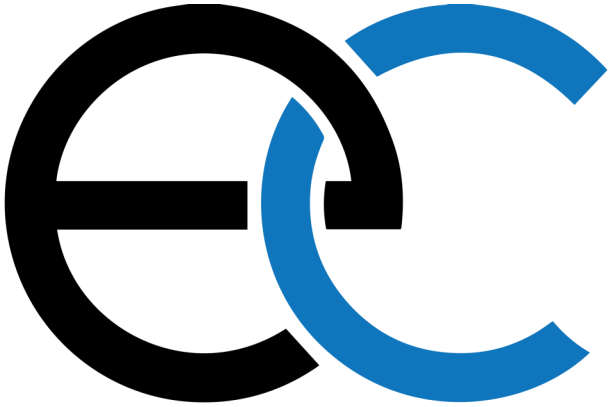

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Editor's Preface

*Editorial Board

On behalf of our contributors, reviewers, editorial board, and editorial team– we warmly welcome you to the seventh issue of *Essence & Critique: Journal of Literature and Drama Studies*. *Essence & Critique* publishes academic articles and book reviews written by leading academics, early career researchers and independent scholars who specialize in cultural studies and/or have a background in performance, theatre and drama studies. The work published is intended to be accessible to everyone and at the same time reflect upon key issues and emerging trends in literature and literary criticism while extending existing conversation. Each work that is filtered from the theoretical and practical knowledge of the authors and passed through the filter of field expert referees and editors will be included in the scope of this journal, which aims to close a gap in the world of literature and drama studies.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the issue writers, our associate editors, our book review editors, our international advisory board and especially our editorial assistants for their contribution in delivering this issue. This issue consists of an intellectually dynamic range of materials, discussing works of writing that are not widely represented within our received canon. We are excited about the breadth of illuminating scholarship in this issue and we would like to invite new writers to join us as we offer a platform for them to present their groundbreaking academic work.

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Table of Contents

ESSENCE & CRITIQUE: JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND DRAMA STUDIES
E-ISSN: 2791-6553 ★VOLUME ℟V.I ★ DECEMBER 2025

Place, Politics and Platial Significance: Victimhood in Kashmir through Select Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Researches on spatial studies, area studies, human geography and globalisation prioritise place, and even conceptualise place as the primary component for many tensions and conflicts concerning identity, meaning, culture, economy and politics. This research article probes into the place politics of the region of Kashmir to understand the notions of victimhood and marginalisation. Kashmir as a borderland territory, is highly exposed to the geopolitical, religious, and ethnic conflicts. Since the region embraces a multicultural society, differential claims over the land in terms of ethnicity and religion provide grounds for the emergence of divergent political perspectives. The article compares select narratives of the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir to construe the problems of victimisation experienced by the members of the community by employing John A. Agnew's concept of 'place and politics'. The article discusses Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* and Farah Bashir's *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* to examine place-based attributes which influenced the events of the 1990s like militarisation, militant insurgency and exodus of Kashmiri pandits, further delineating the contradictory vision of peace in the efforts of conflict resolution in Kashmir

KEYWORDS

Kashmir conflict, victimhood, place politics, comparative, Agnew.

Introduction

Place, in a geographical setting, implies to the physical and topographical representation of space which is inclusive of social categories. Defining place in a sociological setting, includes the usage of terms, like 'locale' and 'region', which represent the embedded production and reproduction of social activities. Since, the term 'place' gains differential connotations and understandings, the meanings and values associated also spread diversly concerning a few aspects like politics, society, economy, ethnicity, community and psychology. Thomas F. Gieryn formulates a common definition of place that suits all branches of knowledge:

> Without naming . . . , identification, or representation by ordinary people, a place is not a place. Places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined . . . A spot in the universe, with a gathering of physical stuff there, becomes a place only when it ensconces history or utopia, danger or security, identity or memory. In spite of its relatively enduring and imposing materiality, the meaning or value of the same place is labile—flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested. (465)

This constituent of everyday life is a material abstraction, that highly impacts the microsociological episodes of acting agents, humans. The microepisodes of social production and reproduction are grounded to space as the physical space or place acts as an influential means of action. According to Henri Lefebvre, "(Social) space is a (social) product [. . .] the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action [. . .] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (26). The integration of the concept of place to understand social interaction, further, expounds the interrelation of politics, culture and economy embedded in the process of production. As Lefebvre accounts, all actions of the agents revolve around the space of production. Apart from social, economic and cultural production, Lefebvre refers to political production too indicating the production of power in the place. Establishment of power and the control followed by it, is often confined and restricted to a particular territory. In that case, the platial importance figures the role played by space and place in politics. The amalgamation of place and politics (place-based politics) branches into various models of political phenomena like geopolitical conflict, clientelism, geography of hegemony, nationalisation and many more. Though these phenomena reflect place-based politics, the inclusive aspects of sociology encourage the understanding of the behaviours of the acting agents corresponding to the political activities. In the case of geopolitics, it purely deals with the politics emerging out of geographical consequences, which depicts the process of territorial delimitation of the state or demarcation of territorial boundaries. Place, by not only

being a monofunctional phenomenon of being a physical space, establishes the interdependency of the social structure to the destined place, developing a space for social activities. In that case, the partake of community in the demarcation of territorial constituency of a nation implicates the political dimensions of the physical space determining human behaviours in it. Subsequently, Agnew comments on the previously mentioned interrelationship of place and community, and its influence on the socio-political structure, "place is defined as the geographical context or locality in which agency interpellates social structure. Consequently, political behaviour is viewed as the product of agency as structured by the historically constituted social contexts in which people live their lives – in a word, places" (43). Exemplifying the place-based politics and describing the geopolitical context in India, the Kashmir conflict, a consequence of partition of Indian subcontinent explains the relationship of place and politics. Kashmir, a land marking the border space between the nations of India, Pakistan and China, acts as the central objective of the geopolitical conflict. The unfinished demarcation of the boundaries of the then princely state of Kashmir—later a constitutional state of India, renders to the emergence of the state of continued war, conflict and terrorism. The differential political ideologies are not solely built over the procurement of the physical space but they involve the distinctive communal population in the place. Kashmir being a borderland provides space for the existence of multiple cultures exhibiting heterogeneity of culture, religion and ethnicity. As widely known, in Kashmir, majority population follows Islamism and the rest of population follow Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism representing the prevalence of heterogeneity in the belief system. The population are not identified with their religion but mostly with their place of residence. For example, people are often referred as 'Kashmiri Muslim' and 'Kashmiri Pandits' exhibiting the affinity towards the place and the place is associated with the construction of identity. This peculiar tendency towards the people's identity prompted the attempt to probe more into the person-place relationship and the influence of the politics in the borderlands of Kashmir.

Through literary interpretation, the article discusses Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* and Farah Bashir's *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* to examine place-based attributes which influenced the events of the 1990s like militarisation, militant insurgency and exodus of pandits, further delineating the contradictory vision of peace in the efforts of conflict resolution in Kashmir. The article compares select narratives of the Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir to construe the problems of victimisation experienced by the members of the community in terms of conflict and marginalisation by employing John A. Agnew's concept of 'place and politics'. The novel, *The Garden of Solitude,* portrays the protagonist, Sridar's experiences of displacement by drafting the timeframe in a way that sequentially describes the familial history, the phase of displacement, phase of resilience, and lastly the phase of

rejuvenation. The other text, *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*, a memoir, narrates the encounters of a girl in the militarised Kashmir, amidst, terror and confinement.

"All politics is local" – Place and Politics

Agnew's concept of place and politics synchronises the ideas of human geography, political sociology and political geography producing a 'conceptual place' for mediating the role of place. Earlier to Agnew, place and politics were not explored in a serious context but some attempts were made. The relationship and close association of place and politics were unearthed from the concept of human geography. A German geographer, Friedrich Ratzel found the expression 'political geography' in his book *Politische Geographie*, a subsume of human geography, defining the link between cultural growth of a nation with territorial expansion. Further the idea was developed into environmental determinism theory which emphasised the role of physical factors in influencing the social, political and economic development and growth. Agnew converges the notions of person, place and politics by discussing its tendency of interdependence: "State and society are not autonomous and separable" as they are merged, explaining "the role of locality or place in mediating the actual interrelationships of state institutions and social processes" (Agnew x). The intermediate role of place in affecting the human activities, irrespective of social and political concerns are initially analysed by distinguishing it into three aspects, locale, location and sense of place. The understanding of the three aspects establishes the platial significance of a locality to both individuals and communities. Further, Agnew, through an empirical analysis, accomplishes the role of place in defining the politics at a microsociological scenario and a macrolevel context, for instance, nationalisation. This research incorporates the ideas of Agnew to interpret the role of place in the politics of Kashmir, from the lenses of two communities.

Victimhood and Platial Politics

The term place is an inclusive definition of the person-place relationship that dwells in a society. Establishment of platial significance by the agents of the community is attained on the pretext of social, and cultural interaction in a macro level. Agnew picks up Randall Collins', concept of macrosociology, where "Collins (1981) has proposed that macrophenomenon are made up of *aggregations* and *repetitions* of many microepisodes" (19). Subsequently, in order to understand macrophenomenon, Agnew develops the three aspects of place as an attempt of determining the subjective/microsociological setting of person-place interaction: "locale, location, and sense of place" (Agnew 5). An individual's routine, social order and subjective orientation with a place unearth the construction of meaning over that place. The cumulative microepisodes of cultural and social interaction, in process, marks the communal place identity

of groups. This, further, explains the communal association in developing the place meaning. The last generation of pandits from Kashmir traces their ancestral history back to 1900 BCE (Pandit) claiming their indigeneity in the land as "the original inhabitants of valley" (Jerath 618). Followed by the existences of Hinduism and Buddhism, Islamism came into practice in 13th century after the invasion of Shah Mir delineating multiculturalism of the land. So, in both means, seamless reproduction of macrosociological components by the pandits and Muslims in the context of place contributes to the creation of communal history in Kashmir. Pred comments on the role of place in a macro level context as "place is not only what is fleetingly observed on the landscape, a locale, or setting for activity and social interaction. . . . It also is what takes place ceaselessly, what contributes to history in a special context through creation and utilization of a physical setting" (Quoted in Agnew 27). This way, the accumulation of microepisodes transcends to a macrophenomenon which, further, impacts the microsociological interactions in Kashmir. The historical significance, a macrophenomenon, serves as a symbolic capital of the communities influencing their assertive claim over the place. Here, the symbolic capital depicts, "'outstanding-ness,'. . . if not the essence, of this power, which, being entirely set within the logic of knowledge and acknowledgement, is fundamentally a symbolic power; but also because the representative, the sign, the emblem, may be, and create, the whole reality of groups which receive effective social existence only in and through representation" (Bourdieu 24). For instance, the protagonist of *The Garden of Solitude*, Sridar recalls his ancestral history through the narratives from his grandmother and mother. The narrative that explains his roots in Kashmir acts as a tool of symbolic capital in constructing the emotional bond towards the place: "Sridar smiled and remembered the story of his great-grandmother's encounter with a lion one wintry night long ago and how she had slapped the beast amid the pear trees in their orchard. He visualised the scene in his mind, over and over again" (Gigoo 241-242). The segment of Sridar's intergenerational memory, not only foregrounds his ancestral history but the roots of his family bounded to his home that is located amidst the significant orchards of Kashmir. Similarly, Farah Bashir constructs her idea of home around the social interactions with her neighbours and the memories of her grandmother. She remarks that "The house I would go back would be bereft of her presence but filled with her memories. Our home, the little monument of memory" (Bashir 211). This excerpt marks the influence of ancestral memory and the cultural capital developed in the context of place, in determining an individual's place meaning. The memories of their ancestors provide the knowledge of symbolic power in constructing an emotional claim over the place. Though the narratives represent the perspectives of different communities, commonly, the repetitive sequences of microepisodes depict the extent of historical significance in the formation of emotional bond over a place. Therefore, the historical dominance over the person-place

relationship acts as a foundational feature in attributing to the subjective orientation towards a place. Since, history is an objective form of generational memories that carries emotions, it manipulates the subjective level of connection between person and place.

Attribution of meaning to a place is often made possible by contextualising the course of action happened there. In that way, the memories of past and the ongoing events of sociocultural activities contribute to the definition of place. As place acts as means of production of microsociological events, the references of social worlds add value to the place, where, "[place] meaning is attributed to acts and events through communication and interaction with limited numbers of people" (Agnew 26). Agnew elaborates on the role of place in a sociological context under three aspects, as one explains the provision of physical setting in which social relations are constituted: "*Locale* refers to the structured 'microsociological' content of place, the setting for every day, routine social interaction provided in a place" (Agnew 5). Additionally, the geographer incorporates the sense of personal and social factors involved in valuing the space. The value of place in Kashmir is determined by the coexistence of diverse communities. The populace of Kashmir is accustomed to the close interaction of multiple communities in a way of adopting the routine of neighbours' cultural activities. Both pandits and Muslims celebrate and support each other's existence by taking part in the festivities of the other, as in "Sridar had returned from Eidgah and was standing by the side of a wall at Gani's courtyard to take home a bowl full of mutton" (Gigoo 29). Here, the pandit boy celebrates Eid along with his neighbours. The narration of that event exhibits the natural engagement of the member of other community in a culture specific festival. Farah Bashir also documents the social relation of pandits and Muslims by narrating their familial practice of celebrating every occasion with their neighbour, the Kauls: "whenever there was a celebratory function to be held at Laxmisree's house, the two houses were connected by a wooden plank, pilav, merging them into one. The last time that happened was in September 1988, when Laxmisree's elder sister's son, Kartik, was born. A feast was thrown to celebrate his birth across both the houses" (86). This part exemplifies the custom practiced by the neighbours rejecting their communal differences. While Laxmisree belongs to pandit community and the author is a Kashmiri Muslim, both the families respond to each other as kith and kin by enjoying the birth of Kartik in a collaborative manner defying the differences. By comparing the narratives of Siddhartha Gigoo and Farah Bashir, the interpretation communicates the similarity in the pattern of social interaction between the pandits and Muslims in the region of Kashmir. The coexistence integrates a locally constructed definition to the place as a space that demonstrates peculiarly pluralist identity, commonly known as 'Kashmiriyat'—"communal harmony, multiculturalism, and the tolerance that the majority community displays towards the minority community" (Hangloo 37). The narratives, by frequently mentioning the

rituals and routines of the locale, add to notion of interdependent lifestyle experienced by the members of the society. The social space that renders multiculturalism promotes the idea of coexistence. Kashmir, as a social space to its inhabitants, is incomplete without the concept of Kashmiriyat, as it loses its peculiar identity. The idea of Kashmiriyat being a locale-specific phenomenon acts as a dominant reference to the geographically oriented identity of Kashmir. The identity and the attribution of meaning to the region of Kashmir as a social space that renders communal coexistence marks the significance of the place, a unique tendency towards the region of Kashmir. The platial significance established by historical significance and strong blend of socio-cultural elements in the context of place escalates the affinity of human-place relationship assisting the status of place in determining the politics of the region.

Kashmiriyat, a locally oriented perspective on the communal coexistence of Kashmir, has a macro level impact over the politics of the region. The partition of nationalities in the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was attempted to establish religiously functioning state, where Pakistan emerged as Islamic republic with Islam as its state religion. Since, Kashmir has a combinatory population, pledging the region to one particular nation remained complicated contributing to the escalating conflict. By complying with the political boundaries of Kashmir, politicisation of communal differences defines the nature of geopolitical conflict in the territory. The state's political ideologies are often dependent over the territorial configuration where it is implemented to cast a place-based political expression. Agnew states his views on the interdependency of place and politics as

> Places, therefore, are connected to the state through its organization into various tiers of administration and the geography of its hegemony. The state survives and prospers as long as it can hold together the territorial coalition of places that gives it geographical form. The state is dependent on places for support as they are dependent on it for political influence. The political parties and local-central links it provides a locus for are in turn their main channels of political expression. (40)

The state's dependency towards the locally oriented concepts influences the formation of the political expressions. Agnew expresses the making of policies for a place and the political dependency over a place. In the context of Kashmir, the locally constructed idea of Kashmiriyat acts as one of the main channels that regulates the national political expression of two nations with respect to the geographical orientations. The term 'Kashmiriyat' is a common expression that holds no political concern but the politicisation of communal differences escalated its sense as a political expression. Ratan Lal Hangloo, states that "Some define [kashmiriyat] as an ideological foundation of ethnic nationalism, and in most recent times, it has also been defined as a marker of Kashmir identity that cuts across the religious divide" (Hangloo 38) emphasising the

political significance of the concept. In the narrative of Siddhartha Gigoo, the coexistence between Hindus and Muslims is positively represented until the rise of insurgency, a result of geopolitical conflict, which affected the relationship of the populace. Suspicion was an omnipresent phenomenon in Kashmir among the people and also the security forces. Suspicion and doubt created in the minds of the people continuously caused rupture to peace and the natural social interaction that happen in Kashmir, especially, communal interactions. Through the conversations between Lasa and his neighbours on the state of terror spreading in Kashmir, Gigoo comments in the novel,

> The local newspapers wrote about freedom struggle. Fear ruled the hearts of the Pandits, and they became suspicious of the Muslim neighbours and friends with whom they have shared close bonds for years. The same fear shattered the love Muslims had for the Pandits. The Pandits became suspects – informers and agents of India. (Gigoo 32)

This excerpt expounds the existing displeasure between the communities without any direct reasons. The suspicion was directed towards both Pandits and Muslims in terms of their identity and allegiance towards the state. Pandits were often called the informers of the state which broke the trust and escalated encounters of betrayal between the communities. The suspicion towards the pandits was not just communal but had waves of nationalism—pandits were identified as 'agents of India'. This way the events of forced displacement of pandits were not just a consequence of religious indifferences but a consequence of national conflict. Here, the notions of Kashmiriyat, though region specific, insinuate the place-based politics of Kashmir. Similarly, Farah Bashir narrates the perspectives of Muslims about the measures taken by the security forces in order to protect the state from the threats to national integrity. The conflicted religious and political ideas resonated the unrest in the region which called for military occupancy. The incessant surveillance, often, reflected in the form of search operations, indefinite curfews and violence were considered as invasion of privacy. The author of *Rumour of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*, expresses the perspective of nationalism through her text: "The sting was of a different kind. When thousands of unarmed dissenters took to the streets to protest the Indian rule, troops fired bullets on these larger processions. Sometimes, they fired tear gas. . . Often, it was worse than the old springtime kreth from chilli fumes" (Bashir 112-113). The excerpt represents how the loss of a regionally constructed idea has an impact over national politics. Farah Bashir portrays her life amidst war and terror but this sequence reveals the political scenario of Kashmir. Though the sequence projects the negative aspects of surveillance and militarisation, it establishes the national attention rendered to a locally oriented disorder. Agnew remarks on the national scale impact on social concerns as, "[r]eference to local settings

or to global processes was largely closed off by the nationalizing of social science and its subservience to the national state" (74). In the 1990s Kashmiri population was divided by religion and different political ideologies causing insurgency in the state. So, the loss of the harmony and peace in the coexistence of communities called for the operation of the state machinery in the region. Gigoo also marks few occurrences in the novel which represents the shift in the national consciousness of the characters influenced by their regional beliefs, as an attempt of exhibiting the existing national conflict from a communal perspective: "'Lasa, we will live in peace and happiness when Kashmir becomes part of Pakistan,' Manzoor would say" (Gigoo 56). Here, Manzoor conceives his peace as settling amidst his own community. Though he wishes for Lasa's accompaniment in Kashmir and the idea of coexistence with pandits, he secretly wishes for communally formulated state. This regionally constructed notions of communal coexistence and displeasures of border demarcation, have direct influence over the state's political ideologies which undergo a transition of becoming a national orientation advocating the emergence of nationalism. According to Agnew, nationalism, a "place transcending ideology" (71), "reinforce rather than undermine the identity between . . . 'social places' and 'physical places'" (4). In the case of Kashmir, Kashmiriyat acts as the principle factor in stimulating the national consciousness of the populace based on communal identity and religious ideologies. Either the loss of Kashmiriyat or its existence provokes nationalism of different means. Through the instances that offer different perspectives on the politics of Kashmir, it is inferred that a locally constructed communal orientation called Kashmiriyat gains a political significance establishing a place-based politics in the territory.

Politics, a geographically rooted administrative orientation, is often demonstrated as an organisation that distributes resources among the community. However, the imbalance in the allocation of resources among the groups creates identity based on political alliances. P. G. Klandermans comments on the development of politicised identity as, "Identity politics had bred politicized identities. Politics is about the distribution of goods and bads in society. The allocation process almost inevitably turns into identity politics even if governments painstakingly try to not advantage or disadvantage the one group over the other" (1). This way, individuals and groups have their identities with different significance based on place, race, economy, religion and many more. The differential identities create divided opinions paving way for the politics based on identities implying to the prevalence of identity politics. Identity politics in Kashmir involves the communal distinction among the population. Certain indifferences in the social and political expressions based on the communal identity negatively affect the marginalised one. In case of Kashmir, both the communities are targetted for different concerns of the region. In the broader concern, identity in Kashmir involves the terms of national consciousness amidst the

populace. Agnew discusses about the nationalism and the consequences of resultant place-political identity: "The consumption side of nationalism involves the so-called psychic rewards that the act of supporting nationalism provides at the time of acting (identification with a community, patriotism, affirmation of identity, racial prejudice, etc.)" (138). Agnew's views on the contribution of the act of support and dejection to nationalism in the formation of identity offer an insight into the place-based politics and the sequential victimization experienced by the Kashmiri populace based on identity. In the novel of Siddhartha Gigoo, the protagonist's family experiences forced migration from Kashmir to Jammu. The exodus of Kashmir pandits, often called as "ethnic cleansing of Kashmir" (NHRC Annual Report 22) was imposed based on the identity of the victimised population—pandits. Sridar's family and friends were under constant threat for life until they left their homeland. Pandits were terrorised for their identity rather than for their actions: "'It is not about being innocent,' a pandit neighbour argued. 'Hira Lal was kidnapped because he is a Pandit and the militants suspected him to be an informer. For the Hizbul militants, all Pandits are informers" (Gigoo 48). Pandits were eliminated from the valley not for their communal identity but for the communal identity that is politicized. The conversation between Lasa and his friends clearly expresses how pandits were tagged as informers in Kashmir during the time of insurgency and how they were victimised, merely, for their identity. Hira Lal was a respectable person in the locality of Nalle-e-Maer, who worked for the Border Security Force (BSF). His multiple layers of identity added to the reason for his kidnap by the militants. Though the character returned safe, the fear and terror that spread among the members of the community expose them to vulnerability and further to the state of victimisation. This instance emphasises the negative consequences of identity politics or politicised identity. P. G. Klandermans remarks on the politicisation of identity as

> Individuals have multiple identities, identities that reflect in how they are socially embedded. Identity or issue politics make identities salient. Depending on the interaction with opponents and allies, a collective identity politicizes. Politicization of collective identity, supposedly, intensifies the impact of collective identity on action preparedness. Politicization of collective identity implies that the involvement of the wider social and political environment is sought. (16)

Though the term 'Pandits' refers to a community, politicisation of the identity adds multiple layers to it by referring them as informers of India, and by implying their allegiance to the nation state. The identity politics involved in the conflict, intensifies its impact by resulting in the displacement of the group. From the perspective of Kashmiri Muslims, who also experienced similar occurrences of identity politics but in different terms. In the 1990s Kashmir, the rise of insurgency and unrest in the region alarmed the need for law, order and security. The unrest in

the territory which is viewed from the lenses of geopolitics called for national attention too. As discussed earlier, from the words of Siddhartha Gigoo (32), about the prevalence of suspicion between the population, the Kashmiri Muslims were suspected for supporting the voices of seperatism and militancy. In that case, ordinary people are also subjected to suspicion and other surveillance strategies. Farah Bashir, in her narrative, documents the difficulties experienced by her family due to suspicion based on their identity:

> Upon discovering the trapdoor on the floor – the voggeh – they went berserk! They ran amok with suspicion, as if they'd unearth a tunnel to the other side of Kashmir, in Pakistan. . . . They did not expect it to be an ordinary floor of an ordinary home with ordinary things. . . . Suspecting militants to be in hiding behind the gunny sacks, they poked the bayonets of their rifles into them. They slashed open the large rice bags, callously unleashing rivers of grains on to the part-stone, part-mud storeroom floor. (97)

This represents how a meaningless door in a house of a person gains significance merely out of the identity beholden by that resident. The repetition of the word 'ordinary' emphasises the indifferent approach of the security forces towards the family based on their identity. Heightened suspicion due to national emergency and security instigates aggressive surveillance measures towards the populace. This act of surveillance, though meant for the welfare of the people induces the negative aspect of victimisation. Here, Farah Bashir's family had their winter supplies in the *voggeh*, which were destroyed in the process of the search operation. Being innocent and not related to any unlawful activities, the family experiences second hand encounters of the insurgency. This instance portrays how an action of suspicion can bring economical, physical and social disadvantage to the victims. In both the cases, none of the characters propagate any ideologies or consents of affirmation towards any organisation, however, despite their innocence in the conflict concerns, these people encounter instances of dehumanisation purely based on their identity. The indirect victims of the conflict are constantly exposed to vulnerability and are victimised in the course.

Place-based Perspectives on Peace

The place-based attributes constructed by individuals as a community on subjective and social levels undergo a transformation with the influence of politics. In case of Kashmir, the local orientation of the place attains a national recognition, moreover, impacts the understanding of home as a place of resort and peace between the communities with the effect of politicised identity and place-based attributes. Kashmiri Pandits mark the valley as a lost homeland, and a place that holds their indigeneity, history and identity, whereas, for Kashmiri Muslims, the place represents their culture and livelihood embedded within it. With the influence of politics, the pre-existed cultural and social attributes to the place like Kashmiriyat, shifted to their currently

prevailing political significance. Similarly, the conflict situation has also developed different perspectives on peace among the communities. Johan Galtung views peace as "*negative peace* which is the absence of violence, absence of war — and *positive peace* which is the integration of human society" (Galtung 2). Pandits, the victims of forced displacement, who were terrorised to leave their homeland holds a negative attachment towards the place. Lasa's emotions of resentment towards his homeland and the fear associated with it expresses vulnerable situation of the community, collectively:

> 'Life is good at the camp. We have nothing to lose now. Nothing that can be snatched! Near our camp, there is a field where some residents grow vegetables. It resembles the kitchen garden we had in our house in Kashmir. The persons who tend the saplings seem very happy. I long for such a happy life.' (Gigoo 143)

Here, Lasa expresses his displeasure in returning to his homeland. Though, Kashmir offers him with his lost economic and social capital, the negative attachment associated with the place pursues him to resent the idea. The negative attachment of the pandits towards Kashmir represents the dark nights of terror, fear and memories of their lost family members. Whereas, the act of reconstructing places that resemble Kashmir in the Jammu camp exhibits the positive attachment of pandits towards the place despite their traumatic experiences symbolising "empathological places" (Manzo 183). The sense of place and the desire for a violence free environment encourages the pandits to envision a peaceful life in returning to Kashmir Valley. Speaking of peace, while the pandits seek peace in returning to the valley, Farah Bashir and her family earn for a life outside Kashmir. The incessant surveillance and militant activities affect normalcy in every aspect of life, which include education, entertainment, social interaction, mobility and cultural activities. Being a young girl, Farah Bashir addresses her thoughts on simple aspects of life that take place outside Kashmir, "The newsprint smiles on the faces of the models in the advertisements made me wonder if I would be a different person altogether had I grown up away from a conflict zone, outside of a disputed territory" (122). According to the protagonist, the smiles and advertisements always raised questions on the lack of peaceful environment in Kashmir to experience such emotions. The newspapers and magazines of Kashmir often portrayed the events of conflict along with the related photographs of either people dead or empty streets with traces of unrest. Being raised in an environment that spreads terror and the resultant makes it impossible for her to experience the simple emotion, happiness. This explains the protagonist's desire to experience an ordinary life outside Kashmir, especially, in a non-violent environment. The perspectives of Lasa and Farah Bashir sums up their contradictory, yet, similar visions on peace. As the characters represent collective population, the pandits view peace with their community's return to Kashmir without any communal prejudices

and differences, whereas, the Muslims desire for life at Kashmir without terrorisation and militarisation. Though both the communities share the same space and experience similar encounters of violence, their visions of peace differ as the pandits living in Jammu expect a peaceful life at Kashmir and the Muslims desire an ordinary life outside. The communities that were spatially united, are divided due to the place-based politics in various aspects including their vision of peace. In both cases, the populace's sense of peace is related to their settlement in Kashmir, explaining the exclusive interdependency of social activities with place. With the influence of political expression formulated based on the geographical orientation, the region undergoes division in personal, communal, and platial levels.

Conclusion

The geographical inclination of Kashmir and the aspect of multiculturalism in the territory emphasise the role of politics in defining the relationship between society and place. The communal perspectives on Kashmir provide the dynamics of political influence in determining the place meaning, place identity and place attachment. The early place-based attributes of Kashmir solely depended on the cultural, communal and social aspects whereas the interference of place-based political expression added the space to mainstream national politics. This association of communities to place highlights the role of politics in changing a region-specific place meaning to an attribute that marks national politics. The interdependency of place and politics not only impacts the platial significance of Kashmir but politicises identity which eventually exposes the populace to victimisation. The development of place-based political identity demonstrates the prevalence of victimhood among both the pandits and Muslims of Kashmir. With this, the study expounds how place acts as a foundational element in all phases of human existence—vulnerability and peace building. By comparing the narratives, *The Garden of Solitude* and *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*, the study discerns the role of politics in fractionalising the attitude of pandits and Muslim towards their place of existence, Kashmir, in terms of place-based attributes, identity and attachment.

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Leveraging Literature: Proposing the Ajax Complex as a New Framework for Analyzing Mass Shooters

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ABSTRACT

As a long-standing medium, literature—especially dramatic literature—has been a source for understanding values, contributing to culture, and informing scientific theories. Indeed, literature is uniquely situated to make significant impacts on the individual, the community, and beyond. Through its characters, narratives, and symbolic patterns, literature offers archetypes and frameworks that both reflect and shape cultural politics. Literary figures not only embody recurring human behaviors but also provide templates by which individuals and societies can diagnose and describe psychological and social dynamics. In doing so, literature serves as a mirror of human complexity while simultaneously acting as a catalyst for change: dramatizing injustices, reimagining identities, and offering alternative visions of social life. The capacity of readers to engage emotionally and critically with fictional figures allows literature to inspire empathy, challenge entrenched norms, and contribute to collective self-understanding. While the Oedipus and Electra complexes have shaped psychological discourse for more than a century, this article proposes a new Greek myth-based complex as a framework for analyzing mass shooters, aiming to replace existing biased labels: the Ajax complex.

KEYWORDS

literature, Oedipus complex, Electra complex, Ajax, humiliation, mass shooter, lone wolf, violence, archetypes, masculinity, literary psychology, Sophocles, Homer, *Iliad*, *Odyssey*

Introduction: From Tragedy to Heuristic

Literature—and dramatic literature in particular—is rich with characters that invite analysis and present archetypes for correlation with contemporary personalities, behaviors, relationships, and disorders. By considering certain literary figures through the lens of modern psychological, sociological, and behavioral theories, we can gain insight into the timeless nature of human experience while also revealing how the complexities of individual and collective identity have evolved over time. Literary characters often serve as touchstones for exploring the nuanced ways in which behaviors manifest, both historically and in present-day contexts. In this sense, the study of literature offers more than just a reflection of the past; it provides a framework for understanding contemporary trends in human behavior and may provide the basis for the development of "values such as courtesy, effort and gentleness" (Polson 34). This article proposes the Ajax complex, a literary-derived heuristic for analyzing how modern societies narrate and understand acts of mass violence.

Purpose and Scope

The Ajax complex is advanced as a theoretical framework rather than a psychological diagnosis. It complements existing interpretive models such as Freud's Oedipus complex and Jung's Electra complex by centering on themes of humiliation, retribution, and the community's contested response to violence. This study treats the Ajax complex as a cultural and rhetorical tool—a theoretical heuristic intended to provide a framework for examining how narratives of mass shooters are constructed, interpreted, and perpetuated.

Theoretical Foundations: Literature as a Framework for Human Understanding

One of the most compelling reasons to consider literary characters in this capacity is the way they embody universal human experiences and emotions. From Sophocles' "Oedipus" to Shakespeare's "Hamlet" to Dostoevsky's "Raskolnikov," these characters transcend their historical and cultural contexts, representing psychological states and moral dilemmas that

remain relevant in today's world. Hamlet's indecision, existential angst, and internal conflict, for instance, can be seen as an archetypal representation of modern struggles with identity, agency, and the burden of choice. In the context of contemporary psychological discourse, Hamlet's paralysis and his oscillation between action and inaction might be read as manifestations of anxiety, depression, or even a form of narcissism, illustrating how classical figures can be mapped onto modern behavioral patterns and pathologies. In her article, "Classics Have Worth," A. Irene Polson contends that "if the 4,000 youth who committed suicide in 2001 had read Hamlet's soliloquy ('to be or not to be') those 15 to 24-year-olds might have changed their minds as Shakespeare's character did" (34). Perhaps Polson intended her remarks to be hyperbolic, but the observation serves primarily to illustrate her conviction that exposure to great literature can cultivate reflection and emotional resilience.

The correlation between literary characters and contemporary behavior is not limited to individual psychological diagnoses. Literary figures often illuminate broader social dynamics and relational structures that persist in modern life. For example, the power dynamics and social hierarchies that underpin relationships in nineteenth-century novels like those of Jane Austen or the Brontës continue to resonate in today's discussions of gender roles, social status, and personal autonomy. The struggles of characters like Elizabeth Bennet, constrained by societal expectations yet striving for individual agency, reflect ongoing debates about gender equality and personal freedom in the modern era. Austen's characters, while rooted in their specific social milieu, provide a means of interrogating current relational dynamics, such as the influence of social media on self-presentation, the pressures of economic stability in relationships, and the negotiation of power between partners. Scholar Annie Schultz contends that "Many writers of fiction have turned the inner lives of oppressed characters outward in order for readers to glimpse depictions of moral injustices that mirror those of the real world" (*Sitting Still* 187).

Moreover, literature allows for the exploration of archetypes—characters who serve as templates for broader patterns of human behavior. Carl Jung's theory of archetypes posits that

certain figures recur across cultures and time periods, reflecting deep-seated elements of the collective unconscious (*Psychological Types* 528). Characters such as the Hero, the Trickster, or the Shadow appear not only in ancient myth and legend but also in contemporary literature and media. These archetypes provide a lens through which to interpret both individual behaviors and collective cultural phenomena. The archetype of the Hero, for example, can be seen in modern political figures, celebrities, or even influencers on social media, whose narratives of struggle, sacrifice, and eventual triumph resonate with contemporary audiences. In this way, literary analysis serves as a means of examining the psychological and emotional underpinnings of modern leadership, celebrity culture, and the construction of public personas. In his 2001 "Enhancing Response to Literature Through Character Analysis," educator Larry R. Johannessen champions the importance of character analysis in literature and provides a detailed commentary on how teachers might do so which includes identifying values, dealing with irony, and follow-up writing activities (146–9).

Furthermore, the way readers and audiences relate to these characters can also provide valuable information about contemporary emotional and cognitive processes. Research in psychology and cognitive literary studies suggests that the act of engaging with fictional characters allows individuals to practice empathy, simulate social interactions, and explore moral and ethical dilemmas in a low-risk environment. This phenomenon, often referred to as "narrative transportation," (Green and Brock 701) highlights the role of literature and media in shaping not just our emotional responses but also our behavioral expectations and social norms. By identifying with or even criticizing literary characters, readers and viewers negotiate their own values, biases, and desires, making literature a powerful tool for both personal reflection and societal critique. This dynamic interaction between reader and text has long been a subject of interest for scholars seeking to understand how literature not only mirrors but also provides a model into better understanding the human condition. The capacity of literary works to illuminate human nature has deep roots in the Western intellectual tradition, where literature has

been regarded as a lens through which to explore the complexities of behavior, morality, and societal norms. Indeed, Nieli Langer, writing in *The Journal of Educational Gerontology*, asserts that "Literature is a handbook for the art of being human" (593).

Since Aristotle's observation-based approach to understanding human nature, scholars and theorists have expanded inquiry into behavior, cognition, and emotion. Among the most influential contributions to psychoanalysis, Freud's Oedipus complex and Jung's Electra complex have long framed discussions of early psychosexual development. More recent scholarship, however, invites consideration of broader psychic formations and conflicts that extend beyond these classical models while drawing from other literary archetypes.

Building on the methodological precedents of Freud and Jung, this study introduces a third framework—the Ajax complex—derived from Sophocles' *Ajax*. Conceived as a literary and cultural heuristic, it offers an interpretive alternative to prevailing labels for perpetrators of mass violence, such as "lone wolf," "mass shooter," and "terrorist." A brief review of the Oedipus and Electra complexes provides the necessary foundation for this analysis.

Oedipus and Electra as Archetypal Precedents

Freud first referenced Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899/1900), using only a few pages to outline the play's psychological resonance. He observes that "the action of the play…consists merely in a revelation, which is gradually completed and artfully delayed—resembling the work of a psychoanalysis—of the fact that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laius [his father], and the son of the dead man and of Jocasta [his mother and wife]" (227). The tragedy's power, Freud contends, "cannot lie merely in the assumption between fate and human will, but is to be sought in the peculiar nature of the material by which the opposition is shown" (227). He posits that a "voice within us" recognizes the horror of Oedipus's fate because "we are all destined to direct our first sexual impulses towards our mothers, and our first hatred and violent wishes toward our fathers" (228). This voice, he adds, is quieted only when we repress these impulses and "forget or suppress our jealousy of our

fathers" (228).

Freud's reading thus shifts *Oedipus Rex* from a meditation on fate to an exploration of repressed desire. The tragedy dramatizes universal psychic forces as "murderous rage and forbidden desire" that remain active within all human behavior. For Freud, its enduring relevance lies in the imperative "to recognize our own inner self, in which these impulses, even if suppressed, are still present" (228). By mirroring psychoanalytic revelation, Sophocles' play exemplifies how literature can expose hidden dimensions of consciousness and compel self-examination.

Freud's contemporary, Carl Jung, proposed a female counterpart to the Oedipus complex—the Electra complex—which he first outlined in *The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (69). Drawing on Greek tragedy, Jung interpreted *Electra*'s devotion to her father, Agamemnon, and hostility toward her mother, Clytemnestra, as the psychic inversion of Oedipal desire. He writes that "in the daughter, the typical affection for the father develops, with a correspondingly jealous attitude toward the mother. We call this complex, the Electra-complex" (69). This formulation mirrored Freud's model while introducing a framework for examining female sexuality through a literary archetype.

Freud, however, rejected the analogy, arguing that "we are right in rejecting the term Electra complex which seeks to insist that the situation of the two sexes is analogous" (*Interpretation of Dreams* 229). Jung himself later moved beyond the theory, emphasizing "anima and animus as the innate structures of sex and gender" (*Anima and Animus* 186). Despite subsequent critiques that the Oedipus and Electra complexes are heteronormative and reductive, both remain enduring archetypal referents—literary models through which patterns of desire and identification may still be examined.

Ajax in Classical Context

Sophocles' *Ajax*, generally regarded as his earliest extant tragedy, revisits a hero renowned from

Homeric epic as the second-greatest Greek warrior after Achilles (*Iliad*; *Odyssey*). Preceding the events of Sophocles' play, Ajax's valor is repeatedly affirmed: he duels Hector to a draw, protects Patroclus's body "as a lion stands over its young" (*Iliad* 17.133), and aids Odysseus in recovering Achilles' corpse for burial. When Achilles' divine armor is awarded to Odysseus for rhetorical skill rather than martial strength, the Greek commanders signal a cultural shift from heroism defined by brute force to one governed by eloquence and intellect. As Eric Bronson observes, Ajax "can't convince himself that it's a future worth living for," while Odysseus "represents the new democratic way of life where nothing is fixed and everything, even friendship, is always negotiable" (120). The heroic age wanes; the age of reason and persuasion begins.

Sophocles opens *Ajax* with Athena and Odysseus, marking the only instance in his surviving works where a god appears visibly onstage. Athena reveals to Odysseus that she has maddened Ajax, who, intending to kill the Greek leaders, has instead slaughtered the army's livestock: "He fell upon the horned throng dealing death and hewing them to the earth around him" (Sophocles 4). In her chilling account, "while the man raved in the throes of frenzy I still urged him and hurled him into the toils of doom" (4–5). Athena then cruelly summons Ajax forth to be mocked before Odysseus, who protests in vain: "I wish that I were far from here" (5).

Ajax appears carrying the carcass of an animal he believes to be a slain enemy. He praises Athena for aiding his vengeance and vows to "crown [her] shrine with trophies of pure gold for this prize" (5). When she asks about his victims, he boasts that those who humiliated him "will never again dishonor Ajax" (6). The episode exposes both his delusion and the gods' indifference to human suffering.

As the play unfolds, Tecmessa recounts the aftermath of Ajax's madness: "He seized a two-edged sword and was eager to go forth on an aimless path," slaughtering "bulls, shepherd dogs, and fleecy prisoners" before regaining reason and collapsing in shame (10). Overcome by humiliation, Ajax laments the "mockery" awaiting him and cries, "Woe is me! Woe is me!" (12).

His despair culminates in suicide—an act performed at the seashore after invoking Zeus, Hermes, and the Furies.

The play's resolution centers on the moral debate over Ajax's burial. Menelaus and Agamemnon seek to deny him funeral rites, while Odysseus, his former rival, argues for compassion and respect. Ultimately, Odysseus persuades them, assisting Teucer in the burial. The tragedy closes not with divine retribution but with human reconciliation, suggesting that moral discernment and empathy, not heroic valor, define the emerging ethical order of the Greek world.

If any Greek mythological or literary figure parallels the psychological and behavioral trajectory evident in contemporary acts of mass violence, it is Ajax. His progressive descent—from humiliation to delusion, rage, and ultimately self-destruction—mirrors the staged escalation often observed in perpetrators of mass shootings. Unlike Achilles, whose violence is sanctioned within the heroic codes of warfare, or Orestes, whose matricide is divinely contextualized and ultimately absolved, Ajax occupies a uniquely human and unredeemed position. His actions arise not from divine command or collective justice but from wounded honor and psychological collapse. For this reason, Ajax offers the most compelling classical analogue for examining the internalized rage, isolation, and moral disorientation that characterize modern acts of retaliatory violence.

The Ajax Complex Explained

The Ajax complex is a literary-derived heuristic describing a six-stage narrative arc (described below) of humiliation leading to violence and collective response. It is not predictive or diagnostic but interpretive, offering a framework for understanding how societies narrate acts of violence.

Valorizing Violence: A society that valorizes aggression or provides ready access to violent scripts creates conditions where violent solutions appear conceivable.

Establishing Accomplishment and Identity: The perpetrator's prior history of accomplishment or

recognized competence—academic, social, or occupational—that intensifies the psychological impact of subsequent humiliation or perceived injustice.

Experiencing Humiliation and Betrayal: An incurred slight or betrayal (real or perceived) that causes the person embarrassment and/or humiliation.

Seeking Retribution and Restoration: A prompting to revenge or retribution (real or perceived) that comes from the self or from an exterior force, as in "god" or "voices in one's mind" as a means to restore dignity and/or status.

Enacting the Violent Act: The act of violence itself wherein the target(s) and/or innocents are slain which may be targeted or indiscriminate.

Reckoning with Aftermath and Memory: The collective aftermath of violence—its psychological and social fallout for victims, perpetrators, and their communities—manifested through processes of reconciliation, ethical reckoning, and cultural response in forms such as media framing, public memorials, and policy debate.

Valorizing Violence

The first aspect of the Ajax complex begins with the culture that surrounds maleness. In his chapter, "Deep Plays: Theatre as Process in Greek Civic Life," Paul Cartledge identifies the battlefield as the "true site for the display of Greek manhood and masculine prowess" and a place where men may enact "their essential natures" (13). Since the culturally sanctioned aggressiveness of men was celebrated in "war and athletics" by the Greeks, it's only logical that young boys would imitate—and likely be rewarded—for such behavior and perpetuate a cycle of male aggression (14). The question for the purposes of articulating an Ajax complex becomes: Does the aggressor live in a culture where male aggression is celebrated? Certainly for Ajax, he did. Not only did Greece celebrate male aggression with competitions and displays, but Ajax, in fact, has just come out of a decade-long war in which his accomplishments were crucial for the Greek army to win the war. Studies in anthropology, psychology, and sociology find that male

aggression is common but its expression and acceptance vary in degree from culture to culture. Some cultures may encourage or tolerate aggressive behavior, while others may strongly condemn it. It is also worth noting that aggressive behavior is not solely a male trait. Women can also exhibit aggression though the manner in which it is displayed can vary.

The most commonly used tool to measure aggression in groups of people within specific cultures today is the Buss-Perry "Aggression Questionnaire" developed and first administered in 1992 with results published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. In their findings, researchers Arnold H. Buss and Mark Perry found that their sample of college-attending men in the United States of America ages 18 to 21 scored higher on three of the four named areas of aggression: Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, and Hostility, but there was virtually no difference for gender on the area of Anger (452). Citing violent deaths and aggression in the United States, Erin Grinshteyn and David Hemenway summarize their findings in their 2019 article, *Violent death rates in the US compared to those of the other high-income countries, 2015*, as follows:

The US firearm homicide rate is 24.9 times higher than in other high-income countries.
The US firearm suicide rate was 9.8 times higher than in other high-income countries.
83.7% of all firearm deaths occurred in the US.
91.7% of women and 98.1% of all children killed by firearms were in the US.
Firearm homicide rates in low-guns states were 13.5 times higher than other countries. (20)

Establishing Accomplishment and Identity

The second aspect of the Ajax complex merely requires a person who has acquired some measure of success. The success could be as nominal as getting a good grade on a spelling quiz or being the valedictorian of their graduating class. Indeed, any success that is acknowledged by another person and holds importance in the mind of the recipient is valid which in effect means: everyone. This broad and general assertion speaks to today's underlying fear that a mass shooting

could happen to anyone, anytime. The degree or nature of accomplishment—great or small—matters chiefly because it grounds self-worth, thereby magnifying the impact of a subsequent slight or betrayal. This second point of accomplishment or success is the one that friends or relatives of the perpetrator will refer to in an effort to assert the perpetrator's former normality and stability. It is also the aspect wherein that same friend or close relative will begin to assert their own innocence or non-advocacy of the violence.

As outlined above, Ajax's accomplishments during the Trojan War are sufficient to establish their noteworthiness.

Experiencing Humiliation and Betrayal

The third aspect of the Ajax complex involves an incurred slight or betrayal—real or perceived—that causes the person embarrassment and/or humiliation. It is highly likely that most people have all experienced feelings of embarrassment and humiliation—universal emotions that play a significant role in shaping human behavior. These feelings are often deeply tied to one's sense of identity and self-worth, and, while most individuals manage such emotions through adaptive strategies, it is important to acknowledge the dangerous potential they can harbor when unresolved. Physician-Psychologist Evelin Gerda Lindner plainly argues that "all human beings yearn for recognition and respect; their denial or withdrawal is experienced as humiliation" (*Humiliation* 59). Lindner's research also advises that humiliation, in particular, can provoke intense emotional responses, as it often involves a perceived loss of dignity or status in the eyes of others (59). In some cases, humiliation may lead to feelings of helplessness and shame, which individuals might cope with through either withdrawal or aggression.

In the context of mass shootings, the link between perceived humiliation and acts of violence becomes particularly salient. Some perpetrators of mass violence have been found to harbor deep-seated feelings of humiliation and social rejection, which may contribute to their desire for retribution (Leary et al. 202). Thus, while feelings of embarrassment and humiliation

are nearly universal, the way in which one chooses to cope with these emotions can be crucial. For a minority of individuals, such feelings can fester and, when combined with other risk factors, may lead to catastrophic outcomes, speaking to the pervasive fear that mass shootings can occur anywhere, at any time. It is during this aspect of the Ajax complex where mental health care is crucial but often not received. In Ajax's case, his wife, Tecmessa, and half-brother, Teucer—along with the chorus of sailors—attempt to assuage his tormenting thoughts, but are ultimately unable to stop him from bringing about his own demise.

Seeking Retribution and Restoration

The fourth aspect of the Ajax complex involves a prompting to revenge or retribution (real or perceived) that comes as a "call" from the self or from an exterior force, as in "god" or "voices in one's mind." This aspect is possibly the most complex and has received much attention over many years and connects to many facets of theories of aggression. The process by which an individual resolves to enact violence as a response to perceived humiliation or embarrassment often involves complex psychological, social, and cognitive mechanisms. While each case may differ, certain patterns of thought and justification can be observed, especially in individuals predisposed to violence. Research suggests that individuals who act violently in response to humiliation typically undergo a process of cognitive restructuring, where violent behavior becomes a justified means of regaining control, power, or dignity. In his book, *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes*, James Gilligan recounts how a man he interviewed justified killing his wife because she humiliated him on their twentieth-anniversary by mocking the man's inability to provide financially. The woman called her marriage to the man a "waste," and that night, feeling completely justified, he strangled her with a leash (87). Gilligan further reports that the man showed no remorse and communicated his innocence "despite the fact that he…was found guilty" (87).

Humiliation, as distinct from mere embarrassment, can be a particularly potent trigger for

violent responses. According to the work of sociologist Thomas Scheff in his *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism, and War*, humiliation involves the "perception of public degradation," which threatens the individual's social identity and self-esteem, potentially festering as "feelings of shame and rage" (8). Scheff further observes that to identify a person in the throes of such turmoil is more of an "art" rather than a "science" (8). When this perception festers, it can transform into feelings of rage, especially if the individual feels powerless to restore their sense of worth through non-violent means. In this way, violence becomes a perceived solution—a way to reclaim lost status or to assert dominance over those perceived as responsible for the humiliation. Certainly for Ajax, he felt powerless to change his situation even after his wife begs him to hear her pleas and not do anything rash or kill himself (Sophocles 12).

Another position that is useful to consider is the cognitive dissonance theory as defined in Leon Festinger's 1957 *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* which is, "the existence of non-fitting relations among cognitions" that may serve as the impetus for action suggests that individuals experience psychological discomfort when their beliefs or values conflict with their actions (3). To resolve this, they may reframe their beliefs to justify actions that would otherwise seem morally unacceptable. In the case of violence as revenge for humiliation, the individual may begin to see violent action not as wrong, but as necessary or even righteous. They may come to view themselves as a victim whose suffering warrants retaliation. This restructuring of thought allows them to resolve internal conflict about violence by framing it as a means of restoring justice. Researchers Cindy L. Anderton et al., argue that there is a relative relationship between the strength of one's beliefs and the degree to which a person has been wronged (whether perceived or actual), stating that "the greater the degree of the dissonance experienced by a person, the more motivated that person is to act in some way that will reduce this psychological discomfort created by this dissonance" (*Revisiting Festinger's Theory* 265). That Ajax was a mighty warrior and was then reduced to a laughing-stock is too great a discord in his mind for him to move beyond the humiliation of not winning Achilles' armor and his embarrassment over

the fact that he slaughtered innocent livestock when he had intended to kill his fellow Greek soldiers.

Albert Bandura's concept of "moral disengagement," as articulated in his 1999 *Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities*, is another useful framework for understanding how individuals justify violent behavior (193). Bandura argues that people can commit aggressive acts when they disengage from the moral standards that typically regulate behavior and cautions that this type of behavior is on the rise (193). This process can involve mechanisms like dehumanizing the victim, shifting blame to external forces, or minimizing the harm caused (194). In cases where humiliation is the trigger, the aggressor may dehumanize the person or group they blame for their emotional pain, viewing them as deserving of retribution. By doing so, they diminish feelings of guilt or remorse. Since the Greek Atreidae awarded Achilles' armor to Odysseus, they are, in the mind of Ajax, his newfound enemies and the ones who, by Ajax's way of thinking, should suffer.

Researchers Jeffrey Swanson et al., disclose findings in their 1996 study, *Psychotic Symptoms and Disorders and the Risk of Violent Behaviour in the Community*, showing that in some cases, individuals who commit acts of violence report feeling driven by external forces, such as "hearing voices," experiencing "delusions," or believing that a "higher power" is commanding them to act (309). Those researchers note that these sorts of behaviors are particularly relevant in individuals suffering from certain psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia or delusional disorders. Research indicates that a small subset of violent individuals may experience auditory hallucinations or delusions of grandeur, in which they believe they are acting on divine instruction or under the influence of supernatural forces (309). For these individuals, violent actions may be perceived as morally justified or even divinely ordained, giving them a powerful sense of purpose that overrides typical moral constraints (309–310). Sophocles begins *Ajax* with Athena celebrating the madness and delusions of Ajax and further admitting that it was she who caused him to behave so; and while there is no instance

where contemporaries refer to Ajax as being afflicted with psychiatric disorders, he certainly was motivated by a higher power.

Cultural narratives and social environments can also shape how individuals interpret their experiences of humiliation and how they choose to respond. In cultures or subcultures where honor and respect are highly valued, and where retaliation is viewed as an acceptable means of restoring honor, individuals may feel socially sanctioned to engage in violent behavior. The honor culture framework suggests that individuals may view violence as a necessary response to restore their social standing after a perceived slight or humiliation (Nisbett and Cohen 2). Here, violence is not only a personal resolution but a socially reinforced action. Certainly, Ajax behaves from within the older code of honor that was upheld and celebrated by the Greek army especially during pre-Trojan War times. But again, a newer culture of rhetoric and argument has begun to eclipse the old-world order.

The "frustration-aggression hypothesis" (Dollard et al. 27) posits that when individuals are thwarted in their goals or feel blocked from achieving a desired outcome, they may experience frustration that can manifest as aggression. Humiliation, in this context, can be seen as an obstacle to one's social or emotional well-being, provoking frustration that may lead to aggressive behavior. If the individual feels that non-violent means of addressing the humiliation are unavailable or insufficient, they may turn to violence as a way to "vent their frustration" and "regain a sense of control" (27). Even after Ajax speaks with and touches his son, Eurysaces, as a means of saying 'farewell,' Ajax goes to the seashore fully intent on suicide.

Individuals, then, who enact violence in response to humiliation or embarrassment often go through a process of cognitive and emotional transformation, wherein violent action becomes justified as a means of restoring dignity, power, or justice. This may involve cognitive restructuring, moral disengagement, cultural reinforcement, or even delusional beliefs. While not all individuals who experience humiliation will resort to violence, those who do often perceive violence as a necessary and justified response to their emotional injury.

Enacting the Violent Act

The fifth aspect of the Ajax complex is the deed itself wherein the target(s) and/or innocents are slain which may or may not include a primary target. For Ajax, his primary target was Odysseus, but in the act of seeking revenge and retribution, Ajax killed a variety of livestock all of which he thought were Greek soldiers. In constructing the theory of an Ajax complex, it is not necessary that a person have a specific target; rather, it may be a random or spontaneous act of violence. These incidents may reflect the perpetrator's desire to enact chaos or gain notoriety. A recent example of this is the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, where Stephen Paddock opened fire from his hotel room onto a crowd at a music festival. Paddock killed 60 people and wounded hundreds more, but investigators found no clear motive or demographic group that he was targeting specifically. Instead, it appeared that the attack was planned for maximum casualties, with the victims chosen indiscriminately because of their presence at the event.

Another type of mass killing with no specific target involves perpetrators who are driven by a desire for notoriety or a form of "suicide by mass murder." These individuals often view the act of mass murder as a way to leave a lasting legacy, regardless of who the victims are. As a good example, the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, though often considered a school-targeted attack, also showed signs of broader nihilistic goals. Reporting for *Time* magazine, journalists Nancy Gibbs and Timothy Roche detailed how the shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, fantasized about creating widespread chaos and destruction, even planting bombs in the cafeteria to maximize casualties indiscriminately and how the two boys were, in their words, going to "kick-start a revolution" (*The Columbine Tapes*).

Reckoning with Aftermath and Memory

The sixth aspect of the Ajax complex concerns the fallout experienced by victims and their contacts, perpetrators and their contacts, and the broader culture in which such violence

occurs. While specific examples of individual or societal outcomes lie beyond the scope of this examination, recurring themes identified across numerous studies include shock and disbelief, relief, guilt, remorse, and indifference. Likewise, the responses to an act of violence—whether expressed by those directly affected or by society at large—warrant continued scholarly attention and consideration.

At the same time, this discussion of the *Aftermath and Memory* stage remains necessarily brief, as it is not the purpose of this study to analyze or evaluate the various ways in which societies respond to mass violence—through legislative reform, public memorialization, or the preservation of the status quo. Rather, this stage represents the next logical and inevitable phase within the cycle articulated by the proposed Ajax complex. The forms that aftermath and memory take—be they calls for justice, policy change, or symbolic gestures of mourning—are inherently variable and unpredictable. What can be asserted, however, is that both *Aftermath* and *Memory* endure as essential components of the social and ethical continuum that follows such acts, shaping how communities reckon with loss and construct meaning in the wake of violence.

Reframing Violence: The Ajax Complex as an Interpretive Heuristic

Widespread familiarity with the Oedipus complex (and, to a lesser extent, the Electra complex) enables critical engagement—whether through agreement or refutation—while providing a means of identifying subconscious or conscious desires deemed inappropriate. In a similar way, familiarity with the Ajax complex offers an articulated rubric for recognizing inappropriate trajectories and for dissolving an emergent Ajax complex, thereby enabling individuals to acknowledge aggressive or even homicidal impulses. Consequently, the framework offers therapists and behavioral specialists a basis for interventions that promote constructive outcomes for affected individuals.

Indeed, the need for new perpetrator labels is addressed by scholars Maggie Campbell-Obaid and Katherine Lacasse in their article, "A Perpetrator by Any Other Name: Unpacking the

Characterizations and Consequences of the 'Terrorist,' 'Lone Wolf,' and 'Mass Shooter' Labels for Perpetrators of Mass Violence." In that article, Campbell-Obaid and Lacasse determine that "non-White or Muslim perpetrators seem more likely to be called terrorists" and that "White or Christian perpetrators…are instead more likely to be labeled lone wolves" (426). Similarly, Vito D'Orazio and Idean Salehyan contend that labels for perpetrators of acts of violence carry connotations that need closer examination and posits that "Whites are more likely to be called 'mass shooters' [than Arabs or Muslims]" (*Who is a Terrorist?* 1017).

The Ajax complex, conceived of by means of a literary work, begins to build a general rubric that may help provide a foundation upon which to examine acts of violence on micro and macro levels while simultaneously displacing the labels of "lone wolf," "terrorist," and "mass shooter" that have become encrusted with bias.

As outlined above, the six stages delineate the structural and psychological progression of the Ajax complex, providing a literary heuristic for examining acts of violence with greater nuance and ethical precision. The following table summarizes these stages for clarity and reference (see table 1).

Table 1

Source: Author's formulation of the six stages of the Ajax complex, adapted from Sophocles' *Ajax*

Stage	Heading	Core Description	Cultural or Contemporary
1	Valorizing Violence	A society that glorifies aggression or	Cultural narratives of
2	Establishing Accomplishment	A prior history of accomplishment or	Achievement-based iden-
3	Experiencing Humiliation and	A real or perceived slight or betrayal	Public shaming, social
4	Seeking Retribution and Resto-	An internal or external prompting to-	Justification of violence
5	Enacting the Violent Act	The moment of violence itself, whether	Mass shootings, acts of
6	Reckoning with Aftermath and	The collective aftermath of violence –	Memorialization, media

Acknowledging Limitations and Conclusion

The application of literary archetypes to real-world behavior necessarily involves interpretive, not empirical, reasoning. As heuristic models, such archetypes illuminate patterns of meaning and cultural narrative rather than predict or explain individual psychology. Freud's Oedipus complex and Jung's Electra complex—each derived from tragic literature—proved influential precisely because they offered metaphoric frameworks for understanding psychic conflict, yet both faced substantial criticism for their reductionism, cultural bias, and lack of empirical grounding. The Ajax complex should be understood in similar terms: not as a psychological diagnosis or causal theory, but as a conceptual tool for exploring how societies narrate and interpret acts of violence. Its value lies in clarifying the symbolic and rhetorical dimensions of such narratives, while acknowledging the ethical need to avoid romanticizing perpetrators or pathologizing human suffering.

Although it may be tempting to extend this method by drawing upon the wealth of Greek myth and tragedy to devise additional archetypal "complexes," such extrapolation exceeds the present aim. Yet it is precisely from this fertile imaginative ground that ancient Greek philosophers cultivated their own theories—reflecting what Alfred North Whitehead famously observed, that "the European philosophical tradition consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (Whitehead 39). Indeed, while philosophers preceded Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, it may be argued that Greek tragedy itself served as a catalyst for the kind of rigorous observation and philosophical inquiry that continues to inform intellectual and moral discourse today.

In conclusion, literary characters offer a rich terrain for theorizing about contemporary human behavior. By exploring the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of these figures, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which literature both reflects and shapes the complexities of modern life. Whether through the analysis of universal archetypes, the interrogation of power dynamics in relationships, or the consideration of how readers emotionally engage with fictional figures, literature provides a valuable framework for

examining current trends in human behavior. As we continue to navigate the shifting landscape of identity, morality, and social interaction, literary figures remain vital touchstones for understanding the evolving human condition.

In this light, the Ajax complex stands as a viable theoretical model—one that bridges literary archetype and contemporary behavioral analysis. While not predictive in a clinical sense, it offers a structured vocabulary for articulating the moral, psychological, and cultural dimensions of violence. As such, it contributes to the broader interdisciplinary conversation between literature and the human sciences, reaffirming the enduring relevance of tragic insight to modern inquiry.

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The Theatre of Trauma in Sarah Kane's Plays

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Sarah Kane's dramatic oeuvre through the lens of trauma theory, arguing that her plays construct a theatre of trauma in which shock, violence, and emotional intensity serve as instruments of cognitive transformation for the spectator. By dismantling traditional theatrical forms and narrative coherence, Kane redefines the relationship between performer and audience, shifting the latter from passive observers to active participants in trauma. Her dramaturgy functions as a mirror of postmodern anxieties—fragmented identities, the collapse of moral systems, and the failure of human communication—while simultaneously seeking an ethical awakening through emotional confrontation.

KEYWORDS

trauma, postmodern theatre, Sarah Kane, violence, spectatorship, ethics, psychological realism

The analysis identifies five apocalyptic dimensions across Kane's plays—of civilization, love, identity, language, and the Self—corresponding both to the evolution of her work and to the inner disintegration of the human psyche. From Blasted's visceral portrayal of war and social dehumanization to 4.48 Psychosis's introspective depiction of suicidal depression, Kane's theatre embodies a progressive internalization of violence: from external conflict to inner chaos. Her use of aesthetic gaps, fragmented language, and destabilizing imagery transforms the stage into a site of psychological participation and moral reflection.

Ultimately, Kane's art exposes the failure of humanity to confront its own destructiveness. Her writing, deeply rooted in personal experience, blurs the boundaries between life and art, body and language, ethics and aesthetics. 4.48 Psychosis, her final work, epitomizes this convergence—an apocalyptic descent into the Self where destruction and revelation coexist, and where the spectator must face the essential question: what remains of human truth in a world governed by chaos?

1. Introduction: The Theatre of Trauma

1.1 Shock and the Spectator

The mechanism of trauma functions effectively in Sarah Kane's plays because it relies on shock—on exposing, dissecting, and performing live those things that are usually unspeakable. This process directly implicates the audience, holding them accountable and transforming them into accomplices. The spectator's physical personal space is threatened by the possibility that something unexpected might happen to them, while their psychological personal space is made vulnerable through the suggestion of complicity in the crimes and atrocities revealed on stage.

Shock plays a pivotal role in Kane's theatre, stripped of the garments of relativity by probing the most profound and primal unconscious fears of humanity. As Caruth observes, the source of trauma does not lie in the original violent event in the victim's past, but in its repetitive presence—in the nightmares and daily reenactments through which the event is not fully known or assimilated, and must return to consciousness for the process to be complete (Caruth, 1995, p.4).

2. Mechanisms of Shock and the Spectator's Transformation

Through her dramatic writing, Sarah Kane establishes a powerful connection between postmodern culture and traumatology, constructing what Armstrong (2008, p.19) calls a theatre of trauma, grounded in five dimensions: the apocalypse of form, tradition, and society; the

apocalypse of love and the couple; the apocalypse of identity and language; and the apocalypse of the Self. These dimensions are present, in varying degrees, across all five of her plays.

The most significant aspect of a traumatic event—whether experienced directly or indirectly—is its potential to alter a person's belief system. In other words, intense emotions can reshape cognition. This is one of Sarah Kane's central artistic stakes:

"If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched."
— (Kane in Saunders, 2002, p.22)

Kane employs what Innes (1993, in Wallace, 2008) terms total emotional truth as a traumatizing strategy toward the witnessing spectator, pulling them out of their comfort zone and inducing a cognitive shift. She generates intense emotion by foregrounding individuals overwhelmed and crushed by existential crises, through an exhaustive representation of violence, and through the creation of disorienting dramaturgical devices—temporal fragmentation, multiple and contradictory identities, ambivalent perceptions, and dream-like logic—that destabilize audience perception much like trauma does in real life.

Kane described the creative process behind Blasted as follows:

"In the early drafts I brought the characters and situations to the surface; in the later drafts I buried them again—I made them more felt than heard."
— (Kane in Saunders, 2009, pp. 90–91)

This strategy creates a performative space for the spectator, allowing the reader or viewer to engage in active negotiation of meaning, filling the gaps in the text with interpretations grounded not in a fixed past but in their own present reality.

In The Implied Reader, Wolfgang Iser (1974) describes a similar strategy he calls aesthetic gaps—empty spaces within a literary text that the reader must fill, thereby becoming an active participant in the meaning-making process. In Kane's theatre, such emptiness functions symbolically as a representation of traumatic loss, silence, or inner void, while also serving as the means through which she transforms a witnessing audience into an engaged and complicit one. From here, it takes only a single element of surprise to shatter the assumed rules of the theatrical game.

In any traumatic event, there exists a power dynamic between perpetrator and victim. On stage, these roles may be played by actors embodying fictional characters, while the spectator

begins in the position of a neutral witness—more or less immersed, more or less identified with what unfolds before them. Typically, the spectator remains within a safe aesthetic distance, experiencing theatre as a protected observer of the fictional world.

Things stand differently in Kane's theatre of trauma. Beginning with Blasted, Kane shatters the conventions of realist drama and the representational frame of traditional theatre. Theatricality itself dissolves, giving way to an authentic communal event, in which spectators are forcibly removed from their comfort zone and placed in a position of existential risk. One might argue that one of the key reasons Kane changes the dramaturgical rules and abandons the framework of traditional British realism is precisely to create the necessary conditions for this transformation—to redefine the spectator's role from passive observer to active participant in trauma.

"Kane says chaos is dangerous for us, but we have to go into chaos to find ourselves." — (Bond in Saunders, 2002, p.25)

A transformation in the spectator's belief system becomes possible only when that system is threatened or called into question. Kane's theatre of trauma denies the audience the privilege of maintaining a safe aesthetic distance from the dramatic event.

The dramatic strategies employed by Kane at the textual level actively block the spectator's capacity to adopt an aesthetic attitude—that is, to perceive the performance as an autonomous artistic object and thereby to position themselves outside it. Instead, the imagery and rhetoric of violence, coupled with elements of surprise and unpredictability, draw the spectator into the fictional world, forcing them to assume the position of either victim or perpetrator within a power dynamic that no longer exists outside themselves, but becomes part of their lived experience in the here and now.

The mechanism of trauma and its influence on the role and condition of the spectator can be outlined through the following stages:

Through an element of surprise—generally violent, illogical, and devoid of meaning—the representational framework and dramatic conventions are shattered or suspended.

The sense and narrative coherence constructed by the spectator, based on theatrical signs previously received and interpreted, are destabilized and questioned.

The spectator begins to feel that their comfort zone and their very status as a spectator are under threat.

This generates psychological discomfort, unease, and intense emotional and physiological reactions.

As a result of this discomfort, the spectator may attempt to re-establish distance by emotionally detaching from what is unfolding, rejecting the disruptive moment, denying its significance, or even mentally exiting the experience.

Alternatively, the spectator may embrace the disruption, accepting full psychological absorption into the emotional experience offered, and—through immersion in the shared communal event—renouncing the position of neutral witness to become an active, participatory agent within the theatrical act.

After the event, a process of secondary evaluation occurs: aesthetic distance may be re-established, and the experience of the performance may be accepted or rejected.

Ultimately, a change in the spectator's belief system may emerge as a consequence of this process.

3. The Apocalypse of Civilization: Blasted

According to British critics (Saunders, 2002, p.24), the reactions to the violence represented in Blasted ranged from disgust and nausea to intense negative emotions—anger, horror—that lingered in the memory of those who witnessed the performance, as noted by reviewers and commentators of the time.

British critic and playwright Ken Urban recalls that when he left the Royal Court Theatre after seeing Blasted, he was unable to articulate what he had just experienced. Later that evening, while watching the news on television, he found himself crying uncontrollably. "Kane," Urban observes, "had the capacity to use theatre in a visceral way—specifically, the experience of being in theatre. Yet she also knew that the stage is a space of ideas, and that awareness motivated her to push beyond the limits of the visceral." (Urban, 2001, pp. 34–36)

Kane employs violence as a technique or strategy to provoke secondary cognitive evaluations—reactions that emerge after the event. In other words, she constructs explosions with delayed effects.

At the same time, she works at the emotional level, since emotion is the only mechanism capable of inscribing the memory of an event into the body, and the body is the only vessel capable of keeping that emotion alive after the performance ends.

While the cognitive system may eventually reach an adaptive conclusion—a compromise or negotiated understanding of the violence it has encountered—allowing the individual to continue functioning, the body retains the memory of the shock, serving as a trigger for those later cognitive re-evaluations.

4. The Apocalypse of Love: Phaedra's Love and Cleansed

The contemporary spectator, desensitized by prolonged exposure to mediated violence, has already developed an adaptive belief system toward the violent acts surrounding them. In order to make the spectator receptive to violence again—to make the amygdala cry out alarm, danger—Kane exploits the representational frame of theatre and its unique power of identification. In other words, she creates sudden, extreme moments of violence that destroy the spectator's comfort zone and awaken genuine affective response.

Thus, the major objective of Kane's traumatic mechanism is not merely to shock, but to expose the audience to total emotional truths about the contemporary human condition: our pathological fascination with violence, our indifference to its consequences, and our failure of responsibility and guilt.

Each play constitutes an element of a larger, exhaustive traumatic experience—a station on a journey toward the deepest layers of Being, where an external war (Self versus Other) gradually becomes an internal war (Self against Self).

The existential stations—the apocalypse of civilization and human society, the apocalypse of love, the apocalypse of identity, the apocalypse of language, and the apocalypse of the Self—correspond, in my view, both to the chronological succession of Kane's plays and to progressive inner stages that can be traced within each individual text.

As Armstrong asserts in Postmodernism and Trauma: Four/Fore Plays of Sarah Kane, "Kane's theatre possesses a dystopian nature—apocalyptic, nightmarish—and reveals the death of the individual (physical, moral, psychological, emotional) and, implicitly, the death of society itself." (Armstrong, 2008, p.15)

The destruction of the hotel room in Blasted represents the zero point of an apocalyptic vision, where the characters are physically, psychologically, and morally destroyed, serving as instruments through which Kane presents multiple forms of social violence: war, as a representation of the dehumanization of human society; and rape, abuse, mutilation, and cannibalism, as representations of the dehumanization of the individual.

A single act of domestic violence—Cate's sexual abuse at the hands of Ian—suddenly transforms the dramatic space into a theatre of absurd, cruel, and illogical warfare, thrusting both the characters and the audience into a time and place devoid of recognizable markers or rules.

"For me the form did exactly mirror the content. And for me the form is the meaning of the play, which is that people's lives are thrown into complete chaos with absolutely no warning whatsoever."
(Kane in Rebellato, 1998)

Blasted (or the apocalypse of civilization) seems constructed as a mental assault on the audience, striking the spectator through every line, scenic image, and stage direction. Yet, Kane herself describes the play as peaceful:

"I don't think it is violent. It's quite a peaceful play. (...) Personally, I think it is a shocking play, but only in the sense that falling down the stairs is shocking – it's painful and it makes you aware of your own fragility, but one doesn't tend to be morally outraged about falling down the stairs."
(Kane in Sierz, 2000, p.78)

The violent acts, often criticized by British theatre critics as gratuitous—for example, the Soldier who rapes Ian and then mutilates him, eating his eyes, or Ian eating a dead baby—are intended to highlight the dynamics of war, its absurdity and cruelty, as well as its traumatizing effects on the human being, regardless of whether one occupies the position of victim, witness, or perpetrator. These acts forcibly awaken the audience from emotional numbness.

"War is confused and illogical, therefore it is wrong to use a form that is predictable. Acts of violence simply happen in life, they don't have a dramatic build-up, and they are horrible."
(Kane in Saunders, 2002, p.48)

Is there a possibility of salvation, an escape from the apocalyptic vision of a self-destructive society? Is it possible to break free from the vicious cycle of human cruelty, both on an individual and societal level?

The final stage images in Blasted suggest that salvation is, indeed, possible. Cate returns to the hotel room with food, performing a final act of generosity toward her aggressor. At the same time, the closing scene, in which Ian devours the buried baby before his death, may symbolize the extreme degradation of humanity, but it can also be read as an act of hope, of regeneration, a possibility of returning to innocence. Rain falls over all as a symbol of purification and new beginnings. Yet, this beginning carries the risk of ending tragically if the

individual fails to acknowledge the consequences of their actions, and, on a broader level, if the audience does not recognize, and thus resensitize themselves to, the consequences of violence and the possibility of change.

Phaedra's Love creates a space in which an apocalyptic vision of love emerges. Similar to Blasted, the representation of love initially appears classical, namely, the love between a man and a woman (Ian and Cate, Phaedra and Hippolytus). This is the only traditional element in these love stories, which, as the dramatic thread unfolds, transform into horror stories, where the couple is always positioned within a power imbalance: the male figure assumes the role of aggressor, abusing, torturing, or raping the female victim. While Ian rapes Cate, Hippolytus, exploiting his mother's obsession with him, psychologically abuses Phaedra, turning the sexual tension between them into an incestuous act.

In Cleansed, the apocalyptic vision of love is realized through the relationship between siblings Grace and Graham, which, unlike Phaedra's Love, does not produce harassment, abuse, or suicide. Instead, it foregrounds the obliteration of individual identity: their love is so intense that the brother and sister lose their uniqueness and merge into a single person.

Another facet of traditional love is dismantled in Cleansed through the relationship between Carl and Rod, where Kane problematizes the sincerity behind declarations of love and promises, critiquing the stereotypical language of love as lacking truth:

"Carl: That I'll always love you.
That I'll never betray you.
That I'll never lie to you.
Rod: You just have." (Complete Plays, 2001, p.110)

Can anyone make a promise containing the words "always" or "never" and consider it truthful? Kane offers, through Rod, an alternative language of love, one that is brutal, shocking to romantics, yet grounded in the essence of truth:

"Rod: I love you now. I'm with you now.
I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you.
Now. That's it. No more. Don't make me lie to you." (Complete Plays, 2011, p.111)

In Cleansed, we also find the traditional romantic couple, degraded to an even greater extent than in previous texts: the male aggressor (Tinker), like a puppeteer, determines the appearance and existence of the female victim as an erotic object, who is irrelevant or nonexistent in his absence.

5. The Apocalypse of Identity and Language: Crave

In Crave, the representation of love becomes a lyrical, abstract discourse—love is no longer the domain of complex dramatic characters but rather fragments of disembodied voices, speaking without engaging in dialogue, within an acoustic landscape marked by autistic-like notes: a prolonged monologue reflecting on what kind of love is acceptable and what is not, with the voices taking on, in turn, the roles of aggressor, victim, and witness.

In the first three texts, love—though perverted and apocalyptic—still retains the potential to save the characters:

"Grace/ Graham: Body perfect. Died. Burnt. Back to love. Felt it. Here. Inside. Here. Here now. Safe on the other side and here. Graham. Always be here." (Complete Plays, 2001, p.150)

In Crave, however, love no longer transfigures, but instead seems to function as a pretext, alongside other conversational themes, for constructing, through the physicality of words, sentence length, and rhythm, a sonic background:

"A: Most people
B: They get on
A: They get up
B: They get on
A: My hollow heart is full of darkness
C: One touch record
M: Filled with emptiness
B: Satisfied with nothing
A: Poor, poor love, I feel nothing, nothing. I feel nothing." (Complete Plays, 2001, p.174)

In 4.48 Psychosis, love appears only as a shadow of what once was, representing a past love that did not materialize and cannot be realized in the present or future:

"Sometimes I turn around and catch the smell of you and I cannot go on I cannot fucking go on without expressing this terrible so fucking awful physical aching fucking longing I have for you. And I cannot believe that I can feel this for you and you feel nothing.
Do you feel nothing?" (Complete Plays, 2001, p.224)

Love is dead, and the awareness of this fact triggers resignation, overwhelming loneliness, and a flirtation with death:

"Built to be lonely. To love the absent." (Complete Plays, 2001, p.219)

The only form of love that can exist once the love of another is refused is self-love. Kane's characters, however, are from the outset unable to love themselves. This impossibility inevitably propels the voice in 4.48 Psychosis toward the annihilation of the Self:

"It is myself I have never met, whose face is pasted on the other side of my mind.(...) Look away from me!" (Complete Plays, 2001, p.245–248)

6. The Apocalypse of the Self: 4.48 Psychosis

The climax of human violence imagery is reached in Cleansed. Grace's journey in search of her brother Graham, murdered by Tinker—the doctor/warden of the hospital where he had been institutionalized—culminates in her merging with Graham, becoming physically identical to him.

This transition process is gradual: she initially wears his clothes, dances or speaks with his spirit, makes love with him, and ultimately becomes him after receiving a male sexual organ transplant.

Whereas in the first two texts, dramatic forms remain recognizable (dramatic scenes, plot, character-driven action, identifiable personalities), in Cleansed, Kane takes a first step toward the dissolution of the individual and the construction of a fluid, interchangeable identity, irrespective of sex or psychology.

If the individual no longer has a fixed identity, then their psychology and language can be constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed—a dramatic strategy fully realized in Crave, a poetic puzzle, the creation of a multivalent mind in which the external conflict has been internalized, and the battlefield becomes one of words, memories, and images.

The four voices of the text speak of desire, love, incest, abuse, failure, pain, loss, rejection, rape, and aggression, transforming the physical violence of Blasted, Phaedra's Love, and Cleansed into a textual violence derived from the characters' desires, memories, and words. Despite the apparent dialogue between them, the voices do not truly interact, listen, or communicate.

Crave appears as a dramatic space of four monologues of identity-less voices, either of four separate individuals or of a single consciousness trying to encompass, compress, and express, in a timeless whirlwind, all the pain of the world. In a world where identity and the power to communicate have vanished, the characters increasingly resign themselves and accept that the only way to liberate themselves, to escape the burden of traumatic memories, is to die.

4.48 Psychosis captures the apocalyptic vision of the Self, which, deprived of identity and love, collapses, depicting live, through an equally fragmented language, the progressive process of inner destructuring and disintegration.

While in Blasted, Phaedra's Love, and Cleansed the audience is exposed to images of physical violence, and in Crave to textual violence arising from the fragmented memories of voices, in 4.48 Psychosis the audience encounters a violence of physical language, through repetitions of phrases and verbal expressions addressed to a public incapable of assigning them any coherent meaning or understanding them.

"100 93 86 79 72 65 58 51 44 37 30 23 16 9 2" (Complete Plays, 2001, p.232)

6. The Apocalypse of the Self: 4.48 Psychosis (continuare)

4.48 Psychosis is a monologue devoid of temporal continuity, spatial markers, or clear enunciative instances; it is primarily structured according to the internal variation of emotional and cognitive states characteristic of depression. The enunciative instance delves consciously and deeply into the darkest recesses of its depressive state, shining a spotlight on every thought and emotion in an attempt to describe with precision the experience of inner suffering and despair.

4.48 Psychosis presents the portrait of a depressive personality as it is described in the specialized literature. It is not the author's diagnosis or biography that gives the text its value, but the real experience of the states described. The literature describes depression as a major imbalance between what an individual gives and what they receive from their environment (in relation to their social, professional, personal, and relational life). The text of 4.48 Psychosis is the perfect expression of this imbalance, resulting from a radical, absolutist approach to life and to others.

The enunciative instance, like the author herself, inhabits a world of absolutes: total love, total truth, total honesty.

"But the pursuance of honesty was something that
kept coming back to me when I was writing Phaedra's Love.
And someone said to me, because I was going on and on
about how important is to tell the truth,
and how depressing life is because nobody really does (…)
and he said: that's because you've got your values wrong.
You take honesty as an absolute and it isn't. (…)
And I thought, if I can accept that if not being completely honest
doesn't matter, then I'd feel much better.
But, somehow I couldn't, and so Hippolytus can't.
And that what's kills him in the end." (Kane in Saunders, 2009, p.70)

In a recorded BBC interview, available on the website theatrevocei.com and conducted in 2008, director James McDonald remarked on the tension present in the auditorium during the first viewing of the production of 4.48 Psychosis, with the audience fully aware that the playwright had just committed suicide. McDonald explains this tension as either a form of admiration from the audience for someone who dared to become a living embodiment of their own work, or as a form of respect for an artist who, through a handful of theatrical texts, succeeded in challenging many of the myths and values of contemporary society, as well as the personal beliefs of each spectator. The destructive tension at the core of 4.48 Psychosis reveals a profound psychological struggle between the need for coherence and the impossibility of achieving it. The fragmented language of the play mirrors the disintegration of the ego under the pressure of depressive thought patterns, which oscillate between self-blame, nihilism, and desperate appeals for meaning. As trauma theorists have emphasized, the depressive state often constitutes not a lack of emotion but an overflow of unprocessed affect—a condition in which the subject becomes trapped within the repetitive circuit of unassimilated pain (Caruth, 1995, p. 62). In this sense, Kane's protagonist does not merely "express" despair but enacts the phenomenology of depression: a consciousness caught between lucidity and paralysis, between the yearning for connection and the terror of exposure.

Freud's distinction between melancholia and mourning becomes particularly relevant here. In mourning, the subject eventually detaches from the lost object, re-establishing investment in the external world; in melancholia, however, the object is internalized, and aggression toward it turns into aggression toward the Self (Freud, 1987, p. 244). The voice of 4.48 Psychosis embodies precisely this transformation—grief turned inward, where the Other becomes inseparable from the Self, and self-punishment replaces mourning. The recurrent

numerical sequences and obsessive repetitions function as cognitive rituals—failed attempts to impose order upon chaos, to regain a sense of mastery over uncontrollable affect.

Kane's dramaturgy thus captures a paradox central to depressive cognition: the mind's simultaneous desire for annihilation and transcendence. This is what Shneidman terms "psychache," the unbearable psychological pain that seeks relief through death (Shneidman, 1993, p. 45). Yet in Kane's text, suicide is not represented as escape but as a radical form of self-confrontation. The suicidal impulse becomes an epistemological drive—the search for absolute truth through the dissolution of the boundaries that separate the subject from its pain. The act of self-destruction is both the ultimate failure of adaptation and the final assertion of autonomy, a desperate attempt to reclaim authorship over one's own suffering.

At 4:48—the symbolic hour when sanity returns—the mind experiences a fleeting state of clarity that borders on revelation. It is a moment of cognitive lucidity, when the mechanisms of depression are recognized in full consciousness. Yet this awareness does not heal; rather, it exposes the irreconcilable split between the intellect that perceives and the affect that overwhelms. The result is a theatrical structure of paradox: light that illuminates only the depth of darkness, understanding that coexists with the impossibility of redemption.

6.1. The Question of the Essential

Another compelling theme worth addressing is the distinction between what is and is not essential—both in the values of a society and in the personal values of each individual.

"At 4.48
when sanity visits
for one hour and twelve minutes I am in my right mind.
When it has passed I shall be gone again,
a fragmented puppet, a grotesque fool.
Now I am here I can see myself
but when I am charmed by the vile delusions of happiness,
the foul magic of this engine of sorcery,
I cannot touch my essential self." (Complete Plays, 2001, p.229)

The question of what is essential or true in one's life—or, implicitly, in one's way of thinking—is a central concern of clinical psychology. How can we be certain that the thoughts

we experience in a so-called normal state of mind express the truth, the essence, the authenticity of our being, and not merely a collective truth shaped by a society that has decided what is normal and what is not, what is important and what is trivial—often in ways that serve the interests of certain groups rather than those of the individual?

Why couldn't we come to know our needs, desires, and thoughts more authentically in a moment when we are no longer constrained by the rules and prejudices of society—perhaps, for instance, in a moment of madness? It is well known that every king, in the past, had a Fool at court—the only one with access to the truth and the only one allowed to speak it.

Mental illness can, among other things, signify a withdrawal from the game of social rules and norms—a stepping outside of the constructed, the fictional—toward a "zero moment," where things appear clearer and truths more genuine. In a certain sense, mental illness may represent an individual's inability or refusal to adapt to society.

But can a mentally ill person truly distinguish between the essential truths of a world stripped of censorship and the fictitious products of their own affected psyche? This is a dilemma with no clear resolution. The purpose of psychological treatment is not necessarily to reveal "the truth," but rather to help the individual develop functional ways of thinking and living—strategies that allow adaptation to the world one inhabits.

Likewise, the internal mechanism of society operates by constructing truths, patterns of thought, and modes of behavior that ensure its own perpetuation. For certain individuals, however, societal truth comes into conflict with personal truth, and functioning within the system is no longer sufficient. The explanations and justifications offered by society become inadequate.

A few recurrent questions that emerge throughout Kane's work may be paraphrased as follows:

How can one live in a world capable of such atrocities?
How can one carry on with daily life after learning about the Holocaust?
How can one accept violence occurring elsewhere without taking a stand, without acting?
How can one accept being a complicit witness—through inaction—to such violence, without going mad?
How can it seem normal to live in such a world, yet insane to wish for death?

These are questions that provoke both introspection and action.
And, of course, the final, haunting question:

"Why do you believe me then and not now?" (Complete Plays, 2001, p.229)

"Why do you believe me then and not now?" is a question that can be considered from two perspectives: the dynamics of patient and therapist (who speaks the truth—myself or the mental illness?), and the dynamics of author–work–audience (why is a work produced during a period of mental health considered fiction, while a text produced during a period of psychological crisis is not?). The answer ultimately remains at the discretion of each individual.

Official critics of Kane's work (Aleks Sierz, Graham Saunders) situate her theatre within a domain that maintains a clear aesthetic distance between author and work, in contrast to performance-based practices, for example, where personal experience and artistic practice intersect. By exposing herself publicly through an act of self-destruction, Kane succeeds in blurring these boundaries, directing the analysis of her work toward a retrospective reading informed by biography.

Undoubtedly, Kane's public death—as David Creig notes in the introduction to Sarah Kane. Complete Plays (2001)—altered the way her text is read and her play 4.48 Psychosis is experienced, fundamentally changing how critics and audiences perceive her theatrical oeuvre.

However, Aleks Sierz argues that a biographical interpretation of 4.48 Psychosis is restrictive, as the artistic legacy of the author risks being irrevocably confined by the limits imposed by her suicidal act (Tycer, 2008, pp. 23–26). In such a context, the artist may appear more "authentic," yet the complex symbolism of the play could be diminished. This line of reasoning is, in my view, also limiting, as it overlooks one of Kane's major artistic intentions: to create intense emotional experiences based on authentic personal experiences.

"I've only written to escape from hell
– and it's never worked –
but at the other end of it when you sit there
and watch something and think
that's the most perfect expression of the hell I felt
then maybe it was worth it." (Kane in Saunders, 2002, p.1)

7. Between Truth and Fiction: Ethics, Biography, and Interpretation

As Edward Bond (1999, p.23) notes, the final act is a theatrical act. As Kane plunges into her own Self, she discovers both how the world appears and how it thinks; by describing intimate, personal, and intense experiences, she simultaneously depicts the nature of the world:

the moral, social, and human failure of man in the face of his own selfish, self-destructive instincts.

Suicidal depression, along with the aggression toward others, manifests the destructive instinct of death, since it is impossible for an executioner to inflict suffering—physical or psychological—on a victim without also being victimized. The complete union of these two forms of aggression occurs in 4.48 Psychosis, where the enunciative instance becomes the executioner–victim, subjected to total annihilation.

Kane wrote 4.48 Psychosis with Edwin Shneidman's The Suicide Mind on her bedside table, while feverishly probing her personal experiences to authentically express what it means to live in the Absolute within the powerless world of Man. Claude Régy names this introspective endeavor in L'état d'incertitude (2002) as "Kanean lucidity": writing about herself and about Others, being herself and Others, losing the sense of where she ends and the Others begin.

"She has gone deeper into her own psyche
and I think she knew she was delving deeper,
and she did have a very strong reaction to the play. (…)
I think there was a kind of love–hate relationship with this play and she knew that she was exhausting a certain reserve in herself while she wrote it." (Kenyon in Saunders, 2002, p.110)

Freud, in his essay Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1987), demonstrates that a person's destiny is biologically driven by two fundamental instincts: the life instinct and the death instinct, and by a continuous negotiation between these impulses. The self-destructive drive—the desire to return to the original state of nothingness, the destructive tendency of the personality—is most fully expressed in the act of suicide, a form of aggression directed toward the body, toward the suffering Self.

Suicidal depression is the affective condition that most accurately portrays the tumult, struggle, and negotiation between the death instinct and the life instinct. Suicide is simultaneously a crime against the Self and a crime committed by the Self as the perpetrator; it is a death in which aggressor and victim are one and the same, in which the Self surrenders to itself to be destroyed.

4.48 Psychosis bears witness to a person who exists simultaneously in the roles of aggressor, victim, and witness. In this text, the power relationship is both perverted and intensified, foregrounding a Self that can simultaneously be torturer, victim, and lucid observer

who organizes the mise-en-scène in which the other two aspects of the depressive Self enact their roles to the end.

The concept of the Absolute in a World of Man is unadaptable, irrational, and can only produce suffering for the one who demands it and for the one upon whom it is imposed as a mode of behavior. Total Truth in a World of Man can kill.

The enunciative instance demands absolute love and absolute honesty from the Other, who is either Real (and therefore cannot provide what is demanded, because human existence, adapted to contemporary society, cannot live or function normally while adhering to absolute concepts) or NOT Real (in which case the mental projection of the Other, their phantasm, aligns with the ideals of the enunciative instance but cannot concretely provide the tangible elements of a real relationship). In both cases, the games are lost, and the natural response can only be death. he tension between truth and fiction in 4.48 Psychosis also invites reflection on the ethics of representation within trauma art. When personal suffering becomes material for aesthetic creation, a double movement takes place: the private is made public, and pain—traditionally unspeakable—enters the symbolic order. This act of exposure carries both emancipatory and exploitative potential. For the artist, transforming trauma into art may offer a sense of control, a symbolic mastery over the unrepresentable. For the audience, however, it risks voyeurism, as the spectator consumes the pain of another under the guise of empathy. Kane's work destabilizes this dynamic by collapsing the distance between the suffering subject and the witnessing audience; her theatre demands participation rather than consumption.

The ethical question that emerges—who owns pain once it is shared?—lies at the center of Kane's dramaturgy. In 4.48 Psychosis, the playwright does not offer the audience an external victim to pity; instead, she places them in the position of the witness confronted with their own capacity for identification. As Levinas (1969) suggests, the ethical relation begins with the recognition of the Other's vulnerability; yet, Kane radicalizes this encounter by erasing the boundary between Self and Other altogether. The audience does not merely "see" suffering—it feels implicated in it. The ethical experience thus ceases to be theoretical and becomes affective: an embodied acknowledgment of responsibility.

Kane's blurring of autobiography and fiction complicates this ethical framework further. The proximity of her suicide to the staging of 4.48 Psychosis generates an interpretive tension that no critical discourse can fully resolve. When the author's death becomes part of the work's horizon, the act of reading itself risks contamination by pathos. The critic is no longer interpreting a text but negotiating a legacy. Yet, to read 4.48 Psychosis solely as a suicide note is

to betray the very artistic intelligence that sought to transcend personal pain through form. The work's complexity resides in its oscillation between confession and construction, sincerity and artifice.

Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject provides an illuminating framework for understanding this oscillation. The abject marks the point where meaning collapses, where the subject confronts the limits of what can be symbolized—the body, death, madness. In 4.48 Psychosis, Kane transforms the abject into language, not by sanitizing it, but by preserving its destabilizing force. The audience is confronted not with a coherent narrative of illness but with its syntax—broken, repetitive, circular. In doing so, Kane performs an ethical gesture: she refuses to aestheticize suffering while simultaneously refusing to let it remain invisible.

This tension between exposure and concealment defines the moral landscape of Kane's theatre. Her plays neither preach nor moralize; instead, they enact an ethics of confrontation. To witness 4.48 Psychosis is to encounter the paradox of empathy: one is drawn toward pain while recognizing one's impotence to alleviate it. The audience's task is not to redeem the suffering subject but to bear witness without appropriation—to hold the gaze without claiming ownership of what it sees.

From a psychological standpoint, this act of witnessing mirrors the therapeutic encounter. Just as the analyst must tolerate the patient's anguish without dissolving it into explanation, the spectator must endure the play's fragmentation without demanding closure. In both contexts, empathy functions not as fusion but as sustained attention. Kane thus reconfigures theatre as a form of collective therapy—a ritual of shared endurance through which private trauma becomes communal recognition.

In this light, the ethics of 4.48 Psychosis extend beyond the boundaries of biography or art criticism. Kane's ultimate achievement lies in transforming the stage into a moral laboratory, where the boundaries between truth and fiction, artist and spectator, self and other, are blurred not to confuse but to awaken. The act of witnessing becomes, paradoxically, an act of creation: to perceive pain truthfully is to restore meaning where meaning seemed impossible.

8. Conclusion: The Voyage into Chaos

Sarah Kane's work represents a poetic of destruction and revelation, a theatre of trauma and of the sacred, in which violence becomes both language and means of purification. Her plays

do not offer the spectator catharsis in the Aristotelian sense, but rather a destabilizing experience—an exposure to the raw material of pain, loss, and despair.

Through her dramaturgy, Kane dismantles the spectator's comfort zone, replacing passive contemplation with active participation in the traumatic event. She calls upon the audience not to empathize superficially with the victims on stage, but to recognize within themselves the aggressor, the witness, and the survivor.

Her theatrical vision abolishes the traditional boundaries between fiction and reality, actor and spectator, art and life. The audience is no longer shielded by aesthetic distance; they are forced to confront the unbearable truth of human destructiveness and the limits of empathy.

Violence, in Kane's theatre, is never gratuitous. It is both symptom and revelation: the symptom of a fragmented, dehumanized society, and the revelation of a desperate yearning for connection and meaning. The stage becomes a psychic laboratory in which the spectator, subjected to extreme affective tension, experiences the same mechanisms of shock, denial, and repetition that define trauma itself.

Her dramaturgy functions like a rite of passage: through horror, the spectator is reconnected to compassion; through fragmentation, to meaning; through death, to a renewed sense of life.

From Blasted's devastated hotel room—metaphor of a destroyed world—to 4.48 Psychosis's inner void, Kane charts the apocalyptic map of the modern soul. Each play pushes violence further inward, transforming external explosions into implosions of consciousness. The apocalypse becomes intimate.

In 4.48 Psychosis, the theatre reaches the limits of representation. The language collapses, and with it collapses the illusion of the stage. What remains is a raw presence—the voice of the Self stripped of all masks, facing its own annihilation.

Kane's final message—"Please open the curtains"—can be read as both an invocation and a farewell. It may signify the desire for light, understanding, or transcendence, but also the exposure of the void. It is a request for revelation, not redemption.

Her artistic legacy lies in transforming pain into knowledge, suffering into communication, and destruction into an act of creation.

Through her writing, Kane achieves what few artists have accomplished: she transforms personal trauma into collective catharsis, making theatre not a mirror of reality but a mirror of the soul.

In confronting the chaos within, she invites us to acknowledge the chaos around us—and to find, in that confrontation, the fragile possibility of humanity. Kane's theatre ultimately leads the spectator to the threshold between self-knowledge and dissolution. Her work, grounded in the poetics of trauma, refuses resolution, closure, or the comfort of meaning. Instead, it insists on the necessity of confronting the chaos that underlies both the individual psyche and the collective condition of humanity. The "voyage into chaos" that defines her dramaturgy is not a descent into nihilism but a deliberate immersion in the abyss—a search for authenticity within fragmentation. Through this immersion, the spectator encounters the paradoxical possibility of rebirth: understanding that to face destruction is, paradoxically, to rediscover the potential for transformation.

In this sense, Kane's theatre aligns with the existential project of writers such as Antonin Artaud and Samuel Beckett, yet it transcends both. While Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty sought to awaken the spectator through violent sensory shocks, Kane's theatre of trauma transforms that cruelty into interior revelation. Her cruelty is psychological rather than physical—it dismantles the illusions that protect us from our own fragility. Like Beckett, she recognizes the futility of language, but whereas Beckett's void is absurd, Kane's is affective: a space charged with grief, guilt, and the remnants of love. Her fragments are not merely linguistic but psychic, the splinters of a self that continues to seek coherence despite its disintegration.

From a psychological perspective, Kane's theatre can be seen as an enactment of trauma recovery. The repetition of violence, despair, and fragmentation mirrors the processes of reliving and reworking inherent to trauma therapy. Yet, unlike traditional narratives of healing, Kane's plays refuse to close the wound. The pain remains visible, exposed to the gaze of the audience, who are invited to share in its endurance rather than its cure. This refusal of catharsis is not a failure of art but its ethical strength: it resists the cultural impulse to neutralize suffering through interpretation. Kane's drama thus becomes a moral act—a decision to keep the wound open as a reminder of the human condition's fragility.

Her voyage into chaos also functions as a critique of contemporary Western culture, where trauma has become both a spectacle and a commodity. By transforming personal despair into collective confrontation, Kane reclaims trauma from the domain of passivity and transforms it into agency. Her characters, though destroyed, remain active agents in their own suffering.

Their pain does not reduce them to silence; it becomes their mode of speech. Through them, Kane asserts that even in the depths of despair, language—however broken—can still testify to existence.

Moreover, Kane's dramaturgy offers an implicit spiritual dimension. The cycle of destruction and renewal that unfolds across her plays evokes an inverted form of redemption. Salvation in Kane's universe does not arise from divine intervention or moral resolution, but from the act of facing horror with absolute lucidity. To witness pain is to participate in the sacred. The stage becomes a site of revelation—a secular altar upon which the modern subject confronts the limits of empathy, morality, and identity.

In the final line of 4.48 Psychosis, the plea "Please open the curtains" resonates as a gesture both theatrical and metaphysical. It invites not applause but awakening—a call for light, for consciousness, for the possibility of meaning after the collapse of meaning. This moment encapsulates the essence of Kane's vision: the confrontation with death as an act of radical truth-telling. In opening the curtains, she exposes the audience to themselves, demanding that they acknowledge not only the cruelty of the world but their complicity within it.

Ultimately, Sarah Kane's legacy lies not in the documentation of despair but in the ethics of her courage. Her theatre challenges us to reconsider what it means to be human in a world stripped of certainty. By transforming trauma into form and suffering into knowledge, she creates a theatre that is simultaneously brutal and redemptive, intimate and universal. Her voyage into chaos becomes, for the spectator, a journey toward compassion—a recognition that to witness another's pain is, at its deepest level, to rediscover one's own humanity.

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Pathways through Winter Landscapes: Confronting Haunting Memories in David Park's *Travelling in a Strange Land* (2018)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interconnections between the natural space and the human psyche in David Park's novel *Travelling in a Strange Land* (2018). Focus is placed on the active role of the natural landscape in both exacerbating the protagonist's struggle with traumatic memories and contributing to his process of making peace with the past. Suppressed memories buried into the unconscious rise to the surface and unsettle Tom's emotional and mental state as he travels alone through the frozen landscapes of Ireland and England to bring his ill son back home for Christmas. In this literary work, the snowy landscape assumes a major presence. The natural world provides stimuli that activate the traveller's memory and mentally transport him into times and places that have left an indelible mark upon his psyche, while it also acts as a sanctuary allowing Tom to reflect upon the loss of his eldest son and bear witness to his grief and trauma. Ultimately, this analysis brings forth the two parallel journeys that are in progress; that is, Tom's winter road trip and an inner journey through mental and emotional landscapes of traumatic memory.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

Representations of the natural environment have been prominent in Irish Literature throughout the years. From folk tales about the natural world and its magical power, like the stories about the mythical island of Tír na nÓg, to nature poems such as Seamus Heaney's *Blackberry-Picking* (1966) and W.B. Yeats' *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* (1890) and to contemporary works of fiction such as Niall Williams' *This is Happiness* (2020), the Irish landscape extends over its function as setting and assumes an active role in these literary narratives. David Park's award-winning book *Travelling in a Strange Land* (2018), which will be the focus of this paper, is a narrative of travel fiction that brings forth the interconnections between the natural space and the human psyche. This paper will engage with the active role of landscape in both exacerbating the protagonist's struggle with recurring memories of a traumatic past and contributing to his process of making peace with the past. Suppressed memories buried in the unconscious rise to the surface and unsettle Tom's emotional and mental state as he travels alone through the frozen landscapes of Ireland and England to bring his sick son Luke back home for Christmas. In this literary work, the snowy landscape does not merely function as a background for the narrative to unfold but rather assumes a major presence. On the one hand, the scenery provides stimuli that activate the traveller's memory and mentally transport him into times and places that left an indelible mark upon his psyche; on the other hand, it allows Tom to reflect upon the loss of his eldest son Daniel and acknowledge the great impact of carrying such a family trauma. Although at the beginning of the narrative Tom's arduous journey is connected to his parental concern for his ill son Luke, what later transforms this middle-aged man's story into a modern-day pilgrim story is the attempts to both retrieve the painful memories of his first son Daniel from the inner chambers of his psyche, and mourn that loss. Indeed, due to the double purpose the journey serves, Claire Kilroy characterizes Park's protagonist as an "everyman" in her review in *The Guardian* (par 8), an individual embodying the universal experience of dealing with child loss and trauma. With the above in mind, this paper aims to probe the two parallel

journeys being in progress; that is, Tom's winter road trip to Sunderland, England and an inner journey through mental and emotional landscapes of traumatic memory.

In *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (1994), Paul Rodaway brings to the fore the human-environment encounters, shedding light on the corporal experience of geographical locations and how that experience is registered in the individual's mind through the senses. "Sensuous geography," argues Rodaway, "is an interaction with the environment both as given to the senses and as interpreted by the senses themselves in conjunction with the mind" (26). Hence, the senses allow for any kind of environmental stimuli to reach the barrier of the body as well as lead to the decoding and comprehension of that stimuli. Subsequently, individuals form a connection with a place and assign specific qualities to that geographical location. In *Travelling through a Strange Land*, as Tom crosses Northern Ireland and moves through the snow-covered land of England, not only is he highly alert of his surroundings and the dangers lurking in that heavily snowed environment, but also, he is triggered to look inwards and revisit places in memory. As Rodaway contends, the body's ability to move is a key factor that defines the concept of sensuous geography, a concept that "is in fact both spatial and temporal in character" (28). The movement of the car towards Sunderland, and particularly the GPS directions showing Tom the way towards his final destination, are always juxtaposed with the emerging memories of the past that momentarily interrupt this forward movement. The place of memory is defined by non-linear mobilities that unsettle the traveler's inner world and challenge his emotional buoyancy. This notion is explored further in this paper.

In the first subsection of the paper, the outer world of the narrative is interlinked with the realm of memory since any encounters with the natural environment trigger the buried traumatic memories to rise to the surface, fusing Tom's past and present reality. In the second subsection, focus will be placed on the role of the natural space in assisting the protagonist's attempts to articulate his pain and lessen the impact of haunting memories upon his psyche. Drawing on Michelle Balaev's seminal essay "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" (2008), which

examines the impact of the natural world on the traumatized person's turbulent process of delving into memories of the past and finding ways to alleviate their pain, it will be argued that the landscape can function as a sanctuary for the grieving father, as a place for him to bear witness to his own trauma and externalize the pain that has been haunting him. The specific division into two subsections aims to address the gradual changes in the protagonist's psyche as he struggles to find balance between revisiting the past and releasing his distress. While a major part of the narrative revolves around Tom's struggle with regularly resurfacing traumatic recollections, another part underscores his need to confront those haunting flashbacks and seek healing. This paper draws attention to the transformation of the natural surroundings into a place of refuge for the traumatized character who, in his challenging journey midwinter, has the opportunity to reconnect with nature and actively try to alleviate his emotional distress.

Outer and Inner Worlds: Encounters with Nature and the Return of Traumatic Memories

The world of the novel is a frozen one. It has been snowing for days, warnings against unnecessary travelling have been issued, and as the concerned protagonist notes, "nothing seems quite certain anymore, and not just the relationship between time and distance but everything that makes up the world as we once thought of it feels like it has been knocked out of sync" (Park 5). The natural world gains an eerie and uncanny quality from the very beginning of the narrative. Drawing on Jentsch's theory of the uncanny, Freud defined the "unheimlich" as anything that "arouses dread and creeping horror," since the uncanny suggests the loss of what previously evoked a sense of home (219-20). In the novel the once-familiar place is transformed into an unwelcoming one which Tom is forced to learn to navigate through. Indeed, it requires effort to enter this unfamiliar and strange land. With every attempt to get the car on the main road, Tom encounters failure as the car slides on the ice and returns to point zero of the journey (Park 8). Performing the first task that would mark the start of his road trip instantly becomes an overwhelming experience for the hero who is momentarily overcome by despair, conceiving of

that situation as "not a good omen for the journey," feeling "powerless to affect its trajectory" (Park 8-9). David Conradson examines the close relationship between the individual's emotional world and landscape and acknowledges the impact of the qualities of each location upon a person's inner world. To borrow his words, "as individuals become imbricated within particular ecologies of place, so their emotions . . . arise in part from embodied physiological and psychosocial responses to the constituent elements of those places" (Conradson 183). The eerie atmosphere of the snowy surroundings has a great effect upon Tom's emotions. Yet, an ulterior motive makes this journey unavoidable and fuels the protagonist's perseverance. Despite the uninviting character of the natural world around him, "this winter pilgrim"[1] (Mantis 10), will engage in a physically and emotionally challenging journey in hope of releasing a burden from his psyche by reaching his destination. Notably, it is not the actual geographical location to which the readers are introduced in the first page, but rather the landscape of a recurrent nightmare that discloses a family tragedy and a loss that Tom has yet to overcome. In that feverish dream Tom is confronted with the challenging task of crossing a frozen lake to reach the house opposite it. It is a mentally and emotionally accessed world where "[e]verything is hidden, even the secrets that [Tom hugs] tightly to stop them finding the light" (Park 1). This inner world reflects the protagonist's turbulent psychological world and particularly his struggle with articulating traumatic experiences. The act of burying secrets magnifies the impact of haunting memories upon the psyche and further contributes to trauma remaining unresolved. Tom creates what Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok call "psychic crypts," that is "the individual's forcible creation of a psychic tomb" where tragedies from the past are hidden (22). Tom's past is marked by the death of his eldest son Daniel and suppressing his grief in these internal tombs leads to the prolonging of his bereavement and the decline of his mental health. In his nightmare, Tom is often "sunk knee-depth" and is tempted to "surrender to [his] weariness and rest [his] head in the soft pillow of its snow" (Park 1). The prominent presence of the natural world in his consciousness and his use of language allows readers to adopt what Sten Pultz Moslund

1 The corresponding term in Greek, which is found in the introductory part of the translated text, is "χειμωνιάτικος προσκυνητής." The translator reveals from the start the connection between Tom's journey and a pilgrimage, preparing the reader to keep in mind that this journey will have a great effect on the traveler's psyche.

describes as "a topopoetic mode of reading" (30) of a literary work. That is, the language of many literary works is infused with elements that convey the setting's topography, anything that reminds readers of the "tangibility" of the world and therefore allowing them "to enter . . . the sensuous experiences of place as a lived-in world" (Moslund 31). In Park's narrative, memory is experienced as a "frozen land," a place where the fear of "fall[ing] into some gaping crevice" (1-2) and the ice covering the surface of the lake breaking dominates. The world of that recurrent and unsettling dream is experienced as "a lived-in world" (Moslund 31) by Tom as much as the real-life place of Belfast and all the other places he ventures through. Thereupon, the prominence of an imagined place demonstrates the central role of the land of memory in the unravelling of the narrative.

Interestingly, the farther away Tom manages to reach, the more evident this parallel journey through memory and suppressed grief becomes. As Tom is observing the boat moving away from the "snow-covered shoreline" (Park 14) of Ireland and into the open sea, he is engulfed by thoughts of his family and senses a change within him. He admits that "everything feels intensely strange as the present slips into the silent place where memory and consciousness filter into each other to make something new" (Park 14). Tom gradually realizes that on this solitary journey he will be confronted by memories of a traumatic past that reside within him, and whose great effect still lingers. For a brief moment, past and present mingle, and Tom is convinced he can discern Daniel among the crowd. Details are not yet disclosed about this young man's identity, except that Tom often sees him in different places, "always fleetingly and never long enough for [Tom] to raise [his] hand and call out to him" (Park 14). Thus, Daniel is a liminal figure, rooted in Tom's memory but with the power to unsettle his present. Anne Whitehead's explorations of trauma in narrative fiction show that the concept of ghosts "represents an appropriate embodiment of the disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present" (6). Indeed, by blurring the boundaries between the actual world and the place of memory, Daniel's presence becomes a ghostly one haunting Tom. As the narrative progresses,

Daniel assumes the role of Tom's fellow traveller. To cite an example, when snow falls from a branch, breaking "the silence and stillness" of the place where Tom has stopped the car, he is confident that Daniel is hiding somewhere in the woods (Park 26). Yet, the real place around him contrasts with the one rooted in memory and images of the past since "there are no prints in the snow" (Park 26). This oscillation between reality and memories indicates that Daniel occupies an active role in Tom's life, being deeply engraved in memory as well as gaining presence in the here and now of the journey as a haunting figure of someone long lost. Rodaway argues that sight is "a creative interpretation of appearances," dependent also on the rest of the senses and memory (117). In Tom's case, visual illusions are frequent and memory often dominates over the senses. Despite knowing that he is daydreaming of Daniel and that the person sitting next to him in the car is but an illusion, since "the light of the snow streams *through* [Daniel's figure]" (Park 32; emphasis added), the part of Tom that is plunged in grief carries Daniel to the present. The relationship between time and space rumbles, as the place of memory and the place of experience weave into each other.

In this winter journey, Tom comes to the realization that he must grapple with not only the challenging weather conditions, but also the memories of a traumatic past, lying buried in the mental landscape of his psyche.

"I'm not sure if I can go on covering what for the moment is hidden": The Natural Environment and Overcoming Unresolved Trauma

In this subsection, focus is placed on the main character's tumultuous process of confronting painful memories, with the natural space gradually assuming an important role as a sanctuary, where Tom can ultimately confess the trauma he suppresses in his inner world. On the one hand, this solitary journey helps the main character bear witness to his own trauma but, on the other hand, the treacherous conditions make the journey already challenging enough for Tom to dwell on his inner turmoil. He expresses his doubts about whether "the monochrome world [he's] travelling through makes it easier or harder" to reflect on a traumatic family past (Park 60).

Each attempt to delve into memories that burn bright in the protagonist's mind leads to a constant collision of inner and outer worlds: "The snow conceals everything but I'm not sure if I can go on covering what for the moment is hidden" (Park 60), Tom admits, disclosing his distress. Despite trying to supress his grief like the snow covering his surroundings, Tom is conflicted over the urge to release the burden of carrying traumatic memories. The healing process often entails looking inward and retrieving memories that triggered psychic wounds. As Balaev observes in several contemporary narratives "[t]his inward glance is paired with a growing awareness to the external world outside the individual mind" (164-65). It is a process manifested in the narrative as obtaining a multidirectional feature. While external stimuli lead the traveller to probe into the interior tombs in his psyche and address the buried memories of the past, the very act of confronting unresolved traumas leads Tom to become more alert of the external world and through the imagery of the natural landscape try to articulate his inner pain. As this winter traveller continues his venture, the question of whether Daniel "[i]s part of [the family's] inner world or locked outside" (Park 46) overshadows Tom's mind. Rodaway places emphasis on the body's ability to move and notes that one's geographical experience is informed by the collaboration of different senses and the mind's perception of a locality, suggesting that one's sensuous experience of place does not remain stable. Rather it is in progress as the body and mind pass through places and receive stimuli that are interpreted and can affect the individual's perception of himself and his relationship with that place. In particular, Tom's revisiting of his past is affected by the winter landscapes he crosses; the more he is exposed to a frozen and unwelcoming natural environment, the more he believes that his relationship with his eldest son Daniel was significantly more difficult to navigate than reaching England in such conditions. Despite the snow and the fear of an accident occurring, "there are the tracks of other cars to follow" and warning signs that offer a relative consolation to the traveller, whereas the journey through parenthood is "a kind of blizzard" (Park 56). Both father and son are caught in a blizzard of flawed parental decisions and adolescent drug addictions, a blizzard that ultimately causes

Daniel's death and leaves a scar upon Tom's psyche.

For Rodaway, perception is a key factor in geographical experience since it "is inclusive of both passive encounter with environmental stimuli and active exploration of that environment" (12). As Tom drives through places and (un)consciously draws parallels between the natural world and his experiences, he gradually engages in a process of articulating his pain. Particularly at the sight of a farmer feeding his livestock, Tom is reminded both of images on the local news of farmers looking for their lost sheep, relentlessly digging in the frozen soil until they find their animals and of his failure to find Daniel and save him (Park 105). Despite trying to console himself by thinking that helping Daniel with his drug addiction was a strenuous challenge for a parent to effectively handle, "this thought gets blighted by the image of the farmer never giving up . . . and how with his hands sunk deep he pulls the black-faced sheep from its burial place" (Park 112). The landscape probes him to capture his feelings of guilt and regret in language, and thereby externalize this burden. Hence, memories of a traumatic past do not remain ineffable but with effort can gradually turn into narrative memories. The natural world is infused in the language of the narrative, disclosing the prominence of the landscape in the traveller's mind and providing him with the means to articulate his trauma and externalize it. Balaev notes that this conjunction between natural place and an inner psychic world suggests "the various workings of the mind as the individual attempts to understand, incorporate, and explain the traumatic event" (161). Even more, when the natural world acquires a vindictive, insidious power over human existence, it discloses Tom's deteriorating psychological state. That is, when the memory of embracing Daniel's dead body surfaces in Tom's consciousness, he mourns that loss by repeatedly pleading for Daniel to return "from the high places, the sea that is too rough," to cross "this snow-filled road" and approach his father (Park 148). Therefore, the depiction of treacherous landscapes in the novel underscores the finality of death and Tom's irreparable loss, rendering his calls for Daniel futile. As Moslund observes, the language of the narrative is often defined by elemental forces like "earth, wind, water, light, vegetation, density,

or scarcity of matter" (34). These natural elements shape one's geographical experience and in Tom's case provide him with the means to incorporate in discourse the indelible mark of his son's death upon his psyche. In his desperation to comprehend the tragedy he suffered, Tom returns to the memory of him and his own father destroying a bats' nest, thinking that "[he] disturbed some natural order, set in motion everything that has ever happened in [his] life" (Park 160). Thus, the natural world gains increasing presence in Tom's narration, particularly when he reflects on the trajectory of his life and confronts the pain induced by his trauma.

As time goes on and the destination seems to be unreachable, depressing thoughts cloud the traveller's consciousness and the need to share his burden is intensified. Could the woman whose car got off track act as a witness to his confession? Could the snow-covered woods function as a safe space to release the burden of his past hurts? The brief but unexpected halt to Tom's journey is a crucial point in his process of acknowledging his trauma and ameliorating its effect by sharing his internal pain. "[I]n this frozen suspended moment where [they] both wait for the future to arrive," Tom is swept by the desire to open up to this stranger and bury his memories into "that pure white grave of snow" (Park 98). The landscape plays a major role in evoking these thoughts. The forest surrounding the place evokes feelings of calmness that creates the impression to Tom of being somewhere isolated, and regardless of the outcome of his confession, even if this woman cannot understand his vulnerable state, the reality will not aggravate since "whatever words are spoken will be subsumed into the silent snow-filled spaces that lace the trees" (Park 98). For psychoanalyst Dana Amir, bearing witness entails "the possibility to deposit the traumatic substances in another subject who cannot be annihilated by them" (6), to an individual who will not act as a vessel for the traumatic affect to be transmitted but who can keep a relative distance. With that in mind, Emily, a stranger whom Tom meets unexpectedly, would act as a witness to his narrative and become an objective listener to his confession if he managed to externalize his pain. Notably, it is when Tom finds himself in this woman's company, that the woods emit a sense of safety. On the contrary, when the two of them

continue their separate paths, the tranquillity and silence of the woods affect the traveller negatively, as he contemplates about death, wondering whether it would be better to reach deep into the forest and never find his way out (Park 125-26). Traumatic memories are engraved in his mind and, to prevent being entirely consumed by them, Tom has to grasp any chance in this journey to reflect upon his psychic wounds and ameliorate the traumatic effect of past events.

In moments of emotional tension, when the aftereffects of traumatic events overflow, the female voice of the satnav[2] on the car draws the traveller back to reality and acts as a reminder of Tom's two parallel journeys, in memory and in the lived-in world. Tom feels grateful for the "calming voice" guiding him and contends that this voice, despite "its bewilderment," would understand the reason for the change in the journey's direction (Park 155). "I can't tell anyone where I am because it's not where I'm supposed to be and I can't explain the reason if anyone asks" (156) admits Tom, suggesting that his action of making a final stop at a place that tugs at his heart relates to everything he suppresses and needs to confront. As Rodaway notes, maps demonstrate "both features and relationships in space and ideas or claims about or on that space" and particularly for Tom, there is a different kind of map, a mental one linking past and present, a map illustrating his wounded psyche (140). While according to the GPS device assisting his journey, the traveller moves forward in time and space to reach closer to his son Luke, he is also drawn back to memory lane whenever he dwells on bleak memories of his past. Hence, the past acquires its own geographical location in memory and becomes reachable when Tom's traumatic affect is triggered, and he is overwhelmed by recollections of what he has suffered. The connection between this mental map and the actual world of experience becomes more evident as Tom travels by the place that reminds him of experiences of a long time ago.

The final stop in his journey is a mental stop in the realm of memory. The forest Tom stops by is a camping site where he used to bring his boys when they were young and somewhere deeper in the woods there is a big statue of an angel. "The paths to the monument have disappeared under the snow" but Tom finds his way (Park 159). He reaches the realization that it

2 Abbreviation for satellite navigation. It refers to a navigation system that depends on information received from satellites to guide the driver of a vehicle. In the literary work the term refers to the gps device commonly used in cars.

is not his body that should be buried under the snow but rather past mistakes and every hurtful word that was spoken (Park 160). In this place that feels "as sacred as anywhere [he's] ever stood" Tom takes the courage to look at the picture he took of Daniel when he found his dead body and then delete it (Park 160). Although for a moment he hesitates to look at the camera and focuses on the blue sky and the sounds, "hoping to hear a voice that might guide [him]" (Park 162), he has to confront what haunts him on his own, to bring this image from the place of memory to the outer world and bear witness to his trauma. Without resorting to language to articulate his grief, Tom offers a silent testimony to a place that functions as a sanctuary, a meeting point for the character's past and present, his emotional and lived-in world. As Balaev concludes, "the talking cure does not always provide a remedy for the traumatized protagonist" and healing can often be achieved through "direct contact with the natural world" (164). Although Tom's countless encounters with the natural world do not result in his healing, they do contribute to the reconstitution of what Dori Laub calls "the internal 'thou'" (70); that is, the possibility of having a witness or listener within oneself, a first crucial step in initiating the challenging process of healing.

Conclusion

This paper engaged with a contemporary work of Irish Literature that brings to the spotlight the interconnections between an individual's inner world and the natural environment. Like a winter tale of the twenty-first century, Park's *Travelling in a Strange Land* is both a personal account of Tom's journey in midwinter from Belfast to Sunderland and an account of an inner journey through the suppressed memories of a grieving father. That is, while Tom moves forward toward England where his son Luke waits for him in the college dormitory, he also follows a non-linear direction in the land of memory, struggling with his unresolved trauma. In this narrative, an imbalance defines the time-space continuum, as traumatic past and present mingle and inner and outer worlds constantly clash. By crossing the frozen land Tom is provided

with the chance to contemplate upon his pain and become a witness to his own trauma. Thus, traumatic memories do not remain buried.

Travelling in a Strange Land illustrates the embodied experience of place and the connection between the human psyche and the natural world. The solitary journey through winter landscapes is transformed into a journey towards confronting haunting memories and releasing the burden of suppressing grief and trauma within oneself. When the whiteness of the snowy landscape evokes calmness and the feeling of safety, the natural landscape becomes a refuge for the traveller. What Park's narrative underscores is not the idea that encounters with nature offer complete healing of one's psychic wounds, but rather the role of nature in empowering traumatized individuals engage in a process of healing. This travel narrative poses the question of whether nature can assume the role of a witness to the traumatized person's vulnerable position. Eco-literature brings to the spotlight the need to further examine the intimate relationship between emotional landscapes and the natural environment. Thereupon, such narratives open the space for discussions about the therapeutic power of nature, stressing the significance of reconnecting with the natural world.

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Female Discourse, ' Parler Femme,' and Genderlect Theory in Susan Glaspell's Trifles

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ABSTRACT

The prominent French feminist theoreticians, namely Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, challenge male discourse and argue that it does not provide women with freedom of expression. Irigaray suggests the invention of "parler femme" as a new dialect for challenging the social stereotypes assigned to women and reshaping female subjectivity. Irigaray's view is supported by Cixous, who believes that women should have a language of their own and that they should subvert the phallocentric language through the intermediary of "l'ecriture feminine." This new type of female discourse is expected to deconstruct the symbolic order and to establish a new order based on a better representation of women. Cixous's "ecriture feminine" raises female revolutionary voices against male dialect and its misrepresentation of the female plight. Susan Glaspell's dramatic text in *Trifles* can be classified as an example of "l'ectiture feminine" because it invites the audience to analyze female silences, puns, and new images. Indeed, the French feminist lines of thought assist in the endeavor of comparing the differences between male and female discourses in *Trifles*. Unlike the male characters who use an authoritarian style and look for concrete proof to uncover the identity of the murderer, the female characters rely on symbols, images, intuition, metaphors, silence, tone, mood, and psychology to interpret the homicide. Glaspell's female characters succeed at finding out the identity of the murderer, and their investigative style is more constructive because they dig deep into female silence, and they understand the unspoken words of Minnie Wright. On the other hand, the male discourse fails at examining the motives of homicide because it is based on stereotypes, authority, and repression. "Parler femme" is achieved in the play through the solidarity of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, through their sympathy with Minnie Foster, and through their belief that domestic violence is the unjust outcome of patriarchal oppression.

Some feminist stylisticians who analyze female style in a specific social context argue that male and female modes of expression are different, but equal. In her "genderlect theory," Deborah Tannen affirms that differences are sources of richness, and "both men and women could benefit from learning each other's styles" (298). This present research focuses on the intersection between French feminism and feminist stylistics, thematic concerns, textual analysis, and theatrical props and objects to understand the differences between male and female discourse, where, for instance, Glaspell's female characters choose social exile instead of duplicitous, phallocentric communication. As members of Glaspell's audience, we must evaluate the importance of female discourse, study Glaspell's ideas about the richness of female discourse and the necessity of establishing a smooth dialogue between male and female discourses, and recognize the female playwright's call for dismantling marginal spaces and liberating modern American women.

KEYWORDS

female discourse, French feminism, "parler femme," "l'ecriture feminine," female silence

1. Theoretical Framework on Female Discourse

1.1 Parler femme and the Setting

According to Luce Irigaray, language is responsible for female inferiority because women are misrepresented by male discourse. Indeed, "Woman's social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that the woman does not have access to language except through recourse to masculine systems of representation which disappropriate her from her relation to herself and to other women" (Irigaray 85) . In other words, male discourse is dominated by patriarchal practices and it fails to present the inner dilemma of women, to reflect their social confinement and to grasp their psychological turbulence. For example, the play opens with the image of a chaotic kitchen: "The kitchen is the now abandoned farmhouse of JOHN WRIGHT, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table—other signs of incompleted work" (Glaspell 1). The kitchen —associated with female chores and housework obligations —is disordered, which shows the refusal of the female householder to be engaged in domestic activities and her rejection of the patriarchal mindset which defines the ideal woman as a caretaker and an angel who is expected to be in charge of the family needs. Disorder shows the chaotic relationship between MR. Wright and his family and it suggests the presence of an unconventional wife. Male discourse is thus introduced from the very beginning of the play and the kitchen is interpreted by male discourse as the sphere of women and it is seen as an invalid evidence. Female discourse reverses male interpretation, and female characters rely on the disordered kitchen as a tangible proof and cause of homicide. Unlike male investigators who observe 'Nothing here but kitchen things' (Glaspell 1), women believe that the dark kitchen reflects the gloomy aspect of the home and suggests the presence of a dysfunctional couple. According to Selina Kolls, a researcher in American gender and arts, " While the incomplete works in Minnie's kitchen send a message of an incompetent housekeeper to the male character, the women on the hand, interpret it as a sign of a disturbed consciousness' (99). Kolls uses capital letters when she refers to the 'kitchen' to highlight the role of domesticity in heightening female psychological malaise .It is noticeable that female characters dig deep into female psyche and they look for the causes rather than the identity of the murderer. They are fully convinced that the traditional mindset of the husband, his harshness and his inability to get along with his wife are the deepest- rooted factors of the murder. The female character's psychological interpretation of Minnie Wright recall Luce Irigaray's 'parler femme,' which represents the inner concerns of women and provides them with the opportunity to speak their minds. "For Luce Irigaray, women's language is the articulation of an unconscious that cannot speak about itself, but can try to make itself heard. Women need to be able to enter language as subject and to speak

our own identity" (Jackson 95). Indeed, female characters succeed at understanding the unconscious side of Minnie because they rely on 'parler femme'. On the other hand, male characters trivialize women's interpretation and Mr. Hale argues that 'women are used to worrying over trifles' (Glaspell 401). His statement reveals the minimization of female characters and the indifference about female needs and minute details. Male discourse clearly fails to decipher female inner psyche and emotional concerns.

1.2 Female Discourse and Female Isolation

Female discourse and ' parler femme' can be further analyzed through the seclusion of Minnie and her unhappy marriage. Images of the jar, the fruit, the cherries, and the telephone party show the role of abstract and non-verbal language in translating the female plight. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green point out that, unlike male discourse, which underestimates details, female secrets, and inner depth, "parler femme has multiple meanings not limited to but including speaking the feminine, speaking of and to women, speaking as women-subject- and action or speech by or on behalf of women ([sic] pour les femmes ou au nom des femmes" (*Teaching Irigaray* 131). Glaspell speaks on behalf of women when she puts a female murder who is victimized by male repression and who is misrepresented by male language. Indeed, "traditional or non-feminist poetic discourse responds to the two main restrictions excreted on women's publication and production of a discourse in which the words and forms to be used have already been determined by men" (Diocaretz 46). Female characters in *Trifles* sympathize with Minnie and they use a feminist discourse when they try to fathom her hidden codes and her non-verbal language and bodily gestures. In fact, "Feminist discourse encircles verbal constructs created with textual strategies (imagery, arguments, perspective) that contribute to an expansion of messages in which the individual and the collective experience originate from a critical stance against the social contexts of patriarchy and its language" (Diocartez 46). Female characters challenge male discourse when they invite the audience to grasp the motivations behind the murder.

To start with, images of the cold jar of cherries and the fire reflect the walls of misunderstanding between Minnie and her husband and the cold relationship of the couple. In this respect, Mrs. Peters notices and murmurs: "*to the other woman*) Oh, her fruit; it did freeze, (*to the* LAWYER) She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break"(Glaspell 403). Like Minnie who needs warmth, care and mutual understanding, cherries need full sun to thrive. It is clear that female interpretation digs deep into the details of Minnie and looks for the motivation behind the murder. Killing her husband (John

Wright) is a sign of challenging the social institution of marriage. Indeed, the conventional marriage of Mr. Wright and Minnie is based on a cold relationship and it is meant to fulfill the patriarchal agenda. Mrs. Peters' comment about the explosion of the jar alludes to Minnie's inability to support the patriarchal norms and her refusal to be confined within the institution of marriage. Non-verbal language, the image of the jar and the symbol of the cold cherries have helped female characters uncover the identity of the murderer and the hidden secrets of Minnie. "Her secrets kept under pressure burst from their fragile containers. The single intact jar symbolizes the one remaining secret, the motive to complete the prosecutor's case' (Smith 175). Not only has Mrs. Peters succeeded at identifying the identity of the murderer, but she has revealed the role of the cold relationship, the mis-matching that has bound Minnie and her husband together, and the lack of communication that has initiated domestic violence in Minnie's home.

'Parler femme' is also traced through Mrs. Hale's implicit interpretation of food imagery. 'Irigaray refuses to codify a parler femme and adopts a Derridean deconstructionist strategy in her texts, one that continually undoes fixed sexual designations and makes ambiguity the marker of her feminist-re-evaluation' (MaKaryk 48). The ambiguous language of the play is conveyed through the symbol of the loaf bread and the image of the withering cherry. MRS Hale counters male discourse and she uses her own female investigative style. This investigative style is observed in the following utterances: "MRS HALE: (*eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it*) She was going to put this in there, (*picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things*) It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. (*gets up on the chair and looks*) I think there's some here that's all right" (Glaspell 405). The body language of MRS Hale reflects the way women cross linguistic boundaries and they rely on gestures as a mode of self-expression. In this respect, MRS Hale's eyes which are "fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread -box" (Glaspell 405) indicate the female characters' focus on details of Minnie's psyche and their ability to understand her psychology. Indeed, the bread box suggests the situation of confinement and the isolation of Minnie. She is expected to be an ideal housewife and to create a neat house, but Minnie keeps bread beside the box as a sign of rejecting domestic roles and raging against the patriarchal mindset. In fact, "Cross-culturally in both physical and metaphysical references, bread is the basic substance of life" (Amar 26). The presence of the bread outside the box shows Minnie's longing for freedom as the main feature of leading a comfortable life. The loaf of bread thus indicates that Minnie is denied the basic elements of a happy life: mutual understanding, a good companion and respect.

MRS Hale sympathizes with Minnie, she tries to comfort her by hiding the secret of homicide and she regrets the fact of not supporting her neighbor in moments of needs. MRS Hale affirms: 'you, it's queer, Mrs Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of the same thing' (Glaspell 404). The overgeneralization alludes to the situation of some modern couples, the remarkable split and gender inequality. While the couple live together, they fail to create a functional family because of female repression. Domestic violence is perceived by Glaspell as the outcome of the patriarchal agenda which denies female political and socio-economic rights. Accordingly, the female characters of the play do not legitimize domestic violence, but they understand that Minnie is implicitly looking for a warm home and a supportive husband instead of being confined in domestic activities. Female discourse is further reinforced through the image of the clothes. Mrs. Hale renders Mr. Wright responsible for domestic violence because of his male domination and his indifference about Minnie's interests.

Mrs. HALE uses the sartorial appearance of Minnie before and after marriage and she implicitly argues that Minnie is the scapegoat of matrimony as a social institution. She reveals: 'I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang' (Glaspell 402). Minnie's festive mood, positive vibes, fresh looks and sweet past are replaced by a gloomy mood, tragic deeds and dramatic situations. Mrs. Hale's female discourse is also punctuated with the use of negation and affirmation. For instance, the lady denies the fact that the disharmony of the couple is the main trigger behind homicide, but she affirms that living with an authoritarian husband accentuates the dramatic events in the play. Mrs. Hale informs her husband and the audience: 'No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it' (Glaspell 11). The sheriff's lady seems to be hesitant while expressing her ideas and she uses abstract connotations to deliver some messages about female confinement. She does not rely on direct statements because she is convinced that her codes are not going to be transmitted via male discourse. Mrs. Hale uses negation to draw an atmosphere of bleakness and to prove that the conventional and harsh husband failed to keep the cheerful mode of the home. In another occasion, Hale uses abstract notions to criticize the patriarchal mindset and to condemn spousal abuse of female rights. She uses an ironic tone while depicting the profile of Mr. Wright: ' Yes—good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him—(*shivers*) Like a raw wind that gets to the bone'(Glaspell 19). Mrs. Hale discusses the notion of goodness and she ironically declares that 'a good' husband is not someone who abides by the duty to pay and to respect moral ethics, but he is rather

someone who respects the rights of his partner and provides her with a space of freedom. The amplification suggested by the image of the wind allows Mrs, Hale to introduce her views about the role of emotional sterility and coldness in widening spousal conflicts. Mrs. Hale is standing by Minnie, but she is implicitly raging against the patriarchal norms which stifle female freedom.

Mrs. Hale is also affected by male authority and she is denied certain individuality because she is presented from the beginning of the play as a wife and her proper individual name is not mentioned throughout the play. She is described in the following opening stage directions: 'the SHERIFF's wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. MRS HALE is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters' (Glaspell 1). The women are detected through their facial expressions and not by the words they utter. The two ladies are clearly socially presented as socially prestigious women but, both of them are irritated because of the mysterious atmosphere and the misrepresentation of women. They share with Minnie the denial of rights and the absence of individuality in a society where women are assigned domestic, social and educational rights. Parler femme reacts to the social domination of men and it' may be translated as both to speak woman and speaking as a woman and indicated its link to women-only social contexts and solutions through a homonymic pun (pour les femmes) on women's agency' (Ince 96). Parler femme is applicable to Glaspell's *Trifles* because the female playwright employs puns to satirize male authority. Her selection of Mr. Wright and Minnie's names indicates her rejection of the social norms which give the right to male characters to minimize women. Mr. Wright believes that he has the right to manipulate and to minimize Minnie, but Glaspell creates a subversive woman who does not appear on stage, but her silence speaks louder than her words and her physical presence.

Female longing for freedom can be interpreted through the symbolic dimension of fire. The three female characters of the play enjoy the warm flames of the fire and the country Attorney invites them'(*rubbing his hands*) This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies'(Glaspell 5). From a French feminist perspective, fire stands for female desire and repressed wishes for liberation. 'Irigaray does associate fire with female desire in speculum because the capacity of the burning glass to enflame the cool of platonic reason. Yet the burning glass is principally the place of the mystic for Irigaray' (Martin 165). The burning glass is a sign of female subversion against the conventional mirror as it allows women to rebel against the way she is socially perceived and to open new horizons. Irigaray invites women to have a fresh look at the mirror and to be active members instead of being mere objects in their patriarchal societies. : 'For Irigaray a woman's place is through the looking glass and beyond a different conceptual realm,

rather than a reflection of masculine realms' (Jackson 95). In other words, women are expected to go beyond male domination, to have a confident view on the mirror and to rely on female discourse as a means of revolutionizing male discourse which does not represent female preoccupations. Glaspell breaks the mirror trough the voice of Mrs. Hale and Minnie Wright and she gives them the floor to have a voice of their own and to create their own modes of expression.

2. Feminist stylistics:

The French feminist reading of female discourse correlates with the arguments of feminist stylisticians who believe that male and female discourses are different. Deborah Tannen develops feminist stylistics and argues that patriarchal culture is responsible for gender miscommunication and gap. In her *You Just Don't Understand*, Tannen writes, 'the male is seen as normative, the female as departing from the norm. And it is only a short step maybe or inevitable one form different to worse' (15). She confirms that women are compelled to follow the social norm in a society which misrepresents them and that women's use of language should be better understood. Tannen cites the example of a husband and a wife who do not use the same syntactic structures or the same lexis. In a spontaneous dialogue between a husband and his wife, the wife asks 'you would like to stop for a drink?' (qtd. in Tannen15). The wife gives priority to the wishes of the husband because she is raised in a patriarchal culture where men are given priority. The wife is implicitly tired and she wants to have a pause and to have a drink to change the pace of the long journey. The husband misunderstands the wife and he accuses her of being playful with words. He asks: 'Why didn't she just say what she wanted? Why did she play games with me' (qtd in. Tannen 15). The husband fails to understand that his wife is a passive agent within the patriarchal society and that she relies on implicit meaning rather than direct statements. The wife has another interpretation and 'from her point of view, she had shown concern for her husband's wishes, but he had shown no concerns for hers' (Tannen 15). She had not shown self-interest because she uses a male dominated language which gives prominence to men. Tannen's argument is in line with the views of 'Genderlect researchers in the 1970's [who] discovered that women habitually used less powerful forms of speech than men such as permitting interruptions, using qualifying words, adding softeners and appending tag questions' (Johnson et al 67). According to genderlect theoreticians, women's speech is softer, more poetic and indirect than male speech because women are socially trained to be inferior

Genderlect theory is applicable to Glaspell's text because gender differences are echoed through the conversation between male and female characters. The prominent genderlect feminist

theoretician 'Tannen engages the concept of culture to bloster her central proposition. She has linked the impact of male-female differences in language codes to the challenges of intercultural communication by introducing opposing key concepts that guide women's and men's production and interpretation of language' (Foss et al 433). While male characters ignore the harshness of Mr. Wright and its role in bringing about domestic violence, female characters believe that disharmony and male repression are the major triggers of the murder. In this respect, the country Attorney interrupts Mrs. Peters when she comments on the cold relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Wright and he accuses her of focusing on uninteresting details: 'I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now' (Glaspell 12). The repetitive use of the first person pronoun 'I' shows male dominance and the minimization of female views. Mrs. Peter is silenced by the male investigators, but she relies on silence as a source of power. She speaks freely to Mrs. Hale and both of them succeed at creating a female bond and at interpreting the murder in their own way. They start from hesitation to confirmation and they fuse emotions and logic to investigate over the murder.

Raport talking or women's reliance on interactions and relationships is conveyed through their skillful use of the canary bird image as the clearest evidence for the murder. The ladies ponder over Minnie's wish to bring a canary bird to her home and they observe that there are many affinities between the bird and the situation of Minnie. Mrs. Hale asks a torrent of questions and from a genderlect feminist view, 'women ask questions returning to points made by earlier speakers and attempt to bring others to the conversation' (Allen 55). Mrs. Hale brings Mrs. Peters and the audience to her speech when she invites them to contemplate over Minnie's motivations behind getting the canary. She asks: 'Why, I don't know whether she did or not—I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.' (Glaspell 17). This rapport- talk is punctuated with the use of cause- and effect questions, a tone of hesitation and the presence of indirect statements. In her private talk, Hale implicitly believes that Minnie buys a canary to Alice attenuate the feelings of seclusion, to recomonpensate for the absence of kids and to find a warm companion, The same style is used by Mrs. Peters' female discourse is marked by the use of wh questions which are meant to look for the reasons of the murder and to elaborate on the role of gender inequality in bringing about disbalanced female psyches. The lady asks: '(*glancing around*) Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it.' (Glaspell 18). This tendency of asking deep questions recalls the genderlect theory's arguments about the differences between male and

female discourses. Unlike ' men [who are] using more questions that expressed their own opinions, women [are] asking questions that sought elaboration' (Freed and Ehlrich 280).

Rapport- talk is also conveyed through the female characters' deep focus on the relationship between the bird vs the cage, the past vs the present, the individual vs the social and the longing for freedom vs cultural obligations. Genderlect researchers assert that 'men tend to talk about their accomplishments, using competitive terms, while women may understand their contributors and acknowledge other's assistance' (Allen 55). Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters assist Minnie when they understand her desire to have a voice of her own and to rebel against unbearable spousal abuse. In this context, they compare the caged canary's longing for freedom to Minnie's desire to quit the tight attic. The canary is defined as the symbol of delight, joy and freedom: 'Canary: happy, comfortable home, as in singing' (Vollmar 72). The comfortable canary recalls Miss Minnie's balanced psyche and delightful mood before marriage. Like the bird which is imprisoned in the house of Mr. Wright, Minnie is chained by the manacles of patriarchy and her freedom is stifled. Mrs. Hale observes: 'She—come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery. How—she—did—change. (*silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things*) Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind' (Glaspell 20). Minnie's mood has negatively changed after getting inscribed within the institution of marriage and her reaction to the act of killing the bird shows her rejection of male domination. Minnie kills her husband because he kills the canary which reminds her of the golden old days when she used to be free from social engagements and to sing merry songs about life-celebration.

Female discourse succeeds at subverting gender stereotypes and at creating independent women who support each other and they use silence as a non-verbal language of resistance. They challenge male discourse when they use symbols and rapport talk to investigate over the motivations of the murder and they deploy riddles to hide the identity of the female murderer. For example, the ladies create a harmonious bond and they agree to understand and to support Minnie instead of judging her and defining her as ' a criminal.' They succeed to redefine 'crime" which finds more culpability in their earlier failure to help Minnie than in their "moral choice" to suppress evidence' (Mael 284). Self-revision shows that the ladies are implicitly calling for examining the reasons of the murder before judging the murderer. Male social domination over discourse remains the main factor of female silence in the play. Indeed, 'silence, alone, however is not a self-evident sign of powerlessness nor volubility a self-evident sign of domination' (Tannen 636). Female characters use silence as a source of power when they find

out the identity of the murderer, but they defend her and refuse to confess that Minnie kills her husband because of his violent attitudes. Peters 'subversion of male discourse of dominance is perceived when she informs the other ladies about the dead canary:

MRS PETERS: (*takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice*) My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a—dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with—with—wouldn't they *laugh*! (Glaspell 23)

The repetition of the negative form 'wouldn't they laugh' creates dramatic irony because Mrs. Peters invites the audience to discover the identity of the murderer, but she avoids men and she does not want them to her about the association between the dead canary, the dead soul of Minnie and the physical death of Mrs. Wright. Glaspell's sarcastic laughter against male dominance is further conveyed through the playful use of language and the metaphor of the knot. While the country Attorney minimizes female ways of thinking, women use figurative language to convince the audience about the role of social repression in accentuating physical and psychological violence. The act of killing the husband is the outcome of psychological malaise.

The final words of the play are significant as they announce the success of female discourse at expressing female needs, intentions, motivations and inner world. In the final scene, the Attorney mocks women's understanding by saying; ' Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to—what is it you call it, ladies?' (Glaspell 24) and Mrs. Hale answers in an assertive tone: 'We call it—knot it, Mr Henderson.' (Glaspell 24). The image of the knot stands for female empowerment as it alludes to female union and the collective decision of going beyond male signs, rules, obligations and strict dictums. Women challenge male discourse and invent a female mode of expression. The knot 'conveys the sense of knotting the rope around the husband's neck. They have discovered the murderess and they will knot tell' (Alkalay 8). They revise female identity when they laugh at male limited investigative ways and they agree to protect Minnie.

Conclusion

The use of French feminism and feminist stylistics reveals the role of female discourse in

challenging the symbolic order and in providing women with means of expression.The paper shows that male characters fail to unveil homicide because they rely on concrete evidence and tangible methods. On the other hand, women succeed at reaching truth and at recognizing the identity of the killer. Silence, symbols and female psychological state are used by female characters to uncover the motivations behind homicide. *Trifles* calls for making female voices more audible and setting modern women free from male repression and authority. This paper shows the role of female sympathy and silence in protecting Mrs. Hale. Future research can focus on silence as a mode of female expression and as a a subversive strategy of female resistance.

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Children and the Non-human World Bearing Witness to Ecological Loss in 20th-Century Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT

The nonhuman world and perspective in children's literature are by necessity created by human narrators, which makes human perspectives an inseparable part of the narrative. However, while being human constructions, these narratives have the potential to eliminate the centrality of human perspectives and foreground nonhuman voices, as they are intended to align with the worldview of their target audiences. In this sense, this article analyzes how children's and nonhuman viewpoints converge in children's literature from the 20th-century through an ecocritical framework. A significant part of this article is devoted to analyzing Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) and Theodor Seuss Geisel's *The Lorax* (1971) in how narratives dominated by nonhuman perspectives challenge the Anthropocene and thereby promote environmental consciousness and ethical engagement with the nonhuman realm among young readers. Methodologically, the study employs close textual and multimodal analysis to examine how anthropomorphic figures, nonhuman narrative voice, and visual–verbal storytelling techniques contribute to ecocentric representation and portray the more-than-human world as an eyewitness to and victim of human destruction of nature. By studying the verbal and visual representations of the natural world through the perspectives of beings most deeply affected by destructive human activities, this study explores the exclusionary aspect of human-centered narratives and stresses the significance of inclusive environmental perspectives.

KEYWORDS

Anthropomorphism, children's literature, ecocriticism, nonhuman perspectives

Introduction

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary area of literary and cultural studies that gained prominence in the latter half of the 20th century. It analyzes "the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature" (Glotfelty & Fromm xix), shedding light on how literary works affect the way we perceive the natural world and interact with it. Ecocriticism allows for the examination of the effects of cultural norms and anthropogenic activities on the environment and ecosystems through a novel approach that eliminates the boundaries between humans and other life forms. In this respect, ecocritics seek to uncover the root cause of the global ecological crises and encourage humans to reduce the effects of destructive human activity on the environment by highlighting the importance of a balanced and respectful coexistence between humanity and the more-than-human world. In doing so, ecocriticism challenges anthropocentric approaches embedded in traditional humanist thought, which often places humans above all other beings, and alternatively argues that nature possesses inherent value regardless of its usefulness to mankind.

Throughout history, literature has predominantly focused on human experience, reducing nature and the nonhuman domain to simple backgrounds or resources. The widespread presence in literary works of a world where human superiority is the norm has often led to the marginalization of non-human voices and, consequently, to the dominance of human-oriented perspectives. Since works addressing the natural world through human centrality tend to disregard the pain endured by non-humans, an ecocentric narrative that recognizes the inherent value of nature is essential to restore the long-lost balance between humans and the natural environment. In this sense, as Greg Garrard highlights in *Ecocriticism*, ecocriticism's focus on the more-than-human world necessitates a redefinition of the term "human."

In *When Species Meet*, Donna J. Haraway further questions the traditional concept of what it means to be human and whether humans can truly exist without other species. She rejects the anthropocentric hierarchy that places humans above all other life forms:

> I am a creature of the mud, not the sky… I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such… (3-4)

Her alternative approach highlights the deep entanglement of human life with the more-than-human world by revealing that the human body is largely made up of nonhuman organisms.

In this regard, she dismantles artificial barriers between species, portraying humans not as a solitary species but as interconnected ecosystems whose survival is contingent upon other life forms.

In literature, the emphasis on human experience reinforces the human-dominated perception of other forms of life. Conversely, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida develops a distinctive approach that removes the human eye from its privileged role as the observer of the animal domain. Accordingly, he challenges the human-centered inclinations of philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, and Heidegger by foregrounding the nonhuman perspective, which is often marginalized in conventional philosophical discourse. In his work, Derrida recalls a moment when his eyes meet the questioning gaze of his cat as he stands naked in his bathroom. His interpretation of his nonhuman companion's gaze suggests that, similar to humans, animals possess a type of consciousness caused by the act of observing and being observed. "They [philosophers] have taken no account of the fact that what they call 'animal' could *look at* them, and *address* them from down there, from a wholly other origin" (13). His view of the human realm through the eyes of an animal disputes the principles of humanistic thought and provides a distinctive framework for exploring the nonhuman world. This perspective is the hallmark of children's literature, where the distinction between fantasy and reality often becomes blurred.

Recent ecocritical analyses of children's literature have underscored the significant role that environmental themes and anthropomorphized animals play in influencing children's ethical interactions with the nonhuman world. Dobrin and Kidd's *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism* is the first major collection to connect ecocriticism and children's culture studies. It highlights how children's literature can challenge prevalent anthropocentric narratives and foster ecological awareness among young readers. Another influential perspective is offered by Stacy Alaimo, who, through her concept of "trans-corporeality," argues that human bodies are materially interconnected with nonhuman beings and environments. This approach questions Western humanist assumptions of the individual as self-contained and autonomous. It has also shaped recent readings of children's literature by demonstrating how destructive human activities transcend the human realm and permeate the wider ecosystems to which all bodies belong.

Other ecocritical studies on children's literature analyze texts from various perspectives, such as deep ecology, environmental ethics, and eco-pedagogy. Makwanya and Dick assert that promoting children's involvement in climate adaptation activities elevates their ecological awareness and fosters a sense of stewardship in them. They propose encouraging youngsters to articulate their experiences and environmental concerns through writing. Kübra and Çelik study *The Lorax* alongside its Turkish translation through the lens of deep ecology and highlight that

ecological elements are prevalent in both versions, reinforced through literary devices including repetition, rhyming, hyperbole, and neologism. Furthermore, in his article "Ecocriticism and Children's Literature: Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* as an Example," Ismail underscores the didactic dimension of *The Lorax* by examining the detrimental consequences of industrialization and environmental exploitation. He argues that Seuss places the responsibility on future generations to repair the environmental damage caused by adults, highlighting the crucial role of education in this process.

In her work "Environmental Imagination and Wonder in Beatrix Potter," Kerslake argues that Potter's anthropomorphism functions as a pedagogical tool that conveys moral lessons through "dark humor" and "sophisticated irony" (73). According to her, Potter's portrayal of Peter Rabbit as a disobedient child is intentional, because she believes that children's sense of wonder cannot be satisfied unless they explore nature and become a part of it, even at the cost of disobeying parental authority. Similarly, Allani highlights Potter's emphasis on the essential role of participation and experimentation in discovering and connecting with nature, which didactic learning does not provide. Considering the adult-centered aspect of Victorian children's literature, "Potter emerges as a forerunner in contesting anthropocentric views that place man at the center of the universe, dominating rather than coexisting with nature" (Allani 178).

Building on these ecocritical discussions, this article contributes to ecocritical discourse by analyzing how nonhuman perspectives, multimodal storytelling, and anthropomorphic figures raise ecological consciousness and nurture a sense of responsibility toward the nonhuman world among children. Unlike prior research that often examines *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *The Lorax* in isolation, this study brings both texts into dialogue, exploring how they depict the natural world and portray children as witnesses to ecological degradation, while highlighting the ecocentric dimension of presenting natural elements as active participants in the narrative.

Ecocentric Aspects of Anthropomorphism and Children's Unconditioned Perspective

For centuries, human societies have marginalized individuals who deviated from the cultural norms and practices of their societies. They were often labeled as *other* and in certain cases exposed to discrimination, exclusion, and dehumanizing practices. Humans' inclination to regard differences as *threats* extends beyond human communities and permeates into many aspects of human life, including their interaction with the natural world and ecosystems. Similarly, humans have perceived nature as a commodity to take control of and exploit rather than as a living system that holds an intrinsic value.

Literary works designed for adult readers usually adopt a human-centered outlook on life in

contrast to works that target children. Such texts, whether intentionally or not, often possess an anthropocentric perspective. Therefore, due to the absence of a mindset free from the profit-driven justifications of human cognition, they may fail to illustrate the consequences of human activity on the natural environment in an objective manner. In contrast, anthropomorphism in children's literature serves as a literary tool that encourages children to perceive the human realm from nonhuman eyes and thereby foster empathy towards the injustices they experience. By presenting humans and nonhuman beings with human qualities as parts of the same natural environment, anthropomorphism highlights the importance of a harmonious coexistence between human beings and other species. Furthermore, since animals endowed with human traits align with children's world, where the line between reality and fantasy is blurred, the anthropomorphic dimension of children's literature eliminates the human exceptionalism that characterizes works intended for adults.

In comparison to adults, children are regarded as more "nature-associated, both because they seem more overtly to display organic embeddedness than do adults, and because they are commonly attributed with an affinity with nature-associated, indigenous peoples pursuing traditional lifestyles" (Stephens 40). Children's intimate bond with nature is nurtured by their vivid imagination, which bridges the gap between reality and fantasy, allowing them to attribute human traits to animals and plants. As Yanar suggests, since children "possess a unique capacity to embrace and get pleasure from the potentiality of many consequences, while simultaneously rejecting rigid absolutes" (860), they are naturally intrigued by differences and resist predefined boundaries established by society. Therefore, the hierarchical order between humans and other life forms, commonly observed in the adult world, is absent in the world of children. Consequently, it can be argued that children's worldview that does not regard differences as markers of hierarchy allows them to approach environmental concerns with a deeper sense of sympathy and objectivity. In comparison to adults, contrasts serve children as sources of curiosity, which bring new opportunities for exploration and discovery.

The unconditioned nature of children's perspective is referred to by the 17th-century English philosopher John Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he proposes that the human mind begins as a "tabula rasa," or blank slate, free from fixed notions and binary oppositions (45). According to this view, preconditions and dualistic thinking are not acquired innately but rather formed through experience and social impact. In the early years of their life, particularly during the stage of identity development, children perceive the world through the lens of equality, since their cognition is not yet shaped by dualities such as right and wrong. At this point, children usually see nature not as a resource they can benefit from, but more as a reassuring and secure presence.

As children reach maturity, the blank slate is filled with social norms, fixed notions, and dichotomous thinking. Adults with a pragmatic mindset tend to justify environmental degradation by viewing it as an inevitable outcome of technological advancement, economic growth, and urbanization. In contrast, children usually feel empathy and a deep sense of justice toward nature, as their minds are not governed by rational and practical reasoning. Consequently, their unconditioned worldview enables them to confront environmental issues with moral clarity, curiosity, and compassion. In this sense, children's sensitivity to nonhumans' predicament might be perceived as a counter-narrative to anthropocentric narratives. Furthermore, their readiness to accept diversity and embrace it with curiosity makes them natural innovators in how we might interact with the natural environment and cope with the global ecological crises.

Anthropomorphized Animals as Eco-Witnesses in Dr. Seuss's The Lorax and Beatrix Potter's The Tale of Peter Rabbit

Books designed for children frequently narrate events through nonhuman eyes while integrating vivid depictions of natural settings where humans and animals cohabit in harmony. Due to the active participation of the nonhuman world in its narrative, children's literature possesses an ecocentric dimension that strengthens children's connection with the world around them and thereby develops their affinity with beings outside of the human sphere. Furthermore, nonhuman figures with human attributes not only encourage children to utilize their imagination but also teach them vital moral lessons that would otherwise be challenging for them to comprehend. For example, the anthropomorphized animals in Aesop's tales, such as *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, *The Hare and the Tortoise*, and *The Fox and the Crow*, teach children ethical values such as respect, honesty, and fairness in ways that are simple and memorable.

In *The Lorax*, Dr. Seuss adopts a nonhuman standpoint to portray the extent of the destructive influences of unchecked industrial growth and human greed on the natural world. The protagonist, Lorax, who famously states, "I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues" (Seuss), brings up the moral dilemma of nature's incapability to protect itself against environmental damage, as it cannot speak for itself. However, the Lorax's unwavering advocacy for nature and its defenseless inhabitants highlights that lack of human speech is not an excuse to harm the innocent. In this respect, the Lorax is a strong emblem of moral duty since he speaks up for the parts of nature that are often disregarded.

Although the Lorax is depicted as an animal-like figure, his appearance blends features from different species, giving him a broad, inclusive quality. This reflects the core values of ecocriticism, which seeks to dissolve the strict boundaries between humans and other species.

Moreover, the Lorax's human side such as empathy, moral judgment, and reason, in addition to his linguistic ability, bridges the human and nonhuman worlds. This makes him a role model who fosters ethical responsibility toward defenseless beings in nature. Furthermore, his sudden emergence as a response to the Once-ler's chopping down of a Truffula tree, along with consciousness-raising warnings about environmental well-being, suggests that the environment is neither ownerless nor open to humans' arbitrary use.

As Aslan and Bas note, the Lorax's criticism of the Once-ler challenges the human-centered assumption that "due to the superiority of using the 'language' feature, human beings define 'other' entities outside of himself as unwise" (714) and therefore, insignificant. By speaking for those without a voice and defending nature, the Lorax challenges the belief that animals are less valuable or less intelligent simply because they cannot communicate in human language. By giving human qualities to nonhuman beings, characters like the Lorax help readers recognize the injustices inflicted upon the natural world—wrongs that might otherwise remain unnoticed. In this respect, assigning animals or nature a human voice is not meant to glorify human qualities but rather to encourage empathy towards nonhuman beings and dismantle human-centered hierarchies. A similar effect is achieved in Potter's works, where anthropomorphized animals convey the impacts of human intrusion on their habitats on a smaller, more intimate scale rather than through a large-scale ecological collapse.

In contrast to the ecologically sensitive Lorax, the Once-ler stands for unrestrained capitalism and its association with destructive human behavior. He embodies human greed to conquer the world and subjugate ecosystems for personal gain. His discovery of the Truffula Tree, which he transforms into a substance called Theneed, "a Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need" (Seuss), reveals humanity's profit-driven attitude toward the more-than-human world. The felling of these trees leads to inevitable ecological consequences such as the loss of entire ecosystems. For instance, the Brown Bar-ba-loots, who depend on Trufula to live, lose their main food supply. Consequently, they are forced to leave their natural habitat in search of food. The gloomy portrayal of the natural environment in *The Lorax*, thus, reflects the scope of the current global environmental crises and practices such as overfishing, which destroy marine ecosystems and deprive aquatic species of their food sources.

Canonical children's books by the Victorian writer and illustrator Beatrix Potter are notable for their lifelike descriptions of animals that coexist with humans in natural settings. As Kerslake states, "Her illustrations alternate between depictions of real animals and others of the same animal wearing clothes and adopting human postures with an interesting play on anthropomorphism" (79). They resemble actual animals when they are without clothing and behave like humans when dressed. Such behavior is evident in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* when

Peter puts his jacket off to escape from Mr. McGregor.

Potter has a distinctive approach to the animal domain, which is shaped by her curious personality and active role as an observer in nature. Her unique perspective reflects her scientific approach to anthropomorphism, which exhibits "no flicker of sentimentality or sympathy" (Kerslake 85). In her works, the lifelike depictions of animal characters with human qualities and their portrayals as models of good behavior encourage children to see animals as an integral part of nature. Squirrel Nutkin and Peter Rabbit are two examples of animal figures that teach children important moral lessons. Their mischievous behavior and the negative consequences that follow serve as a reminder of what occurs when youngsters disobey and treat parents and authorities disrespectfully. Furthermore, their anthropomorphic side plays a significant role in promoting the idea that animals have voices of their own to express joy, sorrow, fear, and annoyance, despite the limitations of human perception.

Potter's works adopt an ecocentric perspective in their portrayal of humans encroaching upon nature and the ensuing threats they pose to animals coexisting with humans. Due to the ever-present danger beyond their home, Peter and his family must constantly remain alert to the perils awaiting them where the human and nonhuman domains converge—namely, the garden. Potter depicts Mr. McGregor's garden as a dangerous place Peter is warned to stay away from, as its owner shows no mercy toward intruders: "… don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden. Your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor" (7). In contrast, Peter experiences a deep sense of calm and security upon returning home, away from human interference. "He slipped underneath the gate and was safe at last in the wood outside the garden" (25).

Humans' ownership of nature is vividly illustrated by Potter, particularly when Peter ignores his mother's warnings and ventures into Mr. McGregor's garden. Ironically, after eating some of the vegetables in the garden, Mr. McGregor calls Peter "a thief" and chases him with a rake in his hand. In reality, it is the owner of the garden who intrudes upon the rabbits' natural habitat and consumes their main source of food instead of sharing what nature freely offers all species. As Peter escapes, he encounters several man-made obstacles, such as a gate, a gooseberry net, and a tool shed in the garden. "He found a door in a wall; but it was locked, and there was no room for a fat little rabbit to squeeze underneath" (22). All these objects restrict his movement and slow his escape. When he becomes stuck in the net, only sparrows come to his aid. Animals helping other animals, along with artificial barriers forged by humans reveal the hostile presence of humankind within the natural world. As demonstrated in the text, Peter's survival instincts and cautious behavior in his interactions with the human world, along with his mother's warning about how his father paid the price for intruding into the human domain, offer a portrayal of environmental vulnerability on a subtle, individualized level. On the other hand,

the Lorax's environmentally conscious warnings against large-scale industrial activities, which destroy various animal species and force them to migrate extend ecological loss from an individual level to a global level.

Multimodality's Role in Ecocentric Narratives in Children's Literature

Multimodal texts combine multiple modes of communication—words, images, sounds, or textures—that play a vital role in producing and interpreting meaning. Children's books usually draw on multimodality that helps young readers to get immersed in the material they read and arouses a sense of curiosity toward the text through vivid images and depictions. In this regard, the multimodal design of children's books enhances the effect of ecocentric portrayals of the more-than-human world by stirring emotional responses toward human-induced injustices and harmful environmental practices.

Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* portrays the dramatic shift in the natural world before and after the Once-ler family. It opens with a verbal and visual depiction of a dark and gloomy town where "the wind smells slow-and-sour when it blows and no birds ever sing excepting old crows" (Seuss). The visuals illustrating this scene evoke fear and anxiety in the reader, as the barren setting lacks any greenery and is dominated by a row of unattractive buildings illuminated by artificial lights. There is no indication that the story's darkness is connected to nighttime, which intensifies the story's bleak atmosphere and conveys a sense of irreversible destruction. The name of the street containing the word "Lifted" is symbolic of the environmental catastrophes following the disappearance of the Lorax.

After the young boy pays the Once-ler to hear the Lorax's story, the narrative shifts to beautiful imagery that vividly captures the untouched beauty of nature before the Once-ler and his family arrive. The colorful images bring the landscape to life, depicting a sunlit, flourishing environment where plants and animals coexist and thrive harmoniously. The colorful Truffula Trees fill the scene, and the animals appear peaceful and content. There is a bright, lively pond filled with fish, and Brown Bar-ba-loots play joyfully beneath the trees.

> Way back in the days when the grass was still green
> and the pond was still wet
> and the clouds were still clean,
> and the song of the Swomee-Swans rang out in space...
> one morning, I came to this glorious place.
> And I first saw the trees!

The Truffula Trees!
The bright-colored tufts of the Truffula Trees!
Mile after mile in the fresh morning breeze (Seuss)

The physical appearances of both characters match their personalities; the Lorax looks like an old wise man whose consciousness-raising warnings about the environment contast the fearsome appearance of the Once-ler. Although only a part of the Once-ler's body is visible throughout the story, he resembles a monster with his green skin and yellow eyes that align with his greed and moral corruption. At the beginning of the story, the boy's obligation to pay him to hear the Lorax's story and his meticulous calculation of the payment portray the Once-ler's materialistic nature and foreshadow his profit-driven interaction with nature later in the story.

When the Once-ler builds a small shop to produce Thneed, "a Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need" (Seuss) from Truffula trees, the narrative acquires an ecocentric dimension. As illustrated vividly, the Lorax's emergence from the stump of a felled Truffula tree and his reaction to environmental degradation dramatize nature's defenseless state in the face of destructive human activities. In contrast to the Lorax, who originates from nature, the Once-ler is depicted as an external force encroaching upon the natural world in pursuit of material gain.

As the Once-ler's business grows, the once serene and harmonious nature starts to deteriorate. As the Once-ler family cuts down more Truffula trees and builds factories for material growth, the pristine blue sky becomes obscured by smoke and pollution. As a result, the Brown Bar-ba-loots and Swomee-Swans are forced to leave their natural habitat in search of food and to escape the suffocating smog that covers the sky.

The visual representations of environmental degradation portray industrial growth and the ensuing ecological destruction that humanity faces today. The Once-ler's family company, with its employees knitting Thneeds day and night under artificial lights and operating machines to fell Truffula trees in large quantities, evokes in the reader's mind a vivid image of mass production in factories. All the beautiful elements of nature, from trees to animals depicted in vivid colors, gradually disappear as the Once-ler takes control of the natural world. The Swomee-Swans, choked by smoke, and the water pollution caused by the Once-ler factory picture the inevitable outcomes of human greed. Through the Once-ler, who experiences a moment of guilt, the author emphasizes that although humans are aware of the scope of their destructive deeds, they choose to justify them in the pursuit of industrial and technological advancement.

I, the Once-ler, felt sad
as I watched them all go.

BUT ...
business is business!
And business must grow
regardless of crummies in tummies, you know (Seuss)

After the last Truffula tree is cut down, the environment descends into permanent darkness and gloom, as portrayed by images that depict a landscape shrouded in silence. All these visual elements enhance the story's sense of loss and despair. The joy, energy, and light that once filled the environment disappear with its natural inhabitants. The environmental damage the Once-ler causes eventually leads him to total isolation, as everyone, including his family, abandons the area they now deem uninhabitable. This scenario exemplifies how humans cause their own destruction.

However, the author does not conclude the story with a sense of despair. Although the Once-ler's greed is the root cause of environmental destruction, he ultimately learns a lesson from this experience. The word "*UNLESS"* that the Lorax leaves behind means that there is still hope, which becomes tangible with the boy's arrival. It is the boy whom the Once-ler entrusts with the duty of planting the last Truffula Tree seed to compensate for the damage he has caused. The fact that a young boy is given this responsibility cultivates a sense of care and moral duty in children toward the natural environment.

Beatrix Potter's watercolor illustrations of the natural environment possess a photographic quality, making them appear as direct scenes from the real world. They reflect the aesthetic beauty of nature through the gaze of an observer who has a keen eye on details. Potter's sharp observational skills come to life especially when she portrays the contrast between the free, animal-inhabited world of nature and the human-controlled, domesticated one. In *The Tale of Peter Rabbit,* Peter's home is depicted as a wild, natural space where animals move freely, in contrast to Mr. McGregor's cultivated garden, which reflects human order with its hedges, flowerpots, nets, and other such artificial features. This duality reflects humanity's effort to tame nature, as is evident in the tension that arises when human intervention in nature restricts animals' freedom. In this regard, Potter portrays Mr. McGregor as a symbol of humanity's desire to claim ownership of nature and protect it from any perceived threats—animals in this case. He is described as a merciless man holding a rake and is ready to attack intruders. His attempt to trap and step on Peter enhances his hostile attitude, inviting readers to empathize with Peter. Peter's helplessness when he gets lost in the garden, crying out in fear, dramatizes the detrimental outcomes of human encroachment upon nature and animals.

Since readers perceive the human realm through the experiences of Peter and his family,

the natural elements assume an active role in the narration, endowing it with an ecocentric quality. The way Potter illustrates Peter's physical appearance along with his fears and hopes grants him an individuality, which amplifies the story's eco-conscious dimension. Like Seuss, Potter employs visuals to raise ecological awareness; however, her delicate watercolors and illustrations of animals expressing human emotions are highly detailed and invite close observation, whereas Seuss employs a more direct and dramatic portrayal of environmental threats that lack the photographic quality of Potter's images. *The Lorax* raises ecological consciousness through dark and gloomy images that depict the end result of environmental destruction, followed by flashbacks exhibiting the initial beauty of nature before human involvement. In contrast, Potter nurtures eco-consciousness through visually appealing depictions that capture the beauty of the natural environment where animals and humans coexist in tension.

Although Peter has human attributes such as wearing clothes and speaking like humans, his natural instincts remain intact, as Potter visibly portrays verbally and visually. For instance, when he must save himself from Mr. McGregor, Peter attempts to get rid of any barriers that restrict his movement, including his jacket and shoes. This is when he goes back to his authentic animal self, guided purely by nature. The sad expression on his face, his anxious quick steps, and defenseless look make Peter appear as a victim of humanity's menacing presence in nature. Ironically, Mr. McGregor's act of hanging Peter's jacket and shoes on a scarecrow to frighten the blackbirds symbolizes humanity's desire to dominate nature through fear and threat.

Peter's disobedient behavior and the resulting conflict between animal and human domains can be seen as a warning against the consequences of disrupting harmony in nature due to disregarding the boundaries of others. Although Potter vividly illustrates the detrimental effects of human invasion of nature through Mr. McGregor's cultivated garden, Peter's own intrusion into the human sphere is likewise portrayed as a source of tension that can only be resolved when both species respect the limits of one another. In this sense, Potter implicitly criticizes destructive human impact on nature through the mirrored disobedience of an animal. Thus, children learn about the negative consequences of disobedience and the transgression of boundaries through the actions of an animal possessing human traits. All the visuals in the story, infused with the aesthetic beauty of nature and the anthropomorphic emotions of animals conveyed through their gestures and expressions, reinforce this message.

Although *The Lorax* and *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* differ in tone and style and originate from different periods within the 20th century, a comparative reading reveals how each text employs anthropomorphism, nonhuman perspectives, and multimodality to challenge human-centered narratives. Seuss employs nonhuman speech as a tool of resistance to environmental

destruction through the Lorax, who openly confronts destructive human practices and questions the moral implications of human greed. Potter, on the other hand, uses intricate images and narrative tools such as facial expressions, gestures, and the contrast between wild and cultivated spaces to convey the everyday pressures animals face due to threatening human presence in their natural habitats. Additionally, while Seuss illustrates large-scale environmental degradation through vivid color shifts and striking imagery, Potter employs intricate and realistic watercolor images to depict ecological loss on a micro level. Furthermore, through animals' cautious actions and human-like expressions, Potter dramatizes how claiming ownership of land and boundary-making shape their everyday reality. Together, the two works demonstrate that 20th-century children's literature adopts multimodal storytelling and nonhuman points of view to question anthropocentrism and thereby encourage young readers to reconsider human dominance and perceive nature as a living, feeling presence.

Conclusion

Children's books are crafted in alignment with children's perception of life, free from polarities and the conditioned thinking of adulthood. Since their world is not governed by pragmaticism, children are inclined to see nature as a realm of living beings with whom they can form genuine emotional connections. In this regard, children's literature serves as a medium that allows children to develop empathy toward non-human entities and engage with the more-than-human world both emotionally and consciously.

By bringing the human and animal realms together, children's literature promotes the idea of interdependence between humans and other species. The multimodal and anthropomorphic figures contribute to its ecocentric dimension in how they dissolve the hierarchical order between humans and other species. The multimodality of children's books fosters eco-consciousness through their visual and linguistic modes that decenter human perspectives. As witnessed in both *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *The Lorax*, the colorful illustrations and non-human voices allow children to learn moral lessons, unlike in adult literature, where human voice and experience are the lenses through which readers view the nonhuman world. In their unique ways, Potter and Seuss invite young readers to recognize that nature is not a passive background but a living, feeling participant in the shared web of existence.

Anthropomorphism in both works has a significant role in developing environmental consciousness in children. Animals and other natural elements endowed with human traits and depicted as coexisting with humans allow readers to see the human world through nonhuman eyes. This approach encourages children to understand the extent of harmful human activities on the more-than-human world, free from the profit-driven reasoning of the adult mind. In *The*

Lorax, Seuss employs anthropomorphism mainly through the Lorax, an environmentally conscious figure with human attributes, who speaks up for the defenseless parts of nature. His protests on behalf of nature against the harm inflicted on ecosystems portray environmental destruction on a global level. In *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, anthropomorphism serves as a tool to raise awareness of the pain and fear animals experience due to human intrusion into their natural habitats. Peter's facial expressions and emotions, as well as the aesthetic beauty of nature conveyed through Potter's detailed and colorful illustrations, enhance the ecocentric message of the text and portray the ecological crisis on a more individual level.

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Missionary Ethics and Colonial Power: A Bakhtinian Reading of Father Krick in *The Black Hill*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ethical positioning of the figure of Father Krick in Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*, a novel situated in what is now known as Arunachal Pradesh in India by bringing Postcolonial theory into conversation with Bakhtin's idea of moral accountability. Through close textual analysis, it argues that Krick's encounters with Indigenous communities are shaped by an orientalist framework that embeds his missionary efforts within wider imperial agendas, ultimately contributing to epistemic and physical violence. Employing Bakhtin's critique of "theoretism," the study shows how Krick depends on rigid, repeatable images of the "Orient," that have historically facilitated both colonial and evangelical authority. A Bakhtinian reading of ethical responsibility further demonstrates Krick's displacement of culpability onto colonial institutions, exposing the instrumental and ethically compromised nature of his professed "love" for the natives. By highlighting Krick's orientalist worldview and his refusal to recognise the interdependence of religious and political domains, the paper challenges assumptions about the autonomy of **the religious sphere**. It also situates the novel's critique within current debates in Arunachal Pradesh, where renewed attention to the Freedom of Religion Act reveals how contemporary legal ambiguities around conversion threaten to perpetuate epistemic violence.

KEYWORDS

Father Krick, Postcolonial theory, theoretism, moral accountability, love, Orientalism

Introduction

The figure of Father Nicholas Krick, the non-native French Jesuit priest in Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* (2018) offers a particularly complex entry point into the intersection of postcolonial studies and Bakhtinian thought. Mikhail Bakhtin's early philosophical writings, especially his essay, *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, move beyond his more familiar theories of language to propose a profoundly ethical vision of being. For Bakhtin, the "self" is neither abstract nor autonomous. It is always located in a particular, unrepeatable context and it must exist in participation with this specific world to which it is answerable for its "presence." In other words, the self cannot claim any "alibi in being." A human subject, by virtue of presence and participation in life, cannot claim detachment or innocence from the world in which they act. This Bakhtinian ethical stance resonates powerfully within a postcolonial framework, where the question of "presence", i.e. who is permitted to be where, under what structures of power, and **with what justification and effect, becomes central to how imperial authority is produced, sustained, and legitimised.**

The Black Hill, set in the mid-nineteenth century in the region now known as Arunachal Pradesh, narrates the encounter between Father Krick, a French Jesuit missionary en route to Tibet, and the Indigenous Abor and Mishmi peoples inhabiting the region, tracing the chain of events that culminates in the death of the Mishmi chief Kajinsha. Situated in the early phase of colonial contact, the narrative reveals the ways an ostensibly benign missionary journey becomes entangled in the violence attending imperial expansion. While Father Krick appears to conceive of his mission as distinct from the apparatus of colonial power, his presence is nonetheless implicated in forms of cultural, epistemological, and ultimately physical violence enabled by imperial structures. Bringing postcolonial theory into dialogue with Bakhtin's ethics of answerability, this paper examines the ethical and political implications of Krick's moral self-positioning, arguing that his insistence on separating his missionary endeavour from the broader imperial operations facilitates a troubling evasion of responsibility for the cultural and epistemic violence resulting from his presence and actions.

The ethical tensions identified in Father Krick's self-positioning, while rooted in the historical setting of the narrative in Arunachal Pradesh, continue to resonate in the post-colonial political climate of the region, where entanglement of state power and religion continues to shape debates around religious freedom, conversion, and state authority. The recent revival of the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (APFRA) and the anxieties surrounding the erosion of Indigenous faiths and cultures

underscore the persistence of questions about cultural autonomy, political control, and the ethical claims of the nation-state, questions that echo, in altered form, the very dynamics dramatized in the novel. By situating *The Black Hill* within these intertwined historical and contemporary contexts, this paper investigates how Dai's novel interrogates the ethical claims embedded in missionary and state ideologies alike, challenging the presumed separation of the religious and the political, and revealing their deep and enduring entanglement.

Father Krick's denial of colonial association

Nicolas Krick's story begins with him embarkation on a missionary journey to Tibet, a decision initially presented as being motivated by his desire to **rediscover meaning** in his ecclesiastical vocation rather than to spread the word of the Gospel: "More than the challenge of carrying the Gospel to unknown parts of the world," Krick "was seeking an experience of the passionate union with the divine" **(Dai 15).** Serving in the protected parish of France where preaching and everyday rituals had turned mundane and lost meaning and spiritual depth, he was looking for a renewed connection with God as he set out on his journey to Tibet through India. This union with the divine, he believed, "would come only through the path of love and service" (Dai 15).

Furthermore, following his arrival in India, Krick disavows his association with the British colonial authority on multiple occasions. Upon being invited by the British political agent, Captain Vetch, on an expedition to meet the Abor people, he initially rejects his offer, not wanting "to be part of what he thought was a military mission" (Dai 87). When Krick finally joins Vetch after being reassured that the meeting with the Abor was intended to "make peace with them," on sensing tension in the meeting, he is seen regretfully reflecting that "if he were killed now he would be dying with the English, for the English, when he would have preferred to die for his own cause" (Dai 89). Likewise, later in the narrative, on being interrogated by a Tibetan official following his arrival in the Tibetan village of Sommeou, Krick makes sure to dissociate himself from the **British colonisers,** asserting, "I am a man of religion. I am not British. I am French" (Dai 117). Krick's insistence on **his identity as a French missionary,** and his reluctance to die for an English cause underscore his desire to be seen as an autonomous missionary, operating independently of the British colonial project. **In claiming that his missionary journey is primarily driven by personal, spiritual longing, and his belief that authentic union with God can only be attained through the path of "love,"** Krick emerges, at the onset of the narrative, as someone seeking personal salvation through sincerity, struggling to remain spiritually sincere in a world saturated with violent hierarchical structures.

Orientalism: The Pernicious Legacy of "Theoretism" Shared by Mission and Empire

Contrary to Father Krick's benevolent assertions that his missionary journey operates independently of the colonial project, a close reading of the text reveals latent orientalist assumptions that underpin the cultural and discursive foundations of both missionary activity and the imperial project. Orientalism, the Eurocentric, stereotypical depiction of the Orient by the West, can be understood as a form of what Bakhtin refers to as "theoretism," the tendency to explain and categorise events, actions, utterances, and human beings through a specific theory or theoretical logic. The theoretical cast of mind sees individuals and separate moments in time through the lens of repetition. Thus, distinct moments or events come to be perceived as instances of repetitions of a particular theory or set of rules. Vehemently opposing such systems of deterministic generalisations based on repeatability, Bakhtin asserts, "it is a sad misunderstanding…that truth can only be the sort of truth that is put together out of general moments, that the truth of a proposition is precisely what is repeatable in it" (Morson 96).

If, as Bakhtin suggests, "theoretism" rests on the assumption that "truth" is reducible to what can be abstracted into generalised, repeatable propositions, then orientalism, the centuries-old unified body of knowledge, produced by Western writers (scholars, missionaries, travellers, novelists, and diplomats), and characterised by a dualistic logic that draws rigid distinctions between the "civilised West" and the "uncivilised East," represents a particularly pernicious historical manifestation of this logic.

Orientalist discourse enacts a Eurocentric, racialised theoretism in which the "truth" of the Orient is produced not through dialogic engagement with its irreducible, lived particularities but through the abstraction of those realities into essentialised types and frozen images. These abstractions, circulated as stable, recognisable "knowledge" in the form of stereotypes, function as a repeatable currency of representation, easily deployable across time and space in the service of both imperial control and missionary expansion. In other words, orientalist stereotyping entails the removal of lived specificities from their spatio-temporal context, reducing complex dynamic lives into fixed categories. The abstraction of lived experience enacts a dynamic central to Bakhtin's critique of representation, a phenomenon that Bakhtin scholar, Caryl Emerson, refers to as the "corruption peculiar to images" (410). While Bakhtin acknowledges the human need to construct, to quote Emerson, "circumscribed image(s) essential for our practical functioning in the world" as we "continually do others the favour of

(provisionally) fixing their identity," "by bestowing an image" on them, he cautions against any "form-shaping" activity that seeks to fix identities "once and for all time." As Emerson notes, such operations remove objects "from space and time, into some autonomous, unanswerable Utopian sphere where they were so uninterruptable that there was nothing an ordinary outside consciousness could add to them, no potential dialogue for good or ill, no medium of exchange, no way one could leave one's mark" (Emerson 410).

The theoretism of orientalism, thus, lies in its practice of removing "objects," from their specific spatio-temporal contexts, i.e. their lived historical context, repackaging stereotype as "truth." In doing so, orientalism produces an easily recognisable and repeatable "knowledge" of "the Orient" that serves imperial interests, erases lived difference, and forecloses ethical engagement with the Oriental Other as a unique and unfinalisable human subject.

The erasure of the spatio-temporal context within orientalist discourse becomes immediately apparent at the onset of the novel, particularly reflected in the narrative commentary on the European Church leaders' "gaze" toward Tibet. When the narrative notes, "what drew their (the Church leader's) gaze most were the unexplored mountains of the high Himalaya and the mysterious kingdom of Tibet…remote (and) mystical," (Dai 14) it reproduces familiar orientalist tropes that construct Tibet as an essentialised, mystical space in which time and history appear suspended. The characterisations of both India and Tibet as spaces "deeply mystical" or "shrouded in mystery" **functioned** to define the essential modernity and rationality of Western culture by projecting contrary qualities onto the Oriental Other (King 147). Peter Bishop, underscoring how Western constructions of Tibet **relied o**n suspending spatio-temporal context to serve imperial interests, notes, "Tibet's frontiers were equivalent to the boundary of a temenos, a sacred place" within which "time and history are suspended," prompting Western commentators to depict Tibet as a space "in deep freeze," "left on the shelf," "a museum," defined by "its mythology, its reincarnations, its supposedly unchanging tradition." With little to no interest being shown in its dynamic, "colourful history," and evolving institutions, Bishop emphasises the West's fabrication of the static, timeless Tibet in service of imperial interest: "It was the Western imagination which needed an unchanging Tibet outside time and history. How nicely this mystical fantasy dovetailed with imperial demands. …The mystic East remains a timeless memorial to a bygone age – the time of the ancients" (Bishop 34).

A similar orientalist attitude likewise informs Father Krick's first encounter with

the hills that lay beyond British administrative control in the 1850s when the events of the narrative unfold. His impression of the landscape is infused with a language that recalls the Edenic representation of the Orient found in some of the "imaginative geographies," the self-serving mental mappings of the Orient projected onto its space by Orientalist narratives.

On his way to the Mishmi Hills, enraptured by "the beauty of creation unfolding before him" Krick reflects: "Here, there is nothing to awaken passion, pride and jealousy…Everything around was peaceful, as it must have been in the first days of creation" (Dai 93). His description of the hills as "green, pristine, and silent" **(Dai 93)** reduces the hills to a homogenised landscape, implicitly extending its essential purity to its inhabitants by stripping them off the most ordinary of human emotions of vanity, envy or passion. The evocation of the "first days of creation" carries a distinctly romantic orientalist undertone informed by a "nostalgia for lost origins," "an important strand in the Western representation of the 'mystic East'" (King 147).

Associating a sense of purity with the hills endows them with a Biblical timelessness, figuring them as morally uplifting and positioning them as a spiritual counterpoint to the industrial, modern West. Often prevalent in nineteenth century Romantic and Orientalist representations of India -one of the most popular of these narratives being the projection of India as the primordial "cradle of civilisation," promoted by scholars such as the German philosopher, Friedrich Schlegel in his book, *On the Language and Wisdom of India* (1808)- these tendencies were born out of the post-Enlightenment spiritual crisis of the West dominated by rationalistic thoughts and secular values and consequently, marked by a yearning for spiritual anchoring. The constructions of a primeval, timeless, essentialised, mystical Orient served the Occidental Self's need for a sense of continuity with the pristine, innocent past lost with the modernisation and rationalisation of the post-Enlightenment West. So, when Krick contemplates at the foothill, "If Voltaire had spent time here, he would have become a servant of God, …for in these wild hills, the work of an all-powerful God was truly manifest under the transparent veil of nature," (Dai 93) his reflection exemplifies the Orientalist tendency to deploy the Orient as a site through which the West's spiritual longings are articulated and fulfilled. The assumption that the perceived purity of the landscape in its supposedly "natural state" could transform even a sceptic like Voltaire into a believer underscores the romantic-spiritual idealisation of the East as a redemptive and morally restorative space for the Western imagination. **As a result, the hills are not engaged as lived, historically situated spaces but are instead transformed "once and for all," into symbolic**

surfaces upon which Western desires are projected.

Krick's Edenic vision is therefore rooted in a totalising representational gesture of fixing the identity of the Indigenous space conclusively, exemplifying the "corruption peculiar to images" that Emerson refers to. By bestowing an image of primordial purity upon the hills and their inhabitants, the narrative forecloses their historical agency and lived complexity, transforming them into static figures within an Orientalist imaginary rather than participants in a shared, unfolding human reality.

Such projections, Edward Said suggests in his seminal book *Orientalism*, took a specifically fictional turn in the writings of French scholarly "pilgrims" to the Orient. Said distinguishes these writings from the narratives of British colonisers, who, possessing direct control over parts of the Orient, employed a "material imagination" "limited by the realities of administration, territorial legality, and executive power," leaving little "room for imaginative play" (Said 169). In contrast, French "pilgrims," lacking sovereign control and guided by the French "mission civilisatrice" as a "second-best political" substitute, wrote from a sense of "acute loss," longing, and imaginative projection. They "planned and projected for, imagined, ruminated about places that were principally in their minds; Theirs was the Orient of memories, suggestive ruins, forgotten secrets, hidden correspondences" (Said 169), often drawing on memories of ancient civilizations, the Crusades, or the Biblical past.

Against this backdrop of orientalist imagination, the French Jesuit priest, Father Krick's description of the hills as "peaceful as it must have been in the first days of creation" can plausibly be read as informed by the French "interest in the Biblical past," that French pilgrims often projected onto Oriental landscape. Moreover, Krick's perception of the hills as a space that, by dint of its "innocent" or "pure" character, could transform even a sceptic like Voltaire into a believer, also recalls to mind the narratives of writers who "found in the Orient a locale sympathetic to their private myths, obsessions, and requirements" and consequently exploited "the Orient in their work so as in some urgent way to justify their existential vocation" (Said 170). In this light, Krick's decision to undertake a missionary journey to Tibet in search of a renewed spiritual connection with God, one that had been lost in the mundane ritualistic nature of his duties in his French parish, may initially appear to stem from a purely personal, apolitical motivation. Yet, when read within the framework of "seeing" articulated by Said, it becomes evident that his seemingly private and non-political quest

remains inevitably enmeshed in, and dialogically shaped by the Orientalist discourse through which he perceives and inhabits the world.

While the Orient, imagined as a counterpoint to the post-Enlightenment Occidental world, and as a site for contemplating Western anxieties functioned in Romantic orientalist representations as a screen for the West's projection of its own spiritual crisis, the essentialist characterisation of the East as "mystical", "innocent", unchanging, and hence, "non-rational" simultaneously helped solidify notions of Western modernity and rationality in ways that legitimised imperial interests and the colonial "civilising mission." Commenting on the West's convenient essentialist projection of the East as both, a site of nostalgia for a spiritual past, and as a backward, primitive space, Richard King in his book, *Orientalism and Religion* (2001), notes:

This nostalgia for origins provided, on the one hand, a much needed sense of continuity with archaic traditions and the natural world and, on the other, a way of defining the West as quintessentially 'modern' in contrast to the 'primitive' or 'traditional' cultures of the East. Asia in general and India in particular came to be seen as the West's gateway to its own past – to the lost innocence and childhood of humanity (147).

Pivoted on the assumption of linear temporality, wherein history was imagined unfolding along a single progressive continuum, in this mode of thought, the Western civilisation represented the pinnacle of social and cultural evolution, while the non-Western societies were cast as "primitive" or "backward," capable of progress only through the adoption of Western norms and values. This logic carried over to the Christian theological discourse, which arranged religions along an evolutionary ladder, placing non-Christian faiths on the lower rungs or depicting them as deviations of Christianity. Such violent characterisations of non-Christian religions, marked by a supposed "lack" within Western Christian scholasticism, in turn, fed into and legitimised the dominant Euro-centric narratives of the so-called "civilising mission."

Such orientalist assumptions also shaped Christian theological and scholastic traditions that drew comparisons between Christian and Non-Christian religions to gauge their convertibility, treating the latter as preliminary stages in a teleological history culminating in Christianity. The impulse to compare and hierarchise religions can be observed in earlier scholarships of religiously inclined Sanskritists such as Monier-Williams, whose comparative studies promoted a "quasi-Darwinian" hierarchy of religions in the Indian context. Framing "Vaishnavism as a lower evolutionary stage of Christianity," these works **suggest** that Indian and Chinese "heathens" possessed a *lumen*

natural, a capacity to understand morality and metaphysics through reason, if not through divine revelation, thereby making them suitable candidates for Christian conversion (Tiné 4). Later in the 20th century, building on earlier scholarships, Fulfilment theology, most notably articulated by J. N. Farquhar, "the codifier of fulfilment," in his book, *The Crown of Hinduism* (1913), drew on ritualistic affinities between non-Christian religions and Christianity, to claim that non-Christian religions are not false but incomplete anticipations of Christianity, awaiting fulfilment in Christ. As noted by Harald Fischer-Tiné in his article, "Third-Stream Orientalism: J. N. Farquhar, the Indian YMCA's Literature Department, and the Representation of South Asian Cultures and Religions (ca. 1910–1940)," Fulfilment Theology cast Christianity as the telos of religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, "discovering" Christian elements in these religions, portraying their adherents as already moving towards Christian "truth" and thus ready for conversion: "Its discursive strategy was fairly straightforward: Christian elements were "discovered" in South Asian religious traditions, which were then read as evidence for the fact that Hindus and Buddhists were on the path to Christianity and hence prepared for conversion" (Tiné 4).

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A comparable dynamic can be traced in Father Krick's response to his first encounter with a Tibetan ritual, in the village of Sommeou. His initial approach to the ritual reflects a similar tendency to identify ritualistic similarities between the Tibetan religion and the Catholic religion. Initially, Krick sees the rite performed by the lama as an "opportunity to actually witness something that he had only read about in accounts that drew ritualistic affinities between the Catholic religion and the religion of Tibet" (Dai 125). Seen within the broader historical context in which such comparative strategies have been used to infantilise non-Christian religions and subsume them within the fold of Christianity, Krick's attitude reads as politically charged and violent.

Furthermore, although Krick approaches the Tibetan ritual hoping to discover "ritualistic affinities" with Catholicism, his expectation is quickly thwarted. He does not find much commonality between the Tibetan ritual he sees and his Catholic rituals except for the fact that the "lama's prayer beads resembled the Catholic rosary and the "chanting construed as the equivalent of ten Hail Marys" **(Dai 125).** However, his inability to "believe" the Tibetan ritual stems from the fact that it "seemed more like exorcism spells to cast out unseen sorcerers and house demons," **(Dai 125)** unlike the devotional purposes the rosary and the chanting of Hail Marys are employed for in Catholicism. Father Krick cannot "believe" in the ritual because it does not map onto Catholic

categories of meaning or practice, his response thus reflecting an orientalist tendency to evaluate a non-Christian religion solely through the interpretive frameworks of his own Catholic faith.

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What further consolidates Krick's orientalist posture is the manner in which he interprets the audience's response to the religious ceremony. Unable to invest in the ritual himself, he positions himself as a detached observer, explaining the "animated" audience's emotional reaction -"a bright light was burning in the eyes of all the onlookers"- in terms of the universal need to believe. His claim that it was the "incurable longing for the mystical passion to unite with the divine" that constituted the "impact of the lama and the magical properties of his cure that consoled the poor and the desolate," (Dai 125) implicitly diminishes the inherent spiritual efficacy of Tibetan religion. By locating the power of the ritual not in its own religious authority but in the psychology of its practitioners, and by attributing the ritual's impact to a generalized human longing rather than to its intrinsic spiritual truth, Krick's account reinforces a hierarchical opposition between Christianity and Tibetan religion, thereby sustaining an orientalist framework rather than fostering genuine cross-cultural dialogue.

The structural imbrication of Father Krick's missionary enterprise within imperial networks

. **Father Krick's attempts to distance himself from colonial authorities despite exhibiting an orientalist attitude that informed both missionary and colonial projects exemplify a broader historical pattern in which moral or spiritual enterprises operating under colonialism often professed autonomy from imperial agendas while remaining deeply entangled in the structures of power they purported to transcend.** Although revisionist historians like Andrew Porter insist on only a tenuous compatibility between missions and empire, arguing that "By and large most missionaries did not want to be imperial propagandists and colonial rulers, any more than they intended to be consistent or uncritical supporters of capitalist enterprise," (Porter 323) critically potent accounts such as Andrea Paras', while taking into account, Porter's arguments, asserts the impossibility of avoiding "the fact that, at the very least, the missionary societies benefited indirectly from Britain's interest in promoting civilization" (Paras 36). Paras goes on to assert, "…even though many missionary organizations later attempted to retreat from their imperial affiliations, "colonial ambitions…acquired momentum and moral legitimacy through their associations with the missionary enterprise" (Paras 38).

Even as certain missionaries attempted to dissociate their work from the colonial project and its civilising mission, their missionary zeal to convert non-Christians inevitably reproduced the violent orientalist logic of Christianity's presumed superiority as a Western religion. Noting the symbiotic relationship between the missionary enterprise and the project of empire, Andrea Paras argues, "Missionaries' belief in the importance of conversion provided impetus to British imperialism" even when some "missionary agencies were often wary of their connections to the colonial cause" (Paras 39) and missionaries came to be accepted "as legitimate agents of empire" (Paras 37).

The historical complicity between the colonial and missionary enterprises problematises Krick's attempt to assert spiritual autonomy from colonial structures as he frames his journey through the colonial landscape as a quest for personal or transcendent purpose rather than one serving imperial interest. In fact, Krick's claim to autonomy from colonial structures is complicated by the structural imbrication of his missionary enterprise within imperial networks, made evident from the very conception of his journey in France, when the Missions Étrangères de Paris strategically determined his route to Tibet through British-governed India rather than through China. Unlike the path through China, that involved the risk of antagonising the hostile Peking government, the route through India was considered the "only alternative," "the only accessible route," because India "was an area equally distant and untried but … was ruled by the British" (Dai 38).

Just as the Missions Étrangères de Paris had predicted, the British colonial presence in India proves to be a blessing for Krick's mission throughout his journey. His endeavour is facilitated by the British colonial government in India, the colonial officers serving as the "providential nutcrackers" for the preaching of the Gospel, with Krick receiving "the kindest attention and help from the British authorities in the person of Captain Reid, Captain Smith and the political agent Hamilton Vetch who was camped in Saikwa at the time" (Dai 87).

The support from the British colonial authorities ranged from a letter of recommendation issued by Captain Dalton, the magistrate of Guwahati, authorising his "exploratory journey" into the Mishmee and Abor territories, to privileged access to the private library of a friend who commanded the garrison at Nowgong where he came across accounts of British travellers who had attempted to cross into Tibet from the eastern frontier (Dai 58). The ethnographic objective of this "exploratory" journey to the Abor hills which involved making "a personal assessment" of their culture and habits otherwise deemed inaccesible (Dai 88),

alongside his privileged access to knowledge produced by British travellers, echoes epistemic strategies characteristic of colonial modernity, wherein knowledge of the Other was produced by the coloniser as a means of cultural domination and imperial consolidation.

When Krick later expresses his intention to render himself "useful to science, geography, and history" aided by the "good sextant" gifted by Vetch as he embarks on his journey to the Mishmee hills, his presence becomes further embedded within the colonial apparatus of cartographic knowledge-production that underpinned imperial expansion. (Dai 91). This ostensibly neutral pursuit of science, geography, and history by the missionary, aided by the sextant gifted by a British political agent, once again, foregrounds the entanglement between strategies of colonial knowledge production and the missionary enterprise. This alignment between colonial epistemic practices and the missionary project becomes more explicit as the narrative shifts from epistemic forms of domination to overt coercion. After the Abor people refuse to assist Krick in his journey to Tibet, the British political agent Vetch secures Krick's passage through Mishmee territory by compelling the Khampti chief, Chowsa, to act as his guide. This coercion takes the form of a veiled threat involving the chief's son. When Vetch tells Chowsa, "We will look after your son while you travel with the priest," Chowsa realises that "they were using his little boy…to force him to take the stupid priest into the Mishmee hills" (Dai 90). The epistemic violence implicit in Krick's association with colonial authority ultimately escalates into material violence later in the narrative when following Krick's death at the hands of a Mishmi chief, British forces respond by killing Kajinsha, mistakenly identifying him as responsible for the priest's death.

The merging of Krick's missionary enterprise and the wider colonial project becomes legible even in the semiotics of his attire and his overall bearing as he embarks on his journey to the Mishmee territory. As he traverses further into the Indigenous space, his "cassock," emblematic garment of clerical authority, is replaced by "a cotton blouse with black trimming and pants of the same woven fabric tucked into big boots." This sartorial change, coupled with the rifle he carries, produces an "overall unlikely appearance" that stands "in odd contrast" to "his missionary cross," "the only indication of the religious nature of the mission" (Dai 92).

His satchel, filled with objects such as the Bible, the breviary, a medicine box, the sextant, and "a supply of ink and paper," embodies the instruments of colonial religious authority, knowledge production, mapping and the colonial appropriation of scientific and

medical authority. Each of these items, representing a different dimension of colonial knowledge production and control, gestures towards the covert mechanisms of imperial power that underpinned missionary enterprise transforming the satchel into a condensed symbol, a metonym, for the cultural hegemony and exploitative dimensions of the broader colonial project. While the Bible and the breviary represent colonial religious authority, the medicine box symbolises the scientific and humanitarian discourse used to legitimise empire. Likewise, while the sextant signifies navigational mastery that enabled the colonial exploration leading to the control over the colonised space, the writing materials evoke the power of colonial documentation, record-keeping, and the production of colonial knowledge.

Together, these accoutrements form a portable ensemble of epistemic power through which the colonizer perceives, interprets, and orders the world. The satchel, therefore, does not remain merely a personal possession of Krick's but rather transforms into a metonymic representation of colonial epistemology, implicating him in the colonial enterprise, for these very items constitute the mechanisms through which cultural colonization operates, enacting the subtle yet pervasive forms of epistemic and ideological domination that sustained imperial hegemony and facilitated the subjugation of the colonized "other."

The institutional patronage accorded by the colonial administration to Krick's missionary endeavours, the convergence of his epistemic practices with the knowledge-producing mechanisms of by the colonial state, coupled with Vetch's coercive intervention to secure the cooperation of the Khampti chief, Chowsa, collectively illuminate the structural entanglement and mutual imbrication of missionary and colonial projects.

This nexus between evangelical and imperial enterprises becomes particularly conspicuous when Krick, identifies himself as a *sahib*, the nomenclature reserved by the natives for British colonial functionaries, and insists upon the deferential treatment customarily extended to such figures by reminding the natives of the sahib's "generosity" who "receive you well and give you presents." In appropriating the title *sahib*, Krick inadvertently discloses the internalisation of colonial hierarchies and an orientalist sense of entitlement, revealing how missionary subjectivity was inflected by the symbolic and discursive authority of empire.

Father Krick's Evasion of Moral Accountability: Colonial authority as an alibi

Navigating this specific colonial spatio-temporal context structured by the complicity between colonial enterprise and missionary project, and sustained by a

hierarchy that positions him as the dominant "Self," Father Krick's attempt to distance himself from the colonisers while simultaneously demonstrating orientalist attitudes, reveals the contradictions inherent in his theoretical disposition. Krick's persistent effort to distinguish his mission from imperial activity produces an artificial bifurcation between evangelism and empire, both culturally rooted in orientalist thought. This rhetorical separation obscures the shared orientalist assumptions underpinning both undertakings and allows him to shift responsibility away from his missionary enterprise, equally laden with orientalist underpinnings, onto the colonisers. In doing this, Krick commits the moral error of resorting to an "alibi" for ethical responsibility. Invoking an "alibi for being" exposes his unwillingness to confront his own complicity within the colonial framework, and foregrounds his evasion of accountability. As Bakhtin scholar, Gary Saul Morson notes, "For Bakhtin, the theoretical cast of mind not only oversimplifies the world… but also entails yet another moral error…people try to create what Bakhtin called an "alibi" for ethical responsibility. We shift responsibility to someone or something else and behave as if we were not there – as if we had an alibi and so could not be responsible" (Morson 99). In the context of Krick, by shifting blame onto the colonisers, he situates moral accountability outside himself, thereby creating an alibi for the violent consequences of his own missionary endeavour and his "presence" in that specific spatio-temporal context. But, in reality, his work remains embedded within the same orientalist framework and dependent upon the infrastructure of British colonial power that he tries to distance himself from. In invoking this separation, Krick, thus, transforms the colonial authority into a positive alibi that legitimates his own actions, even as he benefits from and reproduces the very system he ostensibly disavows.

Krick's evasion of moral accountability becomes particularly evident when he is confronted by Kajinsha, the Mishmee chief, about his assumption of the superiority **of his** Christian "God." In response to Kajinsha's inquiry, "…why have you come here to tell us of a God you say is more powerful than any other god?" Krick argues, "I did not say that. I am only telling you about my God. It is my duty" (Dai 139). In this exchange, by refusing to acknowledge the implications of his missionary presence, **and consequently, refusing his agency**, in terms of the cultural violence being inflicted on the colonised land, Krick invokes what may be understood as a "negative alibi." Kajinsha's challenge exposes the inherent violence in the act of proselytization: to preach the superiority of one's own God, especially one associated with the powerful colonisers, necessarily implies the inferiority or insufficiency of another's. Krick's insistence that he is merely "doing his duty" signals his refusal to recognise this violence or to accept the hegemonic

implications of his mission. **As Bakhtin observes, "Since our crime is negative, we can readily tell ourselves we have done nothing wrong because we have done nothing. The moral error lies in denying presentness" (Morson 100).** Krick's denial of his active participation in the dynamics of religious domination thus exemplifies this moral error, i.e. the attempt to construct an alibi through negation, and thereby to withdraw from the ethical dimension of his own actions.

The Problems with Krick's "Love"

Krick's orientalist assumptions and evasion of moral accountability also call into question the nature of the love and service he claims to practice to attain the spiritual reconnection with his faith he was determined to attain at the very outset of his missionary journey. In the very beginning of his journey, Krick is convinced that his "passionate union with the divine" can be achieved only through the path of love and service, and thus professes to serve with "love." However, the love Krick claims to practice stands in sharp contrast to Bakhtin's understanding of "love" as an ethical relation the subject engages in, and which emerges through what he calls "participative thinking" (uchastnoe myshlenie). Participative thinking is the humbling act of entering another person's consciousness or position, not to fuse or absolutely identify with it, but to return to one's own position with a renewed sense of responsibility. This dialogic relation, grounded in "participatory outsidedness," assumes that one cannot truly analyse another's consciousness but only address it, converse with it, and be changed through that exchange precisely because one can interact with another consciousness only from the outside. As Emerson states:

An outside position vis-á-vis another consciousness… provides neither party with a ledge to sit and watch, unchanged by the view… To know a given content, therefore, I must, from an outside position, participate in it, converse with it, and assume that in turn… will be altered by my interaction with it… To every definition offered to another consciousness, one must sense the other talk back: "not bad, perhaps even partly true-but not wholly me (Emerson 407).

In **Bkahtinian** view, therefore, the ethical self emerges through the recognition and preservation of boundaries between distinct consciousnesses. This acknowledgement of limits, i.e. the self's necessary separation from the other, also shapes his understanding of "love." As Emerson observes, love begins with the confirmation and respect of boundaries: "before anything can be loved, boundaries must be confirmed and respected—for I can only 'answer' to someone else across a boundary" (Emerson 408). While Bakhtin is of the view that human beings must, to some extent, define and project

images onto the surrounding world in order to make sense of its "multitude of fluid events, people, and impressions," he insists that such representations remain provisional (Emerson 407). *Participative thinking*, guided by the principle of *participatory* outsidedness, and grounded in respect for boundaries, prevents the finalization of another consciousness into a fixed or closed image. In fact, for Bakhtin, love constitutes one of the only two modes of engagement (the other being art) in which participative thinking flourishes and the subject maintains openness toward the other. Unlike the instrumental impulse to extract "a useful image or two from another person and then move on," "love," for Bakhtin, entails a sustained attention, care, and effort, enabling a genuine subject-to-subject encounter (Emerson 407). A true experience of love, then, is marked by what he refers to as an "urgent curiosity," a focused, cognitive attention that deepens one's understanding of the "beloved" through continually renewed and individuated responses. In contrast **to the condition of** "love," Bakhtin notes in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, "Lovelessness, indifference, will never be able to generate sufficient power to slow down and linger intently over an object, to hold and sculpt every detail and particular in it" (Emerson 408). Only love, he concludes, possesses the perceptive and imaginative subtlety required to engage the world in an ethically and aesthetically productive way.

In contrast to Bakhtin's understanding of "love" as a participatory mode of being that demands the acknowledgement of the other's autonomy and interiority, Krick's missionary impulse, observed in the discussed instances, forecloses the kind of mutual recognition Bakhtin associates with genuine, ethical encounter. When Krick identifies himself as a *sahib*, the colonisers, he **reflects** the orientalist and hierarchical assumptions underpinning his "love" (Dai 99). Similarly, his cultural misreading of Abor tattoos as "quite clearly the Maltese and Lorraine cross" is rooted in domination rather than dialogical reciprocity. His assumption about the superiority of his God and his failure to perceive the **Indigenous** people as independent consciousnesses with equally valid worldviews exposes his monologic consciousness. Krick speaks *about* the other rather than *to* or *with* them, an attitude that stems from his conclusive finalisation of the other through the act of fixing the other within his own ideological or theological framework. Because his love does not depend on maintaining boundaries that allow for genuine responsiveness, it takes the form of entitlement, projection and assimilation. As he never acknowledges the other as a subject capable of responding to him on equal ethical grounds, it eliminates the very possibility of "participatory outsidedness." That is, his "love" does not involve the "urgent curiosity" and sustained attentiveness to the other's irreducible particularity that the Bkahtinian understanding of "love" demands. In other

words, while Bakhtin's notion of love is grounded in the idea of co-experiencing the world with the other while preserving difference, Krick's is a "theoretical" love, one that is not only unidirectional but also instrumental, whereby he treats the other as an object of conversion, a medium through which his religious truth must be realised. What is problematic about Krick's love is not only its cultural arrogance but the structural impossibility of dialogue within the theoretical framework it is lodged in. Consequently, while Krick's "love" may be sincere within his own belief system, but in Bakhtin's terms, this sincerity does not equate to dialogical openness. From a postcolonial perspective, his love remains ethically limited because it erases *alterity.*

Conclusion

Employing the dual lens of Postcolonial theory and the Bakhtinian notion of ethical accountability, this paper has attempted to analyse the ethical positioning of Father Krick, the French Jesuit priest, on his missionary journey to Tibet, within a space marked by colonial presence in *The Black Hill*. Through a close reading of the novel, the paper identifies an orientalist mode of seeing that shapes Father Krick's encounter with the natives..

Given that orientalism constitutes the cultural and theoretical assumptions underpinning both evangelical and colonial undertakings, this paper reveals how the novel exposes the complicity between Krick's missionary endeavour and colonial authority. It does so by foregrounding the violent ways Father Krick's missionary enterprise is imbricated within imperial networks, a process that ultimately culminates in physical violence and the death of the Mishmee chief, Kajinsha. Drawing on Bakhtin's critique of "theoretism"—the tendency of deterministic models or universal rules to subsume events, actions, and utterances under a single theoretical logic, this paper identifies Father Krick's orientalist thinking as a particularly pernicious manifestation of such theoretism. His reduction of the "Orient" into essentialised types and static images operates as a portable, repeatable representational currency that can be deployed across contexts to further both colonial authority and missionary evangelisation.

Moreover, approaching the text through a Bakhtinian conception of moral accountability reveals how Father Krick deflects responsibility by invoking colonialism as an alibi, effectively shifting blame onto the broader imperial project. This manoeuvre further complicates the form of "love" he claims to offer the natives by spreading the word of the Gospel. Unlike Bakhtin's vision of love as a deeply participatory mode of being, one that requires recognizing the other's autonomy and interiority, Krick's

missionary impulse shuts down the possibility of the mutual recognition that, for Bakhtin, grounds any genuine, ethical encounter. Krick's love is "theoretical," unidirectional and instrumental as he treats the other consciousness as an object of conversion, a vehicle for realising his own religious truth. The problem with Krick's love is not only cultural arrogance but the structural impossibility of dialogue within his framework. While sincere on his own terms, Krick's "love" is not dialogically open in Bakhtin's sense and, in postcolonial terms, remains ethically limited because it erases alterity.

By foregrounding Krick's orientalist disposition rooted in his theoretical cast of mind, demonstrating how his missionary endeavour is imbricated in imperial structures of power, and underlining his failure to take moral responsibility for the violent consequences of his presence, this analysis unsettles his claim that the domain of religion can be rigidly separated from the political motivations and the power structures in which it is embedded. This entanglement between the two spheres acquires particular urgency in the contemporary politics of Arunachal Pradesh, where the recent revival of the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (APFRA) has reignited debates surrounding faith, conversion, and state control. The Act's vague formulations of "force," "fraud," and "inducement," despite existing provisions in the Indian Penal Code addressing coercion and deception, render it redundant and position it as less a protective legal measure than a mechanism of surveillance. In practice, such ambiguity enables the criminalisation of voluntary conversions and exposes individuals to bureaucratic scrutiny and harassment. Read alongside similar anti-conversion laws in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh- widely criticised for violating Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate religion- the revival of APFRA, in the absence of demonstrable evidence of widespread forced conversions, raises pressing questions about its political motivations, particularly its possible role within broader efforts to promote Hinduisation among Indigenous communities.

Although the Act is presented as a measure to safeguard Indigenous cultures and religious traditions, it is perceived as discriminatory, particularly against Christians, who have historically faced violence, church demolitions, and harassment under the pretext of such laws. At the same time, Indigenous voices have voiced growing anxiety about the erosion of Indigenous faiths through the Act, which they see as facilitating the acceleration of Hinduisation that threatens to absorb tribal identities into the cultural mainstream of the nation-state.

The critique in the novel therefore reverberates within the post-colonial context the novel is situated in, wherein the state apparatuses, under the pretext of moral

authority, replicating the ideological and political imperatives characteristic of colonial governance, enact laws that infringe upon one's freedom of religious choice and practice. Such a reading of the novel gestures towards how postcolonial governance, much like colonial authority, continues to conflate the religious with the political. In this light, the novel's exposure of Father Krick's unethical mode of being, his claim that faith can be separated from politics, gains renewed relevance. It reveals how religion, personal belief, and political authority remain inseparably bound in the socio-political landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. By juxtaposing colonial missionary logic with contemporary state practices, this study illuminates the persistent entanglement of moral rhetoric and political control in both past and present.

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