

# Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies (LLIDS)

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ROMANTICISM  
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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION  
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SLAM POETRY  
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**LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES  
(LLIDS)**

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(LLIDS)

VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 1 • FALL 2017

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# EDITORIAL

**Deeksha Suri and Nikita Goel**

The present academic scene is rigorous enough in encouraging scholars to produce quality research and present it in the public domain, but the platforms to accommodate new scholars still showcase bleak possibilities. In this respect, LLIDS structures itself as a journal with delimited interdisciplinary space which is focused upon accumulating and organizing critical research of aspiring as well as established scholars. The representative principle of the journal is to promote uncompromised academic research, in both the general and particular aspects of enquiry. The enforcing and enduring perspective behind the actualization of this project remains free exchange of ideas. The journal marks its distinct presence in wholeheartedly respecting the academic import by creating an intellectually competent platform devoted to the representation of talent and effort without any impediments of publishing and processing charges. Being an open access journal it primarily allows the researchers to have a wider and varied readership and admits engagement with diverse interdisciplinary perspectives. All along diffusion of new strides in academic scholarship will enhance the beneficiaries not only amongst the writers but also the readers. The difficulties involved in establishing a new journal are almost inconspicuous in the face of a journey that collaborate the efforts of academic enthusiasts with the reflections of our advisory editorial board. As our concern is to work within unencumbered critical and reflexive frameworks we invite academic enthusiasts as well as our readers to contribute their research to the journal.



# That Thing Called Love, And The Thing Called Fat

## Fatness, Love, and Performance

Prerna Subramanian

### SPOKEN WORD, PERFORMANCE, AND IDENTITY

Spoken word poetry is poetry developed to be performed, and hence the aspect of performance is very crucial to the genre. It is a mixture of theatrics, elocution, recitation, and daily life spoken elements, and hence, it makes for a very fertile ground for resistance poetry and prose. Its origins also lie in similar contexts; the history of spoken word poetry shows the informal, free, liberating and subversive element of the genre.

The rise of hip-hop in the late 1970s led to new ways for - wordsmiths to showcase their skills onstage. In response to what he saw as elitist and overly academic approaches to poetry, Chicagoan Marc Smith began hosting open mic nights in 1984, focusing these events on poets performing their work, as opposed to reciting it aloud. The popularity of these events led Smith to host performance poetry competitions, called poetry slams, where competitors were given three minutes to present their work to a set of judges selected from the audience. ("Poetry on Center Stage" 2008)

Performance forms a huge and the most essential part of spoken-word poetry. Along with the content, it is the presence of the poet and their mannerisms, acts, ways of expression which add fodder to the whole presentation. It is not mere recitation of written word, but an ensemble of devices coming together. When these performances are about the person themselves, their struggles, their experiences and their life-stories, it becomes a performance of performativity, of a body narrativising the performance they indulge in the real world (performing oneself in a marginalised racial, sexual, gender, class, ethnic category). Susan B.A Somers-Willett in her essay, *Slam Poetry and the Cultural Politics of Performing Identity* states:

Performance, then, is an instance of identity's performativity, a live embodiment and enactment of an identity in a particular space and time. As discursive practice, performativity is both prior to and a result of any embodied performance: performativity is that normative behavior to which a performance alludes or which it parodies, and it is also a performance's effect in that the normative behavior reflected in a performance is disseminated and eventually incorporated into that behavior's performative history. (Somers-Willett 56)

To understand the personal narrative in a public performance, one needs to analyse what happens when performativity and performance are coalesced. When a particular identity is being brought to the fore by the performance, the "stylised repetition of acts" (Butler 520) become more and more apparent. The artifice of the constructed identity is revealed through the act of performance, and the presence of the performer on the stage reinforces this

revelation as (...) “the author’s physical presence ensures that certain aspects of his or her identity are rendered visible as they are performed in and through the body, particularly race and gender but extending to class, sexuality, and even regionality.” (Somers-Willet 68) The presence of a marginalised entity on stage, expressing its self through a medium that brings together words, enactment and voice, renders the artificiality of the exclusion uncomfortably apparent. When an individual whose stories have been misrepresented, under-represented or not represented at all, performs a narrative that thrusts upon the forgotten, ignored and neglected stories- performance becomes a powerful tool for destabilising the dominance of narratives that normalise certain kinds of performativity. Resistance, revolutions, rebellions, all have a strong component of “speaking out” and the notion of getting one’s voices heard. Performativity and performance tend to amalgamate together in spoken word Kristin M Langellier in *Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity: Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* comments:

In performativity, narrator and listener(s) are themselves constituted (“I will tell *you* a story”), as is experience (“a *story* about what happened to me”)... Thus, the *personal* in personal narrative implies a performative struggle for agency rather than the expressive act of a pre-existing, autonomous, fixed, unified, or stable self which serves as the origin or accomplishment of experience... performativity articulates and situates personal narrative within the forces of discourse, the institutionalized networks of power relations, such as medicine, the law, the media, and the family, which constitute subject positions and order context; and *performance* implies the transgressive desire of agency and action. (Langellier 129)

Thus, spoken-word poetry is a tool through which a neglected identity brings forth its self through the medium of performing the performativity that has been portrayed in the forms of negations, neglect and negativity. It seeks to change the way we look at certain individuals through the lens of the discourse that has taught us to maintain status quo. Nishalini Michelle Patmanathan in her thesis, *Slam as Methodology: Theory, Performance, Practice*, states:

Slam can also be thought of as a topic of research. For instance, researchers can use the method of conducting a textual analysis from existing slam performance poetry pieces to arrive at conclusions about the nature of cultural production and/or human experience. Slam as a topic of research puts political and sociological imaginations to work in perceiving the politics and practices that form lived experiences (Denzin, 2003). (Patmanathan 66)

Though slam poetry is the competitive form of spoken word poetry, this paper would concentrate on three performances which were staged in various slam festivals. The analysis would be limited to the content and would not take into account the competitive aspect of the performance. Though the element of competition affects performance and even content, due to the lack of background information and to consider the larger issues discussed in the content, the “slam” aspect of spoken-word would not be covered in the paper. We thus, situate the next three poems we look at in this context of assertion of identity through performance. The paper will first discuss the context of fat identities and narrative before attempting a content analysis of the poems.

THE FAT PERSON: FAT IDENTITY, EXPERIENCES, AND NARRATIVE

A fat person is often defined in negation, in terms of what the person is not, and also, what others should not be like. A fat person is not a figure of emulation, of imitation but a figure of perverse imagination, excess, uncontrolled desires, grotesque, and trivialisation. Thus, fat person finds themselves being made a part of the dominant discourse through marginalised categories: the fat friend, the fat nerd, the fat bully, etc. Fatness is to be reviled, corrected, and questioned. Jeannine Gailey in her essay, *Ample Sex* in the book *The Hyper(in)visible Fat Woman*, states: "Fat women are frequently considered deviant because they violate one of the most fundamental gender norms of Western culture: Women should be beautiful, or at least try, and fat is not typically considered beautiful." (110)

What makes fat identity's performance different from the ones of other marginalised categories? What is the essential marker of departure when it comes to a fat person performs on stage about being fat, and about other struggles being narrated by another person? This is where performance and performativity complicate each other. The essential difference of all other identities and fat identity is the very visibility of the fatness being extrapolated, questioned, and made a site of struggle and narration. It is closer to racial identities, when the color of the skin is made the site of contestation. As Petra Kuppers puts it in her essay, *Fatties on Stage*:

The fat performer does not escape her physicality. Since her sign of difference is overpowering, she is in the same position as the woman of color—she cannot jump from discourse to discourse, from passing to being. Her "essence" is always already embodied on stage... The fat woman remains, in all her guises, the fat woman. (Kuppers 281)

But the struggles of the coloured skin still lie outside, even if they delineate from their skin. Whilst a fat body's struggle is simultaneously outside and within the very embodiment of fat: it is embodiment of an anomaly, not difference; it is visibility of a lack, and not only visibility of dissimilarity. Moreover, fat is not considered comparable to issues of class, race, ethnicity, or even gender. Fat is seen as a mere health concern and it may entail health risks, but can its struggles be put on the same plane as the struggles of a black woman? This is what Kathleen LeBesco makes clear in her essay, *Queering Fat Bodies/Politics* and politicises the issue of fat by calling its narrativisation as an act of resistance:

But if we think of *revolting* in terms of overthrowing authority, rebelling, protesting, and rejecting, then corpulence carries a whole new weight as a subversive cultural practice that calls into question received notions about health, beauty, and nature. We can recognize fat as a condition not simply aesthetic or medical, but *political*. (75)

The three poems which I would discuss will be in the realm of fat bodies and their experience in romantic and sexual relationships, and how fatness is treated as an anomaly, a digression, and as something to be reviled.

#### 1. FAT PEOPLE HAVE SEX TOO: CHRISTOPHER STANLY'S FAT LOVE

Fat love is like nothing you see  
in magazines on TV or movies, we proudly rip these shirts off and fill the air  
with the skin only we are familiar with,

Fat love is loud, a moaning metal frame  
Knocking against the wall,  
Will make your neighbours check the front door because  
That sound can only mean emergency  
Fat love is an emergency. (quoted in Stanly, 00:01:30)

Christopher Stanly in his poem brings to the fore a discourse that has been deemed absent from reality, or considered unimportant for representation: the possibility of fat people engaging in sexual intercourse. "*Fat love is like nothing you see in magazines on TV or movies*"-Stanly calls into the void that is there in media representations of romance, which excludes people who are fat from its narrative of romance and sex. Stanly in his poem through his effusive, descriptive and explicit narration thrusts upon a story which has been deemed to be non-existent. This trope of discomfiting the audience with what is considered grotesque and showing the existence of such a discourse in words which are familiar, actions which are routine is to show the normalcy of what has hitherto been considered as unusual. Somehow, there is a "thin-gaze" which gets discomfited in such poetry, of listening to notions, and ideas known very well but now their site is on a body hitherto unthinkable. At the beginning of his poem, Stanly presents the idea of sex without naming which kinds of bodies are engaged in the act. But the manner in which he chooses his words, uncovers the stigma attached to talking explicitly about sex on public platforms, and the absurdity of it. He chooses the sardonic phrase "decide to engage in coitus" (00:00:23), somehow revealing the hypocrisy of stigmatisation of sexual intercourse in the public, at the same time harking to the normalcy of it by invoking the simplistic biology of the act. When the poet introduces fat bodies, he even goes further deeper into the stigma and breaks it open. As Samantha Murray comments in her essay, *Locating Aesthetics: Sexing the Fat Woman*:

One only has to reflect on the ways in which we speak about fatness in this historical moment in Western societies... We talk about fatness as a major health crisis, an epidemic, a drain on resources, a symbol of the failed body, and as an aesthetic affront. We do not talk about fat and sex. (Murray 239)

Media representation works as an Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser 86), and Stanley in his poem points out how a narrative which is absent from films and other digital platforms, gets translated into a void in material reality as well. Media forms ideologies and is formed on ideologies, and both work in the structural neglect of fat bodies. This he talks through the kind of furnitures that are manufactured, which do not take heavy bodies into account:

If either of these adults are  
over 350 pounds they are thinking of one thing: the bed frame.  
Four pieces of melted steel connected only by slender screws  
are expected to support this fat  
love, this rumbling love, this neither of us ordered the salad love.  
Every fat person is an engineer when it comes to the dynamics of a box spring  
if it's IKEA we aint fuckin on  
that box spring. (quoted in Stanly, 00:00:23-00:00:50)

The society's preoccupation with thinness has normalized a normal human body to be perceived as thin and thus, acceptable. This acceptability in turn runs into the accessibility of certain features of reality which "unacceptable" bodies are victims of. Be it clothing,

furniture, or even the discourse of romance and love- fat bodies are one way or another relegated in the background and their existence is considered as a deviation from the normal: they have to bring themselves to the “normal” condition of being thin so as to have full access to reality. Fat men are considered borderline impotent, or effeminate and fat women are marked as bodies to be made fun of rather than made love to. Fat is an aberration, a threat to status quo, built on thin bodies. As Jeannine A. Gailey comments in her essay, *Transforming the Looking-Glass: Fat Women’s Sexual Empowerment through Body Acceptance*:

Fat is perceived as a threat to the heteronormative system because: a) men who are attracted to fat women have failed to embody hegemonic masculinity, and b) fat women who easily find and pursue partners subvert the conventional beauty norms and feminine discourse. (53).

The next two poems would look at two distinctive realms of fat identity and the idea of love.

2. SEX, FAT BODIES AND BODY SHAMING: RACHEL WILEY’S “10 HONEST THOUGHTS ON BEING LOVED BY A SKINNY BOY” AND YESIKA SALGADO’S “HOW NOT TO MAKE LOVE TO A FAT GIRL”

The phrase “Big girls need love too” can die in a fire.  
Fucking me does not require an asterisk.  
Loving me is not a fetish.  
Finding me beautiful is not a novelty.  
I am not a fucking novelty. (quoted in Wiley, 00:02:35- 00k:02:56)

But boys  
make it difficult  
to be a fat girl graceful  
In her body  
often taking  
my size as an invitation  
to be ridiculous  
dismantling my large  
Into body parts  
when questioned  
what they like about me  
as if it were too much to ask  
to find the whole of me desirable  
and if all else fails  
they assume the answer  
“big girls are my thing” is supposed  
To make me want to jump out of my pennies.  
(quoted in Salgado, 00:01:02- 00:01:27)

Both these poems point out to the shaming that comes along with having a fat body. Fat is seen as something that requires a corrective, and often people who are not blatantly antagonistic, tend to be patronising. The whole phenomena of “fat-admirers” show a curious construction of fat as something that is “abnormal” to be liked, and hence it could only be a

guilty pleasure, a fetish. Loving a fat person is not seen as a normal process, but as a person having a preference for a “type”- “He likes big women”, “She likes bears” is often thrown around for people who happen to engage in relationships with people who are identified as fat. Cat Pause comments in her essay, *Human Nature: Fat Sexual Identity and Agency*:

So we have on the one hand, men who pursue fat women as sexual partners out of deviant desire, and on the other, men who pursue fat women as sexual partners to reinforce their virility.” It is quite impossible to find a narrative where a person who is fat is engaged in romance that is conventional, and not spoken of in hushed tones. (40)

There is a danger of immense body shaming even after a relationship is forged, which Salgado in her poem emphasizes upon. It is understandable, as Salgado says, that one is apprehensive in their encounter with another body; but when it comes to a fat body, the apprehension is not limited to the fear of a wrong touch, but it is the infantilisation of the fat body that Salgado points out. This resonates what Pause says through quoting Kerby, “Don’t be afraid of touching your fat lover’s body. Figure out what you love about the experience. Never, ever say, ‘I never thought I could enjoy sex with a fat person.’” (43)

This disbelief is also found in various aspects of a fat person’s public life, which Rachel Wiley points out. She talks of “The cute hipster girl at the coffee shop assumes we are just friends and flirts over the counter (Wiley 00:02:08-00:02:09). There is no question of a possibility in our psyche to think of a possibility where a fat person is in a romantic relationship.” Their bodies marked them as “not dateable” or undesirable in conventional settings because of the stigma associated with fat.” (Gailey 56)

Both the poems point out to how fat bodies have been erased from the cultural psyche of the people when it comes to imagining romantic and sexual encounters. Fat bodies are always unrepresented in imagination for them to be accepted in material reality. This imagination is formed through images which are available through institutions, representations, and other kinds of ideological apparatuses. But their very narrative dismantles this discourse and reveals its construction, the artificiality of what is considered a natural given. As Gailey states:

Due to the tremendous amount of attention in the media and popular culture about the harms of fat, coupled with the constant barrage of highly sexualized images of thin, scantily clad women, we begin to associate sex and sex appeal with a specific body type.” (112)

Hence, fat is a threat to masculinity and femininity because fat women who enjoy sex and find and pursue partners demonstrate that the conventional beauty messages are inaccurate or misleading. Their performance of a narrative reveals how they perform quite unknown stylistic acts (borrowing Butler’s terms as previously stated), and this becomes an empowering tool to destabilise set notions of body-image and romance.

Patmanathan in her discussion about slam as methodology writes:

Social change begins to occur when the slam performers/subjects are able to re-negotiate a means to create meaning that no longer positions them as a

victim. Rather, their re-positioning or re-alignment of their situation alters the social and lived narratives that have been placed on them at least within that transient moment. Through the development and re-development of subjectivity the performers create new rendering of old oppressive experiences and tell new stories within existing social restrictions. Slam performance offers a mode to be seen and heard for artists whose concerns, lives, and dreams are often not given serious attention. (Patmanathan 84)

Seen through this lens, the three performances disassemble the notion of which kind of bodies could be placed in a cultural imagination of love, romance, and sex. They use their under-represented or misrepresented status and show a different world that exists or can exist, simultaneously prevailing with and challenging the existing notions of love and bodies that take part in the process of love. Which bodies do we think of when we imagine an ideal lover is more to do with media images, stories, myths, traditional knowledge, and little is realised about which bodies get systemically thrown to the periphery. Lea Kent in her essay. *Fighting Abjection: Representing Fat Women* says:

In presenting fat bodies in sexual acts, fatwomen actively desiring other fat women, fat women in S/M scenarios, *FaT GiRL* appropriates sex as a joyous way of rewriting the fat body. It uses the erotic to envision a good, pleasurable body in which there is an interplay between the body's desires and the self's expressions—the good body is rewritten as the body that can tell the self its desires, act on its desire, provide pleasures. Suddenly the disciplined body, the dieting body, the subject of “self-control,” seems empty and impoverished. (Kent 142)

These performers rewrite the fat body, they perform through their performance different acts that have not found a place in our cultural imagination, our sociological imagination, and reveal the very procedural nature of ideology, and how our world has its roots in narratives of appropriation, and how these narratives could be changed and countered through more narratives. The poems become a tool of rearranging the codes of how we look at the body which is speaking of its own body and its experiences, yet the medium of spoken word makes it an enterprise of exposing the political in the personal. The arena of romance stands questioned, its gendered spaces and notions break down when few identities reveal their invisibility through a medium which renders them, their bodies, and their stories visible. The narratives create a world which may seem new but their idea is to establish their presence in a world where they have been hitherto thought to be non-existent, or irrelevant. Spoken word can be a powerful medium to let loose the narratives of people who have been invisibilised and silenced but at the same time, its embodied nature can open up avenues of discussions and problematization of vulnerable, demonized, and derided bodies.

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# Freedom of Expression, Literature, Fact, and Fiction

Syed A. Sayeed

On 5th of July, 2016, the Madras High Court delivered a significant judgment in a case relating to a petition filed by some persons and organisations against the Tamil author Perumal Murugan, demanding that Murugan's Tamil novel, *Madhorubagan*, should be banned as it hurt the sentiments of the people of a particular village and had 'portrayed the Kailasanathar temple in Tiruchencode and its women devotees "in bad light"'. Tiruchencode is a real village used as the setting for the novel which, among other things, depicts certain reproductive practices that were in effect among particular castes/communities some time ago. The presiding judges were the Hon'ble Mr. Sanjay Kishan Kaul, and the Honourable Mrs. Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana. The judgment they delivered was remarkable in that it not only took a decisive and enlightened stand on the specific issue of banning the novel in question, refusing to ban creative works for supposedly hurting sentiments, but more importantly, it articulated the court's position with regard to the wider question of freedom of expression. Moreover, it did so at the level of general principles in a manner that provides a point of departure for meaningful debate.

The judgment, of course, received fulsome praise from all quarters for providing impeccable closure to the case itself, which it doubtless richly deserved. Also duly appreciated by all was the fact that the honourable judges did not try to provide final answers, but on the contrary articulated the pertinent questions with great vigour, providing the public sphere an opportunity not only to just reopen the debate about freedom of expression but to rescue it from the level of identity-victimhood and mob judgment. It would be fair to say that the trajectory of the judgment, if followed upon, would certainly succeed in restoring the debate to its proper space of rational, civilised discussion. In this sense, the judgment can be seen as an invitation to re-structure the debate on questions about the scope and limits of art and literature, the conflicts of ethics, the privileges and responsibilities of the artist, and a host of related issues. It is an invitation we must accept for not to do so would be to waste a valuable opportunity. If, in this spirit, we accept the invitation and decide to discuss the points made by the honourable judges, we shall find that there are several related issues that demand our attention. Obviously, not all the issues can be discussed in any one single effort. Here, I have selected two specific issues. These issues actually pertain to two central assumptions implicit in the judgment. First, the judges assume that art and literature should be treated as a category apart in the matter of freedom of expression, and secondly that the genre of 'historical fiction' is a legitimate mode of expression and its claims about its relation to reality are valid. As enlightened as the judgment is, these two assumptions are problematic. It is not that they represent an idiosyncrasy of the judges. On the contrary, they are in complete consonance with current enlightened general opinion. But, the fact remains that these two assumptions need to be examined carefully since much depends on how acceptable we find them.

Let me restate the two issues in a slightly more elaborate way:

When it concerns a work of art or literature, we tend to be fierce advocates of unhindered freedom of expression. But in cases of ordinary or common speech, we are inclined to be somewhat ambivalent. This raises the uneasy question whether the artist or writer's right to expression is, in some sense, supposed to be privileged. Is it in a category different from the freedom of expression to be enjoyed by other, ordinary people? On precisely what grounds can such a differentiation be made?

As those familiar with the facts of the Perumal Murugan case would know, the petitioners' main ground for grievance was that the novel, while ostensibly being a work of fiction, makes references to real places, people and practices – in an embarrassing way. In other words, the problem is grounded in the hybrid nature of this category of quasi-fiction, variously referred to as historical fiction, fictional biography, novelised history and so on, where the author blends fact and fiction in various ways. The following questions arise here: what is the exact nature/status of this category of creative works? Can fact and fiction coexist in the same frame without implosion? Is the immunity and privileged status they claim, valid?

As can be readily seen, the first question concerns the equality of rights and freedoms under the more general principle of equality in the context of justice. In other words, assuming a certain quantum of permissible freedom of expression, the question is whether everybody has equal entitlement to it.

The second issue involves the permeability of the wall that separates fact from fiction and the predicated question whether historical claims can take refuge in the protected space of fictionality, or, more accurately, whether fiction can make reference to reality and yet enjoy the privileges—whatever they may be—of fiction.

Let us begin with the first issue. The essence of this issue lies in the implicit claim that while there must be restrictions on freedom of expression per se, literary (artistic/creative and so on) expression requires a special exemption, or, at any rate, a significant relaxation. From the point of view of equality before the law, which is the essential principle of justice, this is a serious claim with far-reaching implications. As must be obvious, its central, acculturated presupposition is that there is a qualitative distinction between art and common speech. However, for all its appearance of a self-evident truth, this is, in fact, a highly problematic presupposition. Not only is its validity doubtful, but more importantly, it is necessary to ask whether it is not an ill-advised assumption that may ultimately hurt the very cause of freedom of expression. For this reason alone it is worthwhile – going against our ingrained cultural inclinations – to examine this distinction between the arts and literature on the one hand and ordinary speech and commonplace expression on the other. The very fact that such an enlightened judgment as the Perumal Murugan judgment uncritically accepts these assumptions – the assumption of a qualitative distinction between literary and other kinds expression, and the more problematic assumption that, somehow, the former must have different criteria for restriction in the context of freedom of expression—shows how deeply ingrained these assumptions are, and why it is necessary to put them under the scanner of conceptual interrogation.

The basic stand of all champions of freedom of expression is that the creative artist/writer should enjoy total freedom to express/write anything, and if any spectator/reader disapproves of the work, she is – as the judges say in the judgment– after all, free to not view/read it. That is to say, (for the sake of simplicity, confining ourselves to

the creative writer) as long as he keeps clear of constitutional values etc., the writer is not accountable for his decision to write a particular thing and the reader has virtually no right to protest. But, the question is by virtue of what special qualities the writer/artist gets this extraordinary privilege. What gives someone called a 'writer' this indivisible 'right to write'? This immediately takes us to the more basic question as to who, in any case, is a 'writer'.

It is obvious from the context that everybody who writes something, say on some social media platform, is not considered as a writer. If you post something on Twitter or Facebook, you do not become a writer in the sense intended by those who feel culturally aggrieved when a novel is banned. The writer that they have in mind would seem to be someone who engages in a particular kind of writing, what you might call imaginative writing or writing of the kind the French structuralist thinker Roland Barthes called 'intransitive writing', where the object of appreciation is the language itself. Here, it may not be out of place to note that, though necessary for legal purposes, any talk about the writer is a misleading metonymy. Although it is the author whose accountability is at issue in the legal context, for the purpose of clarifying certain issues it makes better sense to bracket the writer, so to speak, and focus on what she has written, that is to say, the text. It is texts of a particular sort that are given the privilege to come into being and exist regardless of their effects or consequences, regardless of the discomfiture they may cause to some people. So, to repeat the key question more bluntly - what is so special about these texts that they should be given privileges and exemptions denied to others? What are art and literature - in this context? Let us be clear about the context: in broad terms, it is about the relevance of cultural distinctions in the context of principles of justice. There are certain distinctions and valorisations we make in the domain of culture, for instance, in relation to art, literature, music etc. The question is: should these be taken into consideration where the question of right and justice is involved?

The basis of the artist's (in the wider sense, including the literary writer's) claim to certain privileges and certain exemptions is the plea that his works are creative, and that creativity must have unhindered scope for expression. Since a great cultural value is attached to art and literature, there is a reluctance to openly question this claim of the artist for fear of inviting scorn as philistine boorishness. But, at some point, the question has to be asked: What exactly is the meaning of terms like 'creativity' and 'creative imagination'? A little reflection would tell us that there is no such thing as an absolutely uncreative mind. In order to understand this point, let us look closely at the relation between imagination and creativity.

It is an indisputable and obvious fact that every human being is endowed with the faculty of imagination inasmuch as it is a necessary feature of human consciousness. To imagine is to place before our mind what is not present to our perception. Imagination represents our cognitive relation to what is absent, whereas perception represents our cognitive relation to what is present. If I may put it with patronizing simplicity, you perceive what is there and you imagine what isn't. That's all there is to it. Now, what is absent can be of two kinds. Either it is something that exists, but is absent to our perception or it is something that does not exist. It is the former when I imagine an ordinary elephant in my drawing room and the latter when I imagine a pink elephant with blue wings genuflecting before me. Normally, we use the term 'imagination' to denote the former, and 'creativity' to refer to the latter. In the final analysis, there is little more than this to the difference between ordinary imagination and 'creative' imagination. Given this fact, it should be easy to see that, no matter how feeble his imagination may be, every individual is capable of

'creative' imagination to the extent that he can imagine something that does not exist. It is hardly worth clarifying that when we say 'something that does not exist', it is not necessary that it should be objectively nonexistent. The object – say, a flying snake – may actually exist somewhere, but if I have never heard of, let alone see, such a thing and still imagine it, it is an act of creative imagination. Therefore, the difference between ordinary people and 'creative' people, between the products of their respective 'creative imaginations' is only a matter of degree – and quite crucially, of publicity. You may imagine unknown people leading strange lives; if you keep it to yourself or share it orally with only a handful of friends, you are just an ordinary person although surely an amusing companion. On the other hand, if you write down what you imagined and publish it, you will be called a novelist and if a sufficiently large number of people buy your novel and read it, you will be called a famous novelist or, with some luck, a great novelist. Needless to say, this makes all the difference in the domain of culture and there is a good reason for it. The person who just imagines and does not widely share the product of his imagination does not contribute anything to society, whereas the person who expresses what she has imagined in a coherent way in such a manner that it reaches a large number of people contributes to the richness of our collective imagination, and consequently, we hold her in high regard and value her person and her work. So, it is not as if there is nothing remarkable about the artist and writer and that the value we accord them is misplaced. The point is that artists and writers are not fundamentally different from other, more 'ordinary' people. Ultimately, it is a matter of what you might call degrees of originality. The question therefore is: Is this (essentially quantitative) difference in capacity for creative imagination between an ordinary person and an artist relevant in the domain of rights and freedom, in the domain of justice? On what basis can we grant rights, privileges and protection to the latter that are denied to the former? In other words, can we conceive of a convincing argument in support of the claim that the extent of the right should be proportional to the degree of talent or originality? It may be argued, quite rightly, that it is especially important to preserve the right of those who are creatively original in the interest of collective good. But, surely it cannot imply, conversely, that the right of expression of those with little or no originality can be set aside, or should be proportionately negligible. The creative artist's case may provide a striking argument as to why it is important to preserve the right to free expression. But the argument must be, as such, for the right of all and not merely that of a few gifted individuals.

Let us now take up the question of art and literature in terms of their relation to other creative activities.

As for art, any cogent definition of it must centre on the fact that, essentially, art is nothing more than the deliberate creation of appealing effects. Any definition which deviates from this central fact will either include too much, according the status of art to any action whatsoever, or leave out too much, limiting the title of 'art' only to great artworks, the latter being the greater risk since, given the cultural value attached to art and artists, there is always a temptation to keep the domain of art small and exclusive. If we accept this skeletal definition of art, then there is no sense in treating what we valorise as 'Art' as a separate domain. This latter notion is a culturally loaded concept without any coherent basis. The idea of popular culture has, to a certain extent, demystified 'high Art', but unfortunately, in that process, it has ended up valorising popular art in a structurally identical way. Instead of deconstructing the hierarchy, it has only inverted it. The simple fact is that the very binary of ordinary 'art' and great 'Art' is untenable. The binary must be replaced by a continuum comprising all art with different degrees of originality. In other words, the

continuum represents art as defined above: an agential effort to create certain effects that the agent—and subsequently the audience—believe to be appealing. (It would save much bother if we said ‘aesthetically appealing’, but that would be either vacuous or circular.) Mona Lisa is art and so is a commercial hoarding, as is a drawing or a paper boat made by an ordinary, not especially gifted child. Once we grasp this point, it becomes easier to see that the distinction between art (either high or low) and non-art is itself, at best, fuzzy. This means that as far as the right to expression is concerned, it makes no sense to distinguish between artistic and non-artistic expression. Art has no privileged status in this matter.

The same, more or less, applies to what is called ‘literature’. The simple, embarrassing fact is that nobody knows what precisely literature is, what makes a fragment of language literary, or how we can identify a work of literature. The more the question of literature is talked about, more profuse is the confusion. The fundamental error is to suppose that literature is characterised by some essence or certain attributes. It is impossible to discern any such essence or identify any attributes possessed by literary texts and only literary texts. Metaphoricity, beauty of language (whatever it may mean), evocative power, multiplicity of meanings, affective force—a number of things like these are offered as the basic attributes of literary texts. But, none of them are found in all literary texts, nor are they absent in all ‘non-literary’ texts. Metaphoricity is ubiquitous, beauty of language is arbitrarily subjective, so is evocative power, and multiplicity of meaning is a matter of hermeneutic ingenuity.

One preferred way out of this quandary is to take refuge in some variant of the canon theory of literature. This theory essentially suggests that there is no objective essence or set of attributes that characterise literature; that literature is nothing but a corpus of texts that have been accorded a special status by (mostly dominant) reading communities in different cultures in different periods. This makes literature a matter of subjective preference of dominant groups in societies. While it may make things easier in justifying the teaching or valorising of certain texts over others, particularly in academic establishments, it should be noticed that this theory effectively erases the distinction between the literary and the non-literary. The moral to be drawn from all this is that it is best to avoid talking about ‘literature’ except in literature departments of universities (where ‘literature’ is simply whatever they decide to teach).<sup>1</sup> To sum up, there is no reliable way to identify literature or distinguish it from what is not literature. Given this fact, it is nothing short of dangerous to invoke the notion of literature in the important context of rights and restrictions for, if there is no way to distinguish between literature and non-literature, it follows that we must speak, not of the right of expression of the literary writer, but of any writer, any speaker whatsoever. Whatever rights the so-called creative writer is supposed to enjoy, are applicable to everybody; and equally—although this might not be palatable to some people—whatever restrictions apply to the rest of us apply to the literary artist as well. Whether it is slander or obscenity, the attempt to apply different criteria to art and literature on the one hand and other domains on the other is the product of a psychologically, as well morally

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<sup>1</sup> One could say that the entire problem with ‘literature’ begins with its identification with fiction and verse; we begin by equating these with ‘literature’, and then when we discover that all works of fiction and verse are not impressive enough to merit the grand name of ‘literature’, we engage in the totally dishonest game of inventing arbitrary criteria to distinguish fiction and verse that are good enough (profound, complex, significant, and all the rest of it) to be deemed literature from those which are merely entertaining and, therefore, not worthy of being designated as ‘literature’. Then remains the uneasy task of deciding the fate of non-fiction prose, which is decided equally arbitrarily, invoking the vague notion of *belleslettres*.

muddled, perspective. What is scurrilous does not become decent just because it is said in fine language; and what is 'obscene' is still obscene no matter how aesthetically it is presented. It is plain cultural elitism to suggest that the artist must have unquestionable licence to express what is fundamentally unacceptable. What we need to do is not to take sanctuary in different sets of criteria but interrogate the criteria themselves: to ask, for instance, what makes something obscene, who is qualified to judge what is obscene, and who determines right of access to it, and so on.

In the Perumal Murugan judgment, the judges say, apparently quoting Salman Rushdie, "The choice to read is always with the reader. If you do not like a book, throw it away. There is no compulsion to read a book." But, the same thing can be said in any context whatsoever and aver that there is no compulsion to look at Twitter or Facebook, or watch the TV or listen to malicious slander about you. Why should it be that only the 'creative writer' can have his say and the onus to read or ignore is on the reader? If it is a freedom, it must apply across the board. While acknowledging the diversity of literary tastes, the judgment insists that 'the right to write is unhindered'. From the context it is clear that the reference is to the 'writer', the creative, gifted person who writes novels and plays (and perhaps prose of a certain elevated kind). It is not clear by precisely what logic the so-called creative writer has this unhindered right that is denied to others, simply by virtue of the fact that he has a more fertile imagination or a better command of language.

What, then, should be the axis on which to settle matters such as those in the case of the work of the writer Perumal Murugan? This question takes us to the second question mentioned at the beginning – the relation between reality and fantasy, fact and fiction, between a story and a report. The real issue in all such matters is not about art or literature. In fact, bringing in the idea of 'literature' into it only creates confusion. The issue has to do with the responsibilities that go with truth claims. Let us look at this matter closely. For the sake of simplicity, let us confine ourselves to writing.

There are, as we all know, two kinds of writing. There is the set that comprises journalism, history, biography and so on, that constitutes non-fiction, and there is the set consisting of novels, stories, plays and some forms of poetry that we call fiction.<sup>2</sup> The principles governing the composition and dissemination, as well as the consumption of the two sets, are quite different from each other. The rights and freedoms and the corresponding restrictions associated with non-fiction are, and should be, different from those associated with fiction. The set constituting fiction deals with what is not and never was real. To recall Aristotle's statement from Poetics, fiction deals with the 'possible' as opposed to the actual which is the object of history. On this fact rests the limitation, as well as the freedom and glory, of fiction. It is forbidden to deal with the real and must confine itself only to the imaginary, to what can be. Yet, it is valuable because it evocatively tells us how life (or the world) can be and provides an escape from what is, and also enriches our consciousness by showing us the infinite possibilities of human existence. That is why society values great fiction and honours those who produce it.

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<sup>2</sup> There is no need to speak separately about theoretical writings, reflections, opinions, commentaries and so forth since they, too, are aligned with these two sets based on their subject matter. Also, reference to rare, anomalous, border-line cases is unnecessary since this is a clarificatory exercise. Borderline cases will necessarily have to be dealt with specifically, but even there, some modulated version of the general principles discussed here will be operative.

But, the basic fact pertinent to our discussion is that, by definition, fiction is an expression of what is imagined, which means that it does not represent the real. We perceive what is real and imagine what is not real. You cannot perceive the unreal, nor can you imagine what is actual. Therefore, fiction is the other of fact and they stand in a relationship of mutual exclusiveness. It follows that the resemblance of the fictional to the real, if any, must be avowedly coincidental (since, in principle, it is possible that someone imagined something and that something happened to be strikingly similar to something else that is real). This point needs to be stated with some emphasis since it is crucial to the entire issue.

Fiction, in the public domain, is a matter of avowal and trust. A great deal of nonsense is spoken on the supposed identity of fiction with falsehood. The simple fact is that falsehood is meant to deceive whereas fiction is not. A lie does not declare that it is a lie; if it does, it is no longer a lie. A story, on the other hand, must announce that it is a story; if not, it amounts to a lie. Fiction in writing is similar to disguise in performance which is not impersonation but a transparent, avowed concealment of the actual countenance. To reiterate, the writer of fiction must, as a matter of honour, declare that what he is presenting is fiction, which means that it is not identical with and is mutually exclusive with, reality past or present. This avowal is meant to invite trust from the reader, and any disingenuousness or dishonesty on part of the writer entitles the reader to feel a sense of betrayal of her trust. The false avowal is not only a breach of promise but a form of deception and deserves to be treated with the same scorn and stringency as any other kind of deception.

The set of non-fiction deals with reality, past or present: real people and real events. The obligation here is towards unerring perception and faithful description. Strictly speaking, imagination has no place in this since, as pointed out earlier, imagination is mutually exclusive with perception. If there is to be room for imagination at all, it is only on the strength of its promise to make the description more deeply faithful, and never as a substitute for perception. More importantly, any use of imagination in non-fiction that tends to blur the distinction between the actual and the merely possible is mischievous and deserves contempt.

So, while the writer of fiction is bound by his proclamation not to encroach on the domain of the actual, the writer of non-fiction is bound by his professed commitment to truthfulness: an untruthful historian and an untruthful biographer are both equally contemptible. Trouble arises when, with whatever motive or for whatever reason, the line between these two distinct universes of discourse is ambiguated. Unfortunately, in many cases, particularly in present times, such ambiguation is not stray, unintentional or innocent. There are entire genres and writing practices that rest on the putative legitimacy of a deliberate mingling of the real and the imagined, of a seamless fusion of what is and what has never been. This tendency may be harmless as long as it is confined to the ultimately inconsequential pursuit of literary studies. But, when it spreads to the domain of the political, as has happened in recent times, the consequences can be very serious.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, if not for any other, it is important to question its legitimacy.

Take, for instance, the genres of 'historical fiction', 'fictional auto/biography' and so on. Evidently, they represent a fusion or mixture of fact and fiction. But, at what level is the

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<sup>3</sup> It is this state of affairs that is denoted by the recently coined term 'post-truth era'.

fusion done? It cannot be at the level of the sentence. In a factual statement, the terms and the relations between them must refer to what is real and factual. On the other hand, in a fictional sentence, the terms and the relations posited between them refer to what is not real or factual. 'Barack Obama was the first Black President of the United States' is a factual sentence whereas 'Dragons feed on unicorns' is a fictional sentence. Now, the paradigm sentence of historical fiction or fictional biography must contain one term referring to a real entity and another referring to an unreal one, or it must posit an unreal relation between two real or one real and another unreal entity. For example, a paradigm sentence of historical fiction or novelised history must be something like 'Barack Obama hunted dragons in his childhood' or, more mischievously, 'Barack Obama ordered the assassination of Vladimir Putin'. What is the ontological status of these sentences? Are they factual or fictional? Or, is there supposed to be a third possibility? If the entities (in this case, persons) are meant to refer to reality, the relations between them are unreal, in which case the sentence is simply a falsehood. If the entities are unreal, any relation between them is necessarily unreal and, therefore, the sentence is pure fiction. In what conceivable sense, then, can we speak of historical fiction at the level of sentences?

Defenders of these genres recognize the force of this question. However, their response tends to consist of the problematic claim that this problem does not arise at the level of texts comprising several sentences. According to this stance, while it is true that unitary facts and unitary fictions are mutually exclusive, complex, heterogeneous structures such as literary texts can consist of constituents, some of which are fictitious while some others represent reality. In other words, although at the level of a sentence, all its constituents must refer unambiguously either to the real or the unreal, at the level of larger discursive units of which sentences are constituents, it is possible to have coherent texts in which some sentences represent fact and some represent fiction. In such cases, according to the defenders of historical fiction, as long as the author states at the outset that she has produced a hybrid text (such as 'fictional biography', 'life-writing', or 'novelised history' etc.) in which fact and fiction coexist, it should not present a problem. But, the truth is that the problem remains. The question of ontological status persists at that level too. A coherent text (consisting of more than one sentence) must have an unambiguous ontological status as much as a single clear sentence. A text in which some sentences are factual and some are fictional is not a cohesive entity and strictly speaking cannot be treated as a text. There are two reasons for this. First, what matters in the final analysis is the way the two kinds of sentences in such a hybrid text are related to each other, since the two kinds of sentences cannot just co-exist without altering each other's character. Second, the frame in which the sentences occur, the totality to which the sentences together contribute, also determines their individual status. Let us look at these two points closely.

Let us begin with the first point.

To keep things simple, let us take a text of so-called historical fiction consisting of just two sentences. Of the two sentences, one of them would be about a real object and the other about an imaginary object. If not, the text would be either pure fact or pure fiction. Now, the question is about the relation between the two sentences. If there is no textual relation between them (as opposed to mere positional proximity in the sense that they are uttered one after the other, or are found next to each other on a page), it is hard to see on

what basis those two sentences together form a text.<sup>4</sup> For them to constitute a text, they must be related to each other in some particular way at the level of meaning and reference. What sort of relation at that level can we assume between them?

We can refer to things in two ways (excluding ostensive reference which is not relevant here): by using a proper noun (or a name), or alternatively through what you might call 'convergent descriptions'. We say 'Barack Obama' or we say, 'the first Black president of the United States'. Now suppose I create a character, an imaginary person, whom I decide to name 'Barack Obama'. I may proceed to make a number of statements about this imagined person. When I do so, I am obliged in principle to specify unambiguously for each statement whether I am referring to the actually existing individual or to the imaginary person. If I do not specify, and leave a (random or methodical) mix of some statements that are true about the real person and some that are not, I am guilty of mischief for I am deliberately creating ambiguity of reference through which I can make false statements about the real person and, when cornered, can escape censure by claiming that the statements are about the imaginary person. In effect, it is like introducing two characters, one based on a real person and the other totally imaginary, and making a number of statements using a pronoun so that it never clear who the pronoun stands for.

Matters become more complicated when I choose convergent descriptions instead of proper nouns. Continuing with our example, if I say that I am referring to a certain imaginary person who, in my narrative, happens to be the first Black president of the United States, who was born on fourth of August in Honolulu and who was awarded the Nobel peace prize, and then proceed to make certain damaging statements about that character, one would be justified in suspecting mala fide motives. Supposing I make a statement about my fictional character to the effect that he was secretly a Muslim, I am guilty of mischievous intent because what I am doing essentially is to fix the identity of a supposedly imaginary character by using descriptions that converge towards a real person and then making a false, but slyly suggestive, statement about him. If I attempt to take refuge in the specious claim that I am talking about my fictional character, no matter how elaborate a tale I weave around that character, I would be justly held guilty of disingenuousness or worse, the reason being that I made a large of number of descriptive statements about the supposedly fictional character, which are true about a real person and have thereby fixed the identity of the person. After doing that, any 'fictitious' statements I make about him would be simply false statements. This point will become even clearer when we discuss the second point.

The second point relates to the fact that fiction and fact are defined by their mutual non-relation. There can be no relation of any kind between fact and fiction—not even the symmetric relation of truth and falsehood since only a factual claim can be true or false; a statement professedly about the imaginary cannot be either true or false. It has no truth-value. Therefore, no matter of fact can enter the frame of fiction and nothing fictitious can enter the frame of fact. Even if a fact enters the frame of fiction, by virtue of its relation to the structure of the latter, it becomes a fiction. Take the example of Malgudi. Even if there existed a village called Malgudi with the topography described by R.K. Narayan, the Malgudi of his stories would not be the real Malgudi. It is as fictional as the characters and their lives. The reason is that just as with a person, a place, too, is identified both by its name as

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<sup>4</sup> In this connection, let us avoid the rather pointless discussion about authorial intent. By using the term 'text' we are holding that the structure under consideration is a text so long as the reader (who may be the author herself or the contingent reader, interpreter, translator or whatever) is treating it as a single semiotic entity.

well as historical descriptions that converge in such a way that they are together true only with reference to that place. Insofar as none of the events described in the stories occurred in the actual village of Malgudi, the Malgudi of the stories has no relation except that of a shared name. In other words, the history of a place is part of its identity and, if a place does not have that history, it is not that place even if the name and some other details match, and the resemblance is and must be explicitly acknowledged as a piece of coincidence. But, supposing that the fictional Malgudi uncannily resembles the real Malgudi in all respects. Aside from pitying the poverty of imagination of the author, one would be justified in holding the resemblance in suspicion, especially if the place is used as the scene of some unsavoury incident reflecting adversely on the inhabitants of the real Malgudi. Therefore, the greater the convergence of the real and the fictional, the stronger becomes the onus to assert the coincidental character of the resemblance. In other words, the author must explicitly exclude the real from his fiction, which is another way of saying that reality cannot exist as an ingredient of fiction. Any piece of reality must transmute into fiction once it is placed in a fictional frame.<sup>5</sup>

The same holds good, a fortiori, the other way round. Any fiction introduced into the frame of factuality cannot remain a fiction for there is no place for it in the frame of factuality. A 'fiction' floating in the pool of reality is nothing but a falsehood. In other words, the fiction acquires the status of a possible fact that has to be either true or false. It cannot remain a 'fiction' in the proper sense of the term since the two frames are incommensurable. To give an example, if I write a story in which Jawaharlal Nehru shook hands with Adolf Hitler, either both are fictional characters or I am stating a falsehood about the historical Nehru. My story must choose between being a totally fictional account in which everything is fictional or a historical account containing falsehoods. It cannot be both or some half-way-house between the two.

Now, by way of an example, let us look at the problem with the novel of Perumal Murugan. There was an issue only because Perumal Murugan was not unequivocal about the exact ontological status of his work. Either he was giving a factual account, in which case he was playing the role of a social historian. It is a perfectly unexceptionable task, but, in that case, he should have made that clear. He should have admitted that he was referring to real people and that he was knowingly and deliberately subjecting their descendants to acute embarrassment.<sup>6</sup> There are also other obligations incumbent on the historian such as exactitude of facts and accuracy of presentation and so on, which he should have observed. He should have taken responsibility for the actions he was attributing to the people he was writing about. That position would have taken him along the road of ownership for his claims and involved questions about his locus standi, as to by what right he thought himself entitled to bring into the glare of publicity the discreet acts of members of another community. Further, to concede that he was writing a factual account takes away the option of invoking his creative imagination, appealing to the value of literature and so forth. He must defend himself as any reporter would.

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<sup>5</sup> All this would not be so crucial if the places or people an author chooses to fictionalise are remote in time and do not have any emotional significance for the now existing people. To give an off-hand example, a fictionalised account of Attila the Hun may not matter much but a fictionalised account of Jesus or Mohammad may have consequences.

<sup>6</sup> Whether the cause of social reform justifies every means used for it, including invasion of privacy and violation of dignity, is an important question but outside the scope of this discussion.

Or alternatively, what Perumal Muruggan wrote was a work of fiction, in which case, in order to avoid accusations of sly, thinly veiled portrayal of real people, he should have avoided convergent descriptions that unerringly pointed to a certain place and a certain community. If his position is that the convergent descriptions are purely coincidental – which, in principle, a writer of fiction can claim – and that he was describing purely imaginary, possible characters, actions and events, then his reformist claim becomes untenable. For what social comment, criticism or reform can you offer by depicting a possible practice that never existed anywhere? What would be the point of such an exercise? How can you praise or condemn something that never happened, or draw a moral from it? That you can imagine it happening in a possible world is irrelevant since you are not even saying that it is likely to happen in the real world. It is supposedly the product purely of your imagination. In that status it can serve no purpose other than to entertain.

Let us face the simple fact that the trouble arose purely from the circumstance that Perumal Murugan projected his novel as some sort of semi-factual fiction – an impossible category as I have tried to argue – thereby inviting the suspicion that he was using the peculiar genre of ‘novelised history’ or ‘historical fiction’ as a smart move to occupy the no man’s land between history and fiction and have the best of both worlds. He claimed to have written about a real village and even suggested that he had made the place famous by writing about it.<sup>7</sup> But the present inhabitants of that village may not relish the prospect of that kind of fame. In such a case, for the author to claim that it is a matter of his ‘creative’ right is unjustified.

To return to the general principle, fact and fiction have different kinds of rights and obligations, different codes of representation which are sharply divergent from each other. Literature as a large category might include fact and fiction, novel and history under its rubric. However, each sub-category has its own set of rules. One may mix them in whatever way. But, one cannot enjoy the privileges of fiction and reject the responsibilities of fact.

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<sup>7</sup> Murugan says, “Tiruchengode is my hometown. I was born and raised there. I have a great fondness and respect for my hometown. I believe that using my town’s name in my fiction adds to its fame”.

# Performing Murder and Metaphor

## Red Herrings and the Knowledge of the World in *The Hound of Baskerville* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

Ritwick Bhattacharjee

*And then, in correcting the proofs, we notice some misconstructions, some oddities... We send for Marana, we ask him some questions, he becomes confused, contradicts himself... We press him, we open the original text in front of him and request him to translate a bit orally... He confesses he doesn't know a single word of Cimbrian!*

-Italo Calvino

The Webster dictionary defines a red herring as “something unimportant that is used to stop people from noticing or thinking about something important”. This definition of a red herring as a mere distraction, however, fails at delineating the philosophy of red herrings, especially in its form of and as a literary device. Considering red herrings as sign systems then, the current paper seeks to outline a paradigm to understand not only the world of and around red herrings in a novel but also the subjectivities that both control and are controlled because of red herrings. Since red herrings are primarily deployed in detective fiction, the paper uses Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of Baskervilles* and Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* to both create the aforementioned theoretical paradigm and chart out a tradition of red herrings as it has been passed from Doyle to Christie.

Before a consideration of detective fictions, it seems fitting to discuss in brief Italo Calvino’s *If On a Winter’s Night a Traveler* because it exemplifies the philosophical complexities of red herrings in its entirety. While not a detective novel in the strict sense of the term, it uses almost all essentials of a detective story to frame its narrative: from a “crime” to the protagonist’s quest towards solving it. Divided broadly into two sections, the odd chapters of the book set up the reader as the central protagonist by narrating the events in second person: “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*” (1). The book, then, begins by telling that the reader-protagonist has bought and wants to read *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*. As the novel progresses though, the reader-protagonist realizes that not only is the book he has got not *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, but what he does have is not complete either. Duly, he goes back to the book-shop from where he had bought the book and asks for the novel he has begun to read instead of *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*. The bookstore clerk tells him that the book he has been reading is a Polish novel called *Outside the Town of Malbork* and hands him that book. As the reader-protagonist starts to read the second book he realizes that it is not the book that he had been reading in the first place and is once again incomplete. This is a motif that runs throughout the novel: every time the reader-protagonist wants to read a book that he has begun with, he ends up having a completely different novel and each novel never progresses beyond the first few pages. Accordingly, each even chapter of the novel narrates the different beginnings that the reader-protagonist encounters in the novel.

Confusing as it may be, there is a linear narrative in the novel. It is only through the reader-protagonist's search for a book that he wants to read and his successive failure to do so is he able to find out the Truth behind Ermes Marana's deceptions. Marana is a translator who translates Cimbrian novels into English without knowing even "a single word of Cimbrian" (64). He also produces fake novels by using Silas Flannery's formula for creating best-selling novels. Further, it is Marana who is responsible for the reader-protagonist's constant encounter with wrong books. Considering Marana's denouement and the fact that the reader-protagonist is made aware of each title after he has gone through with the reading of whatever text is available to him, each title becomes a red herring. Every title of each novel-part is made to signal towards a novel by one character or another that it is not originally supposed to. While *Outside the Town of Malbork*, for example, is supposed to be the title of the novel that the reader-protagonist reads under the heading of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, the novel contained within and attached to the former that he receives is completely a different one. Red herrings in the novel then are not distractions inasmuch as they become signifying processes towards an end where the reader-protagonist is able to Know the truth behind the scams run by Marana. Each wrong and incomplete novel in the chain forces him to keep on looking for a right one, ultimately putting him face to face with Marana. The complex nature of red herrings in a sense allows a growth and a possibility of knowledge which wouldn't have been if not for such systems of signification. They are not mere distractions but become a way to know the world: knowledge made possible only by and through red herrings and not direct significations

To delineate this philosophical nature of red herrings (as exemplified by Calvino's novel) in *The Hound of Baskervilles* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* then, the current paper uses the theoretical paradigms of Martin Heidegger. Unlike any other theorist or philosopher, his treatise on equipments and signs finds comprehension of the Being of the world<sup>1</sup> not only through the signs (or equipments) that work as they are supposed to work, but also through signs that do not. In fact, for him, the latter takes precedence over the former. Considering red herrings as signs which signify objects or incur interpretation that they are not ideally supposed to, they Become as broken signs or broken clues; in which case, Heidegger turns out to be essential to understand how and why red herrings work. Further, red herrings take on far crucial a role in Doyle's and Christie's fiction (than Calvino's) because detective novels depend on clues for a successful narrative progression and a solution of each mystery. Clues become signs towards a successful disclosure of crime. Red Herrings, as broken clues, in a sense then, become as vital as any material evidence gathered in these novels: for not only the solution of the crime but also an understanding of world of the respective detective novel.

The *Hound of Baskervilles* opens with Sherlock Holmes and his trusted friend Watson speculating the identity of a client from a cane that was left by him at their apartment. Simultaneous with Holmes' prediction of his identity, Dr James Mortimer enters their house and recounting the myth of a cursed hell hound haunting the Baskerville family of Devonshire, asks the duo to solve the mystery of the curse. Considering the recent death Sir Charles Baskerville in a manner that proves the reality of the cursed hound from hell and the arrival of Sir Henry Baskerville, the last remaining Baskerville heir, Mortimer urges for an urgent solution. As the story progresses Holmes finds that Sir Henry Baskerville is beset with a series of mysterious events. First, the young Baskerville receives an anonymous letter

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<sup>1</sup> Knowing the world in its essence in fact becomes essential for a solution because the detective is able to comprehend each suspect only through such forms of knowledge.

that warns him against his trip to the Baskerville mansion at Devonshire. Then his shoes mysteriously disappear from his hotel room. Finally Holmes finds out that someone using Holmes' name is following Henry and Dr. Mortimer. Interested in the case, Holmes sends Watson with Baskerville and Mortimer to Devonshire to investigate. Once there, Watson is made aware of a dangerous convict who has escaped from a nearby prison. Later in the novel Watson finds out that the Baskerville butler and his wife John and Eliza Barrymore, whom Holmes had initially suspected of tailing Sir Henry, are in fact related to the convict and are helping him hide from the law. The mystery draws to a close when Holmes finds out that one of Baskerville's neighbors, Jack Stapleton, is actually a Baskerville. It is Stapleton who, using a hybrid hound and phosphorous, manages to bring the curse to life to not only kill Sir Charles but also Henry; so that he could inherit the Baskerville fortune.

Published a quarter of a century after the *Hound of Baskervilles*, Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is set in the small town of King's Abbott. Narrated by the town physician Dr James Sheppard, the novel begins with the death of Mrs. Ferrars due to an overdose of Veronal. Most of the town, however, believes that her death is in fact suicide over the guilt of murdering her husband. As the novel progresses, it is revealed that Mrs. Ferrars had actually killed her husband and was being blackmailed because of it. Roger Ackroyd, an eminent industrialist who is expected to marry Mrs. Ferrars receives a letter posthumously from her revealing the name of the blackmailer. Dr Sheppard, though present with Ackroyd when the letter reaches him, leaves before Ackroyd is able to know the name of the culprit. After a while Dr Sheppard gets an anonymous phone call that Roger Ackroyd has been murdered. Rushing to his mansion, Sheppard asks Ackroyd's butler, Parker, to help him open the office door. Inside they find that Ackroyd has truly been stabbed in the neck with a silver dagger. The police immediately suspects Ralph Paton, Ackroyd's stepson, because of rumors of a feud between the two. After some preliminary investigation, they also find Paton's footprints outside Ackroyd's study. With an intention to save him, Flora, Paton's intended wife and Ackroyd's niece seeks the help of Hercule Poirot. Once involved, Poirot finds out that everyone in the Ackroyd household is hiding something that will help him bring the case to a close. Parker, for example, is found guilty of blackmailing his previous employer. The book though ends by ousting that it is in fact Dr Sheppard, the Watson figure of the novel who blackmails Mrs. Ferrars, murders Roger Ackroyd to hide his crime and frames Ralph Paton for the murder.

Insofar as red herrings are concerned, the two detective novels under consideration have a distinct pattern between them. Christie, perhaps understanding the importance of a red herring in all its complexity, not only incorporates similar herrings as Doyle does in the *Hound of Baskervilles* but also modifies them in a manner that makes clear a red herring's philosophical conceit. The two novels for example, play on the idea of "the Butler did it"<sup>2</sup>. Both Holmes and Poirot suspect the respective butlers in each novel, the Barrymores and Parker, of committing the crime. Further, John and Eliza Barrymore and Parker are essentially guilty of one crime or another. But while the Barrymores' harboring of a fugitive takes a clear side-step from the main mystery of the murder (distracting Holmes, Watson and the reader from the main plot), Parker's blackmail of his former employer and the desire to do the same to Ackroyd positions him in a space which is well within<sup>3</sup> the

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<sup>2</sup> Often in detective stories it is the Butler of the household who commits the particular crime, hence giving rise to the cliché of "the butler did it" in detective stories.

<sup>3</sup> Since the novel makes clear that there is a connection between Mrs Ferrar's blackmailer and Ackroyd's murderer.

parameters of the murder and its solution. Yet, like the Barrymores, the latter is a clear Red Herring (once again successfully diverting Poirot, the reader, the police and Dr Sheppard). The conception of the red herring Parker by Christie in such a manner signals towards a vivification of red herrings: to the extent that these misunderstood clues become essential for the knowledge of the world of the novel and subsequently the solution of the crime. Poirot is able to know him as red herring and move on to other suspects only after Parker's crime is brought into limelight. While the Barrymores had nothing to do with the murder, Parker takes up an intricate position within the scheme of Ackroyd's murder to become a tool towards its solution. Further, what this signifies is that the recognition of a red herring as a red herring is contemporaneous with the inculcation of a knowledge of the world around and simultaneously of the crime-solution complex.

It is important at this juncture of the argument to put forward Heidegger's aforementioned theoretical paradigm. In his philosophical treatise *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger posits that the Being of the Dasein<sup>4</sup> depends on its Being-in-the-world (102). Insofar as the Being of the Dasein holds significance over the Beings of all entities<sup>5</sup>, it becomes imperative for him to comprehend the compound of Being-in-the-world. He does so primarily through the idea of the Being of the world. For Heidegger this Being of the world cannot be defined simply by the things that inhabit the world because such a definition presupposes a world. The world then is that which not only allows entities to exist within it but also permits those entities to "show themselves in their being" (97). Hence, to understanding the Being of entities as something more than a "mere thing", showing themselves in their being, he lays the concept of the equipment (98).

An equipment differs from a mere thing in that every equipment is not just "present-at-hand" (97) but "manifests itself in its own right...[as]...*readiness-to-hand*" (98). The equipment does not simply "exist" within-the-world but presents the possibility of "manipulability" (98). This manipulability allows the equipment to be used and be interacted with and change nature into environment. Heidegger uses the example of a hammer to explain an equipment's readiness-to-hand. A hammer can only be a hammer when it is either being used for hammering a nail or is available for that purpose. In other words, the hammer can Be only when it is used towards the act (or the work) of hammering. All equipments in that sense have a referential nature "towards which" (99) they are attuned for the act of "work":

That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves. On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work-that which is to be produced at the time; and this is accordingly ready-to-hand too. The work bears with it that referential totality within which the equipment is encountered...The work to be produced, as the "*towards-which*" of such things as the hammer, the plane, and the needle, likewise has the kind of Being that belongs to equipment...the work which we chiefly encounter in our concerned dealings-the work that is to be found when one is "at work" on something- has a usability which belongs to it

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<sup>4</sup> Dasein, while literally means "being there" is translated into English as "existence". For Heidegger the Dasein is the human subject which is concerned with a concern of its Being.

<sup>5</sup> For Heidegger only through an understanding of the Dasein's Being is it possible to understand the Beings of all other entities

essentially; in this usability it lets us encounter already the “towards-which” for which *it* is usable. (Heidegger 99)

The referential quality of every equipment is important, for it is only within a contextual environment that the equipment can function. Heidegger terms this larger context an equipment structure: that which incorporates not only the equipment under consideration but every attendant material that the equipment works on or is worked on by. The equipment structure for a hammer therefore would include nails, wood, trees, metal, land, and so on. Any use of equipment then partially discloses the world because there is no limit to the equipment structure. It can start from the smallest of materials and extend up to encompass everything in existence; hence ultimately ending up with a contemplation of the whole world (100).

The disclosure of the Being of the world attained by substituting an entity's presence-at-hand with its readiness-to-hand however, as mentioned above, partial because while readiness-to-hand does allow one to encounter the Being of all things ontologically, such readiness-to-hand is premised upon that entity's presence-at-hand. A thing can be ready for use only when it exists beforehand. Further, readiness-to-hand demarcates an entity's natural state in a natural environment. The hammer then can be used because all conditions for its use are ideal. In which case, as Heidegger says, the importance of both the presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand of an equipment fails to be noticed by the Dasein. Hence, Heidegger continues, it is only in a broken state<sup>6</sup> that readiness-to-hand can be truly recognized. Firstly, when the equipment is not in its natural state or environment, its unreadiness-to-hand transforms that entity into something merely present-at-hand (since it doesn't provide the possibility to be used anymore). Secondly, while that entity is just present-at-hand, instead of losing all readiness-to-hand, the entity displays a Being that necessarily includes its readiness-to-hand, albeit in a negative way. It is in an absence of and in an object that its true importance is realized. A pen for example cannot be used to hammer a nail. In effect, because of the absence of the hammer or the placement of the pen instead of it, the true Being of the both these entities is understood. Unlike the complete ready-at-hand equipment then, the broken entity possesses within it both presence-at-hand and through an absence readiness-at-hand. It is both, the possession and the knowledge of that possession of these two characteristics through which the complete Being of an equipment is realized. This realization is then followed by the complete comprehension of the “world” instead of the partial one attained through an unbroken equipment. The broken tool in this sense becomes important for a discussion on red herrings, for red herrings act as such broken equipments that are extremely necessary to understand the world concerned with and around it.

The above argument, considering red-herrings as equipments, draws upon Heidegger's classification of “signs” as equipments:

“We come across "equipment" in "signs." The word "sign" designates many kinds of things: not only may it stand for different kinds of signs, but Being-a-sign-for can itself be formalized as a universal kind of relation, so that the sign- structure itself provides an ontological clue for "characterizing" any entity whatsoever...signs are themselves items of equipment whose specific

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<sup>6</sup> The broken state of an equipment includes its actual breakage, its implementation or use in an environment that is not suitable for it, a missing equipment and so on.

character as equipment consists in *showing* or *indicating*. We find such signs in signposts, boundary-stones, signals, banners and the like.” (107-108)

What is highlighted through the classification of signs as equipments is a reference or a context “towards which” every sign is geared. Signs do not exist in vacuum or are simply present-at-hand. They are ready-to-hand towards a particular concern as well. Heidegger uses the example of turn indicators fitted in cars to explain this equipmental nature of sign systems. While these indicators signify that the driver-user wants to or is about to take a turn, such a system of signaling is also meant for other drivers and pedestrians on the road so that they either stop or give way to the driver using the turn signals. Therefore, these signs are used towards the work of driving on the road, not only for the driver using such signals but for everyone around.

Like the turn signal red herrings too are sign-equipments and have a definite interpretive referral. As mentioned above, however, red herrings act as broken equipments because more often than not red herrings are forcibly turned to have “unnatural” interpretations. Similar to a pen being used instead of a hammer, they are compelled either to refer to or be interpreted as something they should not ideally be. Further, such interpretations are made to *seem* natural so that these red-herrings can successfully perform their ostensible tasks as distractions. Dr. Sheppard, for example, in order to frame Ralph Paton for the murder of Roger Ackroyd, uses Paton’s boots to create footprints outside Ackroyd’s study and forces him to hide from the law. The footprints and Paton’s disappearance are made to refer to something (Ralph’s guilt) that they naturally do not refer to. Understandably, the police suspects Paton because they (un)successfully misinterpret the red herrings created by Dr. Sheppard as clues. Poirot is able to clear Paton of all charges only after he recognizes the red herrings as red herring. This recognition corresponds to the acknowledgement of a broken equipment and through that of the world.

Further, since signs are always meant for someone towards a particular use or a goal, red herrings too have attendant subjects. Red Herrings can only Be *because* of a set of persons and *for* a different set of persons. Both these sets have an important part to play in the functioning dynamics of red herrings as broken equipments: while one set “breaks” it, the other interprets the Being of these equipments through such unreadiness-to-hand. Conventionally, detective novels have the Author and the Criminal as the creators of red herrings and the Reader and the Detective as the ones for whom these signs are created. The Barrymores and Parker are examples of red herrings created by Doyle and Christie for their readers and for Poirot respectively. The current paper, however, concentrates on the criminal-detective binary with regards to red herrings because even though the author writes the red herrings into existence, s/he writes them as the criminal would want them to be. The reader on the other hand interprets the respective red herrings simultaneous with the detective. Added to which is the unfair advantage that the author has over not only the reader but every single character: detective or criminal in the novel.

Red herrings are created by criminals through their “performances” of crime. Each crime, in a sense, becomes like a theatrical presentation. In the *Hound of Baskervilles* for example, the red herring of the hell hound is created by Stapleton through such actions. He doesn’t simply murder Sir Charles Baskerville but sets the stage, gathers all actors and ultimately performs the murder like a play. The arrangement and the staging of Sir Charles’ murder to look as if an actual hell hound has committed (or at least facilitated) his death creates the red herring which is uncovered by Holmes only at the end. The theft of Sir

Henry's boots from his hotel room also becomes a part of the performativity of murder and remains a red herring till Holmes is able to use that red herring in its broken-ness to figure out the existence of an earthly hound. Similarly in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Dr Sheppard's setting the scene in Ackroyd's room, placing Ralph Paton's footprints outside, having himself phoned, finding the body, and playing along as the innocent chronicler of events all become performances creating multiple red herrings in process. Each act of such performances turn "materials" into "metaphors" allowing the incorporation and attachment of structures of meaning not apparent or natural to such materials: in process creating the possibility of a red herring. Further, Insofar as red herrings, reflecting broken equipments, are indispensable for the ontological disclosure of the world, criminals, at least within the boundaries of a novel, become facilitators towards the attainment of such knowledge. The performance of a crime in a sense opens up the door to the understanding of the world within the novel, the characters in it and through them finally the World in general. Detectives on the other hand, through their uncovering of red herrings as red herrings and not simple clues, not only complete such forms of knowledges but also "grow" in course. Holmes is able to solve Sir Charles' murder only after he realizes the curse as a red herring. This realization allows him to move beyond the myth of the curse to think of a way that would have turned a myth into reality; en route of which find out who the culprit is.

Red herrings therefore are not simple distractions to deviate the reader's and the detective's attention away from solving the crime. Working as broken clues, they become fundamental towards the understanding of the world of the novel and through that of characters inhabiting that space and finally the solution of the crime. In a sense, red herrings are if not more, then equally important as material evidence in detective fictions.

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# The Nature of 'Perception' in Wordsworth's Poetry

## Highlighting the Dissonance Between 'Perception' and 'Conception'

Deeksha Suri

The period of Enlightenment is understood both as a historical moment and a conceptual framework. It was an 18<sup>th</sup> century movement that held rational certainty to be determinant in setting the ground for self - knowledge. This conviction was equally held by both Rationalists and Empiricists during that period. Despite the unifying principle, variance lies in their designated 'source' of knowledge of the subject as well as the world. While Descartes (1596 - 1650) as a Rationalist philosopher places emphasizes on certain innate ideas and the doubting faculty or the mind of man, Locke (1632 - 1704) through his concept of 'Tabula Rasa' emphasizes primarily on the role of the senses in acquiring knowledge. In agreement with Cathy Caruth's assertion that, "With...empiricism as a starting point, we might consider new ways of reading the self - meditations of Romantic texts"<sup>1</sup>, the aim of this paper is to study the nature of 'Perception' in William Wordsworth, beginning with Lockean empiricism. The paper will include John Locke's text '*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*' along with Wordsworth's poems 'Resolution and Independence', Book I and Book II from 'The Prelude'.

In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* published in 1690, Locke elaborates over the processes which are responsible for human knowledge. At the beginning of the essay he proclaims that "by the use of their natural faculties [men] may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions." (*Essay*, 27) Hence, the fallacy of innate ideas can be premised within the principle of rational comprehension. Anything that can be 'experienced' within the physical world as well as reasoned through mental observation is considered to be the source of human knowledge. The word 'experience' holds central importance within Locke's terminology, as it covers the entire scope of the possibility of gaining knowledge. 'Experience' has double origin for Locke i.e. in "Sensation or Reflection". (*Essay*, 87) As the name suggests, sensation is the power of the senses through which man is capable of gaining primary impressions from the physical world which cause the initiation of his sensory experience. Further on, reflection absorbs the material supplied by sensation and acts upon the knowledge assimilated by sense experience through which one attains understanding. Thus, if the first set of experience comes from the external world, he calls the secondary set of ideas "internal sense" which does not has its source in without but in the internal mechanism of the mind. The three pointers necessary to be studied separately in Lockean system are Experience, Understanding and Ideas. Ideas can be understood as perception or the perceived knowledge, which has its source in the sensuous experience. The human eye employed in gaining impressions from the appearances in the external world acts as the agent in production of 'Simple Ideas.' But they also have their origin in 'understanding', which acts as an analogue of the human eye. The ideas

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<sup>1</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Empirical Truths and Critical Fictions* (John Hopkins UP, 1991), 4.

furnished in the mind, when one reflects upon the impressions gained from the outer world are termed as 'Complex Ideas.'

In the *Essay* Locke asserts that "the other fountain from which experience furnisheth the understanding with ideas is, - the perception of the operations of our own mind within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got."<sup>2</sup> Thus the nature of perception in Locke, is primarily the operation of the senses and further of the mind, for enriching the understanding with a different set of ideas than gained through the senses. But, the formation of 'Experience' presupposes a certain coherence in sensuous perception and mental reflection. Hence the point of enquiry is, what accounts for the experiences that stand outside this coordinated interaction within conceptual frameworks. Both Enlightenment and Romanticism put forth the "representation of the origins, or the conditions, of self knowledge; of the mind facing itself."<sup>3</sup> But, Wordsworth's poetry engages differently with sensation and reflection by presenting a disjunction in their united function.

In 1798, Wordsworth and Coleridge together produced *Lyrical Ballads* that comprises a set of poems by both the poets, along with a Preface that is seminal in understanding Wordsworth's style, intent and purpose of writing poetry. In the advertisement, Wordsworth calls for a break from conventional ways of 'looking' for experiencing the pleasure of novelty among familiar forms. He admits his subject to be "materially different from those, upon which general approbation is at present bestowed"<sup>4</sup> and regards this collection as an 'experiment'. In the Preface he emphasizes on forming impassioned relationship with nature, by cultivating the ability to communicate with it. The Preface also focuses on the development of a language that is distanced from Neoclassicism's artificial and strict poetic conventions. His poetry does not seek for grander subjects but the simple events of life, infused with vivid sensation for perceiving beauty. Within the *Preface*, he elaborates on the design of his poetry that germinates both from "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (*Lyrical Ballads*, 252) and meditation upon the imaginative recollections. His purpose is thus to write poetry that reflects an "organic sensibility" (*Lyrical Ballads*, 238) through an integration of feeling with thought.

The prominence of feeling in recounted experiences is ineluctably evident in the language of the poems. But, the point at which Wordsworth stands distinct from empirical methods of gaining knowledge and certainty can be broadly investigated in the poem '*Resolution and Independence*'. '*Resolution and Independence*', published in 1807 sets forth another idea of the mind of a man in dialogue with itself. The poet is oscillating between the present moment and the past joys while he recollects the childhood days and acknowledges a faded rigor in the present moment. "Even while he tries to seize a present joy, an understanding grows in him of the role of the involuntary memory, and he is led to introspection."<sup>5</sup> He recollects the memories of gallivanting in nature and realizes a lack of communion with it in the present moment. The sense of fear, commonly associated with childhood experiences of the poet, are also a part of his mature experience, when thoughts become empty of perceived knowledge, "And fears and fancies thick upon me came; / Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name." (*Resolution and Independence*, 27 - 28)

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<sup>2</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Pennsylvania State University, 1999), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Empirical Truths and Critical Fictions* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), Preface.

<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (Routledge, 1968), 235.

<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* (Yale UP, 1971) 163.

In the poem, the poet perceives the external delights of nature and attempts to participate in its gay spirit, but the poem progresses towards the moment when the poet experiences a lack in formulating a concrete understanding of the external world. When he sees the Leech Gatherer, the poet speculates that, "the oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs." (*Resolution and Independence*, 56) By designating him as the 'oldest man', the poet showcases his improbability in perceiving the figure of the Leech Gatherer, as the epithet 'oldest man' keeps the Leech Gatherer out of a definite temporal and spatial framework. The attempt to perceive the one visible to the poet further complicates when he apprehends the figure just "as a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie." (*Resolution and Independence*, 57 - 58) Inability of the poet in subsuming the figure of Leech Gatherer within decidedly known proportions highlights a rift between his perception and the consequent act of conception. In spite of observing the man, when the poet utters that, "such seemed this man, not all alive nor dead" (*Resolution and Independence*, 64) it becomes the basis of a shift from the empirical understanding of the world.

Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* assigns sense perceptions as the source of all knowledge. Subsequently, reflection upon gained perceptions leads to understanding. Therefore, the unity between perception and reflection is seemingly presupposed in his argument, without providing a rationale over the assured production of an idea in the process. But in this poem, the data assimilated by the senses does not obviate a rational comprehension or reflection. The poet engages his senses in understanding the figure of Leech Gatherer, but fails to establish its coherence with the conception of the same. Hence, the poem exemplifies the distinct nature of perception in Wordsworth's poetry where the immediate engagement with the external world through senses, does not obviate reflection. It accounts for those experiences of the disruptive stimuli which lend a vision that is beyond conceptual frameworks and defeat the logic of rationality in gaining the sense of the world.

In the beginning of the poem, the poet is experiencing a conjugal bliss in nature, "all things that love the sun are out of doors; / The sky rejoices in the morning's birth". (*Resolution and Independence* 8 - 9) But soon the poet is unable to reciprocate that joy and sinks into despair, "To me that morning did it happen so; / And fears and fancies thicken upon me came; / Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name." And it is in the same mood he first encounters the Leech Gatherer. The feelings of a lost communication with nature causes indeterminacy in perceiving anything outside, including the Leech Gatherer. According to Geoffrey Hartman, the categories of time or subject enter his poetry "like the power of thought itself."<sup>6</sup> The fluidity between perception and conception of the outer reality also becomes fractured when the poet himself is decentered from his agency of a perceiving subject, as he finds the encounter "a leading from above, a something given" (*Resolution and Independence* 50). Further, a constant refiguration of what is real abandons the certainty of every predetermined coordinate. "Perplexed, and longing to be comforted, / My question eagerly did I renew, / "How is it that you live, and what is it you do?"" (117 - 119) As the poet is not directly reaching to any conclusive understanding of the Leech Gatherer, rather takes successive steps in the form of assumptions, relooking and questioning, the knowledge received from the senses becomes insufficient in comprehending the Leech Gatherer in the mind of the poet, despite their participation in the act of perception.

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<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), ix.

Enlightenment, worked with the binary of subject and object, where an individual was the subject who casts his/her own understanding for the knowledge of the outer world. But, with respect to Wordsworth's poetry, he does not necessarily look at nature to make sense of it, rather to connect with it and shape the sense of self by respecting the mutual effect of inspiration from nature and his own gift of rejuvenating the creative imagination by writing poetry. Fracture between the subject and the object is healed when each of the constituents engage in enhancing the aspect of self - awareness. "A natural object liberates Wordsworth's imagination only when it both ceases to be purely external and fades out its object status."<sup>7</sup>

According to Harold Bloom in *The Visionary Company*, spots of time in Wordsworth's poetry are "to enshrine the spirit of the past for future restoration." (161) The event of poet meeting the Leech Gatherer in the poem can be seen as a spot in time of this nature. Leech Gatherer here is the exemplar of a satisfied commuter in the natural environment. His stay in nature is harmonized for having accepted the reality as it comes to him and has learnt to "persevere". However, the economic conditions may change or leeches may "have dwindled long with slow decay" (*Resolution and Independence*, 125) but his presence in nature is not affected by this sense of loss. "The failure of communication between him and Wordsworth...which is the substance of the remainder of the poem, is due to his being a part of the solitude around him while Wordsworth, with his anxieties, is a trouble to the place."<sup>8</sup> But, this intercourse with the Leech Gatherer renews his engagement with nature. The idea of new found unity results in poet's renovated affinities and instills a hope of sharing similar communion with nature.

With regard to Wordsworth, Geoffrey Hartman asserts that, "It is perhaps the first time a poet has kept his eye so steadily on the object...and attempted a direct transcription of his personal response to nature."<sup>9</sup> *The Prelude* is subtitled as 'Growth of a poet's mind' that has been conditioned both by nature and poet's own creative abilities. In the book, Wordsworth is registering a personal response to nature, time, memory and imagination through poetry. It encompasses both immediate and remembered pleasures that corroborate in the making of a creative self. According to the *Preface*, "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" is poetry but the recollections in tranquility fashion the mind which makes the poetry. Hence, in the *Prelude* the poet introspects about the experiences, gifts and growth of his mind. Through this understanding, the paper will develop a study on Book I and Book II of *The Prelude* to question the validity of sense experience in producing the knowledge of the objective world. It attempts to throw light on the instances where indeterminacy can be located within perception through senses and subsequent conception by the mind.

Wordsworth calls *The Prelude* "a tale from my heart, more near akin/ To my own passions and habitual thoughts." (Book I 222 - 223) In Book I, Wordsworth begins by addressing his communion with nature. As an experienced traveler he has learnt to participate as well as distance himself from it. He acknowledges nature and imagination as congenial powers, feeding his mind with creative instincts. Basil Willey promotes a similar view when he maintains that with "the bond between nature and the soul of man, this dead world may be brought to life by the modifying colours of the 'imagination'"<sup>10</sup> But the poet is

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<sup>7</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (Cornell UP, 2006), 142.

<sup>8</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (Cornell UP, 2006), 168.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* (Yale UP, 1971), 163.

<sup>10</sup> M.H. Abrams, *English Romantic Poets* (Oxford UP, 1975), 116.

not designating sensory stimuli as the absolute source or starting point of his primal powers. Rather, he mentions his 'vital soul' as the first gift which connects with the external world and initiates the creative process. Hence the poet is coming to understand his independence from nature and immediate sense stimuli. Poetry is written after refiguring what is real and is often an account of incongruity, experienced while configuring the immediate data collected by the senses.

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth expresses the value of nature in transforming his experience, "sedulous as I have been to trace/ How Nature by extrinsic passion first peopled the mind with forms of sublime and fair". (*Book I* 544 - 546) In the beginning of Book I the poet revels in his youthful affinities with nature. The joy felt in nature incorporates active sensations. But in his poetry there are no absolute parameters of perception relevant in all situations. It is in the 'boat stealing episode' that an easy participation with nature seems eschewed and he realizes a presence beyond the realm of sensations. During the boat stealing episode, the poet encounters a different aspect of nature where the comfort of familiar forms is replaced by a haunting vision which intimates of a separateness from nature. While recounting the episode in the poem, the poet is unsure of what he perceived through his senses. The spectacle robs his sense of 'familiar shapes' and his understanding experiences a "dim and undetermined sense/ of unknown modes of being." (*Book I* 392 - 393) During such experiences, bodily senses refuse to lend an explanation and the firm grounds of sensual perception are surpassed in the moment of a spectacle that results in "blank desertion" (*Book I* 395). The poet here is devoid of a familiarity with external forms. The presupposed unity between sensuous perception and conception in Locke's system gets dissolved and the supremacy of perception through the senses is questioned. The poet experiences a dissonance between the data he perceives through his senses and the empty ideas he receives while reflecting upon the same. The mind therefore outgrows its dependence on nature and revives images of the scene through its own creative abilities. As the incident gets 'imaginatively reconstructed' in his poetic composition, the perception of nature may not be the primal power that gives him epistemological certainty, and it can be his own mind with the power to act as the agent of gaining knowledge that becomes central in the process of meaning making. Therefore, the "mind must 'figure' the materials which are to hand into redispersed forms, providing whatever degree of activity or passivity nature seems not to provide."<sup>11</sup>

In the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth proclaims that "feeling therein developed gives importance to action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling." (*Lyrical Ballads*, 239) Spots of time in Wordsworth's poetry are the moments wherein the poet is engaged with more than usual emotional intensity. They tell of "memories by which the mind, 'especially the imaginative power' is nourished and made fruitful by its own self - generated power."<sup>12</sup> Spots of time do not refer to 'still' moments in time but a process through which a poet learns to feel. Boat stealing episode is one such spot of time in past which modulates the present of the poet. Within the orbit of the moment in the past, the poet is unable to articulate the specificities of the scene and feels a 'darkness' surrounding him. The 'moment' refuses to be incorporated in language or any signification, for which the poet revisits its memory to renew it via imagination. Hence the clear perception of 'objective reality' is no less than an enigma for the poet. The 'real' appears to be an unstable entity for being shaped and metamorphosed by the mind

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<sup>11</sup> David Simpson, *Wordsworth and the Figurings of the Real* (Macmillan Press Ltd. 1982), 61.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth* (Infobase Publishing 2007), 199.

concentrating upon it. The presumption of a commonly understood world gets challenged in this instance as the outer world seems lost and can only be revived through a process of meditations and imaginative reconstructions.

In book II of *The Prelude*, the poet discusses his solitary walks during his school days in Hawkshead. The feeling of calm and delight makes him ponder, "How shall I seek the origin?/ where find faith in the marvelous things which then I felt." (Book II, 346 - 347) Nature nurtures his transformative experience but at the same time an ambiguity envelops him. The underlying thought highlights the indeterminacy of the poet in pronouncing the formative aspect of his experiences. He further describes that,

"Oft in these moments such a holy calm  
Would over spread my soul, that bodily eyes  
Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw  
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,  
A prospect in the mind." (Book II, 348 - 352)

Here, the sensory perception gets subordinated to the power of the mind, as such instances do not signify it as the seeding ground of his communion with nature and the self. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke's purpose is to formulate a theory that is concerned with the evaluation of certainty in gaining knowledge. It conceptualizes perception in a systematic manner where "the senses at first let in particular ideas...and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory...In this manner the mind comes to be furnished with ideas and language, the materials about which to exercise its discursive faculty."<sup>13</sup> He is limited to sense - perception for determining the existence of objective world and our understanding of it. But in Book II, Wordsworth presents a critique of this process, denying any particular beginning to an idea. He also presents a critique of Enlightenment rationality by discouraging the processes that "range the faculties/ In scale and order, class the cabinet/ Of their sensations,...Run through the history and birth of each." (Book II 223 - 226) Hence, he doesn't ascribe a significant power to classified sensual perception, rather abstracts his notion of the birth of an idea by putting forth an intuitive understanding.

Critics such as Cathy Caruth, Paul Hamilton, Marshall Brown and various others find Wordsworth's poetry as representative of a "historical moment in sensibility when Romanticism is born out of the Enlightenment's confidence in generating human experience."<sup>14</sup> Their study traces Wordsworth's perception of nature as relying upon sensory ground. Moreover, their study supposes his creative imagination to have its roots in the realm of the senses. But the instances where the poet recounts "seeking the visible world, nor knowing why" (*Book II*, 278) he is unaware of the objective world affecting his senses. According to Locke, 'simple ideas' when gained through sensory perception "the understanding can no more refuse to have, nor alter when they imprinted." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 101) But, in Wordsworth's experience, perception is selective. Objects are not static while providing ideas to the mind, rather, they are modified by imagination. Perception of reality is open to multiple figurings and thus is seen in a new light. In his childhood, nature housed his sense of harmony along with a vision of dread. It escalated poet's joy but also destroyed the comfort of familiar shapes. Hence, the kind of

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<sup>13</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Pennsylvania State University, 1999), 35.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Gill, *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* (Cambridge UP, 2003), 221.

experience fostered by nature also engendered something contrary to empirical claims of perception.

The frame of Wordsworth's experience incorporates communication between poet's mind and nature. In the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* he acknowledges the principle role of nature in nurturing his passions by revealing itself in unprecedented glory. He also recognizes his own agency as the one whose mind has been weaned by nature itself to grow beyond it,

Difference  
Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye,  
No difference is, and hence, from the same source,  
Sublimar joy; for I walk alone (*Book II* 299 - 302)

Geoffrey Hartman in *Wordsworth's Poetry* maintains that in Wordsworth's poetry "imagination flowed with nature's aid back into nature."<sup>15</sup> Hence, instead of denouncing the role of sense perception in Wordsworth's poetry, the paper is presenting a study of those moments where rationality submits its attempts of furnishing ideas. The images supplied from outside have ambiguous impact upon the poet and get refracted by poet's imaginative reconstructions. Claims of empirical certainty cannot be withheld as the language in Wordsworth's poetry is not constitutive of reality rather expressive of it. In book I and II of *The Prelude* empirical starting point of Wordsworth's perception continually gets decentered as the sensuous stimuli is unable to supply a concrete knowledge of the object. Hence, it is axiomatic that Wordsworth's poetry surpasses the 'categorized' understanding of perception in Locke. Nature and human mind are 'correspondent' powers but the first impressions afforded by nature remain displaced, denying the correspondence between 'perception' and 'understanding'. A stable description of perception in Wordsworth is difficult to propose but it certainly exemplifies "the capacity of the mind to co-operate with this 'active universe', to contribute something of its own in perceiving it."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* (Yale UP, 1971), 29.

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# Last Resort Lalli or the New Age Miss Marple

Shrehya Taneja

“Crime has always been a part of our lives. Open a daily... you notice... crime stories... Indian writers, especially in English, did not actually tackle the subject until recently... suddenly... last four-five years, there has been an avalanche of crime writing in India”- Sarma (*Making Crime Pay*, 2015)

Crime has penetrated the daily newspapers and the television set at home entering the domestic landscape and molding the taste of the emerging Indian nation which is now a global market. The ‘India Shining’ slogan adopted in 2004 by the political BJP<sup>1</sup> marked a shift in Indian lifestyle. This slogan became synonymous with rapid development that transformed the image of the nation worldwide. The campaign sought to depict economic change that swept the Indian market in 1990’s hinting at global lifestyle, availability of imported brands and the awareness of an efficient economy that allowed a better lifestyle. The post-millennial Indian nation that might have it all emerged significantly changing the expression of the Indian realities. What appeals to the palette of this new rising India striving to make its mark on the global consciousness? What is this new post millennial India reading?

Suman Gupta<sup>2</sup> (2015) traces the development of ‘Indian English literature’ to 1980’s where the publishers at domestic and foreign markets forayed into the publishing business with fiction written in Indian English. Gupta believes that the Indian market differentiates between commercial fiction and literary fiction represented by writers like Rushdie, Nair and Ghosh; these two arenas are not mutually exclusive and are judged according to the commercial profits. To map the advent of Indian English writing and to gauge the Indian reader’s interests, we need to move beyond the horizons of academic criticism by examining the reception of Indian English fiction and its circulation in the publishing industry. Emma Dawson Varughese<sup>3</sup> (2013) locates the emergence of a ‘New India’ and a ‘New Indian cannon’ in 1980’s that catered to different ‘societal changes’. She details various genres that arose in post-independent India.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhartiya Janta Party

<sup>2</sup> Professor Suman Gupta (1966) is the Head of Department of English and Creative Writing at the Open University, United Kingdom. His interests include modern and contemporary Indian literature as well as political philosophy. His work marks a significant contribution in tracking the progress of Indian Literature. Some of the books on which he co-authored include-*Philology and Global English Studies: Retracings* (2015), *Consumable Texts in Contemporary India: Uncultured Books and Bibliographical Sociology* (2015) and many more. He has also edited *India in the Age of Globalization* (2003), *English Studies on This Side: Post-2007 Reckonings* (2010) and many other volumes.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Emma Dawson Varughese is an independent research scholar who has done significant work in tracing the rise of genre fiction and their resonance with the sociopolitical circumstances which led to their rise within contemporary Indian literature. Her publications include *Beyond the Postcolonial: World Englishes Literature* (2012), *Reading New India: post-millennial Indian Fiction* (2013) *Genre Fiction of New India: post millennial configurations of Crick Lit, Chick Lit and crime writing* (2016) and many other such valuable research work.

While Varughese examines several genres-emergency literature, epic, and fantastical narratives, Young India's fiction-this paper focuses on the genre of Indian detective fiction, a subgenre of crime writing. This paper focuses on the depiction of the female detective in Indian English writing while examining the nature of Indian detective fiction that responds to its literary ancestor, Golden Age crime fiction through Swaminathan's<sup>4</sup> silver haired detective, Last-Resort Lalli. The texts that the paper interrogates include second and the third novel in the Lalli series, *The Gardener's Song*<sup>5</sup>(2007) and *The Secret Gardener*<sup>6</sup>(2013), respectively. Contemporary Indian detective fiction acquired the status of a flourishing genre in the Indian market by being able to capture the reader's imagination. An article titled, 'Reading in India' (2007) registers Swaminathan's detective fiction as favorable. Lalli received numerous mentions in many dailies and made a mark as a popular Indian detective in Varughese's 'Crime Writing' (2014). This character recalls Agatha Christie's Miss Marple<sup>7</sup> making it an ideal point of investigation for its readers. The paper focuses on critically investigating the relationship that Lalli both recalls and shares with Miss Marple.

The genre of detective fiction has become an urbane phenomenon that depicts the multiple diverse realities of India. It has its origin in Golden Age crime fiction that became popular in Britain during the World Wars. The detective story provided an escape from the reality of a life for the British Empire dealing with its waning power. Orsini<sup>8</sup> (2004) follows the advent of detective fiction in nineteenth century India where Holmes's descendants move from Bengali to Hindi literature. A major reason that this genre flourished in the commercial market was its engagement with the colonial India. Orsini's informative essay fails to examine the profile of the contemporary Indian reader of a detective novel. She paves the path for further examination of this phenomenon that has entered the urban space and the domain of English fiction being produced by Indian authors. What are the reader's expectations from the detective fiction novels in Indian English? How do women writers and their creations, the female detectives, impact the genre?

The launch of Doordarshan in 1959 and eventual onslaught of entertainment channels introduced various shows to the imagination of the Indian public. The rise of the urban middle class in the 1980's can be charted through televised Doordarshan serials like *Buniyaad* and *Hum Log*<sup>9</sup>. Both shows, written by Manohar Joshi, consolidated the position of Indian middle class in the post-partition era. *Hum Log* showcased the Basesar family's struggles through its visible symbols of modernity be it gramophones, transistors, and the two bedroom flat. *Buniyaad* charted the journey of a Punjabi family as they progressed from

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<sup>4</sup> Kalpana Swaminathan (1956) is a writer and a surgeon who has authored The Lalli series. She has written many other novels including *Ambrosia for After* (2003)s, *Jaldi's Friends*(2003) and *Bougainvillea House* (2006) and many more. Lalli first appeared in *Page 3 Murders* (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Abbreviated as TGSO

<sup>6</sup> Abbreviated as TSG

<sup>7</sup> Dame Agatha Christie (1890-1976) was a famous English novelist, playwright and short story writer. She created many memorable detectives like Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Miss Marple first appeared in *The Thirteen Problems* (1932).

<sup>8</sup> The essay referred to here is *Detective Novels: A Commercial Genre in Nineteenth Century North India*.

<sup>9</sup> *Buniyaad* premiered in 1986 and was directed by Ramesh Sippy. It starred Alok Nath as Master Haveli Ram and Anita Karwal as Lajwanti, the lead protagonists of the show. *Hum Log* aired in 1984 was the first television drama series to be launched in India was directed by P. Kumar Vasudev. It starred many actors like Vinod Nagpal and Jayshri Arora.

pre partition Punjab to the post partition era. The space occupied by the family undergoes many conflicts related to their survival. The viewers of daily soaps imbibed an ideological cultural experience which condemned the breaking of the patrilineal familial structure while dramatizing the social evils of partition, dowry, and domestic violence as invading the isolated structure and tearing it apart. These shows epitomized the nostalgic past and privileged the joint family system. *Hum Log* had Ashok Kumar appearing after every episode's conclusion acting as the voice of reason debating dilemmas faced by characters and steering the audience in a particular direction. These serials engaged with the contemporary culture of commercialization that began in tandem with these popular shows. The time slots between shows advertised products for the family like 'two minute Maggi Noodles' and 'Hamara Bajaj' scooters paving the way for an urban middle class which distanced from the immediate aftermath of partition, began coming into its own.

Tharoor (*Celebrate College, but Doubt the School*, 2000) commented on the reality of the evolving middle class that composed an India with its multiple truths and realities. He identified the connection between nostalgic intellectual tradition which privileged the reading of the epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana, a past symbolized by the erstwhile Master Haveli Ram who participated in nationalistic movements against colonialism remaining rooted to the Indian way of life. The characters like Nanhe and Majhli who wanted to embrace the life of a cricketer and an actress, respectively, indicated the ambitions the Indian middle class harbored introducing an anglophone present. The families who had worked hard after Independence had been able to amass a certain amount of wealth allowing them to educate their children from English speaking institutions. These students, with the consciousness of their antecedents and a bloody past, formed a reading and writing public that composed a large chunk of the nation and sought to create its own literature. It is during this rich historical moment in which writers like Tharoor, Ghosh, Sealy, and Menon emerged. They could choose from multiple cultural experiences where they simultaneously viewed the works of Indian playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, and Badal Sircar while enjoying Shakespearean theater. "Increasingly, the urban Indian reader is well travelled, discerning and demands variety" - Aniyam Nair (2007) It is this reading public home at different worlds that would be confident in reading Christie while experimenting with their own Indian detectives negotiating an Inter-War Britain and a post-colonial India. It was during the 1980's -90's that popular Hindi detective dramas were launched. Some of these successful shows include *Byomkesh Bakshi*, *Jasoos Karamchand*, *Raja aur Rancho*, *Tehkikat*, and *Saboot* starring Anita Karwal as the Indian female detective. Thus, the Indian reader comes from a tradition of reading British detective fiction, vernacular detective fiction, and watching television serials adapted from popular crime shows.

The Indian detective negotiates an epistemological framework that borrows from European form to express a non-European reality. Subject to its own forces of production in the marketplace, detective fiction is a dynamic literary form responding to the cultural expectations of a changing Indian society. Why do these adaptations appeal to the Indian readers? The rise of the female fictional Indian detective is an emerging phenomenon which requires investigation. Rather than tracing similarities between these genres or looking at Lalli through the lens of adaptation, the paper attempts to trace a critical response towards Christie through her. An Indian reader familiar with Christie's Miss Marple inevitably attempts to trace parallels with Swaminathan's Lalli. Swaminathan debated her decision to choose an older detective, a female aged 63 years, in an interview. She was confronted with the question whether an elderly detective can live up to the challenges of a darker universe where every character is suspicious and the detective constantly doubts. The existence of an

elderly spinster, Miss Marple in a fictional universe, according to Swaminathan's critics, provided her with a framework that she could exploit while assuring her readers that her famed-silver haired detective was not a novel experiment, it had a literary predecessor.

Roma Rajpal (2012) commented that the Indian detectives are post-colonial hybrids comfortable in many worlds. Like the reading and writing public, they converse in English while munching pakoras and tea. This post-colonial moment in detective fiction has bestowed it with possibilities allowing the genre to respond to its literary predecessors by harnessing its potential to tell an innovative story. Responding to the legacy of Golden Age crime fiction writers becomes a task for Swaminathan which encompasses several arguments. The Indian landscape and the gap of almost two centuries with the varied epistemological framework that the evolving detective figures face become important themes. It is the erosion of the family that impacts the Indian social landscape. The appearance of crime from within the internal labyrinth of family becomes the pervading concern of Indian detective fiction. Swaminathan utilizes the generic convention to speak about the dominant familial institution where detective supposedly becomes a beholder of conventional moral values, rescuing the domestic space from chaos and restoring it to a peaceful state.

Miss Marple's adaptation as the central reference by Swaminathan becomes clear in *The Gardener's Song*. The text creates a dialogue between Lalli and Miss Marple over generations. Miss Marple and Lalli as elderly spinsters reside at their homes with cases knocking at their doorsteps. Nothing escapes Miss Marple's eyes and the Vicar describes her as dangerous (*The Murder at the Vicarage*, 1930). Miss Marple prides herself as an aficionado on human nature. For her, human nature is same everywhere while Lalli collects curiosities. Her curiosities recount grotesque nature of the crime committed by ordinary individuals. From Miss Marple, Swaminathan borrows the deceptive appearance of elderly spinster who clucks like a harmless motherly hen, a ruse that both adopt to fool others.

Swaminathan reflects on the parish of St. Mary Mead where everyone knows everyone. The village community lends itself to the cloistered and diverse Indian realities, here specifically the building, Utkrushi A in *The Gardener's Song* where Lalli and Sita reside. The apartment complex housing sixteen families recalls St. Mary Mead with the elderly spinsters who make it their business to be informed about the entire village news. The figure of Mr. Rao represents the amateur detective who recalls both Miss Marple and other nosy elderly women like Mrs Price Ridley, Miss Weatherby, and Miss Hartnell who populate the Vicarage and pass moral judgments in their drawing rooms. Mr. Rao performs the function of the detective within the Indian family system who does his duty by finding faults in others while upholding the family's reputation. Miss Marple could have been a female Mr. Rao, the interfering neighbor who became a nuisance to others, if not for her sensibility. He is the failed amateur detective contrasted against the successful professional detective. Nothing escapes Mr. Rao but he spreads it to the entire building tarnishing reputations in the bargain. The structure of the cramped apartment depicts the shift from Golden Age Crime fiction to post-colonial India where the apartment symbolizes the urban Indian realities. The apartments become isolated communities that house compact living spaces where all the residents are intimate with other's lives.

The apartment buildings in the new mega cities provide a visual image of globalized India as a direct outcome of the India Shining campaign focused on neoliberalization of policies exposing India to world markets. They become synonymous with material desires of middle class to inhabit the urban imagination with their improvised world class lifestyle. The

globalized Indian lifestyle was reflected in consumption of commodities be it Sita's culinary dishes, Kashish's indie pop concert, police procedural tools, and Rita Gomes catching a flight to Dubai to start her own entrepreneurial endeavor of a make-up saloon. The building residents, Padmanabhan, Ramachandran, Betty, Benny, the Patels, Vaibhav Rao, Mr. Rao, and Sita symbolize Christie's urban readers. Sita as the urban cosmopolite recalls Miss Marple's cases when she refers to atropine eye drops in murdering someone and poison pen while attempting to solve Mr. Rao's murder. The atropine eye drops featured as the solution to a mystery that Miss Marple solved in *The Thumb Mark of St. Peter (1928)* whereas, the poison pen recalls *The Moving Finger (1942)*. Sita functions as the narrator, participant reader, and amateur detective who attempts to find the murderer based on her knowledge of reading detective fiction making apparent the connection between Miss Marple's novels and Lalli's detection.

Utkrushi becomes the center of action. There are various incidents emphasizing the breakup of the familial structure like the divorced Patels, Latika facing domestic violence or Srikanth Rao turning into the black sheep of family. Mr. Rao employs his disguise of an interfering neighbor while solving a real mystery. *The Secret Garden* also focuses on conflict within the family. Anil and Priya Chauhan's marriage is in danger and Priya's son Jai decides to seek shelter with Lalli to understand why he cannot play cricket with his new father. Priya earlier married to Hrishikesh Sawant was a victim of marital rape and domestic violence. Jai faced the brunt of his alcoholic father foregrounding another dysfunctional middle class family. Anil's marriage with Varsha Gurav exposes an emotionally abusive relationship where Varsha does not return Anil's affection. Swaminathan critically adapts Christie to initiate discussions about the Indian middle class and problems faced by women. Lalli with the outward appearance of a comely matron like Miss Marple is sought by every member of the society especially women.

Lalli runs the risk of becoming a stereotype that endorses a Western mode of thinking. Transposing the privileged first world woman into third world leads to the emphasis of the contrast of representation of the third world woman as imagined by the Western readers versus the Indian woman represented by an Indian female writer. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1987) cited five approaches in which the discourse around the third world woman is depicted by Western imagination. They are habitually defined as victims of male violence, universal dependants and their identities are subject to institutions of family, religion and economic liberalization. All women, except Sita, within textual universe have their identities defined in connection to their families. Both Vanaja Rao and Varsha Chauhan are wives first. The female characters in *The Secret Garden* are depicted as having dual identities which they are in the process of renegotiating as hidden secrets tumble out. The restoration of broken familial structure becomes the detective's assumed primary function, but Lalli is interested in unveiling the dual personas of criminals within these families. The accommodative ideal, the woman who does everything for betterment of her community and her family to the exclusion of herself shaped by the emergent nationalist discourses and the colonialist discourse has ceased to be.

The novels create a dialogue about the intrinsic violence practiced both within and without organized institutions that undermine the agency of women. Kumudben recounts the story of her niece, Sonu's dowry death while Latika narrates her plight of being burnt like Sonu so that she can be literally and metaphorically silenced. Kumudben here becomes the voice of reason who wants to protect the Sonus of the world. This discussion happens in Lalli's apartment effectively creating a feminist space in her abode and bestowing agency on

the women of Utkrushi. Moreover the doing away of any title before Lalli's name as opposed to the attachment of the respectable prefix Miss or Mrs. signals an escape in reader's mind since, Lalli refuses to let her marital status define her identity. The police detectives conjecture Lalli's history. She is introduced as the narrator's distant aunt. The absence of an organized familial structure re-aligns the reader's imagination fixing her as an individual choosing to privilege her identity of an investigating expert.

Lalli interrogates the hidden realities of the progressive middle class family unearthing different feminisms. The 'cultural other' or here the third world woman has a past of her own; a collective memory passed through generations which makes itself explicit in the attitudes, social modes of behavior, and crimes committed against them. This inherited communal memory indicates the shift towards an Indian audience for whom dowry deaths have become the norm and needs no introduction. However to club all women as being universally oppressed is to take away from their individual narrative voices, where their experiences vary but a shared understanding helps them to tackle the problems.

"She was an elder chanting the collective memory of her tribe...all those gathered about her remembered... wept...commonality of grief...arise from a shared memory and within that memory...many daughters have died... many mothers torn their hearts for them?"- Swaminathan (TGSO, 2007)

Lalli's occupation as a former policeman and her disguise as an elderly spinster allows her to come in contact with different Indian women. As opposed to Miss Marple, who is largely acquainted with people belonging to aristocratic class, Lalli by the virtue of her profession as a detective is engaged with the casteist, class-based and patriarchal structure of the Indian society. While in Utkrushi, we are confronted with urban middle class educated women capable of some agency of their own, in *The Secret Gardener*, Swaminathan creates diverse characters who belong to the fringes of the society. The action moves to a less crowded textual universe ushering in characters who act as the eyes and the ears of the society like Maruti the gardener, the Kapadias, Sukesh an electrician cum thief, Usha who lost everything in an earthquake in Gujarat and now runs a small time business, and Kesar Bai who was sold off into prostitution, later rescued by Lalli. Varsha's past is thoroughly explored as Sita and Lalli visit her college and track her domestic life. She is bestowed with a past of her own as are Kesar Bai, Usha Kapadia, Priya Chauhan, and Mrs. Kolse.

The factor that unites the female characters is the lack of agency that has turned them into victims be it Usha, Kesar, Priya, or Mrs. Kolse. Mrs. Kolse like Priya has an unhappy marriage and both the women do not exercise the option of ending their marriages recalling Lalli's words in the second novel about the compulsive need of the middle class to maintain their hypocritical façade of respectability. However, Kesar and Usha choose to respond. Usha Kapadia is an independent business woman selling Kutchi handicrafts, beads, fabrics, and costume jewellery. Kesar's evident enjoyment of her sexuality, her advice to Sukesh to end his life, and her penchant for classical music create a unique character. Usha's independent venture selling feminine products and Kesar's music and her sexuality become their means of reinventing their self, allowing them freedom of choice and agency.

It is significant that Priya chooses to take shelter with Lalli after she has been raped, Usha opens up to her about her travails and even Mrs Kolse responds to Lalli like Ahilyaba Sawant. Lalli becomes synonymous in the imagination of female characters with security enabling them with a voice away from repressive family structures where they are able to

narrate their problems. Different Indian feminist approaches emerge within the textual universe. It's the engagement with the silent struggles of female characters that mark the transition from the second to the third novel. Swaminathan breaks away from the structure of the conventional detective novels with labeled chapters as here the novel is divided into three parts providing us with the beginning, the middle, and the end. However, in both the novels, Lalli does collect the concerned characters together and provides a solution for them.

The structure of the novel, *The Gardener's Song* is in tune with Christie's formulaic writing. Sita influenced by Christie's novels detects a pattern in a poem that supposedly provides the clue-puzzle structure which the reader or the detective solves. Swaminathan both adopts and subverts Christie's technique of structuring events according to a poem, "Ten Little Indians" in her novel, *And Then There Were None* (1939). The events of the novel fit the pattern of the poem and invoke Christie's writings. *The Mad Gardener's Song* (1967) is a nonsensical poem written by Lewis Carroll<sup>10</sup> which even though follows a rhyme has no reasonable explanation. Swaminathan links events in this poem in a rational manner by calling it 'The Gardener's Song' erasing the word "Mad" from the title. The Mad Gardener speaks about the disappointments he faces, characteristic of the ordinary middle class life which keeps him from tending to his garden be it the relatives overstaying their welcome, the cold winters, the need for luxuries, and finally, the hopelessness of the human condition. The poem plays on the bitter realities of the middle class life displaying the motives of the middle class mind whose liberal modern lifestyle is dependent on economic prosperity. The Gardener, Yellapa, is an inquisitive onlooker who, recognizing kinship with the Kannada Raos, approaches Vanaja and ultimately foils her plans. Here, he becomes the eyes and the ears for the professional detective.

Moving onto the criminals, Mr Rao's naiveté lies in his inability to suspect Vanaja of the crime. He cannot imagine a female criminal. This assumption is strengthened when everyone suspects Anil as the murderer. Priya is ready to end her marriage with Anil because she believes him to be the culprit. Miss Marple's cases focused on many female criminals. Both Vanaja and Varsha seemed ordinary women who turned into murderesses. Varsha is a compulsive killer who murders to gain her motives beneath her persona of an amiable educated achiever. She was subjected to imagined and actual sexual assault by Makarand, her stalker. Vanaja borrows a leaf out of Lalli's book. She employs her disguise of a dutiful daughter-in-law while aiding her husband in the blood diamond business by using her home-made agarbattis to get Latika unconscious. Swaminathan (2011) commented that Lalli is worried that the Indian society is teeming with sordid crime while pretending to be respectable. The disparate labels of the elite middle class or the low life mean nothing to her. Lalli is worried about the psychopath that hides beneath an ordinary self. There is the doubling of selves that happens in both the criminals echoed by Lalli's spinster-detective persona. The use of doctored agarbattis by Vanaja indicates the subversive manner in which the institution of religion proves advantageous to her, revealing the dual agency of religion. Varsha uses her sexuality to strike a bargain with Mr. Kolse to prevent him from revealing her hidden persona while playing the devoted housewife.

Lalli has been shaped by the Western crime shows that populated the audience's imagination. The professional female detective in two American crime dramas aired several

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis Carroll (1832-98) was an English writer, mathematician, photographer and logician famous for writing nonsensical poems and Alice's Adventures.

years apart, *Body of Evidence* (2002) and *Rizzoli and Isles* (2010)<sup>11</sup>, depict the advent of modern forensic sciences. Dayle Hinman is a real life criminal profiler whose cases were dramatized for television. She analyzes body language, blood splatter patterns and the criminal's psychology to locate them. *Rizzoli and Isles* has been developed from a series of detective fiction books penned by Gerritsen and adapted for television. Doctor Maura Isles transforms the victim's body into an object of study allowing her to aid the crime solving process. The appearance of the criminal profiler and the medical examiner is a splitting of Miss Marple into different characters having access to various areas of technical knowledge. Lalli is an omniscient character who has gained both medical and psychological insight over the years but she calls in Doctor Qureshi just like the Florida police relies on Hinman, and Rizzoli seeks out Dr. Isles.

Viewers familiar with these crime dramas expect the stereotypical image of a professional detective, and hence, Lalli's penchant for dressing up for murder, reflected in Hinman's pantsuits while looking forward to both Rizzoli's no-nonsense attitude towards her choice of clothes. Lalli absorbs from crime dramas the professional detective's ability to dress for the job in a shirt and trousers. Negotiating the masculine space of the workplace itself offers a challenge that these fictional characters portray on the screen. Both Hinman and Rizzoli tend to downplay their sexual identity. Hinman adopts a professional attitude relying on logical analysis to locate her criminal. Rizzoli would rather be noticed only for her work as opposed to Dr. Isles who is comfortable negotiating her sexual identity where she both appropriates as well as distances her persona of an inquisitive female and a rational medical examiner. Hinman and Isles represent the entry of the forensic expert or the medical examiner in the novelistic universe.

Joy Palmer (2001) locates the popularity of the medical examiner with the rise of the medical mystery or forensic detective novel. These detectives read clues provided by the body transforming it into an anatomical text. The essential problem here is the visibilization of crime. If it was not for the corpse, the crime would remain undiscovered. The introduction of Qureshi, the medical examiner in *The Secret Gardener* foregrounds this trend. The representation of the brutalized body renders the narrative realistic and foregrounds the female gaze. Lalli and Sita look at the bodies of Mr. Rao, the dismembered body parts of Anil's Rita, Kesar, and Varhsa's parents. The masculine gaze of the detective is replaced by the female as the textual universes confront the problems of the women. Qureshi's retrieval of the painted finger opens the door for the solution of multiple crimes. While Dr. Qureshi resorts to radiocarbon dating, Lalli goes to a makeup saloon to help them locate the year of the murder, privileging the opinion of a professional female like Arifa. The Rose Ionic nail paint, common place nail polish, synonymous conventionally with women, becomes a cultural apparatus that enables detection through a feminine mode of knowledge like gossip. The fragmented body parts reconstruct various cultural identities in the social sphere be it of Arifa, the owner of the saloon who identifies the expensive nail paint, or the ambitious Rita capable of affording it.

Swaminathan critically responds to Miss Marple by adapting her to negotiate Indian realities. She picks up newer perspectives and innovative strategies to enrich her character,

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<sup>11</sup> Tess Gerritsen (1953) is an American novelist and a retired physician whose crime thriller, *The Surgeon* (2001) for the first time introduced the character of Jane Rizzoli who went on to feature in other works. In the television show, Angie Harmon stars a detective Jane Rizzoli and Dr. Maura Isles is played by Sasha Alexander.

Lalli, and the genre of Indian detective fiction shaped by both the Western imagination and the dialogic Indian realities.

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# Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's 'Beast of No Nation'

## A Historical Discourse

Raheem Oluwafunminiyi

For Fela, music was not only a weapon but a means to change the world.<sup>1</sup> He was conscious of this and very much vigorously pursued it with all sense of devotion. Such was the nature of his music that Fela himself had once said he wanted to play music that would not only be meaningful but also stand the test of time. True to this day, most, if not all, of Fela's music have stood that "test" and in all, continues to elicit debate among a wide spectrum of society. Known for his pioneering efforts in creating the Afro-beat genre, Fela is considered as one of the most important music personalities to have emerged in post-independence Nigeria. Beyond this, he is best described as a legendary rebel, no doubt, with a cause, who at times wore an eccentric garb. He was perhaps the only musical figure of his generation who used music as a potent weapon and voice against tyranny, brutality and oppression. His fierce criticisms against the political class and on diverse issues of the day earned him constant rebuttal by the government. It is against this background and his brutal experiences in the hands of the Nigerian state that formed the crux of most of his protest music, *Beast of No Nation* not being an exception.

A song like *Beast of No Nation* is not uncommon in Fela's music corpus. This however, appear to be unique for two possible reasons. First, typical of Fela who was anti-system, especially at a time when yet another prison term was slammed on him, following charges of money laundering; it was expedient, therefore, to release a song critical of the way he was 'unfairly' treated by the law and state. Second, by the 1980s, global politics had taken a frightening turn and as Cold War tensions brewed, apartheid in South Africa heightened, the Arab-Israeli war further escalated while coups in Africa worsened. In all of these, the United Nations (UN) failed to act appropriately or even decisively. The twin-events, the latter which Fela followed dispassionately, possibly explain his decision to release the album, *Beast of No Nation*.

Following his release from prison in 1986, Fela released the '*Beast of No Nation*' to critical acclaim. The song came not only as a scathing criticism of the Nigerian military regime but was in response to the event surrounding his detention and prison experience. Specifically composed in themes which highlight, among other things, the characteristic brutal nature of military rule, human rights abuses, undemocratic nature of the UN and apartheid in South Africa, the ultimate aim of the song was to expose political figures and state/global institutions which for Fela represented repression and oppression. While the narratives in the *Beast of No Nation* was framed to show Fela's own frustrations with the Nigerian state *vis-à-vis* his caustic impression of the state of affairs of the global community, this paper contends that a number of issues raised in the song did not reflect the true account of what occurred during this period. The paper, therefore, examines the historical context through

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<sup>1</sup> See Moore, Carlos. *Fela, Fela: this Bitch of a Life*. Allison and Busby, 1982, p. 257.

which the album was released and attempts a critique of some of the issues raised in it by Fela.

#### CONTEXT, MEANING, AND INTERPRETATION IN BEAST OF NO NATION

After his release from jail term in 1986, Fela released the album, *Beast of No Nation*. Aside the motives of the album stated above, it also came in response to other pressing demands. One, after his release, fans were eager to know the next song he had in mind like he had done with previous songs or to it put appropriately, they wanted to know more about his prison experiences. Two, having been jailed by the military, Fela decided to release a song to vent his anger on the former for unjustly incarcerating him on what was believed to be a 'false charge' and three, because a number of global events at the time was not in tune with what the UN stood for which Fela found purely as an unforgiving act of aggression by the powerful against the weak. In the event of these, it became imperative to release an album so critical as to meet these 'pressing demands'. These demands would therefore, form the nucleus of the album that came to be known as *Beast of No Nation*.

It would seem for Fela that his prison experience was not of much importance to narrate than the events that led to it. This is because in the album, he did not provide in clear details what transpired inside his prison cell. This could possibly have been deliberate because his prison experience was not as important as the sum total of what transpired between him and the Nigerian state which ultimately led to his incarceration. It could therefore, explain why Fela decided to divide his experiences into what he termed "inside" and "outside" worlds.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Fela had released songs like *Alagbon Close*, *Kalakuta Show* and *Expensive Shit*, all of which explains some of his past prison experiences.<sup>3</sup> Hence, it wouldn't have been necessary to highlight them once again in the *Beast of No Nation*, since these appear as normal everyday experiences. Interestingly though, Fela would later admit elsewhere that his prison experience was more of a personal development, "bodily and spiritually" which he was no more afraid of and was willing to return to prison "if it's for something positive" (Disu 27).

Nothing could have been most excruciating for Fela than the ugly experiences in the "outside world" which he further summed as a "craze world". For him, a "craze world" was where the police, military, magistrate, court among other 'instruments of state' connived to find him guilty and ultimately jail him on false charges. The album was categorical in its criticisms of not only these state institutions which Fela saw as repressive, but also individuals who headed such state bureaucracies. It is here Fela came heavy on the government, describing specific figures with expletive tags. For many who are wont to know Fela, using such tags was a typical attribute of his satirical writings, stage shows and musical performances. This was noticeable after his return from the US in the 70s, where in reaction to the military's continued stay in power, Fela's music appeared vocal and highly critical of the status quo. This would set the stage for his "Yabis music," as Michael Olatunji called it (26-46). He notes that Fela used this "new phenomenon" to ridicule the government of the day while government policies became subjects of derision. Matched with the satirical

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<sup>2</sup> We take "inside world" to mean the sum total of Fela's experiences in prison and "outside world," all the events that culminated into Fela's 5-year prison sentence by the Nigerian state.

<sup>3</sup> *Alagbon Close* most especially provides a graphic illustration of the brutality inside the infamous Alagbon Police Station in Lagos, Southwest Nigeria.

nature of this “Yabis session,” Fela thereafter, starts with a sort of dialogue with members of his band or audience (32). It is interesting to state that aside the Yabis Sessions, Fela’s live shows engaged in spiritual eccentricities and at the same time, intersected by political cum philosophical illuminations. This perhaps was done to engage the minds of the audience in ways as to expose them to the machinations of the military. In any case, before the actual performance, a form of traditional ceremony was performed where libation is poured, and sanctification made, to the ancestors or gods. This was then followed by “a stroll around and talk for twenty or thirty minutes” on the recent occurrence or trends of the day which include “the latest police attack or something the government was doing” (Van Pelt). Fela would then veer into the main song which often last for about an hour or a little less than that.

To prove his innocence, Fela had indicated that the judge who presided over his money-laundering trial had visited him while in prison to ‘apologise’.<sup>4</sup> This would, however, generate much sympathy for Fela and controversy at the same time. To provide a better grasp of what Fela meant in his description of outside world, he makes reference to the senseless killings of university students both at Ife and Zaria under the military regime.<sup>5</sup> Fela had insisted that in the event of this perilous attack on the masses, where brutal repression was the order of the day; it could only mean the country was indeed, impervious. As noted above, Fela was more interested in happenings within his own country, following his release from prison where he highlighted some of them in the new album. By so doing, his experiences before his prison sentence remain germane for our understanding of his eventual path to prison and what occurred in it. For Fela, the outside world represented impunity which stood more as a rule than exception. If he could be jailed despite his innocence, Fela argued, no other description best fits except that it was a ‘craze world’.

Not done, Fela unequivocally lampooned the most crucial policy of the military regime popularly referred to as War Against Indiscipline (WAI). The WAI was promulgated by the military at the time to tackle the hydra-headed monster of corruption and indiscipline which had eaten deep into the country.<sup>6</sup> In a bid to curb indiscipline, the military used derogatory terms to describe the mass of its ‘unruly’ population. This, Fela expressed, was not only abominable but outright condemnable. The import of Fela’s argument stemmed from the fact that irrespective of the unruly attitude exhibited by the citizen, such appellations should not have been expressed. It presupposes that a government which identifies its people with such description should not only be condemned but also

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<sup>4</sup> Justice Gregory Okoro-Idogu who had jailed Fela came visiting a sick relative at the Maiduguri University Teaching Hospital Fela was similarly admitted. Having been informed that Fela was on the sick bed, he decided to commiserate with him. Much of what transpired between the pair remains in contention.

<sup>5</sup> For the Zaria killings among others, see Sheppard Jr., Nathaniel. “Nigeria Imposes National Ban on Protest after College Riots.” *Chicago Tribune*, 30 May 1986; Adebayo, P.F. “Students’ Crisis: Dimension of Student-Police Relations in Nigeria.” *Ilorin Journal of Education*, vol. 21, 2002, p. 75-82 and Akintola, Bukola. “The Perils of Protest: State Repression and Student Mobilization in Nigeria.” *Encountering the Nigerian State*, edited by Adebani, Wale, and Ebenezer Obadare, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 104-111.

<sup>6</sup> On the WAI, see Ugwuegbu, Denis Chima E. *Social Psychology and Social Change in Nigeria: A Systematic Evaluation of Government Social Policies and Programs*. iUniverse, 2011, pp. 132-134; May, Clifford D. “Nigeria’s Discipline Campaign: Not Sparing the Rod.” *The New York Times*, 10 Aug. 1984 and Agbaje, Adigun, and Jinmi Adisa, “Political Education and Public Policy in Nigeria: The War Against Indiscipline.” *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1988, pp. 22-37.

disconnected from it. Similarly, the global community which provides support for such regime should by extension consigned to the same fate.

It is important to mention here one of the reasons Fela used such strong expletive terms in the *Beast of No Nation*. The album, reactionary from all indications and typical of Fela, was, as a blistering commentary on the politics of the period, aimed at expressing his own frustrations and protest against injustice and the flagrant abuse of the rule of law by the government. Under a military regime, however good-intentioned, the tendency to engage in acts of tyranny, brutality and human rights abuses were not unlikely. This was not oblivious to Fela, having been a direct victim of such acts of military brutality in the past. Hence, under this stark reality, the song was quick to make use of such profane and expletive terms. It was against this backdrop that Fela took a swipe at the UN, questioning her idea of a democratic and united entity. The UN, according to Fela, was short of being addressed as a democratic institution because a few member states appear to arrogate more power to itself against the majority? Pointing emphatically at the huge disparity between the powers exercised by the Security Council and the National Assembly, Fela was concerned as to why the former ascribed for itself the "veto power" despite its minimal number and the latter none, despite its large representation. Throwing the gauntlet, Fela also questioned the rationale behind the conflict between Britain's Margaret Thatcher and Argentina over the Falkland Island, America's Ronald Reagan and Libya over the Berlin discotheque bombing, Israel and Lebanon over Israeli occupation of Lebanon and Iraq and Iran over the former's invasion of the latter, if truly the UN claimed to be united. Not even the destructive nature of the Cold War was spared Fela's criticisms of the UN. According to Fela, if the UN was set up to promote world peace, security and cooperation and prevent an escalation of war and conflict that had ravaged the global community in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the above listed conflicts shouldn't have been encouraged. Paradoxically, each of these countries in conflict held membership status in the same UN whose objectives, among others, was to promote justice and peaceful settlement of conflict. Such a global body, Fela argued, could not claim to be united since the ultimate aim was to engage in proxy wars and conflict between and among member states. Similarly, Fela berated the veto policy of the UN Security Council where "one veto vote is equal to 92". Apart from making no practical sense, he argued, it was an undemocratic statute pursued by those with "animal sense" (Fela).

The idea of an album like *Beast of No Nation*, as this paper notes, was a calculated reaction to a number of national and global dynamics. Fela was able to creatively fuse together each of these experiences to protest against world oppression and human rights abuses perpetrated by powerful states against weaker ones, on the one hand, and the inherent contradictions within the UN which fostered these acts of aggression, on the other hand. Remarkably, virtually all of Fela's songs capture most of these peculiarities and global trends which are more often than not used as album titles, album covers or song tracks. Similarly, the inspiration for the album title, *Beast of No Nation* was extracted from the June 1986 speech of President Pik Botha, the infamous leader of South Africa's apartheid regime.

Fela's use of invectives to describe certain political figures could be noted in the latter part of the song where he raised the burning issue of human rights. He described the pursuit of human rights by the UN as *faux pas*. His argument was primed on the fact that human rights were the legitimate right of the individual and hence, cannot be given by a higher authority. In Fela's own words, human right was the "property" of an individual and therefore, the UN cannot "dash" the individual his own property. Giving the individual a

right, Fela posits, which he or she rightly and naturally owns, could only be extended by those who have underlying motives.

Fela's constant use of diatribes in his music was not unknown to many but in *Beast of No Nation*, there was an apparent difference. This was because, having been reminded by his constituents that the use of polemics in his music was perhaps, the sole reason he was mostly hounded and jailed by the government, Fela in his defence argued that his use of the expletives and especially *Beast of No Nation* to symbolise political figures were not his own making but that of the South African apartheid leader, Botha who at the height of the anti-apartheid disturbances, and in response to the increasing act of civil disorder and agitation by the Black majority in that country, made a statement where he was famously quoted as saying "this uprising will bring out the beast in us". What this statement implied was that under a continued violent struggle against apartheid, the regime would similarly react through the use of force and brutal suppression to end the embarrassing disturbances and struggle.

Under the growing perceptible oppression and suppression against the Black majority in South Africa by the apartheid regime, permanent members of the Security Council which should have heavily sanctioned the errant regime provided it with even the most tacit support. This is evident in the reactions of Reagan and Thatcher who followed suit, albeit on a different pedestal, where they called for a "constructive engagement" (de Klerk) and "similar patience and persistence" (Thatcher) with the apartheid regime because "between apartheid and democracy, the known devil was preferable" (Evans). Similarly, Thatcher, in a brazen show of solidarity, was widely reported to have written to Botha in October 1985 with a promise "to continue fighting the good fight against sanctions" (McSmith). Following this, Fela argued that since there was an apparently undeniable and close relationship between Botha, Thatcher and Reagan, on the one hand, and other apartheid friendly nations, on the other hand, there was no justification in promoting human rights through the UN since each gave strong backing and supported the suppression of the basic human rights of majority Black South Africans. Since there existed a 'constructive engagement' with the apartheid regime rather than isolation and sanctions, it would appear that a high degree of acceptance and support for Botha's human rights abuses was embraced by Western leaders who Fela noted had same "animal" characteristics as Botha himself.

In the final analysis, Fela contends that as members of the UN and Security Council, Reagan and Thatcher, rather than help to promote justice and human rights for the Black peoples of South Africa turned a blind eye to their plight. As such, the UN and its apartheid sympathisers belonged to what Fela collectively termed 'Beast of No Nation'. What this means by implication is that the United Kingdom (UK), US and UN could not claim to champion human rights elsewhere having shown any reason or commitments whatsoever, in promoting same in apartheid South Africa, Argentina among other UN member countries bedevilled by conflict.

#### CONFRONTING THE PROBLEMATIC

By putting Fela's album into broader perspectives, we are here confronted with two problematic inquiries, both of which come with diagnoses. One, was the album meant to stir up sympathy for Fela based on the narratives rooted in it? Two, was Fela truly conversant with the global political interplay at the time to have claimed that the UN was undemocratic? In response to the first problematic, it would seem that the song, critical and

politically profound as the messages were, did much to malign the government's decrees or laws on criminal offences, for example, such as money-laundering which Fela was appropriately accused of, even when it was clear to both the government and citizens that these decrees were part of efforts at salvaging the socio-economic and political malaise dwarfing the country's development at the time. This is because following the 1983 coup that ousted the civilian regime of President Shehu Shagari, former political office holders who had corruptly enriched themselves were discovered to have hoarded foreign currencies in their respective homes and private vaults<sup>7</sup> while others laundered or smuggled them abroad.<sup>8</sup> This would pose a serious economic and image problem for the new military regime which had swept into power under the mantra of fighting corruption and gross indiscipline in the system, hence the promulgation of a number of decrees or acts to usher in a new era in the country. One of such decrees was the Exchange Control (Anti Sabotage) Act of 1984.<sup>9</sup> This Act was instrumental in the case that ultimately sentenced Fela to five years imprisonment.

To paint a clear picture of the events that led Fela into prison in 1984, it is instructive to state here that Nigeria, during the Second Republic, was on the brink of disaster. The display of arrogance and mind-bungling corruption by the ruling elites amidst socio-economic challenges made the emergence of the military imperative (Joseph; Falola and Ihonvbere; Achebe). The coup was in fact a welcome relief for a large section of the population, considering the persistent hardship many faced. By the time the coup leaders set to work, the country was discovered to have not only been plundered but acts of gross indiscipline overwhelmed all sectors of the economy. A thorough clean-up was, therefore, imperative, one which had to involve 'draconian' policies if not far-reaching reforms, should the country return to sanity. It was here Fela ran once again into trouble with the government and its laws.

Much has been said about Fela's 4 September 1984 proposed playing tour of the US. It was in fact, his first since 1969. The tour was however, cut short after Fela was approached by airport officials for having with him 1600 pounds as against the 100 pounds Basic Travel Allowance stipulated by law. Confronted by immigration officials, Fela claimed that his 45 band member crew were entitled to 50 pounds each from the 1600 pounds, albeit by the time the said amount was divided by that number, it still didn't add up to a total of 1600 pounds. Fela was, hence, arrested and dragged to the Justice Gregory Okoro-Idogu led Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Tribunal (assisted by two junior ranking military

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<sup>7</sup> *The New York Times* noted that \$56,000 and \$4.5 million were found in the residences of former Vice President, Alex Ekwueme and civilian governor of Kano State, Alhaji Sabo Bakin Zuwo, respectively. See, for example, "Buhari's New Government Recovers Stolen Millions from Ex-Ministers." *The New York Times*, 21 Jan. 1984 and "Buhari's Tribunal Jails Former Gov. Melford Okilo of Rivers State for 21 Years for having Foreign Accounts." *The New York Times*, 10 June 1984.

<sup>8</sup> A typical example was the case of Minister of Transportation, Alhaji Umaru Dikko who fled to the UK and was almost hounded back to the country in a crater. See "Why we didn't Return Umaru Dikko's Loot - UK." *The Punch* [Lagos], 15 Aug. 2015.

<sup>9</sup> The Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Act of 1984 was a successor to The Foreign Exchange Anti-Sabotage Decree of 1977 which stipulated stiff penalties for offenders. This decree was in response to the foreign exchange malpractices and illegal currency markets operating across the country. The decree was promulgated alongside a special tribunal. See Hashim, Yahya, and Kate Meagher. *Cross-Border Trade and the Parallel Currency Market: Trade and Finance in the Context of Structural Adjustment*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999, p. 72.

officers). While Fela's lawyer, Mr. Kanmi Isola Osobu agreed that he had broken the law under this Act, and having failed with the argument to use the moral turf, quickly put forward a ninety-point appeal for reconsideration to the Supreme Military Council, an appeal that failed on arrival (Concord Weekly 8).<sup>10</sup> The question therefore: did Fela break the law? Legally, there was no doubt that he did under the Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Act but when the charges against him are again scrutinised based on its merit, he was not. This is because, unlike former government officials who were charged and found guilty of 'illegitimate wealth acquisition' or 'money laundering', Fela's 1600 pounds was a legitimate earning and so, should have been weighed technically on that merit by the Tribunal. Failure to declare the said amount before the law for proper documentation and onward use before travelling, however, turned out to be Fela's albatross.<sup>11</sup> Majemite Jaboro provides us with a clear account on why Fela, despite having foreknowledge of the Act, failed to comply with the law. He noted that as part of Fela's entourage on the US tour was one Professor Hindu (Kwaku Addaie), a magician, spiritual guide and close confidant of Fela. Professor Hindu was highly revered and trusted by Fela such that when airport officials found the said amount on Fela, he called out silently to Professor Hindu to make the money vanish. Disobliging, Professor Hindu responded by claiming that he could not use his powers for personal motives.<sup>12</sup> Fela was visibly shocked since his intention to hold on to the money was to 'ridicule' and 'embarrass' the military government using Professor Hindu's knowledge of "magic to break the law" after which a press conference would be called to show "... he had beaten the regime with magic" (Jaboro).

We could, therefore, infer from the above that the Beast of No Nation, where Fela claimed he was unjustly "found guilty" and "jailed for five years", despite his innocence, was not only false based on the above stated facts but also misleading. This part of the album, despite the false narrative, was simply meant to whip up sentiments for Fela and ultimately to embarrass and cast the government in a bad light. Two of such sentiments are worthy of mention here. First is the account given by Rilwan "Showboy" Fagbemi, Fela's baritone saxophonist who observed in a 2012 interview that the money found on Fela was not his but that of Professor Hindu who had hidden it inside a coat and handed it to Fela during the passenger search at the airport. According to Rilwan, Professor Hindu had accosted Fela to intimate him of the money "in my coat" which he said had been brought in from Europe. Fela in turn collected the coat in the hope, based on self-recognition; he would be exempted from being searched. Rilwan averred that 8,600 pounds was discovered on Fela, an offense which was eventually used against him. He went on to point out the conspiracy between the police officer in charge of Fela's arrest and the Presidency, where the latter had requested for Fela's immediate release "if you do not have anything incriminating against him". The Presidency, according to Rilwan, had expected to find Marijuana on Fela but later held on to the offense of money-laundering (Showboy). Though this account cannot be ignored, it somewhat contradicts Majemite's own account and several diverse accounts of what truly transpired at the airport. First, there are divergent views as to the exact amount found on

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<sup>10</sup> The Supreme Military Council, despite pressures to look into and reconsider Fela's case refused to compromise its stand, stating since the law was broken punishment should suffice.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account, see Denselow, Robin. "Nigeria's New President Muhammadu Buhari – the Man who Jailed Fela Kuti." *The Guardian* [Lagos], 01 Apr. 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Another narration claimed Professor Hindu promised to make the money vanish if Fela handed it to him. Hindu's magic did not only fail but the money eventually discovered on him by immigration control. See Collins, John. *Fela: Kalakuta Notes*. Wesleyan University Press, 2015, p. 129.

Fela. Unlike Rilwan's view above, however, many agree the amount was 1,600 pounds. Second, who owned the money found on Fela? Again, many agree the money was a legitimate earning owned by Fela and withdrawn for use on the US tour. This again nullifies Rilwan's account. Third, could there have been a "conspiracy at the highest level" by the government to desperately jail Fela when in actual fact; it was obvious he had run afoul of the law? What is not in dispute in all of these accounts is that Fela had on him an amount that exceeded what the law stipulated and whether the government shielded key witnesses from testifying on his behalf as widely speculated or had easily played into the hands of a government that had wanted to nail him at all cost and on the slightest provocation, the fact remained that Fela broke the law, one whose penalties were not unknown to Fela himself and the general public. In essence, there couldn't have been such idea of a 'conspiracy' to jail him. Fourth, a commentary had suggested that "the technical nature of ... [Fela's] offence" coupled with the negligible amount concerned indicated that the Tribunal was "driven by the personal malice of someone highly placed in the...regime" (Howe 133). While the nature of the offence may have been 'technical' as the commentary suggests, it was unlikely to be 'driven by personal malice' as the writer suggested. This is because, a law was in place to tackle the challenge of currency trafficking, foreign exchange malpractices and illegal currency markets operating in the country. This law was altruistic in the sense that it was aimed at placing an embargo and stipulating stiff penalties on a few economic saboteurs whose illegal actions had put heavy pressures on the parallel market and economy.

Also, the laws were clear on such offences and Fela's impertinence for the law wouldn't have made any difference. The fact that the law was not unknown to Fela and that he deliberately broke it as pointed out in Majemite's account above, showed that the Tribunal was not acting out a script but following the due process of the law as enshrined under the Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Act. Lastly, while we cannot rule out the possibility that vested powers within the military hierarchy would have wanted him jailed by all means necessary to keep him out of circulation, an attempt to circumvent the law, as Fela was always wont to do, was too much of a risk to take based on the above stated narrative.<sup>13</sup>

#### 'FELA/OKORO-IDOGU AFFAIR' AND WAI: SETTING THE RECORDS STRAIGHT

Before we examine the second problematic, it is instructive to visit two salient points Fela raised in the album – his chance-meeting with Justice Okoro-Idogu in hospital where an 'apology' was alleged to have been tendered and the nature of WAI programme of the military regime. This is vital if our understanding of the true events surrounding Fela's incarceration, and onward release, are to be fully enriched. It is also essential towards laying bare the facts and separating them from the slant narrative, part of which the album was embellished with.

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<sup>13</sup> Majemite and Stan Plange's submissions have been taken as a valid fact of history based on the former's mutual and close encounter with Fela, first as the his personal assistant and second, as Shrine Priest. Majemite's seminal book, *The Ikoyi Prison Narratives: The Spiritualism and Political Philosophy of Fela*, has tried to put into proper perspective and lay bare the facts on some of the misrepresentations that has enveloped our thoughts on some of Fela's past actions, especially the issues around his incarceration between 1984 and 1986 and on the Fela/Okoro-Idogu affair. See Collins, John. *Fela: Kalakuta Notes*. Wesleyan University Press, 2015, p. 130.

While Fela refrained from elaborating much on his chance-meeting with Justice Okoro-Idogu at the hospital in the album, stating only that the latter had come to “beg” him, accounts have it that though the chance-meeting truly took place, what transpired was deliberately skewed and didn’t reflect the true nature of the conversation both had in the course of the meeting. In fact, behind this plot to smear the reputation of the said Justice and build a certain emotive narrative around Fela’s incarceration was Fela himself, the Nigerian media and Beko Ransome-Kuti (Beko hereinafter), Fela’s younger medical doctor brother.<sup>14</sup> Accounts showed that Justice Okoro-Idogu had visited a sick relative in a prison hospital where Fela too was coincidentally admitted. Having been notified by a chief warden that Fela who he had slammed a 5-year prison sentence was also in the same ward as his relative, the Justice decided to use the opportunity to meet with Fela and wish him ‘quick recovery’ only for this chance-meeting to be blown out of proportion. This was made possible, as noted above, by Fela, Beko and the sensationalist press, on the one hand, and Amnesty International and civil society groups, on the other hand, all of whom went on to embellish the chance-meeting. As indicated above, while it is true a chance-meeting took place between the two pairs, the said ‘apology’ tendered by Justice Okoro-Idogu as widely claimed by Fela in his album and ultimately ingrained by the press on the body politic, was not only false but blatantly misleading.<sup>15</sup> This is because, following this chance-meeting, Fela falsely claimed to Beko that the Justice came to seek for forgiveness from him since according to the Justice, “I had the order to put you behind bars from above” and hence, apologise because “I was under pressure” (Cited in Moyer).

Accounts at the time, nevertheless, observed that the idea of an ‘apology’ allegedly tendered by the Justice was manipulated by Fela in conjunction with Beko to whip up popular support for the former’s cause and expedite action on his release. Incidentally, Beko who had been misled into believing that the Justice had “promised to get [Fela] released”, following a change of government, quickly “called a press conference and swore to affidavits” that the Justice had apologised to Fela. The ultimate aim, according to Stan Plange, was to ‘blackmail’ the new government into believing that the Justice had visited Fela in prison solely to apologise and say it wasn’t his (the Justice) intention but that of the previous government to convict Fela.<sup>16</sup>

Majemite, however, interestingly submits that, “With a *skilful manipulation of the Nigerian Press*, the drums began to beat louder for Fela’s release” (74). It was on this premise that the next regime was pressured into looking at Fela’s ‘unfair’ trial, having been tagged a *Prisoner of Conscience* by Amnesty International<sup>17</sup> under a heavy campaign started by Beko and civil society groups for his release. It must interest us to know that the next

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<sup>14</sup> The Newsweek magazine was one of the major print media outlets at the time which aggressively reported, and wrote extensively, on Fela’s incarceration. Led by two reporters, Olojede and Soji Omotunde, both spearheaded a story that uncovered the ‘charade’ that led to Fela’s imprisonment which, based on the intensity of their reportage, fast-tracked Fela’s pardon and release by the Babangida regime in 1986. See *Newswatch* [Lagos], vol. 11, no. 1-13, 1990, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Majemite Jaboro, Fela’s Personal Assistant and Shrine Priest in an interview informed me that from a conversation he had with Fela in prison in 1993, Fela made it known that “Justice Okoro-Idogu *never apologised!*” [Emphasis mine].

<sup>16</sup> The Ghanaian musician, Stan Plange visited Fela soon after his release and related this incident. See Collins, John. *Fela: Kalakuta Notes*. Wesleyan University Press, 2015, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> For the campaign to release Fela, see Fela Kuti, PoC, Nigeria. Amnesty International.

regime, before the pressure to release Fela was heaped on it, set up a Commission of Inquiry into Fela's arrest, conviction and imprisonment. Though the Commission's findings were never published, it nevertheless discovered no wrong doing on the part of the earlier Tribunal and hence, rejected a pardon for Fela as the previous regime had similarly done at the time of his conviction (Moore).

However, in a bid to obtain political mileage and garner support from the populace, the new regime capitulated to this 'blackmail' and eventually released Fela. Consequently, all those who had risked their career in defence of the Justice and swore under oath that he never apologised to Fela were summarily dismissed from the civil service.<sup>18</sup> Justice Okoro-Idogu, on the other hand, following Fela's release on 24 April 1986, was prematurely retired by the Armed Forces' Ruling Council based on Fela's spurious allegation that was never substantiated by any court of competent jurisdiction (*Nigeria Releasing Pop Idol from Jail*; African Contemporary Record 117). The wrongful and untimely retirement of the Justice was hastened by a hysterically sensationalist press who in their several failed attempts to force the government's hands into releasing Fela through disparaging editorials and news reports, misled not only the public about the hospital chance-meeting and the so called fictitious "apology" tendered by the Justice but also used it as a tool to build around a revisionist narrative with which has sadly remained ingrained on the collective psyche of Nigerians and body politic of the world till date.<sup>19</sup> Regrettably too, this skewed narrative has continued to play a huge role in the corruption discourse against the Nigerian judiciary which points Justice Okoro-Idogu's action or judgement against Fela as scandalous and the former a rogue and corrupt jurist who was used by the military to manipulate and subvert the course of justice<sup>20</sup> even when it was apparent he was a victim of a scheming press<sup>21</sup> and appeared to have been locked between an intricate web of Machiavellian political exigency (Bello 106-107).

On the other salient point, i.e. the WAI programme where Fela came heavy on the campaign, it should be noted that while Fela was categorical in his belief that the government should not have used disparaging terms against its own citizens, the use of those terms, once again, appear to have been deliberately taken out of context or misconstrued. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Taking a cursory look first, at the country as a whole and second, the past civilian government before it was ousted through a coup in 1983, it was common knowledge that the level of impunity that characterised, on

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<sup>18</sup> These, alongside Justice Okoro-Idogu, include the hospital Chief Warden, low-level wardens, clerical staff and the Chief Superintendent of Prisons named Goji.

<sup>19</sup> A Washington Post report, like several other international and local newspapers, maintain this narrative, using agnostic terms like 'alleged' in order to breathe life into a 'mythical apology' tendered to Fela without necessarily providing facts to back up such 'alleged' report. See, for example, Moyer, Justin Wm. "Muhammad Buhari vs. Fela Kuti: Nigeria's New President-Elect Once Jailed a Music Icon." *The Washington Post*, 01 Apr. 2015. Also, Bolawole, Bolanle. "...And the CJN erred!" *Nigerian Tribune*, 26 July 2015.

<sup>20</sup> A *Newswatch* magazine report had cynically said: "Okoro-Idogu must ask the gods why it was so arranged by them that the judge [Okoro-Idogu] and the judged [Fela] should fall sick and seek medical help at the same hospital at the same time. Such coincidence used to be the stuff of fiction." See *Newswatch* [Lagos], vol. 3, 1986, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> The Newsweek magazine is reputed to have championed this misleading narrative through three cover stories, the first of which was written by Dele Olojede in the 21 Apr. 1986 issue of the magazine. For more on these cover stories, see *Newswatch* [Lagos], vol. 3, 1986, pp. 9, 11 and 38.

the one hand, actions of politicians and government officials in public service and the mass of the people, on the other hand, had no doubt, reached an atrocious crescendo. Aside the unbridled acts of thievery and underhand dealings overtly perpetrated by the political class, gross indiscipline pervaded the polity. The civil service too had been affected by credibility and efficiency problems; the leadership of the country appeared irresponsive to troubling nationwide challenges while wanton disregard for the rule of law remained pervasive. The wide disconnect between the rulers and ruled was such that “collective and personal property; between state and society” as Ihonvbere and Shaw argued, appeared “very blurred” (106). What the government, therefore, tried to exhibit by expressing to the public the level of rot in the polity, was not different from what many knew as a common national malaise at the time. Chinua Achebe had described ‘indiscipline’ at the time as “the condition *per excellence* of contemporary Nigerian society” (27-36). Hence, the introduction of the WAI was a call for “self-discipline and leadership by example” and not in all intent, meant to disparage the mass of the people as claimed by Fela. Equally, the WAI was simply pursued to call the masses’ attention to “important everyday manifestations of indiscipline” which had eroded the fabric of the country for long (*Buhari’s Government Launches “War Against Indiscipline”*).

The above appeared to be the appalling situation throughout the country amidst citizen disillusionment such that it was only a matter of time before the military once again stepped in. Following the gross acts of indiscipline and to forestall further break down of law and order, coupled with the fact that the young officers who had assumed power were of a disciplined type, a number of decrees and policies were simultaneously promulgated, one of which was the WAI, an anti-corruption programme whose goal, among others, was to instil discipline and a sense of integrity among civil servants in an effort to drive professionalism in the bureaucracy. The WAI campaign was also extended to correct all kinds of small acts of indiscipline like late coming, failure to queue at public places, defecating in the open etc. It must further be emphasized that long before the Buhari regime came up with the WAI programme, the moral fabric of the country had been undermined by moral and socio-political malaise. To be sure, as far back as 1975, General Murtala Muhammed had observed that the state of affairs of the country since the end of the civil war was “characterised by indiscipline”. While appealing to Nigerians that “the task ahead ... calls for sacrifice and self-discipline at all levels of society”, the government warned that it would “not tolerate indiscipline” and “condone abuse of office.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, successive governments ever since had observed the slide in morality among the populace and hence, took turn to effect what Foluke Ogunleye termed “a moral re-armament within the nation” (29-30). Just like in the 1970s where the government had called for an ethical revolution, the 1980s came with WAI as an attempt at moral correctness. Fela’s claim, therefore, that the government had called its citizens disparaging names in its bid at moral and societal re-engineering, was not only misdirected but failed to grasp the underlying need behind government’s attempt to moralise an undisciplined citizenry into embracing a culture of conformity, public morality, and social order.

Abundance of scholarly works exists on the WAI,<sup>23</sup> however, just as the name implies, it was, as earlier stated, strictly a war against the entrenched acts of impunity and

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<sup>22</sup> See address by Murtala Muhammed on 30 July 1975, following the coup that toppled General Yakubu Gowon from power.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, Agbaje, Adigun and Jinmi Adisa, “Political Education and Public Policy in Nigeria: The War Against Indiscipline.” *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 26, no. 1, p. 1988.

indiscipline that characterised the Nigerian state. Realising that an undisciplined leadership breeds an unruly nation, the WAI aimed at building a society where law and order would be the bedrock of the state. It intended to establish a sense of patriotism on the country, respect for the rights of others and ultimately build a nation where talent rather than mediocrity, would be rewarded. Though earlier embraced by the masses, the WAI quickly became unpopular among a section of the country who termed it draconian and against all forms of human rights. A literature argued that despite the crackdown on peoples' behaviour, WAI did little to tackle the culture of corruption in high places (Smith 113). What this presupposes is that WAI, however noble intentioned, was only targeted at ordinary citizens while excluding the political and elite class. Fela's scathing criticism of the WAI is not surprising, if his treatment by the same military regime which had jailed him and implemented the campaign at the same time is anything to go by. However, given the time, and in comparison to where Nigeria finds herself today since the Buhari regime collapsed, coupled with the fact that if some of its programmes had been allowed to germinate, the WAI would perhaps have redefined the country and moved the people closer to the Nigeria they yearned for (Last). Daniel Smith's candid view since the WAI programme closed is apposite: "...in the decades since the War Against Indiscipline, ordinary people often speak nostalgically of the Buhari regime – part of a common discourse in which Nigerians view their society as deeply corrupt and themselves as disorderly people in need of iron-handed leadership" (113).

In essence, it would not have been a misnomer if the country's leadership appear to have viewed its citizen as undisciplined based on the circumstance of the time which formed part of why a programme of this nature was conceived. From the above, therefore, it is safe to say that part of the narrative in the *Beast of No Nation* which criticised the WAI was purely based on undue sentiments and not on the merit of the programme itself. The song did much to frame a misleading discourse on the citizens' collective psyche, most of which continue to shape negatively, albeit unconsciously, how citizens view the military's efforts at societal reforms.

Having interrogated and clarified above some of the issues or narratives raised in the song, we should bear in mind that some of the misrepresentations in the album do not necessarily invalidate the message Fela, as he was wont to do, choose to pass across to listeners. In confronting the second problematic, we intend to identify if Fela understood the import of his claim that the UN was undemocratic? Well, when the intensity and dangerous dimension global conflicts occur today and in the decade since the end of the cold war is examined, we can aptly suggest that Fela was, after all, proved right with his succinct description of the UN as a disunited entity. Fela believed that the UN was undemocratic since it had become a tool used indiscriminately by the Security Council to either sanction unbending nations or back rogue states, depending on whose national interests such serves. Fela was keen to know why the UN would cede overwhelming powers to the Security Council, leaving the General Assembly with little or no decision making power, if not that the UN was an undemocratic setup. The UN couldn't have been united, according to Fela, under a circumstance where the Security Council mostly took prejudiced positions on major international conflicts or chose to side with others even when they fall foul of international law.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, nevertheless, and rise of a unipolar world, the US and its allies have been at the forefront of engaging or supporting unnecessary conflicts where the leadership of such 'enemy', 'terrorist' or 'rogue' states as they are labelled by the West, are toppled or destabilised.<sup>24</sup> In all of this, the UN have not only failed in its responsibility to act or protect weaker states from a powerful hegemony but also prepared the ground for the Security Council to use its veto power indiscriminately, thereby installing puppet regimes or allowing rogue states fester, depending on whose interests these serve.

The *Beast of No Nation* would, no doubt, and perhaps, pass as one of Fela's most defining albums in the course of four decades in terms of its scathing exposé on discordant global issues of the time. No African artist of his generation had the artistry, deep knowledge and understanding of global politics than Fela who used trends in both national and global discourse to name album or track titles, album jackets or poke fun at institutions, political and private figures etc., mostly in a bid to bring out a strong point on issues pertaining to global injustice, oppression, state violence among others, most of which affects the common man. The album was not only detailed in terms of Fela's personal experience but also frank in its argument against issues that affect the global community. Each of these issues was not only interrogated in the album but put into proper perspective in line with the realities of the time. Brilliantly analysed, this part of the album appear unarguably to be about the only part Fela's position or view seemed obviously selfless.

At the time the album was released, full-blown conflicts and threats of war further escalated. None, however, was more impassioned for Fela than the violent turn apartheid took in South Africa where Botha had threatened to step up its violent and oppressive campaign against Black South Africans. It would be recalled that Botha had stoutly rejected the growing demands by the Black majority for freedom and release of Nelson Mandela at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle and civil-disobedience which led to uprising and upheavals. Botha would respond by declaring that further uprising "will bring out the beast in us". Within the context of this statement, Fela's argument was primed on the fact that under such repressive regime as that of Botha's apartheid South Africa, the UN should have been decisive enough to compel the US and UK to throw out its "constructive engagement" thesis in exchange for economic sanctions. Since Botha's excesses were accommodated by the US and UK governments, giving the former the much needed avenue for apartheid to fester, and to commit aggressions and violence against the people, the UN could therefore, not claim to be promoters of human rights even when its members encourage the abuse of the rights of others. In response, therefore, to the second problematic, we could say Fela did truly understand the global political interplay at the time which led to conflict among or between UN member states and hence, the reason for his critical reaction to them.

## CONCLUSION

Fela's *Beast of No Nation* which detailed his prison experience and the hoopla around it have not received much scholarly attention within the context of the facts on ground to counteract the ingrained narrative in the album. This paper has attempted to do so in the hope to set the records straight. Fela was no doubt a very popular figure among the masses

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<sup>24</sup> Iraq and Afghanistan fall within this category. While the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban were forcefully removed from power respectively, both countries have seen sectarian violence grow with thousands of deaths recorded since a campaign by the US against Al-Qaeda and Iraq's accusation of stockpiling Weapons of Mass Destruction heightened.

and for the government, a divisive personality. It is therefore, understandable why each time he ran into trouble with the law or state, he was viewed by many as a prisoner of conscience or rebel with a cause. For these set of people, Fela could do no wrong as evidenced in the support given him among citizens during his trial and jail time. His grouse with the Buhari regime, as seen in the album, was really not based on the merit of principle but markedly on a personal vendetta and as this paper has shown, led to a number of casualties which today are yet to be rectified. Justice Okoro-Idogu's arbitrary removal, without recourse to any judicial process or redress, remains a pointer to government's recklessness which tends to discredit the judiciary at every turn. Incidentally, the press appeared to take undue advantage of the situation by pushing forward a false narrative for narcissist reasons. In any case, the *Beast of No Nation* serves as a reminder of the perilous period that characterised the 1980s in Nigeria and around the world. Its apt description of human rights abuses personified by the apartheid regime in collaboration with the US and UK governments easily provides a clearer understanding of how the UN failed in committing itself to combating racial discrimination. The album was also central in exposing the inherent hypocrisy with which the workings of the UN have always typified. Above all, it enriches us with a viable perception of, and brings us closer, to Fela's personal and persistent struggles with the Nigerian state, first, in the pursuit of social justice and second, as an artist who used his music to speak truth to power.

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# Image and Text in Ravi Shankar and Vikram Seth's *Beastly Tales from Here and There*

Samarth Singhal

"Walt's view of the world... it is a world already colonized with phantom inhabitants who have to conform to Disney's notions of it... when something is said about the child/noble savage, it is really *The Third World* one is thinking about... The imaginative world of the child has become a political Utopia of a social class..." (Dorfman and Mattelart 48).

Dorfman and Mattelart speak of a simulated imperialist performance intrinsic to the Disney industry and imply that Disney's 'notions' help place the child into a clarified space within which s/he can entertain and perhaps be acceptably exotic. For Dorfman and Mattelart, Disney's address to the child is also an address to the Third World. They analyse particular Donald Duck episodes set in the Third World to arrive at an intimate relationship between infantilization and spatial politics. Their work is a particularly germane point of entry into a study of Ravi Shankar and Vikram Seth's *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1991). Clearly, Dorfman and Mattelart ask questions of children's fiction while reading cultural colonization into Disney. As a corollary, their work suggests that politics can always be made to reveal itself in the study of children's fiction. The present study, in the same vein, proceeds to explore Vikram Seth and Ravi Shankar's collaboration. In the process of discussing Shankar's illustrations and Seth's text as examples of print history, the paper makes use of categories like dissent, comedy and caricature in order to elaborate upon the manipulation of power inherent in children's fiction. A central concern is to question if the visual addresses its audience differently, or indeed addresses its audience at all under textual duress. The complexity of such an undertaking becomes manifest when we understand that 'reading' an image or text may refer to a wider gap between reading text and reading images. The paper, however, attempts to move beyond a close reading of texts and images to ask if the colony or indeed the postcolony exacts a managerial profit from its visualization in the last decade of the twentieth century.

The *Panchtantra*, *The Jungle Book* (1894), and *Pashu: Animal Tales from Hindu Mythology* (2014), while divorced from each other in space and time, are congruous as they allow animals to talk and dramatize human conflicts through animal conversation. The fantastic nature of this conversation is centrally organized by a desire to comment on human reality (Devadawson 116, Swinfen 17-18) or consequences of human behavior. Swinfen (43), however, is unwary of agential capacity of these animals beyond the freewill imposed upon them by the storyteller. For her, the animal fable, however fantastic, must stem to socioeconomic reality in analysis. "The best animal fantasies thus always operate on two levels: the animals serve as mirrors or models for human behavior, but at the same time they are also true animals in their own right." Swinfen is insistent that the animals be read as animals per se and not merely as human instruments of didactic interpellation.

Vikram Seth's steady progression in the tales toward an apprehension of this social reality is crucial. It seems to feed into the transparent sociopolitical context imagined by Devadawson for the animal fable. It is as if Seth is aware of the human-determined

performances by animals and he revels in that knowledge. This would imply that Swinfen's anxiety regarding the agency of these animals is rendered unjustified. "The Elephant and the Tragopan" is the acme of this acknowledgement of animal performance as the tale meanders through party politics and media circuses. It is imperative to imagine Seth as a sophisticated self-aware artist who displays awareness about generic conventions by breaking them.

His sophistication becomes evident in the insouciant care with which he allows the reader a hint of where the tales have been 'borrowed' from. He claims that the tales are from "India, China, Greece, Ukraine, and The Land of Gup". A cursory glance at this list confirms an authorial position that potentially transcends national territories, especially the Indian subcontinent. If one were to assume his intervention to be authentically cosmopolitan in its reappropriation of fables from various cultures, then one would conclude that Seth is attempting a maneuver of astronomical historical and cultural depth. "Folk tales were used to create a body of ancient cultural traditions that was central to the project of nationalism, within which there was a need to include the child. The child becomes the focus of the process of creating a new consciousness: that of the citizen of the nation." (Gupta and Chatterjee 3). Gupta and Chatterjee describe an intimate link between children's fiction in India and the idea of the child. They lay emphasis on the nationalist project that inspires the inclusion of the child. Seth responds to this ideal in the particular selection of the sources. Such a consciousness is peculiarly postcolonial as it juxtaposes five divergent spaces- India, China, Greece, Ukraine, and the Land of Gup- that have experienced and inflicted colonial violence, and each of these spaces frame narratives of children to qualify the nation building agenda. The clear reference to Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*(1990) is an emphatic reaffirmation of postcolonial anxiety that marks the selection. The Land of Gup in Rushdie's text is under invasive threat by its obverse: the Land of Chup. Gup refers to gossip and volubility while chup to silence. Listing the particular sources allows Seth to outline the national imperative that animal tales function under.

As Seth strings them together, he attempts a rethinking of the imperium through animal fable putatively meant for the child born in a postcolonial world. In fact, the animal fable becomes a fable of protest. Animals usually considered vulnerable, like the rat, the monkey, the goat employ stratagems to outsmart the tormentor thus overturning typical relations of sovereignty. This carries an instantaneous affective appeal to geographies that have recently adopted self governance, say 1947 for India and Pakistan. The animals seem to allegorize the movement of regions from being colonized to being 'independent'.

The ten tales composed by Seth elaborate the process of acquiring agency, culminating in *The Elephant and The Tragopan* where Seth abrogates the appearance of folklore and topically addresses contemporary debates of land, rehabilitation and ownership. Exactly half of his reworked fables feature creatures who must struggle to keep out of the food chain. The monkey, the beetle, the mouse, the cock, the goat in "The Crocodile and the Monkey", "The Eagle and the Beetle", "The Mouse and the Snake", "The Cat and the Cock", "The Goat and the Ram" respectively tackle predators and thereby avenge themselves on figures of authority. The predator is a figure of authority owing to the narrative power it can exercise, and thus becoming the excuse for the prey to transform into a trickster in order to wrest agency from the predator. However, the other half are stories of ambiguous coding, and overturn the agency gleaned before. The trickster figure remains central in the other half but transforms now into the victimizer. In the last tale, agency is thoroughly complicated and the effectiveness of collective action is blunted by a collusion of party

politics and media reception. In other words, the stories feature both the use of the trickster as a subject fighting for control and as a victim turned victimizer.

In fact, these latter stories may be read as cautionary tales meant to terrify the agency that the bullied character has acquired early on. This is a direct manifestation of the maneuver present in children's fiction. "The basic paradox that underlies all discussions about children's literature is, after all, the fact that the literature is written by adults, while the child-consumers have very little to say about the entire process." (Gupta and Chatterjee 4). Seth is interesting as he is able to bypass this maneuver. His tales speak to both caregivers and wards in the division of the tales into those that inspire agency and those that caution such an agency. In Seth's hands it is a calculated double maneuver meant to appeal to adults and children. Yet, the figures of authority- the predators for instance-stand in for the parents and decision makers and Seth's permits them to actively permeate the tales. Thus, the tales become examples of didacticism despite an appeal to children.

However, since it is obvious that Seth's cheeky introduction alludes to nation states who have struggled with imperialism, the complication of agency serves as a scathing comment on the agency wrested from the empire in the movement towards self rule. "The Elephant and the Tragopan" invokes contemporary marginalization of tribal land as the animals wait for the destruction of their habitat, while "The Frog and the Nightingale" punctures the rhetoric of merit in the favour of profit expansion as the manager Frog survives and the singer Nightingale perishes. The contemporary nation state has failed the 'tryst with destiny' and must now negotiate with its own investment in the oppression of its citizens.

Agency may underscore the affective appeal that a narrative of triumph extracts. But, the anxiety of governance is palpable in everyday realities, especially in the unchanging governmental response to tribal groups, and towards caste oppressed. If the colonial superpower distilled wealth and sharpened divisions in colonized societies, then the post-colonial nation does not seem to be intervening. As the victim turns victimizer, the postcolonial nation state finds itself negotiating with internal fissures. For instance, the publicized case of Shah Bano, the raging controversy effected by the Mandal Commission report, and the mob violence in 1984 after Operation Bluestar emphasize the traumatic turn national history takes post 1947. In which case the complication of agency in the animal fable may be read as a comment on the failure of a postcolonial undertaking, and the fable becomes a device to critique the status quo. Thus Seth's work with the animal fable is a site of contradictory impulses: on the one hand, if his audience is meant to be children then the nature of the tales repudiates complete sympathy with the child. On the other, as the narrative folds in upon itself, by setting up agency only to compromise it, then it dramatizes the always already present ruptures in the fabric of a postcolonial state.

The beastly tales remind the readers of the intimate relation between protest and power. Seth opens the trickster up and demonstrates the other side of protest. Cunning is used to demonstrate protest, but it can as easily be used to reproduce power. This power is to be revered and feared. Such a stance on the reproduction of power transforms Seth's tales into narratives that appear to be less patronizing to the child, and might even be considered 'objectionable'. For instance, "The Hare and the Tortoise" invites the reader to think about the desirability of the Hare losing the race, but manipulating social media through her youth, beauty, and charm. The fluidity of the hero and the villain compromises narrow normative ideas of didacticism. Therefore, the tales appear to cater to children only

and not to the caregivers. At the same time Seth cannot risk antagonizing the caregiver reader. Hence, he retains the doublespeak in advocating caution about power accrued through dissent.

The beast fable, in any form is a problematic mode of thought and other forms of talking animals like the Disney industry or the Discovery Channel, where the animals perform their races and nationalities are as mediated by genre and culture. Seth does the best he can in reappropriating the content of the fables, especially by inserting what McLuhan calls 'new media' into his universe but the expectations that he capitalizes on do not change, and this may explain his easy appropriation by the CBSE. This insertion of the new pushes the tales into the present, emptying out the fabular, demonstrating the devices of the fabular to be merely devices. "The Elephant and the Tragopan" uses the idea of the media circus for instance. As a result, these are tales reconfigured for the post Nehruvian welfare state. The last tale is the key to this response to the inadequacy of welfare schemes. The irony is that reworking these tales may comment on governments and power but also reaffirms the fear and caution of power, thus rendering the process didactic.

At this point, it must be noted that Seth may not intend to create fiction for children. It is in the reception of these tales by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), in India, that we can discuss Seth's work as children's fiction. The CBSE has included "The Frog and the Nightingale" in their class X syllabus and the poem in school, is understood as innocuous, read as a witty narration of corruption in the country. It is significant that the tale finds itself being included in school syllabi despite the vivid nature of its dissent.

I will now discuss the speculation of protest, if any, that may replicate itself in Shankar's illustrations. The paradox of muting dissent through a parable of dissent, as in the CBSE's use of these tales, may be what Mirzoeff calls 'managing the subject of visual culture' (18) as the creator, the content and the reader are determined through a politics of compromised representation. In other words, the visual nature of this print element describes dissent but is also mobilized and managed by larger discourses of power that reproduce iniquitous relations of production. Related to this uneven distribution of readerly attention, the insignificant signature of the illustrator -which announces the 'social construction of the visual' (Mitchell175)- reminds the reader of the vague presence of the illustrator. The presence remains vague throughout the ten tales, and at most, the illustrator is only queried when understood as the creator of light hearted aesthetic pleasure. Therefore, if the illustration and the tale are meant to reinforce each other and if some of the comic power is mutual, then here the visual element in print seems to 'accompany' the textual, being lead by it. Twin management is visible here: that of image per se and of the image by text.

The first illustration in the text accompanies "The Monkey and the Crocodile" and is notable for its attention to detail. It bears the heart shaped necklace mentioned in the text and the invocation of the ideal "the table is laid", also as elaborated in the text. Shankar is careful to dangle a solitary branch above the crocodile suggesting perhaps that the 'missus' is dining al fresco. Ironically, the guest becomes the dinner thus complicating the "table is laid" as both the dinner and the guest lie on the table. The crocodile by being visualized as a crocodile, and as a sartorially invested creature, exposes the 'beastly' nature of the tale, but also hides the beastliness in plain sight by visualizing it as social comedy. In other words the collapse between the sinuous body of the crocodile and the elegant costume forced on its shape leads to an oppositional emphasis. On the one hand, the heinous rupture

of hospitality is underscored in the beastly body; on the other hand, the clothes, the distortion, and the paraphernalia of wealth undermine the beastliness of the tale by shifting attention to the comic nature of the scenario. The caricature obscures the moral message as it seems to extract comic mileage off a dressed up crocodile waiting for her choice meat. This ambivalence between the beastly and the comic is, in fact, determined by a powerful affective leverage of the comic in the use of caricature: the pleasure of the comic subordinating the anxiety of the beastly.

The question now is, if visual management occurs precisely at the use of caricature. Mirzoeff explains the 'management' of the 'subject' of visuality as an epistemological organization of both the content of the visual art and of audience. This takes Lacan's 'gaze' forward in order to imagine that both the viewer and the viewed are bound by an impulse to visual knowledge. For Mirzoeff, visual management would *also* work through caricature, but it would always already be innocuously working through all forms and genres that base themselves on visuality. It is possible to draw a relationship between caricature and the 'child', however, and to say that the comic image in its performance of contrast between expectation and fulfillment (Freudn.p.) socializes the child, and thus caricature in children's fiction is able to manage the subject of visual culture. Indeed, that is the crux of *How to Read Donald Duck*. If the joke underlines incongruity between the expected direction of the joke and its compromised fulfillment, and if as Freud argues, laughter is a statement of social cohesion then, the child reader of caricature is being socialized.

It seems as if the comic and caricature blunt any anxiety and transform the image into a source of pleasure. However, the method of the illustrator-caricature- is modified by the illustration's presence as accompanying print. The ill shaped body of the crocodile, the lipstick, the bangles, the expectant air are details of the image. The caricature must be detailed by Shankar, and emphasized in discussion, in order to understand the intent behind the image. The illustration intently imitates the double speak in the tale: the violation of hospitality and the violation of appearances. The violation of appearances, however, determines representation in social comedy. Therefore, the tale itself, after a close look at the illustration, can be *re-read* as a social comedy; the crocodile couple standing for a corrupt refinement and the monkey for the 'natural' peasant in his relationship to mangoes. In which case, Shankar more than Seth brings out the dissent in the story by visibilizing the problem, he locates the 'cause' as it were in the class of the crocodiles, which renders hollow their claims of refinement.

There seems to be a contradiction here. On the one hand, the joke in the visual renders the sincerity (regarding representation of national beastliness) of the tale obscure. On the other, the joke emphasizes an aspect of the text facilitating an allegorical class based reading. It must be remembered that a contradiction or confusion also exists within the 'text' of the tale: a doublespeak mediated both by parents and children, as explained earlier. If the text and the image offer differing systems of intelligibility, there is a similarity in the shape of the affect they exhort: movements away and toward radical critique. At the same time, as Berger (5) opines, seeing is essential to locating the self in the world. The pull of the visual, in other words, may be pushed to the margin by the inclusion of the 'text' in print but it announces itself in this reinterpretation it offers, a rereading that is both pleasurable and critical.

For instance, the evocation of class based identity is more potent in the visual, as costume connoting privilege and wealth can be illustrated and read affectively around a

character. Such a class analysis is replicated in “The Frog and the Nightingale”, where the tale resonates with the unfair treatment meted out to the talented individual, especially in an environment of heightened capital management. The illustration makes this obvious not only in its composition of visual space but also in the content. The nightingale is spaced off in an insignificant corner, in a bubble of postcard landscape amidst a reduced moon and tree. The frog on the other hand, not only dominates the space but also reveals the social position he occupies. The costume that he is allowed is an exaggerated reworking of the costume of classical music experts and his hands move in accordance with the image of expert performers. Prabha Mallya, who illustrates the 2014 Puffin reprint of *Beastly Tales from Here and There*, names it the ‘Hindustani Frog’. By combining frog and classical music, a literal relationship between class, caste and privilege is established as if to say that privilege transmogrifies the individual into a frog. The tale can now be thought of not as an expression of a hurt meritocracy but a hollow meritocracy where talent is a ‘representation of imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ (Althusser n. p.). The illustration suggests that the nightingale never has a chance, not only repeating the tale, but rereading her gullibility as an allegorical victimhood owing to capitalism, telling the readers that capitalism understands merely talented individuals as gullible.

Seth delays to finally arrive at making this relationship between social position and resource allocation to be made obvious, in “The Elephant and the Tragopan”. Shankar on the other hand seems to diagnose it early on. Book illustrations usually function with a hierarchy of text over image, as the credits page shows very obviously, and while this may sound like a limitation, it may as Shankar shows, also be an opportunity of reinterpretation. Shankar does what Seth only reluctantly gestures to. In the relationship between Seth and Shankar, text and image are in conversation with each other as opposed to the image ‘accompanying’ the text.

In conclusion, we may venture answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper. It is clear by now that narratives of dissent are appropriated by the genre of children’s fiction as Seth’s text is received by the educational and reading apparatus in South Asia. The tales can be read as explicating dissent but erring on the side of caution. The tales complicate ‘agency’ and therefore render claims of the child reader deriving vicarious pleasure in the acquiring of agency suspect. Tales of dissent, when read to or read by school children reading CBSE prescribed textbooks, are used to mitigate or manage dissent. The visual, through illustrations, appeals to a different sense of knowledge acquisition, and attempts to make the cause of class visible, and so can be read as being in conversation with the text. Illustrations and caricature help magnify an awareness to dissent but owing to the potency of the visual as epistemological may be used for didactic purposes by making a literal or even an iconophilic reading of the visual. The management inherent in the visual, as in *The Monkey and the Crocodile*, therefore may be both liberating and constricting. The postcolonial nation state dramatizes ruptures in the contradictions explained above but it also curtails ambiguity through the use of state and ideological apparatuses.

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Prerna Subramanian** is currently pursuing her M.A in Society and Culture at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinaga, India. Her research interests comprise Indian cinema, popular culture, feminist theory, transgender studies, LGBTQIA and body image studies.

**Dr. Syed A. Sayeed** is a Professor of philosophy in the Department of Aesthetics and Philosophy at The English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad, India

**Ritwick Bhattacharjee** is a research scholar. His research focuses on fantastical novels of Stephen King, looking at them through German phenomenological traditions. He completed his M.Phil. in English from University of Delhi, India.

**Deeksha Suri**, M.Phil. in English from University of Delhi, India, is a research scholar. Her research interests include English Romanticism, Critical Theory, Literary Theory, and Visual Arts.

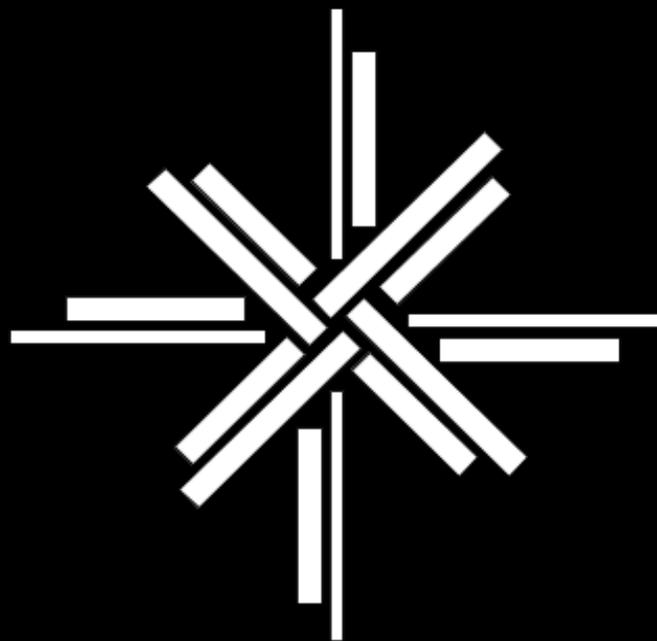
**Shrehya Taneja** is a research scholar. Her research interests include Detective Fiction, Cultural Studies and Post-millennial Genre fiction. She holds an M.Phil. in English from University of Delhi, India.

**Raheem Oluwafunminiyi** is a Doctoral Student at the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. His research interests include Social History and African Spirituality.

**Samarth Singhal** is a research scholar and an Assistant Professor at University of Delhi, India. Exploring connections between print and other mediums, his research interests include Fantasy, South Asia, Satire, Popular Fiction and re-appropriation of Myth.







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