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# Reconsidering a Source of Sir David Lyndsay's *The Monarche* and Its Significance In the Early Scottish Apocalyptic Tradition

*Juan Manuel Castro*

## Abstract

Parallel to the distinctive character of Reformation in Scotland, the Protestant apocalyptic tradition in this country showed an original, nationalist-oriented style, defining itself against both English and French tendencies. Among the first texts to ground these differences was Sir David Lyndsay's *Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour off the Miserabill Estait of the Warld*, commonly known as *The Monarche* (1552). Following the main themes of medieval eschatology, *The Monarche* incorporates key elements that will be characteristic of Protestant apocalypticism in Scotland and shows the influence of *Carion's Chronicle*, one of the most significant millenarian treatises in the Renaissance. This article analyzes the apocalyptic dimension of *The Monarche* and pays special attention to the particular circumstances surrounding Lyndsay's reception of *Carion's Chronicle*. By examining the connections between this poet and certain Scottish exiles in Eastern Europe, we aim to shed new light on the introduction of apocalyptic thought in Scotland and revise the traditionally accepted relationship between this text and similar treatises, such as *The Complaynt of Scotalnde* or John Knox's earliest writings.

**Keywords:** David Lyndsay, *The Monarche*, apocalyptic, Scottish reformation

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of early attempts to differentiate the Scottish Protestant tradition from English and Continental influences, there was actually very little distinction between them. Until 1560, the Reformation in Scotland and England shared similar doctrines and practices and any discrepancies that were highlighted were mainly to foster a sense of nationalism (MacDonald 2022). Though the initial causes of the change may have been different (more political in England, more religious in Scotland), the two nations quickly came together under a shared religion.

Undeniably, however, apocalypticism was one of the areas where their resistance achieved a remarkable degree of importance. The profound influence of Scottish apocalyptic thought played a significant role in creating a divide between England and France, due to the unique eschatological traditions that are native to both countries (Drinnon 2012: 18–62). In contrast, England continued to be greatly influenced by the teachings of Wyclif, who rejected the traditional interpretation of the Apocalypse that had already been abandoned in other parts of Europe (Ball 1975; Firth 1979). By contrast, France embraced Calvin's *laissez-faire* attitude and intentionally chose to distance itself from the increasing anticipation of an apocalyptic event that was spreading among millenarian groups throughout Europe. Subsequently, the long-standing Scottish practice bears a striking resemblance to Lutheran doctrines, yet with a progressive outlook that makes it stand out from the crowd (Gribben 2009).

One of the first individuals to contribute to the debate on the apocalyptic view of Scotland and its place in history was David Lyndsay. Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount, probably the most popular court *makar* under James V's reign, served for years as personal attendant to the king and played a crucial role in his education and mentorship. At the young age of twenty-two, Lyndsay began serving the Stewart family and from then on, his life was deeply connected to the turbulent history of the Scottish Crown during this period. The Flodden campaign, the uncertain period of James' childhood rule, his sudden rise to power with the king's endorsement, and the chaos that followed his passing were all significant events in his eventful life (Murion 1938; Edington 1994). Being well-acquainted with Gavin Douglas and William Dunbar, his remarkable genius and prolific output enabled him to achieve the highest acclaim in Scottish poetry until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly with his creations such as *The Dreme*, *The Historie of Squyer Meldrum*, and his masterpiece *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estatis*.

His final composition, titled *Ane dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour, concerning the Disastrous Condition of the Warld*, commonly known as *The Monarche*, has been thoroughly examined by scholars (Edington 1994; McGinley 2005; Tapscott 2016). Although some admire it as his most sophisticated and comprehensive poem, others consider it excessively long and repetitive, lacking the excellence

shown in *The Thrie Estatis*. In any case, the strong moralistic atmosphere and the complex historical context have led to a lack of academic attention on this poem, which researchers seem to overlook in favor of the more captivating realm of court sycophants, monarchs, and plebeians in Lyndsay's other satires.

*The Monarche* is divided into four separate books, with an Epistle, a Prologue, and an Exhortation to bookend it. Within its lines, a young courtier, burdened by the lack of effective government in Scotland and fearful of divine punishment for moral decay, encounters an elderly man named Experience who shares his concerns but expresses them with a pessimistic view of life. When asked about the origin of evil in the kingdom, Experience provided a comprehensive explanation based on the “laik of Faith, and for Ydolatrye, / For Fornicatioun, and for Adultrye, / Off Princis, Prelatis, with mony ane man & wyve” (ll. 67-9). In order to prove his point, Experience carefully recalled the histories of the most powerful empires (the Assyrian under King Ninus; the Persian under King Cyrus; the Greek in the time of Alexander; and the Roman Empire under Caesar’s rule) and showed how God utilizes autocrats and calamities to bring about His divine plans. In the midst of these disasters, the Papacy and the deteriorated state of the Roman Church are considered the new oppressive rule, the so-called Fifth Monarchy, which is believed to eventually lead to the arrival of the Antichrist and the subsequent end of the world.

Taking into consideration the question of theodicy, Experience provides an overview of the most popular eschatological themes of the time. This includes a thoughtful exploration of the Four Last Things, a portrayal of the Antichrist (identified as the Pope), an outline of the Fifteenth Signs before the Doomsday, and ultimately a description of the End of the World. With that, the courtier goes back to his abode to reflect upon the futility of worldly matters and the importance of acquiescing to attain salvation.

Clearly, *The Monarche* addresses the deepest concerns of a poet who was losing their position at court and whose religious convictions had been affected by the decline of trust in the Catholic Church and a feeling of hopelessness during the Protestant Reformation. With sharp and biting satire, Lyndsay exposes the misconduct of political leaders and the corruption in Rome. Through this, he conveys a heartfelt plea for moral and spiritual transformation, emphasizing the urgency of the situation: “Gett up, thou slepist all to lang, O Lorde, / And mak one hais-tie reformatioun.” (ll. 2701-2) or “On to the deth, and steruit on the Rude, / Lat ws, O Lorde, be purgit with that blude.” (ll. 6237-8). His millennialist outlook is the result of carefully studying history as a perpetual series of mistakes and a deep lack of faith in humanity, which consistently ignores past errors. The opposition between the openness of the courtier and the intense disillusionment of Experience presented by Lyndsay gives one of the most intimate and honest examples of apocalyptic discourse during the early Reformation.

## APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY IN *THE MONARCHE*

In his unique and personal style, Lyndsay's apocalyptic writing incorporates elements inspired by some of the main medieval eschatological works. Some examples include the Fifteen Signs before Doomsday, directly taken from Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* (ch. I "De Adventu Domini". Graesse 1850: 6-7) and a portrayal of the Antichrist influenced by Adso de Montier's *Libellus de Antichristo*. However, he also incorporates certain aspects from the new Protestant tradition that moved away from the medieval millenarianism rooted in the original paleo-Christian eschatological writings. For example, the denial of Purgatory, the identification of the Pope with the Antichrist (not founded on Rev. 13), or the prophetic interpretation of past events were interconnected with Reformed apocalypticism during that time, despite all three concepts having originated in Catholicism (Drinon 2013). Nevertheless, the clearest evidence of Protestant influence in Lyndsay's work can be seen in his heavy reliance on *Carion's Chronicle*, which is widely regarded as the most significant contribution to eschatological thought during the Renaissance period (Stewart 1972: 272).

At the beginning of the Reformation, the apocalyptic textual tradition relied on three main components, two of which were already prominent in medieval theology: *the Book of Daniel* and *the Book of Revelation*. The third of the predictions was *the Prophecy of Elijah*, a revised edition of a Talmudic excerpt, which was most remarkably distinguished by its timeline of world history. It has been suggested that God's creation of the world would take a total of 6000 years, divided into three distinct periods of 2000 years each: the first period, *ante legum*, occurred before Moses journeyed out of Egypt; the second period, *sub lege*, took place while the Jewish Law was in effect; while the third period, *sub gratia*, falls within the era of Christ's grace. It was believed that the Second Coming will happen at the end of this third period (Reeves 1969). Contemporary intellectuals completely avoided accepting the belief in an approaching end time and strongly rejected the idea of the two thousand years leading up to it (Kugel 2003: 36). Most Protestant spiritual leaders, including Martin Luther, were expecting the Parousia to happen before the early 17<sup>th</sup> century according to this version of the *translatio imperii* motif. They believed that it would happen because of the actions of the newly appointed Antichrist, i.e., the Pope, and the modern armies of Gog and Magog, which referred to the Ottoman Empire (Firth 1979: 170). By their actions, the successor to the Roman Empire, Christendom, would be defeated, resulting in the initiation of Armageddon and the End of the World. *The Monarche*, following this periodization, states that "so remanis to cum, but weir, / Four hundredth, with sew-in and fourtye yeir" (ll. 5302-3), predicting the End for the year 2000 of that third period. In Book Four of Lyndsay's poem, there is a detailed description of the history of the world spanning six millenia before the final Rapture (Lerner 1984).

Another crucial aspect of *The Prophecy of Elijah* was the vision of the Four Monarchies, which is an expanded version of Daniel's prophecy of the four beasts. This vision provides a narrative of the four empires that had already been described by Lyndsay throughout his poem. During the Renaissance, a new monarchy, known as the Fifth Monarchy, was introduced to justify the imminence of the Final Advent of Christ. Various royal lineages were recognized as such during the 16<sup>th</sup> century: the Spanish Empire, the Turks, the Muslims, or, as proposed by Sir David Lyndsay, the Papacy, were all seen as the catalysts of the apocalypse and were therefore highly regarded (Capp 1972).

## **CARION'S CHRONICLE AND THE MONARCHE**

In the year 1531, the Dutch mathematician Johann Carion employed *The Prophecy of Elijah* as the basis for his well-known *Chronica*, a condensed compilation of prophecies taken from the Bible and other ancient sources, thereby providing a validation for the practice of utilizing astronomy to forecast future occurrences (Green 2011: 59). In the chronicle, a unitarian vision of time under the divine will was presented, continuing the allegorical interpretation of history that had been initiated by St Augustine and that was highly appreciated by Protestant theology. After a period of twelve months had elapsed, Philip Melanchthon thoughtfully revised and considerably broadened the *Chronicle*, largely disregarding the complex astronomical aspect and incorporating data from both biblical and patristic sources. Undoubtedly, it was Melanchthon's altered version of the *Chronicle* that became the strongly authoritative, nearly sacrosanct, text in Protestant tradition (even though it was preserved in history under the name of Carion) (Lotito 2019). Luther, who had previously been highly dubious of the prognostications of the end of the world, eventually transformed into one of the most passionate proponents of this treatise and his most recent compositions evidence the profound impact the Chronicle had upon him (Stewart 1972: 273).

Carion's influence on *The Monarche* is widely recognized, evident in its overall structure, which is based on the Four Monarchies vision. Additionally, the inclusion of both apocalyptic and non-apocalyptic prophecies throughout the piece contributes to its significance. Lyndsay explicitly alludes to "the Chronicle" on no fewer than five occasions, and we can easily recognize more than a dozen direct quotations that have been extracted from that source. Rarely does Lyndsay differ in opinion from Carion, but when this happens, he presents both perspectives to allow the spectators to form their own judgment. No one has questioned this relationship, even though it is still unclear how Lyndsay could have been involved with this tradition (Stewart 1972: 274).

*Carion's Chronicle* was first translated into English by John Funck in 1550 (let us bear in mind that the publication date of *The Monarche* is 1552) which could be an acceptable date to support a reliable transmission reception under normal circumstances, but that is not the case here. Katharine Firth (1979: 18) argues that the *Chronicle* went unnoticed in England for a long period of time because it presented a perspective of history that was based on factual information. That aspect was not something that the nation was accustomed to when it came to concepts of eschatological anticipation, so Carion's narrative would have been almost blasphemous to the English audience. It is impossible to determine with certainty whether this text would have been able to reach Scotland in less than three years, as Douglas Hamer suggests (1936: III.442), but there are some clues which point to the possibility that the origin of *The Monarche* may have been traced back to 1549 (Edington 1994: 64), or that Lyndsay had knowledge of the *Chronicle*'s outlines before that time. The play *Ane Satyre on the Thrie Estaitis*, written in 1551, gives some clear but somewhat scattered indications of his familiarity with Carion at that time and it seems evident that certain aspects of John the Commonweal's critique of Roman judicial corruption and parts of the initial explanation of Divyne Correctioun about the abuses of the kingdom are very similar to the *Chronicle*. Likewise, *Ane Dialogue betuix Experience and ane Courteour*, published in 1554 but probably sketched much earlier, directly mentions the *Chronicle* in its *ars moriendi* passage (Ruys 2013: 258). However, it is unlikely that Lyndsay had access to a copy of Funck's version of the text. Bearing in mind that Lyndsay was unable to decipher Melanchthon's original text in German, and that no other translations had been made prior to that, it is hard to believe that the initial encounter our poet experienced with the tradition was through a written form of the *Chronicle*. Alisdair Stewart's argument (1972: 273) that Lyndsay obtained the text (likely Funck's version) while he was in the process of composing the poem is not quite convincing even though it would explain why the majority of references to the source material are found in the last two books and the closing Exhortation. However, an analysis of the design and composition of the poem reveals that Lyndsay was familiar with the ins and outs of the *Chronicle* from its first inception, yet maybe, only at the final stages of the process of redaction, did he come to possess a written copy of the treatise.

The question that arises in the face of this rush of dates is, where did Lyndsay obtain these predictions and beliefs if he could not have access to a copy of *Carion's Chronicle* before starting *The Monarche*?

By the time the poem was first written, there were only two documents in Scotland that clearly contained remnants of *Carion's Chronicle*. The first noteworthy work was *The Complaynt of Scotlande*, written by an unknown Scot named Wedderburn, Vicar of Dundee, in 1549. In that work, Wedderburn strongly

advocated for a union with France in the context of the crisis provoked by the "Rough Wooing" conflicts. The treatise, in fact, consists primarily of a mix of political dissent and commonplace imaginative prophecies for the future of the nation, such as Thomas of Erceldoune or Merlin's, that predicted the downfall of Scotland's enemies, which would be completed during the Last Judgment (Flood 2013: 174). After evaluating multiple chronologies to determine the date of the event, the author ultimately concluded that *The Prophecy of Elijah*, which is known to last for six millennia, was the most appropriate choice. The reference provided is too brief to be considered valid and in no other part of *The Complaynt* are there any other references to the monarchies or the Antichrist, but it is likely that Wedderburn was a Catholic, a fact that suggests that David Lyndsay could hardly be influenced by *The Complaynt*.

On the other hand, John Knox's famous *First Public Address*, delivered at St Andrews shortly after the Passover of 1547, further confirms the validity of the *Chronicle*. As a consequence of being persecuted for his involvement in the Cardinal Beaton affair, Knox sought refuge in the Castle of St Andrews where, after careful consideration, he eventually overcame his initial reluctance to enter the ministry. In the opening chapter of his work *The Historie of the Reformatioun of Religioun within the Realm of Scotland* (1559-1566), the author recounts his experience of delivering his first sermon in the parish church of the Castle to a small crowd, possibly including Sir David Lyndsay, though it is impossible to know whether the Scottish poet was present or not among the audience. In the beginning of the speech, the prophecy of the Four Monarchies was mentioned; the reason was not to highlight God's supernatural influence in human history, but rather to showcase the unwavering strength and endurance of the Israelite people, so that's why the warnings of Doomsday found in *Carion's Chronicle* were purposely ignored, and any prophecies about the end of the world mentioned in the sermon were taken from the *Book of Daniel* and the *Book of Revelation* in the Bible (Firth 1979: 113-131). Although Knox was evidently well acquainted with the *Chronicle*, yet it appears he was more engrossed in its illustrative and narrative qualities than in its prophetic message. Concerning his apocalyptic thought, as Richard Kyle states, "the Scottish reformer was first and foremost a man of the Bible" (1984: 449) and nowhere else than in the Scripture shall we find the fundamentals of his millenarian faith. Knox strongly emphasizes the cautionary nature of the apocalyptic writings, rather than focusing on their ability to predict the future. This is why his treatises have been classified as prophetic instead of apocalyptic by most scholars. It is difficult to determine the exact details of that sermon, because the only existing record is a lengthy description written twelve years later, but it makes unlikely to consider the sermon as the true origin of *The Monarche*. It is unclear also whether Lyndsay and Knox had a chance to encounter

inside the castle, or even if the poet was a bystander to the speech, so there exist too many indeterminacies to assume that the start of *The Monarche*'s apocalyptic design can be traced back to the parish kirk of St. Andrews.

This ambiguity allows us to propose a different hypothesis for this question. During the final years of James V's reign and beyond, David Lyndsay served as a Royal messenger, rather than a diplomat, carrying out various tasks for foreign courts. His activities were limited to small diplomatic interactions, though these trips allowed him to become familiar with political matters, which would later prove to be necessary after James's death (Williams 1996: 201). During one of his last expeditions, in the Winter of 1548, Lyndsay was sent to Denmark to negotiate a formal agreement with the Danish monarchy on the subject of the ongoing hostilities with England. Despite Lyndsay's best efforts, the request ultimately ended in failure, though eventually he was able to achieve a relatively peaceful accord with King Christian III regarding the pirates' raids in the North Sea (Chalmers 1806: 36).

Given the bad weather, his journey back was postponed until late Spring of 1549, resulting in him having to stay in Copenhagen for five to six months. Not a great deal is known regarding his sojourn in Denmark, but Thorkild Christensen, in his essay on the Scottish expatriates in Denmark in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1970: 137), does allude to the fact that David Lyndsay would have encountered a circle of religious dissenters from Scotland who would have taught him the fundamentals of Danish Lutheranism. The person leading that community was *Dr Maccabæus*, that was not a real name but merely the pseudonymous of John MacAlpine, as Thomas M'Crie, the famous biographer, was able to reveal more than three centuries after (1855: 349) . As documented in the *Corpus Reformatorum* (1836: III.771), MacAlpine was a former member of the Dominican Order who fled to England after being summoned to Perth to face charges of heresy. Living in London for three years, he was unfortunately forced to leave the country because of Henry VIII's Reaffirmation of the Six Articles in 1539 and eventually settled in Germany where he enrolled at the University of Wittenberg. There he registered for classes taught by Melanchthon, who was Professor of Divinity, and even participated in some *quodlibetal* disputations with him and Luther himself (Greaves 2004). Eventually, he obtained his doctorate in 1542 and also received his new Christian name, *Maccabæus*, in a ceremony presided by Luther. Recommended by his schoolmaster, MacAlpine accepted King Christian III's offer to become the Chair of Theology at the University of Copenhagen where he worked diligently until his death in 1557. During the later stages of his life, he became a prominent contributor to the growth of the Protestant Church in Denmark and actively participated in the translation of Luther's Bible into Danish.

It is possible that John MacAlpine may be the final, crucial piece of the puzzle researchers of Lyndsay have been seeking for decades. Lyndsay's six-month long stay alongside one of the disciples of Melanchthon, the famous Protestant prophet and the actual writer of the Lutheran rendition of *Carion's Chronicle*, appears to be a reliable explanation to connect the author of the Scottish poet to *The Prophecy of Elijah*. A complete version of the *Chronicle*, along with the study of Melanchthon's *Loci Communes Theologici*, could have introduced Lyndsay to the European apocalyptic tradition and the Four Monarchies legend, giving him the necessary elements to create *The Monarche*. Growing increasingly concerned with eschatological themes, it is easy to envisage Lyndsay profoundly astounded by *Maccabæus'* teachings concerning Carion's chronological macrocosm and Melanchthon's prospective interpretations of past events.

## CONCLUSION

Lyndsay's connections with MacAlpine and the Danish dissenters may not be crucial in understanding *The Monarche*, as we already knew that Carion's *Chronicle* was the main source of the poem. The point of contact between the original source of the treatise and the author is hardly relevant to the final result, especially in such a composite work where the accumulation of apocalyptic textual traditions could be traced to countless works in Christian wisdom literature. However, it could shed light on the poet's unique understanding and interpretation of apocalypse, prophecy, and history during his mature years. It may also reveal his ultimate vision of Scotland, a nation whose behavior he had been criticizing since his earliest poems. His perspective of a nation destined to be condemned to "mortall miserie" (l. 64) under its leaders, fated to the same finale as the four dynasties mentioned in the *Chronicle*, allows the possibility of reform that is quite in line with Carion's work. The apocalyptic tenor, which for more than 6000 lines will be relentless with kingdoms such as Babylon, Persia, Greece or Rome, and which seems equally severe with the imminent destruction of Scotland, grows more contentious in the anticipation of an optimistic reform that would postpone the Parousia: "Expell the cause, than the effect belyue / Sall cease: quhen that the peple doith repent, / Than God sall slak his bow, quhilk yit is bent." (ll. 70-72). The perspective Lyndsay proposes at the beginning of his work, which aligns with what he had learned directly from Carion, is not apocalyptic, but rather apocalypticist, according to Bernard McGinn's classical definition: "[apocalypticism is the] sense of the imminence, or nearness of the end - the urgency that sets it apart from other eschatology - and can be psychological as much as chronologically exact, a sense of living in the shadow of the End and being driven by the final events" (1998: xvii and xx). The final result of the of Scotland's nation (and the rest

of the world) is still contingent, displaying an Augustinian perspective of history that interconnects the past, present, and future towards the ultimate End.

So far, it has been widely acknowledged that Lyndsay most certainly adopted his apocalyptic viewpoint directly from John Knox, especially the model of the cyclical evolution of history (Greaves 1976: 45; Firth 1979: 119). However, Knox's framework of prophetic history was fully developed during his exile years (from 1554 to 1559) after *The Monarche* was finished and published (Edington 1994: 201; Kyle 1984: 450). Sir David Lyndsay's development of the apocalyptic imaginary along *The Monarche*, seems more aligned with a non-chiliastic historical reformism, as we can observe in other Nordic countries, Denmark being specifically one of them (Skovgaard-Petersen 1998). We would therefore be in the presence of a third approach, far removed, of course, from the avowed millenarianism later propagated by John Napier, of interweaving historical reform with latter-day expectations of an imminent End.

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## **Ponovno preučevanje vira knjige *The Monarche* sira Davida Lyndsayja in njenega pomena v zgodnjem škotskem apokaliptičnem izročilu**

Vzposejno z izrazitim značajem reformacije na Škotskem je protestantsko apokaliptično izročilo v tej državi razvilo izviren, nacionalistično usmerjen slog, ki se je opredeljeval tako proti angleškim kot francoskim težnjam. Med prvimi besedili, ki so utemeljila te razlike, je bil *Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour off the Miserabyl Estait of the Warld* sira Davida Lyndsaya, splošno znan kot *The Monarche* (1552). Sledi glavnim temam srednjeveške eshatologije in vključuje ključne elemente, ki so značilni za protestantsko apokaliptiko na Škotskem, ter kaže vpliv Carionove *Kronike*, enega najpomembnejših milenarističnih traktatov v renesansi. Članek analizira apokaliptično razsežnost knjige *The Monarche* in posveča posebno pozornost posebnim okoliščinam Lyndsayeve recepcije Carionove kronike. S preučevanjem povezav med tem pesnikom in nekaterimi škotskimi izgnanci v Vzhodni Evropi želi avtor članka na novo osvetliti uvedbo apokaliptične misli na Škotskem in revidirati tradicionalno sprejeto razmerje med tem besedilom in podobnimi traktati, kot so *The Complaynt of Scotlande* ali najzgodnejši spisi Johna Knox-a.

**Ključne besede:** David Lyndsay, *The Monarche*, apokaliptika, škotska reformacija

# Biopunk: Transcending the Ethicality of Scientific Research?

*Majda Nizamić*

## Abstract

The article focuses on examining the notion of ethics and ethicality of scientific research in SF concerning synthetic biology as presented in representative works of the biopunk genre. It examines the figure of a mad and at the same time brilliant scientist, and direct references to ethics. Ultimately, it questions the underlying ethical concerns of creating new human and non-human species. In doing so, the work also discusses human exceptionalism, ethical posthumanism, and public acceptance of scientific advances. I will argue that biopunk works are rich in ethical puzzles that raise awareness of the present and illuminate the path to the future of science.

**Keywords:** science fiction, biopunk, genetic engineering, Margaret Atwood, Paolo Bacigalupi

## INTRODUCTION

Prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century the term synthetic biology was rarely used in scientific literature, yet in popular culture it became a part of the science fiction (hereinafter: SF) topos. This paper refers to the biopunk genre existing under the umbrella term of SF. Although a neologism by nature, the term “biopunk” attributed to the SF writer Di Filippo and his *Ribofunk*, can be used to refer to texts written long before the term’s introduction in the 1980s, as will be shown later. Over time, synthetic biology grew into a distinct aesthetic element of the biopunk genre.<sup>1</sup> Due to the term’s wide prevalence, ethical dilemmas soon followed. People started wondering if the potential consequences of scientific progress are worth the potential gains. Questions revolving around imminent apocalypse, expanding human capabilities, and playing God have also risen. We are left wondering: do biopunk works pose guidelines for opening a Pandora’s box, and is human hubris the key?

To answer this, one must first define what is meant by ethics. Are ethics universal? This is a much-debated question and it invokes considerations of universal morality, cultural differences, individual viewpoints, and the concepts of virtues and vices, to name a few. Ethics have long been a subject of ongoing debates across a variety of fields including literature. SF enhances these debates by extrapolating the ethical dilemmas into not-so-distant future worlds, yet distant enough to wonder if ethics stand the test of time. In biopunk, ethics apply to synthetic biology.

Dymond summarizes five categories of ethical concerns surrounding synthetic biology, “1. Playing God and creating artificial life 2. Uncontrolled release and ecosystem disruption 3. Biosecurity, bioterrorism and biowarfare 4. Global justice and intellectual property and 5. Biopunks, biohackers and DIY science” (12). He links the questions typically evoked through bioethical considerations in considering their justifiability, “Since there are many previous examples where the application of technological advances have resulted in ‘disasters’ or inequality etc., is it ethically justifiable to move forward with synthetic biology given the possibility that the technology might cause worse disasters or greater inequality?” (Dymond 12).

Synthetic biology is mostly concerned with modifications, both human and non-human. Although the idea of human transformation is not recent and can be traced way back to Greek mythology, it is taken to higher levels in biopunk literature. As will be argued, biopunk poses fertile ground for questioning the human condition, the meaning of human, the consequences of unbridled use of biotechnology such as genetic engineering and splicing, and by doing so it juxtaposes fiction and reality.

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1 The biopunk genre emerged during the 1990s, and as its name suggests, deals with biotechnology, synthetic biology, genetic engineering and body enhancement. It depicts a society set in near future that misuses biotechnology to gain power and exert control.

SF is the literature of the future as well as the present. As claimed by Wolfe, “Science fiction must accommodate the shifting and often counterintuitive visions of base reality that science itself reflects” (53). By this rationale, biopunk literature also reflects the societal stance toward ethics. Csicsery-Ronay posits that when SF uses scientific ideas in stories it often cannot completely remove the ethical aspects of those concepts, “More commonly, because sf cannot excise the ethical charge of even the most formal scientific concepts when it employs them for stories, alternative futures are built from the metaphorical ascription of epistemological, ontothetic, and social-ideological values to world models” (94).

In my opinion, these ideas are best voiced in the following biopunk works: Greg Bear’s *Blood Music*,<sup>2</sup> Jeff VanderMeer’s *Borne*,<sup>3</sup> Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*,<sup>4</sup> and Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl*.<sup>5</sup> Hence, ethical issues are imbued in biopunk fiction and should, therefore, be given appropriate consideration.

## A LACK OF ETHICS: DISENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRESENT TIMES

Dymond associates the ethical issues of synthetic biology with the “impacts that past technologies have had on the planet and its inhabitants” (4). He goes on to explain, “science fiction literature and movies are frequently referenced metaphorically in debates over the ethics and social responsibility of synthetic biology. Much of the reason this is possible, even if in reality it is implausible, is due to previous generations of social commentators exploring these ethical themes in response to the potential perils that the new technology of their time posed” (Dymond 5). Through the power of metaphor, literary examples raise discussions relevant to contemporary society. Vint contends, “Although set in the future or elsewhere, science fiction is commonly understood to be about the moment contemporary to its production, the anxieties and anticipations that form that moment” (22). Dymond argues that SF

2 *Blood Music* portrays the unpredictable consequences of scientific experimentation gone awry. Vergil Ulam, a bioengineer, injects himself with intelligent cells that evolve into a unified intelligence that devours the Northern American continent.

3 *Borne* is set in an unnamed dystopian city where Rachel, a biotech scavenger, discovers a mysterious shapeshifting creature she names Borne. Meanwhile, a monstrous creature created through biotechnology terrorizes the city.

4 *Oryx and Crake* depicts a post-apocalyptic world recounted through the memories of Jimmy the Snowman who is the last human left to take care of the Children of Crake, a new humanoid species created by Crake the genetic engineer.

5 *The Windup Girl* transpires in a world ruled by biotechnology, most specifically agrotechnology. It explores the struggles of so-called windups, artificial beings who, along with other genetically modified organisms, were created for human gain. The novel’s focus lies in the power struggle between calorie companies which reign supreme.

novels “do raise ethical themes that are discussed within synthetic biology, such as apocalypse and the morality of meddling with nature (and the consequences thereof), it is worthwhile to point out that the technologies are not typically comparable and thus the risk issues are not always directly relevant to synthetic biology. To the press and to politicians, this lack of relevancy does not dilute the potency of the science fiction metaphor. A perfect example of this is Mary Shelley’s early 19th century novel *Frankenstein*. The technology described by Shelley (a mixture of galvanism and surgery) has little to do with the molecular techniques of synthetic biology, but ... the *Frankenstein* metaphor is the most potent of all” (5).

Moreover, *Frankenstein* illustrates the avoidance of ethical responsibility. The following passage depicts Csicsery-Ronay’s claim that the way to avoid ethical responsibility lies in a mutually assured destruction of the creator and the creation. He wonders, “Where does the ethical responsibility lie when the second human nature of scientific civilization is both a dependent creation and an autonomous one, simultaneously formed by its inventors and forming them with its new powers? Shelley escapes in the classical way, by making the creator and monster immolate themselves together for their conjoint sin against humanity” Csicsery-Ronay (154 - 155).

The notion of ethics is therefore intrinsically linked to the notion of humanity. The capability of moral conduct, the ability to tell the difference between right and wrong, is what makes our species different from others. But how can ethics be applied to the future biological makeup of the human race? Will they evolve simultaneously? Works within the biopunk tradition of SF literature offer an ideal venue for discussing the various implications synthetic biology, gene editing, and human modification may have on individuals and society at large. Although inspired by recent scientific advances, biopunk fiction creates worlds in which they are taken a step, or a few, further to allow for ethical dilemmas to emerge. Human behavior is the culprit for such dilemmas and biopunk reflects this. According to Kučukalić, “The subject matter of biofiction includes newly created creatures, transgenic organisms and their destinies, genetic cures and failures, contagions and epidemics, media treatment of genetic science, commercial and political systems that developed around the use of biotechnology, environmental crises caused and solved by genetic interventions, and the role of human behavior – our merits and failures – in all these changes” (83).

To discuss the above-mentioned, I will be referring to the works of fiction mentioned earlier that I consider representative of the biopunk genre: Bear’s *Blood Music*, VanderMeer’s *Borne*, Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*<sup>6</sup> and Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl*.

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6 Due to spatial concerns I will not be taking up the other two novels from Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (i.e. *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*) in detail, although these novels also support the claims I have made.

All these works feature the character of a brilliant scientist whose understanding of ethical concepts is dubious at best. They seem to consider their logical understanding as a driving force in disregarding moral standards and creating new species or deadly viruses. According to Dymond, “One of the common themes of these stories is the tale of a scientist who becomes the unwitting destabiliser of the ‘natural order of things’ – and a catalyst for releasing all the forms of chaos envisioned in the author’s mind. The moral, it would appear, is that scientists should not attempt to investigate what they do not (and cannot hope to) understand, a moral that is completely at odds with the aspirations of the research scientist” (5). He concludes, “Each of the large number of novels and films in this genre remind the audience that science is a journey into the frontiers of knowledge, where, dimly illuminated by hypothesis, there lurks dystopia and apocalypse” (Dymond 5-6).

Bear, VanderMeer, Atwood and Bacigalupi all paint a post-apocalyptic setting in their novels that resulted from the meddling of the brilliant/mad scientist figure. For instance, in his portrayal of Vergil, the brilliant scientist from *Blood Music* who creates an intelligent plague, Bear draws a comparison to well-known scientists, “Brilliant in the creation, slovenly in the consideration of consequences. Wasn’t that true of every creator? Didn’t anyone who changed things ultimately lead some people –perhaps many people --to death, grief, torment? The poor human Prometheuses who brought fire to their fellows. Nobel. Einstein. Poor Einstein and his letter to Roosevelt. Paraphrase: ‘I have loosed the demons of Hell and now you must sign a pact with the devil or someone else will. Someone even nastier.’ Curie, experimenting with radium; how responsible was she for Slotin, over four decades later? Did Pasteur’s work --or Salk’s, or his own --save the life of a man or woman who ultimately went on to wreak havoc, to turn bad, to really and truly screw up? Undoubtedly” (242). Scientific advancements are presented intertwined with unfortunate aftermath.

VanderMeer makes a direct reference to the figure of the mad scientist in *Borne*, “Another route came after subterfuge to the converted swimming pool where Wick stirred a vat of seething biotech creations like a mad scientist ....” (16 – 17). Atwood describes the scientists of *Oryx and Crake* as playing God employed in a fun pastime activity, “The rakunks had begun as an after-hours hobby on the part of one of the OrganInc biolab hotshots. There’d been a lot of fooling around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God” (58). Lastly, Bacigalupi’s choice of vocabulary supports the idea of science as a game disregarding ethical standards, “Somewhere in this city a generipper is busily toying with the building blocks of life” (64). All the scientists discussed earlier have a common trait – a lack of ethics. This lack is deeply grounded in their disengagement with the present times that they inhabit. By looking into the future they lack the vision of the present and its ethics.

## SCIENCE-FICTIONALITY: A COMPLEX HESITATION ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY AND ETHICALITY OF FUTURE SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES REFLECTED IN BIOPUNK

Schmeink's statement, "We are now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, living in a world that is harder and harder to grasp, that moves ever faster, transforms radically on a daily basis, and confronts us with situations that seem outrageously beyond the scope of our understanding" still holds true while we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (18). In such an era of fast-paced scientific progress the "science-fictional", a term introduced by Csicsery-Ronay in *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* sets the stage for questioning both the possibility and the ethicality of scientific progress. Csicsery-Ronay talks about two "forms of hesitation" that are elicited by SF from its audience, whether we are at a point in our scientific progress to do this and if we did it what would be the ethical implications, "The first is a matter of plausibility: what the text says about the way the world works. The second is a matter of ethical evaluation: what the text says about the values that guide or emerge from the imaginary alterations" (187 – 188).

Kučukalić follows in Csicsery-Ronay's footsteps and notes the connection between literature and reality where literary texts shaped the societal perspective on issues regarding bioethical questions, "Examples of the role that literary texts have played in the Biological Age include a central consideration of literature during the meetings of the US President's Council on Bioethics between 2001 and 2009. The council's members included medical doctors, scientists, and philosophers who addressed a range of bioethical questions including stem cell research, cloning, 'and genetic enhancement, as well as 'the search for perfection,' 'immortality,' and 'vulnerability and suffering,' through the literary works of authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Willa Cather, and Emily Dickinson" (7). This is by all means not a singled-out case as literature has always served the purpose of imagining, explaining, and testing ideas, much as science does.

Biopunk creates future worlds saturated with biotechnology where the application of such technology poses ethical dilemmas. Kučukalić talks about human vulnerability as one of the most prominent principles in biomedical ethics (4). As such, human vulnerability is not at the forefront of bioethical concerns. Instead, biopunk works show how the mistreatment of subjects leads to scientific progress. In *Blood Music*, a short exchange between two scientists shows how easy transgressions in science could take place, "I'm not doing anything unethical, Gerald." "Oh?" Harrison stopped the scrolling. "You're designing new complements of DNA for several NIH-regulated microorganisms. And you're working on mammalian cells. We don't do work here on mammalian cells. We aren't equipped for the biohazards --not in the main labs. But I suppose you could demonstrate to me

the safety and innocuous nature of your research. You're not creating a new plague to sell to Third World revolutionaries, are you?" 'No,' Vergil said flatly" (Bear 8). VanderMeer talks about an entire city being used as a laboratory, "Yet one of the terrors the Company had visited on the city in the past was to test its biotech on the streets. The city turned into a vast laboratory and now half destroyed, just like the Company" (12).

Atwood illustrates unauthorized experiments that are conducted on a mass scale, "HelthWyzer," said Crake. "They've been doing it for years. There's a whole secret unit working on nothing else. Then there's the distribution end. Listen, this is brilliant. They put the hostile bioforms into their vitamin pills – their HelthWyzer over-the-counter premium brand, you know? They have a really elegant delivery system – they embed a virus inside a carrier bacterium, *E. coli* splice, doesn't get digested, bursts in the pylorus, and bingo!" (212). These tactics are employed for population control, automatically lowering the population level. There's also secrecy surrounding the research subjects and procuring entities to experiment with, "At first," said Crake, "we had to alter ordinary human embryos, which we got from – never mind where we got them" (Atwood 301).

Bacigalupi presents this secrecy in hidden DNA material, "Somewhere in this country a seedbank is hidden. Thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of carefully preserved seeds, a treasure trove of biological diversity. Infinite chains of DNA, each with their own potential uses. And from this gold mine, the Thais are extracting answers to their knottiest challenges of survival" (86).

## PUSHING THE LIMITS OF INTELLIGIBILITY: THE POSTHUMAN CONUNDRUM

The ethical dilemma is furthermore mirrored in the notion of the posthuman. Will scientific progress result in the creation of posthumans? The creation of a new and improved human has always been present in the SF *topos*. According to Vint the posthuman may truly be created by changing the body and, "It is the ways that technology might change us – both planned and unimagined – that make it essential that we think critically about the posthumanism we embrace in the twenty-first century" (16).

Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which needs no special introduction, revolves around the literal creation of a new man. Dymond argues, "In Shelley's novel, the central theme is a scientist taking science into the realm of creation (of life). The central premise is that the act of creation of life is something that only God, the giver and taker of life, can bestow" (7). Thus, the posthuman conundrum is mirrored in appealing to a higher power. Shelley invokes God through the words of Victor Frankenstein, "How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how

delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God!” and later his creation, the unnamed monster, “Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance” (71, 129). Even the creation questions the morality and sanctity of its creator.

Additionally, Bacigalupi makes numerous references to deities, comparing scientists to gods, “*We* are nature. Our every tinkering is nature, our every biological striving. We are what we are, and the world is ours. We are its gods. Your only difficulty is your unwillingness to unleash your potential fully upon it” (243). Bear draws the same parallel, “What Vergil had done was the greatest thing in science since --Since what? There were no comparisons. Vergil Ulam had become a god. Within his flesh he carried hundreds of billions of intelligent beings” (96). Crake, the scientist from the *MaddAdam* trilogy equates God to nature and juxtaposes his own skills of creating a new species, “‘Those walls and bars are there for a reason,’ said Crake. ‘Not to keep us out, but to keep them in. Mankind needs barriers in both cases.’ ‘Them?’ ‘Nature and God.’ ‘I thought you didn’t believe in God,’ said Jimmy. ‘I don’t believe in Nature either,’ said Crake. ‘Or not with a capital N’” (Atwood 207). These comparisons are not accidental. The choice of semantics reveals the power scientists can yield and how adherence to ethical standards checks and balances this power.

Kučukalić explains biofiction through the lens of posthuman literature which deals with the scientific themes of human enhancement, “The conception of the ‘human’ is being altered and challenged in the ongoing experiments in the field of genetics as well as popular visions of these activities. In this context, biofictions represent posthuman literature, portraying actors in the posthuman worlds” (10). She goes on to explain that these fictions showcase the biological future of humans and what they might become regardless of their unaltered appearances (Kučukalić 10). Other works highlight the changes made possible through biotechnology by challenging the anthropocentric world. This is evident in works by both Atwood and Bacigalupi. By doing so, biopunk literature examines the ethicality of body enhancement through genetic modification of human and non-human kinds. Vint suggests that SF shows new characters that challenge our understandings of the human and non-human by introducing new ideas not considered previously, “SF is the discourse of boundary figures – monstrous and otherwise. Through its representations of figures that push the limits of intelligibility, SF is able to raise questions about what it means to be human, and to suggest definitions that were previously invisible, untold and therefore impossible” (189).

In *Borne*, VanderMeer refers to the modified beings as abominations, “Did you know the Company made abominations much worse than Mord, Rachel?

Did you know they've meddled in so many things they shouldn't have? Things that affect your life, too.' I spat into the dirt. 'The rumor is you're beginning to modify people, and maybe not asking them first" (116). The abomination that controls the city and destroys everything in its path, Mord, turns out to be human, "He could still speak and understand as they modified him and kept modifying him, until it drove him mad" (VanderMeer 228). VanderMeer calls the whole ordeal tragic, "In the near distance, the lake and all that tragedy of half-lives, of the mysteries of existence and why we did the things we did, to each other and to animals" (244).

Bacigalupi names the genetically engineered people New People and explains the motifs of their existence, "Not human, certainly, but also not the threat that the people of this savage basic culture make her out to be. Certainly not the devils that the Grahamites warn against at their pulpits, or the soulless creatures imagined out of hell that the forest monk Buddhists claim; not a creature unable to ever achieve a soul or a place in the cycles of rebirth and striving for Nirvana. Not the affront to the Q'ran that the Green Headbands believe. The Japanese were practical. An old population needed young workers in all their varieties, and if they came from test tubes and grew in crèches, this was no sin" (35). Emiko, the windup girl, belongs to this new species and she thinks of herself as "a different kind of animal" (Bacigalupi 35). She is not adjusted to the hot climate and her poor genetic design is at fault, "She wouldn't have to know that she had been trapped in this suffocating perfect skin by some irritating scientist with his test tubes and DNA confetti mixes who made her flesh so so smooth, and her insides too too hot" (Bacigalupi 36). In *The Windup Girl*, the creation of genetically engineered animals such as the megodont and the cheshires are mentioned in passing. Bacigalupi includes them in the narrative but gives them no major thought other than in comparing the motives of the scientists. The megodonts were created for the sole purpose of aiding and helping the production in factories while cheshires were a result of playing God. These manufactured beings were part of a trial and error process, "Generippers learned too much from cheshires.' She doesn't say anything else, but Anderson can guess what's in her mind. If her kind had come first, before the generippers knew better, she would not have been made sterile. She would not have the signature tick-tock motions that make her so physically obvious. She might have even been designed as well as the military windups now operating in Vietnam—deadly and fearless. Without the lesson of the cheshires, Emiko might have had the opportunity to supplant the human species entirely with her own improved version. Instead, she is a genetic dead end" (Bacigalupi 114). The novel concludes with a generipper promising future perfected creations, "Limitations can be stripped away. The safeties are there because of lessons learned, but they are not required; some of them even make it more difficult to

create you. Nothing about you is inevitable.' He smiles. 'Someday, perhaps, all people will be New People and you will look back on us as we now look back at the poor Neanderthals' (Bacigalupi 359).

To better understand the idea of posthumanism in the context of biopunk fiction ethical posthumanism needs to be defined. Vint defines it as "ethical posthumanism which acknowledges that self is materially connected to the rest of the world, in affinity with its other subjects [...] It is a posthumanism that can embrace multiplicity and partial perspectives, a posthumanism that is not threatened by its others" (189). This concept supports the idea of the interconnectedness of all life and the unexceptionality of humans. Bioethical standards are transferred to include all living life.

Biopunk fiction supports these ideas by questioning biological categories and the reduction of human into inhuman as a result of excessive government control and capitalism. Elaborating on the preceding points, Vint suggests that it is crucial to create ethical posthumanism, one that encompasses a wide variety of subjects to make us more human in our future stages of development, whatever those might be, "It is imperative that we develop an ethically responsible model of embodied posthuman subjectivity which enlarges rather than decreases the range of bodies and subjects that matter. Such representations are the path to an ethical, accountable, embodied posthumanism, to being more rather than less human in our next iteration" (190). Biopunk aims to reflect this ethical posthumanism by encouraging readers to question their stance on ethics. Vint highlights that SF is the medium that provides agency for non-human subjects by questioning the creation of the posthuman, "Science fiction is an excellent resource for interrogating how we construct the posthuman, and the political ends inherent in various constructions, because its generic conventions provide a space for narrating agency for non-human subjects" (189).

## **HUMAN (UN)EXCEPTIONALISM IN CAPITALIST – DRIVEN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

According to Schmeink "Atwood and Bacigalupi, in their works, undermine concepts of human exceptionalism, question the ontological stability of biological categories, and reveal a belief in the interconnectedness of all life on the planet. In both works, the human is reduced by hypercapitalism to become inhuman, non-human animals are introduced to showcase categorial liminality – if not outright transgression – and to reveal the interrelatedness of species, and finally the 'posthuman' is staged as an alternative category better equipped to prosper in the post-catastrophic environment, having to negotiate its position in regard to the still-existent 'human'" (75). Building on this questioning of biological categories

between the non-human, posthuman, transhuman, and the human, the line separating nature and artifice gets more blurred. To what extent is capitalist-driven scientific progress justifiable?

Concerning what was stated above, Atwood makes overt references to capitalism by having her characters discuss the prices of scientific achievements and ideals, “At NooSkins’ prices it is. You hype your wares and take all their money and then they run out of cash, and it’s no more treatments. for them. They can rot as far as you and your pals are concerned. Don’t you remember the way we used to talk, everything we wanted to do? Making life better for people – not just people with money. You used to be so … you had ideals, then.” sure,’ said Jimmy’s father in a tired voice. ‘I’ve still got them. I just can’t afford them” (63 – 64). She also has them discuss the profitability of manufactured disease, “The best diseases, from a business point of view,’ said Crake, ‘would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally – that is, for maximum profit– the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out. It’s a fine calculation” (Atwood 212). Bacigalupi’s world is also one where profits run everything, “A unique gene that resists a calorie plague or utilizes nitrogen more efficiently sends profits sky-rocketing. If he looks around the market right now, that truth is everywhere displayed” (3). These examples support Vint’s warning that, “In the absence of changes to the social structure, the benefits of genetic engineering will be restricted to the economic elite” (61).

Fukuyama questions human exceptionalism by contrasting humanity to other animal life and defining superiority, “Who can determine what in nature suffers? Indeed, why should the ability to experience pain, or the possession of higher intelligence, become a title to superior worth? In the end, why does man have more dignity than any part of the natural world, from the most humble rock to the most distant star? Why should insects, bacteria, intestinal parasites, and HIV viruses not have rights equal to those of human beings?” (297 – 298). These are also the underlying questions of all scientific research as they deal with the treatment of the object of the research and its consequences.

Atwood specifically portrays the creation of new beings that serve solely human needs such as the pigeons, “The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year” and modified headless chickens, “Those are chickens,’ said Crake. ‘Chicken parts. Just the breasts, on this one. They’ve got ones that specialize in drumsticks too, twelve to a growth unit.’ ‘But there aren’t any heads,’ said Jimmy. He grasped the concept – he’d grown up with *sus multiorganifer*, after all – but this thing was going too far. At least the pigeons of his childhood hadn’t

lacked heads. ‘That’s the head in the middle,’ said the woman. ‘There’s a mouth opening at the top, they dump the nutrients in there. No eyes or beak or anything, they don’t need those’ (33, 203). These animals are stripped of the ability to feel pain to avoid rendering them living beings, ‘And the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain’ (Atwood 204).

In Bacigalupi’s world this idea is best mirrored in the creation of cheshires, ‘Hock Seng has heard that cheshires were supposedly created by a calorie executive—some PurCal or AgriGen man, most likely—for a daughter’s birthday. A party favor for when the little princess turned as old as Lewis Carroll’s Alice. The child guests took their new pets home where they mated with natural felines, and within twenty years, the devil cats were on every continent and *Felis domesticus* was gone from the face of the world, replaced by a genetic string that bred true ninety-eight percent of the time’ (26 – 27).

Vint talks about ‘collective bodily ethics’ and who benefits from making ethical decisions (188). She asserts that we should take responsibility for the outcome of our choices and acknowledge the impact on humans and other species, ‘For example, in an attempt to mediate between the bodily demands of animals and the bodily demands of humans on the issue of laboratory tests using animals, those who argue in favour of the animal bodies must be willing to be accountable for the way in which their position entails the suffering of human bodies from disease, while those who argue in favour of the human bodies must be willing to be accountable for the suffering of animal bodies’ (188). As seen in the excerpts above the ethical standards are inverted to fit the new realities. The creation of new species to benefit societal needs is not questioned nor criticized. This represents a novum termed as ‘ethical novelty’ by Csicsery-Ronay, ‘Each sf novum is a compound of at least two different kinds of radical change. The change usually first appears as a physical-material novelty: change in the material organization of existence. This form is complemented by an ethical novelty: a change in values and mores. The genre does not dictate how the two dimensions will be related in a given text, only that they will be’ (56). The potential judgment of society is therefore intricately linked to this ethical novelty.

## **PUBLIC OPINION: VILLAGERS WITH TORCHES OR BLIND ACCEPTANCE?**

Through SF readers encounter human and non-human agencies and can thus develop empathy. Biopunk works add new perspectives and enable critical reading which are crucial in enhancing ethical standards. On one hand, public opinion and society’s perspective of science and scientists are reflected negatively. Bear depicts the negative connotations on numerous occasions, for instance when the

scientist Vergil talks to his mother “Why every day, over at the Lab, they’re coming up with more and more doomsday – ‘Don’t judge most scientists by me, Mother. I’m not exactly typical. I’m a little more ...’ He couldn’t find the word and grinned. She returned the grin with the slight smile he had never been able to decipher. ‘Mad,’ she said. ‘Unorthodox,’ Vergil corrected” and later links himself to Frankenstein’s monster, another image of a cursed figure chased with pitchforks and torches, “How often had he wished that young Mary Shelley had never written her book, or at least had never chosen a *German* name for her scientist. All the concatenations of the early nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, coming together in people’s minds --Yes, yes, and hadn’t he just cursed Ulam for *his* brilliance, and hadn’t the same comparison crossed his mind? Frankenstein’s monster. Inescapable. Boringly obvious. People were so afraid of the new, of change” (44, 116). VanderMeer shows how scientific advancements can cause panic, “Nothing that had been altered lived there; biotech had been banned from the gardens, with the government set to classify artificial animals as akin to espionage. Malformed animals or rare ones could incite panic, and the newspapers ran articles about suspected biotech cornered and hacked to death by men with machetes” (217). In these examples, readers can see how fear, of technological and scientific abuse, nourishes the imagination.

On the other hand, Atwood states the adjusted acceptance of the modified pigs used for organ harvesting, “Also, to set the queasy at ease, it was claimed that none of the defunct pigoons ended up as bacon and sausages: no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own” (34). This refusal to blindly accept modifications and enhancement is reflected in Gibson’s view, Bacigalupi’s scientist claims, “But you die now because you cling to the past. We should all be windups by now. It’s easier to build a person impervious to blister rust than to protect an earlier version of the human creature. A generation from now, we could be well-suited for our new environment. Your children could be the beneficiaries. Yet you people refuse to adapt. You cling to some idea of a humanity that evolved in concert with your environment over millennia, and which you now, perversely, refuse to remain in lockstep with” (243).

Vint articulates this dualism by highlighting where the real fears regarding the misuse of biotechnology should lie, “Although fears of genetic engineering are often expressed in terms of its ability to create grotesque, transgenic biological monsters, the true risks that it represents are the social problems it may contribute to or create ... We do not need to fear the monstrous others that might emerge from genetic engineering; instead, we should beware the desire to define a ‘base line’ of normality for the human genome and limit to the very cellular level those bodies we allow to materialize. Even that most favourite literary example of the monstrous – Frankenstein’s creation – was made monstrous by his socialization,

not by his biology" (78). There are thin lines between what is considered ethical and the public reception plays a crucial role in augmenting ethical standards.

## SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS: THE LOSS OR TRANSCENDENCE OF HUMANITY?

J.B.S. Haldane, a famed genetics professor, and a non-fiction writer talks about the checked powers of science in his speech on the future of science *Daedalus; or Science and the Future*, "But it is only hopeful if mankind can adjust its morality to its powers. If we can succeed in this, then science holds in her hands one at least of the keys to the thorny and arduous path of moral progress ..." (35). Thus, ethical considerations are intertwined with scientific progress and they cannot be viewed separately.

Conquering nature through science is a risky activity, claims Fukuyama "It involves the desire for mastery over the 'nearly worthless materials of nature,' and the striving to be recognized as greater than the other scientists and engineers against whom one competes. Science as an activity is hardly risk-free, either for the individual scientist or for society, since nature is fully capable of biting back in the form of nuclear weapons or HIV viruses" (317). In other words, progress equals risk and it needs to be decided if the risk is worth the gain. Ethical questions aim toward assessing this risk.

At the opposite ends of the Pandora's box of scientific progress stand the loss of humanity as discussed by Fukuyama and the transcendence of humanity through enhanced ethical standards. Fukuyama states that the inability to imagine an improved future whether through scientific progress or otherwise corresponds to the end of history and thereby loss of humanity, "And if we are now at a point where we cannot imagine a world substantially different from our own, in which there is no apparent or obvious way in which the future will represent a fundamental improvement over our current order, then we must also take into consideration the possibility that History itself might be at an end" (51). The deliberate rejection of progress may lead to the destruction of civilization. Moreover, human hubris and curiosity can lead to other unforeseen side effects. Here, ethics play a significant role. Progress should not be left rampant, or unbridled. As such it is no better than the absence of progress.

Furthermore, throughout the selected works we encounter direct references to ethics. Bear mentions ethical companies, "I haven't read it completely, but it sounds like you're up to some very suspect things. Possibly unethical. We like to follow the guidelines here at Genetron, especially in light of our upcoming position in the marketplace. But not solely for that reason. I like to believe we run an ethical company here" (7). Atwood speaks of immorality, "It's wrong, the whole

organization is wrong, it's a moral cesspool and you know it ... Be that as it may, there's research and there's research. What you're doing – this pig brain thing. You're interfering with the building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's ... sacrilegious" (63 – 64).

## **IMPORTANCE: PAVING THE WAY TO A MORE HUMAN(E) HUMANITY**

Why, then, are ethics essential to be considered in biopunk literature?

Some authors like Kučukalić have repeatedly drawn attention to the importance of ethics in SF. Kučukalić notes that exploring bioethical issues, "shows that further cooperation is needed to generate vigorous public dialogue about genetic research and its applications" and refers to biopunk narratives as tools for lifting the "heavy baggage" of explaining the issues that society will, and already is, facing (20, 19). She explains further that "biopunk stories show how contemporary identity is formed around biotechnology, whether it involves control of bodies, covert experiments, patented genes, or the withholding and obtaining of genetic information and control of knowledge" (Kučukalić 34).

As put forward by Vint, the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality in discussing ethics is important because "while readers may get the 'wrong' ideas about science from reading fictional accounts, they may also get the 'right' ideas about the social implications of science by reading narratives which explicitly engage with the ethical dimensions of technology, something many science fiction narratives do" (64). Given that one cannot know what the future brings, one can rely on literature to illuminate the path by exploring various possibilities, "Science knows in a specific and limited way; it does not exist in a vacuum, separate from people, countries, capital, and the politics that shape it. This is particularly true for biotechnology, where the moral and ethical implications of genetic engineering are dealt with inconsistently, varying depending on the system and the culture. Because, at the present moment, we can know only the fictional, not the actual, future, we must accept artistic visions as harbingers of truth" (Kučukalić 59).

Building on what was said earlier, literature is unshackled from the reins of reality and its artistic imagination allows exploring ethical constraints in various scenarios. As put forward by Csicsery-Ronay (112), "sf has always engaged scientific ideas and speculations in order to affirm the freedom of the artistic imagination from the constraints of deterministic and oppressively systematic ideas" (112).

Kučukalić elaborates how biopunk interprets science, "By consciously using a high level of scientific content, biofictional novels function as active co-creators of current opinions about genetic science: they provide a space in which both our unawareness and unwillingness to grapple with science, as well as the difficult bioethical

questions, become clearer. Biofictions operate as both dissenting and interpreting narratives: they mediate between society and science, giving us a way to participate in the increasingly complicated narratives of molecular genetics" (92). Thus, both future and fiction may be much closely connected than we thought.

Moreover, science in its quest for open research should be altruistic, driven by goals of the common good and this is where adherence to ethics takes the stage. For instance, access to agriculture biotech that saves lives should be available worldwide through the possibilities of open research. *The Windup Girl* paints a grim picture in which some countries fared better than others with complete disregard for fellow human beings, "The Thai Kingdom is clever where others are not. It thrives while countries like India and Burma and Vietnam all fall like dominoes, starving and begging for the scientific advances of the calorie monopolies" (Bacigalupi 3). The aftermath of unethical, egoistic, secret research can also produce dire consequences in geopolitical terms. For instance, the ethics of scientific advancements and the use of biotechnology to modify crops are mirrored in the direct consequences of the creation of groups of refugees whose human rights are under constant violation and whose existence is brought down to less than human, as seen in the following passage, "The old Chinese man is nothing but a scarecrow, dressed in rags, but still, he is lucky. Alive, when most of his people are dead. Employed, while his fellow Malayan refugees are packed like slaughter chickens into sweltering Expansion towers. Lao Gu has stringy muscle on his bones and enough money to indulge in Singha cigarettes. To the rest of the yellow card refugees he is as lucky as a king" (Bacigalupi 4).

Csicsery-Ronay maintains that speculation is the lifeblood of science and that, "Speculation in science involves the imaginary testing of these combinations and complements, through invented scenarios that we refer to as *thought-experiments*" (120). And it is unequivocally literature that enables these thought experiments. Thus, biopunk works serve as a cognitive exercise in imagining and exploring countless possibilities of adhering to or breaching ethical conduct in science. These cognitive experiments could just as easily spill over into the real world. It should be noted that given the fact that the entire human genome is now mapped our ethical concerns do not follow suit, "Our attitude toward the body is of paramount importance when considering how such technologies might be deployed. Our ethical engagement with these technologies lags far behind our scientific capacities" (Vint 60). In their discussion Harraway and Goodeve mention the role of ethics in research and its real-life implications, "The National Institutes of Health National Center for Human Genome Research sets aside 3 percent for 'ELSI'—ethical, legal, and social implications—and state governments also fund ethical and policy research in human genome and other biotechnological areas" (193-194). The funding of ethical research is thus highly disproportional to its significance.

If there are no ethics to be respected then what Kučukalić refers to as the “biopunk promise” may come true, “a likely scenario of controlled biotechnological processes going awry; nature and accident have already fulfilled the biopunk promise” (30). This is the promise of science gone wrong. Bacigalupi has the scientist Gibson ask the most pressing question of the biopunk promise, “We have released demons upon the world, and your walls are only as good as my intellect. Nature has become something new. It is ours now, truly. And if our creation devours us, how poetic will that be?” (246 – 247). This biopunk promise has been fulfilled in all the works chosen for analysis here. As seen in the selected excerpts transgressions in science are evident in the creation of new species, viruses, and human modifications. After all, Victor Frankenstein may have been a prophetic figure in questioning his creation.

## CONCLUSION

Are we on the path of remaking humanity within the cradle of progress? Is genetic engineering an emulation of nature’s power? Will scientific progress be the threat or gain of a Faustian bargain? Who can foretell what will be considered ethical? We imagine the rules of future societies to be established in the same ideas we hold true presently. Maybe, for our own good or belief in our future well-being, we will forego what we hold to be moral or ethical or the right thing to do.

Biopunk doesn’t offer conclusive answers, instead, it creates more questions and makes us consider possibilities and scientific perspectives previously not thought of. It provides insight into the ongoing scientific dialogue within our contemporary culture. Biopunk narratives pose ethical puzzles that are solved through the (un)ethical decisions made and accepted by the characters. In Vint’s words, “And ultimately, this is what ethics is about, not making perfect or painless choices, but accepting the consequences, both good and bad, for those we make” (133).

Does biotechnology mean the loss of humanity or its transcendence? Why are we inclined to fear future biotechnological progress since we are already living in it? Stableford makes a connection between human nature and biotechnological intervention, “Everything that we now think of as ‘human nature’—and, indeed, almost everything we now think of as ‘nature’—is in fact the product of biotechnological intervention. Everything that we think of as good, every worthwhile human achievement, and every Utopian dream of the past that has ever come to fruition owes its existence to biotechnology. That is the simple truth—and yet, paradoxical as it might seem, one of the corollaries of the grateful awe with which we cling to the produce of the biotechnological discoveries of the past is that we are bound to regard with the deepest suspicion the biotechnological discoveries of our own day, and all those yet to be made” (7-8).

Literature is the medium to render the ethical dilemmas of scientific progress palpable without making them a reality first. It provides a space for critical commentary on biotechnology, its applications, and its implications. As argued by Csicsery-Ronay, it was the SF writers who realized that the fast-paced world is closely linked to advanced technologies forming a part of the culture that transcends ethical and religious boundaries, “SF writers were among the first to glom onto the fact that the hyperactive cultural sphere was actually bound to, and perhaps even a product of, technologies of radical splicing and denaturing, and a technoscientific culture with enough social authority to override long-standing ethical-religious taboos” (213). By overriding the ethical taboos, biopunk narratives facilitate the exploration of real and imagined scientific advances. Although speculative, these works are grounded in contemporary scientific achievements and they offer complex viewpoints, “On the one hand, works of speculative fiction present a scientific model; because they extrapolate on the existing conditions in science and society, contemporary literary works often are able to give us a glimpse into one of our possible and plausible futures. On the other hand, literary imagination offers aspects of lived human experience as well as complexity of views that is usually absent from the utilitarian goals and processes of science” (Kučukalić 98).

Future ethics may or may not adhere to what is held true at the moment of the writing of the biopunk texts since the envisioned ethical concerns and consequences are utterly complex. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel since biopunk has informed us that to survive, we need to treat our planet’s species ethically, including each other. Those are the glimpses into the future that we can afford. Ultimately, the future will show if the endeavor of biopunk illustrated the road not taken or the one not yet taken.

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## Biopunk: Preseganje etičnosti znanstvenega raziskovanja?

Članek se osredotoča na preučevanje pojma etike in etičnosti znanstvenega raziskovanja v SF v zvezi s sintetično biologijo, kot je predstavljena v reprezentativnih delih biopunk žanra. Obravnava lik norega in hkrati genialnega znanstvenika ter neposredne etične referenčne. Na koncu se sprašuje o temeljnih etičnih vprašanjih ustvarjanja novih človeških in nečloveških vrst. Pri tem delo razpravlja tudi o človeški izjemnosti, etičnem posthumанизmu in javnem sprejemanju znanstvenega napredka. Avtorica trdi, da so biopunkovska dela bogata z etičnimi ugankami, ki ozaveščajo sedanjost in osvetljujejo pot v prihodnost znanosti.

**Ključne besede:** znanstvena fantastika, biopunk, genetsko inženirstvo, Margaret Atwood, Paolo Bacigalupi

# The Challenges of Translating Metaphors in Slovene Retranslation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories

*Natalia Kaloh Vid, Agnes Kojc*

## Abstract

The article focuses on translations of metaphors, a unique aesthetic and poetic figure which requires special attention and accurate rendering in a literary translation. When translating metaphors, the translator should understand and preserve the meaning and the aesthetic component of the metaphors. The study discusses rendering of metaphors in translations and re-translations of three short stories by Edgar Allan Poe: "The Gold Bug," translated by Boris Rihteršič in 1935, and Jože Udovič in 1960; "The Pit and the Pendulum," translated by Rihteršič in 1935 and by Udovič in 1972, and "The Fall of the House of Usher," translated by Zoran Jerin and Igor Šentjurc (1952), and by Udovič in 1972. In gothic fiction, Poe established himself as a master of metaphors, which he used with astonishing fluency and precision. The results of the analysis demonstrate how and in which way Slovene translators rendered metaphors in the short stories of one of the greatest writers of gothic fiction, and what strategies they used to preserve Poe's unique, dark, and delirious metaphorical style.

**Keywords:** metaphor, translation strategies, Edgar Allan Poe, retranslation, short stories

## INTRODUCTION

Metaphor has traditionally been viewed as a special and intriguing type of figurative language, first mentioned by Aristotle, who perceived it as both an aesthetic and a rhetorical feature, defining metaphor as “the application of a name that belongs to something else, either from genus to species, species to genus, species to species or by analogy” (21). However, metaphor is not merely a decorative element of a literary text or a poetic figure of speech; it reflects human experience and illustrates the way personal understanding, preserving and expressing of abstract concepts are embedded in language. Mary Hesse states that “It is still unfortunately necessary to argue that metaphor is more than a decorative literary device and that it has cognitive implications whose nature is a proper subject of philosophic discussion” (158). Therefore, translation of metaphors requires knowledge, understanding and solid background research to reach an appropriate equivalence at all levels, stylistic, lexical, philosophical and cultural. Metaphors reflect human experience and can contribute to expression of the way human lives are embedded in language. They can include a personalized, compressed use of language or be related to specific cultures. Therefore, metaphor translation requires entailed knowledge and solid background research to get an appropriate equivalence of lexis and syntax as well as of style, text types, and cultural elements.

This study compares metaphors in translations and re-translations of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories “The Gold Bug,” first translated by Boris Rihteršić in 1935, and retranslated by Jože Udovič in 1960; “The Pit and the Pendulum”, translated by Rihteršić in 1935 and by Udovič in 1972, and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” first translated by Zoran Jerin and Igor Šentjurc and published in 1952, and retranslated by Udovič in 1972. Rihteršić's<sup>1</sup> translations of “The Gold Bug” and “The Pit and the Pendulum” were published in the collection *Horror Stories* (1935). The subsequent translation of the short story “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Igor Šentjurc and Zoran Jerin was published in 1952 in the collection *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Stories*. Twenty years later, Udovič's translations were published in the collection *The Gold Bug (Zlati Hrošč)* (1972).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the 1980s, many scholars, including George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their work *Metaphors We Live by*, published in 1980; Gerard Steen in *Understanding Metaphor in Literature: An Empirical Approach* (1994) and Zoltan Kövecses in *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (2002) have examined the linguistic and cultural significance of metaphors. Lakoff defines metaphor as a “cognitive concept” that

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<sup>1</sup> Besides Poe, Rihteršić also translated the works of Jack London and Alexandre Dumas.

creates and impacts our reality and perception, while others perceive metaphor as merely a figurative trope and textual ornament, such as Aristotle in *Poetics* (1982) or Cicero and Quintilian in *Institutionis oratoriae* (1985). Interaction theory and cognitive theory describe metaphor as a process. According to interaction theory, developed by Armstrong Richards, Paul Ricoeur and Max Black, metaphor is the expression of two opposing ideas; the meaning of a metaphor is the result of their interaction (Black 145–179). Interaction theory also developed the concepts of a main object and a secondary object, where we map the implications – common places – of the secondary object embedded in the main object. Black gives the well-known example of the metaphor *man is a wolf*, in which man is the main object and the wolf or the wolf's characteristics, cunning, cruelty, and dominance, are the secondary object. The mapping of these implications and consequently, the development of subsequent metaphorical fields as defined by Kurz (1986), is often culturally conditioned. When adopting a metaphor to a new context, a translator can choose among three possibilities: to use an exact equivalent of the original metaphor ( $M \rightarrow M$  procedure); to seek another metaphorical phrase which would express a similar meaning ( $M_1 \rightarrow M_2$  procedure); or, to replace an untranslatable metaphor in the original with an approximate literal paraphrase (the  $M \rightarrow P$  procedure).

In the cognitive theory of metaphor, developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), metaphor is not merely a linguistic figure, and a concept is raised to the level of cognition and cognitive system. According to the cognitive theory, metaphor is a central form of concept formation and is present in everyday language use, not only in literary language. Metaphors are thus created by projecting familiar *source themes* onto less familiar *target themes* based on everyday experiences by using observation, spatial orientation, objects, living organisms, and the body. The target domain is more abstract, such as mental states or psychological processes. In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson also founded the notion of conceptual metaphors<sup>2</sup> which can also be culturally conditioned.

Beside these traditional, well-established theories of metaphors, Andrew Goatly states in *The Language of Metaphors* (1997) that the process of formation of literal language works the same way as that which we use to form metaphors. At the same time, we need to keep in mind that metaphority has various dimensions, including contradiction, ambiguity of comparison, conventionality, and distance of transmission (Goatly 14). Adding to this, Eco (87) claims that a metaphor is an “additive, not substitutive instrument of knowledge.”

<sup>2</sup> A Conceptual metaphor is a metaphor in which one idea (or conceptual domain) is understood in terms of another. The conceptual domain is known as the source domain, while the conceptual domain interpreted by the source domain is known as the target domain. An example of a conceptual metaphor would be *life is a journey* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

Accepting previous research on translations of metaphors, we turn to Newmark's classification<sup>3</sup> of translation strategies used to render metaphors presented in *Textbook of Translation* (1988).<sup>4</sup> These include (1) reproducing the same image in the TL which is particularly helpful when translating stock metaphors, most frequently idioms; (2) replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image which does not clash with the TL culture; (3) translation of metaphor by a simile, retaining the image; (4) translation of a metaphor into a simile combined with a meaning; (4) conversion of a metaphor into a sensible meaning; (5) deletion (if the metaphor does not serve any specific purpose and the text is still understandable without it); (6) translation of metaphor by the same metaphor combined with a sensible meaning (a translator can add an explanation or a gloss to ensure it will be understood).

Translating metaphors has so far remained relatively unexplored in Slovenian academic literature. Research on cognitive value of metaphors, their meaning and interpretation includes Silva Bratož's *Metaforah našega časa* (2010), Elizabeta Bernjak's and Melania Larisa Fabčič's discussion of metaphors in the language of medicine in *Function and Meaning of Metaphors in Medicine from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics* (2020), which focuses on the cognitive level of perception of this linguistic-stylistic phenomenon, and Jožica Čeh Steger's *Pogledi na metaforo* (2005), which defines metaphor from the perspective of comparative, substitution, interaction and cognitive theory and also presents critiques of individual theories and views. Božidar Kante introduces the concept of metaphor in *Metaphor and Context* (1996) and *What is Metaphor?* (1998), embedding it in a philosophical perception and addressing various views on the plausibility and ontological characteristics of metaphor. Janko Kos, in *Theory of Literature* (2001), discusses metaphor from the perspective of literary history and defines general literary characteristics, focusing on metaphor in traditional and modern poetry. Darja Pavlič, in *Functions of Metaphors in Literary Work* (2001), discusses whether it is possible to go beyond the original, literary-aesthetic spheres and assign a further role to metaphor based on personal experience, perception and interpretation.

The following case analysis uses a comparison-based approach to identify metaphors by analyzing the properties of the target term (target domain) along with those of the base term (source domain).

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3 Newmark states that the first purpose of a metaphor is to describe something comprehensively, economically and generally more forcefully than what is possible in literal language (11).

4 Translated into Slovene as *Učbenik prevajanja* (2000).

## CASE ANALYSIS

### “Zlati hrošč” (“The Gold Bug”)

“The Gold Bug” (1843) features a character named William Legrand who goes on a treasure hunt and is guided by the mysterious image of a golden beetle, a symbol of the gold rush. There are several cases in which the translators introduced new metaphors, perhaps substituting for metaphors they omitted in other parts of the text.

1. As the evening **wore away**, he became more and more absorbed in reverie, from which no **sallies of mine could arouse him** (str. 137).

#### Translation:

Udovič, 1972: Kolikor bolj **se je večer vlekel**, toliko bolj **se je potapljal v svoje sanjarije**, in iz njih ga **niso mogli prebuditi** tudi moji **šaljivi domisleki** (69).<sup>5</sup>

Rihteršič, 1935: Poskušal sem ga **razvedriti** z raznimi domislicami, toda ni se mi posrečilo (20).<sup>6</sup>

The metaphor is omitted in Rihteršič's translation. Udovič keeps the metaphorical image of the evening wearing away and sallies arousing the protagonist, while transferring Poe's source domain of worn-out clothes and the target domain which represents the long, dull evening as a poor-quality fabric. Additionally, Udovič personifies the sallies that arouse Legrand from his reverie. The source domain is water because fantasies are like the ocean in which Legrand is drowning, and a person who wakes up a friend, whereas the target domain describes waking up from a daydream. In the first part of the sentence, Udovič uses the second of Newmark's strategies, as the term “wear away” means “starting to disappear gradually,” which is not the same as the Slovenian meaning of the evening hours boringly and painfully slowly passing by.

5 Udovič, 1972: The more the evening was dragging, the more was he drowning in his own day-dreams, and even my most humorous ideas couldn't wake him up.

6 Rihteršič, 1935: I tried to cheer him up with many ideas, but I was unsuccessful.

2. No, dat' he ain't – he ain't fn'd nowhar – **dat's whar de shoe pinch – my mind is got to be berry hebby 'bout poor Massa Will** (137).

Translation:

Udovič, 1972: Nak, to ne, nikjer ni nič našel, to je tisto, **kjer ga čevelj žuli, moje srce strašno žalostno zastran ubogega massa Willa** (70).<sup>7</sup>

Rihteršič, 1935: No, nič v postelja. Sploh nič ležati. **Prav tukaj njega čevelj žuliti. Moje srce biti very žalosten** zaradi ubogi Massa Will (12).<sup>8</sup>

In this example is the core of the metaphor is mind, or, in the Slovene version, *srce/a*, heart. In the beginning of the sentence, there is an idiomatic expression (*where the shoe pinches*). The subject feels sadness, and the feeling is compared to something heavy. In this case, both translators use Newmark's first strategy of recreating a metaphor *dat's whar de shoe pinch – my mind is got to be berry hebby 'bout poor Massa Will* in the source language with semantically equivalent metaphors in the target language. Udovič opts for the idiom *žuljenjem čevlja* (discomfort of a shoe) and Rihteršič for *žalostno srce* (a sad heart), personifying the heart. The source domain is a sad human, while the target domain is the feeling of sadness. It is interesting that both translators choose to retain the specific dialectical register of Legrand's slave. Udovič therefore omits the verb *biti* (*to be*) in the second metaphor, while Rihteršič uses masculine gender for the heart (while in Slovene the noun *heart* is of the neuter gender), leaving the original *very* in the translation to achieve the effect of colloquial language. In this example the translators recreated the same image and used the first of Newmark's strategies, reproducing the same metaphorical image as in the original.

3. A little before four we arrived at the pit, divided the remainder of the booty, as equally as might be, among us, and, leaving the holes unfilled, again set out for the hut, at which, for the second time, we deposited **our golden burthens**, just as the first **streaks of the dawn gleamed** from over the tree-tops in the East (148).

Translation:

Udovič, 1972: Malo pred četrto uro smo prišli do jame, razdelili smo ostali plen tako pravično, kolikor se je le dalo, pustili jami nezasuti in se spet odpravili proti

7 Udovič, 1972: No, not this, found nothing nowhere, **that is why he has a pebble in his shoe, my heart very sad** because of poor Massa Will (70).

8 Rihteršič, 1935: Well, no going to bed. No lying-down at all. **This is where he's got pebbles in his shoes. My heart is very sad** for poor Massa Will (12).

koči. Tam smo drugič odložili svoje zlato breme prav tedaj, ko **so se posvetili prvi medli žarki jutranje zarje** nad vrhovi dreves na vzhodu (88–89).<sup>9</sup>

Rihteršič, 1935: Malo pred četrto uro smo se vrnili k našemu najdišču, razdelili ostanek zaklada kolikor se je dalo enakomerno, pustili jamo kar odkopano in šli nazaj proti domu. Prav tedaj, ko smo drugič odložili **svoje breme**, so **zažareli** na vzhodu **prvi slabotni žarki solnca** nad vrhovi dreves (26–27).<sup>10</sup>

Both translators use the first translation strategy, reproducing the same image as in the original. In both translations, the sun and its rays refer to a weak person, and the metaphor is a personification of a weak person. In this case we see that both translators used the strategy of translating metaphors and reproducing the original image. The difference is merely in the subject of the image. Udovič metaphorically describes the dawn and remains faithful to the original, which Poe generalises by the dawn. The source domain is a weak human being and the target domain is the rays of the morning sun. Richteršič retained the sun and did not use generalization of the dawn, but his target and source areas are the same as in the updated translation. A weak man is the source area, and the first rays of the morning sun are the target area. In Udovič's translation, the light is more emphasised, as he uses the verb *zažareti* (to shine), which creates a contrast between the bright light, liveliness, and the gloomy image of dawn, which evokes almost paralysing feelings. With the verb *zasvetiti* (to illuminate), Richteršič is closer to the original and the verb more adequately describes the melancholy atmosphere of the narrative. In Richteršič's translation we also find an archaic Slovene expression for the sun, *solnce*.

### “Vodnjak in nihalo” (“The Pit and the Pendulum”)

“The Pit and the Pendulum” (1842) features a protagonist who is condemned and imprisoned by the Inquisition at the bottom of a dark well with a blade swinging above him. This story is filled with dreamlike, lucid and hallucinatory descriptions of horror emerging in the human mind and imagination.

9 Udovič, 1972: A little before four o'clock, we arrived at the cave, we shared the rest of the prey as righteously as we could, we left the caves uncovered, and headed again to the cabin. There, we put down our golden burden for the second time, just as **the first weak rays of dawn shone through the tree tops in the East.** (88–89).

10 Richteršič, 1935: A little before four o'clock we returned to our site, we shared among us the rest of the treasure as equally as possible, we left the cave uncovered and returned back home. Just as we put down our burden for the second time, **the first weak rays of the Sun** shone above the tree tops (26–27).

1. After that, **the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum** (21).

Translation:

Udovič, 1972: Potem pa se mi je zdelo, da se zvoki inkvizitorskih **glasov zlivajo v nekako neprestano, sanjsko mrmranje** (27).<sup>11</sup>

Rihteršič, 1935: Za njo je zvenelo vse, kar so povedali inkvizitorji, **kakor zmedeno in zamolklo brnenje** (65).<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to the original, in Udovič's translation, the voices metaphorically resemble water, merging into one like water and turning into a dream-like humming. Udovič is more faithful to the original, opting for the first translation strategy and recreating the same metaphor as in the original. The translator's metaphor extends from the source domain of water (merging waves, overflowing into a whole) into the target domain of murmuring sound, which Udovič makes even more abstract and mysterious by adding the decorative adjective *sanjski* (*dream-like*), which is almost hypnotic and delirious. Richteršič, however, replaces the metaphor with a simile, *zmedenim in zamolklim brnenjem* (confused and dull humming). The original's intoxicating atmosphere and delirium are lost in the translation.

2. **The blackness of darkness supervened; all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades** (21–22).

Translation:

Udovič, 1972. **Objela me je črna tema.** Zdelo se je, **da je vse občutke pogoltnil nov občutek**, kakor da z blazno naglico padam v globino kot duša v Had (28).<sup>13</sup>

Rihteršič, 1935: Zdelo se mi je, **kakor bi bil vse moje občutke odnesel besneč hudournik, kakor bi vlekel še dušo v pekel** (66).<sup>14</sup>

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11 Udovič, 1972: After that, it seemed to me all the **sounds of inquisitors' voices were pouring into some kind of continuous, dream-like murmur** (27).

12 Rihteršič, 1935: Afterwards, all that was said by the inquisitors sounded like **confused and dull humming** (65).

13 Udovič, 1972: **It seemed all senses have been swallowed by a new sense**, just as I am quickly falling into the deep, like a soul into Hades.(28).

14 Rihteršič, 1935: **It seemed that my senses were carried away by an angry torrent, as if the soul was dragged into hell** (66).

This example consists of a personified metaphor and the soul sinking into Hades. Both translators mainly use the first translation strategy, which is the reproduction of the same metaphorical image as in the original.

The metaphor comes from the source domain of swallowing and carries on into the target domain of illustrating that the feeling was so strong that it overwhelmed them all. Richteršič uses the image of a raging torrent that carries feelings away. It is interesting that Udovič decides to leave the mention of *Hades* and thus maintains the allusion to Greek mythology, while Richteršič decides to domesticate the text and brings it closer to the Slovenian reader by generalizing with *pekel* (*hell*).

### 3. **They tell also of a vague horror at my heart, on account of that heart's unnatural stillness** (22).

#### Translation:

Udovič, 1972: **Govorijo tudi o mračni grozi v mojem srcu, ker je počivalo v tako nenanavni tišini** (29).<sup>15</sup>

Richteršič, 1935: **Pripovedovali so mi tudi o skrivnostni grozi, ki je stiskala srce** (67).<sup>16</sup>

In this case memories are personified. Both translators render the same image in the first part, and therefore use the first of Newmark's strategies, reproducing the same image as in the original. Udovič uses the verb *govoriti* (*to talk*) and Richteršič *pripovedovati* (*to say*), which are otherwise synonymous, but Richteršič's choice is a bit livelier. The source domain is human speech, while the metaphor, and the target domain, refer to the creation of mental images.

The two translations differ rendering the metaphor, *mračni grozi, ker je srce počivalo v tako nenanavni tišini* (*dark horror, for the heart rested in such unnatural silence*). This metaphor reproduces the image in the original which is unnatural stillness of the heart. The heart rests like a man in a bed of unnatural silence and, as in the previous example, the target domain is human and resting and the source domain is existence in silence. Richteršič transforms this part in a different, more expressive way, *skrivnostna groza stiska srce* (*the mysterious horror presses upon the heart*), combining the metaphor with its meaning. The horror in this case is a fist, or a vice that squeezes the heart in a grip. The target domain of the metaphors is

15 Udovič, 1972: **They also talk about dark horror in my heart, for it rested in such unnatural silence** (29).

16 Richteršič, 1935: **They also told me about the mysterious horror pressing upon the heart** (67).

similar in both translations, though Udovič's translation creates an atmosphere of a hidden, vague caution, and malevolence similar to the original. In contrast, Richteršič's translation conveys a stronger sense of fear. Both translators, however, retain the meaning of vague, barely noticeable horror. Udovič achieved this effect with *mračna groza* (*dark horror*) and Richteršič with *skrivnostna groza* (*mysterious horror*). In this way, both preserve the meaning of the original.

### **“Konec Usherjeve hiše” (“The Fall of the House of Usher”)**

This story depicts the end of the aristocratic Usher family after a long-time friend's visit turns into a grotesque catastrophe when Roderick Usher's sister Madeline dies, and her brother then collapses in fear and despair, leading to the end of the entire family. Symbolically, the Usher house also collapses before the protagonist's eyes.

1. During the whole of a **dull, dark**, and **soundless day in the autumn of the year**, when the clouds **hung oppressively low in the heavens**, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher (51).

Translation:

Udovič, 1972: Ves tisti **otožni, mračni, mrtvaško tihi jesenski dan**, ko so **oblaki nizko viseli** in **pritiskali na zemljo z mračno težo**, sem jezdil sam po prečudno puščobni pokrajini, napisled, ko so se že **spuščale večerne sence**, pa sem zagledal **žalostno** hišo Usherjeve družine (5).<sup>17</sup>

Jerin, Šentjurc, 1952: Bilo je nekega **temačnega, otožnega in tihega dne** v pozni jeseni, ko so **viseli** z neba **nizki, težki oblaki** ... Jahal sem že ves dan po nepopisno pusti deželi, ko pa so se **spustile na zemljo prve večerne sence**, se je **dvigal** pred menoj turobni dvorec rodbine Usher (67).<sup>18</sup>

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17 Udovič, 1972: **All that sad, dark deathly silent autumn day, when the clouds hung low and pressed upon the Earth with dark heaviness, I was a lone rider across peculiarly desolated land, and finally I saw the sad house of the Usher family as the evening shadows started to fall.** (5).

18 Jerin, Šentjurc, 1952: **It was a dark, sad, quiet late autumn day, when low, heavy clouds were hanging off the sky ... I spent a whole day riding across an incredibly deserted land, and when the first evening shadows fell upon the Earth, the gloomy mansion of the Usher family was rising on my horizon** (67).

In this example, the day is personified as a sad, gloomy person in both translations. The translators use Newmark's first translation strategy, the reproduction of the same image in the target language. They use the same image as Poe, the sadness, the heaviness of the day passing into evening when the protagonist rides to Usher's mansion. We also see that the translators consistently transfer the depiction of the sombre setting. The evening shadows descend like smoke on the landscape (the source domain is smoke), the day is personified as dark, sad, and silent. The silence, stress and tiredness are described with the decorative adjective *mrtvaško tih* (*deathly silent*). When describing the mansion, Udovič follows the melancholy of the original more closely by using “žalostna hiša” (*sad house*). Jerin and Šentjurc make this part more poetic by adding “turobni dvorec dviga” (*gloomy mansion rises*). Here the source domain is an object, the wall that rises into the air, and the target domain is the protagonist's sudden view of the house.

2. **Feeble** gleams of encrimsoned light **made their way through** the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, **struggled in vain** to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling (53).

#### Translation:

Udovič, 1972: **Medli žarki rdeče svetlobe so se kradli skozi zamrežena okna**, da bi bili predmeti v ospredju bolj razločni. Oko pa se je zaman trudilo, da bi doseglo oddaljenejše kote ali odmaknjene dele obokanega in okrašenega stropa (9).<sup>19</sup>

Jerin, Šentjurc, 1952: **Medli žarki rdečkaste svetlobe so si utirali pot skozi zamrežene šipe** in so komaj zadostovali za razločevanje izrazitejših predmetov v sobi (70).<sup>20</sup>

The metaphorical part depicts light as a faint human or an intruder. All of the translators choose to keep the original image and personify the rays of red light, which are dim. The rays are like a dim man, the source domain is a person, and the goal is to show the light falling through the windows. In Udovič's translation, the rays steal through the barred windows and are presented as someone who should not be in the room, while Jerin and Šentjurc are closer to the original with *medli žarki rdečkaste svetlobe so si utirali pot skozi zamrežene šipe* (*feeble rays of reddish light were pushing their*

19 Udovič, 1972: **Feeble rays of red light were sneaking through the latticed window**, so that the foreground objects could be more visible. The eye, however, tried in vain to see more distant corners or isolated parts of the vaulted and ornamented ceiling (9).

20 Jerin, Šentjurc, 1952: **Feeble rays of reddish light were pushing their way through the latticed windows**, and they were barely enough to recognize more outstanding objects in the room (70).

*way through latticed windows). Make their way through* is more accurately conveyed with the verb *utirati* (*make a way through*). It is interesting that Jerin and Sentjurc use the phrase *rdečkasta svetloba* (*reddish light*), which corresponds better to the image of dim rays, while Udovič is more consistent with the translation *rdeča svetloba* (*red light*). Neither solution, however, fully conveys the meaning of the word “enraptured,” which is more vivid than the usual adjective “red”. An alternative translation could be *Šibki škrlatasti žarki so se prebijali skozi rešetasta okna* (*Weak purplish rays were making their way through latticed windows*). Another personification appears in the example, “*The eye struggled in vain to reach remoter angles of the chamber.*” Udovič preserves this personification with the same image as Poe. The eye is a person who tries in vain to see clearly. The source domain is a person who is unable to see properly and clearly. Jerin and Šentjurc reduce this image to a denotative meaning and paraphrase it with a non-metaphorical description, *so komaj zadostovali za razločevanje izrazitejših predmetov v sobi* (*were barely enough to recognize more outstanding objects in the room*). With this description, Udovič is closer to the original. The translators used Newmark’s first translation strategy, reproducing the same image as in the original.

## CONCLUSION

Poe’s style and work demand precise and creative translation that must preserve metaphorical language. Though the analysis here focused on merely a few of the most illustrative examples of translating metaphors in Poe’s prose, it allows for a telling assessment of the strategies used by the translators.

By analysing three Slovene translations of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories with reference to Newmark’s translation strategies for rendering metaphors, we defined the strategies the translators use. By comparing the metaphors used by Jože Udovič (1972) and earlier translators, including Boris Rihteršič, who translated the collection of Poe’s short stories *Zgodbe groze* (1935), and Zoran Jerin and Igor Šentjurc, who translated the collection *Propad hiše Usher* (1952), the analysis demonstrates how translators develop techniques to preserve linguistic archaism while maintaining the author’s specific, dark and complex style. The results of the analysis demonstrate that the commonest strategy is the one in which the original metaphor is preserved in the translation. Other commonly used strategies include: (a) the replacing of the image in the source language with a standard image in the target language (1); replacement of the metaphor with a simile (1); (d) one case of omission of the metaphor (1); reducing a metaphor to its sense (1) or combining metaphors with their meaning (1).

These examples show that the Slovene translators demonstrated a high level of creativity and managed to capture Poe’s unique, rich, gritty and peculiar style. They preserved the original metaphors in the translations, explained the meaning and, expanded the imagery by using domesticated equivalents, as in the following

example: "Kolikor bolj **se je večer vlekel**, toliko bolj **se je potapljal v svoje sanjarije**, in iz njih ga **niso mogli prebuditi** tudi moji **šaljivi domisleki**." (Udovič 1972: 69).<sup>21</sup> In a few examples, older translations omit the metaphorical expression: "Poskušal sem ga **razvedriti** z raznimi domislicami, toda ni se mi posrečilo." (Rihteršič 1935: 20)<sup>22</sup> In older translations, archaic expressions also occur: "Prav tedaj, ko smo drugič odložili **svoje breme**, so **zažareli** na vzhodu **prvi slabotni žarki solnca** nad vrhovi dreves." (Rihteršič, 1935: 26–27).<sup>23</sup>, while contemporary translations avoid archaisms. In a few examples, the translators introduced their own metaphors: "**Medli žarki rdečkaste svetlobe so si utirali pot skozi zamrežene šipe** in so komaj zados-tovali za razločevanje izrazitejših predmetov v sobi." (Jerin, Šentjurc 1952: 70).<sup>24</sup>

The final point to be made is that analyzed examples confirm that Slovene translations demonstrate imagination and creativity when rendering Poe's metaphors. Even though it was impossible, due to the number of cases in the analyzed texts, to assess all examples in the current study, some tendencies emerged which may be applied for a further analysis of metaphors in Slovene translations of Poe's prose. This analysis helps to better orient problematic aspects of rendering metaphors in translations so that future discussions will have some fresh and relevant material from which to draw.

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21 Udovič, 1972: The more the evening was dragging, the more was he drowning in his own day-dreams, and even my most humorous ideas couldn't wake him up.

22 Rihteršič, 1935: I tried to cheer him up with many ideas, but I was unsuccessful (20).

23 Rihteršič, 1935: A little before four o'clock we returned to our site, we shared among us the rest of the treasure as equally as possible, we left the cave uncovered and returned back home. Just as we put down our burden for the second time, **the first weak rays of the Sun** shone above the tree tops (26–27).

24 Jerin, Šentjurc, 1952: **Feeble rays of reddish light were pushing their way through the latticed windows**, The Challenges of Translating Metaphors in Slovene Retranslation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories and they were barely enough to reveal the more outstanding objects in the room (70).

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### **Izzivi prevajanja metafor v slovenskih posodobljenih prevodih kratkih zgodb Edgarja Allana Poeja**

V prispevku so obravnavani prevodi metafor iz izvirnega v ciljni jezik. Metafora je edinstvena estetska in poetološka figura, ki v književnem prevodu zahteva posebno pozornost in obravnavo. Pri prevajanju metafor mora prevajalec razumeti in ohraniti pomen ter estetske elemente besedila. Z izbrisom, parafraziranjem ali napačno interpretacijo metafor besedilo izgubi svoj ključni element. Pričajoča študija obravnavata metafore v prevodih in posodobljenih prevodih treh kratkih zgodb Edgarja Allana Poeja: »Zlatega hrošča« v prevodu Borisa Rihteršiča leta 1935 in posodobljenem prevodu Jožeta Udoviča leta 1960; »Vodnjaka in nihala«, ki sta jo prevedla Rihteršič leta 1935 in Udovič leta 1972, ter »Konca Usherjeve hiše« v prevodu Zorana Jerina in Igorja Šentjurca (1952) ter Udoviča leta 1972. Poe se je uveljavil kot mojster metafor, ki jih je v besedilu uporabljal z izjemno spremnostjo in natančnostjo. Primerjava prevodov razkriva, kako so se slovenski prevajalci lotili prevajanja metafor v kratkih zgodbah enega najodličnejših pisateljev žanra gotske grozljive zgodbe, razvidne pa so tudi strategije, s katerimi so ohranili Poejev edinstven, temačen in izjemen metaforični slog.

**Ključne besede:** metafora, prevajalske strategije, Edgar Allan Poe, posodobljeni prevod, kratke zgodbe



# A Critical Reflection upon Culture Shock in Monica Ali's Novel *Brick Lane*<sup>1</sup>

*Muhammed Metin Çameli*

## Abstract

The notions of culture and identity are intertwined with one another by occupying a leading role in shaping a certain perception of the world for every single individual. They constitute so meaningful whole that the culture into which a person is born gives that person a more distinct identity from that of a person belonging to another culture. More definitely stated, the concept of cultural identity in question here can be identified as a means of differentiating oneself from the other people who possess varied identities in line with conventions of their own cultures. When viewed from this aspect, for instance, the window from which a Muslim looks at the world cannot be considered the same as that of a Westerner since they have disparate cultural identities. At this point, it must be underlined that Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* pivots around experiences of a Bangladeshi Muslim young woman, Nazneen, who struggles to hold on to life in London because of her arranged marriage. Pertinently, this study will elaborate on the characteristics of the incongruities between Nazneen's own culture and the Western culture in terms of the concepts of religion and gender that result in the Muslim woman's serious culture shock.

**Keywords:** Cultural Identity, Culture Shock, *Brick Lane*, Religion, Gender

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## INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that there exist many studies devoted to the analysis of underlying reasons why the issue of identity posits itself as an integral component of the field of literature. One of the most striking and plausible reasons behind the fact that literature and the question of identity are indissociably bound up with one another pertains to their affinity with the depth of human nature. In broad terms, literature as a field seeks a convincing answer to the baffling question of what makes someone a human or what incorporates the state of being a human so as to better perceive the world. Likewise, when one attempts to define what identity means, it is seen that identity is all about who a person is or how a person is conceived by others around. This being the case, narratives centred around the question of identity in literature aim to provide insight into the ways in which people regard themselves as distinct individuals, communicate with each other and respond to the world. It is important to note that literature intersects with culture to effectively study the question at stake in that the constitutive function of culture in the formation of identity is foregrounded as a key element as well. Barstad, Knutsen and Vestli point out that "Identity is not established once, and for all, but is under constant revision because we are members of a society and a culture" (4). Here, the referred critics not only draw attention to the elusive nature of the concept of identity but also to the conjunction of identity and culture by implying that one's culture is a significant part of one's personal identity. More clearly stated, the emphasis is laid upon what paves the way for the emergence of the notion known as "cultural identity." From among a series of influences which make people who they are, culture stands out as it helps people to distinguish themselves from one another. People belonging to a different culture have their own customs, perspectives and habits which serve to explore means of defining their identities to a serious extent. The diverse circumstances of the social lives they lead and the content of the representations of what they aspire to do are ostensibly determined by their cultural identity thereby concomitantly enabling them to accept or reject the parts of themselves and those of the others. As Amin Maalouf highlights:

The identity a person lays claim to is often based, in reverse, on that of his enemy. An Irish Catholic differentiates himself from Englishmen in the first place in terms of religion, but vis-à-vis the monarchy he will declare himself a republican; and while he may not know much Gaelic, at least he will speak his own form of English. (13)

The comparison drawn between Irish culture and English culture by Maalouf demonstrates that religion, race or language of a specific society form the lens

through which members of that society make sense of the world and define the borders of who they should be.

The focus upon what affects cultural identity also entails thinking about the relationship between cultural identity and immigration. For at least two centuries, immigration of people with distinct cultural backgrounds to the West is known to have had tremendous effects on the process of the formation of cultural identity of immigrants. Immigration to Germany, France and other European countries is, indeed, said to have even soared as of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the heightened awareness among immigrants that they would feel compelled to adapt themselves to their new cultural environments. Lucassen, Feldman and Oltmer state that "Immigration to Germany after the 1880s was massive. Similar trends occurred in France. Migrants had to adjust to their new environments and experienced similar adaptation processes as foreign migrants" (11-2). However, the reflection of what transpires in the background onto literature has taken a lot of time and been extended to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. As regards the literary studies on immigration, the chaotic atmosphere of the new millennium, particularly under the impact of 9/11 can be said to have aroused a renewed interest in writing fiction on the part of a group of writers. As Martin Randall similarly states, "It seems clear that 9/11 was an epochal event that has had profound effect on global politics and it seems equally clear that many writers would feel compelled to write about it" (7). It must be underlined that the tendency to turn to the attacks while studying national or cultural identity in the realm of literature mostly arises out of the epochal event's specific focus upon Muslim identities. In the wake of 9/11, Muslims are known to have been faced with the hardship of fighting against the accusations levelled at them, which means that they have been stigmatized as supporters of an oppressive regime by the Western culture. As a result of what has transpired in the cultural and political background of 2000s, as Nash contends, "The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed the emergence of a new generation of novelists with links to the Muslim cultures of the sub-continent, writing about Muslim subjects" (36). Among the alluded authors of the early twenty-first century, Monica Ali comes to the fore with her British-Asian roots and she seems to have taken up the challenge of elucidating the place issues such as immigration, Muslim national identity or ethnicity occupy in the field of literary fiction with *Brick Lane* published in 2003. Writing this book in the wake of 9/11, Ali centers the story around a young Bangladeshi Muslim woman, Nazneen, who moves to London on account of her arranged marriage to an old man named Chanu. From the very first day of her arrival in the host country, the protagonist of the novel is appalled by the contrasts posed by the Western cultural customs to those of her own and she is psychically tortured. This young migrant woman suffers a lot on account of the perplexities of her condition and paralysing aspect of her having been stuck

between her Bangladeshi identity and British identity. She negotiates with herself during the whole process of her assimilation into the host country, experiences a culture shock and ends up opening a new sphere for herself where she resides with a newly-constructed identity towards the end of *Brick Lane*. However, until Nazneen reaches the point of self-empowerment in a country that is hostile to her cultural identity, she encounters a lot of difficulties. Her entrapment in the chasm opened up by the mismatches between the Islamic culture and English culture forms an indispensable part of the story of who she becomes in the end. Relevant to this point, this study will concentrate upon the nature of the culture shock of Nazneen with links to religion and gender as cultural identity markers.

## **RELIGION AND GENDER AS CULTURAL IDENTITY MARKERS IN *BRICK LANE***

From the right outset of *Brick Lane* which is marked by Nazneen's birth in 1967, the novel presents the newly-born protagonist as engulfed by religious expectations of her homeland. Her mother, Rupban, gives birth to Nazneen as a physically weak baby who runs the risk of losing her life if she is not taken to a hospital in the city center. The baby Nazneen needs some medical help, however, her mother interprets the difficulties they encounter in the first few moments of Nazneen's life in accordance with the fatalistic worldview of her country and raises an objection to the necessity of Nazneen's being examined by a doctor. Rupban's remarks in *Brick Lane* in the face of this unfortunate event must be underlined as the mother says that "We must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it. And my child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate. That way, she will be stronger" (3). When Rupban utters all these in the opening section of the novel, it becomes clear that Nazneen is born into an environment where she is supposed to surrender herself to fatalism for the rest of her life and to develop an understanding of what takes place around her without using her reasoning. To put it another way, Nazneen makes her initial presence known to readers in a way that is geared towards locating her in a country characterised by a kind of blind adherence to regulations of theocratic system. As Hamilton similarly points out:

Nazneen's initial outlook on life is exemplified by the story, "How You Were Left to Your Fate," in which her mother desists from taking the newborn Nazneen to hospital even though the sickly baby refuses all nourishment for several days. Since the baby survived, Nazneen's mother concludes that the only way to deal with one's fate is to submit to it; a quiescence characteristic of Nazneen's initial years in London. (37)

During her upbringing, Nazneen shapes her life in the light of what her mother identifies as an allegiance to what fate brings to humanity thereby lacking in her ability to critically appraise the things. It is evident that she conforms her thoughts to the way of perceiving the world her mother wants her to perceive. Having no chance to deviate from what she is assumed to hold on to as a Muslim girl, the childhood and youth experiences of Nazneen in her homeland and also in London where she moves due to her arranged marriage show the extent to which her cultural image given by birth restricts her behaviour and consigns her to a life of mental imprisonment for a long time. As Ali integrates into the first part of the novel and underlines:

As Nazneen grew she heard many times this story of How You Were Left to Your Fate. It was because of her mother's wise decision that Nazneen lived to become the wide-faced, watchful girl that she was. Fighting against one's fate can weaken the blood. Sometimes, or perhaps most times, it can be fatal. Not once did Nazneen question the logic of the story of How You Were Left to Your Fate. Indeed, she was grateful for her mother's quiet courage, her tearful stoicism that was almost daily in evidence. (4)

The above-given lines demonstrate that Nazneen is raised in a household and homeland where it seems improbable for her to break free from the compulsion to organise her life in conjunction with theological assumptions. When Nazneen is eighteen years old, she accepts getting married to a man found by her father for she has been conditioned to believe that marriage at a certain age is a must in her culture. Confined to a typical perception of a young Muslim Bangladeshi woman, Nazneen shows her approval of her father's decision for marriage as she expresses that "Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma" (5). Nazneen's approval for her father's choice also means that she confirms the validity of the idea that she must be an ideal wife and mother as required by the cultural order to which she belongs. The order that is predicated upon the power fate and religion exert over the lives of believers results in Nazneen's being robbed of the freedom to organise her life as she wishes. However, after a certain while, Nazneen feels assured that the British culture does not cherish the ideas associated with the conservative system in her homeland. Nazneen comes to notice that the only embodiment of a real conservative person is Chanu who considers her as a potential child-bearer and a dutiful housewife. When she overhears her husband, who talks on the phone about Nazneen and says that "Not tall. Not short. Around five foot two. Hips are a bit narrow but wide enough, I think, to carry children. All things considered, I am satisfied" (11). Nazneen is repelled by what she bears witness to. The way Chanu talks about his wife endorses the view that

their relationship is based on the superiority of the husband over the wife as prescribed by the cultural vision of their Bangladeshi origin. To add, as Özün and Yağlıdere contend that “Chanu’s words pinpoint the hardships of Nazneen’s life since she is isolated and lonely in Tower Hamlets, a Bengali Muslim enclave in the east of London” (137). The part of Nazneen which is moulded by her Muslim identity, especially during the first decade of her stay in the host country, makes it hard for her to adapt to the new life which she observes there. She reads Qur'an when she feels in distress and this way she seeks some solace from the complexities of trying to integrate herself into an alien culture. Reading Qur'an as an act is a marker of Nazneen's Muslim identity and she believes that she cannot do without it and it relieves her a lot. Even though she grows more aware of the fact that the Western culture to which she wants to adapt does not require her putting into practice Islamic religious duties, she does not want to turn her head away from her Muslim-self.

Nazneen as a pious follower of faith strikes readers with her acute observations of other women around and the first woman with whom she compares herself is the tattoo lady. As Nazneen wears a traditional clothing “sari” which covers her body, the tattoo lady's completely different style of clothing with tattoos all around her body makes Nazneen think that the idea of organising one's life in compliance with religion does not obviously dominate in the host country. The impression the tattoo lady makes on her functions as one of the most primary affirmative of the disaccord between her culture and that of the tattoo lady. Clothing is a significant cultural identity marker for Nazneen and she is thunderstruck by what she believes the tattoo lady represents as Ares also underlines:

The cultural clash is shown through Nazneen's bewilderment at the semi-naked body of this woman, and her attempts at deciphering its ink inscriptions foreshadow, early in the text, the attention Nazneen is to pay to the dressed bodies that populate the narrative. (160)

Nazneen's view of Western clothing which she associates with rebellion and deviation from certain standards of living in her homeland is strengthened when she watches ice-skaters on TV. As she is not able to speak English at all during the initial phases of her residence in London, what she observes around or watches on TV turns into a substitute for language and conveys specific messages to her. She constantly feels obliged to confront the customs of the host country with those of her own and her interpretation of the garments and bodily movements of ice-skaters is another instance of her realization of the fact that the host country will be a place of estrangement for her. Ali describes Nazneen's state of mind while watching the ice-skaters as follows:

Nazneen held a pile of the last dirty dishes to take to the kitchen, but the screen held her. A man in a very tight suit (so tight that it made his private parts stand out on display) and a woman in a skirt that did not even cover her bottom gripped each other as an invisible force hurtled them across an oval arena. The people in the audience clapped their hands together and then stopped. By some magic they all stopped at exactly the same time. (222)

The entirety of the description provided by the author reconfirms that Nazneen leads a life in London to fit into the decent woman figure in her own culture by performing her household tasks and occupying the private sphere of home. As a religious woman whose fidelity to her cultural identity is the backbone of her life, Nazneen is apparently shocked at what she sees on TV and her unfamiliarity with such performative acts can be said to cause her to feel apprehensive about what awaits her in London as well. As Ivanchikova notes:

Remarkably foreign and incomprehensible, the images of ice skating nevertheless offer a point of identification for Nazneen. The skaters' effortless gliding and spinning signify uninhibited mobility and an ability to maintain control during vertiginous spinning. As she seeks to reorient herself in her new world, overcome the vertigo of cultural shock, and achieve greater personal freedom, Nazneen finds herself confined by her traditional Bengali clothes, her hopelessly domestic and private daily life, and her traditional gender role in her family. (61)

In line with the insight provided by the critic, it must be stressed that not only the woman's but also the man's dressing and movements in the referred scene pose a contrast to Nazneen's Muslim culture in her perspective. Both men and women, Nazneen thinks, must get dressed and act quite differently when her Islamic upbringing is considered. On top of that, the way the audience responds to the performance by giving a loud applause may be deemed as the collective approval of what Nazneen finds as indecent and forms a certain segment of how she views the Western society holistically. It seems that she finds herself in the grips of a totally unknown culture to her as Ares adds that, "Nazneen feels estranged from, and is unable to translate, what she sees on the screen, and the novel thus forces the reader to experience the cultural dislocation that Nazneen herself experiences in Britain" (160). In other words, Nazneen seems to be challenged by the threat of being seen as a cast-away in the new environment whose cultural values clash with those of her own.

The dichotomy between the Islamic and Western cultures with respect to clothing as a cultural signifier projected through the gaze of Nazneen becomes also manifest in the discussion between Nazneen and the wife of their family doctor, Mrs. Azad. The way she talks about Muslim veil and behaves in daily life does not match with Nazneen's talks and behaviours which she exhibits. The defiance

of Mrs. Azad of the theocratic state in Bangladesh while referring to the circumstances of women there characterises her speech which is as follows:

They go around covered from head to toe, in their little walking prisons, and when someone calls to them in the street they are upset. The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing. That, she said, stabbing the air, "is the tragedy." (89)

From the perspective of this Westernised woman, it is understood that the mental confinement of all women living in her native country is a sort of endemic problem to be surmounted, which is at odds with how Nazneen looks at the issue at that time. Having found the space to reside in Britain with her integration into the Western culture, Mrs. Azad goes to any lengths to make others around her feel convinced that the cultural identity of Bangladeshi people is under the thumb of a self-victimising order. This, indeed, corroborates the assumption that one of the major causes of the clash between these cultures is linked to different levels of importance members of them attach to the religion as a principle in their lives. Samuel P. Huntington in his seminal work *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* underscores the idea that religion is a key marker of what makes one culture different from another as the author maintains that:

Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition, and, most important, "religion." The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy." (33)

In the light of Huntington's explanation, it can also be stated that Mrs. Azad's westernisation culminates in the formation of a process whereby she embraces the messages of religion rather differently from Nazneen who does not show any willingness to detach from her Muslim identity completely. Even though the novel shows that Nazneen dreams about freeing herself from being a part of the societal order which stifles her individuality in the later phases of residence in Britain, the character is still seen as not entirely transgressing the boundaries of Islamic propriety except for her love affair with Karim who is initially presented as her business partner in the second part of the novel.

The second part of *Brick Lane* renders Nazneen as a more self-sufficient woman who begins to do sewing business to contribute to the maintenance of home and the narration of her experiences in this part simultaneously brings a new dimension to the concept of religion as revelatory of cultural identity. She interacts with Karim who is a Muslim activist and their business relationship turns into a

secret love relationship as they get to know one another. Nazneen is attracted to Karim both physically and mentally in the sense that he is more handsome and more intellectual than her old husband Chanu. Çelikel pertinently discusses that:

Karim is a young man who represents the freshness, youthfulness and freedom. He is also involved in a political group struggling for immigrant Muslim rights against racism. Nazneen finds this very exciting and from time to time she goes to the meetings run by Karim and listens to the talks that give her courage and excitement. Although their secret love affair gives her remorse, she cannot refrain herself from this relationship and they make love on the bed she also sleeps with her husband. (176)

Karim represents the ideal Muslim man figure for Nazneen. She believes that Karim has been able to construct his identity in Britain by putting a delicate balance to the struggle between Western style and Muslim traditions. Nevertheless, as time progresses, Nazneen is struck by the reality that Karim is not the embodiment of the reconciliation of Islam with Europe within the confines of her mind. Nazneen revisits the role her cultural identity plays on her life in Britain after having been overwhelmed by a sense of regret in her relationship with Karim, because what she views as indicative of an ideal way of adapting oneself to life circumstances in the west is not what Karim stands for. Her doing business, getting outside of the enclosed space symbolised by home and infatuation with Karim's love all imply that she does not fit into the subservient wife figure she embodies during the first decade of her stay in London anymore. In other words, it is understood that the seeds of assimilation into British culture have begun to be sown as Alghamdi points out that "The narrative recounts several distinct strands of the journey Nazneen undertakes: dealing with the legacy of her birth, coming to terms with disempowered position, and, finally assimilation in the English society" (139). However, it does not mean that she estranges herself with her Muslim origin, either. Hers is not a yearning for an emancipation from the position that the Muslim worldview has granted her. As Çelikel lays stress on the nature of the assimilation of Nazneen indicating that "She, too, has a transformed identity. Her transformation into a free-spirited woman is not an escape from and rejection of her national and cultural identity, but it is a choice, a quest, a new form of liberty that she embraces" (177). Towards the end of *Brick Lane*, readers start to think that the novel features the situation of a formerly entrapped woman who is now not bereft of the power to resist against what she considers as female subjugation by simultaneously retaining the Muslim-self. This aspect of Nazneen's case aligns with what the cultural theorist, Stuart Hall alleges in his astute article *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* with the lines below:

Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (225)

The culture shock of Nazneen which is assumed to have occurred as a result of the differences between her Bangladeshi culture and the Western culture particularly with respect to religion needs to be discussed with respect to gender, as well. Before Nazneen moves to London at the age of eighteen, she develops a vision of the world in compliance with certain gender roles ascribed to men and women in her home country. Like the vast majority of women from her cultural background, Nazneen believes that men reside within the public sphere by working and earning money whereas women are always seen in the private sphere of home as cultural guardians of morality and proper wives to their husbands. Hence, the patriarchal configurations of what is right and what is wrong manifest themselves as decisive factors for leading an ideal life for both of the genders in Nazneen's culture to a serious extent. When Nazneen arrives in London due to her arranged marriage to Chanu, she also begins to live in the host country by clinging to a set of gender-based ideals, namely, to the rectitude of the distinction to be made between men and women concerning their statutes in the society. Despite being educated and living in the west for a much longer time than Nazneen, it is important to stress that Chanu still fits into the image of a patriarch concerning his relationship to Nazneen and one of the most remarkable exemplary scenes of their fidelity to fulfilling their culturally-constructed gender roles is foregrounded in *Brick Lane* as noted below:

"Ish," said Chanu, breathing sharply. "Did you draw blood?" He looked closely at his little toe. He wore only his pajama bottoms and sat on the bed. Nazneen knelt to the side with a razor blade in her hand. It was time to cut her husband's corns again. She sliced through the semitranslucent skin, the buildup around the yellow core, and gathered the little dead bits in the palm of her hand. (25)

The given scene represents the great deal of importance attached to wifely duties of a woman in the cultural environment of Nazneen and she fully conforms to these norms at least during the first decade of her stay in London. She does not hesitate to serve her husband as she does not feel the urge to distance herself from being seen as a subordinate wife. She does not make friends with British people and leads a life characterised by a sense of estrangement. Fernández similarly alludes to Nazneen underscoring that:

Nazneen's contact with British society is non-existent during the first decade of her life in London. Nazneen is bound to her husband, by her lack of competences to socialize in the new environment and her inability to speak English. Her space is limited to the apartment where she lives and the Bangladeshi community that surrounds her. (151)

The close proximity of Nazneen to Bangladeshi Muslim culture, especially in terms of her understanding of marriage and gender roles makes her feel that she is cast into the world of the west where the regulations of her own culture do not come into effect. Yet, later on, the more she observes women around, the more she becomes aware of the fact that her existence in London as a conservative, dutiful wife figure may be interpreted as impinging on her freedom. Çelikel refers to the gradual increase in Nazneen's awareness and says that "After realising that she only functions as a wife and a child bearer, she begins to get acquainted with her cultural surrounding and notices the differences between her enforced lifestyle and the liberal culture in her new country" (173). Despite her enclosed lifestyle, Nazneen volunteers to get rid of the language impediment in order to better communicate with British people and dreams about improving her English by going to college with her friend, Razia. However, the young Muslim woman is challenged by the constraints of her own patriarchal culture since her husband thinks that learning English is a grand step for westernisation which may result in Nazneen's indifference to her maternal and wifely duties. Considering that Nazneen is bound to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother and wife in conjunction with her Muslim-self from the perspective of Chanu, her accentuation of such an idea may even be regarded as a covert attempt of breaching the boundaries of propriety set by their Muslim origin.

In the discussion about the culture shock of Nazneen who is struck by the incongruities between her Bangladeshi culture and the British culture on account of the clashing perspectives for gender roles, it is also necessary to touch upon her daughter's experiences. Portrayed as a more different character than Nazneen, Shahana comes to the forefront with her endeavor to conform to the expectations of the Western culture in her lifestyle since she is a second-generation immigrant. She is introduced to readers as a person who is born and raised in London and who has great difficulty in making sense of the worldview of her parents. As Shahana grows up, it is seen that both Nazneen and her husband, Chanu, impose restrictions on her choices, particularly with respect to clothing. Unlike her mother, Shahana does not come to terms with the idea that she must wear a traditional clothing that covers her body in line with her cultural identity, instead, she prefers to wear jeans or short skirts which is found completely inconvenient by the conservative class. Thus, it would be right to contend that Shahana typifies a Westernised individual whose fight against the cultural order coming from the

Bangladeshi origin of her parents is at the center of her identity struggle in London. Her determination to raise her voice against the demands of the patriarchal dogmas originating from the cultural background of Nazneen and Chanu renders the young girl as a somehow marginal character in *Brick Lane*.

## CONCLUSION

The concepts of culture and identity manifest themselves as decisive factors in forming a certain perception of the world for each individual. They complement one another in such a harmonious way that the culture into which a person is born plays a major role in giving that person a distinct identity from the one coming from another culture. The concept of identity, or specifically, cultural identity at work, here can be basically described as the means for differentiating oneself from the other people having different cultural heritages and identities. In that regard, the way a Westerner conceives the world can never be considered the same as that of a Muslim since they have disparate identities shaped by disparate cultures. Considering this distinction referred, it is right to say that it is inevitable for a Muslim to face with difficulties upon starting to live in a Western country as illustrated in the case of Nazneen in *Brick Lane*. Her situation as the other and immigrant in London enables readers, who are in a similar position, to identify themselves with her, and think critically about the hardship of shaping one's identity in a totally different culture. Nazneen's desire for preserving her Muslim identity in London clearly shows that Muslim and Western cultures primarily differ from each other because of their mismatching customs of marriage, ideas of gender roles, authority, religion, and equality as amply demonstrated within the novel. It is seen that while Bangladeshi Muslim culture have certain religion and gender originated restrictions, especially on the part of women that force them to look at life from rather different windows, Westerners have more liberal thoughts about the doctrines of religion and gender within their life philosophies. This, as the article aims to focus upon, culminates in Nazneen's being subjected to the culture shock of being caught in the frays of her Muslim-self and British-self in the aftermath of her moving to London.

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## **Kritični razmislek o kulturnem šoku priseljenke Nazneen v romanu *Brick Lane* Monice Ali**

Pojma kultura in identiteta sta med seboj prepletena, saj imata vodilno vlogo pri oblikovanju določenega dojemanja sveta pri vsakem posamezniku. Predstavljata tako pomembno celoto, da kultura, v katero se oseba rodi, daje tej osebi izrazitejšo identiteto od identitet osebe, ki pripada drugi kulturi. Natančneje, koncept kulturne identitete, o katerem govorimo, lahko opredelimo kot sredstvo za razlikovanje od drugih ljudi, ki imajo različne identitete v skladu s konvencijami svojih kultur. S tega vidika na primer okna, s katerega na svet gleda musliman, ni mogoče obravnavati enako kot okno zahodnjaka, saj imata različni kulturni identiteti. Roman *Brick Lane* Monice Ali vrti okoli izkušenj mlade bangladeške muslimanke Nazneen, ki se zaradi dogovorjene poroke trudi obdržati življenje v Londonu. V tej študiji bodo podrobneje predstavljene značilnosti neskladij med Nazneenino lastno kulturo in zahodno kulturo v smislu konceptov religije in spola, zaradi katerih doživi močan kulturni šok.

**Ključne besede:** *Brick Lane*, religija, spol

# From Retribution to Restoration: A Decolonial Perspective on Justice in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*

*Arunesh Babu, Shanthi Simon*

## Abstract

Retributive justice, which is rooted in feudal, colonial, and punitive structures, has enabled systemic inequalities, putting the marginalised and disadvantaged at the most risk. These frameworks, established through absolutist bureaucracies, continued in a postcolonial setting, obstructing the reintegration of criminals into society. Victor Hugo critiques these unfair power structures from an abolitionist perspective in his book *Les Misérables* (1862). By examining Jean Valjean's transformation from a hardened criminal to a compassionate individual, inspired by Bishop Myriel's act of mercy, the paper emphasises how restorative justice can facilitate personal growth and societal restoration. This paper critiques colonial justice for its emphasis on punishment and its role in reinforcing socio-economic imbalances. It also discusses alternative justice methods that prioritise reconciliation and reintegration, demonstrating how these approaches tackle the underlying causes of crime while fostering equity and community building. Through Hugo's narratives and its connections to postcolonial realities, the paper highlights the necessity of transitioning from punitive to restorative models that dismantle systemic inequalities and promote collective responsibility.

**Keywords:** Restorative Justice, Decolonising justice, Postcolonialism, Critical Prison Studies, Labelling theory

The traditional colonial justice models, as reflected in many legal systems and glorified in popular culture, have primarily focused on retributive justice—punishing offenders in response to their crimes. These systems, grounded in punitive legal frameworks inherited from colonial rule, emphasise punishment over reconciliation, disproportionately affecting marginalised populations and solidifying systemic biases (Fanon, 1963). Victor Hugo, a former Senate and French writer known for his critique of the state machinery and class conflicts, provides the basis for discussing justice from a postcolonial perspective. His work *Les Misérables* critiques the harsh realities and inhumane working conditions with an anti-monarchist and abolitionist perspective, covering the time span of seventeen years, from 1815 to 1832, with the Paris Uprising of 1832 as its climax.

Jean Valjean, the central protagonist of the book, having been hardened by his time in Bagne of Toulon<sup>1</sup> for nineteen years for a trivial mistake he made for survival, was paroled with Yellow Passport.<sup>2</sup> After a series of inhumane treatment, he resumes a life of crime by stealing from a bishop, who granted him refuge. Instead of demanding retribution or calling the authorities, the bishop chooses to save Valjean from the punitive legal system. He forgives Valjean, gives him back the same candlesticks that he stole, and tells him to use them to build a better life. This act of mercy and trust becomes a catalyst for Valjean's moral awakening. Rather than simply punishing the offender, the focus of this book is on restoring relationships, addressing the harm caused, and helping the offender reintegrate into society in a meaningful and just way.

This paper explores how restorative justice is presented through Bishop Myriel's actions and analyses how alternative justice models can transform the criminals rather than damning them. By decolonising justice—shifting away from retributive models to those that emphasise healing and societal reintegration—societies can address the structural factors that lead to crime, fostering a more humane and equitable legal system.

Retributive justice has ancient origins, often linked to religious or divine authority. In early civilisations, such as Mesopotamia and ancient Israel, laws like Hammurabi's Code or the Old Testament principles were based on the belief that justice was divinely ordained (Loewe, 1994). These systems were built on a vertical hierarchy where gods or rulers were believed to have the ultimate authority to punish wrongdoing. This form of justice has dominated legal practices, evolving from divine and royal justice to the modern court systems seen today.

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1 A cruel penal establishment in Toulon, France, where prisoners were forced to do cheap labour under unlivable harsh working conditions and poor sanitation and health.

2 An internal passport in France is issued to former convicts who have served forced labour, branding them even after their sentence and labelling them as dangerous people.

As societies moved from divine rule to monarchy, justice systems retained the hierarchical structures that prioritised retribution as a means of power. Kings and feudal lords were often viewed as the earthly representatives of divine will, and thus their justice systems continued to be characterised by strict punishment. The justice dispensed by royal courts was not only about addressing individual wrongdoing but also about reinforcing the authority of the monarch (Hobbes, 1651). Harsh penalties, including public executions or mutilations, served as visible reminders of the ruler's power and the consequences of defying it. This rationale, deeply rooted in monarchic justice systems, reflects the enduring belief that fear and coercion were necessary for social stability.

One of the convincing rationales behind such punishment-centric models was that it deters others from committing similar offences, thus maintaining societal stability (Garland, 2012). Any disruption to a smooth functioning of the bureaucracy was seen as a crime, and punishment was necessary to restore balance, while ironically, this balance benefited only the privileged sections of the societies at large (Clair, 2020). The idea was that punishment would not only discipline the offender but also serve as a deterrent to others, reinforcing the state's authority. As a result, prison systems and police forces became the main apparatuses for enforcing this punitive approach, with little attention given to rehabilitation or addressing the underlying causes of crime, such as poverty or social injustice (Garland, 2001). In other words, retribution did not affect the power-holding populace as it affected and destroyed the lives of the working class.

During the colonial era, the European colonial powers imposed their legal systems on indigenous populations, replacing local customary laws with retributive models. Retributive justice in postcolonial settings frequently intensifies social disparities by reinforcing colonial power dynamics and sidelining restorative justice practices. These systems emphasise punishment over reconciliation, disproportionately affecting marginalised populations and solidifying systemic biases (Fanon, 1963). The criminalisation of actions perceived as threats to colonial authority, even after independence from the colonial powers, continues to stifle dissent and uphold socio-economic hierarchies (Chakrabarty, 2000). By neglecting restorative practices that emphasise reconciliation and healing, retributive justice systems fail to confront the historical traumas and structural inequalities inherent in postcolonial contexts (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Victor Hugo critiques these unjust justice systems in his short story *Claude Gueux* (1834), which talks about the life of Claude, who was imprisoned and tormented by the director for five years in prison. Hugo critiques how the colonial justice system condemns the working class through the unfair and rigid trials. *Les Misérables* discusses a similar theme through the life of Jean Valjean, who faced imprisonment for nineteen years for stealing food for children and his attempts to

escape from prison. The reason for both Claude and Jean's act of stealing is deep rooted in the inefficiency of the monarch Louis Philippe I to meet the needs of the people during cold winters and famine. Their transgressions are systemically driven rather than personally motivated, yet the justice system incarcerates the social victims, the men of the working class. There is no space for them to voice their reasons to the Crown, and they are silenced by the policing troops. Jean Valjean does not absolve himself of the mistake he made because of poverty. He puts himself on a mental trial, where his conscience holds him accountable.

... it is very rare for anyone to die of hunger, literally; and next, that, fortunately or unfortunately, man is so constituted that he can suffer long and much, both morally and physically, without dying; that it is therefore necessary to have patience; that that would even have been better for those poor little children; that it had been an act of madness for him, a miserable, unfortunate wretch, to take society at large violently by the collar, and to imagine that one can escape from misery through theft. (Hugo, 1862)

When Jean is willing to hold himself accountable, it is the punitive prison system that turns him into an indifferent person towards the law, for the law doesn't defend the rights of the disadvantaged. The economic inequalities present in postcolonial societies restrict marginalised communities from accessing equitable legal representation, leading to more severe penalties and perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion (Spivak, 1988). The inhuman treatment of the wrongdoers pushes them further away from being a valuable and positive contributor to society, leading to recidivism, which is further enabled by a lack of reintegrative support systems.

The distance and communication between the perpetrator and his community are furthered by the complex legal processes and state apparatus, which leads to the alienation of the individuals. Many indigenous and tribal communities have long practiced forms of justice that prioritise communal harmony and restoration over punishment. In these systems, the focus is on addressing the harm caused by an offender, repairing relationships, and reintegrating the offender into the community (Braithwaite, 1989). In certain African tribal societies, justice systems revolve around concepts like Ubuntu,<sup>3</sup> which emphasises the interconnectedness of all individuals and the importance of communal well-being (Tutu, 1999).

Restorative justice operates on the principle that crime is not just an offence against the state or a ruler but a disruption to relationships within a community.

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<sup>3</sup> Ubuntu is a philosophical idea deeply embedded in African traditions, especially within the Bantu languages of Southern Africa. It translates to „I am because we are,“ a notion that a person's identity and welfare are fundamentally tied to the welfare of their community.

Rather than focusing solely on the offender's punishment, restorative justice seeks to involve all stakeholders—the victim, the offender, and the broader community—in finding a resolution that promotes healing and prevents future harm (Zehr, 1990). When Valjean is denied entry into inns despite having enough money, just because he carried a yellow passport, this reintegration is hindered. To his own surprise, the Bishop offers him a stay in his house, to which he exclaims: "Really? What! You will keep me? You do not drive me forth? A convict! You call me sir! You do not address me as thou? 'Get out of here, you dog!' is what people always say to me. I felt sure that you would expel me, so I told you at once who I am" (Hugo, 1862). Branding the convict as a dangerous person for the rest of his life without taking into account whether he has made efforts in transforming himself pushes him back into wrongdoing, for he is denied just wages, denied shelter, and perceived as a threat anywhere. He questions the point in transformation since no reasonable doubt is extended to him. Valjean's transformation did not occur because the bishop saved him from the brigadier; rather, it was a slow brooding one that happened due to humane treatment extended to Valjean throughout his stay and after.

Restorative justice de-centres the state or sovereign from the process and emphasises the individuals and communities directly affected by crime. In doing so, it promotes a more equitable approach to justice that values the perspectives and needs of marginalised groups (Johnstone, 2002). The case of Jean Valjean and Bishop Myriel in *Les Misérables* offers a vivid example of how restorative justice can lead to profound personal transformation. Valjean's encounter with the bishop, who responds to theft with forgiveness and an opportunity for redemption, marks a departure from the harsh retributive justice he has previously experienced. Valjean's acceptance of the label "beast" shows that individuals often adopt societal labels and modify their behaviour to conform to these assigned identities (Becker, 1963).

When society continuously defines an individual by their flaws or past errors, as seen with Valjean after his conviction, it solidifies a deviant identity that can lead to ongoing cycles of marginalisation and criminal behaviour (Lemert, 1951) according to the tenets of labelling theory. Restorative justice aims to address this issue by emphasising the shared humanity and potential for redemption in individuals rather than merely defining them by their previous actions. For Valjean, being acknowledged as a "man" instead of a "beast" marks the beginning of his path to reclaiming his dignity and humanity. This change highlights the critical role of restorative practices in dismantling damaging labels and promoting reintegration and personal development instead of isolation.

The bishop's act of giving him another opportunity to change himself, Valjean embraces it and lives an honourable life till the end. By shifting the focus from

punishment to restoration, societies can work toward addressing the root causes of crime, such as poverty, social inequality, and systemic injustice, rather than merely punishing those who fall victim to these conditions (Zehr, 2015). Anyone who endorses the essentialist retributive justice system would share the same disillusionment of Javert, the central antagonist and police inspector in *Les Misérables*. Through him, we understand how the colonial police force functioned as an extension of the state's power, and its focus on punishment became a mechanism of subjugation, enabling the power imbalance between the oppressors and oppressed (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). Valjean spared the life of Javert despite having an opportunity to end it and promised to surrender to him. This mercy extended by Valjean put Javert in an ideological dilemma, where he is in debt to Valjean while he can't give up his rigid duty to the law.

Towards the end of Javert's pursuit, he drowns himself in the River Seine after witnessing the transformation in Valjean. Jean Valjean not only redeemed himself with the opportunity he was provided with but also helped the working class around him. This reintegration into society inspires responsibility in offenders, which creates a chain of good deeds and better role models, leading to societal transformation. With capital, either education or economic, and good mentorship, offenders are unlikely to relapse into recidivism (Stand Together Organisation).

The necessity for reforming justice systems in the postcolonial context has been acknowledged to some extent, yet it remains insufficiently implemented, as these systems continue to embody colonial legacies that sustain systemic inequalities and marginalisation (Davis & Morrow, 2018). Postcolonial literature powerfully critiques these deficiencies, with works like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977) and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) revealing the complicity of post-independence legal systems in perpetuating colonial hierarchies and stifling dissent. Theoretical contributions from scholars such as Fanon, Spivak, and Santos emphasise the imperative to dismantle epistemic violence and incorporate indigenous and restorative practices into justice systems to confront historical and structural inequities. Yet, the enduring presence of colonial frameworks in both practice and ideology continues to obstruct the achievement of equitable and decolonised justice systems.

The process of decolonisation is a long and never-ending process, for colonial or imperialist ideologies, socially or culturally, constantly mutate into various newer forms. Decolonising justice too requires constant retrospective rework and revisions to facilitate rehabilitation and transformation in people. Restorative justice provides an alternative to the punitive, colonial justice models that have long dominated legal systems. By emphasising reconciliation, accountability, and healing, restorative justice offers a decolonised approach that seeks to transform

individuals and communities rather than punish offenders as the end goal. As societies seek more humane and effective ways of addressing crime, restorative justice offers a path forward that prioritises social reintegration and the restoration of relationships over retribution and power.

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## **Od maščevanja do obnove: Dekolonialna perspektiva pravičnosti v *Les Misérables* Victorja Hugoja**

Retributivna pravičnost, ki ima korenine v fevdalnih, kolonialnih in kaznovalnih strukturah, je omogočila sistemske neenakosti, zaradi katerih so najbolj ogroženi marginalizirani in prikrajšani. Ti okviri, vzpostavljeni z absolutistično birokracijo, so se nadaljevali tudi v postkolonialnem okolju in ovirali ponovno vključevanje storilcev kaznivih dejanj v družbo. Victor Hugo je v svoji knjigi *Les Misérables* (1862) kritiziral te nepravične strukture moči z abolicionističnega vidika. S preučevanjem preobrazbe Jeana Valjeana iz prekaljenega zločinca v sočutnega posameznika, ki ga je navdihnilo dejanje usmiljenja škofa Myriela: članek poudarja, kako lahko restorativna pravičnost olajša osebno rast in družbeno obnovo. Kritizira kolonialno pravosodje zaradi njegovega poudarka na kaznovanju in njegove vloge pri krepitevi družbeno-ekonomskih neravnovesij. Obravnava tudi alternativne metode pravičnosti, ki dajejo prednost spravi in ponovnemu vključevanju, ter prikazuje, kako ti pristopi odpravljajo temeljne vzroke kaznivih dejanj, hkrati pa spodbujajo pravičnost in gradnjo skupnosti. S Hugovimi pripovedmi in njihovimi povezavami s postkolonialno stvarnostjo članek poudarja potrebo po prehodu od kaznovalnih k obnovitvenim modelom, ki odpravljajo sistemske neenakosti in spodbujajo kolektivno odgovornost.

**Ključne besede:** Postkolonializem, zaporniške študije, teorija etiketiranja

# **Toward a New Critical Approach: Deconstructing the Structural and Narrative Discourse in *Season of Migration to the North***

*Haithm Zinhom*,<sup>1</sup> *Fatima Saif Aldahmani*<sup>2</sup>

## **Abstract**

In the framework of contemporary literary theories, this paper explores Tayeb Salih's acclaimed work, *Season of Migration to the North*, examining it as a postcolonial modernist novel that traverses the dynamics between the Orient and the Occident. The analysis investigates the novel to explore the conflicts between the Colonized and the Colonizer, aiming to uncover new thematic directions crucial to the relationships between Africa and Britain. The paper contends that Salih re-writes and reinterprets the history of the British Empire in Sudan by engaging with canonized western fiction, particularly *Heart of Darkness*, to highlight the complex intersections between East and West. As an example of post-colonial Arabic modernism, *Season of Migration to the North* employs a distinctive narrative approach featuring a multiplicity of voices, reflecting diverse perspectives on issues such as colonization, hegemony, hybridity, and loss of identity.

**Keywords:** Post-colonial discourse; Arabic Modernism; Orient and Occident; East and West; Colonized and Colonizer; Narrative Techniques.

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## POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSE: INTRODUCTION

Post-colonialism originated from various discourses, including linguistic metaphors that reinforced hegemonic relations. It did not attain its current significance until it evolved into a theory within cultural studies and literary criticism. Currently, postcolonial studies stand as a significant field, promoting specific perspectives and addressing issues aimed at deconstructing colonial discourse. This theory reassesses the history of former empires, focusing on the impacts of European colonialism on education, language, and economics in affected countries. Although colonial discourse, colonialism, and postcolonial theory are interconnected and form a longstanding field of analysis, their theoretical and methodological aspects are not always clear. Various theorists have linked colonialism with colonial discourse, modifying key concepts integral to postcolonial theory. The interplay among these three terms dates back to the onset of the colonial movement. Some critics argue colonial discourse persists, suggesting the 'post' aspect may be unjustified. In this context, different theorists have propagated ideas about postcolonial theory, particularly within the university cultural scene of Anglophone countries like the United States.

Postcolonial theory in general focuses on analyzing the complicated relationship between East and West as well as the visions and perceptions associated with cultural hegemony and injustices affecting peoples and societies subjected to domination and organized exploitation. This insight into the collective imagination of both the colonizer and the colonized seeks to recognize new meanings created through the dialogue between dominant and subjugated cultures. As a post-colonial theorist, Edward Said introduced the concept of 'Orientalism', which sparked a series of writings that either expanded on, responded to, or developed its ideas, leading to other arguments by scholars such as Homi Bhabha and others. Said explores Orientalism as the legitimate beginning of post-colonial studies bringing it from the diaspora and developing it into a supportive thesis. He argues that "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and that applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspect, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (Said 2003: 2).<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein, post-colonialism describes the situation of nations that freed themselves from European colonization after World War II. Colonialism not only sought to exploit but also created an identity crisis among the colonized, prompting third world intellectuals to take action. As a branch of knowledge and theory, post-colonialism emerged after colonized people clashed on different levels with the cultures of the conquerors, fearing the loss of their cultural identity (Bressler

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<sup>3</sup> Said, E. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

2012: 204).<sup>4</sup> In other words, post-colonialism refers to societies and cultures influenced by the imperial process from the colonization era to the present. The post-colonial theory, post-colonial studies and post-colonial discourse are born out of the arguments about the connections between colonized and colonizer, Orient and Occident, East and West...etc. This complex, multi-faceted, and deeply philosophical domain includes prominent intellectuals such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. These scholars, from diverse cultural backgrounds and traditions, unite to challenge and dismantle the dominant colonial discourse imposed by first world countries. The postcolonial theory aims to probe the aftermath of colonization, restoring the identity of independent Oriental nations by dispelling misconceptions about them.

Critics of post-colonial theory often consist of intellectuals from third-world countries who have either emigrated or been exiled to major capital cities. They emerged from a refusal to accept prevailing discourses and sought to rewrite them in an anti-Western context. Their goal is to dismantle the dominance of their regions by revealing racial and gender prejudices, mechanisms of oppression, exploitation, and the representations of subordinates in the superior discourse. Post-colonial theory involves a critical reading of Western thought in its interactions with the East, encompassing cultural, political, and historical dimensions. This theory analyzes colonial discourse to uncover the implicit structural and cultural elements that govern it. Prominent postcolonial critics aim to dismantle the colonial phenomenon by tracing its historical roots, mental and cognitive links, and exploring the details that spurred the West's colonial aspirations. Scholars largely agree that Edward Said's *Orientalism* played a foundational role in developing postcolonial theory.

Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, suggests that "Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition" (Said, 9).<sup>5</sup> He indicates that imperialism's systems are deeply ingrained, forming the cultural basis of nations. Identity politics in a postcolonial context are shaped by and rooted in imperialist ideology. For example, Edward Said's work in *Culture and Imperialism* incorporates the ideas of two notable contemporary Western thinkers, Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci. These thinkers are considered pioneers of the postcolonial debate and among the first to predict the emergence of post-colonialism, alongside Frantz Fanon. From another perspective, postcolonial theory refers to an analysis that assumes traditional colonialism has ended, entering a phase sometimes called the imperial or colonial phase. Heidarzadegan explains that post-colonialism encompasses theories in various disciplines, from philosophy to

4 Bressler, C. E. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2012.

5 Said, E. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

literary theory, focusing on literature in English from countries that were once or still are colonies. This theory emerged after colonization, as colonized people began to reflect on the loss of identity, race, culture, and oppression. Postcolonial theory stems from the cultural clash and frustrations experienced by the colonized (Heidarzadegan, 11).<sup>6</sup> The term 'post-colonialism' first appeared in political theory in the early seventies. However, the theory of resistance to colonialism is much older. Postcolonial theory and colonial discourse originate from opposing viewpoints on reading history. The difference lies in the details, not the essence. Some scholars see the end of the traditional colonial phase and, consequently, the need to focus on the postcolonial phase's features.

A critical issue in postcolonial thought in literature was the decentralization of Western culture and its values. From a postcolonial perspective, the main works of Western European and American thought dominated philosophy and critical thinking in large parts of the world, especially in regions formerly under colonial rule (Carter, 115).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, theorists and scholars created critiques of colonial discourse, particularly in literary realms, by analyzing and strategizing how texts depicted colonized peoples as savage and primitive. These representations served as justifications for colonialism. By constructing imaginary or false intellectual images of peoples and nations, this discourse systematically facilitated colonization. Colonialism defines "others" as colonial subjects through representation, establishing a practice of supremacy over the inferior. Furthermore, some critics such as Nourin Saeed argues that colonialism is the occupation of land "by a stronger nation or state for 'political dominance,' 'economic exploitation,' and a civilizing mission" (Saeed, 2).<sup>8</sup>

Through several novels by Western authors that explore themes such as racism, class, and cultural conflict, the supremacy of colonialism is evident. These novels often portray the white race as superior in terms of culture, history, language, and beliefs, while depicting non-white people as inferior. The presentation of these themes varies among authors, but they share the same mindset of dividing society into two groups: the strong (self) and the powerless inferior (Other). At a certain level, *Season of Migration to the North* is a fictional response to such novels. It reflects the viewpoint of the colonized toward the issue of colonization particularly in terms of the representation of both colonized and colonizer. Representation is a crucial tool of colonialism. According to Edward Said, representations of the Orient, both visual and textual, are not natural but biased and constructed by

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6 Heidarzadegan, N. *The Middle Eastern American Theatre: Negation or Negotiation of Identity*. Ankara: Akademisyen Kitabevi A.Ş, 2019.

7 Carter, D. *Literary Theory*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2006.

8 Saeed, N. *Colonial Representation in Robinson Crusoe, Heart of Darkness and A Passage to India*. (Unpublished MA Thesis). BRAC University, 2013

“Western Ideology” (Said, 21).<sup>9</sup> The cultural discourse commonly used by this ideology is not an accurate picture but rather representations. Said emphasizes that what is circulated within a culture is not “truth” but representations.<sup>10</sup> Further, Frantz Fanon, in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, discusses how colonialism legitimizes its supremacy over other people. This sense of the colonizer’s supremacy leads the colonized to adopt the languages and cultures of the colonizers,<sup>11</sup> a concept Homi Bhabha refers to as mimicry. This mimicry minimizes the colonizer’s authority over the colonized. Another discourse emerged to counter colonialism, revealing its mechanisms and strategies through counter-texts of resistance known as post-colonialism theory.

Post-colonialism, as a concept, implies opposition to colonial discourse and control, which seeks to influence colonized people profoundly. Colonialism imposes inferiority on colonized citizens through various domains, including cultural, scientific, and literary areas. Post-colonial studies outline the cultural relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, emphasizing how the culture of the colonizer often dominates indigenous cultures. This field has drawn interest from several prominent thinkers and critics, notably Edward Said, who believes that the political impact of writing should be traced through cultural reading, linking criticism to the world. He asserts that the text is a cultural event inevitably connected to political and cultural life (Said, 9).<sup>12</sup> Colonial countries launched their overseas campaigns under the guise of a civilized conquest for peoples deemed unqualified to reach the level of human beings. The image of the Western colonizer was constructed to appear honorable, not as an exploiter but as a bearer of enlightenment. The colonizer portrays colonial missions as duties to assist less fortunate peoples, encapsulated in the slogan “the white man’s burden,” which justified subjugating entire continents (Bhabha, 35).<sup>13</sup>

Western colonialism, under the guise of its ‘noble’ goal, turned colonized areas into private properties, engaging in piracy that included plundering, looting, and uprooting identity and cultural affiliation. The French colonization in black Africa and North Africa is a prime example. Intellectuals, exiled or emigrated from third-world countries, developed an awareness to resist prevailing discourses. This effort led to the field known as ‘post-colonialism’, which aims to undermine and destabilize colonial discourse. Post-colonialism has two branches of authors: Homi Bhabha and Arun P. Mukherjee who see it as “a set of diverse methodologies without a unitary quality,” while Edward Said, Barbara

9 Said, E. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

10 Ibid, p. 30.

11 Fanon, F. *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

12 Said, E. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.

13 Bhabha, H. K. “The Other Question Screen”. *The Oxford Journals*, 24/6 (1983): 18-36.

Harlow, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak view it as cultural strategies centered on history (Bressler, 204). Post-colonialism's concerns became apparent after the publication of a key book by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin.<sup>14</sup> The book addresses topics like language, education, history, and representation, highlighting the critical concern of post-colonialism: the struggles when cultures collide and one dominates another.

On the other hand, the concept of Orientalism gained prominence in post-colonial theory with the publication of Edward Said's book *Orientalism* in 1978. Said argues that Europe's scientific, artistic, and literary discourses are not innocent but deeply connected to power dynamics through the knowledge and representations they produce. Some critics point out that post-colonial studies began with the critiques raised by *Orientalism*. Said asserts that colonial histories, which reveal hegemonic relations between East and West, have generated the discourse of the colonized 'Other.' This 'Other' is perceived as primitive and in need of being marked, processed, and managed. Said points out: The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imagined. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture (Said, 2).<sup>15</sup>

Colonialism is closely related to imperialism but differs significantly. Colonialism involves the concrete act of conquest, while imperialism represents authority or hegemony. Post-colonialism is a multifaceted political, economic, and cultural response to colonialism. As Heidarzadegan notes in *The Middle Eastern American Theatre: Negation or Negotiation of Identity*, post-colonialism should not be confused with anti-colonialism. While anti-colonialism involves the struggle against colonial rule, post-colonialism examines the implications of colonial rule (Heidarzadegan, 10). Colonial discourse analyzes how Western culture has crystallized its colonial orientations towards non-Western regions through various fields of production. This discourse, as defined by Foucault, involves the overlapping of knowledge and power. Foucault's concept of discourse significantly influenced postcolonial critics who analyze colonialism. Ashcroft and others explain Foucault's perspective as follows: Foucault theorizes that discourse is a system of statements that define how the world is understood. It is the mechanism through which dominant groups in society establish the field of truth by imposing specific knowledge, disciplines, and values on other groups. As a social formation, discourse shapes reality for both the objects it represents and the subjects within

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14 Ashcroft B. et al., Eds. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Hove, East Sussex: 1995.

15 Said, E. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

the community it influences. Therefore, colonial discourse consists of a complex array of signs and practices that organize social existence and reproduction within colonial relationships (Ashcroft, et al, 13).<sup>16</sup>

In a related context, feminist perspectives have increasingly influenced post-colonial criticism, with contemporary feminist strategies and postcolonial theory often overlapping and benefiting each other. Critics sometimes view both discourses as a unified field due to their parallels in history and concerns. Pioneers in feminist criticism, such as Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, highlight this similarity. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the founders of the new post-colonial discourse, provides the first feminist perspective in the postcolonial period. As a prominent critic of post-colonialism, feminism, deconstruction, and Marxism, Spivak was a follower and translator of Derrida, authoring the translator's preface for Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. She examines the colonizer-colonized relationship through Subaltern Studies, representing the subaltern in colonial discourse studies. Spivak's work aims to overturn hegemonic structures and question the basic assumptions of dominant thought by exploring the cognitive and discursive dimensions of colonial interventions in other cultures. Rather than merely revealing errors, she seeks to understand how reality is constructed.

Moreover, Homi Bhabha's epistemological efforts involve distinguishing the location of culture by differentiating between visible and hidden knowledge. He is a theoretician influenced by Edward Said's ideas, although he opposed Said in some respects. Heidarzadegan mentions that Bhabha referred to the observation of the colonized of two distinct worldviews: that of the colonizer and that of the colonized people (Heidarzadegan, 16). In a related respect, colonialism forms 'colonial subjects' based on Lacan's concept of the mirror image. Ashcroft et al. explain Lacan's theory as follows: In Lacan's theory, the other – with the small 'o' – designates the other who resembles the self, which the child discovers when it looks in the mirror and becomes aware of itself as a separate being. When the child, which is an uncoordinated mass of limbs and feelings, sees its image in the mirror, that image must bear sufficient resemblance to the child to be recognized, but it must also be separate enough to ground the child's hope for an 'anticipated mastery'; this fiction of mastery will become the basis of the ego. This other is important in defining the identity of the subject according to Ashcroft and others.

Homi Bhabha believes that the colonizer and the colonized are reflections of each other, rejecting Edward Said's concept of binaries (master and slave, colonizer and colonized, European and Other, refugees and host community). Bhabha argues that these binaries benefit the colonizer and create a preference, replacing

16 Ashcroft B. et al., Eds. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 1995.

them with the concept of 'Hybrid Identity' (Bhabha, 87).<sup>17</sup> David Carter provides examples of hybridity in English literature, such as Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, where characters are stuck between two cultures without fully adopting either, leading to hybrids (Carter, 117).<sup>18</sup> This notion of hybridity is reminiscent of the character of Mustafa Saeed, the protagonist of *Season of Migration to the North*, who descends from Sudanese origin and lives in England for a long time. Saeed is trapped in a cultural limbo and suffers from an identity crisis, which leads to his tragic end.

According to Bhabha, the colonial subject or colonized person experiences what he calls 'Psychological Refugee'; the cultures of colonized subjects will not be the same (Heidarzadegan, 16). The relationship between colonizer and colonized eliminates the winner status, as both become distorted. The interaction between the two leads to the assimilation of cultural standards that affirm colonial power but also threatens the colonizer through imitation, destabilizing him. This instability is due to the colonizer's fragile identity. Fanon views imitative blacks as disordered subjects, and Bhabha's concept of mimicry undermines colonizing power. Bhabha explores the subtle interrelationships between dominant and subjugated cultures, focusing on how subjugated races imitate their subjugators. He researches the moments of entanglement and confrontation, where new knowledge can emerge.

Homi Bhabha is a key thinker in understanding the interrelationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Instead of explicitly challenging colonial discourse through concepts such as hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry, Bhabha clarifies the ties and contradictions between the colonized and the colonizer. He is one of the significant postcolonial theorists in colonial discourse analysis alongside Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. Bhabha examines the variety of identities and information when two cultures come together, whether they are colonizer and colonized or refugees and host communities. In his writings, Bhabha addresses how colonialism creates the colonized and constitutes the colonizer's identity. Apparently, colonialism brings together two cultures, leading to the formation of hybrid identities. Both the colonized and the colonizer derive from this hybridity. Unlike Edward Said, who stressed binary structures like East-West or oppressive-oppressed, Bhabha highlights bilateral identities, emphasizing mixed, uncertain, ambiguous, ambivalent, and slippery identities. Bhabha aims to reveal concerns in colonial narratives (Hiddleston, 114).<sup>19</sup> Inspired by Foucault's

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17 Bhabha, H. K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

18 Carter, D. *Literary Theory*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2006.

19 Hiddleston, J. *Understanding Post-Colonialism*. Stocksfield: Acumen, 2009.

explanation of discourse, Bhabha also follows Sigmund Freud and Fanon's psychoanalytic studies (McLeod, 52).<sup>20</sup>

According to Bhabha, "colonial 'otherness' on the black man's body creates an identity crisis." One significant issue for Bhabha in understanding colonial discourse is the stereotype, which arises from the continuous repetition of concepts that colonizers produce to represent the colonized (Hiddleston, 117). Thus, colonial discourse requires fixity to identify and know the other. Bhabha construes the notion of fixity as an essential characteristic of colonial discourse: An essential aspect of colonial discourse is its reliance on the concept of 'fixity' in constructing otherness ideologically. Fixity, as a marker of cultural, historical, and racial difference in colonial discourse, represents a paradoxical mode of representation. It implies rigidity and an unchanging order, as well as disorder, degeneracy, and repetitive daemonic imagery (Bhabha, 77).<sup>21</sup>

One significant aim of the colonizer is to shape the colonized people to resemble themselves. However, this transformation is intended to improve and reform the colonized, which ultimately frightens the colonizer. There are contradictions in the colonizer's behavior: they want the colonized to become more like them—whiter and more Christian—yet simultaneously want them to retain their exotic culture and primitive lifestyle. By adhering to their traditional style and behaviors, the colonized subjects are perceived as more acceptable and manageable. In contrast, the modernized native type is no longer stagnant, passive, or immobile (Nayar, 8).<sup>22</sup> McLeod emphasizes that Said's Western representations are based on fantasy, desire, and dreams, while Bhabha suggests that these fantasies are replaced by fear (McLeod, 53). Like Said, Bhabha argues that colonization establishes a system of representation to realize its ideas about other people and lands. However, Bhabha contends that the goal of colonial discourse will never be fully realized. According to Bhabha's notion of ambivalence, the colonized are not strictly opposed to the colonizer. Bhabha explains the purpose of colonial discourse as follows: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of deteriorated types based on racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to build systems of management and instruction" (Bhabha, 23).<sup>23</sup> In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha redefines major postcolonial concepts in many of his essays. This work summarizes critical postcolonial concepts, and additional subordinate concepts are introduced as needed.

20 McLeod, J. *Beginning Post-colonialism*. Manchester: University Press, 2000.

21 Bhabha, H. K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

22 Nayar, P. K. *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

23 Bhabha, H. K. "The Other Question Screen". *The Oxford Journals*, 24/6 (1983): 18-36.

## THE POSITION OF *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH* IN THE WORLD LITERARY CANON

Tayeb Salih, the brilliant Sudanese novelist, was a prominent figure among Arab writers due to his hybrid cultural identity, blending both Oriental and Western impacts.<sup>24</sup> He studied at the University of Khartoum before moving to London in 1952, where he lived for a long time. This move significantly enhanced his creativity in writing and thinking. Salih married a Scottish woman named Julia, and critics considered his marriage a notable part of his life.<sup>25</sup> His lifestyle manifests his rejection of cultural purity and fixed identity, as he lived with dual languages and a hybrid identity. Salih's experiences and hybrid identity are evident in his literary works. He spent most of his life in England and died there, despite oscillating between England and Sudan (Elad, 2007).<sup>26</sup> His phenomenal Arabic novel *Mawsem Al Hijra Ela Al Shamal*, published in Arabic in 1966 and translated into *Season of Migration to the North* in 1969 by Denys Johnson-Davies garnered significant success among both eastern and western literary critics. According to many critics, the novel represents the political view of the conflict between two cultures (Friedman, 2006).<sup>27</sup> Translated into more than thirty languages and widely taught in a huge number of universities worldwide, *Season of Migration to the North* was one of the best novels of its time.

*Season of Migration to the North* is arguably the most widely read Arabic novel in English translation. As one of the best-known Arabic works, it stands as a classic postcolonial narrative addressing both the British colonization of Sudan and the enduring legacy of British rule. The novel engages in a direct dialogue with British literature and is often portrayed as a rejoinder to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Moreover, *Season of Migration to the North* is a sophisticated literary piece that shares many similarities with European modernism, even as it challenges those traditions. Notably, Salih's novel has numerous connections with the works of James Joyce, who is perhaps the greatest of all European modernists and a postcolonial writer in his own right.

Sudan has historically faced significant postcolonial challenges, including coups and civil wars. In the West, it is often perceived as a land plagued by famine, war, human-rights abuses, and general misery and backwardness. Despite this, Sudan

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24 Stampfl, T. (*Im*) possible encounters, possible (*Mis*) understandings between the West and Its other: *The case of the Maghreb* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation). Louisiana State University, 2009.

25 Ibid.

26 Elad, A. *Voices of Exiles: A Study of Al-Tayyib Salih and His Work* (Vol. 22). London: Oxford University Press, 2007.

27 Friedman, S. Periodizing modernism: Postcolonial modernities and space/time borders of modernist studies. *Modernism/modernity*, 13((2006)): 425-443.

has largely remained on the periphery of modernizing trends within Arab culture. However, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* stands out as one of the most widely admired novels written in Arabic. In 2001, a panel of Arab writers and critics named it the most important Arab novel of the twentieth century. The English translation, done by Denys Johnson-Davies in consultation with the author, is likely the most well-known and widely read English translation of an Arabic novel. This popularity is partly due to the novel's frequent inclusion in American and British university curricula. One practical reason for its popularity is its brevity. More importantly, the novel is often viewed as a counter-text to Western Orientalist or colonialist literature, making it a valuable resource for comparative and critical discussions.

The novel features a dual narrative, presenting two distinct worlds with their own perceptions and judgments. It centers on the theme of return, beginning with the unnamed narrator's journey back to his homeland after seven years of studying in England. He returns to his small native village, Wad Hamid, in Sudan, where he recognizes almost everyone due to the village's small size. However, he does not recognize a nearly 50-year-old man who piques his interest. This stranger, Saeed, had arrived in the village five years earlier. The narrator is curious about Saeed's past in the West, but Saeed is reluctant to share his experiences. The narrator becomes intrigued by Saeed's personality and starts to question his past, especially after hearing him recite poetry in fluent English at an evening party. Reluctantly, Saeed reveals his story: born in Khartoum, Sudan, he grew up without a father and had a strained relationship with his quiet mother. After completing elementary school, he moved to Cairo for high school without informing his family and later went to London to study economics with the help of his British teacher.

At the age of 24, Saeed became a lecturer in economics at the University of London. During his nearly 30-year stay in London, he had relationships with many Englishwomen, seducing them and eventually causing harm to them. He had love affairs with Ann Hammond, Sheila Greenwood, and Isabella Seymour, all of whom committed suicide. Saeed married a British woman, Jean Morris, but killed her shortly after their wedding due to bizarre erotic fantasies. He spent seven years in a British prison before returning to Sudan, where he remarried and led a quiet life as a father of two. Saeed lived in a house near the Nile River with his Sudanese wife, Hosna, and their two sons. He asked the narrator to take care of his family in the case of his death. Shortly after sharing his story and giving the narrator the key to his secret library, Saeed mysteriously disappeared during a flood and likely committed suicide in the Nile. As Saeed's trustee, the narrator managed his affairs after his drowning. Later, the narrator moved to Khartoum to work as a civil servant. During a visit to the village, he learned that Saeed's widow was pressured to marry an elderly man. She eventually married him but then killed her new husband and committed suicide.

## THE PROTAGONIST, THE NARRATOR AND THE WEST

The novel vividly portrays the sense of diaspora and the struggle of balancing and losing identity through Saeed's interactions with the West. His inner world becomes morally and spiritually fractured. Although Saeed adopts European culture, he fails to fully integrate and, in the process, disconnects from his origins and roots. This duality leaves him in a state of cultural and personal limbo, highlighting the profound impact of colonialism on individual identity and the challenges of navigating between different worlds.<sup>28</sup> Saeed's predicament as a migrant is marked by a deep-seated dilemma: he is unable to fully settle either in the West or in his homeland, where he feels isolated. The villagers regard him as a stranger or someone from another world, leading Saeed to live in a state of misery, caught between two different worlds. This sense of being lost and disconnected underscores the profound challenges faced by individuals navigating the complexities of identity and belonging in a postcolonial context.

The narrator's observations highlight his admiration for the positive aspects of tribal and village life, which are marked by warmth, ease, and simplicity. He notices that his father continues to recite the Quran and perform his prayers, while his mother serves the family and brings them tea each morning. Similarly, the narrator's grandfather symbolizes the humble and uncomplicated life that existed before the occupation of Sudan, a time when complexities and challenges were absent. This nostalgic appreciation underscores the contrast between the simple, traditional life of the village and the more tumultuous experiences shaped by colonialism and modernity.<sup>29</sup> Saeed, like the narrator, lives in the West for his studies and experiences European culture. In other words, Saeed, the protagonist, shares a similar experience with the narrator, as they both live in Europe. However, the narrator begins to observe that Saeed embodies the standards of Western innovation and radicalism, which starkly contrast with the villagers' values. When the narrator tries to convey that Europeans are, to a large extent, similar to Orientals, Saeed remains calm and speechless. The narrator's message to people in the East, particularly the youth, is that Europeans are like them, with both good and bad within their community—"over there is like here, neither better nor worse." (Salih, 49).<sup>30</sup>

Saeed remains silent because he understands the truth behind the narrator's words. He possesses a deeper understanding of Western life but holds a different perspective on Europeans. Saeed refrains from sharing everything about Europeans,

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28 Hassan, W. S. *Tayeb Salih: Ideology and the Craft of Fiction*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003.

29 Ibid, p. 39.

30 All quotations are cited from the following version of the novel: Salih, Tayeb. *Season of migration to the north*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies. London: Heinemann, 1969.

fearing he might be misunderstood, particularly by his Sudanese companion Mahjoub, who voices views that challenge Saeed's narrative about the West. Though wise and smart, Mahjoub may not grasp why the colonizers are ordinary individuals like them, despite imposing a culture that does not suit their community and religion. The colonizers assaulted his country and misrepresented the Arab image to justify their colonial project. In a related context, the narrator's grandfather symbolizes the humble and simple life before the occupation of Sudan, a life without complexities, difficulties, or problems. According to Saeed, all complexities and challenges of life are brought by the colonizers. The narrator sees his grandfather as "something immutable in a dynamic world." (Salih, 50). As Saeed recounts his life in Britain, the narrator becomes acutely aware of the stark differences between Western and Eastern cultures. This realization leads to feelings of depression and fear, as Saeed's stories challenge his hope for a stable life free from the shadows of colonialism. The narrator's anxiety reflects the broader struggle of reconciling cultural identities and the lingering impacts of colonial history.

## **SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH AS A POST-COLONIAL NARRATIVE**

The emergence of postcolonial writing is one of the most exciting features of English literature written in previously colonized societies (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2003).<sup>31</sup> It is an area of research interest with a variety of theoretical thoughts, notions, predicaments, and debates evident in various research articles, essays, and books worldwide according to Ashcroft and others. The Arab world experienced colonial presence from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire until Arab countries like Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Morocco gained independence after World War II (Ferro, 2005).<sup>32</sup> As a result, various literary works, including Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, emerged featuring characters that resisted colonization through their identities. Salih employs imagery and symbolism to „write back“ and challenge European dominance. His narrative depicts identity as fluid, unstable, and caught between two opposing cultures. The protagonist, Saeed, suffers from a deep identity crisis, which tears him apart. Through characters that mirror real-life struggles, Salih reflects his personal conflict over identity. An analysis of *Season of Migration to the North* demonstrates how European influence shapes the cultural identity of Easterners, emphasizing the gap between the Orient and the Occident. This colonial influence results in an identity

31 Ashcroft, B. et al. *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literature*. London: Routledge, 2003

32 Ferro, M. *Colonization: A global history*. London: Routledge, 2005.

crisis within colonized societies, making it difficult to determine one's identity. The incidents of Salih's narrative illustrate that the struggle between Eastern and Western identities continues and will persist as long as the West maintains control over the East. In the postcolonial context, identity is a complex and elusive concept (Dizayi, 2015).<sup>33</sup> Unequivocally, an identity crisis is prevalent in all post-colonial societies and remains one of the most debated and controversial issues of the postcolonial era.

This crisis stems from the difficulty colonized nations face in defining their cultural identity and social structure as newly independent states. As each nation endeavors to explore and redefine its self-identity while rejecting the attributes of the colonizer, an identity crisis emerges (Gunew, 1997).<sup>34</sup> A close examination of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* uncovers the oriental/occidental divide through its intricate narrative structures and frequent use of flashbacks. The novel explores the impact of European colonization on colonized people highlighting how the cultural identities of colonized nations are assimilated into the dominant colonial center. The identity conflict between the Orient and the Occident is at the core of Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. The events of the novel uncovers a destructive identity crisis, given its significance to both the author and the text. Salih's narrative spans two distinct eras-colonization and post-colonialism and two diverse cultures, East and West, in Sudan and Britain, respectively.

Another significant aspect of postcolonial identity is "modernism," which is marked by the colonial education systems implemented in colonized nations. This form of modernism often reflects the imposition of colonial values and ideologies onto the educational and cultural framework of the colonized societies, shaping their identities in complex ways. Kelly and Altbach<sup>35</sup> emphasize that colonial education systems were primarily established to benefit the colonizing powers. This type of education profoundly influenced indigenous identities, particularly through language, culture, and religion, continually raising identity-related issues. Culture plays a crucial role in defining and shaping one's identity. In Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, the significance of cultural differences is underscored in matters of identity.

The quest for identity stands as a pivotal theme in Arabic novels. Throughout the struggle for independence, Arab intellectuals were motivated by a deep need

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33 Dizayi, S. A. H. The crisis of identity in post-colonial novel, In *2nd International Conference on Education and Social Sciences, Proceedings of INTCESS15*, 2015.

34 Gunew, S. Post-colonialism and multiculturalism: Between race and ethnicity. In *the Yearbook of English Studies*. Colombia: University of British Colombia, 1997: 22-39.

35 Kelly, G. and Altbach, P. Introduction. In P. Altbach and G. Kelly, Eds. *Education and colonialism*. New York: Longman, 1978. PP. 1-49

to define themselves in relation to others. This desire to establish a distinct cultural and personal identity is a recurring theme that reflects the broader social and political changes of the time. Arab authors, through their literary works, aimed to explore and articulate the complexities of identity amidst the challenges posed by colonialism and the push for self-determination (Al-Musawi, 2003).<sup>36</sup> Imperialism has a profound impact on oriental identity, making postcolonial identity unstable following the decolonization of oriental states. In Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, cultural differences contribute to an identity crisis. The colonizer's mockery of Saeed's wearing of a turban exemplifies the tension and ridicule faced by the colonized, further highlighting the struggles to maintain and assert one's cultural identity amidst the dominating influence of the colonizers. This clash between identities underscores the complex interplay of cultural and social dynamics in a postcolonial context: "This isn't a turban, he said. It is a hat... When you grow up, the man said, and leave school and become an official in the government, you'll wear a hat like this". In this context, Salih laments the displacement of the Islamic "turban" with the colonizer's "hat." (Salih, 20).

A key theme in post-colonialism is „writing back,“ which denotes a form of resistance through the medium of the novel. This concept involves authors from previously colonized nations using their writing to challenge and critique the narratives imposed by colonial powers. By reinterpreting historical events, cultural identities, and social structures, these writers seek to reclaim their voices and assert their perspectives, often addressing the lingering impacts of colonization. This literary form of resistance serves to deconstruct the dominant colonial discourse and highlight the complexities of postcolonial identity and experience (Widdowson, 2006).<sup>37</sup> In *Season of Migration to the North*, Salih depicts the detrimental impact of Western culture on Sudanese culture, portraying the clash between British and Sudanese cultures specifically, and Oriental culture more broadly. Saeed's interracial relationships are presented as a form of opposing discourse between Arab and British cultures. In these relationships, Saeed uses colonial discourse to maintain colonial categorizations, viewing his lovers as representatives of the oppressive West. His acts of revenge against and rejection of his European lovers can be interpreted as a symbolic repudiation of the West. This narrative approach highlights the complexities and tensions in postcolonial identity and the ongoing struggle against colonial influence.

Upon returning to his country, the unnamed narrator's deep affection for his homeland becomes clear. Despite gaining extensive knowledge about Western culture and traditions during his seven years of study in Europe, he chooses to

36 Al-Musawi, M. J. *The postcolonial Arabic novel: Debating ambivalence*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

37 Widdowson, P. 'Writing back': contemporary re-visionary fiction. *Textual Practice*, 20/3 (2006): 491-507.

express his love for his people instead. The narrator experiences immense joy in living in his homeland once again “after a long absence of seven years during his study period in Europe” (Salih, 1). While in Europe, he “longed for them [the villagers], had dreamed of them, and it was an extraordinary moment when [he] at last found [him] self-standing amongst them” (p. 14). His life in Europe was different- a place where the colonizer resides, “a land whose fishes die of the cold” (p. 14). He appreciates the “life warmth of the tribe” (Salih, 14) and “felt not like a storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with background, with roots, with a purpose” (Salih, 14).

According to various critics, Tayeb Salih’s novel *Season of Migration to the North* navigates themes of exile, loss of identity, displacement, alienation, and estrangement within both the homeland and the European diaspora. Originally published in Arabic in 1966, the novel is approached by critics as a post-colonial reinterpretation of Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness*. In this respect, numerous canonical texts in Western literary discourse have inspired a range of rewritings, adaptations, appropriations, or deconstructions from postcolonial, postmodernist, and feminist perspectives. Post-colonial and feminist practices in textual and cultural studies often begin by probing the gaps and silences within dominant narratives, giving a voice to the marginalized and previously unheard. These post-colonial rewritings not only fill these gaps but also present a more nuanced and complex picture, offering new perspectives that have been overlooked in the Western canon. In postcolonial literature, authors such as Salih challenge central narratives as a means of liberating themselves from colonial domination in language, history, and text. To achieve this, postcolonial writers engage in canonical counter-discourse, rewriting master narratives to dismantle the dominant narrative of the English Empire.

Thematically, Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* dives deep into the colonial historical context of Europe’s fascination with Africa often referred to as the “Dark Continent.” Salih skillfully intertwines significant events in European colonialism in the Arab world and Sudan with the protagonist Saeed’s life. Some of these major events include the Battle of Omdurman, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Darfur Declaration.<sup>38</sup> These connections illuminate the broader historical landscape and personal impacts of colonialism, adding layers of meaning to the narrative. Saeed, the protagonist, shares similarities with Kurtz from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. The narrative centers on Saeed’s character and his distinctive form of retaliation against the colonizers. As a Sudanese man, Saeed enters into sexual relationships with four British women-Ann Hammond, Sheila Greenwood, Isabella Seymour, and Jean Morris-who are metaphorically depicted as daughters of Queen Victoria. Through Saeed, Salih depicts a mission to

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38 Salih, Tayeb. *Season of migration to the north*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies. London: Heinemann, 1969.

infiltrate English homes and seek revenge for the British exploitation of Sudan. Saree S. Makdisi highlights that Salih's book serves as an example of a narrative that "writes back to the colonial power" that once ruled Sudan (Makdisi, 805).<sup>39</sup>

There are clear parallels between Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, particularly in the characters of Kurtz and Saeed, as well as Marlow and the unnamed narrator. Both novels dealt with themes of colonial violence and exploitation. In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz is depicted as a ruthless white man exploiting Africa under the pretext of a civilizing mission. In contrast, Saeed, a black Sudanese man, engages in sexual relationships with British women as a form of retaliation for England's exploitation of Sudan. His mission is to infiltrate English Victorian homes and seek vengeance. Both novels also feature doubles: Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and the nameless narrator in *Season of Migration to the North*, who offer alternative perspectives on the central figures.

Edward Said highlights this symmetrical parallel in *Culture and Imperialism*. In his novel, Salih transforms Kurtz's journey into the heart of darkness into Saeed's migration from the Sudanese countryside, burdened by its colonial past, to the heart of Europe. Saeed, like Kurtz, inflicts ritual violence on himself and European women. This migration culminates in the protagonist's return to his native village and his eventual suicide. Salih's mimetic reversals of Conrad are evident, even in the representation and distortion of Kurtz's skull-topped fence, which is mirrored by the inventory of European books in the secret library of Mustafa Saeed (Said, 271).<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the novel's distinctive narrative technique demonstrates the author's effort to employ a strategy that creates a polyphony of voices, presenting multiple perspectives on critical issues related to the connections between the colonized and the colonizer. The story unfolds in both England and a small village in Sudan. After an extended period in England for his studies, the narrator returns to his native village. He relishes the reunion with his family and the comfort of re-discovering his homeland, which, in stark contrast to Europe, provides him with a profound sense of security and meaning. After several months of joy in the countryside, the narrator meets Saeed, a newly arrived and mysterious character in the village. Saeed's presence stirs up a mixture of respect, suspicion, and fear among the villagers. One evening, Saeed shares his story with the narrator, recounting his experiences and adventures in England. The narrator's role is pivotal in conveying the dramatic nature of Saeed's life to the readers. The narrative also occasionally takes the readers into the lives of other characters (the villagers), portraying their simple and spontaneous existence (Natij, 3).<sup>41</sup>

39 Makdisi, Saree S. "The Empire Re-narrated: 'Season of Migration to the North' and the Reinvention of the Present." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 4, (1992): 804–820.

40 Said, E. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

41 Natij, Salah. Narrative polyphony and perspective effects in Tayeb Sâlih's *Season of Migration to the North*. *International Journal of Language Academy*, 10 (2022): 1–18.

The author narrates Saeed's adventures in England through flashback sequences. While a summary of the intricate world of *Season of Migration to the North* may suggest that Saeed is the primary character, the novel's true richness lies in its exploration of multiple characters and perspectives, creating a multifaceted and deeply engaging narrative. Through Saeed's story, readers learn that after completing primary education in Sudan, he pursued secondary education in Cairo and higher studies in England. In England, Saeed excelled academically, engaged in London's intellectual life, and had several romantic relationships. Tragically, four of these relationships ended disastrously, and Saeed spent seven years in prison for killing his British wife, Jean Morris. Upon returning to Sudan, he settled in a small village, living as a simple peasant, marrying, and integrating with the villagers. It is in this village that he meets the narrator, who recounts Saeed's entire story.

## **THE POST-COLONIAL AND MODERNIST INTERFACES OF *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH***

It is no wonder that many critics consider *Season of Migration to the North* a modernist text. Susan Stanford Friedman, for instance, describes it as a quintessential example of “postcolonial” modernism “within the canon of twentieth-century modernisms.” Salih’s innovative narrative technique, thematic depth, and exploration of identity and power dynamics contribute to its recognition as a significant work within the modernist literary tradition. (Friedman, 435).<sup>42</sup> Friedman explores the connections between *Season of Migration to the North* and *Heart of Darkness*. She asserts that Salih’s novel is more modernist, describing it as “a narrative of indeterminacy, of mysteries, lies, and truths; of mediating events through the perspectives of multiple narrators, of complex tapestries of interlocking motifs and symbols; and of pervasive irony,” even surpassing Conrad’s work in these aspects. Salih’s novel masterfully weaves together these elements to create a richly layered and multifaceted narrative. (Friedman, 435).

Stylistically, Friedman regards Salih’s novel as “high modernist,” noting that it diverges even further from the conventions of realism than Conrad’s work. This departure from traditional narrative techniques enhances the novel’s exploration of complex themes and perspectives, solidifying its place within the modernist literary canon (Friedman, 436). Likewise, Saree Makdisi identifies *Season of Migration to the North* as a prime example of “Arab modernism.” However, Makdisi cautions that this does not imply that Arab modernism merely repeats earlier European modernism. Instead, there are parallels between these two political-cultural movements,

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42 Friedman, S. S. Periodizing modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the space/time borders of modernist studies. *Modernism/Modernity* 13/3 (2006): 425–443.

highlighting both continuities and discontinuities in their radically different experiences of modernity as a crisis. These experiences are shaped and mediated through the violent dialogical process of imperialism itself (Makdisi, 105).<sup>43</sup>

According to Makdisi, *Season of Migration to the North* and other Arab modernist texts necessitate a rethinking of modernity—not as a future goal for the Arab world, but as a reality that has already taken hold. However, due to the profound impacts of colonialism and neo-colonialism, Arab modernity has emerged in a distinct manner from European modernity and must be comprehended within its unique context and terms. This perspective emphasizes the importance of recognizing the specific historical and cultural experiences that have shaped Arab modernity (Makdisi 1995: 105). Nevertheless, the engagement of *Season of Migration to the North* with colonialism and post-colonialism does not necessarily distinguish it from European modernist texts. *Heart of Darkness* is the most obvious example, but E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* also comes to mind. Additionally, Joyce's *Ulysses*, often regarded as the central text of modernist fiction, was written by a colonial subject of the British Empire, and British colonial domination of Ireland is a crucial topic in *Ulysses*. This highlights that the themes of colonialism and post-colonialism have been integral to the broader modernist movement, connecting works across different cultural contexts.

Additionally, *Season of Migration to the North* is a sophisticated text that aligns with the thematic concerns and aesthetic strategies of Western literary modernism. This alignment makes its literary merit easily recognizable to Western readers, bridging cultural divides and highlighting its universal relevance and artistic value (Booker and Daraiseh 2018: 52).<sup>44</sup> Though Sudan has not been a central topic in Western discussions of postcolonial literature, *Season of Migration to the North* is widely regarded as a classic postcolonial novel. It explores the encounter between England and Sudan, particularly through the story of Saeed, a young Sudanese man who travels to London to complete his education and then pursues an academic career as an economist. However, his career is derailed when he kills his white English wife, Jean Morris, one of several self-destructive white women with whom he has sexual liaisons, ultimately leading to their ruin. This narrative highlights the complex and often destructive impacts of colonial encounters on individual lives and identities.

Most critics interpret Saeed's interactions with English women as a form of postcolonial revenge for the damage inflicted on Sudan by England during the period of British colonial domination (1898–1956). While the book's narrator

43 Makdisi, S. "Postcolonial" literature in a neocolonial world: Modern Arabic culture and the end of modernity." *boundary 2*, (22)1(1995): 85–115.

44 Booker M. Keith and Daraiseh Isra. "Tayeb Salih and Modernism's *Season of Migration to the North*". *IAFOR Journal of Arts & Humanities* V. 5, Issue 2- Autumn (2018): 51-67.

(and presumably, its author) acknowledges the harm colonialism caused to Sudan, he adopts a dialectical approach, recognizing that the British also introduced certain modernizing influences that ultimately had positive effects. Notable examples include the water pumps that make irrigation from the Nile easier for local farmers and the schools established in the region. Saeed's self-motivated enrollment in one of these schools, despite lacking parental encouragement, exemplifies these positive influences. His father died before his birth, and his mother showed little interest in him. Saeed reveals to the narrator that many Sudanese families at the time were staunchly opposed to having their children attend British schools, viewing them as a "great evil" that threatened their traditional way of life as much as the "occupying armies" that introduced them (Salih, 1969, 20).

Saeed is a brilliant student who finds academia to be his natural environment, despite it being an aspect of British domination in Sudan. His life is deeply intertwined with British colonialism from birth. Effective British colonial rule of Sudan began after the Battle of Omdurman on September 2, 1898,<sup>45</sup> just two weeks after Saeed's birth in Khartoum. Saeed grows up as a colonial subject, living under the shadow of Sudan's colonization. At one point, the narrator learns from a man on a train that Saeed's family belonged to a tribe that provided guides for the British forces led by Herbert Kitchener in recapturing Khartoum and the rest of Sudan from Mahdist rebels in 1885. This historical connection further emphasizes the complexities and layered experiences of colonization depicted in the novel (Salih, 54). The same man informs the narrator that Saeed, as a young boy, began his education as a star pupil at Gordon Memorial College (Salih, 52) named after the British colonial general Charles George Gordon, who was killed during the fall of Khartoum to the rebels in 1885. This institution was opened by Herbert Kitchener in 1902 to commemorate Gordon.

Saeed's exceptional academic abilities soon surpass the capacity of Gordon College, prompting his move to Cairo and eventually to London, advancing deeper into the heart of British hegemony with each educational milestone. He becomes the first Sudanese to win a scholarship to study in England and later the first Sudanese to marry a white Englishwoman. Saeed ultimately earns a doctorate in economics and becomes a successful academic, authoring books with clearly anti-colonial titles such as *The Economics of Colonialism, Colonialism and Monopoly*, *The Cross and Gunpowder*, and *The Rape of Africa* (Salih, 137). His journey reflects the complexities and contradictions of navigating colonial and postcolonial identities, highlighting the personal and societal impacts of these broader historical

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45 The Battle of Omdurman, (September 2, 1898), was a decisive military engagement in which Anglo-Egyptian forces, under Maj. Gen. Herbert Kitchener (later Lord Kitchener), defeated the forces of the Mahdist leader 'Abd Allāh and thereby won Sudanese territory that the Mahdists had dominated since 1881.

forces. The narrative underscores Saeed's internal and external struggles as he attempts to reconcile his cultural heritage with the influences and challenges of Western education and society.

Saeed is depicted as a product of the historical forces of his time, similar to the "typical" characters Georg Lukács describes in the works of the great European realist writer like Balzac. According to Lukács, such characterization helps realist writers capture the process of historical change in a rapidly modernizing Europe. The same can be said of Salih, though while Lukács's notion of typification has an allegorical dimension, Saeed's characterization is more overtly allegorical than that of Balzac's famous characters. Saeed's character is so deeply intertwined with the colonial history of Sudan that it immediately brings to mind Fredric Jameson's controversial argument that all "third-world" literary narratives can be read as "national allegories." Jameson argues that "all third-world texts are necessarily allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel." This perspective underscores the deep connection between individual narratives and broader national histories in postcolonial literature (Jameson, 86).<sup>46</sup>

In essence, Jameson concludes that third-world texts inherently possess a political dimension in the form of national allegory. The personal story of an individual is always representative of the challenging situation faced by the public third-world culture and society (Jameson, 86). Jameson's argument hinges on the premise that, in the "third world" or postcolonial context, public and private experiences remain organically and directly connected in ways that have been lost in the West. In other words, he asserts that contemporary postcolonial texts maintain a connection between personal experience and political history, akin to what was present in the high realist European texts of authors like Balzac.

Saeed, by contrast, is profoundly disconnected from his roots in Sudan, lacking any genuine connection to his homeland. He can be interpreted as a national allegory, but in a way that diverges from Jameson's perspective: Saeed represents the breakdown of the link between private individuals and public communities in the colonial and postcolonial context. In contrast, the narrator serves as an allegorical figure who maintains stronger ties to Sudan despite his Western education, and his experience more accurately reflects that of the Sudanese nation. To fully appreciate the allegorical characterization of Saeed and the narrator, one can view them as different, dialectically interrelated aspects of the same character. This portrayal underscores both the importance of community in Sudanese society and the embattled nature of that community under the influence of colonialism.

46 Jameson F. *Post-modernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991.

In another example of the dialectical approach to colonialism in *Season of Migration to the North*, the narrator recounts an overheard exchange between a young Sudanese university lecturer and an Englishman named Richard, who is employed in the postcolonial Sudanese Ministry of Finance. This interaction further illustrates the complex and nuanced perspectives on colonialism and post-colonialism that Salih presents through the characters and their experiences. The Sudanese lecturer declares, “You transmitted to us the disease of your capitalist economy. What did you give us except a handful of capitalist companies that drew off our blood – and still do?” The Englishman then responds, “All this shows is that you cannot manage to live without us. You used to complain about colonialism and when we left you created the legend of neo-colonialism” (Salih, 59). For his own part, the narrator delivers an ambivalent judgment on the matter: “The white man, merely because he ruled us for a period of our history, will for a time continue to have for us that feeling of contempt the strong have for the weak.” Noting that Saeed reversed this power dynamic by coming to England as a “conqueror,” he concludes that “their own coming too was not a tragedy as we imagine, nor yet a blessing as they imagine” (Salih, 60).

In *Season of Migration to the North*, Salih’s narrator offers a dialectical perspective on colonialism through an overheard conversation between a young Sudanese university lecturer and an Englishman named Richard, who works for the post-colonial Sudanese Ministry of Finance. The Sudanese lecturer accuses Richard of spreading the “disease” of capitalist economy to Sudan, highlighting the complex and contentious relationship between the two cultures in the postcolonial era: “What did you give us except a handful of capitalist companies that drew off our blood – and still do?” In response, Richard retorts, “All this shows is that you cannot manage to live without us. You used to complain about colonialism and when we left you created the legend of neo-colonialism” (Salih, 61). The narrator offers an ambivalent judgment on the matter: “The white man, merely because he ruled us for a period of our history, will for a time continue to have for us that feeling of contempt the strong have for the weak.” He observes that Saeed reversed this power dynamic by coming to England as a “conqueror,” and concludes that “their own coming too was not a tragedy as we imagine, nor yet a blessing as they imagine” (Salih, 62).

Moreover, the political commentary in *Season of Migration to the North* targets both the colonial and postcolonial periods in Sudan. The text comments on Sudan’s postcolonial stagnation in a manner reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon argues that decolonization was only the initial step toward true liberation, cautioning that no genuine freedom could be attained in postcolonial African nations if they merely substituted the former European colonial bourgeoisie with an indigenous African bourgeoisie, while preserving the

basic class structure of the society.<sup>47</sup> Apparently, Fanon asserts that the African bourgeoisie might be even worse than their European predecessors, as they are mere imitators of their Western masters, who had already become decadent by the late nineteenth century, during the full-scale colonization of Africa. According to Fanon, the African bourgeoisie follows the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence without ever having experienced its earlier phases of exploration and invention. This argument highlights the challenges and pitfalls of postcolonial societies trying to navigate their own paths while grappling with the lingering influences of colonial power structures.

The many echoes of Fanon in *Season of Migration to the North* are likely intentional. Salih identifies Fanon as a significant influence on his work, along with Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. Notably, he emphasizes Fanon's pioneering theorization of the emasculating effects of colonialism on colonized men, a motif highly relevant to *Season of Migration*. Fanon argues that the African bourgeoisie may be even worse than their European predecessors because they are merely imitating their Western masters, who had already become decadent by the time they fully colonized Africa in the late nineteenth century. This imitation fails to capture the initial stages of exploration and invention that characterized the Western bourgeoisie, leading to a sense of decadence and senility in the African bourgeoisie before it has even experienced the vitality and ambition of youth.

This influence is evident in Salih's nuanced exploration of the complexities and psychological impacts of colonialism on individuals and societies. Fanon argues that the African bourgeoisie mirrors the Western bourgeoisie in its path of negation and decadence without having experienced the initial stages of exploration and invention. As a result, it is already senile before it has known the petulance, fearlessness, or will to succeed that characterize youth (Fanon, 153). In *Season of Migration to the North*, Salih criticizes the decadent behavior of the postcolonial African bourgeoisie. This critique is nuanced because it is presented through the narrator, a European-educated member of that bourgeois class who works as a civil servant in postcolonial Khartoum. Despite his position, the narrator ironically acknowledges the corruption and decadence of his own postcolonial ruling class. This self-awareness adds depth to the critique, highlighting the complexities and contradictions within the postcolonial society.

During a visit to his native village of Wad Hamid, the narrator responds to his old friend Mahjoub's complaints about the new ruling class being disconnected from the real problems of post-colonial Sudan. He shares his experience of attending a conference with post-colonial rulers from all over Africa, highlighting the widespread challenges and disconnection faced by the new leadership in addressing the needs of their people. This interaction underscores the broader issues

47 Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1961.

of governance and societal change in the post-colonial era, as well as the narrator's recognition of the complexities and shortcomings of the new ruling class. These men are described as: "Smooth of face, lupine of mouth, their hands gleaming with rings of precious stones, exuding perfume from their cheeks, in white, blue, black and green suits of fine mohair and expensive silk rippling on their shoulders like the fur of Siamese cats" (Salih, 118).

The narrator then elaborates on the extravagant lifestyle of the post-colonial bourgeoisie. They emulate their former European masters by constructing grand edifices (designed in London and built with marble imported from Italy) to host their conferences. In these gatherings, they aim to impress each other with their opulence while neglecting the poverty faced by the people. The typical postcolonial African leader merely pays lip service to addressing the issue of bourgeois decadence among the populace, highlighting the disconnect between the ruling class and the real problems of postcolonial African societies. However, they escape during the summer months to their villas on Lake Lucerne, while their wives shop at Harrods in London, with the items flown to them in private planes (Salih, 120). The narrator concludes that "such people are concerned only with their stomachs and their sensual pleasures" (Salih, 121).

Crucially, while the narrator astutely identifies the decadence of the postcolonial bourgeoisie in Sudan and beyond, he does nothing to address the situation, asserting that he is just a lowly functionary without real power to enact change. This resignation highlights the challenges and complexities faced by individuals within entrenched systems of power and the difficulties of effecting meaningful change in postcolonial contexts (Salih, 122). This inaction is characteristic of the narrator throughout the text, most notably in his failure to prevent the forced marriage of Saeed's widow Hosna to the elderly Wad Rayyes. This inappropriate match leads to the violent deaths of both partners. Salih subtly implies that the troubles of post-colonial Africa stem not only from the corruption of leaders but also from the inaction of those who recognize this corruption yet choose the more comfortable option of silence and inaction, all while benefiting from the corrupt system. This critique emphasizes the importance of accountability and active engagement in addressing societal issues.

## **THE MUTUAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH* AND OTHER NOVELS**

Salih's engagement with issues related to colonialism and post-colonialism mirrors themes found in many other colonial and postcolonial novels. One of Salih's key predecessors is René Maran, the French Guyanese writer. His autobiographical novel *A Man like Others* provides significant material for Fanon's discussion

of the sexual dynamics between black men and white women in the third chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Maran's novel tells the story of Jean Veneuse, a black intellectual from the French Antilles who comes to France at a young age and receives his education there. Alienated from his white fellow students, Jean takes refuge in the world of books and becomes a successful scholar. However, his French upbringing and education alienate him from his colonial origins, contributing to his feelings of inferiority and insecurity. He falls in love with and wishes to marry a white French woman, pondering whether black men "tend to marry in Europe not so much out of love as for the satisfaction of being the master of a European woman." He also wonders, "whether I am attempting to revenge myself on a European woman for everything that her ancestors have inflicted on mine throughout the centuries" (qtd. in Fanon, 70).<sup>48</sup>

The parallels between Jean Veneuse and Salih's Saeed are striking and extensive, particularly in their vengeful assaults on white women and their double alienation from both their indigenous and metropolitan cultures. In England, Saeed compensates for his sense of not fitting in by exaggerating his exotic Africanness, using Orientalist stereotypes to seduce English women. He fabricates stories about his African home, at one point claiming that his house in Sudan is so close to the Nile that he can dip his fingers in the river from his bedroom window (p. 39). He burns incense and sandalwood in his London room to enhance the exotic effect (p. 31). Saeed exploits the ignorance and gullibility of the women he seduces, feeding them exotic tales that blend Arabian Desert lore with African jungle mysteries, knowing they cannot distinguish one exotic element from another. In this way, Salih dismantles Orientalist stereotyping a decade before Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

In London, Saeed constructs a seductive environment filled with exotic stereotypes. Meanwhile, in Wad Hamid, he establishes a haven of Britishness where he can unwind in bourgeois seclusion, surrounding himself with European cultural artifacts and his extensive collection of Western books, which includes "not a single Arabic book" (Salih, 137). This contrast reflects the complex and often contradictory aspects of Saeed's identity, shaped by both his Sudanese heritage and his experiences in the West. Even his copy of the Quran is an English translation, emphasizing his Westernization and estrangement from his native culture. Far from being a sophisticated hybrid who feels at home in both England and Sudan, Saeed is a radically alienated outsider who feels at home in neither.

*Season of Migration to the North* shares clear parallels with postcolonial novels of its time, as they explore Fanon's themes of postcolonial decadence and corruption. An apt comparison is *Xala*, by the Senegalese author, Ousmane Sembène, where the story of the protagonist, El Hadji, allegorizes the Third-World bourgeoisie. This class is depicted in *Xala* in a manner reminiscent of Fanon's critique. Once an

48 Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1961

anticolonial activist, El Hadji turns to a ruthless pursuit of wealth in the postcolonial era, inflicting suffering on the very poor he once advocated for. He ultimately becomes an agent of Western capital, mirroring the postcolonial bourgeoisie of Salih's Sudan. Similarly, *Season of Migration to the North* anticipates *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* a novel by the Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah in its analysis of the African postcolonial condition. Published only a year after *Season of Migration to the North*, Armah's narrative attacks the corruption of President Kwame Nkrumah's postcolonial Ghana in a Fanonian style. Armah's novel features an alienated intellectual named "Teacher," who acts as a double for the book's unnamed narrator, mirroring a key structural element of Salih's novel. Like Saeed, Teacher is an insightful thinker who understands the dynamics of colonialism in a Fanonian manner. However, similar to Saeed, he withdraws from the world and fails to heed Fanon's call for intellectuals to lead the liberation of the African people.

By portraying Saeed, the protagonist of *Season of Migration to the North*, as an intellectual who deeply analyzes colonialist economics, Salih aligns his novel with nonfictional studies of colonialism. Fanon's work is the most prominent among these, but it's also notable that the narrator discovers *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* in Saeed's private library in Wad Hamid village after his death. This book, authored by Octave Mannoni, is a groundbreaking text that was one of the first to seriously explore the psychological impact of colonialism on both the colonizer and the colonized, making it a fitting read for Saeed's scholarly pursuits. The text mirrors *Season of Migration to the North* in its focus on the psychological effects of colonialism. However, Mannoni's concept of dependency fostered in colonized subjects-as a mask for their resentment of the colonizer and their inherent sense of inferiority, existing before colonialism- positions them as anticipating conquest and desiring domination. This idea is likely objectionable to Saeed. Fanon echoes a similar objection in the fourth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he argues that any feelings of inferiority in colonized subjects result from colonialism and do not precede it. Indeed, Saeed's pursuit of English women can be seen as a direct challenge to Mannoni's assertion. Conversely, Saeed's academic and scholarly overachievement might also be interpreted as an effort to compensate for his feelings of inferiority.

## **CONCLUSION: *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH* AND *HEART OF DARKNESS***

Undoubtedly, the most frequent comparison for *Season of Migration to the North* is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a pivotal work of colonialist fiction to which Salih's novel is often viewed as a postcolonial response. The thematic juxtaposition of these texts makes sense. Conrad's story follows Marlow, a European who travels to colonial

Africa, undergoing profound experiences and becoming fascinated with Kurtz, a European intellectual who journeyed to Africa before him. Conversely, Salih's narrative centers on a Sudanese narrator, educated in England, who becomes intrigued by Saeed Saeed's story—an African who ventured to Europe before him. In essence, Salih's tale involves an African narrator embarking on a self-discovery voyage by understanding a mysterious African who travels to Britain and is corrupted into savagery, partly through exposure to indigenous culture, mirroring how Conrad's Kurtz seems to awaken his most savage impulses due to his exposure to Africa.

Thus, *Season of Migration to the North* can be viewed as a mirror image and critical inversion of *Heart of Darkness*, as many scholars have observed. Edward Said epitomizes this perspective, stating that Salih's Saeed "does (and is) the reverse of what Kurtz does (and is): the Black man journeys north into white territory" (Said, 30).<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Salih's deliberate reversal of Conrad makes the relationship between these texts quite apparent. However, this relationship is far more intricate than it initially seems. The interplay between Salih's and Conrad's works invites deeper analysis, revealing layers of complexity in their engagement with themes of colonialism, identity, and cultural interaction. This nuanced dialogue enriches our understanding of both texts and highlights the multifaceted nature of postcolonial literature.

Structurally, Salih's Saeed may appear to parallel Conrad's Kurtz, while Salih's unnamed narrator resembles Conrad's Marlow. However, both *Season of Migration to the North* and *Heart of Darkness* exhibit rhetorical complexities in their narrative voices that cannot be reduced to simple one-to-one correspondences. For instance, Marlow is not the direct narrator of *Heart of Darkness* but rather the vehicle for a nested narrative presented by another unnamed narrator. At the outset of *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow is aboard the Nellie, a cruising yawl moored in the Thames, where he recounts his journey into Africa in search of the enigmatic Kurtz to an audience of allegorical figures representing London society, identified solely by their professional roles: a Director of Companies, a Lawyer, and an Accountant. Interestingly, the actual narrator of Conrad's novel, who relays Marlow's story to us, remains entirely unidentified by either name or profession. This further complicates the already intricate rhetorical structure of this proto-modernist precursor to high modernist fiction.

Salih's rhetorical structure is both more and less enigmatic than Conrad's novel. *Season of Migration to the North* begins with the narrator addressing a completely unidentified audience: "It was, gentlemen, after a long absence – seven years to be exact, during which time I was studying in Europe – which I returned to my people" (Salih, 1). The identities of these "gentlemen" remain unspecified in the text, allowing for the possibility that he is either speaking to the novel's readers, akin to the narrator of a Western novel, or delivering an oral narrative to a live

49 Said, E. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

audience—potentially composed of village elders, similarly to Marlow's audience. As Davidson notes, “as quickly as it is aroused, this question of audience fades, for the narrator moves directly into the story he has to relate” (Davidson, 386).<sup>50</sup>

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## **V smeri novega kritičkega pristopa: Dekonstrukcija strukturnega in pripovednega diskurza v *Season of Migration to the North***

Članek v okviru sodobnih literarnih teorij raziskuje znano delo Tayeba Salih *Season of Migration to the North* in ga obravnava kot postkolonialni modernistični roman, ki preči dinamiko med Orientom in Okcidentom. Esej raziskuje roman z namenom, da bi opisal konflikte med koloniziranim in kolonizatorjem, s ciljem odkriti nove tematske smeri, ki so ključne za odnose med Afriko in Veliko Britanijo. Avtorja trdita, da Salih na novo piše in interpretira zgodovino britanskega imperija v Sudanu, tako, da se ukvarja s kanoniziranim zahodnim leposlovjem, zlasti z romanom *Srce teme* Josepha Conrada, da bi poudaril zapletena presečišča med Vzhodom in Zahodom. Kot zgled postkolonialnega arabskega modernizma uporablja roman *Season of Migration to the North* poseben pripovedni pristop z več glasovi, ki odražajo različne poglede na vprašanja, kot so kolonizacija, hegemonija, hibridnost in izguba identitete.

**Ključne besede:** pripovedne tehnike, postkolonialni diskurz, arabski modernizem, Vzhod in Zahod, kolonizirani in kolonizator, pripovedne tehnike.

# Kafka und der Habsburgische Mythos: „Eine kaiserliche Botschaft“

*Johann Georg Lughofe*

## Abstract

Claudio Magris' Konzept vom Habsburgischen Mythos war wohl das wirkmächtigste Konzept zu Spezifika der österreichischen Literatur. Bereits 1963 formulierte Magris darin ein Bündel von literarischen Motiven und thematischen Traditionen, darunter Bürokratismus, Kaiserkult, Eskapismus, Hedonismus und Todessehnsucht. Gerade was Bürokratie angeht, wird Kafka als einzigartiger Experte zitiert – insbesondere mit den Romanen *Der Prozess* (1925) und *Das Schloss* (1926), womit sich Kafka eigentlich hervorragend in den Mythos einreihen würde. Doch bezüglich des Habsburgischen Mythos wird Kafka von Magris nur marginal genannt, obwohl sich der Germanist der Bedeutung des Autors bewusst war. Die Gründe dafür sowie der erst spät erfolgte Einbettung von Kafkas Texten in die Geschichte des Habsburger Reichs werden exemplarisch an „Eine kaiserliche Botschaft“ und „Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer“ gezeigt.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Franz Kafka, Habsburgischer Mythos, Donaumonarchie, österreichische Literatur

Claudio Magris' Idee vom Habsburgischen Mythos wurde wohl das wirkmächtigste Konzept zu Spezifika der österreichischen Literatur – in nicht allzu lange vergangenen Zeiten, als man Literatur in der österreichischen Germanistik noch gerne national fassen wollte. Bereits 1963 formulierte Magris darin ein Bündel von literarischen Motiven und thematischen Traditionen, darunter Bürokratismus, Kaiserkult, Eskapismus, Hedonismus und Todesehnsucht. In der klassisch gewordenen Dissertation des damals blutjungen italienischen Germanisten wird zwar Kafka mehrfach namentlich erwähnt, aber zumeist nur in Aufzählungen, z. B. von Prager Literaten, bezüglich innerer Monologe, der Vaterverhältnisse oder des Bruchs zwischen Individualität und äußerer Welt. (Magris 1966: 176f., 204, 208 und 279) Kaum zwei Paragraphen werden ihm wirklich gewidmet, sein Œuvre darin als „Seismograph der erschöpften europäischen Agonie, deren Erschütterungen und Schwankungen sie alle verzeichnet“ (ebd. 183), genannt. Das oftmalige Name-dropping zeigt, inwiefern Magris Kafkas Bedeutung durchaus bewusst war. Doch wird Magris auch in folgenden weiteren Vorworten des mehrfach neu aufgelegten Standardwerks Kafka nicht mehr Aufmerksamkeit widmen, obwohl er sich noch spezifisch mit dem Autor auseinandersetzt (Magris 1979 und 1981) und dessen Relevanz sicher nicht verkennt. Immerhin gilt Kafka als der „wirkungsmächtigste Schriftsteller des 20. Jahrhunderts“ (Alt 2005: Klappentext), Peter von Matt schreibt von seinem Werk als die „Bibel des 20. Jahrhunderts“ (Matt 2001: 305). Claudio Magris ist sich dessen bewusst, er formuliert selbst an anderer Stelle nicht weniger markant: „In einigen Jahrhunderten, wenn man eingesehen haben wird, daß auch unsere Zeit ihren Dante hatte, wird dieser wohl Kafka heißen.“ (Magris 1981: 32)

Doch im Habsburgischen Mythos findet Kafka keinen veritablen Platz; er passt einmal mehr einfach nicht ins Schema. Lapidar wird dort angemerkt, dass die österreichische Bürokratie „der düster-strengen Atmosphäre der Kafkaschen Welt mehr als einen Anhaltspunkt“ gibt. (Magris 1966: 183) Diese kurze Aus-einandersetzung verwundert, wenn man bedenkt, dass gerade, was Bürokratie – also ein zentraler Motivstrang des Mythos – angeht, insbesondere mit den – bekannterweise erst postum von Max Brod herausgegebenen – Romanen *Der Prozess* (1925) und *Das Schloss* (1926) Kafka als einzigartiger Experte zitiert wird, womit sich Kafka eigentlich hervorragend in den Mythos einreihen würde. Der Literaturnobelpreisträger Elias Canetti stellt fest: „Unter allen Dichtern ist Kafka der größte Experte der Macht. Er hat sie in jedem ihrer Aspekte erlebt und gestaltet.“ (Canetti 1981: 135) Kafkas Werk wurde von Joseph Vogl in Hansers Sozialgeschichte als „Analyse und Genealogie moderner Mächte“, ja selbst als „bürokratisches und kapitalistisches Aufschreibsystem“ (Vogl 2000: 483 und 488) verstanden, das den Übergang von den Disziplinarmächten des 19. Jahrhunderts wie Gefängnis, Anstalt, Fabrik zu den Kontrollmächten des 20. Jahrhunderts wie Kapital, Versicherung und Selbstreproduktion begreift. (Ebd. 487)

Doch nicht nur Magris scheut sich, Kafka in seinem Habsburgischen Mythos einzuordnen, auch seine Nachfolger in diesem Erfolgskonzept lasen Kafka wenig in diesem Bezug. Ein Grund dafür mag wohl in der Problematik liegen, dass sich wohl niemand bei einer nationalen Eingrenzung Kafkas wohl fühlen kann, auch wenn er auf einer Berliner Gedenktafel als „österreichischer Dichter“ – einer Idee, die ein neuer Sammelband nachgeht, sonst gerne als „tschechischer Schriftsteller deutscher Sprache“ genannt wird und in der früheren Literaturgeschichtsschreibung als einer der wichtigsten Exponenten der „deutschen Literatur“ auftaucht. (Pesnel und Paumgardhen 2024) Heilige stehen über nationalen Einordnungen, und als eine Art Heiligen sieht ihn nicht nur Günter Anders (1963: 7) von vielen beansprucht. Die Nicht-Etikettierbarkeit und die Nicht-Zugehörigkeit war ein früher und mittlerweile traditioneller Teil der Lektüren des einsamen Genies, noch einmal dazu Anders:

Als Jude gehörte er nicht ganz zur christlichen Welt. Als indifferenter Jude – denn das war er ursprünglich – nicht ganz zu den Juden. Als Deutschsprechender nicht ganz zu den Tschechen. Als deutschsprechender Jude nicht ganz zu den böhmischen Deutschen. Als Böhme nicht ganz zu Österreich. Als Arbeiterversicherungsbeamter nicht ganz zum Bürgertum. Als Bürgersohn nicht ganz zur Arbeiterschaft. Aber auch zum Büro gehört er nicht, denn er fühlt sich als Schriftsteller. Schriftsteller aber ist er auch nicht, denn seine Kraft opfert er der Familie. Aber „ich lebe in meiner Familie fremder als ein Fremder“. (Brief an seinen Schwiegervater) (Ebd. 18)

Insgesamt wurde also von zwei Seiten – von der Perspektive des isolierten Genies als Einzelgänger sowie von der klaren Festlegung des Habsburger Mythos – die Verortung Kafkas in der Donaumonarchie ver stellt. In Max Brods Logik wurde er höchstens weiter als Prager Literat gesehen, beispielsweise röhmt Georg Lukács die einfache, unmanieristische Sprache Kafkas und führt sie auf das „Prager Lokalkolorit“ zurück, das historisch die alte Habsburger Monarchie spiegelt (Lukács 1958, 87).

Dass es wohl berechtigt ist, auch Kafka mit einem Bezug zur Donaumonarchie, eventuell zum Habsburger Mythos zu lesen, mag insbesondere „Eine kaiserliche Botschaft“ und deren Textumfeld veranschaulichen. Die „Sage“, die Kafka im März 1917 im Produktionskontext der erst postum erschienenen Erzählung *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer* (1931) verfasste, wurde am 24. September 1919 selbstständig in *Selbstwehr. Unabhängige jüdische Wochenzeitschrift* (1919) und im Sammelband *Ein Landarzt* (1920) veröffentlicht. Zu *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer* weist Martin Beckmann noch darauf hin, dass diese Erzählung in der Sekundärliteratur „bisher verhältnismäßig geringes Echo gefunden“ hat. (Beckmann 1993: 423) Er sieht für die geringe Resonanz in erster Linie die beträchtlichen

Deutungsschwierigkeiten ausschlaggebend. (Ebd. 423) Heute ist diese Erzählung sowie die darin eingebettete Sage vielfach und sehr verschieden interpretiert – in wissenschaftlichen Artikeln, Monographiekapiteln und Interpretationsbändchen für den Schulbedarf zu finden. Die Sage selbst liest sich folgendermaßen:

## EINE KAISERLICHE BOTSCHAFT

Der Kaiser – so heißt es – hat dir, dem Einzelnen, dem jämmerlichen Untertanen, dem winzig vor der kaiserlichen Sonne in die fernste Ferne geflüchteten Schatten, gerade dir hat der Kaiser von seinem Sterbebett aus eine Botschaft gesendet. Den Boten hat er beim Bett niederknien lassen und ihm die Botschaft ins Ohr geflüstert; so sehr war ihm an ihr gelegen, daß er sich sie noch ins Ohr wiedersagen ließ. Durch Kopfnicken hat er die Richtigkeit des Gesagten bestätigt. Und vor der ganzen Zuschauerschaft seines Todes – alle hindernden Wände werden niedergebrochen und auf den weit und hoch sich schwingenden Freitreppe stehen im Ring die Großen des Reichs – vor allen diesen hat er den Boten abgefertigt. Der Bote hat sich gleich auf den Weg gemacht; ein kräftiger, ein unermüdlicher Mann; einmal diesen, einmal den andern Arm vorstreckend schafft er sich Bahn durch die Menge; findet er Widerstand, zeigt er auf die Brust, wo das Zeichen der Sonne ist; er kommt auch leicht vorwärts, wie kein anderer. Aber die Menge ist so groß; ihre Wohnstätten nehmen kein Ende. Öffnete sich freies Feld, wie würde er fliegen und bald wohl hörest du das herrliche Schlagen seiner Fäuste an deiner Tür. Aber statt dessen, wie nutzlos müht er sich ab; immer noch zwängt er sich durch die Gemächer des innersten Palastes; niemals wird er sie überwinden; und gelänge ihm dies, nichts wäre gewonnen; die Treppen hinab müßte er sich kämpfen; und gelänge ihm dies, nichts wäre gewonnen; die Höfe wären zu durchmessen; und nach den Höfen der zweite umschließende Palast; und wieder Treppen und Höfe; und wieder ein Palast; und so weiter durch Jahrtausende; und stürzte er endlich aus dem äußersten Tor – aber niemals, niemals kann es geschehen –, liegt erst die Residenzstadt vor ihm, die Mitte der Welt, hochgeschüttet voll ihres Bodensatzes. Niemand dringt hier durch und gar mit der Botschaft eines Toten. – Du aber sitzt an deinem Fenster und erträumst sie dir, wenn der Abend kommt. (Kafka, Erzählungen 1983: 128-129)

Allein die Thematisierung des sterbenden bzw. gestorbenen Kaisers im Frühjahr 1917 legt einen Bezug zu der Habsburger Monarchie nahe. Immerhin ist vier Monate davor der am längsten dienende Herrscher am Wiener Thron überhaupt, Franz Joseph, verstorben. Kafka bis 1918 österreichisch-ungarischer Staatsbürger sah dessen Abbild zeit seines Lebens in jeder Amtstube und Schulkasse vor sich. Dazu erlangte Kafka in dieser Zeit die schmerzhafte Gewissheit, dass der

Krieg für die Mittelmächte nicht zu gewinnen sei und dass seine Investitionen in Kriegsanleihen sicher keine Früchte tragen werden. Dieses Bewusstsein mag sich auch im viel diskutierten und gefeierten Schlusssatz niedergeschlagen haben, der als Schlusspointe das Erlöschen der kaiserlichen Sonne anzeigen mag. (Neymeyr 1994: 349f.)

Barbara Neymeyr weist in ihrer Analyse des Textes darauf hin, dass die Sage unbedingt im textlichen Kontext der Erzählung *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer* zu lesen ist. (Ebd. 346) Dabei werden die Bezüge noch deutlicher: Österreich wurde nicht nur in satirischen Auseinandersetzungen bereits des 19. Jahrhundert gerne als China bezeichnet. Die zwei östlichen Traditionsreiche wurden beide stereotypisch als dekadent, autoritaristisch und politisch sowie ökonomisch stagnierend abgetan. (Meng 1986: 17f.) Einer von Kafkas Lieblingsautoren, Franz Grillparzer, zeichnet den Habsburger Kaiser als orientalischen Despoten. (Lemon 2011: 120) Jiří Gruša betont in *Franz Kafka aus Prag* sogar, dass die chinesischen Metaphern nicht exotisch sind, sondern direkt die korrupten „konfuzianistischen“ Reichsinstitutionen und -ideologien, die Behörden der „Mandarine“ (Meng 1986: 17f.) im „Reich der Mitte“ Europas meinte.

Diese Texte können also durchaus im Kontext der Habsburger Monarchie gelesen werden. Die Schaffung der Einheit durch das Projekt des Mauerbaus und der Idee des Kaisertums, das Framing der „Nordvölker“ als benachbarte Feinde können wie die Einstimmung auf den Mauerbau mit den realen Kriegsvorbereitungen parallelisiert werden. Der Einsatz der Bauarbeiter weit weg der Heimat entspricht dazu der gleichen Aufgabe des Nation-building wie die damalige österreichisch-ungarische Armee. Die bestimmende und verwaltende Führerschaft kann als mächtiger Beamtenapparat verstanden werden. Berichtet wird in Wörtern, welche direkt die Donaumonarchie zu behandeln scheinen.

Konkretere Lesarten, die sich an der historischen Donaumonarchie orientieren, sind erst langsam auf mehr Interesse gestoßen, setzten sich dafür mittlerweile durch. Insbesondere Peter-André Alt in seiner gewaltigen Biographie *Franz Kafka. Der ewige Sohn* von 2005bettet Kafka im Habsburger Kontext ein und versteht ihn als schreibenden Beobachter seiner Zeit. In der *Kaiserlichen Botschaft* wird das Scheitern der Kommunikation mitunter zur Reflexion der fehlgeschlagenen Kommunikation, die in Kriegsberichterstattungen von der Front des Ersten Weltkrieges zu lesen waren. (Alt 2005: 517) *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer* liest Alt angesichts der ungeheueren Ausdehnung des Landes und der entrückten Figur des Kaisers als Spiegel der sinkenden Donaumonarchie. (Ebd. 583)

Dies scheint wie ein Startschuss für weitere germanistische Auseinandersetzungen mit diesem Zugang, denn danach wurden diese zwei Texte oft und verstärkt mit Bezug auf die Habsburgermonarchie gelesen. Benno Wagner versteht 2008 *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer* als zeitgenössische politische Intervention

nach dem Kriegseintritt der USA und der Russischen Februarrevolution, welche das Endstadium der europäischen Monarchien klar erkennbar machten. Nicht zufällig habe Kafka damals zum ersten Mal die familial-soziale Matrix seiner erzählten Welt gegen eine historisch-politische Matrix ausgetauscht. (Wagner 2008: 91) Wagner argumentiert, Kafka schreibe „in einer für den Bestand der politischen Ordnung kritischen Situation über das österreichisch-ungarische Kaiserreich im Zeichen des chinesischen“ und „stellt sich damit in eine ihm fraglos bekannte böhmische Tradition der Krypto-Staatskritik“. (Ebd. 92)

Auch Robert Lemon geht 2011 dem *Orientalism as Self-Critique in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle in Bau der chinesischen Mauer* nach und bezieht sich dabei direkt auf Magris' *Der Habsburgische Mythos*, wenn er die mythische Verklärung des Kaisers im Text bespricht und feststellt: „By creating an allusive China that invites comparison with his homeland, Kafka is thus able to penetrate to the core of the Habsburg Empire's nebulous self-identity.“ (Lemon 2011: 137) Verita Sriratana weist in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit „temporal spatialisation“ (Sriratana 2015: 44) im gleichen Text darauf hin, dass auch dieses Werk der Moderne in einem lokalen und historischen Produktionskontext gelesen werden sollte und nicht nur in einer übergordneten allgemeinen Moderne.

Simona Moti unterstreicht 2019 in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit der Situation in Habsburgs Zentraleuropa im Chinesischen Mauer-Text, dass Kafkas Werk die Politik seiner Zeit indirekt reflektiert. Dabei untersucht sie die Spuren der imperialistischen, nationalistischen und ethnischen Diskurse der Zeit im Text. Die Mauer zeigt sich als Denkbild bzgl. der heterogenen politischen Struktur der Monarchie, der Kaiser als Symbol für den Zusammenhalt, wenn auch selbst machtlos. Dabei verweist sie auf die Manuskriptfassung, wo auch vom „Aufstand“ und „Umwälzungen“ zu lesen ist, welche durch das imperiale Narrativ ruhig gehalten werden. Die Parabel wurde immerhin nur drei Wochen nach der russischen Februarrevolution verfasst. Letztendlich deutet sie konkret die Aussage, dass der erzählende Bauführer es besser wisse als der Kaiser, als Sehnsucht nach einem Europa der Völker, welche aber durchaus einen Kaiser wünschen – eine Nationswerdung beim Erhalt des Reichs.

Vor allem der österreichische Kulturwissenschaftler und Historiker Moritz Csáky, Doyen der Austrian Studies, widmet in seinem *Das Gedächtnis Zentraleuropas* dem Text ein Kapitel und liest dieses China mit der Funktion des Kaiserstums als verbindendes Element, als Metapher des Habsburger Vielvölkerstaates – mit seinen Schwächen und der Orientierungslosigkeit seiner Bewohner. Er geht dabei einer Vielzahl an überzeugenden Indizien nach, mit denen die Erzählung implizit die Habsburgermonarchie thematisiert: der Tod des Kaisers, die Komplexität und Ausdehnung des Reichs, das Beamtentum – die „Führerschaft“ im Text und der Bezug auf den Turmbau zu Babel mit seiner Konsequenz als

verwirrende Mehrsprachigkeit. Die herbeizitierte Einheit des Volks im Text wird auf das franzisko-josephinische Motto „*Viribus Unitis*“ bezogen. (Csáky 2019: 126) Bezuglich des Kaisers, des Garants des Zusammenhangs trotz seiner Regierungsunfähigkeit, dessen mythische Verfremdung und Entfernung mit einer Omnipräsenz einherging, zitiert Czsáky Joseph Roth: „Einsam und alt, fern und gleichsam erstarrt, dennoch uns allen nahe und allgegenwärtig im großen, bunten Reich lebte und regierte der alte Kaiser Franz Joseph.“ (Roth 1991: 227) Ähnlich wie Kafkas Chinesen zeigen sich die Österreicher in einem angeführten Zitat des sonst recht kritischen Hermann Bahr: „Das Gefühl, das wir für den alten Kaiser hatten, galt nicht bloß [...] seiner ehrwürdigen, auch noch durch Leiden geheiligen und durch das Alter verklärten Person, es galt nicht bloß dem Menschen Franz Joseph, es galt vor allem einfach dem Kaiser [...] Er ist der Einzige, worin sich alle vereinigen.“ (Nach Csáky 2019: 129) Dazu wird das im Text diskutierte allmähliche Verblassen des Kaisermythos auf Österreich bezogen – der Bauführer spricht immerhin vom Kaisertum als einer der „alleruneindeutlichsten“ „volklichen und staatlichen Einrichtungen“ (Kafka 1983: 57) –, was einem Zitat von Kafkas Freund Franz Werfel nahekommt: „Bei jeder mythischen Gestalt kommt der Augenblick, in dem die Menschen an deren wirklicher Existenz zu zweifeln beginnen. Im Falle Franz Josephs geschah es noch zu Lebzeiten. Die Sage ging um, der Kaiser sei längst gestorben und im Erbbegräbnis der Kapuzinergruft zu Wien beigesetzt.“ (Nach Csáky 2019: 134) Von diesen Gerüchten, der Kaiser wäre tot und mehrere Männer hätten die Aufgabe den Kaiser in der Öffentlichkeit darzustellen, berichten übrigens Historiker\*innen auch anderweitig. (z. B. Gies-McGuigan 1966: 387) Diese Punkte werden noch bedeutender, wenn man bedenkt, dass es in *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer* im Gesamttext nach der eingebauten Sage heißt:

Genau so, so hoffnungslos und hoffnungsvoll, sieht unser Volk den Kaiser. Es weiß nicht, welcher Kaiser regiert, und selbst über den Namen der Dynastie bestehen Zweifel. In der Schule wird vieles dergleichen der Reihe nach gelernt, aber die allgemeine Unsicherheit in dieser Hinsicht ist so groß, daß auch der beste Schüler mit in sie gezogen wird. Längst verstorbene Kaiser werden in unseren Dörfern auf den Thron gesetzt, und der nur noch im Liede lebt, hat vor kurzem eine Bekanntmachung erlassen, die der Priester vor dem Altare verliest. Schlachten unserer ältesten Geschichte werden jetzt erst geschlagen und mit glühendem Gesicht fällt der Nachbar mit der Nachricht dir ins Haus. [...] So verfährt das Volk mit den vergangenen, die gegenwärtigen Herrscher aber mischt es unter die Toten. (Kafka 1983: 60)

Dazu verweist Csáky auf den unsicheren Namen der Dynastie, die nach Maria Theresia eigentlich als Habsburg Lothringen oder nur Lothringer zu bezeichnen

wäre. Die Unsicherheit nahm damit kein Ende. Kafka selbst schrieb als Antwort auf eine Einladung, sich österreichischen Schriftsteller anzuschließen, wie unmöglich es ihm wäre, sich ein einheitliches Österreichertum vorzustellen. (Csáky 2019: 136) Dazu führt Csáky Kafkas bereits erwähnte problematische Zugehörigkeit an. Die Entsprechung der nebulösen Staatsidee des Texts in der historischen Situation des Habsburger Reichs wird nicht zuletzt anhand eines Briefs von Leopold von Andrian an Hugo von Hofmannsthal gezeigt:

wir haben eine Heimat, aber kein Vaterland – an dessen Stelle nur ein Gespinst. Daß man für dieses Gespinst vielleicht einmal das Blut seiner Kinder wird hingeben müssen, ist bitter zu denken. Nicht als ob mir der Gedanke erwünscht oder auch nur erträglich wäre, dieses alte Reich auseinanderfallen zu sehen. Aber für ein bloßes Bestehen, ohne jede Idee, ja ohne Tendenz über den morgigen, ja heutigen Tag hinaus – für die bare Materie, nach außen u. innen – kann man seine Seele nicht einsetzen, ohne an der Seele Schaden zu leiden. (Ebd. 142f.)

Burkhardt Wolf beleuchtet bereits 2018 in seinen ausführlichen Artikel „Kafka in Habsburg. Mythen und Effekte der Bürokratie“ den Autor explizit mit Bezug auf Magris. Er liest das Werk bezüglich der Tätigkeit des Autors bei der Prager Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt. Kafkas Literatur und Bürotdätigkeiten schlossen sich nach Wolf keineswegs aus, sondern bedingten nach Wolf sogar einander. Immerhin beklagte sich Kafka nur in akuten Schreibkrisen über sein „schreckliches Doppel Leben“ als Autor und Angestellter (Wolf 2018: 197). „Was Kafka also vom Leben fernhielt, war ‚der tief in mir sitzende Beamte‘ – und nicht, wie Max Brod und nach ihm zahllose andere behaupten, seine Amtstätigkeit in der AUVA.“ (Ebd. 200) Der internalisierte Beamte würde hervorragend in den Habsburgischen Mythos passen. Doch Wolf zeigt den zentralen Aspekt auf, mit dem sich Kafka dem Mythos entzieht: „Kafka blickt nicht melancholisch zurück auf den habsburgischen Mythos. Er blickt vielmehr erschöpft nach vorn – nach vorn in unsere Gegenwart.“ (Ebd. 215) Nur mit dem heute relativierten Mythos, der nicht durchgehend von Nostalgie geprägt sein muss, kann Kafka auch diesbezüglich gelesen werden.

Selbstverständlich soll das nicht als einzige mögliche Textfolie dargestellt werden. Beispielsweise Rüdiger Safranskis neue biographistisch-textinterpretative Kafka-Darstellung verzichtet auf jeglichen Einbezug Österreich-Ungarns. Selbst die „Kaiserliche Botschaft“ und *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer* werden nur abstrakt als Parabel der misslingenden Kommunikation zwischen Zentrum und Peripherie bzw. als Variation auf das Thema „Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen“ gelesen. (Safranski 2024: 140-144) Zurecht bezeichnet Heinz Politzer Kafkas Parabel als „Rorschach tests“ der Literatur, die mehr über den Charakter der Deutenden verraten als über ihren Autor (1965: 43). Susan Sontag sah

in ihrem berühmten Essay „Against Interpretation“ Kafka ja gar als Opfer einer „Massenvergewaltigung“, einer „Vergewaltigung nämlich durch eine Armee von Interpreten“. (Nach Anz 1992: 7) Das Bild der Vergewaltigung passt wohl nur bedingt, denn anhaben konnten die Interpretationen den Texten wenig. In einem Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert Kafka-Forschung stellt Horst Steinmetz 1983 fest: „Die unzähligen, da unzählbaren Deutungen, Interpretationen, Analysen, die in den letzten fünfzig Jahren Kafka gewidmet worden sind, haben unsere Kenntnis über diesen Autor und sein Œuvre unendlich vermehrt; und doch ist es, als ob die Werke daraus gleichsam unberührt hervorgegangen wären, als ob wir dem Kern ihres Wesens nicht näher gekommen wären.“ (1985: 156)

Der Kontext der Habsburger Monarchie und Mythos braucht ebensowenig als Kern ihres Wesens aufgefasst werden. Als bedeutend hat sich dieser Kontext allemal bewiesen. Doch die klar definierte Festlegung des Habsburgischen Mythos sowie die Sicht des unbeeinflussten Genies haben diesen Ansatz zu lange verstellt.

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### **Kafka in habsburški mit: »Cesarsko sporočilo«**

Koncept habsburškega mita Claudia Magrisa je bil verjetno najmočnejši koncept specifike avstrijske literature. Magris je že leta 1963 oblikoval snop literarnih motivov in tematskih tradicij, med katerimi so birokracija, imperialni kult, eskapizem, hedonizem in hrepenenje po smrti. Predvsem, ko gre za birokracijo, Kafka navajajo kot edinstvenega strokovnjaka – predvsem z romanoma *Proces* (1925) in *Grad* (1926), s čimer bi se Kafka pravzaprav odlično ujemal z mitom. Glede habsburškega mita pa Magris Kafka omenja le obrobno, čeprav se je zavedal avtorjevega pomena. Razloge za to, in pozno vključitev Kafkoviih besedil v zgodovino habsburškega cesarstva, ponazarjata »Cesarska ambasada« in »Gradnja Kitajskega zidu«.

**Ključne besede:** Franz Kafka, habsburški mit, Donavska monarhija, avstrijska literatura

### **Kafka and the Habsburg Myth: “An imperial message”**

Claudio Magris's concept of the Habsburg myth was probably the most powerful concept regarding the specific nature of Austrian literature. As early as 1963, Magris formulated a bundle of Austrian literary motifs and thematic traditions, including bureaucracy, imperial cult, escapism, hedonism and a longing for death. When it comes to bureaucracy in particular, Kafka is cited as a unique expert – especially with his novels *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926) – which would make Kafka an excellent fit for the myth. But with regard to the Habsburg myth, Magris only mentions Kafka marginally, although he was aware of the author's importance. The reasons for this and the late embedding of Kafka's texts in the history of the Habsburg Empire are exemplified by “An Imperial Embassy” and “The Building of the Great Wall of China.”

**Keywords:** Franz Kafka, Habsburg myth, Danube Monarchy, Austrian literature