. She wants Bipin to get out of their life so that her husband may return to his previous routine. The husband feels amused by this ‘jealousy’ of his wife and thinks that only women are capable of such senseless envy, because they are blind, selfish and possessive in their love. To get more pleasure out of it, he even starts taunting his wife with open and extravagant praises of Bipin in her presence.

35 Freud, *Jokes* 90.
Halfway through the story, the whole situation is reversed as the husband steps into the wife’s shoes and vice-versa. After much rehearsal, a play, *Subbadraharan* – which literally means ‘abduction of a woman’, and results in Basanta Kumari’s change of heart and her figurative abduction by Bipin Kishore – is staged in the zamindar’s courtyard. Both Bipin and the zamindar perform as actors in the play. At night, when the couple withdraw to their bedroom, the husband asks his wife about his performance. Obviously, the husband expects some adulation from his wife, but sidestepping him, the wife starts praising Bipin. ‘Bipin acted the role of Arjun brilliantly. He has the looks of a noble man, and his voice is celestial’ (101), she replies. This makes the smug husband instantly feel envious and insecure. Previously he thought his wife was irrational in her jealousy; now he feels that she is irrational in her eulogies of Bipin, and the more the wife shows interest in Bipin’s musical talent, the more angry the husband becomes towards Bipin. He even starts replicating the words his wife had used previously to disparage Bipin. Finally, unable to take it any more, one day the husband sends Bipin packing, and the poor fellow, an unsuspecting victim of their sexual jealousy, becomes unemployed and shelterless again. Thus the story ends with Bipin walking out of the house and the couple presumably returning to their erstwhile life of trust and routine.

Again, this is a light story in which the author is making fun of male affectation and male arrogance. At the beginning of the story, the husband appears vain, confident and complacent about himself; he thinks that only women are capable of sexual jealousy because of their inherently protective and possessive natures. Besides, they are selfish, parochial and narrow in their world views. But the author deconstructs this male hauteur through a clever role reversal, which demonstrates that men are as vulnerable, apprehensive and possessive in matters of love as are women. Jealousy is an inherent aspect of human nature, and despite gender differences, by and large all human beings behave in the same way when their love life is threatened. Male gallantry and fortitude is only a mask to establish their dominance over women; in reality, men are emotionally as brittle as women. The story is thus designed to trivialise male pretence and generate laughter in readers; it is written in a sympathetic tone, and there is no use of tendency wit or tendency comedy in the narrative, which are devices often used by writers in a satire, for intentionally derogating, diminishing or deriding the subject.

If ‘Privacy’ is about male smugness and sexual jealousy, ‘The Auspicious Sight’ is about sentimentality and passionate love. It centres on one of the most powerful tropes in literature, love at first sight, or what the Greeks call *theia mania* or ‘madness from the gods’. It is about Kanti Chandra, a young widower, who is rich and handsome, and enjoys travelling and hunting. One day as he was sitting on a boat cleaning the barrel of his gun at a nearby village, he suddenly catches glimpse of a young woman standing by the river bank with two ducklings pressed to her chest, and is instantly smitten by her. He sees shadows of both goddesses Durga and Lakshmi in the face of this young woman. Without a second thought, he decides to marry her. He is so charmed by the girl’s beauty that he does not even feel the need to verify who she is. Through a series of misunderstandings he comes to conclude that the girl’s name is Sudha and she is the daughter of a Brahmin villager, Nabin Mukherjee. So the next day, he proposes to the girl’s father that he would like to marry Sudha. The man is baffled by this overhasty behaviour of Kanti Chandra and asks him to see his daughter first. Kanti Chandra brushes aside the advice, thinking in his mind that he has already seen the girl. But actually, the girl he has seen is not Sudha. That is where the twist comes in. The rest of the story is built on this error of identity, which also acts as the main source of irony and humour in the story.
After the wedding, Kanti Chandra is horrified to see that the girl he has married is not the girl he had seen earlier. He is first furious with his father-in-law, thinking that the man has cheated him; he has shown Kanti one girl but married him to another. But then, remembering that the father had insisted on showing his daughter, Kantí’s anger shifts to himself. He then accepts the matter unequivocally, but loses all joy in the wedding. At this time, the girl by the riverside darts into the room, following a leveret, where the newly wedded couple are having their ceremonial ‘auspicious sight’. This makes the other women jittery and they try to bundle her out of the place immediately. But the love-sick Kanti is still infatuated with the girl. He welcomes her and tries to begin a conversation with her — but to no avail. The girl does not respond to any of his questions and starts shaking her body in a senseless way instead, making all the women laugh. By and by he then comes to know that the girl is mute and deaf, and, unable to interact in society, she has become a friend of the birds and beasts in the neighbourhood. This instantly cures him of his intoxication and brings him back to reality. He now sees a new light in his wife’s face, and a new ray of hope in his future happiness. He feels happy that he has married Sudha by mistake, and not the girl who had smitten him by her looks. The story ends with this recognition, and on a happy note. It is a simple story with nothing strident or acerbic in it. It is written on what Freud would call ‘the pleasure principle’,37 in which the author is simply laughing at the recklessness of people like Kanti Chandra who are easily duped by the outer appearance of things and are willing to risk their entire lives without caring to know the truth that lies beneath.

Tagore has used humour in several other stories as well, such as ‘Kabuliwala’, ‘The Editor’ (Sampadak), ‘Deliverance’ (Uddhar) and ‘Number One’ (Paila Nombor). But the nature of humour used in them is different from those I have discussed in this essay. Whereas these four stories tend to be purely comic, written mostly in a spirit of jest or laughter, the other stories combine comic with the serious, and are intended mainly to correct or ridicule a particular moral or social vice. In other words, the kind of humour used in them is derisive humour, intended to generate laughter by mocking or berating an attitude or behaviour for satirical purposes, rather than expressing tolerance or sympathy towards the story’s character and/or subject. In this sense these four stories are unique in their expression of humour and embody the lighter side of Tagore’s character — his tendency to engage in komos, or good-natured ridicule and amusement, for its own sake, perhaps to find relief from his personal seriousness or the serious affairs of life that he often had to attend to in his writing, or perhaps as part of his realistic response to life in all its fullness. They belong to, in Freud’s categorisation, ‘innocent’ or ‘harmless’ humour that is intended to give pleasure to the reader and also provide a stay against the sorrows of life vis-à-vis tendentious comedy that is written in a spirit of ‘hostility’ or satire, and often with the purpose of evoking a ‘sudden outburst of laughter’.38

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37 Freud, ‘Humour’ 563.
38 Freud, Jokes 96.
‘More than the Sum of its Parts’: Popular Music, Gender, and Myth in Haruki Murakami’s Fiction

Heather H. Yeung

In the *Guardian* newspaper in 2007, Jon Wilde cites, amongst other novels, Douglas Copeland’s *Eleanor Rigby*, Martin Amis’s *Dead Babies*, and Bret Easton Ellis’s *Less than Zero*, as examples of the fact that ‘the history of books inspired by song titles is not exactly littered with gilt-edged triumphs’; that ‘fiction inspired by songs … has seldom worked to the advantage of either’.¹ Although Wilde, here, is primarily concerned with the coincidence of marketing potential (or lack of marketing potential) and quality of fiction when song titles are used in books, he also neatly sidesteps the question of the British author Nick Hornby’s novels and essays; prime examples of the centrality of popular music to Hornby’s work are the novels *About A Boy* (1995) and *Juliet, Naked* (2009), and the essay collections *31 Songs* (2003, published in the US as *Songbook*), and *The Polysyllabic Spree* (2004). More pertinently missing from Wilde’s list, perhaps because the example so completely defies the thesis of Wilde’s article, is Haruki Murakami. By 2007, the majority of Murakami’s work to that date had been translated from Japanese into English, and the novels *Norwegian Wood* (published in Japanese in 1987, and in international English translation in 2000) whose title comes from the 1965 Beatles’ song, and *Dance Dance Dance* (published in Japanese in 1988, and in English translation in 1994) whose title comes 1964 song by the Dells, had become international bestsellers.

It is not just the titles of these two novels by Murakami that reveal his deep indebtedness to popular music. Alongside references to and formal use of classical and jazz musical forms, authors such as George Orwell, and Thomas Mann, mentions of traditional Japanese cooking, spaghetti, and McDonalds fast food, pop music sits in the pantheon of high and low cultural references which provide Murakami’s work with both popular appeal and, at times, complex intertexts. Because of the intertextual nature of his works, his lack of authorial prejudice about the sorts of allusions made, and the frequent provision, in his references to pieces of music, of the recording artists, date and even record label, Murakami’s work has been criticised as no more than ‘a sophisticated stylization of trivia’, ‘[dabbling] in a blasé, offhand fashion’ with ‘real’ literature, about which ‘only a very few would be silly enough to get interested in deep reading’.² However, music, alongside these other cultural references, plays a major part in the complex structures and ideologies which are questioned in Murakami’s novels, also influencing the rhythm, form and narrative in the works as well as the performative aspects of the characters in the stories themselves; Murakami states ‘practically everything I know about writing … I learned from music’.³ The widely intertextual nature of his work reinforces the boundary-crossing nature of the themes and contents of Murakami’s work, the majority of which explore in some way the multiplicity of the self, and the nature of the unconscious, and frequently music

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words as a narrative device, presaging a moment of boundary crossing, an epiphany for the protagonist, or some sort of shift in plot.

Just as Murakami’s works have been taken to task for their references to pop culture and their popular appeal, other critics have taken exception to what they see as a distinct gender bias in Murakami’s work. Indeed, the novels and short stories do contain frequent descriptions of female appearances, and male monologues often concern questions of sex: Matthew Strecher addresses Norwegian Wood as an example of Murakami’s ‘female-centred’ literature although this aspect of the novel has not delimited its popularity with male and female readers alike, and one female fan took Murakami to task for a satirical portrayal of feminists in Kafka on the Shore, to which Murakami apologetically replied, also pointing out the many different facets of human identity explored in Kafka. Part of the humour in the scene in Kafka which involves the ‘cartoon-like one-dimensional feminists’ is that it provokes a diatribe on gender and sex, and an important revelation on that subject-matter from Kafka’s mentor, Oshima (gendered throughout the novel as ‘he’).

‘How could any woman of generous spirit behave otherwise, given the torments that I face,’ Oshima says.

The two women stand there as quiet as icebergs.

‘… by the way, the term ‘gender’ was originally used to indicate grammatical gender. My feeling is that the word ‘sex’ is more accurate in indicating physical sexual difference. Using “gender” here is incorrect. To put a linguistic fine point on it.’

‘First of all … I’m a woman,’ he says. ‘… My body is physically female, but my mind’s completely male.’ Oshima goes on. ‘Emotionally I live as a man. … And who knows if I’m a notorious sexist. But I’m not a lesbian, even though I dress this way. My sexual preference is for men. In other words, I’m a female, but I’m gay. I do anal sex, and have never used my vagina for sex. My clitoris is sensitive, but my breasts aren’t. I don’t have periods. So, what am I discriminating against? Could somebody enlighten me?’

Needless to say, Murakami’s gender-criticisms never really take root. Perhaps this is because of the generosity with which he treats his characters, allowing for even the most biased opinion to be deftly, often immediately, contrasted with a different one, as well as the close but unbiased attention that is paid in his work to the performative and fluid nature of literary, gender, and musical categories.

Ellen Koskoff writes that ‘gender and musical identities intersect, intertwine, and inform one another’, as ‘women, men, gender, identity, music, culture, and so on, are not and have never

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6 Rubin 292.
been fixed categories; each must be placed within its own unique and changeable context.⁸ Mirroring this statement, Murakami states that, in his work, ‘No ground is solid … Nothing is conclusive. It’s changeable. I always feel that everything is changeable in my fiction’.⁹ Jay Rubin notes that ‘for Murakami, music is the best means of entry into the deep recesses of the unconscious … the core of the self …, a fragmented narrative’.¹⁰ Lo Kwai-Cheung sees Murakami’s characters as ‘sexed and ethnic beings … [whose] incompleteness of substance is actually the guarantee of their identity’,¹¹ Timothy Murphy notes the ‘decentered and equal-opportunities hybridization’¹² at play in Murakami, and Chiyoko Kawakami notes that Murakami’s works often investigates the dissolution and unsustainability of traditional social and cultural roles in contemporary Japan.¹³ Important elements in Murakami’s work are that cultural constructions are questioned, and musical and gender identities are blurred and changeable. It is these elements of his fiction that I will investigate in this essay.

Jay Rubin notes that Murakami’s frequent pop references provide narrative colouring but are usually not invested with ‘weighty symbolic significance’. However he also notes, ‘if Murakami’s frequent pop references represent anything, it is his entire generation’s rejection of their parents’ culture’.¹⁴ The culture that is rejected here is that of traditional nationalistic Japan, where hegemonic gender roles were reflected culturally in the prevalence of very strict generic styles of the literature and narrative address. The idea of junbungaku or ‘pure’ literature was the highest ideal and intertextuality was limited to references to canonical classical Japanese musical and literary styles. Murakami’s reaction to this was not only to write novels with international intertextual appeal, but also to write protagonists ‘in the first person … [who are] neutral’ and who maintain this important neutrality by rejecting the trammels of ‘any kinship, any connection to a vertical family system’.¹⁵ One of the primary methods through which Murakami achieves this rejection of hierarchical social structures and establishes his idiosyncratic narrative style is through his use of a ‘boku’ narrator.

In contrast to most Western languages, in Japanese, pronouns are hardly ever used in basic sentence construction. However, the Japanese language (written and spoken) has a wide variety of first-person pronouns, all of which have some element of gender signification. The most commonly used of these pronouns in literature is ‘watashi’, a formal first-person pronoun which is usually perceived to be gender neutral (with feminine overtones). Murakami rarely employs

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¹⁰ Rubin 3.
¹¹ Kwai-Cheung Lo, ‘Return to what one imagines to be there: Masculinity and Racial Otherness in Haruki Murakami’s writings about China’ NOVEL 37.3 (2004) 258.
¹⁴ Rubin 17.
‘watashi’ in his writing (as we will see later, when he does so it denotes a firm difference in narrative level), innovatively using the first-person masculine informal or familiar pronoun, ‘boku’. Although Murakami’s use of ‘boku’ may seem to gender his writing, the effect is in fact the opposite. Where the novelists’ use of ‘watashi’ is culturally circumscribed in many ways by its use throughout the history of Japanese literature, in ‘boku’ Murakami found a pronoun through which he could carry out his investigations into the changeable nature of the self and psyche without any excess cultural baggage. Rather than being typically masculine, like the ‘watashi’ narrators of so many of Murakami’s peers, ‘boku’ is, as Margaret Hillenbrand points out, ‘male, but not in any sense that precludes intense female identification’. Hillenbrand goes on to write about the ‘metrosexual’ nature of Murakami’s ‘boku’: ‘straight but stylishly groomed, urban dwelling and urbane ... adept in the kitchen, au fait with every latest trend, in touch with his feelings and utterly at ease with his feminine side’.17

Often, in Murakami’s fiction, boku adopts a passive role, waiting for events to happen to him rather than seeking adventure (as with the protagonists of, for instance, Dance Dance Dance and The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle), eventually undergoing a sort of metaphysical bildungsroman of which sexual awakening is often a part. Boku, in his sensitivity and his rejection of stratified or hierarchical social roles, is often caught between the ‘real’ world (of action) and a spiritual world (of contemplation). It is frequently a female character who will either catalyse the boku-narrator’s movement between these worlds, or who will, in contrast to a different female character, represent one of the worlds and try and persuade boku to stay there, rather than oscillating between them. Contrasting Murakami’s fiction with other Japanese authors of contemporary male fantasy, Susan Joliffe Napier remarks that ‘[Murakami’s] women are remarkable for possessing their own independent personalities’.18 Just as music often catalyses a shift into a contemplative or remembering mode, or even a metaleptic shift in the narrative, the women in Murakami’s fiction, Napier notes, ‘are also clearly linked to an escape into another ... world’.19 Murakami responds similarly to an interviewer’s question about gender archetypes in his novels: ‘in my books and stories, women are mediums, in a sense; the function of the medium is to make something happen through herself. It’s a kind of system to be experienced. The protagonist is always led somewhere by the medium and the visions that he sees are shown to him by her.’20

The masculine and feminine in Murakami often resonate with mythical rather than socially stratified gender roles, which, by dint of their mythic resonance eschew negatively ‘gendering’ categorisations. Indeed, the narrative of Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World is related to the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, and its Japanese counterpart, the story of Izanagi and

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17 Hillenbrand 723.
19 Napier 59.
20 Murakami, ‘The Art of Fiction.’
Izanami, and that of Kafka on the Shore in some ways mirrors the story of Oedipus Rex. The Kano sisters in The Wind Up Bird Chronicle work, in various ways, as mediums; Reiko, in Norwegian Wood, is described teasingly as ‘a regular Scheherazade’ (164); and IQ84’s literary investigation into the nature of sects and religious ideologies contains a balance of male and female figures which assume mythic proportions and operate across gender roles and cultural boundaries as well as, quite literally, across worlds: as ‘maza’ and ‘dohta’, ‘receiver’ and ‘perceiver’. Only After Dark avoids completely this question of gender, archetype, and point of view, as Murakami adopts the first-person plural pronoun, ‘watashi-tachi’, which gives a neutral video-camera-like point of view to the narrative. More often than not, though, music and gender in Murakami operate as intertexts, as elements of the affective layering of the novels, as well as being catalysts of action.

‘Garota de Ipanema’ was originally a South American 1962 bossa nova song written by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes and recorded by Pery Ribiero. Two years later, Astrud and Joao Gilberto were to record a version with Stan Getz using Normal Gimbel’s English lyrics. ‘The Girl from Ipanema’, on the 1964 Verve album Getz/Gilberto, became a runaway hit, winning the 1965 Record of the Year Grammy Award. Technically a jazz/bossa nova record, Getz/Gilberto (which won three further Grammys in 1965) and ‘The Girl from Ipanema’ ranked on popular music charts across the world, providing an example of a piece of music with cross-generic appeal. Jazz records including ‘The Girl from Ipanema’ appeared ‘among titles by the Beatles, Beach Boys, and Andy Williams’ – ‘proof that it is possible for music to be both artistically and commercially successful.’ The song has gone on to be one of the most recorded songs in musical history, defying genre and gender: recordings have been made by artists from Frank Sinatra to Dionne Warwick (for female vocalists a gender-reversed version ‘The Boy from Ipanema’, was soon created), and the song inspired a parody version by Stephen Sondheim (‘The Boy From…’, in The Mad Show), which deals with the female singer’s unrequited desire for a (blatantly homosexual, although she does not seem to know this) male.

An English translation of Haruki Murakami’s short story ‘The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema’ is as yet unpublished, but, built around a memory of the pop song, the story displays many of the ways in which music and gender operate in Murakami’s work. It is, as Jay Rubin writes, ‘vintage Murakami’. The story of the song follows its opening lines, fitting in to the gender-roles prescribed by most melancholy pop lyrics: boy (or girl) sees girl (or boy) (‘tall and tan and young and lovely, the girl from Ipanema goes walking, and when she passes, each one she passes goes “aaah”’), longs for girl (or boy), who is unattainable and unnoticing. The song has a

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21 See, for instance, Haruki Murakami ‘Interview’ with John Wesley Harding, BOMB 46 (1994), where the author states, ‘I was thinking of Orpheus when I was writing Hard Boiled Wonderland. That character went into the sewers, into an underground world. And he’s always listening to music …’ (43).
26 Rubin 12.
simple premise, simple lyrics, and a simple melody, but it is hauntingly effective in this simplicity, as proven by the high numbers of artists who have recorded it. As Murakami writes of Eric Clapton’s album *Reptile*, ‘The Girl from Ipanema’ is ‘not too brash or contrived. It has this steady rhythm and entirely natural melody’. catalysing the mind to get ‘quietly swept into the music’.27 Murakami’s story, too, has a simple premise: remembering the song, ‘The Girl from Ipanema’, the narrator is swept up in a series of remembrances, and shifts with ease from remembrance into a metaphysical realm.

The story opens with the opening lines of the song, as its narrator comments on the unageing nature of the girl in the song, and thus of the unchanged appeal of the song itself: ‘This was how the girl from Ipanema looked at the sea back then, in 1963. And that’s how she keeps looking at the sea now, in 1982. She hasn’t aged. Sealed in her image, she drifts though an ocean of time ... in the song, she does not get old.’28 This leads to further reminiscence, as the narrator recalls his school days (the school corridor, the food, a girl he knew then). From this ‘real’ reminiscence the story then shifts to a metaphysical level: the narrator tumbles into a fantasy scenario where, lying on a ‘metaphysical’ beach, he encounters the ‘real’ girl from Ipanema, and offers her a beer. He asks the girl from Ipanema if, on the hot beach, the soles of her feet get hot, and she jokes that since she is a metaphysical girl, she also has metaphysical soles, ‘neither hot nor cold’. He confides in the girl that her presence, catalysed by remembrance of the song, catalyses also a remembrance of his schooling. To this, the ‘completely metaphysical’ girl from Ipanema laughs, reminding *boku* that ‘the human essence lies in its complexity’. After this metaphysical stop-gap on the beach, the narrator closes the story dwelling on the affective connection between nostalgic musings, the girl from Ipanema, and looks forward to a time when his self is no longer complex or divided: ‘I am myself and myself is me. Subject is object and object is subject. All gaps gone. A perfect union’. In this short story we see the use of the mythic gender roles common to Murakami’s work blend with his use of popular music. For Murakami, ‘we have a new kind of folklore, as a result of this internet world’,29 and this ‘new kind of folklore’, or international frame of reference, means that the Girl from Ipanema becomes a referent as timeless as Eurydice or Scheherazade: she is a pop archetype.

‘The Girl from Ipanema’ is also one of the ‘few bossa novas’30 played after some Bach fugues and various songs by the Beatles by Reiko to *Norwegian Wood*’s protagonist Toru, and his then-semi-girlfriend Naoko. This musical interlude in *Norwegian Wood* comes in the central section of the novel, where Toru, our *boku*-narrator, is lead to question his gender role in society (Reiko and Naoko ask him how many women he has slept with, and if he has cared for them), and is asked either to commit to the contemplative world that Naoko represents (by not sleeping

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28 Part-translation given in Rubin, 9-12. For the sake of accessibility, since the short story is not published in English elsewhere, I have tried to give only quotations from Rubin’s book in this essay.
29 Murakami, ‘The Art of Fiction.’
with any other women), or to leave. Leaving Naoko would involve Toru’s commitment to Naoko’s foil, in the ‘real’ world of the novel, Midori, and, as the novel progresses, it is clear that Toru is not yet able to make this decision, preferring instead to continue to listen to Reiko’s music and her ‘scheherazade-like’ telling of her past history. Although Reiko’s tale of her sexual awakening / rape and subsequent psychological torture by a 13-year old piano pupil, an ‘absolute dyed-in-the-wool lesbian’ (NW 203), provides a contrast to Naoko’s story of her ‘unusual’ ‘boy-girl relationship’ (NW 168) with her childhood friend Kizuki, and it fascinates Toru, neither story provokes him to move away from his state of neutral indecision. The narrative continues in the vein that it has previously. Toru moving between Naoko and Midori, and musing slowly on his life, as Murakami subverts many of the narrative conventions and gender roles of the Japanese ‘I’-novel\(^3\) and the popular formulaic romance.\(^4\)

Perhaps a part of Toru’s prevarication in the central part of the novel is down to the novel’s genesis. If ‘popular music is the model for Norwegian Wood’,\(^5\) the most convincing single model for the novel comes not from the Beatles song ‘Norwegian Wood (this bird has flown)’, but from a different track on the genre-blending 1964 album Rubber Soul, ‘Nowhere Man’, which unlike ‘Norwegian Wood’ doesn’t follow pop-music tradition in playing out the highly sexed melancholic address of unrequited boy to unnoticing girl, but is instead concerned with questions of action and inaction, and existential values. Toru could be seen as an archetypal ‘nowhere man’, who ‘knows not where he’s going’, affected by everything and nothing. Murakami states, ‘I love that song of the Beatles, “Nowhere Man”. When I wrote the first part of Norwegian Wood originally I listened to “Nowhere Man”. So I think there is some part of “Nowhere” in the last of the book. To me this is a nowhere place, nowhere city, nowhere street’\(^6\). The majority of the music mentioned in the novel is of a ‘sentimental’ ilk, leading Rubin to suggest that ‘the tone of the entire book resembles nothing so much as a sweet, sad pop tune’\(^7\).

The interrelation of the body and space takes on an important role in the way that gender and music operate in Murakami’s fiction. The narrator of ‘The Girl from Ipanema’ is propelled by a song into two worlds: a world of sentimental reminiscence and a fantasy metaphysical realm; Toru from Norwegian Wood is propelled by ‘a sweet orchestral cover of the Beatles’ “Norwegian Wood”’ (NW 1) into the world of reminiscence which makes up the main body of the novel, where he is split between Naoko’s contemplative world of the past and Midori’s action-filled hyper-sexed present. This divide is explored further in one of Murakami’s other early novels, Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (Japanese publication 1985, English translation 1991). As the novel’s title suggests, the narrative is split into two distinct, but interrelated sections ‘Hardboiled Wonderland’ and ‘The End of the World’, the stories of which are told in alternate chapters (a device Murakami employs to great effect in IQ84). As in many of Murakami’s novels, the protagonist is unable to choose between different women who carry

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\(^{31}\) See Rubin 152.


\(^{33}\) Rubin 154.

\(^{34}\) Haruki Murakami, ‘Interview’ 43.

\(^{35}\) Rubin 153.
with them different symbolic meanings, but in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, this is complicated further by the division of the novel, and the division between the narrative strands of the protagonist himself.

The *watashi*-narrator of the ‘Hard Boiled Wonderland’ chapters is mirrored in the ‘End of the World’ chapters by a *boku*-narrator. From the novel’s opening, their lives and narratives seem linked, and soon in the book we discover that this linkage is an inextricable one: the *boku*-narrator and the world he inhabits is the unconscious manifestation of the *watashi*-narrator’s self or, as the old man who created the system which enables this split calls it, his ‘core-consciousness’. To add a further layer to *watashi*’s doubling, on entering the town of ‘The End of the World’, the *boku*-narrator, or core-consciousness, is separated from his shadow, who represents his name, his cultural memory, and his identity. Just as *watashi* seeks, among other things, to reconcile his conscious and unconscious selves, *boku* seeks, among other things, to reconcile himself with his shadow. As the various quests that make up the strands of the novel concern identity, so too are they connected to questions of gender and of music. Both the *watashi* and *boku* narrators falls into many of the categories that Margaret Hillenbaum identifies with the metrosexual, however, it is *watashi* who has a wide-ranging taste in music, can cook, and pays attention to his appearance and to the clothing of others. As is Toru in *Norwegian Wood*, he is guided through and into many elements of his narrative journey by female figures, two in particular, the Librarian, a ‘slender young woman with long black hair [and an] elegant backside’ (HBW 73), and the old man’s pink-clad granddaughter, ‘young and beautiful and all that went with it, but chubby’ (HBW 7).

With the granddaughter in pink, *watashi* takes on an apparently protective, almost avuncular, didactic role. But as it is her duty to guide him to her grandfather’s underground laboratory, it is the girl in pink who really takes on the role of the guide and protector. Part-way through their acquaintance, the girl and *watashi* exchange remarks regarding her monochrome aesthetic choice of pink. Through this, the girl, although young and chubby, demonstrates a prosaic attitude to gender signifiers which is mirrored in her attitude towards everyday life:

“You seem to like pink,” I said.
“Grandfather likes it. He says I look pretty in pink.”
“You do,” I said. And she did. (HBW 186-7).

Here, we meet a glancing reference to the Psychadelic Furs’ 1981 song, ‘Pretty in Pink’, and, through this, the 1986 film Brat Pack film of the same name. When compared, these three variations on a theme of ‘Pretty in Pink’ provide very different pictures of femininity; the Psychadelic Furs song concerns a girl who mindlessly sleeps around, and the Brat Pack film is a High-School Cinderella story about a good girl from the wrong side of the tracks. In Murakami’s case, the girl who is ‘pretty in pink’ wears the pink to please her grandfather, who upholds many of the traditional hierarchical values and standards of the older generation, but the gender role

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signified by her adoption of the colour has not affected her egalitarian attitude towards life. Because he is not sexually attracted to her, watashi manages to endure her naïve, personal, and sometimes embarrassing inquisitiveness about the sex drives and sexual relations of males and females, and also be guided by her through an underground labyrinth with no great feeling of emasculation.

Where the girl in pink helps watashi negotiate the topographical elements of his quest, the Librarian helps him with the metaphorical elements of his quest, also teaching him about the importance of developing a mental as well as physical relationship (the first time they sleep together he is unable to get an erection). This Librarian helps watashi investigate the enigma of the unicorn skull, which provides an object-link between the world of ‘Hard Boiled Wonderland’ and that of ‘The End of the World’. As befits a character for whom watashi feels strong sexual attraction, this Librarian is written in a highly sexualised manner. In contrast to this, the female character with whom boku develops a connection in ‘The End of the World’, also a Librarian, is completely desexualised. An inhabitant of the city of the end of the world, she lives without a shadow, and thus without the trappings of sex, gender, memory, or even musical appreciation. As he loses himself in the end of the world situation, the boku-narrator, initially attracted to the Librarian, begins to understand the stripped-down being that existence without a shadow involves.

However, although the women work as plot changers in both narrative strands, they are not quite the Eurydice or Izanami figure that Murakami’s analogy between the novel and these two myths seems to suggest. Rather, the Eurydice figure for watashi is boku, and for boku it is his shadow. Each level of this configuration of the self the novel investigates is incapable of independent existence, and as we move further into the core consciousness in ‘The End of the World’, important constituent parts of watashi’s self evidently do not exist in boku. Although watashi is less sensitive or emotionally intuitive than boku, it is only watashi who has taste in and memory of music. Boku enters the town of the end of the world with no memory of music or his past, but he still fills a male cultural role, although this is without intercourse, or use of a gender-specific first person pronoun in his narration. The shadow, too, is gradually ungendered, as the gatekeeper persistently refers to it as ‘it’ in spite of boku’s sensitively always gendering his shadow as ‘him’ (HBW 62).

As watashi dies at the end of the novel, he does so to the soundtrack of Bob Dylan’s ‘Hard Rain’s Gonna Fall’, remembering the various people he met in the course of his adventure. Conversely, as the shadow and boku part at the end of the novel, boku is surrounded by a perpetual present, thinking about the possibility of recouping some remembrance of the past things and recalled music through his (albeit sexless) relationship with the Librarian. He does not notice that this knowledge seems to rest with his shadow. In spite of his slow attempted manipulation of an accordion from the dusty recesses of the library, and his remembrance of the tune of ‘Oh Danny Boy’, as the novel closes ‘All that is left to me is the sound of the snow underfoot’ (HBW 399). Whereas watashi falls asleep dwelling on his past, boku, in spite of his lack of self-identification, has more hope for a future (although the bleak implication is that without his shadow, boku will be condemned to the cultureless life of the city’s inhabitants). If you lose your connection with your unconscious and your memories, it seems Murakami is commenting, you relinquish your self and all of the facets from which it is made, and you lose your cultural identity – your gender role is obsolete, along with your need for music.
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Imagine a time some fifty or so years from now. A young South Asian student of Indian writing in English embarks on a historical–literary project. She is going to write a new history of Indian English literature (provided the appeal of the new would still hold). Consulting histories of Indian English writing and other related sources on the subject produced by scholars belonging to earlier generations, the young researcher feels a little tickled to find such descriptions in discussions of Indian fiction in English as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the Scott of Bengal or R.K. Narayan, the Jane Austen of India etc. She sits back and tries to tease out what these comparisons imply. Should she also employ such comparisons in her chapter on the fiction (in English) by midnight’s grandchildren she has just started working on?

A gust of wind suddenly enters the young scholar’s study through the open window and ruffles the pages of her desk calendar, an antique thing one of her old eccentric professors had gifted her at the beginning of the year, claiming to have made it himself. Slightly distraught, she flips the pages back to the one for the current month. But for a moment she is taken up with the page for the month of August 2067: her eyes, as if under a magic spell, settle on the few red-lettered dates. From behind the blood-coloured dates, it seems to her, a long white passage (back to Mughal times?) peeps at her.¹ She feels saddened and proud at the same time. The trace of a smile then spreads over her young face: she has got her answer. No, those comparisons won’t do for her. She needs to construct other comparisons, those that don’t smack of the cultural hegemony of an erstwhile colonial power, though one of the South Asian nations, she has to admit, is fast becoming such a power.

With the initial quandary fixed, the young researcher is now faced with a different kind of dilemma. How would she go about discussing the many works (both creative and critical) Tabish Khair, one of midnight’s grandchildren, has left behind? She finally decides to say as little as possible about Tabish’s works of criticism; and although she has an intense liking for poetry, she concludes that she would bring in his poetry only to the extent to which it sheds critical light on his fiction.

The young scholar tries to remember which of Tabish’s works she had read first? Was it The Bus Stopped (2004) or Filming, a Love Story (2007)? Or was it How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position (2012)? She can’t decide; but it is his third novel, The Thing about Thugs (2010), she distinctly remembers, that she had enjoyed reading most. She would start her section on Tabish’s fiction with a critical review of this novel.

What are those things that the young researcher likes so much about The Thing about Thugs? They are many for sure. But the most engaging aspect of the work for her is its way of telling the

¹ On 14 and 15 August respectively, Independence Day (from Britain) is celebrated in Pakistan and India. 15 August is National Mourning Day in Bangladesh. The Mughals ruled (most of) India before the British colonisation of the subcontinent.
story, or rather, stories. It’s so gripping that she could not put the book aside when she first took it up for reading. However, that first impression, she feels, needs some rigorous explication before presenting it to the reader of her new history. Possibly the almost magical appeal of the narrative derives from the artistry with which Tabish brings together its different strands and thus gives his work a kind of tentative, open-ended closure.

Getting up from her desk, the young scholar goes to her kitchenette to get herself a hot mug of coffee, thinking all the while about how to give her readers at least an outline of the story or stories so that they can appreciate what she appreciates most about the novel. Back to work, she picks up the book and turns a few of the opening pages to give the memory of her first reading it a jolt. There’s a narrator, she remembers now, in ‘[his] grandfather’s library,’ diligently reading an odd assortment of books from ‘the Brontës’ to ‘Mayhew’s voluminous accounts of the London poor ...’ (3). It is this narrator who tells one of the stories, the one in which characters such as John May and his accomplices Shields and the One-eyed Jack go about collecting human heads for ‘the great scientific project of M’lord [Lord Batterstone], his indelible contribution to the glory of his race and family name, his proposed Theatre of Phrenological Specimen’ (20). Is Tabish hinting at a parallel (and for the young researcher quite a natural thing to expect from a midnight’s grandchild) between the science of phrenology and the cult of thuggee? Why else would the next chapter be the opening page from the life account of a notorious but now ‘reformed thug’ (183) named Amir Ali? Captain Meadows has recently brought Amir (won over to the path of light and reason) to London to counter those (including Lord Batterstone) in the London Society of Phrenology who hold that phrenology is an infallible guide to understanding human nature. The Captain thinks otherwise. Skull reading is deplorably inadequate when it comes to passing judgment on the moral character of a person. A man or woman is not born a criminal or a saint; it is circumstances that account for what he or she eventually becomes. Amir’s emancipation is a case in point.

All this talk about beheading, phrenology, thuggee etc. leaves the young scholar feeling a little distressed; so she decides to take a break. To divert herself, she switches on the television in the drawing room and is surprised to find that the selected channel is showing The Circle of Reason, a film based on Amitav Ghosh’s debut novel of the same title. For a moment she thinks of changing the channel; but the scene on the screen has already roused the critic in her: Balaram, a committed enthusiast of phrenology, is thumping a small tea table with his fist to lend force to his claim that phrenology is superior to such mainstream sciences as chemistry, nuclear physics etc., while his friend Gopal, with a confused expression on his face, slowly drinks his tea.

With the film over, the young researcher returns to her desk. So The Thing about Thugs invariably begs comparison with The Circle of Reason, she muses. She needs to spell out the similarities between the two works as well as the departures of the one from the other. As she keeps thinking about the issue, it occurs to her that in The Circle of Reason Amitav is much more concerned with how discourses are differentially ordered or situated, with some accorded more prestige than others (like criminology or phrenology) at a given time, an idea he possibly came across in the works of that once formidable French deconstructionist Michele Foucault (how out of fashion deconstruction appears these days as a critical practice!). On the other hand, Tabish inflects the discourse on phrenology not only with class but also with diversity (hence the undercurrent of tension between Lord Batterstone and the group he calls ‘the Combians’ and

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2 The initial hunch strengthens as the young researcher notes that both Amir and John May spend a considerable time in the ‘scullery’.

Captain Meadows’ ‘liberal position’ [20, 70]). The comparison enables the young scholar to consider the beheadings in *The Thing about Thugs* from a fresh perspective. It strikes her now that the victims in the service of phrenology are ‘the very dregs of society’ (207). Thingification is both a class and racial question. And it’s here – that is, in the terrain chalked out by capitalism and ‘the rough beast’ that it spawns in the form of colonialism/imperialism – where the metropolitan Thing and the colonial Thug intersect. Inadvertently the words ‘three cheers to capitalism’ escape from the mouth of the young researcher.

But it’s time, the young scholar feels, she talked about the other two strands in the narrative. In one of them, Amir ‘relat[es] the full account of [his] life’ (21) as an ‘ex-Thug’ (70) to Captain Meadows. The young researcher has no difficulty in seeing what Tabish is trying to achieve here. She is quite familiar with the once-in-vogue postcolonial practice famously defined by the most illustrious of its Indian champions as ‘writing back’. What impresses her is the way Amir impresses on the Captain that he is indeed ‘hear[ing] the account of a real Thug’ (21), while in one of his letters written in Persian and addressed to Jenny, his English beloved, Amir confesses: ‘[M]y dear, I was not, I am not what the Kaptaan [Captain] wants me to be – I am not Amir Ali, the Thug’ (26). So Amir tells Captain Meadows what the latter wants to hear from him. In that case, the actual author of *Notes on a Thug: Character and Circumstances*, the book the Captain is writing based on the stories told by Amir, is not the former but the latter. The subaltern *can* speak, can even appropriate a discourse/text to his own thuggish end (for the moment so thinks the young scholar)! In at least one sense then, Amir is a thug: the way he so smoothly succeeds in deceiving the Captain into believing his made-up story ‘embroidered’ with ‘lies’ (157), even though the Captain is guided by ‘Mighty Reason’ (23).

The third strand in the narrative woven of the Persian letters is actually intended to negate whatever Amir tells Captain Meadows, that is, the ‘official/public’ record of his life. Amir writes in his first letter to Jenny:

> Scribbling away in the murk of the scullery, I wish, perhaps, to leave an account of myself in words other than the ones Kaptaan Meadows uses in his notebook. (26)

Tabish is thus coupling, the young scholar notes, the ‘writing back’ agenda with a revisionist/subaltern one (as had been conceptualised by the guru of the subaltern school of historiography, Ranajit Guha). As such, Amir’s letters are best read as a meta-text that works to upset the hierarchy of discourses by according the personal more significance than the public, a practice that used to be popular with the feminists of her grandmother’s generation.

‘Steady, dear, steady,’ the young researcher soliloquises. She feels a little embarrassed for letting herself be so taken up by the book she is reviewing. Is *The Thing about Thugs* a magic box of wonders? Does it have no blemishes at all? After all it is a work of fiction once crafted by a flesh-and-blood (male) person at a certain time and place. Hasn’t he left any trace of himself in it? Of course, he has; and to her chagrin the young scholar discovers that possibly Gayatri Spivak was not entirely mistaken in raising that resounding question: Can the subaltern speak? The subaltern speaks, but s/he does so (in all probability) in a borrowed tongue. For at times Amir betrays such refined sensibility and taste as well as perceptual sophistication that he becomes all too transparent; it is impossible for the reader not to see his university-educated creator/narrator through him (for a moment the shadow of a doubt crosses the young researcher’s mind: Is she judging the work at hand in a West-derived critical framework that attaches so much value to the criterion of ‘depersonalisation’ in art?). For example, after his release from prison Amir reminisces in a letter to Jenny:
You see, janaam, in those hours of imprisonment, a frightening thought crossed my mind. I felt that I had become my own story; my life had turned into the lie I had narrated to Captain Meadows. Suddenly, I was the thug I had claimed to be.

It felt strange to become something else. Is that all it requires? A few words, a few stories? Is our hold on reality so weak, so insecure? Can stories – told by yourself, told by others – turn us into something else? Why is it that, no matter how we grasp reality, no matter what reality we grasp, we need to don the glove of stories? Is that all we are: stories, words, breath? (177)

It is as if Tridib, a PhD researcher in archaeology, is schooling the unnamed narrator in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* in the discursivity/narrativity of life – life acted/lived out as/in a story: ‘Everyone lives in a story ... because stories are all there are to live in, it [is] just a question of which one you cho[o]se.’

And there’s the rich dose of anachronism. In 1840 Amir sometimes measures road distance in ‘mile’ (21) and at other times in ‘kilometre’ (58), while Captain Meadows (pre-)echoes Marlow in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* by about six decades: ‘This too has been one of the dark places of the earth’ (167).

The shops are pulling down shutters. The busy day is drawing to a close, with the western sky still retaining a little of the crimson tinge of the just set sun. Unawares, the young scholar too takes on the slightly pensive mood of the crawling evening. John May and his men have brutally killed Jenny for no apparent reason. Could it be that they had felt scared lest she went to law and order enforcing agencies to report on them and thus avenge herself on the murder of her aunt, the first victim to pay for the advancement of reason and science in the form of phrenology? However, two of the murderers are eventually apprehended, though what happened to John May is left a mystery. Lord Batterstone has boarded *Good Hope* on a voyage up the Congo, while Amir remains suspended between possibilities: to be on *Good Hope* or not to be.

In the concluding page of *The Thing about Thugs*, the narrator throws a rhetorical question to the reader: ‘Can my language claim to tell all of Amir Ali?’ (244). At the end of her review of the book, the young researcher finds herself asking a similar question. Can even an extensive review claim to convey to the reader the multilayered resonance of such a densely textured novel?

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I am delighted to be launching the book of a very fine writer and friend. Jeri Kroll’s *Workshopping the Heart* is that special sort of poetry book, a New and Selected volume, poetry’s ultimate act of distillation, and so a real landmark in a literary career. I’ve known Jeri since 1981 and I remember how I was struck by the first poems of hers that I heard, at Friendly Street, and by what a distinctive voice and character came across. It was certainly a case of the style being the woman herself.

Such energy, boldness, and unexpected leaps and turns: whether going at a cracking pace or else pausing reflectively, the poetry is always vibrant and engaging since Jeri trusts the sensitivity and intelligence of the reader. These are generous, wholehearted poems in their open attitude to the world. Feelings, emotions, are expressed with assurance tempered with tact, a sense of perspective and good judgement. Since one can make more free with adjectives in a speech than in a poem I’ll add that Jeri’s writing can be playful, provocative, seductive, flamboyant, challenging, confronting and exhilarating.

Her relationship to language is bold and precise in choice of words and in the use of syntactical short cuts, implication and silence. The originality of the images is one of the delights. For example, ‘ridges like reptiles’ vertebrae’; ‘old friends, quaint as long division’; ‘the century strutted out like a supermodel’, and this:

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Spring is Gesprungen when head opens
like a back door
and all the kids rush out
without their coats.
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There is also the humour: warm relish at the incongruity of things, wryness, wit, irony or a play on words, a putting of language through its paces. The double intention of irony and the double apprehension of humour with their changing angles and perspectives are part of the deep seriousness of the work as a whole, and of Jeri’s engagement with life and art.

As I read, and reread, I admired the skilful use of free verse rhythms, and the polished use of traditional verse forms. Also, the way poems are structured to dramatic effect; the pace and timing; the subtly chosen line breaks, often with a density of meaning and energy at both ends. And how many quotable lines there are.

I’d like to say something briefly about each book represented in this selection.

*Death as Mr Right* is a sparkling blend of sophistication and honesty, full of contrasts, spanning life and death. It’s a lively introduction to the frankness, quirkiness and acuity of Jeri Kroll’s gaze.

With *Indian Movies* you are struck immediately by the richness of the imagery. These are sensuous, sexy poems ranging from landscape to love, from Australia to India, the latter being much more than travel cameos: they are exotic and highly coloured, but shadowy too: the powerful villanelle ‘Towers of Silence’, for instance, or ‘The Reluctant Bride’ about a 14-year-old girl strangled to death by her husband.

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*Workshopping the Heart* by Jeri Kroll: Book launch. Jan Owen. 
Transnational Literature Vol. 7 no. 1, November 2014. 
When I think of Jeri’s third book *Monster Love* my memory jumps to a week in the Flinders Ranges, a masterclass with the famous Czech poet Miroslav Holub; it was quite clear that the manuscript which most captured his attention and admiration was Jeri’s *Monster Love*. He found it daring and original and I remember him saying there was nothing like it in Czech poetry.

Various aspects of love are touched on in this section, but it is the mother-son relationship which predominates and Jeri gives voice to the frustrated, desperate, fearful moments as well as the passionate tenderness of the ongoing bond:

I hate you, I love you, I hate you, I love you.
That’s clear unambiguous truth.

*House Arrest* spans the globe from Albany, New York, and San Francisco to Adelaide Writers Week and the Southside Youth Centre, from Tidbinbilla to deep space. This is a densely inhabited book with many arresting images. Here are a few lines from the portrait of Helen, a social worker:

Her instinct for sensing another’s pain
is as precise as the sun
striking the heart of Stonehenge,
or a radio telescope
plotting the souls of stars.

*The Mother Workshops*: Here, as elsewhere, there is no shrinking from painful or ambivalent subject matter. These finely observed and focused poems about an aging mother’s journey through dementia to death are very affecting with no risk of sentimentality, in part through the framing and distancing technique of presenting them as workshop exercises, a series of stations or spiritual exercises along the path. I’ll read Exercise 1: ‘Similes’:

The Mother
The mother’s skin feels sheer as a moth’s wing.
The mother’s eyes look pale
as winter sky nearly empty of rain.

the mother’s nose sniffs
like a dog’s in unfamiliar territory.
The mother’s hip explodes like peanut brittle.
She prods the world with a cane,
peevish for answers.
The mother loses nouns and verbs,
flaps like a bird counting chicks in her nest,
keeps coming up with the wrong number.
The mother is a still pool,
waiting for me to ripple with my words.
I stir and stir.
New Poems includes some wry considerations of time passing and awareness of mortality, and there is a literary menagerie too. I always knew Jeri’s affinity with horses but here she shows empathy also for cows, swans, dogs, cockatoos, snakes, kestrels. I enjoyed the playful wit of ‘Possums’ which begins,

I hear them in the night
scuttling across my mind,
nibbling at neurons,
peeing on synapses,
shorting out links between words.

In this group, ‘The Zen of Grey’ is another favourite of mine; Jeri moves easily between earth and air – from the things and creatures of the earth to a relevant abstraction:

Pure white is rare in a horse’s coat
the truth is mainly grey.

The final section, Vanishing Point, is a tantalising taster from Part One of a verse novel, or rather a crossover poetry novel, written convincingly in the voice of a teenage girl with anorexia. As a narrative it is page-turning, as a series of cameos and incidents it has a touching lyrical immediacy. The full volume due out soon will be launched, I believe during the second semester. I’ll be eager to find out what happens next.

All this adds up to Workshopping the Heart, handsomely produced by Wakefield Press: a beautifully written collection, technically accomplished, finely balanced and full of life. It is a dance of the intellect and the senses, and of imagination in many guises, but I think that Workshopping the Heart is, above all, about relating to others, about love actually: to quote from the poem ‘In the Balance’, ‘the bewildered heart still outweighs all else.’

It is a pleasure and an honour to launch Jeri’s fine New and Selected volume: I heartily recommend Workshopping the Heart to you all.

The Void
Ali Mohammad Lone
Translated and introduced by Ishrat Bashir

Novelist, playwright and short story writer, Ali Mohammad Lone, was born in 1927 in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India. He worked as Assistant Producer in Radio Kashmir, and as Deputy Secretary of Cultural Academy of Jammu and Kashmir. He began his literary career by writing in Urdu but soon turned to his mother tongue Kashmiri. Lone has authored many novels, plays and short stories. Asi Ti Chi Insaan (We Too Are Humans) is his famous novel in Kashmiri. His play Suyya, which has been translated in a number of Indian languages, bagged the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972. Lone has also translated Maxim Gorky’s famous novel Mother into Kashmiri. He has been honoured with Soviet Land Nehru Award. Though influenced by left-oriented Progressive Writers’ Movement in India, Lone skilfully uses modernist elements in his work. He died in an accident on 22 December 1987 while returning home in Indira Nagar, Srinagar.

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Vacuum! Infinite, boundless, ever growing vacuum!
The vacuum is not there out in the Space but has sprung from within my heart and mind, a void that never fills up.
This cycle of day and night
A meaningless thing
Day breaks, light appears
Evening comes, night falls
The day has passed. Night, too, is over. But what do I care? How does it matter when I do not know how to think, how to reflect on things? I am not a recluse or an introvert but my friends think that I am because I don’t know how to talk like them.
Introvert!
This label makes me laugh. Not exactly laugh but you can say it brings a kind of smile on my lips. Yet I keep quiet. What can I say to them when I don’t know how to talk like them? I cannot help my silence.
Among my relations, it has become an accepted fact that I am a reticent fellow.
‘It is wisdom,’ pronounce the elders.
‘It is arrogance,’ tease the youngsters.
‘When one acquires wisdom, words become superfluous,’ say my semi-literate friends.
And I answer all of them with a smile on my lips. Not because I want to mock them for saying this but because I don’t know the reason for my silence. So far as this vacuum is concerned, what can one do about it? It expands itself day after day. Sometimes the whole universe appears only an atom in this endless vacuum. Perhaps even smaller than that. Who knows? What does one call this condition of being?
It is raining today. The whole atmosphere has cooled down. People have taken off their T-shirts and put on suits. But my vacuum! Nothing affects it. Cold or heat, within or without, does not shake it at all.

‘The Void’ by Ali Mohammad Lone. Translated and introduced by Ishrat Bashir.
Transnational Literature Vol. 7 no. 1, November 2014.
When heart and mind are without any emotions, all the varied and colourful expressions of nature are meaningless. How could they affect this vacuum? It remains the same. Insensitive! Dead! Static!

Tell me what is the purpose of our existence? Perhaps you have found some meaning of your own existence. But what is the meaning of my existence? Why do I exist? And if I don’t, why not?

Thousands of books!
And even reading hundreds of philosophies didn’t help me find the answer, not even all the religions of the world and all the perspectives on it gave me any clue.
My question still awaits an answer.
I couldn’t reach any conclusion.
That is why I consider my being, my existence, pointless, absurd and moribund. Even an automaton or a robot has a purpose to be. It is created with and for a purpose which it fulfils. But what am I, a robot or a human being? I could never know it!

People are burdened with and bound in various shackles, shackles of matrimony, of family, of business, of society; and imprisoned in these chains, they trudge up the hill of life like a moorhen with eyes and ears shut and finally reach some kind of end or destiny. But what of me? I too am locked up in all these shackles. Who is free of these chains! Why, then, do I still feel free of them, alone and alienated.

I too leave for office in the morning and come back in the evening, eat my meals, listen to the radio, read the newspaper, keep account of groceries, insurance, G.P. Fund, income tax, house rent, deaths, births, joys, sorrows – even after attending to all these worldly concerns, I feel entirely free. I feel free, alone and untrammelled and it unsettles me from within. Even though I do not believe in God, yet at times, I burst out honestly:

‘Oh my God!’

Recently I met with an accident. I fell off a bicycle one night. At that time also, I cried out, ‘Oh my God!’

But as soon as people pulled me up, I felt nothing, no emotions, no feelings, neither of fear nor of any adventure. At the hospital, when the doctor straightened out my injured arm, I gave a shriek, but only because of the physical pain and broke out in a sweat from head to toe. The doctor perceived something, his hands trembled and he said apprehensive ly that it might be a fracture. The worried expression on the doctor’s face made me laugh and he was surprised. When I was laid on the X-ray table, my arm was straightened once more, and I shrieked again. The doctor said hesitatingly,

‘I am afraid that it is a fracture.’
‘Only two?’

I burst out laughing. The doctor was now angry and said:
‘Sir! Do you think it is a joke? Your bones will take at least three months to heal.’
‘Only three months? Ha ha ha ...!’

On hearing this, I don’t know why I became sad. The doctor examined my head and said,

‘You may have got head injury as well?’

Now I was quiet. How would have I said to this fool of a doctor that head is injured only when it carries some grey matter in it? Empty heads do not get hurt!

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1 Here the writer puns on the Kashmiri word 尕. With a very slight change in pronunciation, this word can be used to mean ‘that’ as in ‘I am afraid that it is a fracture’ as well as ‘two’ as in ‘only two’.

‘The Void’ by Ali Mohammad Lone. Translated and introduced by Ishrat Bashir.
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After seeing the X-ray, I became even sadder. My arm bones were good. The doctor was happy and he said in English, ‘You are very lucky. Thank your stars.’

Phew!

This was the only chance I would have in my life to get a break from the routine but I had missed it. My bad luck! Sleeping on the neat and clean, white and cozy bed of the hospital is sheer romance. But it wasn’t what fate had in store for me. And this foolish doctor says, ‘Really, you are very lucky. I congratulate you.’

‘Huh! Idiot!’

People suffer some kind of want in their life, want of some material things and in the process of acquiring them, a fine and beautiful life slips through their fingers. But I don’t suffer any material deprivation or any want of such kind. What I suffer from is a lack within. My heart is devoid of every emotion, be it fear, joy, sorrow, romance, love or hatred.

Wise men say that we do not live by food, water and air only. These things sustain only the body. However, the human body contains something else as well that needs a different kind of nourishment. I too believed in this truth some time before. That is why I read books, wrote stories, acted in plays, listened to music, watched movies, joined clubs, attended parties, socialised with people, laughed and had fun, mourned and cried with them. That was my past. But my present is altogether a different story. I feel all these exercises futile and worthless. Reading books emptied my mind. Writing stories twisted and complicated the story of my own life. Drama is senseless imitation; music, sheer wilderness. Watching movies is purposeless; going to clubs, hypocrisy; socialising with people and hanging out with friends, a trouble. In fact, living with my family also seems a trouble to me.

Why is it so?

What do I want? I want nothing, absolutely nothing. Yet this vacuum of heart and mind sometimes feels like it is devouring me and I wish this void filled up. What would one need to fill it up with? Love? Compassion? Sympathy? But, if this vacuum, this void does not disappear even after having all these things, then what will one do?

Phew!

I don’t get bored even!

Had I been bored, that too would have counted as some kind of emotion and filled this emptiness in some way!

Oh my God!

Empty heart! Empty mind! How can it be cured?

Rain might be falling. The atmosphere might have cooled down. The pleasant cool of winter must have begun. In such cool weather, sleeping under a cozy white quilt is a luxury but only for those who might be waiting for the dawn after the dark night. But what will one, who has no hope for the dawn to break, do? Where will he go!

Ah!

This vacuum within me! I wish this void would fill up!