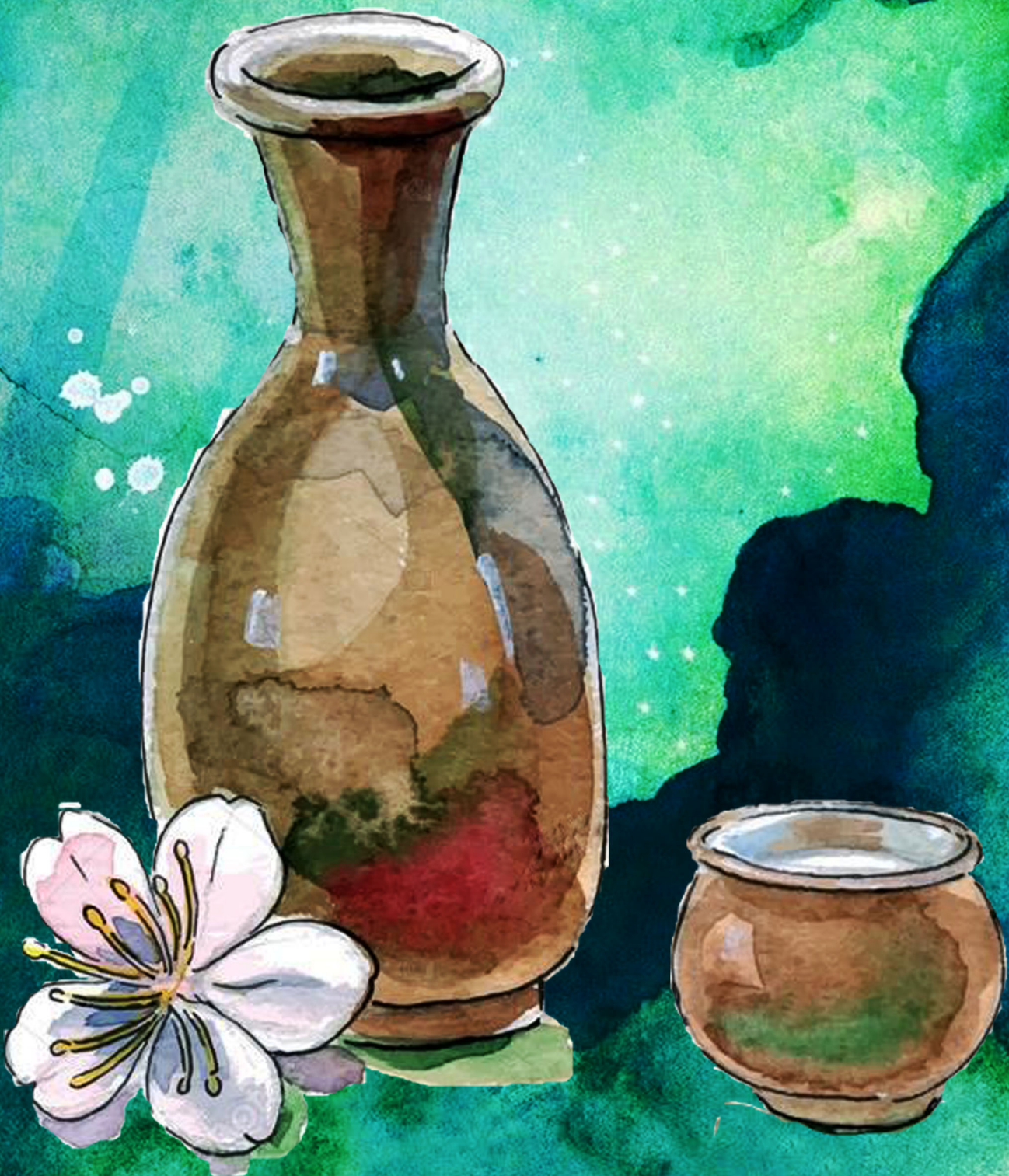


Art's Saké

Loreto College, Kolkata
M.A. Department of English



Art's Saké

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK

I congratulate the outgoing batch (2020) of Postgraduate students of the English Department of Loreto College on their novel initiative - the publication of the first volume of an online magazine, which has a professional touch. The magazine comprises two parts - an academic and a creative section, the former of which underwent two rounds of peer-review and the creative section, likewise, was scrutinized with care for selection. It is now ready for release and I am sure that all those who were involved with its creation are waiting eagerly for their endeavour to blossom. What is also commendable is that the manuscripts were edited by the students, Hemalatha Sridhar and Rhea P. Murmu; the teachers of the Department graciously assisted in the enterprise for which we express our gratitude.

The fervour with which the students of the M.A. Department have worked towards this online magazine needs approbation, as it is indicative of perseverance for the quest for creative communication. It is my earnest desire that the authors of the articles that have crystallized in this publication will keep on responding to the call of the journey in writing as co-travellers, continuing to give expression to their creative reflections for Art's Saké. I am sure that Venerable Mary Ward, our Founder, and Mother Gonzaga Joynt, the Founder of Loreto College will be smiling upon this venture. May the fire ignited by the pioneers of this magazine continue to light other fires in the written world!

- Sr. Dr. Christine Coutinho

A FEW WORDS FROM THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

A Lockdown green spell!

The genie of Creativity has been released recently by our M.A. students, and the result is this bright and beautiful online magazine- Art's Saké.

“Tasting of Flora and the country green”- it is, indeed, a rare combination of “song” and “sunburnt mirth”. May the bubbling enthusiasm of the contributors and the earnest labours of the editorial team inspire more such sparkling academic publications in the years to come.

Ignoring all the clouds of distemperature that the pandemic has caused, let us gather together repeatedly for Art's Saké. After raising their toasts to Art, the scholars will then sit down at the Feast of Life. Cheers, students, may you continue to be the Constant Crusaders for Art!

- Dr. Sumita Banerjee

EDITORS' NOTE

The M.A. Department of English, Loreto College, proudly presents its first online magazine, Art's Saké.

The aim of this online publication was to enable students to exercise both their aesthetic and scholarly inclinations, which is why the magazine is split into the Creative and Academic sections respectively. The Creative section is the product of the students' artistic output, comprising poetry, works in prose, a play, and several reviews. The Academic section constitutes papers offering criticism and analysis on certain writers, specific texts, or areas of literature, compulsorily grounded in solid research. The Academic section underwent two peer review processes to ensure that the most compelling papers are featured. The Creative section went through a selection process as well, making sure that the best works do not escape the insightful reader's notice. The editorial process has been undertaken by the students themselves.

An entirely novel initiative by the M.A. Department of English, this first volume has no specified theme in an attempt to encourage greater participation, and also because the theme of Art is anything under the sun. The multiplicity of subject matter aims to make the magazine a colourful point of convergence of variegated topics of intrigue, and to appeal to several points of view. This magazine seeks to facilitate and celebrate the relationship between literature and the larger world around.

Making this happen was an absolute thrill, we learnt so much, especially about patience, professionalism, and most importantly, about the power of impactful expression. We are elated to share this cherished volume with you, and ardently hope that this creates a new tradition in Loreto, and cements a place for the Postgraduate Department of English among the college's prestigious publications and intellectual archives.

Now, we must all indulge in some Art's Saké!

- Hemalatha and Rhea

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Art's Saké is the product of the dedicated diligence and ceaseless support of many, and we want to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt gratitude to them. First and foremost, we would like to thank our Principal, Sr. Dr. Christine Coutinho for her counsel and encouragement right from the moment we first initiated the idea of an exclusive magazine for the M.A. Department. We are indebted to our precious faculty who always made time to help us whenever we needed them, in spite of their busy schedules. We would especially like to thank Prof. Sumita Banerjee and Prof. Sukanya Dasgupta, because they have been our anchors, never failing to reply to our occasional messages of panic, being ever-ready to steer this ship along by solving our doubts with a calming patience that put our stressed selves at ease. We cannot be grateful enough for their constant guidance as we persevered through this process, which was daunting at the beginning. Finally, we thank all the contributors who submitted their entries – to both the academic and the creative sections – for their continual cooperation through the editing process. Without their willing enthusiasm, this magazine would not have come to fruition.

To those whose entries did not make the cut this time, we urge you to try again, because our most sincere wish is for this magazine to be a continuing affair, and the starting point of a legacy for the PG Department of English at Loreto College.

Thank you all, and cheers!

- Rhea and Hemalatha

ACADEMIC SECTION

“LET EVERY BABBLER BE”: THE MINIMALIST IN EMILY DICKINSON

- Hemalatha Sridhar

- Rhea P. Murmu

Abstract: Emily Dickinson’s poetic style is unique and starkly different from all her contemporaries, ranging from the English Victorians, to the American Transcendentalists. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines minimalism as “a literary or dramatic style or principle based on the extreme restriction of a work's contents to a bare minimum of necessary elements, normally within a short form”. The earliest evidence of minimalism in literature is found in the aphorisms, proverbs, maxims and epigrams of ancient cultures, such as the Greek. This tradition of concise and tight writing was carried forward through the ages, and was adopted into the anatomy of literature. This practice was not consistently popular in all periods of literary culture. The Victorian literary scene saw Emily Dickinson as a representative of this tradition. This is largely because she wrote in a minimalistic fashion that did not conform to any of the established literary standards of her period. She constructed pithy verses which overflowed with intellectual observations while employing a sparse number of words. Her gnomic verses are fraught with epigrams and aphorisms that give her poetry an immense suggestive power. This quality is endemic to her because she created a distinct poetic style for herself based on the philosophy of literary minimalism, and did so by writing interiorised poetry instead of looking outward for poetic inspiration. In this paper, we aim to place Emily Dickinson as a writer who followed the tradition of literary minimalism, and represented it in her ingenious versification in ways unlike other poets.

Minimalism as a philosophy that endorses economy has strong historical foundations in literature. In a pathbreaking article that John Barth wrote in *The New York Times*, he asserts that minimalism ‘is an idea surely as old, as enduringly attractive and as ubiquitous as its opposite. In the beginning was the Word: only later came the Bible, not to mention the three-decker Victorian novel. The oracle at Delphi did not say, "Exhaustive analysis and comprehension of one's own psyche may be prerequisite to an understanding of one's behavior and of the world at large"; it said, "Know thyself." Such inherently minimalist genres as oracles (from the Delphic shrine of Apollo to the modern fortune cookie), proverbs, maxims, aphorisms, epigrams, pensées, mottoes, slogans and quips are popular in every human century and culture - especially in oral cultures and subcultures, where mnemonic staying power has high priority - and many specimens of them are self-reflexive or self-demonstrative: minimalism about minimalism.’¹

Aphorisms, epigrams and the gnomic form, which are pithy structures pregnant with meaning, originated in ancient Greek culture. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines an aphorism as “a statement of some general principle, expressed memorably by condensing much wisdom into few words”.² The earliest Greek aphorisms are traced back to Hippocrates’ propositions on medical diagnosis. This form was later employed by several prolific authors such as Desiderius Erasmus, Friedrich Nietzsche and Oscar Wilde.

An epigram is “a short poem with a witty turn of thought; or a wittily condensed expression in prose”³, which originated in ancient Greece but received new life at the hands of Catullus and Martial, only to be vastly utilised by several Renaissance writers like Ben Jonson and Robert Herrick. Flourishing further in the Neo-Classical period, this device never went out of style, being generously used by later writers like William Blake and Ezra Pound.

Gnomic poetry comprises gnomes, or moral aphorisms. “The term was first used of the

'Gnomic Poets' of 6th-century Greece, although there are older traditions of gnomic writing in Chinese, Egyptian, and other cultures; the Hebrew book of Proverbs is a well-known collection. The term is often extended to later writings in which moral truths are presented in maxims or aphorisms."⁴ Gnomic verses also feature in Old English literature such as the *Exeter Book*. In the Orient, the miniscule Japanese haiku, or the sayings of Chinese philosophers such as Confucius, are also examples of minimalism in the history of the written word. Making note of these illustrations, it can be concluded that in literature, minimalism does not merely rely on keeping the writing brief, but more on how the brief form does not compromise on the amplitude of the meaning that the writer wishes to convey. Forms such as proverbs, aphorisms, epigrams and axioms have a quality of inexhaustibility, because they are universally resonant, and will never lose relevance because they appeal to an aspect of the human condition that is unchanging. Therefore, in literature, minimalism is not about limitation, but about implication, as in the act of holding back information, certain writing can be applicable to several situations, like a parable. It is about the author's innate ability to mould their writing to a simplistic form which is vast in scope. A tradition with such strong roots requires a skilled practitioner.

One observes that in the Victorian period, this phenomenon in literature was not so far reaching in its number of practitioners. The authors in the mainstream preferred a lengthier style, exemplified by Dickens' verbose novels or Tennyson's elongated verses. Emily Dickinson is seen to be one of the few poets of that age to use the gnomic form in her writing. Insisting on keeping her verse particularly economical, she cultivated a writing style for herself that is rich in aphorisms and epigrams, setting her apart from her contemporaries. The long-winded literature of the Victorians reveals that the writers of this era did not possess an affinity for literary minimalism. The works of this time have been famously deemed "loose

baggy monsters” by Henry James, owing to their tendency to ramble on and neglect a policy of prudence in the act of writing. While James said so in reference to the 19th century novel, even the most celebrated poetry of this age, such as Arnold’s multiple philosophical explorations in verse, or Tennyson’s ample poetic renditions with Arthurian themes, was excessively wordy. It is also known that mainly the stalwarts of literature in this period wrote in this meandering and voluminous fashion, and that some of the minor poets did not necessarily conform to this style. One sees the presence of poets like Hopkins who critiqued the standardised Victorian poetic model of verbal embellishment as unnecessary and unoriginal in his poetry, while crafting unconventional verses. Even when the poetry was not frustratingly long, it was usually heavy with political, religious and social discourse that could make it overwhelming to read. Experimental poets like Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti also dabbled in the sphere of social commentary, and discussed some serious issues of their milieu, making some of those works transient and not lasting influences beyond their time, despite their competence. A negligible number of them wrote solely in the manner of Dickinson’s tight and precise style. By never writing in any fashion apart from the succinct one she crafted for herself, she is a legitimate heir to the minimalist tradition in her era, especially in comparison to the American Transcendentalists who were her contemporaries. The Transcendental school was ideologically affiliated with that of the Romantics, whereas Dickinson’s poetry shared a kinship with the works of the Metaphysical poets. Transcendental literature was rooted in its unabashed expression of emotions, complying with Wordsworthian “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. Dickinson, contrarily, always focused on precision that bordered on terseness at times, keeping her sentiments under control, but efficiently communicating them without an emotional excess.

Although greatly influenced by stimulating writers such as Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Dickinson's poetry is so dissimilar to her Victorian peers that her poetic style is understood better when compared to that of Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* instead of a writer from her own time.

Blake's moralising couplet;

"A Robin Red breast in a Cage

Puts all Heaven in a Rage",

strikes a chord with Dickinson's poem 185, due to their use of epigrams:

"Faith" is a fine invention

When Gentlemen can see -

But Microscopes are prudent

In an Emergency." ⁵

Although the tones of Blake and Dickinson differ vastly, they both discuss the flaws of humanity in a similar verse construction, allowing the epigrammatic poems to convey something deeper than the immediate words employed. Both poems rely on implication rather than verbal explanation, and use a simplistic, commonplace language. Such control and careful selection is typical to Dickinson's inimitable style, and also analogous to the philosophy of literary minimalism where less is more. Such an unexampled style is not represented anywhere else in Victorian poetry. Emily Dickinson's genius is seen in how she did not hesitate to play around and experiment with language. Her vocabulary and syntax are unique in equal measure. As a woman who chose the life of a recluse, Dickinson did not have access to the same social resources that her contemporaries did. However, this did not hamper her creative process in any way. Her thorough knowledge of the language enabled her to employ it in ways that were uncommon and ingenious. Her inventiveness is evident in the manner in which she uses objects and ideas from daily life to create something with a

metaphysical pulse. She gives words from the common vocabulary a new life by ascribing new meaning and potentialities to them.

Scott Donaldson, in his article named *Minding Emily Dickinson's Business*, talks about how the poet used the words “circumference” and “circuit”, which are conceptual synonyms, to mean opposing ideas.⁶ Donaldson’s paper explores how Dickinson used the word “circumference” to mean an infinite space that is beyond human comprehension, and the word “circuit” to mean a limited space, especially in association to the earthly. From this proposition, one can infer that in poem 1620,

“Circumference thou Bride of Awe

Possessing thou shalt be

Possessed by every hallowed Knight

That dares to covet thee”⁷,

Dickinson’s mention of “circumference” refers to the metaphysical unknown that man seeks with the same zeal as a knight on a quest. The use of the term “circuit”, on the other hand, in poem 813, represents a limited space.

“This quiet Dust was Gentlemen and Ladies

And Lads and Girls-

Was laughter and ability and Sighing

And Frocks and Curls.

This Passive Place a Summer's nimble mansion

Where Bloom and Bees

Exists an Oriental Circuit

Then cease, like these-”⁸

Here, the “oriental circuit” is an adjective for decrepitude of the earthly, completely

contrasting to the connotations she bestows upon “circumference”. This subtle yet drastic difference of meaning is an example of Dickinson’s sagacious economy, which is representative of her minimalist creative process. Similarly, she associates the word “possibility” with poetry, as noted in poem 657, and prose with “captivity”, featured in poem 613. By drawing such simple linguistic connections, Dickinson communicates something much larger about her life’s hardships and the confining Puritan society she lived in.

Her experiments with language also enabled her to engage in several intellectual plays of words. For instance, her toying with the Protestant concept of Election, and disguising it in her poems as a process of selection, is novel and innovative. In poem 303, she draws parallels between the personified “Soul” that selects a suitor and the practice of Christian Election which dictates that God has predestined those who will gain an entry into Heaven.

“The Soul selects her own Society -

Then - shuts the Door -

To her divine Majority-

Present no more-

Unmoved - she notes the Chariots - pausing -

At her low Gate -

Unmoved - an Emperor be kneeling

Upon her Mat -

I've known her - from an ample nation -

Choose One-

Then - close the Valves of her attention-

Like Stone-”⁹

In this poem, she substitutes the word “elect” with “select” and manages to skilfully compare

the two without any extraneous explanation. The poem appears to be sparse, but is rich in emotional intensity as it explores her notions of loyalty in love. Dickinson, in her minimal approach, allows the reader to make their own connections. In *The Conscious Self in Emily Dickinson's Poetry*, Charles R. Anderson observes that "the fact that she uses "soul," "mind," and "consciousness" almost interchangeably in these explorations should not be charged against her as a sign of confusion, nor should it be allowed to confuse the reader."¹⁰ Dickinson's diction is never fortuitous, it is a result of her sharpened craft, which leans on a sensibility of economy.

In his article entitled *The Poetry of Emily Dickinson*, Sergio Baldi discusses how Dickinson's decision to cut herself away from the outside world led her to focus her poetic vocabulary on her house, her garden, the nature in her immediate surroundings and general images of domesticity. He proposes that she interiorises nature as an "external reality", and her emotions as an "inner reality".¹¹ Therefore, Dickinson's subject matter for writing was centred around the basic resources that she had access to- herself, and her personal space within the home. Baldi suggests that this can be seen in her tremendous mass of gnomic verses, which he calls "definitions and maxims in verse"¹² rather than poems. In poem 1335, she talks about the condition of the human "Heart", which she believed was the sustenance for the mind's wit.

"The Mind lives on the Heart

Like any Parasite-

If that is full of Meat

The Mind is fat.

But if the Heart omit

Emaciate the Wit-

The Aliment of it

So absolute.”¹³

In this poem, one notes how her poetry veered towards interiorising, as she saw her emotions as a subject for her poetry. Charles R. Anderson remarks that “the very poem which warns against the barrenness of aphorism is itself aphoristic, almost a verse-game in its gnomic form”.¹⁴ This observation intensively substantiates the claim of this paper, which is that Dickinson was a committed minimalist who possessed the genius of suggesting things beyond her immediate writing. The “external realism” Baldi discusses, is explored in another gnomic poem, number 1763:

“Fame is a bee.

It has a song

It has a sting-

Ah, too, it has a wing.”¹⁵

This poem is pithy, yet a compelling intellectual exploration of the effects of fame upon an individual, possibly a writer. Poem 1763 is undoubtedly deeply personal, because Dickinson never intended to publish her work. The poem is petite, but gives the reader a sense that it is alive, because it has its own organic buzzing rhythm, much like a bee. Even a poem so simple and playful is layered with meaning.

Poem 288 is similarly witty and wry in tone, and simultaneously an insight into her riddling mind.

“I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you - Nobody - Too?

Then there's a pair of us?

Don't tell! they'd advertise - you know!

How dreary - to be - Somebody!
 How public -like a Frog -
 To tell one's name - the livelong June -
 To an admiring Bog!"¹⁶

In this intriguing, miniscule poem, Dickinson's perception of Amherst's suffocating society as well as her desire for anonymity receive equal attention. The suggestive power of her poetry is potent, and is always intellectually stimulating to the reader.

One can safely assume, therefore, that Dickinson's minimalistic lifestyle is reflected in her concise and tight poetry, which allows her to pass judgements of universal value.

Her innumerable four-line stanzas almost read like proverbs, as they are similarly sonorous in their quality of rendering general truths that are not merely restricted to her own life.

Emily Dickinson is an acknowledged genius for her syntactical improvisations and unconventional punctuation. The copious use of dashes to bridge her aphoristic statements, instead of the regular periods and commas gives her poetry an urgency, while also making it seem like a speaking individual due to its organic cadence. Betsy Erkkila in her article, *Emily Dickinson on Her Own Terms*, suggests "the drama of her poems is created not by logical development and narrative line, but by verbal compression and the dynamic tension created by the splitting of syntax, image, line, and unit".¹⁷

Poem 1129 is evidence of this claim:

"Tell all the Truth but tell it slant-
 Success in Circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased

With explanation kind

The Truth must dazzle gradually

Or every man be blind-”¹⁸

The connection that Dickinson draws of conveying something as momentous as a truth that is potentially revolutionary, to sensitising a child to lightning, is ingenious. She utilises an uncomplicated metaphor that is accessible and bare, but has the ability to transcend this simplicity because it is fraught with universal wisdom. The division of the lines makes the reader focus on each separate segment with greater attention, enabling a steady comprehension of both the profundity and the effectiveness of Dickinson’s comparison. The unconventional syntax in the poem makes the reader also draw a connection “gradually”, despite its abruptness. The abruptness of her language, instead of eluding, manages to capture greater attention to her meaning. “Dickinson's slant style - her use of dashes and off-rhymes and her fracture of image and syntax - is an emblem of her fragmented way of being and seeing in a world split by the polarities of life and death, faith and doubt, masculine and feminine, being and nothingness.”¹⁹

The poet’s image construction is unanticipated because the connections she forms are her own unique constructs. Her propositions can be sudden and shocking, and the effect of this element of surprise is accentuated by her economical bent of artistry. In poem 836, one is similarly astonished by her.

“Truth - is as old as God-

His Twin identity

And will endure as long as He

A Co-Eternity-

And perish on the Day
 Himself is borne away
 From Mansion of the Universe
 A lifeless Deity.”²⁰

This poem is her attempt to negotiate with her faith and the existence of God, by connecting the validity of God with that of “Truth”. The jarring image of the “lifeless Deity” is an immediate indication of her personal struggles with religion. Although a morbid expression of her religious doubts, the poem is intriguing because of the controversial parallel she has drawn between truth, faith and scepticism, so poignantly without an excess of words.

Large portions of her writing focus on her concerns as well as agreements regarding her Protestant faith. Poem 377 is also about the loss of faith, but adopts a different tone:

“To lose One's faith – surpass
 The loss of an Estate-
 Because Estates can be
 Replenished - faith cannot-
 Inherited with Life-
 Belief- but once-can be-
 Annihilate a single clause-
 And Being's – Beggary”²¹

In this poem, the dashes are substitutes for words that would be required to elucidate her feelings clearly. The dashes punctuate her lines by bringing them together as well as efficiently juxtaposing opposing ideas. Dickinson’s variety is seen in her multiplicity of tones that give her concise verses a greater depth of meaning and warrant intense analysis. Her language is always connotative, firmly abstaining from needless babbling. The genius of her use of dashes stem from her minimalistic inclinations.

Famous for her ponderings over life and death, a vast section of her poetry is devoted to the exploration of these themes, which perfectly capture her psychological complexity and intellectual essence.

Poem 816,

“A Death blow is a Life blow to Some
 Who till they died, did not alive become-
 Who had they lived, had died but when
 They died, Vitality begun.”²²,

is a remarkably fluid expression of the implications and understanding of life and death to different individuals. In her sparse four-line stanza, she encompasses more than one philosophy of existence, and takes her words to a metaphysical summit. The economy of the poem in no way compromises the gravity of its suggestion. On the contrary, it makes the reader more invested because of how philosophically engaging it is despite its size. Dickinson’s various tones greatly contribute to the appreciation of her poetry, and in conveying her stance on her pet themes such as death, love, religion, faith, writing, nature, and life. For instance, in poem 724, Dickinson humorously comments on the process of God’s creation as a random act of whimsy on his part, stating that for him, “it’s easy to invent a Life-”, whereas in poem 749, she deals with the irreversibility of death in a sombre tone when she says “All but Death, can be Adjusted”. Her range of moods and tones gives her terse, aphoristic verse a richer texture.

Minimalism as a mainstream movement appeared in the sphere of visual arts in the 1960s, and early 1970s in the United States of America. This artistic movement was headed by figures like Frank Stella, Donald Judd and Carl Andre. It was a reaction to the spontaneity

and flamboyance of Abstract Expressionism. Minimalist literature also simultaneously developed at the time, and is represented in the writings of William Carlos Williams, and Samuel Beckett. In her paper, Erkkila mentions how William Carlos Williams called Dickinson his “patron saint” because her epigrammatic style had greatly inspired him.²³

Dickinson’s philosophy finds validation in those of the minimalist painters and sculptors. Minimalist painter Piet Mondrian famously said “the position of the artist is humble. He is essentially a channel”²⁴, because he believed that the identity of the artist adds something extra to the perception of the work of art. This corresponds to Dickinson’s passionate drive to conceal herself. Dickinson’s poetic speaker is an identity different from herself, as she has clarified in a letter, saying “when I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person”.²⁵ Hence, her need to remain inaccessible is also linked to a minimalist mindset. The minimalists of the visual arts always believed in keeping the piece of art devoid of exaggeration or embellishment because that would make it artificial. Constantin Brancusi’s *The Beginning of the World*²⁶ is simply a polished bronze sculpture of an egg, that is massive in its implications. The onlooker instantaneously perceives the point of the sculpture without anything other than the immediate context. Dickinson too, has a quality of disclosing the universal without saying too much. Poem 1455 exemplifies this, as it has the ability to moralise in such a muted manner:

“Opinion is a flitting thing,

But Truth, outlasts the Sun-

If then we cannot own them both-

Possess the oldest one”²⁷



Figure: Brancusi, *The Beginning of the World* (1924)²⁸

In Adrienne Rich's essay on Dickinson entitled *Vesuvius at Home*, Rich talks about what a revolutionary figure Dickinson was because she managed to rid herself of the constrictions of the stifling Victorian society by embracing the life of a solitary recluse. The feminist vein in Dickinson prompted her to live her life on her own terms, and decide the exact nature and degree of her involvement with society. Rich insists that Dickinson does so as a form of artistic self-preservation, which is what enabled her to write in her interiorised yet concentrated and precise fashion. Calling Dickinson a "gnomic Garbo" because of her mysterious attractiveness, Rich asserts that Dickinson retranslated her resentment towards her contemporary society which was of "volcanic propensities into a dialect called metaphor: her native language".²⁹ Her gnomic poetic process, therefore, relies more on holding back, than on elaboration, because the gaps in information, like the dashes between her sentences, are enough to speak for her. Poem 1748 explains this perfectly:

"The reticent volcano keeps

His never slumbering plan -
 Confided are his projects pink
 To no precarious man

 If nature will not tell the tale
 Jehovah told to her
 Can human nature not survive
 Without a listener?

 Admonished by her buckled lips
 Let every babbler be
 The only secret people keep
 Is Immortality."³⁰

This poem is about how nature has her own rhythm that cannot be controlled by man, and that only by listening to her, can man trace his own story. The verse asserts the importance of listening more than speaking, like the minimalist Dickinson who perceived far more than she felt the need to articulate. Dickinson herself could represent the “reticent volcano”, a structure teeming with power but choosing to restrain itself. Her poetic principle too, is that of reticence, because she is not a babbler, but someone who only expresses what is necessary, and in the most economic, yet compelling manner.

Ted Hughes lauds Dickinson for her “mosaic, pictogram, concentration of ideas; there is the tranced suspense and deliberation in her punctuation of dashes, and the riddling, oblique artistic strategies”, which are all seen in combination in her minimalistic epigrammatic verses.³¹ John Barth, in his article, talks about the “the minimalist pleasures of Emily Dickinson - "Zero at the Bone"”³². Her refusal to change her style despite Higginson’s encouragement for her to regularise her syntax and standardise her metre is proof of her

conviction in her unconventional methods of writing, as her writing reflected the essence of her being. Emily Dickinson's poem 1251 appropriately places her as a thorough minimalist, and perhaps the only one of her time.

"Silence is all we dread.

There's Ransom in a Voice

But Silence is Infinity.

Himself have not a face." ³³

The strength of silence could be interpreted here as what is complementary to appropriate speech, because only purposeful writing governs all her poetry. Polonius' immortal line, "brevity is the soul of wit" is embodied by this poet. A skilful whittler of words, Dickinson's minimalist makings cement her style as one of a kind.

Notes

1. John Barth, "A Few Words About Minimalism", *The New York Times*, December 28, 1986, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/12/28/books/a-few-words-about-minimalism.html>.
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On the Authors -

Hemalatha and Rhea have known each other since they were babies. After school, their paths crossed again at Loreto during the Post Graduation programme, and here, in between constant trips to the college canteen or nearby cafes, their partnership has successfully produced a volume of literary expression that they are thrilled to have spearheaded, and are very proud of.

A professor once endearingly called them the "HR (Human Resources) Gang" of the PG2 class, and since then, they firmly resolved to take that name seriously, giving their all to whatever they committed themselves to, especially their child, this magazine. They enjoy discussing literature varying from the ancients to the moderns, never hesitating to be as animated as they please, while snacking away at Golden Spoon. Their other interests include relating literature to pop culture and not concealing their zeal about women's issues, or speculations on anything they find twisted, always accompanied by an innate vigour.

For Hemalatha and Rhea, literature is something to be absorbed first by the heart, and then the intellect.

DEATH BY BEAUTY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WILDE'S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*
AND MANN'S *DEATH IN VENICE*

- Madhura Bhattacharya

Abstract: Published around twenty years apart, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and *Death in Venice* (1912), promote the concept of Aestheticism through the struggle of the protagonists in these novels to present beauty in their respective works. As presented in *The Decay of Lying*, Oscar Wilde's philosophy on art insists on the fact that art should find perfection in itself, that as an objective, it is not simple truth as Victorians viewed it, but complex beauty. Both Wilde and Mann believed that passionate art had the ability to represent the serious struggle of human existence in the form of complex conflicts, such as between conscious will and uncontrolled passion, or between rationality and morality. Thus, the artists' trajectory towards death in both fictional works is a descent into failure to maintain equilibrium between these two opposing forces.

Unlike most writers of their time, Wilde and Mann were able to perceive the morbidity and darker side of things. They were able to give insight to the weakness of human beings, bypassing the judgement that the contemporary society inflicted on them for it. This paper will explore the various ways in which the authors have created this trajectory of lives ruined in the pursuit of beauty and how the influence of their own lives in some instances, enhances the pathos and significance of the works through the ages.

Literature is an inherently social product, but it isn't always commensurate with its public face or accepted manifestations, much like the lives led by individuals of society who may deviate in any way from the social norms of that time. The degree of influence the life of an artist has on their work is a debated issue, whether the art is considered to be a separate entity in itself, or if the two are entangled so deeply that one cannot properly be analysed without looking into the other. In Oscar Wilde's case, one cannot look at his novel and not his life for the simultaneous trials that changed the course of history for both the man and the novel. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in England and America in 1890 by the J.B. Lippincott Company of Philadelphia in the July issue of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, five years before the series of scandalous trials that would lead to Wilde's incarceration. Wilde soon set about revising and enlarging the novel for a book edition, which was published in 1891 by Ward, Lock and Company.¹ Wilde was already known to the general public for his quick wit, ostentatious dressing and many lectures and journalistic pieces written over the previous decade. But nothing did, more than his novel, make him an iconic figure to both his supporters and his detractors, particularly in the way that it altered how Victorians saw and understood the world they inhabited with regard to sexuality and masculinity. After Wilde turned in the typescript of the novel to the *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine's* editor, J.M. Stoddart, for the 1890 issue, it was quickly determined that the novel would offend the sensibilities of the Victorian reader, due to its graphic content. With the consultation of his publishing associates, Stoddart then went out to strike out around 500 words, without the knowledge of Wilde up until the publication in the magazine. The editing was done in a circumstance of electric tension that raged through the social milieu and sexual paranoia that American literary critic Elaine Showalter wrote of as a "sexual anarchy" in her book *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture in the Fin de Siècle*.² The 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act outlawing "gross indecency" between men, the establishment of the National Vigilance

Association in 1885, and the Cleveland Street Scandal of 1889-1890 all served to bring about a heightened atmosphere of paranoia and intolerance, particularly where upper-class and well-educated, anti-heteronormative English youths were concerned.³ Wilde was to be one of the chief victims of this climate of repression as was evident from the jubilant celebration of his imprisonment in 1895, with the very piece of work that alarmed the editor on first viewing it.

Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* has some of the same autobiographical elements as Wilde's notorious novel, albeit with less fatal connotations attached to it. The novella was written by the German author, and first published in 1912 as *Der Tod in Venedig*. The work presents a great writer suffering writer's block who visits Venice and is liberated, uplifted and then increasingly obsessed, by the sight of a stunningly beautiful youth. The first specific note on *Death in Venice* in published letters can be found in August 1911, when Mann reported work on a very strange thing he had brought from Venice, a novella dealing with the affection of an ageing artist for a boy.⁴ The idea of having brought back something from Venice seems to coincide with memories still vivid in 1930 when Mann recorded that much of *Death in Venice* was not invented but was actually present and needed only to be put into place to prove its extraordinary adaptability for literary composition and interpretation.⁵ There are many elements in the novel that made the work of fiction solely derived from life that Mann had proposed to enunciate or explore in a more aesthetic setting of the an epidemic struck Venice – the stranger in the cemetery in Munich, the dingy motor boat from Pola to Venice, the superannuated dandy, the dubious gondolier, Tadzio and his family, an attempt to leave Venice thwarted by the confusion with baggage, the cholera, the malevolent street singer – all of these weave in and out of real experience and fiction. A point of interest is how he regretted his inability to find a conclusion to the novel, which in a letter, less than a week

after the first, reveals that he grumbled about the great stress and strain because of a work he had spent almost a year on and now determined to finish one way or another.⁶

Both Wilde and Mann had a profound insight into the dialectics of art. Their works treat the relations between art, life and death beyond the levels of exploration of that age. Aestheticism is explored through the demonstration of earthly beauty as the higher artistic absolute beauty. The conflicts between bourgeois and bohemian; beauty as an element of death; between the Dionysiac and the Apollonian; between the highbrow and the trivial have formed the works in purveyance. Aestheticism was a movement which was a reaction to the prevailing utilitarian society, and it postulated the autonomy of aesthetic standards to set them apart from the considerations of morality, utility or pleasure.⁷ Both the authors explore the ideals of the aesthetic art by means of the artists represented in their works, who venture forth in pursuit of beauty beyond its utility. And it is the “fall” of the artist as they reach for it beyond the scope of morality or rationality in both works that is presented as the fate of the artist who desires beyond what society of that time would accept; much like what Wilde experienced himself.

THE ARTIST

The Picture of Dorian Gray and *Death in Venice* include a very specific kind of character subject that the authors of these novels had made essential to the plot as well their discourse on the dialectics of art and its medium. The characters of Basil Hallward and Gustav Aschenbach, present themselves as the artist of renown in search of their most profound work, which in turn would be a revival of their artistic career after the obvious lull that forms when renown is acquired. It is significant to notice the nature of artists, in that both Wilde and Mann demonstrate that what fame the artist craves for, is but an evanescent concept that

leaves them craving for more and thereafter in a different way than what has already been accomplished. It is not far from the comment made by Lord Henry Wotton in the beginning of the novel in *Dorian Gray*, “What odd chaps you painters are! You do anything in the world to gain reputation. As soon as you have one, you seem to want to throw it away.”⁸ Nicholas suggests, Wilde is resonant in Lord Henry’s socially critical dialogues in the Introduction of *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray*, it may be presumed as a direct comment on the vanity of the artist by the author himself.

Mann further explores the deplorable state of the ageing artist in the guise of Aschenbach, who has all but lost the vitality and inspiration with which a young artist ventures into creation. As a young author with a driven passion for his work, Aschenbach had been the model of discipline in his field. He “strove in cold fury to liberate from the marble mass of language the slender forms of his art which he saw with the eyes of his mind and would body forth to men as the mirror and the image of spiritual beauty.”⁹ While elucidating Aschenbach’s habits of work, Mann tells us how his hero, with two tall wax candles in silver candlesticks at the head of his manuscript, would begin the day early, offering up to art in a few morning hours the strength he had gathered in his sleep. The candles are reminiscent of *Schwere Stunde*, a seven-page short story by Mann, where almost the same picture is painted. In this brief sketch, written in 1905, Schiller’s bare room is seen by the light of two candles burning at the head of the manuscript on the desk.¹⁰ This in itself is a trifling recollection which might be accidental if it were not for Mann’s practice of weighing every word. The short story itself was an attempt of the author to don the mask of the admired author in order to understand more clearly the kind of writer he himself wanted to be.

In the case of Wilde’s novel, it is the tragedy of the artist, where the author calls to account

the overly self-conscious artist who projects his own personality too severely on the public. Basil Hallward, started on the proper path towards self-realisation, but in painting the portrait of Dorian Gray he had gone astray. For as he says to Lord Henry in the beginning of the novel – “I have put too much of myself in it.” Hallward has an ideal conception of the role of the artist, and he realises from the outset of the novel that he has not lived up to his conception. Instead of presenting an “abstract” sense of the beauty of his sitter, Hallward has put in his own idolatry and worship of the physical embodiment of his ideal. Thus, he breaks the barrier between subjective reality and objective art. It is also significantly characteristic of the novel to be named as the “Picture” of Dorian Gray, rather than a direct indication to the life of the character itself. It seems to indicate that the author had the notion of putting forth the seed of doubt on the reader’s mind as to the downfall of the title protagonist beginning with the conception of the painting itself. The artist’s interpretation of Dorian’s beauty that extended to the nature of being idolatry, gave rise to the evil head of Narcissus in the mind of his sitter, who, further egged on by the serpentine words of Lord Henry, is summoned to the path that would lead to his doom.

Much like the authors, the artists in these works constitute an important position in the contemporary fabric of society. With their lives, they either set the ideals of artistic accomplishment or the deviance that takes for them to recognise a higher ideal of beauty beyond the scope of societal utility. They are the markers of social trend through their works, whether the impact of the latter occurs at that time, or years later in a society that is more relaxed towards change of thought. Wilde and Mann have proven through their works, and their lives in the case of the former, that the trials and tribulations of the artist at any given age may give rise to a change in the fabric of thought of the society.

BEAUTY

According to Margaret Stetz, in the modern transatlantic world of art, artists were echoing the late-Victorian resolve to “make it strange”. In her work, *The Afterlives of Aestheticism and Decadence in the Twenty First Century*, she mentions how Aestheticism and decadence have proven themselves more than merely resilient movements.¹¹ Although they have the tendency towards the nostalgic and escapist impulses of the modern masses, it has opened the field of literature to consideration of serious scholarship in viewing literary fiction from the philosophical lens of Aestheticism. Wilde, of course has centred his very novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* on the relationship between beauty and morality, amorality and immortality, which makes his work a significantly more important study considering the contemporary social milieu of identities portrayed by the screening of “filtered” self-portraits via technological inventions of modernity, replacing an external artist’s representation to a self-appraisal of one’s own “beauty”. While Aschenbach’s beauty is the Greek ideal which incites the artistic imagination to create the work that is veiled in the guise of the intellectual imagination, Hallward’s beauty is raw and presented as is on the canvas that makes no illusion of the artists’ desires. The dichotomy of representation of beauty here, considers the power of the influence of the artist to make it an objective reproduction or subjective idolatry. The object of adoration in the case of *Death in Venice* is fervently pursued through the streets and canals of Venice with copious glances at the “lover” to further the frenzy of obsession. Aschenbach’s approach to the relationship with Tadzio undergoes an ambiguous treatment. Where he begins as naturally enough with literary allusion with mythological rationales of Socrates and Phaedrus, Narcissus, and Eros, he tries to poetise his feelings for the boy.¹² But as “the page and half of choicest prose” is acquired after a pursuing the boy with abandon, the Platonised structure breaks down to the physical and the erotic. The doom of the artist is

unveiled from the cloud of aesthetic appeal much like the deadly sirocco that surrounds the city of Venice to its fatal consequence.

Hallward's tragedy as an artist is the failure to temper the conscience against the strength of hedonistic instinct and vice versa in dealing with his violent aesthetic and erotic emotions towards the subject of his portrait. The artistic ideal that was supposed to be presented by the beauty of Dorian Gray had been corrupted with the layer of sensual hedonism, which in turn had destroyed the potential ideal to the very basic of human emotions. Dorian's beauty in itself had been used to blind him into a vanity by the hedonistic impulses of Lord Henry and Basil with their slavish worship of his physical charms. And once he ventured forth to the path of narcissistic vanity, Wilde presented the idea that it was beyond the grasp of the sinner to seek redemption by destroying what he conceived, and what was only, the external commodity of their ruin – in Dorian's scenario, the painting.

VICTORIAN MORALITY AND HEDONISM: A DISCORD

By favouring a hetero-normative and patriarchal status quo, late-Victorian law transcribed the banning of any sexual misconduct, punishing the practitioners of any deviation from normative policies of the contemporary society. The opinions of the public as to accepted norms and standards that would dominate the sexuality and the sensuality of the masses, curbed the latent phenomenon, which till then did not even have a term except as a socially deviant hedonistic activity. Wilde's Dorian Gray continually explores the temptations and dangers of sin amongst the "sordid shame" of London. The narrator describes "the dim roar of London was like the bourbon note of a distant organ."¹³ The very breeding ground of sin and the underbelly of criminality in the working-class locale of the East End as associated

with the den for brawling foreign sailors and acts of condemnation. Dorian inspires a fascination in other men, which is a nod to how the novel explores a deviation from the heteronormative. This is seen in “that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide” and Alan Campbell, who spends “two or three minutes of terrible silence” when reading and reflecting upon Dorian’s letter threatening to blackmail him, to reveal to society and the world some obscure sin he had committed in the past and probably in the very company of Dorian.¹⁴ Basil, himself, describes the infatuated fascination of Dorian as “if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself.” Considering the claim for not exhibiting his painting of Dorian as it would “show in it the secret of my soul”, an obvious conclusion can be drawn as to the erotic tendency of emotion of the artist for his sitter.

Aschenbach, on the other hand, who began his pursuit of the beauty of boy in a Platonic ideal, has his downfall etched in the obsession that he cannot discard. The seaside encounter with the lean boy with girlish elegance, genuine sailor suits, pretty fair head with its curls are reminiscent of the Phaedrus mythology where the older artist is enamoured by the younger boy. Youth and vitality are the key to this fascination, yet when the artist crosses the threshold of aesthetic pursuit to the realm of the physical and erotic observance of beauty, the doom of the sinner is as that of the Victorian persecution of the species of alternate desires. Tadzio lies in their personification of an aesthetic ideal. He is the antique beauty restored to life the shores of Venice. Beauty, however, whether of Christian or pagan complexion, is in league with the Devil as the enemy of life, and its fascination is fatal.¹⁵

It might be a disguised expression of the artist’s hidden nature that gives a perspective to the character: an image taken from Botticelli’s painting of St. Sebastian (“an intellectual and

virginal manliness, which clinches its teeth and stands in modest defiance of the swords and spears that pierce its side”) that could either indicate a sublimated masochism or give rise to a new prototype of suffering.¹⁶ Coincidentally, Wilde in exile took the assumed name of ‘Sebastian Melmoth’, invoking the martyrdom of the icon and the eponymous protagonist of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, a gothic novel by Charles Maturin, Wilde’s great-uncle.

THE FALL: A CONCLUSION

The consequence of the pursuit of decadence or aesthetic beauty to its extremity has been characterised by both Wilde and Mann, as death. The ultimate punishment of the eradication of the self is the damnation of their identities, very reminiscent of martyrs of social persecution such as Wilde himself, who lost his artistic fame and was reduced to a criminal offender by Victorian moral standards. Dorian Gray loses the legendary status of notoriety in the grey phenomenon of a city that is swarming in decadence underneath the guise of respected society. However, in *Death in Venice*, Mann leaves the fate of Aschenbach the most ambiguous to judgement with the ending of his novella, where it is stated the renowned author will be found on the shores, but without any indication to the reveal of the sinful pursuit that had led to his demise even with the knowledge of prevailing doom. Mann creates the most out of death in his story, where Aschenbach is repeatedly haunted by the summon of death in the guise of the strange man in the graveyard, who makes him long for travel and considering how fate had taken him to the very shores of his demise, it could not be overlooked as nothing but a reaper figure. Similarly, as the elderly artist lies on the beach, just before his death he perceives the far off figure of Tadzio – “it seemed to him the pale and lovely Summoner out there smiled at him and beckoned; as though, with the hand lifted from his hip, he pointed outward as he hovered on before into an immensity of richest

expectation.”¹⁷ As ambiguous as the message of the traveller in the graveyard made by Mann, there is no doubt that the “pale and lovely Summoner” beckons him to death.

Like the downfall of the artists’ in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Death in Venice*, the authors of these works had a similar being of existence, in one case persecution. Mann never divulged any feelings of desire, yet the incitement of injecting real experiences in Venice which he recorded in his letters as his own, probes an essential speculation of whether or not the desires were real, but more so the implications of revealing them in society which would lead to persecution of the gravest order. In the case of Wilde, the work that would be the basis of his persecution is that which would subjugate him to the Victorian ideals of morality. He remarked that the novel “contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry, what the world thinks me: Dorian, what I would like to be – in other ages perhaps.”¹⁸ Wilde’s comments suggest that the novel is a work of art that embodies his own “secret”; and in other ages this turns out to be gross indecency which was forced upon individuals and whose martyrdom for their natural desires, would be the cornerstone to a movement of breaking down those very moral constraints of society.

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On the Author -

Madhura got into literature at a young age trying to imitate her elder brother pouring over the Harry Potter series. Initiated with Agatha Christie and Ruskin Bond novels, she went on to devour any literary material she could get her hands on. So it was only natural that she'd complete her Honours degree in English Literature and then pursue the madness that is the masters programme. She has the unrealistic ambition of watching all films worth watching, and keeps an alphabetical excel chart to that measure of all that she has seen. Writing in a journal evolved into writing stories that she wishes she could read in the modern canons of literature – when the world is going crazy, she'd rather people revert to their initial simplicity and genuine emotions. Her new passion is in-house gardening, learning the names of house plants and tending to them gives her a sense of peace and tranquility that phone screens seem to be stripping us off.

PROFUNDITY UNDER THE VEIL OF SIMPLICITY IN GERALD DURRELL'S***MY FAMILY AND OTHER ANIMALS*****- Jhilik Roy**

Abstract: Human beings are so grossly engaged in achieving the paramount development in all spheres that they are going against the natural world. The more the human civilization progresses, the more it comes into conflict with nature. My focus is to expose the protagonist's nature-centric perspective rather than a human-centred mindset, and the novel's approach to environmental issues that engage the reader's attention. The theoretical foundation of the article is ecocriticism which is concerned with literary representations of the relationship between the human and non-human. My article is on the profound implicit message of Gerald Durrell's' apparently simple novel *My Family and Other Animals* which shows how important it is to coexist with nature and natural fauna. The objective of my disquisition is to put forward why it is indispensable to maintain a balance with the mother earth that sustains us and how devastating the consequences can be if we breach the natural law.

My Family and Other Animals is a novel by Gerald Durrell published in 1956. It is the most well-known of Durrell's Corfu trilogy, together with *Birds, Beasts and Relatives* and *The Garden of the Gods*. It is regarded as an autobiographical work as it depicts the five years that Durrell spent in his childhood on the Grecian island of Corfu with his siblings and widowed mother, from 1935 to 1939. Though it is presented as autobiographical, the events described here are a blend of fiction and truth. In the novel it is shown that the eldest brother Larry lives with the Durrell family at Corfu, when in reality, he lived in another part of Corfu with his first wife Nancy Durrell whom Gerald does not mention at all. Again, the original reason for the Durrells' departure from Corfu, that is World War II, is not mentioned. Instead it is simplified by saying that the family returns to England for the sake of Gerald's education. Therefore, it would be better to call the novel semi-autobiographical. It is to be noted that by concealing such details, Durrell consciously aims for his novel to be a simple one, so that the area of his focus, which is the natural bounty of Corfu along with its eccentricities, comes to the forefront. Besides describing the life of Durrell family in a humorous manner, this novel encompasses natural flora and fauna along with love and reverence for the natural world; thus, it can be compared to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* in the treatment of the deep respect for nature. *My Family and Other Animals* is a subject of ecocriticism which includes the studies related to the environment and its relationship with literature. Ecocriticism is concerned with environment and literature from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, where texts that illustrate environmental concerns are analysed, and the various ways in which literature treats the subject of nature is examined. Gerry is both the narrator and a character in the novel. When he visits Corfu, he is only ten years old and sees the surroundings through a childish lens. When they arrive at Corfu, Gerry describes the island with various colour images: "sky turned the smooth enamelled blue of a jay's eye" and "the mountains as though sleeping beneath a crumpled blanket of brown".¹ Upon arrival, his very first description of

nature reveals that he is more interested in natural beauty than in human actions. This novel is about Gerry's explorations as a naturalist. His primary interests lie in botany, biology, and zoology. He spends most of his time minutely observing the animal life in his gardens as well as throughout the island. Though he has a negative view of education, he finds an interest in studies when a zoological flair is inserted to his lessons. Durrell gives great effort in detailing the narration of his discoveries for the readers. Culture is a major theme in this novel. Culture is a product of social behaviour and certain norms that have been established in human societies. As culture differs from place to place, the Grecian culture is different from that of England. The incident centring the lavatory box, though depicted in a humorous manner, throws light on the differences in lifestyles. What is logical to the Greeks seems to be quite absurd to the Durrells. To mother's demand of a villa with washroom, Mr. Beeler, the hotel guide, asks "Have you not got the sea?"² This remark amuses modern people but helps to understand that people of this island are culturally connected to the natural world. The fact that language is an effective way of assimilating two cultures is revealed when Spiro bridges the gap between the Durrells and the taxi drivers simply by speaking English, though the English he has learnt while spending eight years in Chicago is improper. The cultural difference becomes extremely prominent when we explore the colonial perspective in this book. The Durrells have migrated to a new place where they will have to adjust themselves and even though they do not have money, people of the new place regard them as "lords". The Durrells, coming from England, which is an imperialist country, makes the Corfu residents impose a status of colonial dignity upon the family, calling them the lords of this island. The old shepherd Yani calls Gerry "little English lord"³, and this perspective of colonialism is further highlighted from a comment of Gerry: "The fact that I was English was sufficient for the islanders had a love and respect for the Englishman out of all proportion to his worth. They would trust an Englishman where they would not trust each other".⁴

Anthropocentrism is a historically positioned ideology which works within the circuits of colonialism. On the other hand, ecocriticism is nature-centric and is concerned with animal rights and environmental conservation, laying emphasis on natural purity.

Gerry treats Corfu as a playground where he can conduct his observations on plants, animals and insects. The novel depicts the natural world as an inescapable part of life and suggests that coexisting with the natural world means that one must not try to tame it, and instead, accept it as it is. After discovering an earwig's nest, Gerry checks the mother earwig hourly and writes a notice warning everyone not to disturb her. It is noteworthy that the two correctly spelt words in the notice are biological ones: "BEWAR - EARWIG NEST - QUIAT PLESE."⁵ Weeks later, he forgives an adolescent earwig for not recognizing him. The fact that Gerry anthropomorphizes even the tiny earwigs signifies that he believes from the core of his heart that they are worthy of consideration. He even deals with dangerous creatures like poisonous scorpions with love, which shows that to Gerry they are not minacious provided they are properly handled and respected. But the scorpion incident denotes that he will have to learn a lot about animal husbandry because he keeps them in a match box and then forgets as a result of which Larry falls into trouble. The family must endure the consequences of his blunders as he adapts, because children learn from their mistakes. Humour has been used in the novel at different places. Readers feel amused to see Gerry trying to establish a friendly relation between Ulysses, the owlet and Roger, the dog. At first this does not work out but later when Ulysses treats Roger as a means of transport, the truth comes out that friendly relationship is also possible between two different species and the novel thus upholds that a symbiotic relation is extremely essential. Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism as "a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis".⁶ This novel thus becomes a study in ecocriticism as it deals with

interpretation of animal behaviour, especially of animal consciousness; and the centrality of animals in the habitats where they have evolved.

Though the narrator is not judgmental at all, through the artistry of his presentation the characteristics of the family members come to the foreground. His family, especially his mother, accepts the animals which he brings home and gives him a separate room for keeping his specimens, which Gerry calls his “study”. The mother is tolerant and is always concerned with fulfilling everyone's needs rather than satisfying her own desires. She is quite detached from the outer world and engages herself in cooking and gardening which are confined within the domestic walls. As she withdraws herself indoors, she tries to bring the tamed nature, that is, her garden, indoors with her. Contrarily, her youngest son Gerry loves not to tame nature but to embrace the wildness of nature in its own form.

The character Larry in *My Family and Other Animals* is obnoxious and patriarchal. He cannot tolerate animals and does not possess any kind of reverence for nature. His character is anthropocentric which means he is a believer of human beings as superior and at the centre. He is irritated even with the pet dog Roger. His insistence that the magenpies need to be locked up shows his desire to dominate the natural world instead of coexisting with it. Such an attitude is heavy with colonial implications as well, because Larry is convinced that he is the “lord” of his house. Later, he faces the consequences of his entitlement when the magenpies raid his room, showing him that they are more powerful. Leslie's hunting habits show how human beings exert control over nature and try to tame it. Such behaviour by Gerry's siblings show their self-centredness, and how they are eager only to satisfy their own needs without paying any heed to the natural world. It is due to this self-centeredness that modern people are also facing dangerous consequences. In this connection, the reference to

the incident of the Amazon rainforest fire can be brought to notice. Though it seemed to be a natural calamity, scientists expressed the view that the farmers were deliberately starting the blazes to transform some parts of the forest into clear land for crops and livestock, due to which the disaster took place. This is a pivotal indication that if nature is not respected and handled properly with caution, people have to face the grim consequences.

However, one part of the novel strikes us, when we see that during the fight of Geronimo and Cicely, and how Gerry does not separate them and observes how the food chain works. This suggests that he understands that he cannot completely control what happens in nature. Here, some may say that Gerry seems to be somewhat anthropocentric because a true animal lover should try to stop the fight instead of watching the death of the mantis full of eggs. Moreover, he accepts Belgian consul's viewpoint that death can be humane when an animal is suffering and thinks that his tutor is doing a right job by killing the diseased cats. We feel surprised to see how an animal lover like Gerry can conform to his tutor's philosophy which incorporates the idea of killing instead of providing proper sustenance to the helpless animals. Here arises the complexity of the issue, because death may bring apparent relief from suffering, but the destruction of life cannot be a permanent solution. According to *The Bible* human beings are made in the image of God and so, I think, it is our responsibility to conserve the natural world instead of annihilating God's creation.

Domestication incorporates a precursory idea of domination which little Gerry is not ready to bear with. As Gerry's collection of animal species becomes more exotic, he happily struggles to construct enclosures for them that mimic the animals' natural habitats instead of the conventional process of domestication. The deep connection he has with all animals, especially his pet dog Roger, is one he does not even feel for his siblings. Gerry is

affectionate to such creatures which common people think to be threatening as well as abominable. He takes care of the snakes when they get exhausted in the scorching heat of the sun and keeps them in a cold water tub where they again rejuvenate. This reminds us of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* where the Mariner is redeemed only when he becomes able to bless the water snakes. Coleridge points out that all creatures, big or small, however ugly, must be loved as we all are the manifestation of the same Almighty:

“He prayeth best, who loveth best
 All things both great and small;
 For the dear God who loveth us,
 He made and loveth all”.⁷

From exploring the doctrines of various religions, it becomes conspicuous that all animals should be given space, and it is their natural right to exist on this mother earth. Buddhism preaches the idea of non-violence and the message of ‘live and let live’. Buddhist thought believes that animals are sentient beings. According to Mahayana school, animals possess Buddha's nature and therefore contain the potential to attain enlightenment. In addition to this, the doctrine of rebirth propounds that any human being can be reborn as an animal, and any animal can be reborn as a human. In Hinduism, for example, Chapter 10 of *The Bhagavad Gita* shows ‘The Opulence of the Absolute’, where Lord Krishna manifests His divine energies by saying: “Of horses I am Uchchaisrvas”; “Of cows I am Kamaduk”; “Of elephants I am Airavata”; “Of serpents I am Vasuki”; “Of birds I am Garuda”; “Of animals I am Lion”; “Of water animals I am Makara”.⁸ Krishna proclaims that He is the seed-giving father of all living entities. *The Bhagavad Gita* explains the origin of creation. God says in this holy book: “All living entities are my part and parcels”.⁹ A biological father gives the seed into the womb of a mother, and the seed grows into a particular type of body. In the

same way, God impregnates the material nature and we take birth with material bodies of different forms. However, we are so ignorant that we are unable to understand this supreme truth, and due to this ignorance, we fight with each other, we discriminate ourselves on the basis of wealth, status, caste, creed, religion, sect, and nationality, and we consider animals to be our subordinates. This universal truth is conspicuous in the discussed novel as the message of this book is to co-exist with the natural world instead of looking down upon the animals, and to let the animal kingdom flourish.

Not only in religion, but also in the domain of science, the revered British naturalist and scientist Charles Darwin, closed the fissure between humans and animals by propounding the theory of natural selection which states that human beings are animals as they evolved from them. Therefore, if human beings have rights, other animals should have the same. Both theology and science are against the notion of human beings being superior to animals. In the novel in discussion, the law of Corfu prioritizes the preservation of natural flora and fauna unlike the English law which gives importance mainly on preserving human relations. This is evident in chapter 2 of the novel when the Customs official undertakes the duty of inspecting one trunk and Spiro bangs the lid on the man's finger, reminding him of the grave crime of causing harm to a fish, for which he had to pay twelve thousand drachmas as fine. For the offence of injuring a fish this person is called a criminal by Spiro who is revered as well as feared by everyone on the island- "I won't have any criminal talkings to me abouts dutys".¹⁰

In this Grecian island of Corfu, the punishment of harming an animal is more severe than that of murder because in chapter 17 we see that Kosti who convicted for killing his wife, is not stigmatized as a hardcore criminal, instead he is regarded as a "trustworthy" and "good prisoner", and is allowed to travel home during the weekend. Kosti himself admits, "Any like me, those they feel they can trust, are allowed to make boats and sail home for the weekend,

if it's not too far".¹¹ Thus the law of Corfu tries to build a social structure by giving more stress on preserving nature. In response to the question of what ecocriticism is or should be, Camilo Gomides has offered an operational definition: "The field of enquiry that analyses and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations".¹²

Gerry finds a kind of consolation from his intimacy with animals, and similarly Mrs. Kralfesky soothes herself by talking to her flowers. She anthropomorphizes a flower by calling it "him". It is undeniable that nature has its own power of healing, and animals also have an inner power to provide solace. This is exhibited abundantly in literature and films, for instance, in *The Jungle Book* by the renowned author Rudyard Kipling, most of the characters are animals and the principal character of boy or man-cub, Mowgli, is brought up in the jungle by wolves. In the 2008 American comedy-drama film *Marley and Me*, a married couple's life changes after adopting a puppy named Marley who, with his antics, teaches them and their children important life lessons. The 2020 American fantasy adventure film *Dolittle* reveals how Dr. John Dolittle gets his only companionship from an array of exotic animals with whom he speaks on a daily basis, and when Queen Victoria becomes seriously ill, the doctor and his flocculent friends set out on an adventure to a mythical island for finding the antidote. Compared to other political forms of criticism, there is little dispute about the philosophical and moral aims of ecocriticism. Its territory has enlarged considerably from romantic poetry, nature writing and canonical literature to theatre, film and television. Simultaneously, ecocriticism has adopted methodologies and theoretical approaches from other fields of literary, social and scientific study. In the discussed novel, after migration the Durrells gradually get accustomed to the new habitat and Corfu becomes a land of possibility for them. Their adjustment is reminiscent of the idea of the influential

cultural and post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha's Third Space, which refers to the liminal space between colliding cultures and which gives rise to something different and new.¹³ It becomes both a geographical and a mental space of security for the Durrells. This novel can be regarded as diaspora fiction as it deals with the issues of existential rootlessness. Here, Gerry relocates from the urban to the rural. In diasporic literature, writers talk about a desire to return to the origin. Often diasporic people have a *nostos* for *utopos* (nostalgia for utopia). However here, their place of settling becomes what Gerry considers home. At the end of the novel, the Durrells are returning from their sojourn, but Gerry is unwilling to return because Corfu becomes the home for Gerry.

During his childhood when Gerald Durrell visited Corfu, the islanders' humane qualities and love for nature made him feel so deeply attached to them that they left a lifelong impression on his mind, causing him to immortalise some of them in this autobiographical novel. One of these characters is Gerry's greatest friend on the island named Theodore, an esteemed scientist who treats Gerry as an adult who is serious and proficient in his craft. Others such as Yani, Agathi and the ever-fascinating Rose Beetle Man constitute noteworthy native presences that are rendered affectionately in the novel.

The fact that the Durrells brought with them many of Gerry's pets, including the exotic ones, back to England and the mother's annoyance at the Swiss official's writing "One travelling Circus and Staff"¹⁴ on a card under the column "Description of Passengers" show that the animals are undeniably a part of the family, although not of the rest of human society. The title of the novel implies that to the author his 'family' and the 'other animals' are at the same level. Durrell himself has famously said, "My childhood in Corfu shaped my life. If I had the craft of Merlin, I would give every child the gift of my childhood".¹⁵ These experiences

motivated him to later become a known British naturalist, conservationist and zookeeper. In this novel humour has been used as an instrument to attract a great number of readers. *My Family and Other Animals* was a great financial success and provided funding for his further expeditions with animals. Superficially, the novel seems to be a children's fiction but if we go in depth, it provides a profound message. It takes us back to our original roots, which is the back to nature, something lost but essential in today's modernized world full of endangered species, deforestation, pollution and global warming. In this paper, I have tried to explore the ecocritical perspective envisaged in the novel. Cheryll Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader* opines that just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies.¹⁶

The recent pandemic Covid-19 in 2020 has caused mass deaths throughout the world. Since social distancing is probably the only viable solution to come out of the lethal situation, lockdowns have been implemented in various countries. However, this situation is healing our mother earth. This has significantly altered our environment for the better. Due to less carbon emission, air pollution has reduced. Not only this but also the noise pollution has significantly decreased, making it possible for us to hear the chirping of birds and the rustle of leaves. Today homo-sapiens are caged, but animals and birds are free in the bosom of earth. They are getting their natural habitats back. The true fact is that during the last few centuries the world has become a capitalist one where people run after the tremendous advancement in technology and industry in order to quench their mountainous greed without paying attention to the environment, as if human beings are the only species of relevance in all the world. But this conception has been proved to be false, and perhaps through this

pandemic, nature is trying to claim her authority and bring a balance to biodiversity by making us realise what we have forcibly taken from other species. Thus, a tenuous connection can be established between the present scenario and the discussed novel. In the novel, the author's amicable relationship with the natural world urges the readers to save the planet and to live harmoniously with the natural kingdom. This novel brings to light the theory of ecocriticism that gives equal value to all living organisms and acts as a reaction to man's anthropocentric behaviour of dominating nature and brings together all these complex strands in the garb of simplistic writing. This novel is a different kind of bildungsroman which adults and children alike appreciate.

Notes

1. Gerald Durrell, "The Migration," in *My Family and Other Animals* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2016), 12.
2. Durrell, "The Unsuspected Isle," 21.
3. Durrell, "The Rose-beetle Man," 45.
4. Durrell, "The Rose-beetle Man," 50.
5. Durrell, "The Strawberry-pink Villa," 37.
6. "Ecocriticism," Wikipedia, accessed May 14, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecocriticism>.
7. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (text of 1834)," Poetry Foundation, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834>.
8. Santanam Swaminathan, "Animals in the Bhagavad Gita!," Speaking Tree, last modified July 9, 2015, <https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/animals-in-the-bhagavad-gita>.
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10. Durrell, "The Strawberry-pink Villa," 29.
11. Durrell, "The Chessboard Fields," 330.
12. "Ecocriticism," Wikipedia, accessed May 14, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecocriticism>.
13. "The Third Space: Cultural Identity Today," Amherst College, last modified June 8, 2020, <https://www.amherst.edu/museums/mead/exhibitions/2008/thirdspace>.
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On the Author -

Jhilik is a quiet girl from the second year of the M.A. department, who became extremely excited to get a job opportunity in the corporate sector just after completing her graduation. After genuinely engaging in the job, she felt claustrophobic due to the tight schedule, workload and duty. There, she had to behave as a trained professional but inwardly she used to miss her cheerful student-life. Within one year of the job she realized that literature was her field of interest and understood that

she could not live without the smell and pages of books. She feels blessed to be a part of Loreto, which has helped her in pursuing her interests again and going ahead with her dreams. She feels that sunshine has peeped into her life because now she is able to spend quality time reading the great authors of literature including her favourite Shakespeare.

**EXPLORING MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE* THROUGH
THE LENS OF IDENTITY AND ISOLATION**

- Radhika Mookerjee

Abstract: Toni Morrison has been a powerful voice and an emblem of hope for African-American women in terms of identification with themselves and with society at large. Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* published in 1970 brings to light the lives of four individuals – Pauline, Cholly, Sam and Pecola in a post-Depression setting in Ohio. In the novel, female lives are driven by the need to eke out their identities. Here, women often dwindled in their existence in isolation, deserted by the men and forced to be single-handedly responsible for the upbringing of their children. Pecola seeks the bluest eye akin to that of her school mate, as it represents an ideal beauty and a form of acceptance for her. Women in the novel belonging to different social roles unite in their search for identity in a social order that views them as “nothing”. The song of Mrs. MacTeer resonated the pain of the drudgeries of a poverty-stricken livelihood without the mention of love, echoing the toughness of each woman. In writing this paper, my aim is to highlight their search for identity, and the harsh depictions of both mental and physical torment. Pecola endures the psychological trauma of abuse at the hands of her father. However later, Pecola conforms to the codes of conventional beauty by merging herself with the ethereal “bluest eyes”, thus consummating the search for identity which in turn results in isolation.

In her foreword to *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison states, “the origin of the novel lay in a conversation I had with a childhood friend. We had just started elementary school. She said she wanted blue eyes.”¹ What was initiated as a conversation, shapes an intricate exploration of the undercurrents of racial discrimination. Thus, on a wider spectrum, Toni Morrison deals with the importance of identifying oneself with respect to society. In her Preface to the book, Morrison gives a trajectory to the journey through traumatic experiences, tolerance and how the characters traverse along the path;

“Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father’s baby that the marigolds did not grow. . . It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to spring from our seeds. What is clear now is that of all of that hope, fear, lust, love and grief, nothing remains but Pecola and the unyielding earth. . . The seeds shrivelled and died; her baby too. There is really nothing more to say – except why. But since *why* is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in *how*.”²

The author captivates readers through her skilful depiction of the trauma of young girls inflicted by members of a patriarchal society. Morrison strikes a chord with the reader’s heart in the way she brings out the essence of her narrative, in how the marigold could not bloom and the seeds did not spring: it was perhaps the loss of innocence and the search for the self which resulted in a tragic outcome. What follows is its explication. In her journal article, *Introducing Toni Morrison-Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, Jane Foress Bennett writes: “The rape of a child, placed as the touch of a bruised father who 'loved her enough to touch her...but his touch was fatal', at the heart of the novel, does something I have never seen elsewhere. The full horror of Pecola's violation is intricately linked to the subtle and creeping violence of racism. Nothing is compromised - the novel's passion and metaphysical reach blow wide open the silences and cowardice that make stories of girls' rape

look different from stories of being black under the gaze of whiteness.”³ The concept of idealized beauty imposes undercurrents of racism that run swiftly throughout the narrative. The lethal fusion of racial discrimination, the vulnerability of the girls under the male gaze and a search for the ‘self’ combine to create elements of horror in the text.

The onset of the novel introduces readers to the poverty-stricken childhood of the two girls – Claudia and Freida. Their house- cold, old and green, they return home amidst the desolate “space with dying firelights”. The first call for an isolation from community occurs when the sisters are said to be at fault. Despite their sickness, they are merely glanced at for their weakness. The narrator comments; “our illness is treated with contempt.”⁴ The language and narrative mode employed by Morrison brings to surface the utter despair and need for love. When the child narrator is taken ill and has been cornered in the house, her sister sings- “When the deep purple falls over sleepy garden walls, someone thinks of me...”⁵ There is a longing for love and tenderness in the lines above. The harshness of her mother’s treatment towards Claudia is pointed out poignantly, later in the novel.

The arrival of Pecola into the narrator’s family introduces the primary plot. The construction of her identity and her association of beauty with that of blue eyes is idealized as the perfect form any woman can achieve. Ironically, Pecola has been described by Claudia’s mother as a “case” that has no place to go to. Blending with the concept of identity is that of isolation- the “outdoors” is a term that defines communal isolation. “Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life.”⁶ A condition where an individual shifting from the norms of daily life was isolated, much like a social separation for an offence.

Beauty and Identity have been bound together in Morrison’s novel, where Shirley Temple

represents the epitome of the pristine figure with her curly golden locks, rosy cheeks and the ocean blue eyes. Shirley Temple becomes the idol of beauty for Frieda and Pecola, but for Claudia she voices a hatred for racially biased standards of beauty, raising the first cries of rebellion in the novel. For her Christmas present, it is a preconceived notion that she wishes to own a blue-eyed doll. Claudia becomes the author's mouthpiece in delivering the idea of a structured "white" beauty and an identity which is foreign to African-American culture.

Claudia says, "The dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls."⁷ Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* writes: "The contemporary ravages of the beauty backlash are destroying women physically and depleting us psychologically. If we are to free ourselves from the dead weight that has once again been made out of femaleness, it is not ballots or lobbyists or placards that women will need first; it is a new way to see."⁸ Wolf's comment is supportive of the comparison between Claudia and Pecola in their understanding of Beauty. While Claudia destroys the blue-eyed doll, Pecola internalizes this conventional ideal of beauty which colonizes her, thus falling into the loop of a psychologically tumultuous existence.

When Claudia destroys the doll- trying to understand the distinction between a white girl and a coloured one, she dismantles the doll to look into a metallic framework. Thus, she breaks to the readers the falsity of such a notion as a "blue-eyed beauty" and de-constructs the shadows of distinction embedded in identity. At the end of the chapter 'Autumn' Pecola has reached puberty, she menstruates, this being the first sign of womanhood in her. She feels a distance among the three girls when she asks about getting someone to love her, "how do you do that?"⁹ Readers are drawn back to Mrs. MacTeer's song in the same chapter, which resonates with the African-American musical genre, the blues, which transforms pain and lamentation into lyrics as an only way of vocalizing agony. She sings of the hard times mentioning that the absence of a man's love though painful is endurable; she says, "pain was not only

endurable, it was sweet”¹⁰. Herein lies the irony of the women in the novel. The end of autumn echoes the barrenness of the lives of the women. As nature sheds and prepares for winter, women in the novel are united by an intense desire to be loved to overcome an empty existence.

Parallels can be found in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* which delves into the lives of Afghan women, while portraying his central characters in search of identity and love in a blazing war zone, dominated by the male members of society. “There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me need in life, and they don’t teach it in school. Only one skill. And it’s this: tahamul. Endure.”¹¹ The pain and misery of Mariam and Leila in a country that is torn by war as well as by the impositions of strict codes by which women must abide are relatable to the lives of the women in the novel who are also compelled to act in accordance with the established societal norms. One of the striking points is where Pecola is seen praying at night for the blue eyes that would possibly not isolate her from her teachers or classmates, eyes that would not lead to a struggle of covering up behind a veil of silence and shame, for Pecola believed that her ugliness was the cause for her misery. The constant imposition of white standards of beauty through the blue eyes of Shirley Temple reveals a lasting colonial impression in her psyche. The distinction between the white and the black is rather acute in this context.

In an essay published in *The Guardian* Morrison states, “I wanted my imagination as unencumbered as possible and as responsible as possible. True to the content of the novel, her imagination and unapologetic language has portrayed every detail of the unimaginable tyranny at which the females were exposed, taking the story to a higher plane.”¹² The process of self-identification and breaking barriers of stereotypes is indeed an in-depth analysis that

Morrison's work provides when scrutinized. Claudia is the character who has broken all the culture-specific boundaries. Even as the novel makes progress, readers are able to make a contrast between her and Pecola. Toni Morrison's inclusion of seasonal changes gives a natural mode of growth and decay to the lives of characters present. When Winter sets in, the arrival of Maureen Peal becomes a new ideal of beauty for the girls. Though earlier her beauty raised fears of isolation, the girls acknowledge that she isn't their enemy but "The thing to fear was the thing that made her beautiful..."¹³, making a hint at the structure of beauty that is constructed by the male gaze that preys upon the young girls. Maureen is the yellow-dream child who calls herself cute, calling Claudia "black". Children do not differentiate among their peer group based on colour, but here Morrison points out the deep-rooted conditioning that is at work, leading to streaks of enmity among Maureen, Pecola, Claudia and Frieda. Continuing along these lines, the incident of Geraldine's cat being killed by her own son Junior while the entire blame is put on Pecola who was merely a visitor who pleads the notorious child to stop causing harm to the cat, Junior screams out "you can't get out, you're my prisoner."¹⁴

Using words like "prisoner" and imposing a connotation of barbarity upon a child is a haunting depiction of the ways in which social influence worked upon the child. Guarded on all sides by a stereotypical framework of beauty, female characters often lose themselves in a loop of psychological turmoil. Wright in *Native Son* and Ellison in *Invisible Man*, present this with the hero's conception of self and of his place in society. The narrator in *Invisible Man* notices a sign in a shop-window in Harlem: "You too can be truly beautiful. Win greater happiness with whiter complexion. Be outstanding in your social set."¹⁵ The narrator feels a savage urge to push his fist through the pane, but does not apply the admonition to himself. Male or female, there is an intention to focus on the search for identity and the need to feel

desired and loved in community life.

A constant usage of the term “eyes” gives a necessity on Pecola’s part to attain an identity moulded on white standards of beauty. As she holds her dress against the wind, the author gives voice to the snowflakes falling and dying on the ground. The imagery has a dirge-like solemnity. Is it also the dying out of Pecola’s wish for identification and acceptance? Disintegrating family bonds and a sense of loneliness, propels her closer to the dark abyss where the need for the blue eyes become more significant than ever. The chapter entitled ‘Spring’ dominates the greater part of the book. It deals with multiple incidents, reflecting on self-identification and isolation through lives of the different female characters. Expressions and symbols have been carefully employed in the text to reveal a psychological understanding of the characters. This particular chapter is a reminder of Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*,¹⁶ which reveals the familial trauma embedded within Angelou’s upbringing. Like caged birds yearning for freedom through their songs, Morrison’s characters in this novel are those women who could take flight, but their wings have been pinned down by their surroundings. In an endearing account of the life of Pauline, we find the cause of her toughened demeanour. Pauline’s figure is carved out of one who sees isolation and seeks identification at an early age: “her general feeling of separateness or unworthiness she blamed on her foot.” A cocooned existence made her retreat to herself and arrange things, the process of the arrangement probably being an attempt to gather her innermost pieces all to herself, waiting to be accepted by “love”. Pauline’s soul filled with the songs of fantasies, her dreams had been shaped by a woman in the choir, Ivy – who “sang the dark sweetness that Pauline could not name”, hereby restoring to our senses the character of Celia from Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*¹⁷, where Shug Avery gives her some hope of breaking through her oppressive life. After the initial peaceful days of married life, distancing

between the couple begins and Pauline's sense of loneliness is looming. Juggling odd jobs and harbouring a disturbing, abusive relationship with her husband, pregnancy gives her the endurance to nurture her girl child with utmost care. After joining a church, lending her services and becoming a member of the Ladies Circle, Pauline is the representation of the pillar of strength for her children, and a woman who fights daily odds and is fiercely independent despite all struggles, "holding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns, and her children like a cross."¹⁸

Cholly Breedlove is the male-figure that depicts the brutality of patriarchy in the novel- "Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him."¹⁹ Isolation had grappled Cholly since birth. He had never been loved or given tender care, neither was he protected from the vicious surroundings which led him to become the dominating male whose actions were based not on sensitivity but only on his primal impulses. For the satisfaction of his own sexual desires; he destroys the lives of Pauline and Pecola. His character has similarities with that of Pap in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Pap, the father figure for Celia impregnates her forcefully and later gives her away for marriage – as though her body and her life were a commodity meant for his purpose and transaction. Both Walker and Morrison have depicted the brutality of patriarchy and the lustful gaze of the father figure towards their daughters. Pecola's childhood molestation and the baby that she carries in her womb, become the reason for her isolation from society at large. Her yet to be born child appears to have given her a different identity; not one of the beautiful 'blue-eyed' women, but of one where her own mother does not support her. Everyone wants Pecola's baby dead before it is born, in a world of universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temple cups, and Maureen Peals. Pecola, left alone, invents the friend

who comes to play with her, causing the utterance of “LOOKLOOKHERECOMESAFRIENDTHEFRIENDWILLPLAYWITHJANETHEYWILL PLAYAGOODGAMEPLAYJANEPLAY”. The figure of Jane is completely a figment of Pecola’s imagination in times of her loneliness. It is the first sign of her loss of identifying herself in society before her final separation from the community. In Bloom's Guides to Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Lisa Williams in the *Artist as Storyteller and Survivor* writes, “Pecola Breedlove [is] invisible to those around [her], and as a result, live[s] outside of language. . . [She] can only retreat into a world of [her] own creation where [she] can find form for [her] muted anger.”²⁰ A comment by Bell Hooks further explores the pathetic psychological condition of Pecola: “Madness, not just physical abuse, was the punishment for too much talk if you were female.”²¹ Insanity shrouds Pecola into a lonely existence debarred from contact with her own community. Spring Comes to an end with Pecola’s wish to attain the “bluest eye”, for which she goes to church. Summer blooms and so does Pecola’s view of self as having “the perfect blue eyes...”. It is the lack of hope, and seclusion that pulls her to the fringes of losing her sanity. She cannot decipher that others do not view her as the epitome of beauty. The seeds planted by Claudia and Frieda are left in the soil, never touching the blue skies, isolated in darkness forever.

“So it was. A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfilment.”²² As people averted their gaze from Pecola, her only friends from childhood, Claudia and Frieda, are compelled to leave her, never to return. The lack of growth of the flowers and their association with the unborn child is tragic. Such a sense remains with the readers long after the years like a “folded handkerchief” have turned and unfolded. To deal with a sensitive issue like Pecola’s, the author ties together childhood, innocence and friendship between the young girls in the

novel. What centres her despair at the end is much in the separation from the friends who had never uttered anything ill about her based on her appearance. As centres of education and expansive learning, schools failed to put an end to discriminations based on racial differences, thus becoming institutions aiding the implementation of prejudices upon coloured individuals. In writing the essay Morrison vouches for the need to represent an Africanist persona in order to understand the presence of 'whiteness' to a great extent. In her essay *Black Matters*, Morrison says: "What became transparent were the self-evident ways Americans chose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanistic presence."²³

In my paper I have attempted to show how identity and isolation – the two 'I's run as deep-structures in close proximity throughout the novel. Pecola's tragic life course shadowed by the death of her child and her isolation from society resonates Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'urbervilles*; where Tess's world is turned upside down as Destiny drags her to her pitiful death. "...the President of the Immortals (an Æschylan phrase) had ended his sport with Tess."²⁴ Although Pecola lives, hers is an existence where like a bird unable to take flight, she is caged up, mentally and socially. Blue then becomes symbolic of her failed recognition of identity. It becomes a reminder to her – of the self which is probably a mature individual, but the scars of the past lead to a total disintegration of her self-identity; bereft of love, she steps into darkness.

"We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made her think we had a sense of humour. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used - to silence our own nightmares. And she

let us, and thereby deserved our contempt.”²⁵

Therefore, I have studied Pecola’s need for constructing her own identity and how she falls prey to the social order and stereotypical mindset of her own community, thereby failing to attain the beauty she craves. Her strong desire for blue eyes is a construct of the colonised identity which shatters her individuality. Pecola resorts to an imaginary world with her belief that she has blue eyes now. Somewhere amidst losing herself, Morrison gives her lead a uniqueness. The image of hostile marigolds and the child are inter-connected. They give a sense of the dreary existence of Pecola who is a mere shadow. Her presence does not matter, and her absence would be ignored. Taking a look into the mirror of the bluest eye, the blue colour is connotative of white supremacist influence. Pecola’s life is submerged completely into the abyss of madness and lack of love. Morrison’s exploration of her characters through the lens of identity lends out a strong undertone of the loss of innocence, of self and the ways in which the past claws into the present, making existence a living curse. The genius of language and inimitable suppleness of narrative gives us a wider picture of the cultural issues through the eyes of a writer with ample knowledge of the harsh and chilling realities of her own community. Summer’s blazing sun takes away from Pecola not only her child, but her own childhood, which has been lost in the tribulations of past and present. Therefore, in Morrison’s novel we find the downward spiralling of Pecola’s life in search for beauty and identity, leading to her complete isolation from society.

Notes

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On the Author -

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**ICEBERG OF INNOCENCE: FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS IN GOLDING'S
LORD OF THE FLIES WITH CHARACTERS AS A COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUS**

- Raka Mukherjee

Abstract: William Golding's celebrated novel *Lord of The Flies* (1954) traces the psychological exacerbation of prepubescent boys, belonging to the age range of six and twelve. These young boys are isolated after a plane crash in an uninhabited island, away from adult supervision. The combined characteristics exhibited by each character-Ralph, Piggy, Jack, Simon and the Littluns come together to form a cohesive psyche of the adult British colonizer. This paper attempts to trace the psychological metamorphosis and gradual degeneration that occurs inside each character, under the light of the Freudian Iceberg metaphor, "The mind is like an iceberg; it floats with one-seventh of his bulk above the water."¹

This paper claims that each character of the novel corresponds to a specific part of the Freudian iceberg. Piggy represents the superego, Ralph the ego and Jack the id. Simon stands out as the ego ideal and the Littluns as the unconscious that encompasses suppressed fear and anxiety. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to extensively explore the psychological trajectory of the characters and place it alongside the Freudian iceberg.

“The ego is not the master in his own house”– Sigmund Freud, in *A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis* (1917).

The adult human psyche is balanced by multifaceted elements that control one’s actions and consequences. William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* explores the workings of the psyche in young boys who are isolated in freedom and entrapment on an island as a result of a plane crash during the Second World War. Under the light of the above quote, this paper will illuminate the deep delving allegories that the ingenuity of Golding’s pen has gifted to mankind. In order to explore this idea extensively there should be first a brief discussion on this scientific contribution of Sigmund Freud and his theory of Psychoanalysis. This will further illustrate the personality and roles assigned to each character, and sketch their importance in the novel. Sigmund Freud was a Viennese physician and the founder of Psychoanalysis. He suggested that human behaviour is determined by the unconscious mind, a repository of repressed impulses and desires, of which the waking mind is completely unaware, but determines the way we think, feel and act. According to Freud, all human behaviour is motivated by the desire to feel pleasure. The motivation is organized and directed primarily by two instincts: Eros (sexuality) and Thanatos (aggression). Freud conceptualized both these instincts as being powered by a form of internal psychic energy that he called the Libido (the Pleasure Principle). In his explanation of the interactions between various parts of the human psyche, Freud introduced a number of overlapping theories. These encompass the libido movements through id, ego and superego, or the dynamic section of the psyche which are further structured into three sections. These layers: the conscious, preconscious and the unconscious, form the Topographic section of the psyche.

Our Psyche according to Freud resembles an iceberg, with the area of primitive drives, the id,

lying hidden in the unconscious. The ego deals with the conscious thoughts and regulates both the id and the superego, the latter being the component of personality composed of the internalized ideals that we have acquired from our parents and society. Of these psychic structures the id (literally the “it”) is the source of libido and the only structure present and developed right at birth. The id is associated primarily with thinking in visual and irrational terms, which is called primary process thinking. After the birth a part of the id differentiates into the ego (meaning “I” in Latin), whose function is to translate the id's internal wishes by contact with actual objects. This is called secondary process thinking. Despite the ego being the “I”, a part of it exists in the unconscious. The last structure to develop is the superego (in German Uber-Ich, or literally, the “Over I”), which is the result of the resolution of the oedipal complex, and the internal representation of parental and social values. It is a sort of internalised parent composed of reactions formed to unconscious sexual wishes. Obeying this inner voice results in secondary narcissism of pride, an expectation of being loved by a parent figure, and disobedience to which creates guilt. It is divided into two parts – the conscience, which represents the internalised taboos, and the ego ideal, which contains the internalised aims and goals. Similar to the ego, the superego operates partly in the conscious part of the mind and partly in the unconscious id. Of the three levels of the iceberg, the Conscious represents awareness, while the Preconscious is those thoughts which although not conscious at the moment can be made conscious voluntarily. The Unconscious is that part of the psyche which is repressed and therefore not part of one's awareness. The contents of the unconscious are heavily influenced by childhood experiences.²



The diagram above is a pictorial representation of the positions of the characters of Ralph, Piggy, Jack, Simon, Roger and the Littluns on the iceberg of the human psyche. Taking the deserted island as a collective consciousness of the colonial British man, each character could be categorized distinctly by that specific section which overpowers their individual prepubescent psyche, controlling their actions and contributions to the Darwinian maxim of the “survival of the fittest” on the island.

Sigmund Freud observed in his seminal work *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

“Children are completely egoistic; they feel their needs intensely and strive ruthlessly to satisfy them.”³ This quote emits the true essence of the Freudian tripartite structure that manifests itself into the vivid and defined personality traits of the characters in *Lord of The Flies*. As the marooned boys gradually descend into utter savagery, the readers get to observe how quickly one’s superego and ego can dissolve into the bestial id and border on the unconsciousness. There is considerable exemplification and representation of the Freudian tripartite in the novel, as it is clearly noticeable that each segment of the iceberg is personified by each character. Piggy represents the superego, Ralph, the ego and finally Jack,

the feral id. The character of Simon is Christ-like and allegorically represented to be the ego ideal. Similarly, the Littluns share the unconscious instincts of the cohesive band of the young boys. It can be explored in detail with textual references once an attempt is made to draw the trajectory of each character's psychological journey through the course of the novel. Right at the beginning of the novel, Piggy is portrayed as the discoverer of the conch shell which is the first sign of civilization. The idea of a clarion call to gather all the abandoned boys on the island together marks the beginning of the need to establish order among chaos - "We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting. They'll come when they hear us."⁴ Piggy, just like all the other deserted boys, falls under the age group of six to twelve. Therefore, his individual superego is the manifestation of imitating the ideal adult or his aunt, ("My auntie wouldn't let me blow on account of my asthma"⁵) and following the restriction imposed by this authority figure even during their absence. This is also the mimesis or recreation of the job of the man with the megaphone, who had died. Piggy is composed, organized and in constant need of reassurance of things to be in order. As he uplifts the importance of social value, he puts the idea of taking down the names of all the boys as the first sign of civilization. "I expect we will want to know all the names"⁶ Whenever the boys seem to get out of hand Piggy is found to reinstate justice, authority and safety. For instance, after all the children gather to build a fire in the second chapter, on the mountain, it explodes out of control. The young boy with the mulberry birthmark vanishes and is presumed dead amidst the inferno they created. It is Piggy who attempts to regain control by suggesting the idea of making shelters. "We ought to be more careful... The first thing we ought to have made was shelters..."⁷ The superego is characterised such that it functions by disciplining and shaming the ego for giving into the primitive desires of the feral id. Representing these characteristics, Piggy states, "Which is better – to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill."⁸ The entire basis upon which the superego is constructed is the rules and compliance to the expectations of the

society, while that of the id is to satisfy any impulsive desire, like to hunt and kill. Piggy stands out as a stark example of contrast between the primal lusts of the id and the guilty reckoning of the superego. This is the same reason why Piggy is finally hunted down and killed. The characters gradually degenerate and give in to the overpowering id. Piggy, in contrast, represents consciousness, the conch being the symbol of the conscious civility which he dies protecting towards the end of the novel.

Jack is described as the antagonist right from the very first scene where he is introduced. He is the eldest and the leader of the choir. Coming from one of the most dogmatic and disciplined bands, the trajectory of his psychological degeneration is ironic and significant. Preconditioned as a self-proclaimed leader, the first blow of his overpowering id is inflicted upon Ralph, who is elected as the chief over him. The ignition of his need to establish power rises from what Alfred Adler described as the Inferiority Complex, which develops in childhood as children naturally feel inferior because they are constantly surrounded by stronger, more powerful people with greater abilities. Alder suggests that “a child generally seeks to emulate and achieve the abilities of its elders, motivated by the surrounding forces that propel him toward his own development and accomplishments.”⁹ Therefore, Jack's cry of “I ought to be chief.... because I'm chapter chorister head boy. I can sing C sharp”¹⁰ and later the decision of settling for leading the hunters - “This could be my army”- can be actually regarded as a self-assurance of having the greater responsibility of hunting for food, the primary cravings of the id being for violence, lust and hunger (libido). He possesses a sense of entitlement to dominate and overpower the island and it's then-present inhabitants which is the genetic hand-me-down coming from the colonising father figure, that is the corrupt superego of the British colonizer which is echoed when he superciliously asserts “We're English, and the English are the best at everything.”¹¹ Another significant instance that the

discerning reader can identify in attempting to connect Jack with the psychological id, is his eagerness to establish punishments for the boys who broke the rules which were established to maintain law and order. Further instances include his attempt at appropriating Piggy's glasses, snatching them, to build a fire, and his inability to kill the pig in the first chapter, which becomes the kindling and premonition of the horrific and brutal killing of the sow, "Kill the pig, cut her throat, bash her in."¹² Thereafter, the killing of Simon under the delusion of the need to hunt down the imaginary beast. Finally, his complete metamorphosis and contagious influence on the band of Littluns to hunt down Ralph and kill him. Hence, he attempts to transform completely into a beast, eradicating the last sign of order or civility that is Ralph or the ego.

The character of Roger in the novel simulates the id, like Jack, in the sadistic pleasures of bullying or hurting the boys, at the beginning, as an attempt to scare them by throwing rocks at them, yet making sure that the rocks did not actually hit them. His violence and cruelty contrasts with Jack as he does not need to build up a superiority complex to establish himself as a leader. Instead he is described as "a boy who kept to himself with avoidance and secrecy". Joining Jack's tribe, almost like a parasite, he establishes his niche in the world of evil and savagery, transforming into the hangman as he later murders Piggy, beyond any sense of guilt, only for pure pleasure of thanatos. Driven by the blood thirst, he furthers it as he prepares to put Ralph's head on a stick, imitating the head of the sow. The barbaric hunter (unconscious id) preparing to prey on the last hope of civilization (conscious ego), Ralph in an attempt to carry "death in his hand."

Twelve-year-old Ralph, emerging from the scar, is Golding's protagonist representing the living consciousness that keeps the "iceberg of innocence" afloat till the last concluding

minute. Balancing between the opposing forces of Piggy and Jack, and occasionally rising up to feed the needs of both, he emerges as the manifestation of the ego, balancing and swaying between either direction of the superego and the id respectively. However, till the death of Piggy, Ralph is seen keen to be loyal to the superego. The internal struggle and juggle between the chaos and order takes a toll on Ralph as he eventually begins to lose hope and fulfil the directions and expectations of the superego. The colonizing ego, keeping in mind Ralph's father whom he expects to come to his rescue, sets its first mark, when he discovers the island and immediately declares that the place belongs to him. "At least I think it's an island...perhaps there aren't any grownups anywhere."¹³ A sense of possession out of adult supervision liberates the ego. With the help of Piggy, he acts as the first one to call upon the crowd blowing on the conch shell and is elected chief by vote. Thereafter the task of this representative of the ego begins, being the one to settle problems, and the decide rules and barriers to establish order. Ralph's refusal to accept the presence of the "beastie" as claimed by the Littluns is the rational consciousness of the ego that keeps the collective consciousness aware of pragmatism and logic. Jack and the hunter's overpowering id inveigles the rational ego of Ralph to let himself become prey to his carnal self, giving in to the murder of Simon. However, the very next day there is a guilty conscience that rises within him which reassures one of his role as the rational, practical and moral ego that is imperative to the balancing act of the degenerating collective consciousness of the deserted boys. Finally, on being hunted down by Jack and his hunters, as the prey, Ralph runs for his life amidst the fire of annihilating innocence till he finds the adult human supervision standing in front of him. Almost as a *deus ex machina*, the naval officer appears to relieve the dehumanized abandoned young boys now turned into beasts. "Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy"¹⁴ The concluding line, ingeminates the thoughts lying in the conscious ego of Ralph that bursts

into tears on the anagnorisis of failing to hold on to the civilisation and human superego (Piggy) and completely dehumanizing into the tempestuous depths of the hungry ego, feeding civility as grub to satiate the savage hunger of the id. The character of Simon is the archetype of the ideal self- the pure, innocent truthful self that is governed by the practice of following societal rules, manners and directions. The kindness that the character of Simon is embellished with reflects in his tender and motherly instincts as he readily shares his food with Piggy and picks out fruits for the Littluns. It is the character of Simon that has to encounter the head of the sow or the “Lord of the Flies” which is Golding’s rendition of true knowledge. As Simon ventures into the unravelling of the true beast, it is the severed head of the sow who says “You knew didn’t you? I’m a part of you? Close close close! I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are what they are.”¹⁵ The ego ideal is informed of the true presence of the “Beastie” which resides within themselves. While Simon carries the message of the real beast to be lurking within the human id, he is hunted and killed by the other boys, thereby eliminating the final chance of redemption from the Dionysian, feral selves that their ids ignited. His crucifixion as he stumbles into the group’s atavistic orgy, is therefore the symbol of the destruction of the visionary figure, the true discoverer of the lurking evil, the true interpreter of the bestial malady overpowering civil propriety and humanity. The projection of the killing of the sow could be analysed as the psychosexual interplay of the pleasure principle in hunting down perhaps the only feminine figure in the novel apart from mother nature. In the hunting episode the children demonstrate their ungratified oedipal connection with the mother figure which is a symbol of a craving for love and care (eros), and of authority and domination (thanatos) simultaneously. Endangered in an anomalous setting and enthralled to initiate into the experience of power, they fantasize a feminine figure and inflict physical pain and humiliation upon it. “Wedded to her in lust”¹⁶, the hunters satisfy their carnal instincts of the libido that causes this violent hunger within them. This is

not a drive corresponding to fulfilment by sexual intercourse, as the boys are too young, therefore, it translates into the psychological urge to possess and dominate, as is graphically portrayed in the novel.

The unconscious acts as a receptacle for ideas or memories that are too powerful, too painful or otherwise too intense for the conscious mind to process. Freud believed that when certain ideas or memories (and their associated emotions) threaten to overwhelm the psyche, they are split apart from a memory that can be accessed by the conscious mind, and stored in the unconscious instead. This develops the pretext for dreams and past experiences. In the text, *Lord of the Flies*, the Littluns dream about the “beastie” which could be psychoanalytically characterized as an after effect of the images of brutality that they witnessed on the island. A conspicuous incident involving Percival Wemys Madison, in the fifth chapter of the novel demonstrates the effects of isolation from society. The inexorable workings of the unconscious anxiety and fear results in the Littlun's loss of memory. Been taught to introduce himself with his name, address and contact information, “Percival Wemys Madison. The Vicarage. Harcourt St. Anthony, Hants, telephone....”¹⁷, the little boy faces an identity crisis when he is unable to remember his civil identity by the end of the novel. This elucidates the overpowering primeval instincts that the island induces in the psyche of the boys, causing them to unlearn the civil codes of conduct imparted to them under parental supervision. The fear associated with these images directly manifests into dreams or nightmares of a lurking beast which is later validated by the conversation between Simon and the Lord of the Flies itself, who can also be presumed to be a psychological manifestation, of the innate beast inside each human being.

Although the characters of Piggy, Jack and Ralph embody dominant traits of the Freudian iceberg and represent the different workings of the psyche of the corrupt colonizing man,

they are not devoid of being under the influence of the workings of the other two facets of the tripartite features upon them individually. For instance, Piggy's id is demonstrated in his denial to accept their participation in the killing of Simon. His excuse "It was dark. There was – that bloody dance. There was lightning and thunder and rain. We were scared"¹⁸ projects his denial in looking at murder directly in the eye and hence faltering to be the true voice of reason. On the other hand, Ralph too demonstrates workings of the id in his purposeful calling of Piggy by that name, although he asked him not to. His idea of extracting humour by insulting Piggy's physical attributes and his sense of freedom in shedding his clothes to take a swim, embody the first ignition of his suppressed id which blows up in a huge proportion while he participates in the killing of Simon. Jack, previously being the head of the choir, already has a notion of rules and civility (that is the ego and superego) in his preconscious state of mind. Such workings could be found in his participation in setting up rules and analysing tracks on the island, to be animal marks. However, being unable to kill the pig at the beginning and self-imposing a sense of weakness, he takes it upon himself to completely lose the focus of being rescued and concentrates solely on the act of hunting and establishing his power and domination over the island. The idea of Jack's personality to be constantly acting like the lurking id over the psyche of the British man may be indicated by Golding, and therefore, there is the need for characters like Ralph and Piggy, that is the ego and superego, to keep a check on barbarity under the mask of diplomacy. Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* could perhaps be designated as a movement to untangle the workings of the human psyche under the garb of children's literature and the historical context of the Second World War. The seamless weaving of the idea of the degenerate British colonizer by assigning a trait of the psyche into the thread of each child, stranded on the desolate island, marks the genius of the author in dissecting the adult psyche through the minds of dehumanized kids. Ralph, Simon, Piggy, Jack, Roger and the Littluns, perhaps are the

scapegoats executed under the guillotine of civilization or savagery, which might sound like antonyms, but portray synonymous traits in the British colonizer. In conclusion the psychological fall in the novel appropriately resonates Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's words “....man's place in the universe is somewhere between the beasts and the angels, but, because of the divine image planted in him, there are no limits to what man can accomplish....” of the human capability to elevate to become angels or to degenerate to a beast, in his celebrated work *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. As rightly opined by Golding in one of his essays, “I must say that anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey, must have been blind and wrong in the head.”¹⁹ On reading Golding's novel from a colonial point of view Stefan Hawlin comments: “The whole fantastic drift of the novel is to set the savages, the subject peoples, the ‘children’, back in their place at the bottom of a hierarchy ruled by the white man.”²⁰ This quote supports the argument that the psychic dissection of the British colonizer is represented through the boys who become a coherent whole to be finally owned and ruled by the colonizing white man.

Notes

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On the Author -

Raka Mukherjee is the little Jack out of the huge box of literature, films and theatre. A quick glance through her bookshelf or EBook library would display a range of postcolonial and feminist fiction from around the world. She can be found scribbling in her notebooks or backstage on theatre wings, either scripting, writing or directing plays. An amateur in short film making, mostly interested in visually recreating the imaginative whimsy of her mind. She also likes to try her hands at creative and academic projects. She has dreams of being a research scholar and authoring her own fictional books with the little ideas that she keeps inventing and discarding inside her mind space. From Sukumar Roy's Abol Tabol to delving into mysteries of Sherlock and Feluda, she enjoys a tickle in her funny bone and rushes in her adrenaline.

**“A FAITH LIKE A GUILLOTINE, SO HEAVY, SO LIGHT”: THE SINGULAR,
THE UNIVERSAL, AND THE ANGST OF EXISTENCE IN *THE TRIAL***

- Hemalatha Sridhar

Abstract: Literature is conventionally expected to be a discloser and a preacher of universal truths. The universal is a collective archive of everything that mankind has standardised as historically unchanging and certain. One of the tags pinned to writing of quality is its ability to transcend the specific and tap into the pulse of the universal human existence. However, one cannot assess the universal satisfactorily, without studying its contrary force, the singular.

The fragmentary process of living under the influence of modernism brought to importance the experience of the perturbed individual in relation to a broken world. There was a more distinct focus upon the possibility of the singular as a unique entity that might not conform to the universal, and of the universal being aloof and inaccessible to the singular. This complex relationship between the two elements results in an existential befuddlement, because one is unsure of their own position, as well as the rules that govern their world. Franz Kafka's enigmatic yet profound writing captures this perplexing conundrum perfectly. In his novel, *The Trial*, the singular and universal share a puzzling bond and constantly redefine themselves, becoming the catalysts to the protagonist's abject existential bewilderment and steady decline. This paper aims to study the riddling nature of this intricate relationship, and how it affects the protagonist Josef K, in turn revealing Kafka's perception of the condition of man.

In the final section of *What Is Literature* entitled ‘Situation of the Writer in 1947’, Jean-Paul Sartre, speaking of Kafka’s success as a writer, says “as for Kafka, everything has been said: that he wanted to paint a picture of bureaucracy, the progress of disease, the condition of the Jews in eastern Europe, the quest for inaccessible transcendence, and the world of grace when grace is lacking. This is all true. Let me say that he wanted to describe the human condition”.¹

The Trial is fraught with bizarre complications and ambiguities present in the world that one may be perceptive to, but not be able to explain with adequacy. Franz Kafka, despite being harshly self-critical of his writing almost constantly, manages to highlight and invite introspection upon some of these vague, subterranean issues, causing his readers to be simultaneously captivated and disturbed. A *New York Times* article entitled *The Essence of ‘Kafkaesque’*, explores in depth the assessment of the prolific biographer of Kafka, Frederick R. Karl famously said that the term “Kafkaesque” is “when you enter a surreal world in which all your control patterns, all your plans, the whole way in which you have configured your own behavior, begins to fall to pieces, when you find yourself against a force that does not lend itself to the way you perceive the world.”² Josef K’s situation is peculiar and unique, and yet it is not entirely unfamiliar enough to the human experience to make one unable to connect with him. Kafka’s hyper-real rendering of K’s ordeal is jarring, yet exceptional in its ability to awe the reader, as well as establish a kinship with his novel’s protagonist.

The singular is an unstable force, as it is individualistic and solitary, not subscribing to the normative. It does not have the backing of regularity. Society takes comfort in recurrence, while the singular categorically abstains from it. The universal is steady, being an establishment that is familiar and common, guaranteeing security because it is a general phenomenon. It is characterised by repetition, and has a reputation for being reliable as it is rooted in tradition and history. It is the knowable, the predictable, and hence the acceptable.

The universal manifests itself in multifarious forms such as social institutions and cultural morality. In their introduction to the book *Kafka and the Universal*³, editors Arthur Cools and Vivian Liska propose that in the reception of Kafka's work, philosophy can be seen as a universal due to its tendency to conceptualise, while literature can be viewed as a singular as it can be alienating in its approach. They observe that "Jean-Paul Sartre's saying that "Kafka's testimony is all the more universal as it is profoundly singular" is indicative of a key paradox in the reception of Kafka during the twentieth century, a paradox that has wide-reaching implications for our understanding of the interface between literature and philosophy."⁴ Such a reading suggests that Kafka's writing is inexhaustible in its interpretative scope, as the universal and the singular are limitlessly applicable to depict forces that share a tension with one another. The conceptually paradoxical singular and universal share a complicated relationship in Kafka's novel because they oppose one another but can never be torn asunder, nourishing the elements of bafflement and ambiguity that the author is famous for. In *The Trial*, Josef K represents the singular, and the law, which is the object of his torturous chase, is the universal.

In *Sartre, Kafka and the Universality of the Literary Work*⁵, Jo Bogaerts highlights the widespread popularity of Kafka in France because he was perceived as an author without roots, belonging to a no-man's land, which to his French readership, gave his writing a universal quality. The journal article brings to light the author's warm reception in France, especially Sartre's fondness for and his defence of Kafka's works in great detail. Bogaerts discusses in depth what "Sartre calls the 'true universality' of Kafka"⁶ as the potential for "a dialectical movement that transforms the particular into the general" in his writing. However, in disagreement with Sartre's concept, calling it misleading as it does not place Kafka's writing as something having universal meaning pertaining to all readings, Bogaerts asserts

that Kafka “has the unrelenting potential of releasing specific meanings within new contexts”⁷. Contrary to the universality that the French ascribed to Kafka which Bogaerts explored, Stanley Corngold, in *The Singular Accident in a Universe of Risk: An Approach to Kafka and the Paradox of the Universal*⁸, focuses on Kafka’s geographical specificity as an influence upon his writing. Corngold alludes to James Joyce’s idea of how “in the particular is contained the universal”⁹, where Dublin was the singular that represented the world. He proposes that what Dublin was to Joyce, Prague was to Kafka- “Kafka’s singularity to a focus on Prague and concluding that the outcome of this focus is also the universality” of the world¹⁰. This article affirms, therefore, that the singular and universal while being clashing forces, can also be referential of one another. Such hermeneutical flexibility is what makes Kafka’s writing a subject of undiminishing intrigue, inviting constant scrutiny.

Corngold’s analysis of Kafka’s writing being a product of the singularity of the author’s experiences is persuasive, especially with reference to *The Trial*. Corngold, concurring with Derrida’s view that the law is neither a natural being nor an institution, puts forth his opinion, which is that the law could mean literature¹¹. Examining some of Kafka’s diary entries that Corngold references in his paper, one notes that Kafka’s insecurities about his inadequate literary output are amply expressed, alongside him referring to writing as “*Gericht*” or “the invisible judge”¹². Writing, for Kafka, according to Corngold, was an outlet that could displace and dispel his existential anxiety, and held a sacred place for the author. The article connects this claim to the conversation that Josef K has with the prison chaplain, where the latter tells K that he did not respect the written word enough¹³, implying that it is perhaps why he is doomed to fail. The power of literature, which is represented by the law that is a universal, is undeniably an extension of Kafka’s personal proclivities. Therefore, his singularity translates into the universal here. Corngold observes that the law/ literature, is the

process of the unfolding to Kafka: “The singularity of the opening image of K. in *The Trial* is to his "process" what Kafka’s singularity is to Kafka’s universality: Kafka’s opening image is the nucleus of Kafka’s law.”¹⁴ Bringing to light a line from *The Trial* that Kafka later edited out, Corngold further accentuates his point - “as the famous deleted passage from the beginning of *The Trial* has it: "That is why the moment of waking up was the riskiest moment of the day".”¹⁵ From this, one can infer that Kafka’s vulnerable position before literature could join hands with Josef K’s baffling subordination by the law. Kafka’s own universe loans him the stimulus and ideas that enable him to create something universal. K, while mulling over his situation, appropriately notes, “in short, he hardly had the choice now whether to accept or reject the case, he was in the middle of it and must fend for himself. If he was tired, that was unfortunate.”¹⁶ This view of the literature as a universal contrasts with the one expressed earlier by Cools and Liska. The tussle between the singular and the universal is, therefore, a layered and complex motif that is boundless in its interpretative capacity.

The parable entitled ‘Before the Law’ narrated to Josef K by the prison chaplain, is an exact miniature of the entire novel because it discusses all of the vital themes and ideas that are distributed in various chapters of the book. ‘Before the Law’ brings to the forefront the epistemological and ontological issues that Kafka’s apprehensions continuously challenge and target. Arthur Cools calls the parable “a kind of abstract symbol of the narrative of *The Trial*”¹⁷. The parable embodies the impossibility of a homogeneous understanding, as interpretations tend to be subjective and particular, rather than unbiased. It is directly concerned with the issue of the singular and the universal because it illuminates one about K’s fate, and about the intricacies of his enigmatic problem. In the parable, the universal is represented by the law, which is an overbearing but unseen presence. The singular is the

countryman, an individual who seeks the law. The law is considered a universal as it is an established institution that is general and public. It is a body acknowledged and recognised by the entirety of society. In *The Trial*, it seems to be almost omnipotent in the influence it has upon those who seek it, and yet, it is so fragmented due to its bureaucratic constitution, that it is shapeless and unapproachable. The door-keeper, despite being an employee of the law, has no inkling of its workings, and only knows of its hierarchical structure which is disjointed, and consequently, not concrete. The law is peculiar as one can conceive of it in ideas but not truly gain an entry. The naïve countryman thinks “the law is supposed to be accessible to everyone and at all times”¹⁸, which indicates that it is a universal structure that everyone should be privy to it. Yet, he is denied access by the door-keeper. One notes a complex contradiction here (as K himself points out to the chaplain). Seeing the law, a structure so strongly tethered to human history and existence, as an ambiguous and labyrinthine abstraction, Kafka prompts one to question what the universal constitutes at all. The universal is said to be all that is known and understandable, it is what everyone has been conditioned into trusting, as it guarantees certainty. However, here, by challenging how palpable a universal like the law really is, Kafka challenges the epistemic and ontological value of what is considered universal in the first place. The singular is the lone individual force in battle with the universal as they have opposing goals. In the parable, the countryman, who wants an audience with the law but is constantly thwarted by the door-keeper, stands for the singular. He is an outcast who cannot cross paths with what is thought to be an integrated and ordered system. At the same time, the singular here is not wholly unique as well, as it could be less uncommon than assumed. The countryman represents a struggle far beyond himself, therefore, he too can be likened to universal, as his being and hassles are not unknown to society either. Therefore, in the parable and in the novel, one sees the bewildering nature of the singular and the universal, and how the flexibility of these definitions causes great unease

and gives rise to abject confusion.

It is obvious after reading the parable that the countryman does not obtain the audience with the law that he so desperately craves. Like K, the readers also after their first reading, instantly note how the law is unjust in prohibiting the countryman's entry. Yet, according to the chaplain, he was always promised an entry, but just not at the moments he desired, because there had been a gate exclusively for his access. Hence, the law is not cheating him. The chaplain says that the door-keeper's statements are not contradictory when he says he might let the countryman in later, and in the end when he closes the gate that was meant only for that specific individual, because they both indicate that there was a chance that the countryman could have secured the law. The chaplain's argument is so well reasoned that it resonates with K's words to Titorelli - "what matters are the many subtleties in which the court gets lost. But in the end it produces great guilt from some point where originally there was nothing at all."¹⁹ The parable is brought up by the chaplain because he was talking to K about deception. Therefore, deception, the crux of the parable, is also conceptually riddling, and as K bitterly notes, "it makes the lie fundamental to world order"²⁰. K's intensive ponderings about how "perhaps all this brooding was weakening his powers of resistance, but it was vital not to deceive himself and to see everything as distinctly as was possible at this time"²¹ are a fruitless exercise, because he will indefinitely remain an unsuspecting victim to the universe's cruel arbitrariness.

The chaplain's explanation complicates the relationship between the universal and the singular, because here, they are not only paradoxical, but are tied together by a vague promise of deliverance. When the countryman is dying, the door to the law is radiant as it is a reminder of the possibility of a transcendence as well as an exclusion. The gate is an aporetic

threshold where both points of entry and non-entry converge. Hence, the singular is both involved and excluded at the same time by the universal. The outcome is a servile sense of confoundment and disorientation as nothing is ultimately a guarantee. K's disgust for his own name when the chaplain calls out to him is an evidence of Kafka's exquisitely subtle yet sharp artistry. The frustration of the sense of losing the self because the world around appears to lose meaning is poignantly conveyed by Josef K- "thinking how frankly he used to give his name at one time and what a burden it had become recently; now his name was known to people he was meeting for the first time; how pleasant it was to introduce himself first and only then be known."²² Uncertainty, which is one of the key ideas and conundrums in Kafka's works is observed with clarity due to this problematic relationship of the universal and singular. Homogeneity is impossible to achieve in both the forces because the world in itself is not completely knowable. Kafka's parable *Prometheus* ends with "the legend tried to explain the inexplicable. As it came out of a substratum of truth it had in turn to end in the inexplicable"²³, which is another eloquent, compelling assertion of how concepts like truth and certainty are elusive and not uniformly comprehensible to human existence. Kafka implies that human beings do not have the resources to assess what a universal surely is, which leads to the brewing of an unbearable existential angst.

The parable is symbolic of the act of living itself, as people constantly come into things that they are unsure of, or are promised things that are possible but not available to them. The law is life itself, as it is confusing, painful, frustrating, unpredictable and frighteningly uncertain. Within the novel, K's struggles (like that of any man) are compared to the countryman's. Both are exiles from the transcendence that the law offers, and are ultimately annihilated. K worms his way into every possible nook to gain access to the law, meeting with various figures like Titorelli the painter, Huld, Leni, the warders, or the woman from the court

offices, but all his toil bore no fruit, as he too, like Block the merchant, is a subservient dog before the law. Frederick R. Karl articulates with precision, “you don't give up, you don't lie down and die. What you do is struggle against this with all of your equipment, with whatever you have. But of course you don't stand a chance. That's Kafkaesque.”²⁴

Arthur Cools, in *Desire and Responsibility: The Case of K.*²⁵, compares K's ordeal to that of the Greek tragic protagonist. He suggests that K's obsessive urge to find the reason behind his arrest is comparable to Oedipus' feverish quest for the truth that ultimately ruins him. Cools says, “In *The Trial*, K.'s desire to know the object of the charge, the instance of the accusation, and the rules of the trial, and his desire to free himself from the accusation constitute the main dynamic of the sequence of chapters; these desires determine the regulations and permissions which upend K.'s daily life, and they disturb continuously all his various interactions with others.”²⁶ However, unlike the elevation of self-esteem awarded to the tragic protagonist following his moment of recognition (anagnorisis) prior to his fall, Cools notes that Kafka's writing only “reveals certainly the power of the court, but it does not reveal the possibility of the sense of justice”.²⁷

K never stops trying to piece his case together, just as the countryman tries to bribe the door-keeper. However, he gets nothing from his slogging other than the consolation that he tried his best to alter things. At the same time, the consolation from trying gives him encouragement to strive harder because he sees a possibility of him reaching his destination. André Gide made a persuasive impression when he wrote the following about *The Trial* in his diary: “The anguish this book gives off is, at moments, almost unbearable, for how can one fail to repeat to oneself constantly: that hunted creature is I.”²⁸ Here, one sees how the universal and the singular are strangely linked despite being opposing, as the universal

constantly beckons as well as excludes K, and he in turn, keeps chasing it as he feels it gives him some kind of direction and orientation. The theme of existential ambiguity never abandons the novel because of the continuously lingering feeling that one does not really know at all what appears to be known. K's assessment of Huld, an agent of the universal, and his treatment towards clients like Block sums up the burden of the universal upon the singular- "the client forgot in the end about the outside world and merely hoped to drag himself along this illusory path to the end of his case"²⁹. K too is subject to the very same cruelty by the law, making the outside world as well as his own person deeply unknowable to himself.

Jacques Derrida famously observed that *The Trial* is a novel of constant denial and deference because it depicts a gruelling process of non-arrival. Raphael Foshay in *Derrida on Kafka's "Before the Law"* notes that "Derrida finds in Kafka's 'Before the Law' a text that explores the undecidable relation between signified and signifier, between the conceptual universality of the law and the singularity and individuality of the man from the country. The man seeks access to the law because it is universal and applies to everyone, and he is denied access because he is not everyone, but only himself and no one else."³⁰ This opinion is in passionate agreement with the claim of this paper, which is that the interplay between the singular and the universal expresses the paranoia that Kafka harbours of man's ambiguous position in an erratic world.

In conclusion, while the universal and singular are acknowledged as opposing forces, in *The Trial*, one sees a point of coincidence of both forces, which heightens the tension and frustration caused by incertitude in the novel. The atmosphere of ambivalence is sustained throughout the book because of this delicate relationship. When the chaplain tells K after

discussing the parable that “correct understanding of the matter and misunderstanding of the same matter do not exclude each other entirely”³¹, Kafka very effectively drives home his theme of radical uncertainty into the novel. The universal can represent philosophy or science, which attempt to make sense of the world and bring ideas into the mainstream of human experience, while the singular could stand for literature, which explores what could be, or of a unique breakdown of order. Arthur Cools suggests that “the narrative of *The Trial* denies the very possibility of grasping the universal in terms of an (ethical) idea (be it the idea of justice, of faithfulness, of freedom, or of emancipation). Is Kafka therefore not the writer who shows why the question of the universal is misguided in relation to literary fiction, claiming the autonomy of the literary text and withdrawing it from any discourse about truth? Unless literary fiction reveals, in the concreteness of the image and in the singular chain of images, the true condition of any approach to the universal.”³² The singular and universal assure nothing in this novel, persistently needling one into feeling a deep discomfort within. The chaplain tells K that “it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary”³³. This weighty statement refutes all promises of security or certification to the individual, especially by a universal like the law which is known to be inextricably bound to morality and ethical principles, making one sensitive to the terror and helplessness K feels. Sartre’s assessment of Kafka as the writer of “the human condition” is therefore incontestable. Kafka’s writing itself possesses a parable-like nature, because of the colossal space the writer manages to create, where infinite interpretations find validity. Kafka’s pithy aphorism “a faith like a guillotine, so heavy, so light”³⁴ beautifully captures the muted horror of man’s condition. *The Trial* more than adequately sums up the state of man in a world where bureaucracy, corruption, distortion and secrecy reign, leaving one cowering, unprotected and perplexed about one’s significance.

Notes

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On the Author -

Hemalatha was basically raised in Loreto, and consistently does her best at trying the patience of her good-natured professors. College allowed her to take her innate eccentricities several steps

further as she graduated from skipping classes with wild abandon while dragging her friends along, to being unable to leave a lesson (of her interest, or if she's coaxed into paying attention) without being wide-eyed about the words, phrases, and emotional undercurrents that were explored.

She has always loved anything that shocks her, but with time, she realised the importance of writing down how and why she perceived things a certain way. Grateful for the limitless encouragement her professors gave her, she decided to brave this venture with her friend, and begin something new for the MA department.

Interested in stories, sketches and colours, her favourite kind of artistic expression is when these categories coalesce to become animated films or graphic novels. She will read anything that will deeply move her, as long as it is fairly dramatic. She hopes to creatively contribute to the world of art in some way. For now, this magazine gives her immense joy, because she got to give back to the institution that gave her the ability to bunch together her raw and instinctive responses into something more coherent and meaningful.

CREATIVE SECTION

AN ESCAPE**- Shruti Ghosh**

The sunshine on her cloudy, grey cheeks
Reflected the truth of her pain
Which she hid between
Her stifled sobs, biting them between
Her breaths like a secret untold.
Her pain gnawing
At her bones; the scars lining
Her bare skin
Tell of her sin.
Her soul
Simmering silently
Caged in the walls
Of a cave that
She built bravely and necessarily,
To dull the barbed wire of taunts and thorns
Pricking her heart, bleeding it dry.
Now she is an injured animal,
Weather-hardened rock,
Bone-dry, barely existing.
Laughing at the house of pain and madness,
(She escaped barely clutching her heart
Between her bleeding hands)

As she retreats to her unbounded castle on the cliff

She conjured out of her sobs, her breaths, her pain:

And her magic.

On the Author -

Shruti landed in the English department at Loreto College five years ago almost as if by a miracle for she was fated for the History department. She felt quite out of place, doubting whether she truly belonged here. But the more she immersed herself in class, the more she was enthralled by the larger discourses around literature like philosophy. After three years, Loreto was a natural habitat to come back to which offered its comfortable embrace and a feeling of homeliness. The masters programme opened up a world of possibilities. After five years in this college, what has she learnt, you ask? She went from "I-could-never-write-poetry" to two poems being published in the journal. She loves to read Camus who writes about finding our place in the universe and thus aptly feeds into her existential apprehension. 'The Outsider' by Camus and 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower' are two of her favourite books. Not very musically informed, her playlist consists of film soundtracks, her favourite being '500 Days of Summer'. She occasionally likes to share her thoughts about books that she reads on her bookstagram account which has a moderately increasing following.

NOSTALGIA

- Akanchha Khettry

Looking back has its own way,
You pull and get pulled further away.
Memories dark and bright,
Done and dusted, some embraced tight.
Clinging to the frame and yielding to the name,
You hold on, or try to be in the game.

Roots that erode the time
Time that clouds how far we've come away
Away, away from what the other had to say,
Guilty. We've only had our way.

Yearning for yesterday
Forgotten stand the golden ages.
The golden bird sings an empty solace.
Our words remain
Pining to tune to our music.
Reprised.

On the Author -

For Akanchha, the classrooms of Loreto College have nurtured her love for literature. The last five years of her life have been spent, rather, lived fully at college. She attempts to write some of her thoughts down in the manner (calling it a "storm" would be an understatement) in which they occur. Leave her at a bookstore or a movie theatre and she should be fine. You can spot her regularly at the Oxford Bookstore on Park Street with her friends. She is still exploring her music preferences, though she agrees that she needs something loud at sunrise and the opposite at

sunset. Being essentially old school, she prefers paperback over kindle. For now, she is content reading 'Less' by Andrew Sean Greer and occasionally turning back to her favourite book of all time, 'The Little Prince', while attempting to keep a respectable academic graph.

IDENTITY

- Radhika Mookerjee

She is warm at heart, strong and bold

Defying unnecessary bondage;

She soared higher every single day

Pushing through every wreckage.

Social boundaries and stigma cannot contain her,

Education the thunderbolt in her hands,

Breaking down self limitations,

Confident she stands.

Neither colour nor caste, nor religion

Pushes her into shells

She is born to grow, to lead and believe

Making a path for the rest.

Who is she? She is You and I, she is the Sunflower and the Blazing Heat.

The First Showers of the season

And winter's cold breeze.

She is on her quest to conquer the odds,

Her mission is far from Oblivion

Till the sun shines bright on her Horizon.

BEAUTY WHO 'SLEEPS'**- Shruti Ghosh**

Flawless,
Lying breathless
In the funereal cold bed,
She looks like the epitome of Beauty.
Grace and purity
Adorn her idle-rouged cheeks.
Wearing stainless virtue
Like a mantle:
Ironclad and unwavering.
Her blood-drained lips
Waiting to be parted:
Waiting for the pliant kiss
That would revive her from
Her cadaverous stupor.
Everyone grieved.
She died tragically,
They said.
Young, beautiful, and unblemished -
In her springtime like a rose
Nipped in the bud.
Colourless and wan
Like a dying swan,

She sings her cheerless swan song silently, demurely.

For she was destined to don

The curse of her Beauty

Like a badge of honour -

Obediently, lifelessly, doll-like.

Sleeping in a dark solitary tower

Forever untainted, unsullied, and untouched –

Her name is Beauty.

JAZZ STATION**- Raka Mukherjee****Dramatis Personae:**

Man – 21st century

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Gatsby

Daisy

Al Capone

Texas Guinan

Ella Fitzgerald

Louis Armstrong

Greta Garbo

Frank Sinatra

Langston Hughes

SCENE ONE

(Midnight)

Stage divided into two parts.

Stage L

A MAN in his mid 30s, in a shabby overcoat and unkempt hair, walks along the sidewalk of an empty street. He is drunk, and it is late at night when he starts talking aloud:

“Hold fast to your dreams, for without it life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly!”

Why does my fate fiddle with my life like a juggler managing to juggle all aspects of happiness and failing to balance them!!! Dropping them one at a time, it’s almost two scores

and I've failed to hold on to my dream now! Do you hear Hughes? Do you hear me? (takes out a few pieces of paper) rejected, AGAIN, I've been rejected for the 'nth time since I was a teen of fifteen, writing my own plays - desperate - for recognition! But oh no no no, I'm too ancient for the modern taste! I can't make a living of my dreams in this era, I belong to a different time, I've got to leave, I've got to go home, I've got to go back to the corporate cubicle of relentless nine to five toil back in the city. I've got to get on the train away from my dream now. (leaves with a sunk head, limping because of the effect of alcohol)

Stage R (Train Station)

A man is seen sitting on the bench, wearing a suit, a pair of lace-up Oxford shoes and a hat.

Man one comes and sits beside him.

Man 1: Sir, when does the next train arrive?

Man 2: You're talking to me, old sport? I'm just waiting here for a friend.

Man 1: You're at a train station at midnight waiting for a friend? Who's that? Godot?

Man 2: Ah, no. But the gentleman is called Gatsby. My best friend and creation.

Man 1: Ah, looks like I'm not the only one deluded here, your name sir?

Man 2: Francis, sir, and you?

Man 1: RIGHT! FRANCIS INDEED, I WON'T BE SURPRISED IF YOU CALLED YOURSELF FITZGERALD.

Man 2: Hahahah old sport, you're funny, well you'll see. (takes out a copy of *The Great Gatsby* and snaps it in the air)

Stage L

[Music: (The 1974 *The Great Gatsby* motion picture soundtrack plays) actors enter as Gatsby and Daisy]

Perform a little dance (about a minute)

MAN 1: SURPRISED tries to grab hold of them, they vanish by the time (leave the stage)

Stage R

Am I stuck in a design of mine? Or did I cross a time portal? How did the London train station transform into a real life fiction, Mr. Fitzgerald, is this real or did I just watch *Midnight in Paris* too many times?

Stage L

Train arrives.

Fitzgerald: That's me, old sport, I'll bid you farewell .

Man: May I come with you sir?

Fitzgerald: I've had a long night, I prefer to retire to Zelda's arms, old sport. I'll see you around.

Fitzgerald boards the train and leaves.

SCENE TWO

Stage R

(By the time, Fitzgerald leaves, a stout man in a 20s gangster attire enters, suited up, smoking a cigar along)

Al Capone: Do I smell hooch here? You, young man, how can a hombre like you afford to drink so much of giggewater in public? I, being one of the masters of bootlegging who ain't afraid of some chin music or even Harlem sunset won't be able to carry hooch like you do for my skid roads! Those clubhouses would be ready to house me and every man knows I ain't afraid even of the big sleep!

Man: Sir, this is just cheap whiskey!

Al Capone: Cheap, cheap you say? You appear like a dewdropper, I wouldn't call this cheap, I might as well assume you got hold of the giggeljuice from good skills in glomming my

friend. Ahh, but now I know what to do with you. Come along, I'm about to take you to a juice joint.

(Both get up and walk towards stage L where the cardboard boxes turn into a speakeasy door)

Al Capone: Remember, SPEAK EASY!

(Knocks on the door, a flap from the cardboard piece opens)

Al Capone: (whispers) Molls and dolls.

[The cardboard box is revealed to show Capone's gin joint.]

5 girls will be revealed (one bartender, two dressed in fashionable clothes, two men in 20s gangster attire, all ramp to music, till Texas Guinan is introduced)

Texas Guinan enters.

Texas: I AM THE WOMAN, THE GIRL SHERIFF, THE SCHOOL M'ARM, Red Head, The Wildflower of the mountain range.

Al Capone: Here's daddy's baby. The Queen of the nightclubs, Texas Guinan.

Texas: Do you know who's getting in the next spot?

Man: There's more?

Texas: Oh of course dear! What do you expect on the jazz express at midnight in New York?

A square foot of streetlight transforms into the night of young love and blues and music and all things prohibited.

SCENE THREE

Stage R

Enter Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong.

A mixtape of the best duets of the both jazz singers play.

As they sing along the other characters join in the dance.

(The dance should be moving mostly like a ramp walk again alongside the two singers) (2 minutes)

SCENE FOUR

Suddenly everything drops. Silence. Darkness. Enter Great Garbo and Frank Sinatra.

Stage R

Frank Sinatra: Young man, would you like to dance with her, on this starlit night?

Man: Sir, frankly, I don't know you and and... Why does she look so familiar? Marvel of beauty, charismatic, enigmatic! Pray tell, who is she?

Frank: Well, frankly young man, I'm Frank enough, they call me Sinatra and here I give you the temptress, the mysterious lady and the flesh.

Greta: Oh cut it Frank, I'm Greta Lovisa Gustafson. They call me Great Garbo.

Man: Oh, Greta Garbo! Greta talks?

Greta: Of course, since Anna Christie... Now the night is young and I'm in the mood for some blues, would you take my hand young man, and lift me off my toes.

Frank: Oh, I'm thinking of a song, a symphony that has been going in my mind for a few days now. (Sings "Strangers in the Night")

(Man and Greta Garbo dance)

"Love was just a glance away, a warm embracing dance away from you" Greta drops on the floor (Blackout)

SCENE FIVE

(Stage divisions are broken; man wakes up on the bench which is now on centre stage)

Man: Where am I now? Has the time portal broken? Am I back to the twenty-first century now? Was I dreaming? Where's my whiskey and what's with my file? Was I robbed last night?

(A man enters)

Other Man: Good morning, lad, so tell me, what happens to a dream deferred?

Man: Langston Hughes!? So, was all this real?

Langston Hughes: Young man, keep your imagination alive, keep the music alive, keep your spirits high and hold on to your art. Script truth, script dreams, script life as you live it.

It's time to say Farewell and Goodbye!

Claps.

The train arrives.

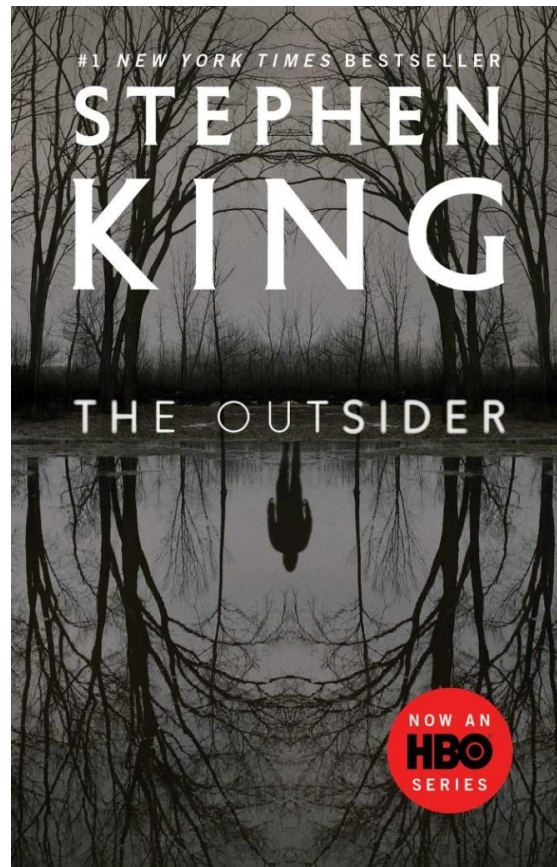
All characters: (in unison) Goodbye and good luck, to your fancy!

Characters circle around crossing the man in slow jazz music and once he is in the centre lights go dim. Everyone holds hands, bows.

Curtain.

***THE OUTSIDER: BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN
SUPERNATURAL AND REALITY***

- Maryleen Raktima Baidya



REVIEW –

“Doesn’t look like a monster, does he?” “They rarely do.”

- Stephen King, *The Outsider*

Stephen King is not an unknown name for most of us. Some readers love him; some do not, the reason – him being known as the “King of Horror”. Many people associate King with just the genre of horror but those who read him begin to realize that he is not limited to only this specific genre. Horror as a genre consists of a very broad spectrum but most people generally

categorise horror into the subcategories of gore, violence and unnatural occurrences. King's works of horror, however, include much beyond that.

For starters, one can always expect the unexpected from him. As the synopsis from the book suggests, the plot consists of a riveting and absorbing chain of events. However, this is Stephen King. The story is set in a small town where a boy has been murdered in the most barbaric and horrifying way possible and all the clues, eye witnesses and forensic evidence point to one person – Terry Maitland, who is a much appreciated and beloved figure among the locals. He is popularly known as Coach T as he teaches the children baseball and is a respected teacher at school. Detective Anderson has Terry arrested in the most humiliating way possible. It seems to be a simple open and shut case until Terry's lawyer brings in evidence that Terry was seventy miles away when the crime was committed. Now this particular development in the case pushes the detectives from their hard ground. They had so much evidence against Terry from the crime scene that they did not consider to cross-check Terry's whereabouts on the day the crime was committed. It is impossible to explain in any logical way how a person can be present at two places at the same time. This is the basic crux of the story which promises quite a lot. One expects a very hardcore, thrilling ride which will finally explain the unexplainable. However, King always delves towards the paranormal. You might have an eager desire to understand how this reality of one-person-being-in-two-places-at-the-same-time happens. King successfully builds up the plot with such mind-boggling and unthinkable clues that the reader is convinced that Terry Maitland is the murderer before being faced with the possibility that he is innocent. His storyline will have the reader begging for a baffling yet rational explanation. At this point, the story takes a turn – there is something eerie going on.

Many people do not prefer to read King's novels because of his humongous passages, but even in his voluminous novels, he has the ability to hold the attention of the readers. Stephen

King is a brand name by himself. This particular book is around five hundred pages long yet there is never a dull moment in the story. It grips the reader's attention till the very end.

The only complaint about this book is that it introduces the character of Holly Gibney, who is a recurring character in the trilogy of Stephen King's *Mr Mercedes* series. Many references that King provides in the story may not be easily understood by someone who has not read the series and in turn, may ruin it for them. However, *The Outsider* competently acts as a standalone novel. King plays it well with the book and teases the reader on what to expect.

Assuming Stephen King to be a writer of the horror genre is a common mistake. King's take on individuals is not fictional at all; in fact, it is very life-like. This quality of his horror writing is what differentiates him from other horror writers. It does not just include violence, gore and terror. His depiction and style of writing are so real that they induce fear, panic and terror within us. We can connect, feel and understand what the characters are going through. His horror is of such kind that one feels that it might happen with them. It is not the sort of unbelievable happening, it is quite explicitly the impossible possibility occurring that his novels portray. No one has the ability to craft a skin-crawling, spine-chilling and hair-raising scene like Stephen King does.

Statutory warning: nightmares guaranteed if you do decide to delve in.

On the Author -

Maryleen had always felt like the love for literature has been etched deeply within her even before she knew anything about it. Listening to ghost stories from her grandfather are some of the fondest memories from her childhood. Crime fiction, detective stories, mysteries and thrillers - she lives for it all. A self-proclaimed Christie fanatic, Maryleen's first novel that she ever read was Agatha Christie's 'Death in the Clouds'. There has been no turning back for her ever since. Now this love for reading has led her to create her own bookstagram account where she reviews books. This community has broadened her horizons and paved ways for her to explore more diverse genres. Despite reading a range of genres, at the end of the day, she returns to crime fiction, specifically true crime, which has her hooked to the book and glued to the screen. She believes that this genre makes one more aware and given the state of affairs in present times, being "extra vigilant" is only natural.

JOJO RABBIT: THE NAZI WHO LEARNT COMPASSION

- Madhura Bhattacharya



Early in the re-education of the German people, the Allied military government attempted to develop a sense of collective responsibility for the results of National Socialism. The Psychological Warfare Branch of the United States Army had conducted detailed interviews to determine the awareness of the German people regarding the existence and function of the concentration camp. Newspaper accounts continually told of the enemies of the Reich being moved to the concentration camps; and jingles were made as early as 1935 to propagate the underlying terror of the times. One such being:

Lieber Herr Gott, mach mich stumm

Das ich nicht nach Dachau komm.

[Dear God, make me dumb

That I may not to Dachau come.]

Nazi policy allowed for the circulation of facts as it would keep the Germans informed of their existence and function but no more than that. On the part of most Germans, a

psychological repression, that is, the desire to avoid knowing the unacceptable aspects of National Socialism, helped maintain a vacuum, and furthermore, the propaganda education of the Goebbels left the identity of the youth of Germany at potential risk, much like it was before the war.

Taika Waititi's film, *Jojo Rabbit* (2019), explores the 1940s war-time Germany in a comic satire, lampooning the Nazis, much as his genius predecessors Charlie Chaplin and Ernst Lubitsch had done before him. Holocaust humour is a delicate instrument for all the horrific acts that are explored, which can be hard to laugh at. Yet the openhearted black comedy that the movie has succeeded to be, is reminiscent of the elegance of German folktales which guide us through the darkness with a candle lit with hope; and the hand holding that candle is that of Jojo's mother Rosie.

The film revolves around a 10 year old boy, named Jojo, played by the young artist Roman Griffin Davis, coming to terms with hiding a Jewish girl, Elsa (Thomasin McKenzie), in his home, who had been taken in by his mother (Scarlett Johansson). Growing up in 1940s Germany, Jojo is an enthusiastic boy with a rapturous smile and blond hair, and a deep reverence for "the saviour of our country, Adolf Hitler". His inherent innocence and self doubt regarding his identity has made him the perfect vessel to absorb the Nazi rhetoric, especially about Jews. When he goes to the camp of Hitlerjugend – for his initiation as a "man" by becoming a Jungvolk – he is taught about the Jews who have fangs, scales and 'serpent tongues'. Yet it is in his inability to kill a rabbit when urged by bullying upperclassmen, that we come across the pure innocent heart of the child who just wants to be part of something bigger than himself, not knowing that to do so he must let darkness engulf him. The incident results in him being anointed with the name of Jojo Rabbit, to reduce his inability to kill as an act of cowardice; consequently, to reclaim the title with some dignity, he gets hurt by a hand grenade and is left deformed and morbidly embarrassed.

A boy with so much to prove and with a need to build a place for himself in a world full of horrors, Jojo becomes a sympathetic character whose fanaticism is harmless to everyone but himself. In an article for the *Vanity Fair*, Waititi claims that he was tired of seeing World War II from the lens of the soldier and wondered at the experience of the ordinary people of the time. In 2010, his mother introduced him to the book, *Caging Skies* (written by Christine Leunens in 2004), and he was struck by how “the stories focused on the treatment and experiences of the children.” His ability to balance unassailable goofy moments with an acknowledgement of the real-life horrors has made the movie exceptional. But a truly genius move had been introducing the lampooning rendition of the imaginary character of Hitler, enacted by Waititi himself, “as a way to externalise the battle that is going on in Jojo’s head throughout the film.” Jojo requires his ideal image of Hitler to enable him to face the world and make sense of its cruelty. An imaginary friend, who is invisible to everyone but him, is made in the image of the Führer, who he admires and believes to be his best friend. Yet the calm demeanour of a parent asking a child about the cruel bullies who would have called him names, hardly incites the fear and dread of the man who went on to terrorise an entire race. It is evident that the boy’s imagination has made the fatherly figure of the Führer to provide the reassurance that few except his mother provide. Incidentally, we see the devolution of this image which comes nearer to reality as the film progresses with the growth of empathy in Jojo; at a point when Jojo contemplates his interaction with Elsa, Hitler’s personage changes into the very man who roused the nation with his speeches made with great passion and gesticulation.

As an anti-thesis to the Nazi identity that is propagated by every other person in Jojo’s life, his mother, Rosie Betzler, injects hope and worldly wisdom into her “zealot” boy through her parenting. Scarlett Johansson breezes into the film as the mother who provides reassurance, and through gentle humour and sunny smiles, attempts to direct the mind of the son away

from the dangerous ideas that threaten to smother his innocence. Waititi claims his film to be a “love letter to all mothers.” Rosie’s aim in life is to encourage her son to remain a child, much against the wishes of the world, and to protect him against the pervading darkness surrounding them. But she would not have him blind to it. Bearing in mind his fanaticism towards the Führer, she would turn his head towards the hanging figures in the town square rather than away from them, as to questions regarding the reason of their fates, she would shed the wisdom of a sensitive person understanding the horrors of the world, by saying that they did “what they could.” Rosie becomes the golden thread that holds together the movie with her love and laughter, bringing back her son from the precipice of an abyss by gentle gestures of indulgence.

Wars battled with guns are often less impactful than the ones made with words among people with no post in life, but armed with opinions bestowed on them through their upbringing in a culture. Elsa, the Jewish girl hiding in the walls of Jojo’s dead sister’s room, acts as that adversary whom Jojo must defeat to regain the iron-clad belief in his Führer. Their interaction ranges from humorous battles about racial figures of prominence and tales of the supernatural prowess of the Jews, to the touching letters written by Jojo from Elsa’s fiancé to communicate emotions he cannot claim to be his own. Elsa develops his emotions from a Jew-hating fanatic to a boy fascinated by the girl who, instead of having horns and a tail, would conduct battles of wit with him.

Other characters in the film, like Sam Rockwell’s disgruntled, disillusioned and defeated Captain Klenzendorf, provide the audience with a splash of different colour other than what paints the spiritually dead masses. Fräulein Rahm (Rebel Wilson) acts as the guide to the girls of the camp, whose future is to be dedicated to the war effort by carrying babies, as the Fräulein’s exaggerated claims reveal. Sub Officer Finkel, played by Alfie Allen, is portrayed as the constant companion of Captain K, loyally executing his commands despite the

Captain's constant demotion, along with subtle intonations regarding their relationship. And finally Yorkki, Jojo's "second best friend", played by Archie Yates, who is physically reminiscent of the character of Piggy from *Lord of the Flies*, whose frequent weaving in and out of scenes and interactions with Jojo, shows the transitory life of the youth of the time who were trained for glory and then thrown into the pit of death to survive by their own wit.

The relevance of the film, after so many other interpretations of the war throughout the years, had been in question since its release. The advertising campaign for the movie had termed it "an anti-hate satire", and Waititi himself has claimed the importance of these stories at the present time more than ever. He says, "They're a way of educating ourselves, and more importantly the younger generations, about the dangerous habits of humans and the importance of fighting against intolerance and hate. Waititi expertly swings between these shifts in the film and it goes from funny to tragic to rousing in a heartbeat. The thread of humanity stays intact through the film even when the tone becomes too playful. Despite the occasional heightened artificiality, the emotions shine through. His direction has a unique sensibility which uses the tropes of war and humour to create a dimension which links the representation of hate through space and time, serving the contemporary masses with a gentle warning through past mistakes. From the intonations of the German version of "I Want To Hold Your Hand" by The Beatles in the opening credits with vintage images of cheering and saluting, to the concluding scene of the German version of "Heroes" by Bowie, Waititi had incorporated popular music and contemporary dialogue to make the film resonate its critical message to today's audience. Amid constant news rising from the hatred of the "other", it remains an entreaty to live up to the ultimate epitaph presented by the film: "they did what they could."

A CONVERSATION ONLINE
WITH BESTSELLING AUTHOR RUTH WARE

A relatively new author, Ruth Ware has stormed her way into the book world by churning out constant bestsellers, earning her the moniker of being the new Christie in town. She is stirring up a storm in the world of cosy crime fiction and the psychological thriller genre with novels like *In a Dark, Dark Wood*, *The Woman in Cabin 10*, *The Lying Game* and *The Death of Mrs Westaway*. Both *In a Dark, Dark Wood* and *The Woman in Cabin 10* were in the U.K.'s *Sunday Times* and *The New York Times* top ten bestseller lists. The editorial team's introduction to Ware happened through bookstagram - the book community of Instagram. This brief interview is the result of our project to harness the power of social media in interviewing this best-selling author.

Interviewed by Shruti Ghosh and Maryleen Raktima Baidya

1. What is it like being compared to the Queen of crime fiction? How does Agatha Christie inspire your writing?

It's a huge honour! I think Christie is a brilliant plotter and if my books can provide some of the satisfaction that hers do in terms of an unguessable devious denouement and a twisty ending, I would be very happy.

2. What is your favourite Agatha Christie book?

I think the best plotted is *And Then There Were None* but probably my favourite is one of the Marple ones. Maybe *A Murder is Announced*.

3. Are you familiar with any Indian authors?

Yes! I love the writing of Aravind Adiga, Neel Mukherjee, Deepa Anappara and many others – I also adore the Sam Wyndham series of crime novels by Abir Mukherjee. He was born in Scotland and writes in English, but his books are set in Raj-era India. They are wonderfully evocative. And the writer Anjali Joseph has been a friend since we were in our twenties. I am always keen to discover new voices though. We are living in an era of unparalleled richness in that respect.

4. What are the special challenges of writing a mystery/thriller novel as opposed to any other genre?

Well the competition is very high - so you have to be very good, and you have to stand out, with a clear hook that lures readers in. And crime readers tend to read a lot in the genre so they become expert at spotting twists and guessing the solution to the mysteries. You have to work hard to fool them!

5. What role does the setting play in your novels? You have a fascination with dark woods, forests and trees, would you turn to the mountains, seas and deserts for future thrillers?

Strangely my new book is set on a mountain - it's out this autumn and it's set in the French Alps in a ski resort. So yes!

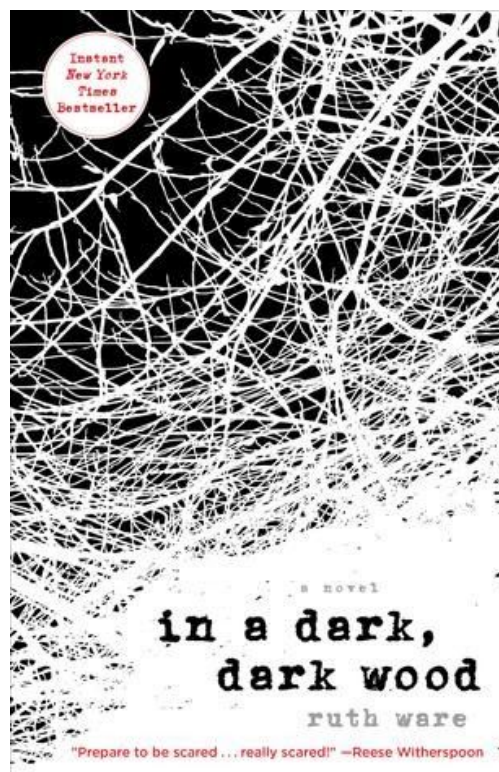
6. Which work of yours till date has been the most mentally taxing as a writer and why?

Probably *The Woman in Cabin 10*. It was my second crime novel and while I was writing it, *In a Dark, Dark Wood* was on its way to becoming an unexpected success (unexpected to me, anyway!) I really put pressure on myself to ensure the follow up was as good as possible. I

was desperate to prove that I was not a one-trick pony, and could produce another book just as gripping.

IN A DARK, DARK WOOD: WHERE BEAUTY AND SUSPICION MINGLED

- Maryleen Raktima Baidya and Shruti Ghosh



REVIEW –

“People don’t change,” Nina said bitterly. “They just get more punctilious about hiding their true selves.”

- Ruth Ware, *In a Dark, Dark Wood*

This book is Ware’s debut book in this particular genre. As the synopsis suggests, *In a Dark, Dark Wood* is about a woman who is invited to her childhood best friend’s hen party whom she has not seen in over ten years. What starts as an innocent party in an isolated house in the woods soon turns into a crime scene where everyone is a suspect.

The protagonist of the story is Leonora Shaw, a secluded crime writer who has had a difficult life. Lenora or Nora is haunted by the memories of the traumatic experiences she has had as a teenager. These ghosts have successfully crept into her adult life and affected who she is. She is distraught most of the time but is gradually trying to bring some semblance of order into her life until the invitation to her childhood best friend's hen party arrives. But amends are not made overnight. Years of resentment, heartache and deceit flare-up to the brim and relations among the gathered friends are further strained. Nora longs to be back in London, back to her writing rather than being amidst the strangers masked in the garb of so-called friends from her earlier life. Unbeknownst to her, the sinister plot that she feels brewing is just the tip of the iceberg.

In a Dark, Dark Wood begins with a thrilling prologue and is written in the vein of locked-room mysteries and Agatha Christie is unequivocally one of Ware's biggest influences. The novel follows the trope of one of Christie's most well-known stories *And Then There Were None* and slowly builds the plot through different aspects like sudden invitations, dark woods, huge and isolated mansion, untrustworthy characters which again leads to the unearthing of more deceptions and lies. Something is very wrong in the group but we cannot pinpoint exactly to one single character who could be the cause. We can smell something alarming and ominous brewing in the house but no one knows who is doing it because everyone is faking innocence. Due to this, there is no proper antagonist in the story until the very end when the perpetrator is finally discovered. We have our doubts and suspicions about Clare, Nora's childhood best friend, sometimes but nothing is made apparent.

The first half of the novel may seem very slow and tedious but the author is trying to put all the pawns in place before the final act starts. The opening of the story, however, is quite arresting. Nora wakes up in a hospital with a faltering memory of what had happened and

why she is hurt. The past – her stay in the woods– is mingled with the present as she desperately tries to remember what had occurred. Through flashbacks in the story, we delve into the deep, secretive past of Nora and Clare. The ending is quite predictable for staunch crime fiction addicts and thus after a glorious suspenseful ride, the ending is a little disheartening.

Exposure and curiosity play a big role in the plot. These two aspects constantly work together to produce new yarns of the plot. As the story goes on, the curiosity of one character exposes the secret of another one. This happens, particularly with Nora and Clare. Though they were former best friends, each knows that the other is harbouring some big secret which involves the both of them. The setting in the story plays a very important role in this book, in this case it is set in a glass house which faces the dark woods – *“There was something strangely naked about it – it felt like we were in a stage set, playing our parts to an audience of eyes out there in the wood.”* (In a Dark, Dark Wood)

Clues and foreshadowing play a very important role in the book too. Time and again, we are reminded that everything is not quite as normal as it seems. They are in a glass house with no privacy, no curtains, no protection and no cell connectivity. Surrounded by dark, thick woods, each character seems to be playing a specific part that has been assigned to them, while staying in the house. Beauty and suspicion have been mingled well by Ware. The glasshouse in the middle of the woods was indeed an alluring vision but given the fact that it was isolated, with no other houses or buildings in the vicinity and that there is no way of establishing contact with the outside world gives it an eerie feeling.

The book has been marketed as a mix of spooky horror and crime thriller which is quite obvious from the book cover and the title of the book itself. The spook factor and the mystery are very much present in the story but the horror element is amiss. This book has drawn

comparison to Gillian Flynn's novels due to the fact that they feature women protagonists and both are written by female writers. However, both authors portray their diverse cast of characters very differently. Ware's ability to create a unique setting for psychological jump scares diminishes as the novel delves into the second part. Ware spins a durable yarn throughout the story but it all starts to crumble gradually as the climax unfolds. Ware uses similar kinds of tropes which are ubiquitously found in all kinds of crime fiction but true-crime fiction readers can see through it quite well.

This book is a perfect crime read. One will obviously be intrigued as there is a constant undercurrent of something uncanny and dangerous. It has a perfect blend of twists and turns to keep the reader hooked until they have turned the very last page. It is not a hardcore crime novel instead it is a more cosy British crime mystery which borders on the eerie and uncanny happenings. A perfect read for stormy dark nights, maybe in a dark wood too.

*"In a dark, dark wood there was a dark, dark house;
And in the dark, dark house there was a dark, dark room;
And in the dark, dark room there was a dark, dark cupboard;
And in the dark, dark cupboard there was... a skeleton."*

(From *In a Dark, Dark Wood* by Ruth Ware)

“READREADANDREAD” – THE KEY TO GOOD WRITING

A Presidency University alumnus and blossoming writer, Devapriya Roy is best known for her books *Friends from College*, *Indira* and *The Heat and Dust Project*. As fellow Calcutta girls, the editorial team is thrilled to have corresponded with Roy as she reminisced about her younger days spent in the city. Roy shares with us her experience of becoming a published author, her thoughts on literary festivals and her advice to budding writers in this e-mail correspondence.

Interviewed by Maryleen Raktima Baidya and Shruti Ghosh

1. What prompted you to turn to the written word and when did you decide on being a writer?

I think even as a child I was moved, most of all, by words. I remember listening to stories – my great grandmother was my first quarry for this but my grandmother and mother and both grandfathers were great storytellers too – whenever I could, getting sucked into those worlds, inhabiting them long and deep. On the hot and humid Calcutta summers, I would spend the afternoons reading, while everyone else napped. Ever since I learnt to read, I have never been alone, I have always shared my life with fictional characters. I must have been getting hardwired to be a writer in these years, I suppose, even though naturally this was all happening sub-consciously.

2. Can you tell us about the struggles of being a debutant writer getting published in India?

Once upon a time, Indian writers who wrote in English had to look to London or New York as the metropolitan centres of the publishing industry. They would have to write about India

in a certain way to get published in the West – and it is from this that the “mangoes and monsoon” stereotype about Indian Writing in English emerged. Fortunately, this changed in the first decade of the twenty-first century in India. And by the time I became a writer, Indian writers in English were writing for an innately Indian market. Publishing houses were also actively looking for fresh young voices.

Today, there are now many reputed publishing houses in India, and a very large – almost staggering – number of books are published each year. The market has amazing depth and breadth now – from self-help to graphic novels, thrillers to history, chick lit to political biography, literary fiction to weighty tomes on economics and geopolitics, the publishing ecosystem is extremely vibrant. However, this also means that competition is very high too, and for a book to stand out in this very dense market is more difficult. A lot of first-time authors find that even if they are published, their books don’t get reviewed and so on. I would recommend that any aspiring writer today should find a literary agent (there are many in India now) and the agents will negotiate on their behalf with a publisher.

3. How was your experience working with HarperCollins for *The Heat and Dust*

Project?

I was very fortunate to have got V K Karthika as my editor and publisher. (At the time, Karthika headed HarperCollins India. Now she is the Publisher of Amazon-Westland’s several imprints.) Karthika is the sort of old-style editor that you read about in books – with a deep, instinctive sense of how you can improve your work. So, from commissioning *The Heat and Dust Project*, based on a proposal and a sample chapter, to the long years it took for the book to take shape, and finally to publishing it, Karthika guided us wonderfully. (She had also published my first novel *The Vague Woman’s Handbook*.) However, for a

book to be successful, it needs a whole village as it were. And Harper's marketing and sales teams rallied marvelously to lift it up.

4. All authors are readers first. What are the kinds of stories or genres that draw you as a reader? Which authors instilled the love and joy of reading in you? Can you name some of your favourite authors/ works and tell us why you love them?

As a girl, I remember reading almost as much in Bengali as I did in English. Ashapura Debi and Saradindu Banerjee were my favourites then. The thing about both these writers is their extraordinary range – both wrote for children *and* adults, Saradindu wrote historical fiction, detective novels, screenplays – and that they were remarkably prolific through their lives. In Calcutta Girls' High School we had a great library and, more importantly, a wonderful librarian. There was the whole Enid Blyton, Nancy Drew, Ruskin Bond, Louisa May Alcott, Colleen McCullough, Margaret Mitchell world, there of course. The books our generation consumed in India. But also, Anita Desai and Vikram Seth and Dom Moraes. I read at least one book from this library for seven years straight. At some point I also managed to convince my mother that I needed the British Council library for academic reasons. That was bullshit of course but the old British Council library – on Shakespeare Sarani – was a treasure trove that opened up a whole world of literature to me. I can go on and on, of course. But there are two specific book recommendations that I want to leave you with. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is a magnificent novel, a work of pure genius that rewards the patient reader with untold joys. In my opinion, it is the greatest novel to have come out of the Indian sub-continent. The other (mercifully much shorter) novel that I often recommend is Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah*, a love story that is written in a deliciously contemporary voice.

5. In your opinion, what is your best work yet? Would you like to branch into different genres to challenge yourself as a writer?

I think *The Heat and Dust Project*, the travel-memoir that Saurav (Jha) and I wrote together was the most challenging one to write. We had aimed to capture a certain snapshot of India, and bringing all the strands – travel, memory, history, marriage – together was tough. I have written a serialized novel lately (*Friends from College*, which was published weekly in *The Telegraph* as *The Romantics of College Street*), a crazy project to embark upon (especially for a perennial procrastinator like me). *Indira*, which is a graphic novel, was also great fun to do, especially because I was collaborating with the wonderful artist, Priya Kuriyan. What I need to do now is take a deep dive and write a nice, long literary novel!

6. What is the hardest challenge of being a writer? What is your strategy to overcome it?

Sitting in one place and actually writing the book – there are so many distractions. There are no strategies, you just have to strap yourself to your desk and write!

7. How would you define the essence of your novels?

This is a difficult question. I think I shall leave it to my readers to define the essence of my novels.

8. We are told that back in the college days, you had started a little magazine called "Un-Presi-dented". What was the driving force behind it? How did that shape you later?

I think I have never been able to match the amount of energy and enthusiasm I exhibited in the first few months of college in the rest of my life! *Un'Presi'dented* was a product of that

time. I remember I wrote an editorial in verse for it – the influence must have been Seth's *Golden Gate*. I think for our class (Prof. Sanyal will remember this too) being in College Street, an all-round literary hub, which was also a nerve centre for the Bengali little magazine ecosystem, was electric. We were getting inspired by everything around us, our teachers, the history of the college, the ambience at Coffee House, each other! The thing that I remember the most about *Un'Presi'dented* is that I published my future husband (and co-writer) Saurav's articles often in it. We also had our first big fight about the edits I did on one of his articles!

9. What are some of your fondest and the most ludicrous memories of literature classes?

Fondest memories are of my undergrad classes at Presidency and graduate classes at JNU. The love we lavished on texts, unpacking verses and analyzing the lives of writers: I miss the intensity of that. I am sure there were things that seemed supremely ludicrous to us at the time – but somehow now only the fond memories remain.

10. Reading is not a habit often inculcated or encouraged at a young age in India; parents see it as a waste of precious time when a child could be studying. Did you have to grapple with any such thing as a child? What advice would you give to parents who may have a negative bias towards reading as a leisure activity?

It is a tragedy at so many levels. For one whole set of children, reading for pleasure is a foreign concept. They have no access to libraries, books are an unspeakable luxury for their parents, and their schools do not make reading outside the syllabus a factor in their haphazard curriculum. As for those who *can* afford books but choose not to invest time in reading for pleasure, thinking it is a waste of time, I really have no words. Reading opens

doors to the imagination – so I would argue it is good for scientists! – and reading builds one’s facility in language. The act of watching something, whether a movie, a cartoon, a video, is essentially a communal event. It’s more fun if you do it together. But when you read, you learn to be alone, you learn to slip inwards, into a journey that reveals to you the many ways in which a few words on a page can create whole worlds in the air. It is magical.

11. What is your assessment of the current Indian readership and what does the future hold for both readers and writers in terms of growth?

I think there is no doubt that a lot of young people prefer stories told on screens and not in words. Unfortunately, they are losing out on the specific joys that reading brings. When you watch Harry Potter on screen, you see Daniel Radcliffe as Harry. When you read the Harry Potter books, *you* are Harry (unless you are Hermione). It makes *all* the difference.

12. What is your opinion about the mushrooming Lit-Fests all over the country? What are your thoughts about the changing landscape of extracurricular activities in terms of literary events then and now?

I think litfests are fun, because they give authors (who mostly work in silence on their laptops wearing shabby PJs) an opportunity to travel, stay in fancy hotels for two nights, wear nice clothes and meet readers and other authors. I have no complaints! But litfests are also increasingly focusing on Bollywood these days – and that feels a bit self-defeating to me.

13. Do you think a background of Literature studies in the graduate level helps to shape a literary career?

If you have studied literature as an undergrad and a grad student, then it means that for five years you have filled your life with books and reading. You have read closely, and you have read from different perspectives. That would *certainly* train you to be a writer. After all, reading great writers *is* the best way to learn how to write. However, it's also important that you read contemporary fiction – which often universities don't teach – because to be published now, you also need to know what is happening in the world of contemporary letters. Tolstoy, Tagore and Dickens were deliciously *of their time*.

14. What according to you is an easier task: writing or teaching?

This is a difficult one. I have been writing for much longer than I have been teaching. So teaching is possibly tougher. But I learn a great deal from my students, and they renew me in so many ways, that I think a combination of teaching and writing is probably ideal for me now.

15. What would be your advice as a writer to another budding writer trying to break into the literary world?

First: Read the best of contemporary literature, Indian and world. Definitely join a library so you have a steady supply of books. My own (non-empirical) theory is that for every ten thousand words you read you will probably write a hundred words of prose that you won't hate. So *readreadandread*.

Second: Write. Just as you must practice the sitar or the violin for years before you can dream of performing professionally, you will find that once you start writing, it will take years of practice before you get published.

Third: Don't become a writer to get success, fame or money. I am sure there are easier ways of achieving these things. Write only if you are willing to fail at it again and again. (After a

while, all your books will feel inadequate to you, mark my words.) It's that sense of failure that will push you to write the next one!

