ISSN 2457-0044

/eˈlɪdz/

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

ISSUE 5.3 SPRING 2022

This page has been intentionally left blank.

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (LLIDS)

EDITORS

Deeksha Suri
Nikita Goel

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Md. Faizan Moquim

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Divya Sharma
Sharanya DG

ADVISORY BOARD

Abhishek Sharma, *University of Delhi, India*
Angus McBlane, *Queen's University, Canada*
Craig A. Meyer, *Jackson State University, USA*
Indra Kaul, *University of Delhi, India*
Ipshita Chanda, *EFLU, India*
James S. Baumlin, *Missouri State University, USA*
O. P. Singh, *University of Delhi, India*
Simi Malhotra, *Jamia Millia Islamia, India*
T. S. Satyanath, *University of Delhi, India*
Yvonne Stafford-Mills, *Cerro Coso Community College, USA*

Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies (ISSN 2457-0044) is an open access e-journal with a double-blind peer review policy. Hosted at https://ellids.com/, its quarterly Issues are published in Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. Committed to promoting the standards of research, *LLIDS* provides an interdisciplinary discursive space for relevant and meaningful investigations. It attempts to fashion a space that would allow researchers to collate their insights with larger issues and to engage with the existing fault lines of research through rigorous academic inquiries that have the potential to transform the intellectual landscape by addressing key issues confronting the society.

LLIDS is published under the aegis of E.L.A. Project, a not-for-profit organization, and is licensed under **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License**.

Donations A little help goes a long way. *LLIDS* needs people like you, who understand and appreciate the significance of platforms which contribute in furthering free dissemination of research and other educational opportunities. We invite you all to become our Patrons in funding *LLIDS* and encouraging our attempt in sustaining open-access research. To register your support, please donate as per your financial convenience – www.ellids.com/support-us/.

For any further queries, please write to us at editors@ellids.com.

CONTENTS

Editors' Note | v–viii
Contributors | ix

Poetics of Travelling Self: Discursive Formations and Purposiveness of Travel

Becoming Sahibs: Bengali Bhadralok Travel Cultures and a Colony in *Paschim*, c. 1850–1911
Ahana Maitra | 1–24

Special Submissions

Locating Innocence in Sexual Difference: Problematized Masculinity in Hemingway and Baldwin
Rachid Toumi | 25–41

"Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī": A Study of Vaiṣṇava Aesthetics in Tagore's Poetry
Ujjaini Chakrabarty | 42–60

Reifying, Reinscribing, and Resisting Manicheanisms in Representations of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda
Lauren van der Rede | 61–81

This page has been intentionally left blank.

EDITORS' NOTE

Deeksha Suri & Md. Faizan Moquim

Keep moving! Steam or Gas or Stage,
Hold, cabin, steerage, hencoop's cage –
Tour, Journey, Voyage, Lounge, Ride, Walk,
Skim, Sketch, Excursion, Travel-talk –
For move you must! 'Tis now the rage,
The law and fashion of the Age.

– Coleridge, "The Delinquent Travellers"
(qtd. in Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century" 108)

Coleridge's acute sense of the shifting cultural landscape or emergence of a new zeitgeist characterized heavily by the motif of travel was prophetic. The "rage, […] law and fashion" of Coleridge's "Age" have not only reinforced and cemented themselves, but have also taken new and varied forms in contemporary times. Though the motif of travel goes back to the earliest recorded history of human civilization, "[b]y 1800, travel writing was well established as a central branch of print culture" as well (Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century" 110). The 19th century witnessed "dramatic effects on travelling" by facilitating speed and convenience in the wake of the development of railways and motor cars, which was further radicalized in 20th century with the massive development in commercial airways transportation (109). The traditional as well as modernist experimental forms of travel writing flourished during the years between the two World Wars (Thompson, *Travel Writing* 58). In the globalized 20th century, travel writing, which many thought would cease to exist and interest, has ironically diversified and expanded into new avatars, and the genre continues to be produced and consumed in ever increasing commercial numbers in the 21st century.

The meaning and purposes of travel as well as travel writing have also changed drastically over the centuries, alongside their varying forms. Eric Leed points out that "Ancients saw travel as a suffering, even a penance; for moderns, it is a pleasure and a means to pleasure" (7). If for ancients, travel signified a befallen necessity or a determined undertaking, the interpretation of travel in terms of "an experience of freedom and the gaining of autonomy" is characteristically modern in its emphasis and orientation (12). Going beyond travelling for penance, pilgrimage, conquest, trade, or to seek better pastures, the modern world allows for travelling, without any reason "except to escape a world where all things are a means to an end, [and] travel, in modern circumstances, is prized less as a means of revealing ungovernable forces beyond human control than for providing direct access to a new material and objective world" (14). Leed perceptively writes, "The celebration of travel as a demonstration of freedom and means to autonomy becomes the modern topos" (13).

Through these changes in form and purpose, what remains consistent is that travel as an experience of movement engenders a change in the perception of the self, for the traveller renegotiates their presence and positionality with every new experience. Attempts to assimilate different cultures, encountering strange realities, and living through anonymity render a certain aspect of alterity which questions the very conceptions, perceptions, and worldview of the traveller. Writing about these experiences does not merely entail describing and reporting an unfamiliar world traversed, but also an interaction of the self with the world and its culturally diverse inhabitants. Travel narratives are then attempts at articulating the unfamiliar and the other, and, in this attempt, the traveller turns inward to seek the authenticity of one's self.

The dialectic of the familiar and the estranged receives dynamism as travel narratives either reassert situatedness or introduce the new to discursively and narratively form the self and the other. Such narratives influence the diverse ways of perceiving, classifying, knowing, and identifying with places and peoples. In contemporary times, travel and travel writing have thrust the world towards globalization and cosmopolitanism. A cosmopolitan vision promotes a harmonising agenda through its dominant rhetoric of transculturation. As it ministers to a new vigour for integrated cultural experiences, it promotes the notion of hybridity over displacement. Travel writing has been able to carve a niche by presenting narratives which create an interaction between global identity and a sense of difference.

However, discourses of travel still retain a tendency to deploy gestures that produce authoritative knowledge about the other, as mechanisms of exerting power and control. Travel writing, therefore, has also been seen as one of the "discourses of colonialism" by way of which "one culture comes to interpret, represent, and finally to dominate another" (David Spurr, qtd. in Holland and Huggan 47). Reading colonial ambitions in the production of travel writing in colonial India, the Issue presents Ahana Maitra's research, titled "Becoming Sahibs: Bengali Bhadralok Travel Cultures and a Colony in *Paschim*, c. 1850–1911," which brings to light how a strand of travel writings in Bengal, in nineteenth century were not only complicit with the colonial gaze but also attempted to mimic the "colonial master" in reproducing the colonizing rhetoric. The paper traces the shifting contours of travel from the precolonial times when travel was mainly undertaken for religious and trade purposes to the West influenced travel culture which gave rise to leisure and health tourism. In doing so, the paper argues that Bengali Bhadralok discursively produced the space of "*Paschim*" as a counterpoint to the health resorts, like Darjeeling, that were developed by the British. Studying the narratives of leisurely travels of the Bengali Bhadralok to *Paschim*, the paper demonstrates how their travel narratives followed the colonial logic of appropriation in representing the region of *Paschim* as *terra nullius*.

In the Special Submissions section of this Issue, Rachid Toumi's "Locating Innocence in Sexual Difference: Problematized Masculinity in Hemingway and Baldwin" reads Ernest Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* to explore the loss of the idyllic innocence with respect to gender and sexuality in the post-First World War Western society. Both these novels problematize the typical masculinity of a patriarchal Western society by dramatizing the crises of the protagonists which, the paper argues, is tied to the inability of these individuals to embrace gendered fluidity in the changing world. The next paper in this section, titled "'Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī': A Study of Vaiṣṇava Aesthetics in Tagore's Poetry" by Ujjaini Chakrabarty focuses on the characterisation of Rādhā, the consort of Lord Kr̥ṣṇa, in both religious and secular literary traditions of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* in Bengal. This paper studies the influence of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, as well as the literary and aesthetic traditions that followed, in Rabindranath Tagore's portrayal of Rādhā in his collection of poems, "Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī." The final paper of this Issue, titled "Reifying, Reinscribing, and Resisting Manicheanisms in Representations of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda" by Lauren van der Rede, reads the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 as a text using its three different literary and cultural representations: Uwem Akpan's short story "My Parent's Bedroom," the documentary *Let the Devil Sleep: 20 Years after Genocide in Rwanda*, and the Netflix series *Black Earth Rising*. In showing how these texts literarily trope the genocide through the logic of Manicheanism, by reifying, reinscribing, and also resisting the categories of victim and perpetrator, it seeks to challenge the twofold assumptions undergirding the popular representation of the Rwandan Genocide: a) genocidal violence is temporally and spatially bound and b) Hutus are perpetrators and Tutsis are victims.

This Issue, with the theme of Travel Narratives, is the third instalment of Volume 5 of *LLIDS*, which broadly deals with the topic of Life Writing. While the previous two Issues covered the introduction to Life Narratives and narratives of trauma, the upcoming Issue will explore the ethos, positionality, and structures of narrating life stories. Each Issue of *LLIDS* is a statement of commitment by the authors towards creating discourses which bridge the lacunas of research in their respective fields. This attempt cannot be complete without the earnest contributions of the peer reviewers and the advisory editorial board, the consistent support of our readers, as well as the determined efforts of the editorial team. We would like to thank each person associated with *LLIDS* for their steadfastness in making *LLIDS* a platform worthy of its purpose.

Works Cited

Holland, Patrick, and Graham Huggan. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. U of Michigan P, 2000.

Leed, Eric. *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*. Basic Books, 1991.

Thompson, Carl. "Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing." *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, edited by Nandini Das and Tim Youngs, CUP, 2019, pp. 108–124.

---. *Travel Writing*. Routledge, 2011.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ahana Maitra (ahana.maitra@gmail.com) is a doctoral research student at the Department of English, Jadavpur University, India. Interested in moving beyond the colonial/anticolonial binary, her research focuses on assessing the role of native elite cultures in erecting hierarchies in the Bengal region. For her current project, she examines the links between Bhadralok travel practices to *Paschim* and its links to the disruptive socioeconomic transformations of the Chotanagpur region.

Lauren van der Rede (lvdr@sun.ac.za) is a lecturer in the Department of English at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Her research explores the intersection of annihilatory violence, literary and cultural studies, and psychoanalysis in relation to the question of memory, from and through the African context. She received her PhD from the Department of English at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, where she was also a Next Generation Researcher based at the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR). Her doctoral dissertation is titled *The post-genocidal condition: Ghosts of genocide, genocidal violence, and representation* (2018).

Rachid Toumi (hemingwayagadir@gmail.com) is a PhD candidate at the Laboratory of Values, Society and Development at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Université Ibn Zohr, Morocco. His doctoral thesis is on the theme of Identity and expatriation in the works of the American authors, Ernest Hemingway and James Baldwin. He completed an MA program in English titled “Race, Ethnicity and Alterity in Literature and Culture” in 2007 at the same faculty. Rachid currently teaches English at the Ministry of Education in Morocco.

Ujjaini Chakrabarty (cujjaini@yahoo.com) is a research scholar in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Tezpur University, India. Her research interests lie in cultural communication. Currently she is working on her research on Oral Tradition and Cultural Memory, where she explores the socio-cultural influence of the oral performance of *Srimad Bhagavata Katha*, based on the *Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana*, an influential text of Hinduism.

This page has been intentionally left blank.

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (LLIDS)

ISSN 2457-0044
CC Attribution-No Derivatives 4.0 International License
www.ellids.com

Becoming Sahibs: Bengali Bhadralok Travel Cultures and a Colony in *Paschim*, c. 1850–1911

Ahana Maitra | Jadavpur University
http://ellids.com/archives/2023/05/5.3-Maitra.pdf

Abstract | From around the second half of the nineteenth century, the Bengali Bhadralok were no longer travelling only for the purposes of pilgrimage. By this time secular travel cultures were emerging, and the Bengali Bhadralok who had come into close contact with the discourses of colonial modernity began to travel extensively. Many of these Bhadralok travellers were converging on what was known as *Paschim*—a set of sites on the western end of undivided Bengal, and currently falling within the post-independence Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand. By situating this travel culture in relation to the history of precolonial travel as it was prevalent in the region, the paper proposes to understand the reasons for which the journeys to *Paschim* might be said to have constituted a new modality of travel—constituted by the Bhadralok's discursive adaptation of the colonial gaze, which in turn, as the paper will argue, made it possible for such travellers to establish a Bengali colonial centre there. In this context, the paper analyzes to what extent travel narratives as cultural texts shaped such expeditions into the region. Three of the earliest instances of the new Bhadralok travellers' documentation of their travels to the region—Bholanath Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay's *Palamau*, and Rabindranath Tagore's "Chotanagpur"—will be studied to trace the development of a discourse on the region which proved to be both textually and materially influential. In connection with this, the paper also proposes to attend to a predominant strand of this history: the practice of vacationing in the "west," i.e., *Paschim*, as health tourists, which became an integral part of the leisure and recreational repertoire of the upper and upper middle class Bengali Bhadralok. Attending to this aspect of Bhadralok's involvement with *Paschim*, the paper will attempt to investigate its particular role in furthering their emerging colonial ambitions.

Keywords | Colonial traveller's gaze, *Paschim*, Colonial ambitions, Utopia, Bengali Bhadralok Culture, South Asian Travel Writing, Nineteenth Century Health Tourism, Bholanath Chunder, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore

As the Bengali writer, poet, and journalist, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay alights from his *daak* (mail carts)[1] on the banks of the Barakar river,[2] he is surrounded by a group of children who call, "Sahib, one paisa, Sahib, one paisa" (Chattopadhyay 24). Try as he might to explain to this group of excited children that he is not a Sahib[3] but, merely, an "unexceptionable Bengali," the children refuse to believe him, and keep insisting that he is in fact one (24). They believe that, as Sanjibchandra[4] explains, anyone who is riding a car is a Sahib. On the banks of Barakar, close to the western margins of the contemporary province of Bengal, an "unexceptionable Bengali" could be and was in fact being confused with one. With this anecdote in *Palamau*,[5] Sanjibchandra—as the paper will try to show—manages to hint at the intentions of the Bengali Bhadralok,[6] many of whom in the mid-nineteenth century had begun to turn their gaze upon the region, and the nature of their commerce with it. In the following sections, this paper, studying the journeys to "*Paschim*"[7] as an organized set of practices, will try to explore three interrelated issues in relation to it. By situating the journeys to *Paschim* within a history of contemporary travel cultures, the paper shows the reasons for which these journeys need to be set apart from other modalities of travel. Further, it examines the ways in which the textual production of the site in Bhadralok writing of the period—in Bholanauth Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay's *Palamau*, and Rabindranath Tagore's "Chotanagpur," for instance—

---

[1] Before the establishment of extensive railway networks, carts pulled by horses would transport mail. These carts would also often transport passenger over long distances. In this case, Sanjibchandra had availed such a cart from the Inland Transit Company to carry him from Ranigunge to Barakar.

[2] The Barakar river is the main tributary of the Damodar river and flows through the northern parts of what is now the state of Jharkhand in India.

[3] The word "Sahib" in Arabic meant friend or companion. Passing as a loan word into Urdu, "Sahib" meant Lord or master. In colonial India, the term began to be used to as an honorific for white, European males and contained a reference to their position of power in the region.

[4] *Editor's Note*: The use of the first name for the author Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay has been has been retained in the main text of the paper to set him apart, given that Chattopadhyay is a very common surname, and he is better known through his first name. However, to follow the conventions of academic writing, the references still use his last name.

[5] After being serialized in the periodical *Bangadarshan* between 1880 and 1882, *Palamau* was published as a standalone text. However, in 2007, the publishing house, Writi, published it as a part of an anthology of Bengali travel writing titled *Chirantan*. All citations from *Palamau* in the present article are from the text as it was included in *Chirantan.*

[6] The word "Bhadralok" denotes a social class, predominantly made up of Bengali, Hindu, upper caste individuals. Although internal distinctions existed, they could be distinguished as a social whole by the way in which they took enthusiastically to English education, availed of the employment opportunities that became available under colonial rule and engaged with the institutions of colonial modernity.

[7] The Bengali word "*Paschim*" means "west." In nineteenth century travel writing, this word signified the set off sites located in the western margins of the undivided province of Bengal—sites which are now part of the post-independence Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand.

persistently facilitated such an exceptional modality of travel. Finally, the paper wishes to explore the way in which these journeys, and their representations, were utilized by the Bengali Bhadralok for developing themselves as regional elite, in competition with their colonial masters.

Apart from benefiting from colonial economic arrangements like the Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793),[8] the group collectively called the "Bhadralok" was produced, in many ways, also out of contact with various institutions of colonial modernity. As Tithi Bhattacharya notes in her article, "what distinguished [the Bhadralok] […] was education of a certain kind" (162). While English education led this group in terms of employment opportunities that were becoming available, the growing proximity to colonial institutions that this implied, led them—irrespective of "whether they were attracted or repelled by European values"—to "reexamine the philosophic basis of their culture" (Broomfield 10). Such grappling with "intellectual issues introduced to their society by European cultural intrusion" led them to interrogate the tenets of Hinduism and reform the religion, and "forms and techniques" were "freely borrowed" from English to express these ideas in a form of Bangla which was sought to be gradually desanskritized. Journals and newspapers were also established, and began flourishing, as a result (7–9). The spirit of reform also did not remain limited to the sphere of religion but spilled over into the sphere of leisure and health as well.

No longer travelling only for the purposes of pilgrimage, the Bengali Bhadralok, from around the second half of the nineteenth century, had begun to leave home in search of adventure, for emulating the 'Grand Tour,' for work tours, or to flee the polluted air and waters of Calcutta. Their aims, often influenced by their new familiarity with western travel narratives and spirits emboldened by their new found reformist zeal, led them to question "caste taboos that forbade upper-caste Hindus from crossing 'black water'"[9] (Chaudhuri 165); to question "Brahmanical authoritative opinion" which also held that "travel meant being exposed to the unwholesome auras of alien people and influences, drinking impure water, eating food from unrighteous lands" (qtd. in S. Sen, *Travels to Europe* 3). Many among the new Bhadralok travellers travelled to Europe, and more particularly to England, "consumed by an intense anxiety to make the most of their time in the metropolis": As Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay explains, these tourists, armed with "the 'image repertoire' of the 'great city' acquired from fiction, guide books and tourist brochure," attempted to read and map the city according to these codes, to discover the space they had hitherto read of (298).[10] It was not only to England, however, that members of the Bhadralok travelled: Tagore, for instance, visited Russia after the Russian Revolution while Swami Vivekananda, en route to Chicago, travelled extensively to Japan. Both Tagore and Vivekananda wrote approvingly of what they saw, seeing these societies as ones fit to be emulated.[11] Domestic travel, too, received a fillip under these circumstances: Baradakanta Sengupta's *Bharat Bhraman* (1877) and Prasannamayee Devi's *Aryavarta* (1888) contain accounts of such journeys undertaken within the country.[12] These travellers often turned their gaze towards a set of sites, collectively known as "*Paschim.*" These sites, as has been mentioned before, loosely formed the western margins of the Bengal Presidency until 1911, when Assam, Bihar, and Orissa were separated from Bengal and *Paschim* was bordered out cartographically as a distinct space. As the sites constituting *Paschim* became part of the separate province of Bihar with its new capital in Patna, it could no longer be perceived as a peripheral "frontier" region to the urban centre of Calcutta—linked, but separate.

---

[8] The Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793), put in place by Cornwallis, was the fixing of the revenue of land. The administration hoped that assuring landlords that their profits would not be taxed would incentivize them to make improvements to the land. Inability to pay the fixed rate would lead to transfer of landholding. What happened as a result was what Ratnalekha Ray has called "a great circulation of titles" with "most of the ten great landholding families [getting] badly mauled" and smaller zamindars, their administrators, government officials, and new merchants based in Calcutta buying up agricultural land (73).

[9] The term "black water" is a literal translation of the word *Kala-pani* which was used to refer to the seas, the crossing of which was proscribed in Hindu law. It was stated that such voyages would lead to a loss of caste. See, *The Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* 168.

[10] For contemporary travel writing in this vein, i.e., of "reading" England in terms of what the Bengali Bhadralok had already read, see Shibnath Shastri's *Englander Diary* (1888) and Troilakyanath Mukherjee's *A Visit to Europe* (1902). Rakhal Das Halder, who "regar[ded] British rule as a God-send" in

Till 1911, however, the sites making up *Paschim* remained as a peripheral region of the Bengal Presidency, only ideologically bordered out as a distinct space. That space is not only material, but is also ideologized, is an idea that by now has a long critical history. Henri Lefebvre, utilizing Gramsci's notion of "hegemony" has explained the necessity of moving from a "strictly geometrical meaning" of space (1), from the practice of thinking of space as the "passive locus of social relations," and instead, argues that "space serves" and "hegemony makes use of it" (11). As De Certeau explains, although not encompassing, there are dominant "discourses that ideologize" space and seek to determine its "proper meaning" (95, 101). Such ideologization, moreover, as Arnold explains, has not, historically, remained materially irrelevant. While explaining that "ideologized space" is a "cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings," Arnold emphasizes, that landscapes do not thereby become "immaterial" (Arnold 5). Going further, Arnold makes the connection between ideology and materiality of space explicit, and explains that even though terms like 'vision' and 'gaze' seem to "imply appraisal but inaction, aesthetic taste rather than material transformation," often 'seeing' or 'reading' a landscape, "was commonly the prelude to, or necessary precondition for, […] physical transformation" (6). During this period, *Paschim*, with its sites not yet cartographically distinguished from the Bengal province, was, thus, more emphatically such an ideological space. Through its production according to a "shared set of codes"—recurring across cultural texts produced in and around the second half of the nineteenth century—the Bhadralok ideologically set apart, constituted and apprehended the site. As Parimal Bhattacharya explains, its

---

his diary (xxiii), which was later published as a book, titled *The English Diary of an Indian Student, 1861–62*, wrote of his visiting Stoke Poges to avoid committing the "unpardonable folly" of not visiting the gravesite of Thomas Gray, whose "immortal" "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" he had read (75).

[11] Swami Vivekananda praises the technological advances made by the Japanese who, as such, seemed to him "to have fully awakened themselves to the necessity of the present times" (Vivekananda). Tagore, again, wishes that members of the Indian working class would benefit from being trained in post-Revolution Russia (*Russiar Chithi* 3).

[12] Simonti Sen's article, "Emergence of Secular Travel in Bengali Cultural Universe: Some Passing Thoughts," and Kumkum Chatterjee's article, "Discovering India: Travel, History and Identity in Late Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century India," trace the history of the emergence of secular travel among the Bengali Bhadralok in greater detail.

cartographically marginal character ensured that the space of *Paschim* would provide "necessary context and depth" to the "centre of urban Bengalihood" (7).

Tracing the history of the Bhadralok's journeys to *Paschim* through their representation in cultural texts that predictably proliferated around the practice of travelling to these sites, the paper will investigate the set of codes in terms of which the geographically contiguous but heterogenous sites came to be produced as the unified unit of *Paschim*. In attempting critical and historical readings of Bangla travel writing produced between 1850 and 1911, specifically, Bholanauth Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India* (1869), Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay's *Palamau* (serialized in the periodical *Bangadarshan* between 1880 and 1882), and Rabindranath Tagore's "Chotanagpur" (1906), the paper will attempt to identify the components of the shared discursive code through which the Bengali Bhadralok both imaginatively grasped and constructed *Paschim*, and subsequently the ways in which that might have impacted how the Bhadralok accessed and remodelled it, as they came to be entangled, in the process, in a history of disruptive socioeconomic transformation in the region.

Of Pilgrims and Traders: Early Modern Cultures of Travel

In her survey of Indian travel writing, Supriya Chaudhuri writes that for a long time in the Indian subcontinent, it was mostly pilgrims, traders, and rulers who had had reasons to travel (159). If we look closely, the travels of all three categories of persons mentioned, arguably, contain something in common. Surviving narratives produced in Bengal of traders and pilgrims detailing their journeys show that the journeys to *Paschim* undertaken by Bhadralok travellers were unique with respect to not only other contemporary travel cultures but also travel cultures which were already extant in the region. *Paschim* was taken and remained out of time in sharp contrast to the historical situatedness of the other destinations through and to which the travellers went. The protagonists of Bijayram Sen's *Tirthamangal* and the *Mangalkavya* literature—texts that have been cited as early modern precursors to this new brand of travel writing being practiced by the Bengali Bhadralok travellers to *Paschim* (Chaudhuri 161; Mukhopadhyay 316)—do not, unlike the later Bhadralok travellers, seem to navigate historically or socially unmarked spaces. Highlighting the way in which the historical situatedness of the sites that appear in *Tirthamangal* or the *Mangalkavya* literature are conveyed and comparing it with the way in which *Paschim* came to be represented, it will become possible to draw attention to the contrasting effects produced by such differential modes of textualization. As such, it would also become possible to illustrate the extent of the departure that the new mode of travel writing, employed in textualizing *Paschim*, presented to the historical modes of travel writing prevalent in the region.

Bijayram Sen, a physician, is known for having been a part of Raja Krishnachandra Ghoshal's[13] entourage when the latter had been on pilgrimage. Sen would later go on to compose a long poem titled *Tirthamangal* (1770) about their travels.

---

[13] Raja Krishnachandra Ghoshal was the son of Gokulchandra Ghoshal, a mid-eighteenth century figure who amassed wealth in becoming a *bania* (i.e., a procurer of goods) for East India Company's Governor Harry Verelst. The pilgrimage, the account of which is found in *Tirthamangal*, was undertaken sometime around the second half of the 1760s (Curley 78).

In one of the initial sections of the poem, we learn that Krishnachandra, his son, and one of his ministers are pondering upon the amount of money that they will have to spend if they are to visit the "*triad* of holy sites" (16; emphasis added). Sen feels no need to expand further what constituted this triad. From Sen's twentieth century editor, we find out why that is the case: the 'triad' in contemporary travel discourse had referred to a set of three holy sites in northern India, namely, Kashi, Gaya, and Prayag, and contemporary readers of Sen were expected to know this without needing further elaboration (16–17). What the 'triad' should be and was, had been determined by the textual tradition which included material like *Tristhali Setu*, a sixteenth-century text by the famed Vaishnava saint and pilgrim Narayan Bhatta Goswami, and *Tirtha Prakasa*, a seventeenth century text by Mitra Mishra (Aiyangar lix). However, the elision in Sen's text, then, cannot be said to be entirely innocent. The assumption of knowledge on his readers' parts is utilized to signify that he would be travelling a well-trodden path. In this, their journey—and its textual production—is inserted within an existing tradition, which in allowing the text to be generified, provides it with a readership.

Arguably, this also has certain effects upon the sites that it textualizes. Many such texts, apart from prescribing routes and pitstops, also contained guides on the tasks pilgrims were supposed to undertake once they were at these sites. The sections on *tirtha-niyamas* (pilgrimage rules)[14] that are included in most of these texts, specified, for instance, the numbers and types of ritual baths that were to be undertaken, or repeatedly harped upon the "genius loci" of Gaya, and its suitability for performing the *sraddha*, or propitiatory rites (Aiyangar lxxxiii). The allusion to such prescriptions in *Tirthamangal*, then, sets up expectations, not only about the route he will be following and the sites he will be visiting, but also the activities he will most probably engage in, expectations he will have to fulfil by the end of his narrative. Thus, to make the journey legible and legitimate as a pilgrimage, it was almost imperative that each new traveller only do as others before him had done. In this, then, the discourse of pilgrimage produces a site which is accessible only in limited ways, available to be used only in fixed and predetermined modes.

From the stipulations on routes and the order to be followed while visiting these sites, it also becomes possible to see that each individual site usually formed a part of a circuit. Pilgrims would usually stop at each point on that circuit and were also expected to complete the circuit. This led to an itenerization of the journey, which significantly limited the amount of time a pilgrim could spend at each individual site. In Bijayram Sen's narrative too, one comes across numerous references to Krishnachandra and his retinue alighting from and boarding their boats, thus emphasizing the limited time they are able to spend in each site, before they move on to the next (B. Sen 18–19, 24, 25, 46–49). The entanglement of the pilgrimage with various sacred schedules also posed temporal limits on this mode of travelling. For instance, while almanacs laid out the auspicious times for starting out on such journeys, the *melas* (fairs) held at regular intervals at these sites of worship also often determined when most pilgrims would visit these places (Aiyangar xxvii).

---

[14] Bhattalakshmidhara's *Krtyakalpataru* is a work in fourteen *Kandas* (volumes) and is a digest of Hindu scriptural texts. It mainly details the duties incumbent upon the practitioner of the religion. The eighth *kanda*, titled *Tirthavivechanakanda*, deals with the necessity of undertaking pilgrimage and the duties of pilgrims. *Tirtha-Niyamas* (Pilgrimage Rules) and *Tirtha Mahatyas* (The Glories of Pilgrimage Sites) are sections in scriptural texts that contain guidelines on the pilgrimage sites to be visited, the rites to be performed there, and the benefits accruing to the devotee as a result.

Traders were also bound by similar spatiotemporal constraints. In the introduction to the "Tirtha-Kanda" of *Krtyakalpataru*, K. V. Rangasamy Aiyangar explains that traders too would frequent sites of pilgrimage, especially at the time that large *mela*s were held (xxvii). Like pilgrims, it was imperative for traders, looking for a market for their goods, to situate themselves within existing networks. Thus, early modern genres of religious poetry, like the *Mangalkavyas*,[15] which bear testament to the flourishing mercantile culture in contemporary Bengal, contain descriptions of the thriving trade at the various *ghaats* (docks) where the merchants embarked. In Ketakadas Kshemananda's seventeenth century version of the *Manasamangal Kavya*, for instance, the merchant, Chand Saudagar, arriving at Patan, "gets busy with trading, and has no leisure" (K. Das 7).[16] As the text says, he is able to buy diverse commodities like camphor, clove, scented sandalwood, gold, silver, cloth, spices, arms, and cosmetics (7). Twelve years later, Chand seeks leave from the king to return to his native land. As such, the site that Chand finds himself in is represented as one marked by abundance, prosperous enough to trade in diverse luxury commodities, and possibly with regulatory mechanisms enforced by an established political authority, towards whom Chand can be seen making his overtures (8). In similar vein, the many *ghaats* through which *Chandimangal*'s merchant Dhanapati passes are seen to be densely populated, with "hundreds and thousands of people bathing in the river at the same time," and the ones at which he stops to trade on the way to his destination has enough to fill his boats with "many treasures" (Chakravarti 202–203). That Dhanapati too, like Chand, is on his way to Sinhala, probably suggests that this was an established trade route, popular among contemporary merchants, perhaps because it provided them access to particularly conducive markets where there was a demand for Bengal's exports, and from where merchants like Dhanapati and Chand could import high priced luxury items. Dhanapati, thus, hopes before he sets out on his journey that he will be able to:

> trade deer for horses, coconuts for conch shells, medicinal herbs for cloves, dried ginger root for weapons, frogs for elephants, pigeons for parrots, fruits for nutmeg, vermilion for cinnabar, crotalaria fibre for white yak tails, glass for sapphires, sugar for camphor, lac for bonduc nuts, bedspreads for woollen cloth and blankets, turmeric for yellow dye made from cow bile, uncured tobacco for

---

[15] *Mangalkavyas* are Early Modern genres of Bengali religious poetry composed between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly in praise of folk deities. They were sung and recited before particular versions of them came to be written down. Among the *Mangalkavyas*, *Manasamangal*, *Chandimangal*, and *Dharmamangal* are the most well-known.

[16] The critical consensus is that Ketakadas Kshemananda wrote the *Manasamangal Kavya*. Earlier, it was believed Ketakadas and Kshemananda referred to two different poets who together had written the Kavya. This is no longer held to be true. However, since the paper refers to different versions of Ketakadas Kshemananda's text—as it was rendered by various twentieth century editors—I will be following the respective editors' decisions while citing from these. Bijanbihari Bhattacharya refers to the author as Ketakadas Kshemananda, hence the in-text citation to his version of the text gives the author's surname as Kshemananda. Basanta Ranjan Ray, however, renders the name of the author as Kshemananda Das, and in instances where this article is referring to his version of the text the in-text citation renders the author's surname as K. Das.

> cumin seeds, madar plants for mangoes, and yellow orpiment for diamonds. (Chakravarti 199–200)

It is perhaps because of this that we see Dhanapati trying to woo the ruler of Patan with lavish gifts (209). In his study of the trading cultures of the Bay of Bengal region of the Indian Ocean, Kenneth Hall writes that although urban port centres were often somewhat autonomous entities, "networking with multiple coastal centres" rather than being completely integrated with the "region's centre of political power […] in the port-of-trade's agricultural hinterland," it would usually be controlled by strong local authorities (113). Sinhala's ports of Kalanbu and Dondra, for instance, if Ibn Battuta's account and another contemporary inscription are taken into account, were controlled by local merchant lords with "five hundred Abyssinians" in his employ, or administered by a "Mahapandita officer" who collected duties from arriving merchants in return for protecting them from illegal market practices (Hall 134). Later in the fifteenth century, especially in Sinhala, the coastal market centres were brought under stronger control of a centralized political authority (134). The picture that emerges, then, is that of a land marked by existing structures of authority with which new arrivals to the land had to negotiate with in order to gain various kinds of privileges.

Moreover, while on their journey to distant lands, Chand and Dhanapati have to pay homage not only to earthly authorities but to heavenly powers as well. In another version of Ketakadas Kshemananda's text, Chand is seen to be waylaid on his way to Sinhala. The port in Kalidaha, at which Chand is forced to stop, is under Manasa's zone of influence, a deity who is revered by the local people, as Chand finds out to his peril when he disrespects her (Kshemananda 2–5, 11). In the *Mangalkavya* text, the deity appears not only as a disembodied presence, but also as a flesh and blood figure, keeping tabs on all new arrivals to her territories' shores through a number of her mortal informants, insisting on being adequately worshipped (5). To refuse worship to the deity is to invoke her deadly wrath. The merchants, as Dhanapati is soon made to realize, are not travelling through abstract space—which is to say, not through an empty, homogenous extension, but that which is shot through with the presence of various levels of deities. The waters near Mogra, on which Dhanapati sails, for instance, while being a neutral medium for boats to sail, can also turn into a malicious death trap created between Chandi and Lord Indra (who controls the weather) to drown the recalcitrant merchant ardent only on worshipping Shiva; just as Hanumana, intervening on Manasa's request, can turn the calm waters near Kalidaha stormy, drowning Chand's wares and killing his six sons (Chakravarti 203–204; Kshemananda 4, 9).

As a result, the pilgrimage and travel narratives convey the historical situatedness of the sites they travel through. The land in such narratives emerges thoroughly marked by existing patterns of land-use, with which travellers have to negotiate. Thus, the sites that appear within texts—depicting pilgrimages or trading—seemed to be accessible only in limited ways. However, this practice of emphasizing the historicity of space, that is to say, of representing space as entwined with its sociocultural history, is absent in the nineteenth century narratives of travel emanating from the Bengali Bhadralok milieu, especially insofar as the travelogue modality was brought to bear upon the *Paschim*. In what follows, the paper argues that the travelogue modality as it was used to textualize journeys to the *Paschim* may justifiably be isolated and studied as an organized set of practices that remained implicated in the development of the colonial centre which the Bengali Bhadralok, in competition and collaboration with the British colonial administrators, managed to set up in the region over the years.

***Paschim* in the Eyes of the Nineteenth Century Bengali Bhadralok**

Unlike texts in which the existing travelogue modality is utilized through various textual strategies, wherein the landscape is sought to be rendered recognizable, as illustrated above, the strategies adopted to textualize the *Paschim* served to emphasize the 'newness' and the 'emptiness' of the landscape. Sanjibchandra's *Palamau* repeatedly refers to the changing of modes of conveyance that was necessary for the speaker to reach his destination. He muses, "Thinking that I would have to go via Hazaribagh, I rented a daak from the Inland Transit Company, and started from Ranigunge at one thirty in the night. In the morning it stopped on the east bank of Barakar […] it would have to be pushed across the river" (Chattopadhyay 24). Rabindranath Tagore, writing in his essay "Chotanagpur" four years after *Palamau* was published in *Bangadarshan*, describes the journey thus, "The jerking of the train rocked me so that my slumber was all mixed up. Waking and sleeping, dreaming and waking together formed a mish-mash, as if […] with strange sounds the names of stations were called […] everything disappeared, everything was dark, everything was silent, only the wheels, making their incessant way through the dimly starlit night, could be heard" (720). Instead of describing the landscape as it gradually transforms until he arrives at Madhupur, Tagore writes of his travelling through 'darkness' and 'silence.' This descriptive strategy conceals on the one hand his whereabouts from the text, and on the other hand, makes the transport and communication infrastructure connecting Calcutta and Madhupur disappear, like the railways on which in fact he was then being currently transported.

Unlike the *Mangalkavyas* where the narration proceeds through citing the names of various places that the merchants pass on their way to the Sinhala kingdom (Dhanapati, for instance, notes their passing Kaladhautapur, Chandrasiddha Island, and Jhonkadaha) (Chakravarti 206), in Tagore's case, the names of the intervening stations are described as 'strange' and are elided, and as such the geographical distance between the two sites is occluded. What is effected, as a result, is an exoticization of the landscape. References to availing multiple modes of conveyance abound in Tagore's text as well: Tagore, like Sanjibchandra, has to travel by train till Giridih, and by *daak* from Giridih to the banks of Barakar, where he has to spend a night "somehow, restlessly, in between waking and sleeping," before the *daak* proceeds to Hazaribagh in the morning ("Chotanagpur" 722). The question, of course, is not whether Sanjibchandra or Tagore actually had to avail these various modes of conveyance to reach their destinations in the *Paschim*, but the discourse on the site that such a mode of textualization inevitably produced, and in turn, the ways in which it allowed such travellers to position themselves with respect to the landscape.

Both *Palamau* and "Chotanagpur" contain references to the 'pulling and pushing' that would be required to take the *daak* to the opposite bank from where the journey will continue, representing it as a difficult landscape putting up multiple barriers and hence demanding strenuous labour to be scaled ("Chotanagpur" 721; Chattopadhyay 24). The reference to frequent changes in modes of transportation needed in order to reach their destination serves to exaggerate the distance, both geographical and social, of the site from the city. In many ways, these texts were reproducing a discourse that was being popularized through contemporary colonial travel writing on the subcontinental region.[17] Nitin Sinha, in his book on colonialism and its impact on the development of communications infrastructure in Eastern India, writes that the ‘interior’ was “as much a constructed category as an encountered one,” constructed to address the overlapping political, social, and economic imperatives of the British colonial authorities (xix). To legitimize the ‘civilizing mission’ and public works initiatives of the colonial administration, it became necessary to reconstruct the already open world of the *Mangalkavyas* and to, as Sinha puts it, ‘interiorize’ the subcontinental region, to produce it as a space which requires progressive and continuous ‘opening’ up (xix). These travelogues arguably, thus, served to produce the space as a ‘new’ site—as if hitherto untraversed. In thus constructing the “newness” of the space of *Paschim*, the texts served to construct it as a space that had not been claimed by and did not belong to anyone else. Such “fictions” of *terra nullius*,[18] of “no one’s land,” as Sven Lindqvist argues, had historically been used to “justify the European occupation of large parts of the global land surface” along with its “accompanying acts of dispossession and destruction of indigenous society” (3–4). To textualize a site as *terra nullius* is also to simultaneously construct and posit the colonizing self of the traveller arriving upon it.

In *Palamau*, for instance, the colonizing self which a traveller could textually develop while accessing such a ‘new’ site, can be found out. In *Palamau*, we find the speaker musing to himself, “The hills have raised a wall, as if the world ends there […] I can see smoke rising from one or two villages in the forest […] my tent is on the other side […] looking at this unmindfully, I think that this is my ‘world’” (Chattopadhyay 35). The one accessing a ‘new’ site, could always claim it as “[his] world,” always arriving, as it were, ‘first’ on the site. Corollary to this, the text also seems loath to note all markers of existing patterns of land-use. Right in the middle of *Palamau*, Sanjibchandra becomes stumped for words, lamenting that he “cannot find a subject to write about” (38). Although seemingly an innocuous statement, it can also be seen as a useful articulation of descriptive non-plenitude. Intermittent references to the ‘excessive cleanness’ of the Latehar hills, the “tiny village […] after a wide expanse,” or the “one or two villages inside a jungle” produce it as an empty expanse waiting to be filled (31, 35). Sanjibchandra, in fact, insistently negates the reports that threaten to dismantle his construction of the region. He criticizes a report published in the English newspaper *The Bengal Hurkaru and Chronicle* on the various military parades and activities of the military band in the region because, as he explains, it had led him to think of Palamau as a "boisterous city" (29). Instead, he has found out, as he tells the readers, that Palamau is "no city," that there is not even a "remote village"; the place as he sees it is "filled with hills and jungles" (29). Naturalized thus, the space is sought to be divested of existing markers and histories of human habitation.

---

[17] Elizabeth Fenton, who came to India along with her husband, Captain Neil Campbell, and after his death married Captain Michael Fenton, with whom she later emigrated to Australia, wrote in her journal, which was later published, of her first view of the countryside near Calcutta thus: “With what eager interests you watch the first objects which denote your arrival on new soil, from the moment you see the Island of Sagur like a small cloud in the horizon! then you perceive it thick with mighty forests” (8). Fenton was not the only one to employ such an interiorizing gaze, to insert visual obstacles to a view of the land in her text, which would be progressively removed. David Arnold in *The Tropics and the Travelling Gaze* writes extensively of the politics of narrativizing, as opposed to simply depicting, Indian landscape to “signified progression (or regression) from the familiar into the exotic and from the civilized to the heathen,” as the project of empire had to be justified among the metropolitan at the discursive level (25).

[18] The term ‘*terra nullius*’ is a Latin term meaning ‘land belonging to no one’ or ‘unowned land’ and what the term signified was commented upon in the course of the history of colonization to determine the kind of rights that European powers had to the lands which it had ‘discovered.’ Therefore, the term was used in the context of determining the status of land in the New World before the colonial encounter, and the term was used more particularly in case of Australia (Banner 96).

However, it is not as though travellers like Sanjibchandra did not encounter the existing inhabitants of the site. In fact, a significant amount of textual effort has to be spent in *emptying* out the space, as marks of the materiality of its existing inhabitants constantly threaten to rise to the surface. Training his gaze upon the men and women of the Kol community, he describes them thus:

> The adult males among them have drying skin, flies hover around their eyes, they do not smile, as if all of them are losing their vitality. I think the Kol tribe is decaying. Just as the vitality of particular individuals is reduced, so the vitality of particular tribes also starts decaying; gradually it disappears altogether. People die, tribes disappear. In representing a 'decaying' population, the text is simultaneously able to represent a space that will be left empty imminently. (32)

Sanjibchandra was by no means the first or the only traveller to write about the region thus. In fact, in *Palamau*, he was reproducing very closely the description of the site available in Bholanauth Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*,[19] published close to thirty years before Sanjibchandra's text began to be serialized. Like Sanjibchandra, Bholanath too comes upon a village on the banks of Barakar which he says, "abounds with many men, women and children of the [Santhal] race" (177). The route on which it is, is said to pass through "wastes, heaths and forests" (180), while the Barakar itself is described as a river which "possesses no history — no antecedents — no name in the annals of mankind […] a desert river [flowing] through desert solitudes" (177). Immediately after, the Santhal residents of the village are also described in similar terms: "[He has] neither any alphabet nor any arithmetic; no architecture, [and] none of the useful or ornamental arts; no monument, no laws, no literature, to record the past existence of his nation" (183). Therefore, according to Chunder, they can be "swept" away (183). The apophatic exertions—the repeated denial of any history of social, cultural, and economic practices to the communities he encounters—show the textual effort that was necessary and that was being invested to empty out the site.

The contrast produced in reading *Travels of a Hindu* alongside *Tirthamangal*—Bijayram Sen had passed the same sites on his way to Benares—clarifies the enormity of the task which was at hand for this emerging travel discourse. Around fifty years before Bholanauth Chunder, Bijayram Sen on his way from Rajmahal to Munger, too, seems to have encountered the members of the indigenous communities settled in the region. Travelling possibly through sites currently falling within the Santhal Parganas division in the northern part of the modern Indian state of Jharkhand, Raja Krishnachandra and his retinue, of which Bijayram Sen was a part, fear that they are moving through hostile territory, surrounded as they are by hills on which they believe "all the 'Chuar' homes are" (44).[20] Krishnachandra's party does imminently come face to face with them, and Sen describes their state thus, "Seeing the figure of the Chuars, the passengers are scared/they fall silent and tremble in fear" (44). It is only after a ritual exchange of gifts and pleasantries between the two groups that the party of travellers is able to pass through the site (44). Even though at the time of Bijayram Sen the various indigenous communities settled in the region were already seen as 'uncivilized,' it appears from the prevailing discourse that the sites have to be accessed very much in negotiation with the systems of authority that are put in place by the indigenous communities that reside there—remaining resistant, as such, to being appropriated as *terra nullius*.

---

[19] Bholanauth Chunder's 1869 publication *Travels of a Hindoo* in two volumes is an account of Chunder's journey through the northwestern parts of the Indian subcontinent.

Hence, it appears that the politics of the travel discourse emerging around the second half of the nineteenth century, especially insofar as it concerned the 'west,' cannot be examined, as Prathama Banerjee does in *Politics of Time*, only in terms of the elite Bengali's varied attempts to exorcise and distinguish himself from the "primitive within" (3). It was perhaps not, as Banerjee suggests in her book, limited to negotiating the Bhadralok self, committed to the "pursuit of knowledge, abstraction and morality" in opposition to the "bodily, the sensuous, the valorous and the practical" self of the 'primitive' (113). Instead, contesting Banerjee's Bhadralok/'primitive' binary, these accounts, as the paper will attempt to argue in the following section, often evince a more violent obliterating politics.

In the preface to *Travels of a Hindoo*, Bholanauth Chunder is praised thus by his British presenter, J. Talboys Wheeler:

> But so far as he delineates pictures of Indian life and manners, and familiarizes his readers with the peculiar tone of Hindoo thought and sentiment, his Travels are far superior to those of any writer with which we have hitherto become acquainted. Even the observant old travellers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who went peeping and prying everywhere, mingling freely with Natives, and living like Natives, never furnished a tithe of the stock of local traditions, gossiping stories, and exhaustive descriptions which are here presented to English and Indian readers. (Chunder xiii)

After having approved Chunder's gaze, he reveals what it resembles, and in that also the reasons for which he approves of the account and recommends it. Wheeler commends Chunder for imbibing, along with his fellow "bunniahs,"[21] "a tincture of European refinement" (Chunder xx), and for that being able to, among other things, overcome "the strongest possible prejudice against travelling [which] existed in the minds of the

---

[20] The Adivasi communities residing in Chotanagpur, in the south-western part of what would later constitute the Bengal Presidency, were referred to as "Chuars" in medieval Bengali texts. Sri Chaitanya, the 15th century Vaishnava saint, travelling through the region wrote of their being employed as *paik*s or militiamen by local kings and chieftains, and of their being granted land in return for their service (Sarkar 3685–3686). E. T. Dalton, in his *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872) wrote of Chotanagpur being "regarded by Hindoos as being outside the pale of Hindustan" (qtd. in Chandra 143). Used to refer to the various indigenous communities of this region collectively, the term 'Chuar' is derogatory.

[21] The word "*bunniah*" or "*bania*" is derived from the Sanskrit word "*vanik*" which means 'merchant.' In Bengali, the term was used specifically to denote moneylenders and indigenous bankers.

Bengalees" (xv). Having undertaken this veritably European project—which, as he explains, was quite unlike the journeys undertaken by "only the old men and old widows who left their homes to go on pilgrimages to Benares and Brindabun"—Chunder, according to Wheeler, had followed in the footsteps and cultivated the gaze of the "observant old travellers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who went peeping and prying everywhere," but had turned out to be "far superior" than the Europeans (xiii, xx). Sanjibchandra, while commenting on the Kol and Asur communities, records his observations in the words of A. C. Geekie, who in 1871 had published a book titled *Christian Missions: To Wrong Places, Among Wrong Races, and in Wrong Hands* on the difficulties associated with preaching the word of God among the various 'uncivilized' peoples of the colonies. Quite literally reproducing the colonizer's gaze in his own text, and leaving to the audience the task of recontextualizing the comment in the present milieu, Sanjibchandra inserts the following quote from Geekie's book into his own text: "In Canada for the last fifty years the Indians have been treated with paternal kindness but the wasting never stops […] the result is only this that their extinction goes on more slowly than it otherwise would" (33). In this, Sanjibchandra ends up implicitly indicating the fate he speculates for the indigenous communities he encounters in the region.[22] Thus, in recasting his positionality with respect to the indigenous communities in the Santhal Parganas region in terms of the one between the Anglo-Saxon invaders of North America and its indigenous inhabitants, Sanjibchandra perhaps implicitly reveals the aspirations underlying Bengali travel practices to the region. The willingness to share and participate in a common colonizer's discourse is also typographically conveyed as the materiality of the roman script is made to share textual space with the Bengali script. It appears that in this discourse, the indigenous inhabitants of these sites do not adequately emerge as an 'other,' in opposition to whom the Bhadralok seek to define themselves. Incorporating the colonizers words within its typographic space, it seems that the Bhadralok, away from the urban colonial centre, were perhaps intent on remodelling *Paschim* as a site for expressing an elite Bengalihood, not so much in opposition to the 'primitive' other, as in competition with the colonizers.

The textual strategy of articulating colonial aspirations, however, did not remain limited to emptying out these sites and representing the Bhadralok traveller's encounter with its indigenous inhabitants as analogues of other colonial encounters. In these same texts, detailed visions for what might be done in these sites which had been emptied were also being proposed. In *Palamau*, for instance, listening to a 'wild bird' calling in the "*mandakranta* rhyme,"[23] Sanjibchandra mistakes it for one of the 'educated' talking birds of Vrindavan's "*Radhakunja*"[24] that advocate for Krishna (36). That Sanjibchandra mistakes the space of Palamau for Vrindavan and is "disillusioned" moments later serves to emphasize what the site could potentially be—what could be but is not yet. Like Sanjibchandra, Bholanauth Chunder also explicitly emphasizes the *potential* of *Paschim* to become a utopia. While acknowledging that Barakar "*now* [is] a solitary outpost of civilization in a region of barbarians," Chunder lists the possibilities that nonetheless lie germane in it (179; emphasis added). Chunder's vision for the future of the region bears quoting at length:

---

[22] The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of political turmoil in the region. As Sanjukta Das Gupta explains, the colonial state had by the second quarter of the nineteenth century "penetrated into such regions, provoking widespread local resistance" (276). The Kol Rebellion (1832), the Chuar Rebellion, and the Santhal Rebellion of 1855 are notable examples. Members of indigenous communities residing in the region were also often coerced into migrating as labourers to the tea plantations in Assam and elsewhere (LaFavre 23–24). With the members of their own social class involved in such administrative, political, and commercial systems, Bhadralok travellers, however, seldom documented or commented upon such conditions existing in the region.

[23] *Mandrakranta chhand* is a rhyme scheme used in classical Sanskrit poetry, believed to have been used for the first time by Kalidasa in the epic, *Meghadutam*.

> [T]he place bids fair to be a mart of great trading activity — to be a considerable outlet for the products of the hill-regions. The local advantages of its situation, to be heightened the more by the extension of the Railway, would attract here large numbers of men for business. The spot is particularly suited for manufactories of lac-dye and shell-lac […] Hides, horns, and beeswax can be had here in abundance. Timber, which has become a valuable commodity in the Indian market, can be largely procured from these districts. There are fine pasture lands, and cattle might be reared with great success. The mineral wealth of the region is inexhaustible. Scarcely any land-owner now appreciate the ores of iron or the veins of copper lying in his estate, and takes them into the account in estimating the value of his property. But time shall give to the Indians their own Birmingham and their own Sheffield […] In a region of twenty miles in circumference, there are seen now a few straggling huts of reeds and thatches. The traveller in the twentieth century would find all this space covered with neat bungalows, pleasant country-seats, warehouses, and shops. (179–180)

That Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar would go on to name the house he built in Karmatanr—where the term "*tanrbhumi*" signifies 'uncultured land'—"Nandankanan" ["The Garden of Heaven"] clarifies not only a spatial division between the 'uncultured' wilderness and the 'cultured' gardens of the Bengali Bhadralok, to maintain a demographic distinction, but also hints at a temporal project. The site, thus, hovering between being an 'uncultured,' 'fallen' land and the heavenly garden of Nandankanan, between being a 'wilderness' and the pastoral space of Vrindavan, between being a "solitary outpost of civilization" and a "mart of great trading activity" is produced as a *prospective* utopia.

Unhealthy Cities, Exclusive Hill Stations: Health Tourism in the "Plains of Bihar"

The utilities and impacts of such textual dreaming, by early travellers to the region, begin to emerge when these narratives are situated in the context of the development of Bhadralok culture particularly in the urban centre of Calcutta. As travel practices of the Bengali Bhadralok were morphing to accommodate non-religious travel, and as a result of which health and wellness tourism was added to their expanding leisure and recreation repertoire, one of the reasons for which the Bengali Bhadralok started travelling to *Paschim* was in order to develop it as a healthful site, one capable of rivalling Darjeeling. Heightened impetus for such travel practices to emerge was provided with the production of Calcutta as an unhealthy city. The representation of Calcutta was "chang[ing] dramatically" as the colonial state—visualizing itself as needed for and given over to "improvement"—sought to fashion itself out of the mercantilist power it had hitherto been (Datta 15–16). Opportunity for it also presented itself: repeated outbreaks of epidemics in Calcutta, with a particularly serious outbreak of cholera in 1865, were beginning to be linked by municipal authorities with the poor quality of air and water supply in the city, and especially in its "native" quarters. As a result, "Victorian sanitarian regimes" for which water was a "secular commodity," clashed, in particular, with Hindu notions of the ritual purity of the water of river Hooghly[25] (Chakrabarti 178). While municipal authorities were quick to blame the dumping of excreta in the river water and using the same for the purpose of drinking as the cause for the outbreak of cholera epidemics in the city, many orthodox Hindus resented the emptying of septic tanks in the holy waters, and additionally believed that the piped water that began to be delivered, after the first pumping station was built at Pulta, to be less pure than the river water which they had hitherto been drinking (178, 194). The then contemporary Bengali Bhadralok remained intensely involved in these debates. Rajendralal Mitra, for instance, intervened regularly in support of David Waldie, a Scottish chemist, who believed that the impurity of the Hooghly's waters was a result of siltation, and artificial salination could make it fit for drinking (Neogi). The latter had remained embroiled in continuing debate with Prof. MacNamara, a chemistry professor in Calcutta University, who was of the opinion that the water of Hooghly was inherently impure and recommended that latest filtration technologies be imported from England to purify the water, and his opinion was finally heeded by the municipal authorities when the pumping station was put up in Pulta (Neogi).

---

[24] *Radhakunja* or "The Bower of Radha" is in Vrindavana, a site which is part of the sacred geography of Vaishnavism for being the site of the amorous exploits of the two Hindu deities, Radha and Krishna. Situated on the banks of the Yamuna river, it is currently part of the post-Independence Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

It was not only water, however, which occupied the attention of public authorities. The Fever Hospital Committee[26] reports—which dwelt on matters extending beyond and in greater detail than required by its stated aim—represented the city as being poorly built. The slums inhabited by the labouring poor particularly came under scrutiny with the committee recommending that the slum dwellers be "obliged to build their habitation with regularity," "to have streets and squares" in order to permit "free circulation of air" (Datta 108). Pradip Sinha, in his inventory of the estates of some of the "opulent families of Calcutta," has shown that most of the land on which such poorly planned slums came up was rented out by the *abhijaat* Bhadralok[27] of the city (P. Sinha 140–159; Datta 108).

---

[25] The river Hooghly flows through what is now the state of West Bengal in India. It is a distributary of the Ganges, and because of its connection with the Ganges, the Hooghly is considered to be holy by the Hindus of the region.

[26] The Fever Hospital Committee was set up primarily to deliberate on the need for a new hospital in the city for Indians apart from the Native Hospital and Police Hospital. Ranald Martin had deemed the Police Hospital suitable for dealing with the "destitute…lying about the streets" (qtd. in Datta 100). The Native Hospital on the other hand was proving to be inadequate for "tackling epidemics or disease that had a 'public' dimension" (Datta 100).

[27] Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay in *Kalikata Kamalalaya* (1823) offers what is probably the first definition of the term Bhadralok. Bandyopadhyay described them as an internally differentiated group that could be broadly classified into the (a) *Abhijat*/*Vishayi* (b) *Madhyabitta* (c) *Daridra athacha bhadra* (15–17). The Bhadralok, thus, came to be defined as an internally divided "social class" with "*abhijaats*"—"new men" who had moved into the city during the second half of the eighteenth century on the backs of the wealth they made as junior partners of English traders—at the top of the internal hierarchy.

While remaining implicated in the development and maintenance of such slum dwellings, members of the same class would also often serve as members of colonial civic improvement bodies like the Fever Hospital Committee, becoming party to both the material and discursive production of the "unhealthy" city. Members of the *abhijaat* Bhadralok class like Ramcomul Sen, Motilal Seal, Russomoy Dutt, and Dwarkanath Tagore, after being nominated by the Fever Hospital Committee to demur on solutions, all provided evidence to the committee regarding "slum owning landlords," and the insanitary living practices and urban conflagrations they were enabling, despite their belonging to such a category of landlord themselves. (Datta 106–108). The Bhadralok, along with the colonial administration, were able to position themselves as actors in relation to the city and its population rather than as targets of reform. In fact, when a subcommittee was created to be in charge of the "Subscription Books for the donations and subscriptions" for the new Fever hospital, it "solicited the liberal aid of all native gentlemen" for their "poorer fellow countrymen" (*Report of the Committee appointed by the Right Hon'ble the Governor of Bengal for the Establishment of a Fever Hospital and for Inquiring into Local Management and Taxation in Calcutta*, qtd. in Datta 102). Although Motilal Seal donated the land on which the Fever Hospital—later renamed the Medical College Hospital—was built, this new hospital and its services were not intended to cater to the medical needs of the Bhadralok.

Through a battery of reports which documented and reported on sanitary interventions, the city of Calcutta[28]—in complete contrast to the way in which it had come to be viewed in the last decades of the eighteenth century[29]—was being produced as an unhealthy site; one which needed to be subjected to extensive 'improvement' to be made liveable. Produced as such as an unhealthy site, the urban centre of Calcutta began to be seen less as a coveted colonial possession and more as a site to be escaped from. Along with the colonial administrators, the Bhadralok, who also played a significant role in municipal governance, on the one hand, became familiar with the aspects of urban environment that was criticized for being insanitary, while, on the other hand, they were keen to differentiate themselves from their "poorer fellow countrymen" whose living practices these reports often criticized[30] and sought to correct through the proposed spatial and public health reforms. Instead of being seen as colonized subjects of reform, incorporating health and wellness tourism in their leisure and recreation repertoire would allow them to represent themselves as an indigenous elite by aligning themselves with the colonial administrator's view of the unhealthy city from which, like the British, they too sought to periodically escape.

---

[28] Wellesley's Municipal Minute of 1803 was the first in a long line of reports that documented the environment of the city and the measures required to 'improve' it. The proceedings of the Lottery Committee (which had been set the task of proposing spatial improvements after the epidemic outbreak of cholera in 1817), Ranald Martin's *Notes on the Medical Topography of Calcutta* (which Martin finished writing in 1834), the reports of the Fever Hospital Committee (set up in 1835), and the reports of the Building Commission (published in 1897) are other notable examples.

[29] With the decline of erstwhile centres of power like Murshidabad, Calcutta had emerged as the region's foremost city. The *East India Gazetteer* (1828), described Calcutta as a "new city"; its "splendor" produced out of the new wealth of the "native gentry [and] its European population" (323). Such glowing reports were not only found in the chronicles of European writers, but Bengali poets and singers also seem to attest to them. Kuluichandra Sen, for instance, an uncle of the more famous Ramnidhi Gupta, patronized by Nabakrishna Deb, testified to Calcutta's power in luring settlers in a somewhat ironic vein, "Praise be to Kolkata, O praise be, Of all that is new, you the birthplace be / […] To make a quick buck, to become rich overnight/ they leave home and on Calcutta, they set their sight" (qtd. in Chakraborty 7).

[30] The Fever Hospital Committee report states that a "Native gentleman" reported that "few wells or tanks are […] kept clean" by "the generality of natives" who nonetheless use this water for cooking and cleaning. Another "Hindoo gentleman" reported that such "filthy pools […] supply the poorer classes with water for culinary and other purposes" (Committee upon the Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvements 11).

Alongside the aforementioned debates that were taking place on public health and hygiene, in a related development, there was a proliferation of narratives both from public authorities and individual authors that stressed the "curative benefits" of hill stations.[31] The Bhadralok who remained closely associated with the debates on health and hygiene too came to be familiar with the discourse which, in intending to 'acclimatize' the Europeans arriving in India in climates that "most resembled those of Britain," recommended journeys to the hill stations (Harrison 74). Such sectoring led on the one hand to the "differentiation of India into 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' zones," and, on the other, to the representation and development of the hill stations as mini versions of the metropolitan 'home' (Harrison 74). A section of the Bhadralok, too, seemingly came to be influenced by this view, and histories of leisure especially as it pertains to nineteenth century Bengal[32] have dealt extensively with the way in which the "Indian elite – native princes as well as the middle classes – staked a claim to the hill stations" and especially to Darjeeling (Bhattacharya-Panda 11). However, as Bhattacharya-Panda shows while tracing this history, there was considerable opposition to this 'incursion' into what was seen as an "ostentatiously European social space" (51). By 1906, Governor Sir Andrew Fraser and the Civil Surgeon of Darjeeling Colonel Crofts, for instance, were vetoing a proposal to build a phthisis[33] ward in the Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium, the 'native' counterpart to the Eden sanatorium, and suggested the building of such a ward in Ranchi instead (Bhattacharya-Panda 86). Although the building of the proposed phthisis ward was finally sanctioned, the health tourism of the Bengali Bhadralok, and especially of the middle class among them, to Darjeeling was, nonetheless, sought to be discouraged. Various members of the regional royalty and the *zamindars* were also keen on keeping the Bhadralok out, with the Maharaja of Burdwan recommending that a project be drawn up for a sanatorium "somewhere in the plains of Bihar" for the "poorer classes, such as the low paid clerical staff employed under the government or elsewhere" (Bhattacharya-Panda 90). As Darjeeling came to be gradually shut off to the "ordinary native,"[34] the development of another such complex had become desirable, and it is in this context that the *Paschim*, arguably, was sought to be constructed as a rival location.

---

[31] The initial consensus on the beneficial climate of the "hill stations" was developed as statistics for mortality rates in the military for the hills and plains were compared. Two studies conducted in the 1840s showed that the mortality rate of soldiers stationed at the three presidencies were more than twice that among those convalescing in "highland sanitaria" (Kennedy 25). Almost a decade earlier, the Deputy Surveyor General had been first sent to Darjeeling to assess its suitability as a possible site for a sanatorium for European troops posted in Northern India. Joseph Dalton Hooker, visiting Darjeeling in 1848, writes of its "rapid increase" by "temporary visitors in search of health, or the luxury of a cool climate and active exercise" (Hooker Chapter IV).

[32] See Dane Keith Kennedy's *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* and Nandini Bhattacharya-Panda's *Contagion and Enclaves: Tropical Medicine in Colonial India.*

[33] The disease, which is known as tuberculosis at present, was in the nineteenth century referred to variously as consumption, wasting disease, and phthisis.

[34] With the proposal for the phthisis ward in the Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium being vetoed and the members of the regional royalty and zamindars coming together with the colonial administration to keep the Bhadralok out of the exclusive social space of Darjeeling, a hue and cry was raised in the contemporary periodicals. *The Bengalee* published editorials repeatedly attacking what it perceived to be a racially

Contrary to what Bhattacharya-Panda suggests in her study, it was not only the "poorer classes" among the Bengali Bhadralok who had enthusiastically taken to the project of seeing *Paschim* as a site for potential health resorts. From the interactions that Rajnarayan Basu writes of in his memoir, *Atmacharit*, it becomes clear that, by the 1870s, a bustling Bhadralok community had come up in *Paschim*—the community counting among its members prominent public figures like Ramgopal Ghosh, Ramtanu Lahiri, Debendranath Tagore, and Basu himself—thinking it a suitable site for building their health homes (Basu 105–106, 114). In his description of Hazaribagh, Rabindranath Tagore provided a list of reasons for which he considered it a healthful site: Hazaribag, Tagore writes, "is not very urbanized. Alleys, lanes, garbage, drains, crowds, noise, cars, dirt, dust, mosquitoes, flies, all of these are not too common here. Situated among fields, the mountains and the greenery, the town is neat and clean" ("Chotanagpur" 722). Placing his list alongside a report that Lord Wellesley prepared on the state of Calcutta's urban environment proves to be illuminating. Wellesley wrote: "In the quarters of the town occupied principally by the native inhabitants, the houses have been built without order or regularity, and the *streets and lanes have been formed without attention to the health, convenience or safety* of the inhabitants" (qtd. in Goode 237; emphasis added). Further, from S. W. Goode's study of municipal Calcutta in which Wellesley's assessment is quoted, the ways in which the city was being constructed as an "unhealthy" site can be seen, with "dust and rubbish and all kinds of dirt thrown into [the streets], ad libitum, from every house" (147); one which, moreover, was represented to be unamenable to sanitarian interventions as the "densely populated Indian quarters" and the "narrow streets of northern Calcutta" fail to provide an "unobjectionable site for public dustbins" (167). Tagore, with his description of Hazaribagh was viewing and constructing the site almost as an exact opposite of such an "unhealthy" city.

Thus, in this "neat and clean city" would come up the rest homes of the Bengali Bhadralok. Juxtaposed with the textually emptied landscape are the lavish built environments of the Bengali Bhadralok's "*kuthis*,"[35] like the one to which Sanjibchandra

---

motivated decision. Berating the veto, an editorial of *The Bengalee* on 27 November 1906 stated, "Are we to understand that what is good for the Eden Sanitarium, to which only Europeans are admitted, is not good for the Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium which is resorted to by 'natives' only?" (qtd. in Bhattacharya-Panda, 86). The "quest for exclusivity" led to attempts to discourage Indians' health tourism to Darjeeling by constructing alternative destinations. While on the one hand the colonial administration was keen on maintaining the exclusivity of Darjeeling and finding alternative sites which were supposedly "better adapted than Darjeeling to […] constitutions of […] Indian gentlemen" (Bhattacharya-Panda 89) (Kurseong, another "hill station" near Darjeeling was suggested as such an alternative, for instance), elite Indians like the Maharaja of Burdwan, B. C. Mahtab, and Dr. Nil Ratan Sarkar, apprehensive about the prospect of "racial humiliation," attempted to "resist the influx of middle-class Bengalis into Darjeeling itself" (90). To prevent "overcrowding" in Darjeeling, the Maharaja of Burdwan, for instance, wrote to the Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal proposing alternative locations in *Paschim*, namely Madhupur, Simultola, and Deoghar (91).

[35] *Kuthis* are spacious houses, usually belonging to businessmen, high-ranking government officials, or other eminent men, which could be used as both places of work and living. The term *kuthi* would probably be reminiscent of the related term *Nilkuthi* which was a shortened form of the phrase "Nil Saheber Kuthi" (literally, "the houses of the Indigo planters"). The Indigo planters, who were usually white Europeans, worked and lived out of such spaces close to the fields that they had leased where Indian farmers were

pays a visit and tellingly describes to be of a kind “which is rarely seen even among Sahibs” (Chattopadhyay 28). It is not unusual that Sanjibchandra comes across such a household belonging to a Bengali in these parts as many contemporary illustrious Bhadralok families had come to own property in the region. In Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna’s biography of his older brother, he writes of Vidyasagar being inundated with visitors making various demands of him. To escape the ‘excessive people,’ and on his doctor’s suggestion, Shambhuchandra mentions, Vidyasagar “[bought] a bungalow very close to the Karmatanr railway station” (Vidyaratna 226). One of Sukumar Ray’s poems, “Kolikata Kotha re,” contains a reference to a “comfort-house” in Giridih, where the speaker, freed from the necessity of responding to the calls of clock-time which seems to govern the lives of those who had invited him to attend a tea-party in the Kolkata, and also, more generally, the lives of the Bengali Bhadralok who had availed most of the employment opportunities that had become available under the colonial government, is able to live by the maxim, “When you’re hungry, eat your fill, when you’re sleepy, sleep” (S. Ray 89). From Nalini Das’s memoir of the Ray family, *Saat Rajar Dhan Ek Manik*, it seems the ‘comfort-house’ of Sukumar’s poem was a reference to a property that the family had owned in Giridih. After Ray’s death, Das writes, “Mamima [Ray’s wife] decided that for some days she would go somewhere healthful outside Kolkata” (21). They opt for Giridih, where, just like Sanjibchandra’s Bengali host, within a huge garden, the Ray family, too, has a great house, “Rose Villa” (N. Das 21). These structures, in turn, seem to have been built in imitation of the ones that the British built in the ‘hill stations,’ wherein, abandoning the “grid patterns of the civil and military stations,” they had “constructed […] along the crests of ridges and around the shores of lakes, without apparent premeditation or planning,” and “cultivated English fruit orchards and vegetable gardens in their backyards” (Kennedy 3). The Bengali household in Hazaribagh to which Sanjibchandra pays a visit, for instance, seems to have been built keeping such tenets in mind. Sanjibchandra describes it as a ‘mansion’ with a garden wide enough for an evening stroll, a pond, and finally an orchard in the backyard, where its resident has managed to grow bananas—a feat, if Sanjibchandra is to be believed, hitherto unheard of in that region (27). It is, then, not incidental that Sanjibchandra “mistakes the house as belonging to some wealthy Britisher,” but actually hints at the possibility that English architectural forms—especially from the hill stations—were being imported to *Paschim* (26).

It is in this context that the utilities of constructing the sites of *Paschim* as *terra nullius* and articulating a descriptive non-plenitude need to be analyzed. In *Palamau*, the articulation of descriptive non-plenitude—more effective since it comes in the wake of Sanjibchandra’s narrator repeatedly admitting to his volubility “even if no one is listening,” and to his ‘pleasure’ in speaking (23)—transmitted the perceived material dearth through a textual lack. A perceived topographical lack had been viscerally conveyed typographically, so that the dearth was experienced not only by the traveller moving through the region but, also, analogously by the “three-four humble Bhadralok […] who [would] have read of [his] tour through Palamau in the pages of *Bangadarshan*” (34). Confronted with Sanjibchandra’s lament for the dearth of “capital” (34) with which

---

often forced to cultivate Indigo. Dinabandhu Mitra’s play *Nil Darpan* [*The Indigo-Planting Mirror*] bore witness to this exploitative practice and was written in 1858–59.

to narrate the site on the one hand, and the imagery of utopian spaces on the other, the Bhadralok readership of such travel narratives about *Paschim* was being encouraged to *invest* in an empty, as yet unmarked world, now textually prepared to be ripe for the 'making.' A motive underlying such textual preparation perhaps begins to become apparent when one looks at the almost contemporaneous emergence of the Bhadralok health tourist. Contributing to and facilitated by its discursive production as *terra nullius*, the Bhadralok health tourist in the second half of the nineteenth century, was well-placed to envision its production as a healthful utopia; to wish, on the one hand, to construct and maintain *Paschim* as a utopian contrast to the "unhealthy" city of Calcutta, and on the other, to develop it according to the architectural models provided by the British in the hill stations. It can be argued, then, that the Bhadralok, aided discursively, accessed *Paschim* in terms of these two imperatives, and as such, it was turned into a rival space on which the Bengali Bhadralok could enact their 'English' desires—engaging in health tourism and building health resorts—away, however, from resentful English eyes.

Conclusion

It is in this context that the reasons for the children confusing an "unexceptionable Bengali" like Sanjibchandra with a Sahib become clearer. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Bengali Bhadralok were transitioning to newer modes of travelling. Travel cultures in the precolonial period, as has been noted earlier, had mostly stemmed from religious or trading practices, with most ordinary people travelling almost exclusively for the purpose of pilgrimage. As historians of the regional travel cultures have noted, before the advent of colonialism, for Hindus—a religious group with which most Bengali Bhadralok were, at least nominally, affiliated with—very few forms of travel apart from pilgrimage had sanction. Such journeys, and also journeys undertaken for the purposes of trade, had a few features in common. Early Modern pilgrims and traders—as the paper has tried to illustrate—travelled to sites that seem to have been socially, economically, and culturally marked; to sites that evinced rich histories of land use. Moreover, in these sites, they were non-descript as individual travellers, and would only be admitted (or read about) insofar as they reproduced the expected gestures—the gestures of those who had come as travellers to these sites before them. Therefore, these sites seem to have appeared before such travellers as places rather than as spaces—that is to say, as sites with a past. It was only in negotiation with such pasts that travellers could access and operate within these sites.

However, the encounter with colonial modernity led to the emergence of multiple forms of secular travel with the Bengali Bhadralok, who had come to become most familiar with the education, public health, and cultural regimes of colonial modernity, beginning to travel extensively, and also, to write extensively about it. It was in this context that the heterogenous but organized and sustained practice of journeying to *Paschim* began to be undertaken by the Bengali Bhadralok. Unlike the previous modes, discourses surrounding the Bengali Bhadralok's journeys to *Paschim* produced the site through the language of interiorization and discovery, so that each successive traveller to the region was able to appropriate it as *terra nullius*. 'Prepared' in this way—as an empty 'world' ripe for the making—*Paschim* could emerge as the ideal destination for the Bhadralok health tourist, who desired a site which could prove, on the one hand, to be a contrast to the "unhealthy" city of Calcutta, and could, on the other hand, be modelled to be a replica of the British settlements in the hill stations. That *Paschim*, especially in its cultural representations, remained hovering among the various visions that the Bengali Bhadralok (often imitating the colonial traveller's gaze) sought to impose upon it, ensured, to a large extent, that it was continuously produced as space rather than as place: as an empty expanse awaiting the utopian touch. In these ways, this practice—both in its intentions and effects—thus turned out to constitute something completely new, playing a role in shaping the identity of the Bengali Bhadralok.

* * *

Works Cited

Aiyangar, K. V. Rangaswamy. Introduction. *Krtyakalpataru*, by Bhattalakshmidhara, edited by Aiyangar, vol. 8, Oriental Institute, 1942, pp. i–xcii.

Arnold, David. *The Tropics and the Travelling Gaze: India, Landscape and Science, 1800–1856*. U of Washington P, 2006.

Bandyopadhyay, Bhabanicharan. *Kalikata Kamalalaya*. Samacharchandrika Press, 1823

Banerjee, Prathama. *Politics of Time: Primitives and History-Writing in Colonial Society*. Oxford UP, 2006.

Banner, Stuart. "Why *Terra Nullius*: Anthropology and Property Law in Early Australia." *Law and History Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2005, pp. 95–131.

Basu, Rajnarayan. "Atmacharit." *Nirbachita Rachanasamgraha*, edited by Baridbaran Ghosh, College Street Publishers, 1995.

Bhattacharya, Parimal. *Dyanchinama: Ekti Smritir Pratnasandhan*. Ababhash, 2012.

Bhattacharya, Tithi. "In The Name of Culture." *South Asia Research*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2001, pp. 161–187.

Bhattacharya-Panda, Nandini. *Contagion and Enclaves: Colonial Medicine in Tropical India*. Liverpool UP, 2012.

Broomfield, J. H. *Elite Conflict in Plural Society*. Jadavpur UP, 2018.

Chakrabarti, Pratik. "Purifying the River: Pollution and Purity of Water in Colonial Calcutta." *Studies in History*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2015, pp. 178–205.

Chakraborty, Niranjan. *Unabingsha Satabdir Kabiwala o Bangla Sahitya*. Indian Associated, 1958.

Chakravarti, Kavikankan Mukundaram. *Chandimangal*. Translated by Edward M. Yazijian, Penguin, 2015.

Chandra, Uday. "Liberalism and its Other: The Politics of Primitivism in Colonial and Postcolonial Indian Law." *Law and Society Review*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2013, pp. 135–168.

Chatterjee, Kumkum. "Discovering India: Travel, History and Identity in Late-Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century India." *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, edited by Daud Ali. Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 192–227.

Chattopadhyay, Sanjibchandra. "Palamau." *Chirantan*, Writi, 2007, pp. 21–50.

Chaudhuri, Supriya. "Indian Travel Writing." *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, edited by Nandini Das and Tim Youngs, Cambridge UP, 2019, pp. 159–174.

Chunder, Bholanauth. *The Travels of a 'Hindoo' to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*. Trubner, 1869, 2 vols.

Committee upon the Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvements. *Abridgement of Report of the Committee appointed by the Right Hon'ble the Governor of Bengal for the Establishment of a Fever Hospital and for Inquiring into Local Management and Taxation in Calcutta*. Bishop's College Press, 1840. https://archive.org/details/b24997262.

Curley, David L. "Styles of Mastery of a Calcutta Brahman Family: Krishnachandra Ghoshal's Pilgrimage to Gaya, Kashi, Prayag, 1769, In Vijayram Sen's *Tirthamangala*." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2020, pp. 77–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464619892893.

Das, Kshemananda. *Manasamangal*, edited by Basanta Ranjan Roy, Natabar Chakraborty, 1910

Das, Nalini. *Saat Rajar Dhan Ek Manik*. New Script, 1993.

Das Gupta, Sanjukta. "Remembering 'Tribal' India: Landscape, Ethnology and Governance in Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas in the Nineteenth Century." *Glimpses of Indian History and Art: Reflections on the Past, Perspectives for the Future*. Sapienza Universita Editrice, 2012, pp. 271–293.

Datta, Partha. *Planning the City: Urbanization and Reform in Calcutta, c. 1800–c. 1940*. Tulika, 2012.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. U of California P, 1984.

Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Ancient India. Translated by Patrick Olivelle. Oxford UP, 1999.

Fenton, Elizabeth. *The Journal of Mrs. Fenton, 1826–1830*. Edward Arnold, 1901.

Goode, S. W. *Municipal Calcutta: Its Institutions in their Origin and Growth*. Corporation of Calcutta, 1916.

Halder, Rakhal Das. *The English Diary of an Indian Student, 1861–1862*. Asutosh Library, 1903.

Hall, Kenneth R. "Ports-of-Trade, Maritime Diasporas, and Networks of Trade and Cultural Integration in the Bay of Bengal Region of the Indian Ocean: c. 1300–1500." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 53, no. 1-2, 2010, pp. 109–145.

Hamilton, Walter. *East-India Gazetteer*, vol. 1. W. H. Allen, 1828.

Harrison, Mark. "'The Tender Frame of Man': Disease, Climate and Racial Difference in India and the West Indies, 1760–1860." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 70, no. 1, 1996, pp. 68–93.

Hooker, Joseph Dalton. *Himalayan Journals*. 2 Vols. *Project Gutenberg*, 1891, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6478/pg6478-images.html.

Kennedy, Dane. *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*. U of California P, 1993.

Kshemananda, Ketakadas. *Manasamangal*, edited by Bijanbihari Bhattacharya, Sahitya Akademi, 1977.

LaFavre, Gabriel. "The Tea Gardens of Assam and Bengal: Company Rule and the Exploitation of the Indian Population in the Nineteenth Century." *The Trinity Papers: Trinity College Digital Repository*, 2013, https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/trinitypapers/21.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991.

Lindqvist, Sven. *Terra Nullius: A Journey through No One's Land*. Translated by Sarah Death, New Press, 2007.

Mukhopadhyay, Bhaskar. "Writing Home, Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of Dwelling in Bengali Modernity." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2002, pp. 293–318.

Neogi, Tathagata. "Quenching the Capital: How Calcutta Got its Water Supply." *Medium*, 13 June 2017, https://medium.com/the-calcutta-blog/quenching-the-capital-how-calcutta-got-its-water-supply-6d08db0f3e65.

Ray, Ratnalekha. *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society, c. 1760–1850*. Manohar, 1979.

Ray, Sukumar. "Kolikata Kotha Re." *Samagra Sukumar*, edited by Baridbaran Ghosh, Nath, 2001.

Sarkar, Uday Sankar. "Chuar Revolt in South West Bengal: A Historical Analysis." *Journal of Critical Reviews*, vol. 7, no. 8, 2020, pp. 3685–3693.

Sen, Bijayram. *Tirtha-Mangal*, edited by Nagendranath Basu, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1916.

Sen, Simonti. "Emergence of Secular Travel in Bengali Cultural Universe: Some Passing Thoughts." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies on Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2020, pp. 4–14.
---. *Travels to Europe: Self and Other in Bengali Travel Narratives, 1870–1910*. Orient Longman, 2005.

Sinha, Nitin. *Communication and Colonialism in Eastern Bihar: 1760s–1880s*. Anthem Press, 2012.

Sinha, Pradip. *Calcutta in Urban History*. Firma KLM, 1978.

Swami Vivekananda. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 5. Epistles, First Series. en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Complete_Works_of_Swami_Vivekananda/Volume_5/Epistles_-_First_Series/III_Alasinga.

Tagore, Rabindranath. "Chotanagpur." *Rabindra Rachanabali*, vol. 14, Paschimbanga Sarkar, 1962, pp. 720–723.
---. *Russiar Chithi*. Visva Bharati, 1945.

Vidyaratna, Shambhuchandra. *Vidyasagar Jibancharit*. Siddheswar Press, 1914.

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (LLIDS)

ISSN 2457-0044

CC Attribution-No Derivatives 4.0 International License

www.ellids.com

Locating Innocence in Sexual Difference: Problematized Masculinity in Hemingway and Baldwin

Rachid Toumi | Université Ibn Zohr

http://ellids.com/archives/2023/05/5.3-Toumi.pdf

Abstract | This paper examines the theme of gender in Ernest Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. Both expatriate artists interrogate in their novels an American gendered identity tied to innocence and trauma in historical junctures. For these influential members of the New/Lost Generation, sexuality is less a biological fact than a social construction and a performativity. In their counter-narratives, both iconoclastic American writers dramatize traumatized and problematized masculinity which clings to a false sense of security. They depict the male protagonists as troubled patriarchal subjectivity-formations struggling to rehabilitate the innocence and happiness of an Eden-like social space against the "sea change" of history and the dazzling light of personal experience. As transatlantic modernist icons whose literary sensibility is framed by the experience of the Great War and its aftermath, Hemingway and Baldwin are witnesses to a historical era characterized by a social order in flux in which hegemonic patriarchy is in crisis against the backdrop of emerging new identities. In exilic space, they put under review the standards defining gendered identity by positing the loss of innocence connected to sexuality and the embrace of sexual difference as a condition for endurance and the maintenance of a civilized and sustainable democratic social arrangement.

Keywords | Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin, Sexuality, Patriarchy, Masculinity, Innocence, Gender Fluidity, Identity, Subjectivity

Gender is an important aspect of personal and collective identity that both Ernest Hemingway and James Baldwin reconstruct as individuals and as writers. In their modernist quest for meaning, both American writers construe sexuality as a social construction and trace the genealogy of normalized heterosexual patriarchy to the capitalist "division of labor."[1] For Baldwin, as well as for Hemingway, the historicization and contextualization of gendered identity in modern society expose it as ideological function, not truth. The First World War and its aftermath have had a particularly great impact on the reformation of their gendered consciousness in a changing social landscape.[2] Men's traumatic experience in the war and women's rise in the social scale have entailed a radical redefinition of traditional conceptions of femininity, masculinity, and manhood in a context characterized by the blurring of gender roles and the ambiguity of sexual identity in the public sphere.[3]

Hemingway and Baldwin have made use of expatriation as a means to review personal identity. The Parisian expatriate space, with its comparatively removed and relaxed social atmosphere, enabled both budding artists to interrogate American gendered identity. This engagement was not simply a matter of enacting the forbidden in American society in alien territory, but about an artistic effort in exilic space to come to terms with gendered fluidity by problematizing masculinity and by locating innocence in sexual difference. The authors put their white male protagonists in the European setting to tap the source of American culture—self-defined by its exclusion of sexual difference—by testing the limits of their understanding of gender and by juxtaposing innocence about sexuality, tied to social upbringing, with actually lived experience. Such a strategic employment of self-exile may serve as a metaphor for the movement from innocence to experience and as a paradigm for the reconstruction of personal identity in the context of modern alienation.

Baldwin reminds us that he is the descendant of a preacher and knows perfectly well that the original Eden tree in the Bible is a sight of existential ambiguity. "It is 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.' What is meant by the masculine sensibility is the ability to eat the fruit of that tree, and live. What is meant by the 'human condition' is that, indeed, one has no choice: eat, or die" ("As Much Truth" 39).[4] For the African American author, gendered identity is as ambiguous as the tree in the Eden narrative. As he puts it in an interview, "nobody, no man and no woman, is precisely what they think they are, love is where you find it" ("Civil Rights"). Similarly, behind the almost unassailable machismo popular image of Hemingway lurks the man and artist in androgynous spaces. Hemingway tells his androgynous son Gregory that they both "come from a very strange tribe," implying that both father and son are strangers to the cult of American white male masculinity and innocence (qtd. in J. Hemingway 426). In *The Garden of Eden*, the author debunks this macho myth that critics[5] associate with his name.[6] "How can we be us and have the things we have and do what we do and you be this that's in the clippings?" David's wife, Catherine, wonders in the novel (24).[7]

---

[1] As Baldwin argues, this was the case in ancient times. Men protect their kin as warriors, while women retain their nurturing function. However, such a division of labor—and human relations in general—has been unprecedentedly and vastly "commercialized" in the modern era. Such levels of commercialization of gendered roles, the American activist-author explains, are new ways of domestication and control in contemporary patriarchal society ("Freaks" 815–816).

[2] Hemingway's fiction is not about nostalgia for a pastoral innocence which rejects the momentum of history and change by clinging to the values and identities of the pre-war social order. For Hemingway, the First Great War and its colossal impact serve as a metaphor for modernity (Holcomb and Scruggs 9). In fact, the influential member of the Lost Generation claims the war and its violence as his "heritage" (*Selected Letters* 808).

[3] See, Martin 47–50.

This article examines the themes of sexuality and gender in Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* and Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*.[8] Through the technique of close reading, the paper explores how both self-exiled artists interrogate in the novels an American innocence tied to sexuality. By managing the representations of prototypical American characters that adhere to socially-constructed masculine self-images, they produce a crisis-packed situation in their counter-narratives in which the dramatic denouement is only logically resolvable if their fictional protagonists lose innocence by accepting (sexual) difference. Hemingway and Baldwin redefine in *Garden* and *Giovanni* standards governing fixed notions about sexuality and gender. While the masculine sensibility in mainstream modern society posits heterosexual relations as the standard for normality, both artists' narrative strategy consists in dramatizing in the novel free-floating forms of desire which defy standards of sexual normativity. In this context, they define "innocence" as the incapacity or unwillingness to recognize the complexity and the ambiguity of gendered identity in a changing post-First World War social landscape. Their protagonists cannot make the movement from innocence/immaturity to experience/growth because they fail to come to terms with gendered fluidity outside patriarchal identity. Baldwin is ironical of the "attempt of the American to at once preserve his innocence and arrive at man's estate" ("Preservation of Innocence" 597). Sharing Baldwin's redefinition of manhood, Hemingway tells his son Gregory that "it is very difficult to be a man" (qtd. in "Ernest Hemingway: Wrestling with Life").

---

[4] As a teenager, Baldwin himself became a minister preaching sermons before he left the church for good. He later shifted into an uncompromising anti-Christian position.

[5] Hemingway complains on one occasion that "all these guys [critics] have theories and try to fit you into the theory" (*Selected Letters* 887). Similarly, Baldwin's experience with critics and criticism taught him, as he put it in a conversation with Nikki Giovanni, that "a real critic is very rare" *(A Dialogue* 83).

[6] Hemingway finds certain variants of this macho image very offensive. He says in one of his letters that "he-man is rude to say" (*Selected Letters* 818).

[7] *The Garden of Eden* takes place in France in the early years of the 1920s when Hemingway was living in Paris as a young expatriate writer. Aspects of the life and career of the main protagonist of the novel, David Bourne, reflect those of the writer. We learn from the beginning of the narrative that David is a budding American writer who lives and works as an expatriate in Paris.

[8] Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* and Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* are abbreviated in citations as *GOE* and *GR* and are hereafter referred to as *Garden* and *Giovanni* in the text, respectively.

This reading shows how Hemingway and Baldwin probe the origins of culture by tracing such subjectivity-formation to social upbringing and its hegemonic heirlooms. It concludes by noting that the rhetoric of "tolerance" is inadequate in sustaining plurality and maintaining peace in modern democratic society, and posits the acceptance of the ambiguity of gendered identity and the embracing of sexual otherness as the ideal model for managing social space. The starting point for such social transformation is the individual and its potentiality to affect a major change of heart through lived experience, both Baldwin and Hemingway suggest in *Giovanni* and *Garden*.[9]

The main story of *The Garden of Eden*[10] is about the personal experience of David Bourne, a young writer, and his comparatively well-off wife, Catherine Hill, a homemaker. They have just got married when the narrative kicks off and are enjoying a honeymoon in the paradisiacal French Riviera. They enjoy their time to the fullest, eating, drinking, swimming, and making love. In their pursuit of happiness and construction of paradise in pastoral southern France, they venture to 'enhance' heterosexual desire through forms of erotica and exotica, Catherine taking the lead. She is obsessed with tanning her body and bleaching her hair, urging her husband to follow her lead. While David's carnal desire is stimulated by Catherine's erotics and exotics, he does not take her exploits seriously and already harbors some unexpressed apprehensions about the whole show. Only a few pages into the narrative Catherine warns her husband that she is of "the destructive type" and has subversive intentions with regard to some implied transgressive form of sexuality:

> "I have these flashes of intuition," he said. "I'm the inventive type."
> "I'm the destructive type," she said. "And I'm going to destroy you. They'll put a plaque up on the wall of the building outside the room. I'm going to wake up in the night and do something to you that you've never even heard of or imagined. I was going to last night but I was too sleepy."
> "You're too sleepy to be dangerous."
> "Don't lull yourself into any false security. Oh darling let's have it hurry up and be lunch time." (5–6)

This "dangerous" form of sexuality turns out to be gender reversal and androgyny, which the husband feels is threatening his constructed masculine image and a 'normal' and controllable heterosexual relationship. Anxiety builds in David about the "security" of his masculinity and sense of constructed manhood as Catherine leads him into the deep and troubling waters of subversive sexual experimentations. Catherine engages in the endeavor to "change" her gender. She wears "a true boy's haircut" (15), calls herself "Peter," names David "Catherine" and claims him as girlfriend, trying all the while to *initiate* him into the world of gender fluidity (17). David feels quite ambivalent about her plans of sexual experimentations. The situation is further complicated by the introduction of the gorgeous character of Marita into the couple's private life, a plot development which is meant initially to maximize the eroticization of their sexual liaison. The threesome now engages occasionally in various sexual forms, including group sex, lesbianism, and androgyny.

---

[9] A "nation" is made up of its individuals and their "achievement," and the "quality" of the community is by definition determined by the quality of its members (Baldwin, "The White Problem" 91).

[10] *The Garden of Eden* was heavily edited and posthumously published in 1986. This is the title Hemingway himself gives the novel, as its editor Charles Scribner, Jr. tells us in his sketchy preface to the text (*GOE* vii). The author first began writing it in 1946 and worked on the original manuscript intermittently for about fifteen years (Oliver 169). The main action of the story takes place in France in a post-First World War period. Embedded in the main story is David's African narrative which chronicles his childhood experiences with his dad in pre-war pastoral Africa.

David is overwhelmed by panic. He feels that his masculine world is cracking and reacts by taking refuge in the certain and comforting terrain of romantic and romanticized fiction. He reads W. H. Hudson's *Away and Long Ago*. His reaction to post-war changing social realities is reminiscent of Hemingway's characterization of the Jewish persona, Robert Cohn, in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Like *Garden*'s David, Robert reads and revisits Hudson to flee from post-war actualities into a vanishing pastoral world (*Sun Also Rises* 11). Hudson's pastoral narratives make both protagonists "feel rich" (*GOE* 94–95) and undivided in a historical context characterized by loss, fragmentation, and alienation. Robert, like David, is in love with a post-war 'modern' woman, Brett Ashley, whose "hair was brushed back like a boy's" (*Sun Also Rises* 21) and whose promiscuity is devastating to his knightly love. Unlike Robert, David knows, although his innocence persists, that he cannot 'stop' his wife's "different […] time" (*GOE* 231). Both men's pastoral dream of a domesticated woman, whose gender role is fixed and well-defined within traditional masculine representations and significations, is shattered by the rising new identities post First World War. In *Sun Also Rises,* Robert, like the Spanish bull-fighter Pedro Romero, does not see Brett beyond his masculine romance. Her "true love" has passed away in the war (35) and she is now the traumatized, hedonistic, and promiscuous 'new woman' of the century who can even be the uncontrollable *femme fatale*. She is the sort of woman who can put 'innocent' men through inferno (25). Jake Barnes, the emasculated narrator-protagonist in the novel, and Brett Ashley find it "funny" that Pedro wants to make Brett look "more womanly" and marry her (202). Robert's romantic attachment to Brett breaks his heart and reduces him to a pathetic figure by the end of the novel, "crying" like a child (161). In *Garden*, Catherine mocks David's paternalism, telling him, "I am of age and because I'm married to you doesn't make me your slave or your chattel" (225), and challenges his claims to traditional masculinity by urging him to see the hybridity of gendered identity. "I am you and her […] I'm everybody," she tells him (196). Even Marita, who is willing to perform heterosexual identity and accept subalternity within the system of patriarchy to fulfil her dreams of domesticity and 'have' David (she "loved and respected" his masculine world (193)), tells him that she can be "just the way" he is (185), that is, an androgynous individual.

Everything has changed since the time of the Great War, including "the weather," and "what was not changed was changing fast." David, "as a man of the world, probably saw it in the same way" (*GOE* 94). And yet, despite being a travelling writer, he struggles to maintain some semblance of pastoral innocence. Hemingway is using the "weather" and its fluctuations here as a metaphor for modernity. Marita says that Catherine is "panicked" by "her different time" (231). The truth is that while Cohn and David are alarmed by the "time," at least Catherine and Brett confront it despite their confusion and stress. Survival in this fast-changing world, Hemingway says in *Garden*, necessitates a reconstruction of personal identity outside the values of a dying patriarchal world order. It is a time of social unrest and uncertainty, but total change is sure to come.

David is increasingly tormented by guilt and is deeply disturbed by a gnawing sense of alienation. He is alienated from his self-image in the mirror (*GOE* 168) and uses the booze to take away his "remorse" (69). He feels stuck in the mud of his new immediate experiences with Catherine and is of the opinion that "writing is the only progress you make" (166). He feels he can impose order on his existence by removing himself from reality through writing. It enables him to inhabit the masculine world of his father, a space in which his wife has no place (146). He is haunted by his childhood memories of Safaris to pastoral Africa with a father who represents the heroic code of grace under pressure for him. Against his wife's wishes, he does not feel like writing about their honeymoon exploits. He abandons writing Catherine's "project" of transgressive sexuality and is very careful not "to get the work mixed up" (the honeymoon narrative with the African journal) (188; 190). Catherine's subversive feminist voice responds by telling him to assume his responsibility as a man and as a writer by engaging with the time's gendered "narrative" instead of regressing to the stasis of the patriarchal values and its chivalric ideals. "Someone has to show you that the stories are just your way of escaping your duty," she tells him (190). Insensible to his wife's insistent demands, David carries on his narrative "project" of writing fragmented recollections of his bygone adolescent adventures with his dad in the black continent. Hemingway crafts two antagonistic narratives with two juxtaposing time frames in the novel—one is Catherine's in the present and the other is David's in the past—each one pushing in opposite directions, increasingly creating distances between the couple. As Baldwin puts it in his essay on The Lost Generation, significantly titled "As Much Truth As One Can Bear," *The Garden of Eden* exemplifies the "two strains in American fiction—nostalgia for the loss of innocence as opposed to an ironical apprehension of what such a nostalgia means" (38).

In *Garden*, Hemingway crafts a pathetic white male protagonist who has become troubled not only by a growing sense of insecurity about his masculinity encountering modern transgressive sexuality, but also by the horrors as well as the delights of the ambiguity of sexual identity. At moments of painful self-examination, David would acknowledge the joy his potential homosexuality gives him. He would confront his own 'illicit sexuality' outside religious jargon such as "sin" (21) and "temptation": "'All right. You like it,' he said. 'Now go through with the rest of it whatever it is and don't ever say anyone tempted you or that anyone bitched you'" (84). Steeped into the culture of his time, David resorts to the various Christian, patriarchal, and medical discourses available to him to explain and contain Catherine's subversive feminist discourse and practice. He delineates her new gendered identity as "perversion" and as mental disorder (120). He suggests that they visit the "Geneva" psychoanalytic circle for consultation and treatment, but she declines his offer for fear of incarceration in a medical institution (158). David makes use of knowledges and discourses which have the air of scientificity or sanctity to validate his patriarchal politics of containment and general discursive system of "exclusion."[11] David reproduces Catherine's identity through the simple act of *naming*.

---

[11] In "The Order of Discourse," Michel Foucault discuses "the procedures" by which "the production of discourse" is governed by a system of "exclusion" based on "prohibition," "division," and "will to truth."

He calls her “crazy,” “devil,” and describes her sexuality in terms of “sin,” and “perversion” (44; 45; 21; 120). He attempts to incarcerate her in a psychiatric clinic, and finally abandons her by the end of the story. This mechanism of “radical realism” is a form of power that creates the object and its corresponding reality in an oppressive social milieu in which a potential fightback is effectively checked (Said 72). In *Garden*, Hemingway calls for the need to update our language to describe sexuality in modernity beyond patriarchal and paternalistic discursive formations, power relations, and pastoral innocence.

Hemingway is fully aware that sexuality and gender are social constructions tied to innocence and the exercise of power, and shows us in the novel a character tormented by a guilt that is traceable to social upbringing. He writes symbolically that David “welcomed his father’s presence in the bar until he glanced in the mirror and saw he was alone” (*GOE* 148).[12] The “mirror” metaphorically becomes for the protagonist a confounding sight of conflictual self-images and identities that he fails to reconcile. He retreats into his coherent and undivided “inner core” (183) by miraculously and childishly rehabilitating, though ambivalently, the masculine world of his father and his Africa, and by embracing Marita’s subordination, offers of domesticity, and normalized heterosexual love. Marita “*retrieved*” the manuscript of one of David’s African stories that his jealous wife had attempted to tear apart, and the remainder of his journals starts “*returning* to him intact” (157; 247; emphasis added). David also finds a way to ‘correct’ the writing of Catherine’s transgressive sexual/feminist “narrative” by introducing in it his relationship with Marita and making it triumph. He forcibly attempts to bring about the romantic impact of the happy ending both in fiction and in real life that the masculine sensibility desires. Baldwin explains such attitude as “the American way of looking on the world, as a place to be corrected, and in which innocence is inexplicably lost” (“As Much Truth” 36). The anxiety of this pastoral ideal is relatively assuaged by preserving innocence about mysteriously lost identity; it ambivalently holds on the impossible fantasy that the former self can be reclaimed after the impact of encountering difference and loss. Marita in *Garden* innocently wonders how the pastoral tranquility of David’s Eden-like African narrative is profoundly shaken by violence: “It was strange and how do you say *pastorale*. Then it became terrible in a way I could not explain” (156; *italics* in original). Catherine, called “devil” by her husband, almost inexplicably disappears in nature by the end of the novel as though she were a vanishing howling Satan that has just been cursed by a pious and God-fearing human. Here, the language being used and the plotting is almost fairy-tale like and as juvenile as the “child’s notebook” David uses to write his fiction (158), which is Hemingway’s way of accentuating the innocence and the sense of unreality of his protagonist’s reaction to experience. Like Robert Cohn, David

---

In Western society, the French philosopher argues, “sexuality and politics” are the sights where discursive power is most visible and effective (52–55).

[12] Hemingway’s fiction, like Baldwin’s, is autobiographical. He tells his interviewer George Plimpton in 1958 that a writer may recuperate in fiction fragments of “forgotten racial or family experience” (“Interview with E. Hemingway” 30). Ernest’s relationship with his dad, Clarence, is powerfully dramatized in his fiction. Both in real life and in fiction, this relationship is characterized by a profound ambivalence, especially as it relates to what James Baldwin calls in his essay on the Lost Generation as the American innocence-connected “masculine sensibility” (“As Much Truth” 38). In *Garden*, the author looks back at that tenuous relationship and zooms in on this aspect of “family experience” to see it with the detached critical distance of a writer’s eye.

Bourne is shown ironically to be “a case of arrested development” (*Sun Also Rises* 39). They are dreamers of sacred and pastoral lands in post-war modern times. In the context of her analysis of some of Hemingway’s fiction, Morrison reminds us in *Playing in the Dark* that the point of view of a writer and a fictional protagonist must not be conflated (86). Hemingway is an artist who always distances himself from the literary material he consciously creates, and is concerned with chronicling, however imperfectly, “what happened,” as prominent Lost Generation author Malcolm Cowley puts it in his 1937 review of Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not* (180).

Like Hemingway’s *The Garden of Eden*, Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*[13] takes place in France in a post-war era. In this setting and context, the protagonist, also named David, undergoes a crisis at the level of his (gendered) identity, like *Garden*’s David. Baldwin kicks off his narrative with the character ‘confronting’ his self-image in the window glass of a house in the French Riviera, brooding over his ‘heart of darkness’ as a guilty descendant and enactor of bloody Arian identity:

> I stand at the window of this great house in the south of France as night falls, the night which is leading me to the most terrible morning of my life. I have a drink in my hand, there is a bottle at my elbow. I watch my reflection in the darkening gleam of the window pane. My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past. (*GR* 221)

What triggers off this interrogation of personal and collective identity in David, “*monsieur l’americain*” (*GR* 263), is his disquieting and traumatic ‘encounter’ in Paris with a poor young man of Italian origins named Giovanni. Being a quintessential American steeped in white male notions of manhood and caught in his narcissistic and aggressive self-image of socially constructed masculinity, his ‘homosexual’ love for Giovanni initiates his dilemma about (gendered) identity. His ultimate panic-stricken and guilt-ridden cowardly betrayal of Giovanni, and his unwillingness and incapability to lose innocence traps him in loneliness, excruciating pain, moral bankruptcy, and existential inertia.

David’s voyage to Paris is less an expatriate’s journey of self-discovery and growth than escape and stagnation. “If I had had any intimation that the self I was going to find would turn out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time in flight, I would have stayed at home,” he says in his meditations (*GR* 236). He is not likely to act, but only “will be stiller” (221). David ultimately comes to the knowledge in exilic space that he would never be able to run away from the ambiguity of his (sexual) identity by changing places or through mastery of “self-deception” (235). It is only by completely, and without laments, losing innocence and accepting his ambiguous identity, Baldwin suggests in the novel, that David could come to terms with himself and others, and achieve authenticity of being. Man’s existential condition is already tragic, Baldwin’s reasoning goes, and to survive it one has to “say Yes to life” (222) by surrendering to the power of love. Love is “the only human possibility” in a world characterized by loss and pain, as the African-American writer puts it in an interview ("Civil Rights"). He continues by explaining that humanity is linked by a common destiny, and that the acceptance of the shared experience of pain and loss through the power of human compassion is wisdom speaking ("Civil Rights"). In such a philosophical vision, "joy" is posited as a concrete and attainable alternative to "happiness." "Joy" is the term frequently used by Baldwin in *Giovanni*, not "happiness." In such a worldview, Man's existence is tragic because he has lost the original happiness and innocence of the Garden:

---

[13] Published in 1956. The main action of the narrative takes place in France in a post-Second Great War era. A series of flashbacks in the novel move the story back in time to the inter-war period.

> [N]obody stays in the garden of Eden […] life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it. Either, or: it takes strength to remember, it takes another kind of strength to forget, it takes a hero to do both. People who remember court madness through pain, the pain of the perpetually recurring death of their innocence; people who forget court another kind of madness, the madness of the denial of pain and the hatred of innocence; and the world is most divided between madmen who remember and madmen who forget. Heroes are rare. (*GR* 239)

Man's tragedy lies in the fact that the Eden-like existential condition of "innocence" and "happiness" is short-lived. As Baldwin puts it in *Giovanni*, "Perhaps everybody has a garden of Eden, I don't know; but they have scarcely seen their garden before they see the flaming sword" (239). In order to enjoy existence, one has to accept such fundamental facts of life as loss, pain, and death. This blues-like attitude towards life is what makes the difference between the child and the man, "innocence" and "wisdom" ("As Much Truth" 37). Describing the theme of *Garden*, Hemingway says that the novel is about the "happiness of the Garden that a man must lose" (qtd. in Oliver 169). The whole existential question for Hemingway is about "how to live in it" (*Sun Also Rises* 124) through survivalist strategies (e.g., "not discuss casualties," *GOE* 227) and by en*joy*ing the basic pleasures of life to counter modern alienation.[14]

The joy that David first experiences as a teenager with his younger best friend Joey is his first encounter with his 'dark' sexuality and ambiguous gendered identity. The experience is short-lived, however, because the spontaneity of the homosexual act, which Baldwin defamiliarizes as a 'natural' act of "love" (225), is almost immediately transformed for the protagonist into a guilt-ridden, panic-stricken immoral and emasculating act (226). Like Hemingway's David, it is none other than the psychic 'presence' of the father-figure that causes the reflex, the shame, and the horror. Both *Garden*'s and *Giovanni*'s white male protagonists find it extremely difficult, in fact almost impossible, to 'kill' the interiorized father-figure and the patriarchal/masculine identity he represents. It is such subjectivity-formation in the patriarchal society, at the center of which looms large the father-figure, "the bulldog," the psychic monster, that produces characters like Hemingway's and Baldwin's egos, tormented by guilt and torn psychologically apart by a conflict between desire and a suppressing and crippling superego: "There is something fantastic in the spectacle I now present to myself of having run so far, so hard, across the ocean even, only to find myself brought up short once more before the bulldog in my own backyard—the yard, in the meantime, having grown smaller and the bulldog bigger" (*GR* 223).[15] David's half-conscious mistreatment of his best friend is traceable to his father's repulsive, aggressive, and alienating rites of initiation of the son into masculinity and manhood: "I did not want to be his buddy […] what passed between us as masculine candor exhausted and appalled me" (232).

---

[14] See also, Baldwin's "The Uses of the Blues."

The patriarchal/masculine social order that the father-figure represents operates on various levels to ensure the smooth functioning of its individuals within its hegemonic regime. This system galvanizes its "ideological apparatuses" (the family unit, the church, the school) to guarantee that its subjects "work by themselves," its coercive institutions and disciplinary power always being in the background in case culture fails to do the job bloodlessly (Althusser 145; 181). In this context, the characters in *Garden* and *Giovanni* find themselves overwhelmed by the psychic workings of the interiorized masculine stereotype and its most effective psychological mechanisms, namely repression and guilt. In this way, the patriarchal system monitors its subjects "panoptically."[16] David's sexual encounter as a teenager with the boy, Joey, deeply upsets his tranquility, and its impact "was to make me secretive and cruel. I could not discuss what had happened to me with anyone, I could not even admit it to myself; and, while I never thought about it, it remained, nevertheless, at the bottom of my mind, as still and as awful as a decomposing corpse. And it changed, it thickened, it soured the atmosphere of my mind" (232).

Both Hemingway's and Baldwin's protagonists are crippled by the prospect of being subject to disciplinary power and its certain immediate backlash in case its cultural 'defenses' are violated. In both novels, the fears of the protagonists are relatively appeased by the element of secrecy. They are anxious, and even horrified, not to upset the visible daily accepted modes of behavior. For instance, while David Bourne and his wife's 'illicit sexuality' is acted out behind closed doors, aspects of their "pioneering" (*GOE* 167) and partly visible libertarian gendered performances in the narrative are carefully kept from coming into confrontation with traditional society:

> [T]he local priest disapproved. But the girl went to mass on Sunday wearing a skirt and a long-sleeved cashmere sweater with her hair covered with a scarf and the young man stood in the back of the church with the men. They gave twenty francs which was more than a dollar then and since the priest took up the collection himself their attitude toward the church was known and the wearing of shorts in the village was regarded as an eccentricity by foreigners rather than an attempt against the morality of the ports of the Camargue. The priest did not speak to them when they wore shorts but he did not denounce them and when they wore trousers in the evening the three of them bowed to each other. (6)

As another instance, David warns his wife at one scene in the novel that "you can't swim in Spain the way we do here" because they would "get arrested" (30). Similarly, *Giovanni*'s David remembers one of his fleeting affairs with a guy in the times of the army and the war, and recalls the horror he feels when the "fairy" is 'discovered' and harshly penalized: "The panic his punishment caused in me was as close as I ever came to facing in myself the terrors I sometimes saw clouding another man's eyes" (236). In such a panoptical setting, Hemingway's and Baldwin's characters feel vulnerable and powerless to 'act' in accordance with their genuine emotions and individual free will in private as well as in public. Secrecy and hypocrisy function here ideologically as a base for the exercise of power. Society may not punish its subjects for forms of closeted illicitness but for the most part for disclosing 'perversion' in defiance of the symbolic, and actual, dominance of authority. This means that individuals cannot challenge authority in the open in organized social movements, that their fear implicitly recognizes their subalternity, and that power has always had the upper hand. So the question may not only be of normality or rights but also of hegemony and the recognition of authority.

---

[15] The "bulldog" could refer to Baldwin's step-father who represents for the step-son an aggressive form of patriarchal social order which is based on the domestication of women and children. Baldwin's traumatic experience with his step-father is especially powerfully dramatized in his *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953).

[16] This involves "the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination—the demand for identity, stasis—and the counter pressure of history" (Bhabha 86). See also, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (240).

The metaphor of "the sea change" is used by both Hemingway and Baldwin to refer to a transformation in masculine identity and self-image. Giovanni's room, situated in the marginalized outskirts of Paris, and which is shared by David, is a site at once of psychic and social conflict in which identity is being reconstructed. In this room, *Giovanni*'s David undergoes "a sea change" similar to the one undergone by *Garden*'s David:

> I scarcely know how to describe that room. It became, in a way, every room I had ever been in and every room I find myself in hereafter will remind me of Giovanni's room. I did not really stay there very long—we met before the spring began and I left there during the summer—but it still seems to me that I spent a lifetime there. Life in that room seemed to be occurring underwater, as I say, and it is certain that I underwent a sea change there. (289)

Baldwin probably is making here an allusion to Hemingway's short story titled "The Sea Change," first published in 1933. This neglected piece of fiction is rarely discussed by Hemingway scholars to point to its author's possible gender politics and his revision of American identity in a post-First World War era. This very short narrative is developed predominantly by means of conversation, which is partly Hemingway's way of saying that dialogue and self-examination could be the beginning of a coming to terms with oneself and others in social space. Papa's startling short story dramatizes the dilemma of traditional masculinity in modernity. The girl in the story tells her man that she is in love with a woman, and that she would leave him at least for a while for her new sexual life and love. The man reacts in his macho fashion, telling her hopelessly that he would have killed her new lover "if it was a man" (376). The girl's lesbianism renders all the man's masculine action and reaction desperately ineffective. The man, called Phil in the story, also describes her "change" as "perversion," but the "girl" argues that "we're made up of all sorts of things," reminding him that he always knows it and that he has "used it well enough" (377), pointing in all this to their actually lived and desired sexual ambiguity. Phil, with all the excruciating pain of losing innocence,[17] unlike the American male protagonists of *Garden* and *Giovanni* who desperately and innocently cling to their masculine narcissistic image in the mirror, recognizes the "change" and begins to accept it, saying that he is now "a different man" (378–379). As great preservers of American innocence, they could not see "home" as "a sea change," "not a place but simply an irrevocable condition" (*GR* 294). Both protagonists are partly like their countrymen they have left at home—tourists-like Americans they have the opportunity to 'watch' much more closely in expatriate space, who "seem incapable of age" and suffer the pain of "the disconnected" against the rising "power of inventors" of modern identity (*GR* 293). David Bourne thinks that he is "the inventive type" (*GOE* 5), while he is actually "the disconnected" writer whose mandate has expired. He forcibly disconnects his writing from the lived experience and places it in a pastoral/patriarchal setting removed from reality and history in his improbable attempt to preserve innocence. It is the iconoclastic voice and practice of Catherine which has the power to "invent" identity in modern society: "I feel as though I'd invented you," she tells her husband and Marita (*GOE* 191).

---

[17] As Baldwin argues, "It is this inexpressible pain which lends such force to some of the early Hemingway stories" ("As Much Truth" 36).

In the dialectic of social change, the threat posed by the disruption of social order, by otherness—sexual, racial, and classed—is reacted to by hegemonic groups with panic and by clinging to the "safety" of their long-standing, socially-constructed, and power-validated identity. Guillaume, the degenerate homosexual bar-owner, whom Giovanni has worked for and ultimately murders out of despair and hopelessness, becomes "dangerous" and disgusting when he recalls that he comes from "one of the best and oldest families in France" and that "his name is going to die with him" (*GR* 306), partly because of what he still thinks of as his sterile homosexuality. In his dilemma, he feels that his instinct of self-preservation and ancestral power are threatened by (sexual) difference and the disruption of the social and historical continuum, and then gets frightened and becomes violent.

The ideas of safety and sterility associated with masculinity and homosexuality are subject to rigorous analysis by Baldwin in his redefinition of the standards defining American gendered identity. The ostracization of homosexuals based on the standards of nature and infecundity as a justificatory mode of representation is disclosed in the point of view of the queer writer as an inadequacy. He points out that the single and the infirm can also be described as unnatural and infecund, judging by those standards of patriarchy applied to the case of the "homosexual." He explains that what is called "homosexuality" in modern times has never jeopardized the reproduction of the human kind and that this component of sexuality is as old as the human race. He concludes that there are thus ulterior motives for scapegoating sexual difference other than the ones presented as apparent reason ("Freaks" 595). In "The Man Child" (1965), Baldwin interrupts a fiercely competitive patriarchal system's obsession with safety and continuity by showing how its innocence, violence, and greed are the seeds of its own destruction. Knowing that his friend's wife is barren now and being uncontrollably tormented by guilt and jealousy, Jamie strangles to death in the farm barn his old pal's only child, Eric, "the prince, the son and heir" (808). In *Giovanni's Room*, Giovanni has once lived an Eden-like life in pastoral Italy before he moves to Paris and tragedy. He has once dwelled in the "Garden" of "maidens" (*GR* 239) before he turns to men. He spits on the cross, and leaves his heart-broken "girl" behind in Italy after their baby is born dead (335). By confronting his characters with *nada* and barrenness in such a context, Baldwin interrupts patriarchy's pastoral innocence and dreams of security. Humility, love, and compassion are the ultimate spaces of refuge in such a world where all safety is an illusion, says the African-American writer through such literary representations.

Like Guillaume, both *Garden*'s and *Giovanni*'s Davids are obsessed with self-preservation and safety. They are incapable of *true* love; their sexual liaisons are no more than "masturbation" (*GR* 223). These traumatized masculinities are vicious because if "you can't love a woman [and] you can't love a man, you are dangerous" (Baldwin, "Civil Rights"). In one of his confessional moments, *Giovanni*'s David admits that he is "too various to be trusted" (*GR* 123), and *Garden*'s David says after his ruthlessly selfish machismo, "You have to last yourself" (*GOE* 108). Both protagonists are destroyers of Man and their "innocence is the crime" (West). That innocence is a source of evil is the wisdom Hemingway arrives at by the end of his expatriate experience in Paris: "All things truly wicked start from an innocence," he writes towards the end of his Parisian memoir (*A Moveable Feast* 181). To "last" does not mean the existence of the fittest according to the rules of the jungle. Quoting Hemingway in his memoir of expatriation to Paris, *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin writes: "I consider that I have many responsibilities, but none greater than this: to last, as Hemingway says, and get my work done. I want to be an honest man and a good writer" (9).[18] Endurance entails integrity and an ethically-based loss of innocence. As Baldwin writes, "People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster" (*Notes of a Native Son* 129).

Love, joy, and peace in modern society are unattainable in both Hemingway's and Baldwin's cultural approach until difference and the loss of innocence of the unitary/coherent Garden is accepted with passion and compassion. One of the fundamental concerns for both writers is how to make social space an accommodating place for *all* with responsibility and integrity. Since difference—racial and sexual—is a social and historical reality as well as a truth of the individual's incoherent self, the standards defining the social order must be reviewed. The inability, unwillingness, or failure to revise personal and collective identity along those lines does not end the story with the happy ending, with 'security' reestablished as *Garden*'s David struggles to do by the end of his improbable Eden-like narrative of innocence. In Hemingway and Baldwin, security and safety are alien to the lived world outside the Garden, and the dictum of "play it safe," as the black artist writes in *Giovanni* (267), is as risky as all the evil in the world.[19]

If dominant patriarchy and masculinity, in its chauvinistic or paternalistic forms, is concerned with security and the exercise of forms of power, as Hemingway and Baldwin dramatize in fictional works such as *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Garden of Eden*, "The Sea Change," and *Giovanni's Room*, then the hegemonic system is in trouble because these forms of dominance are more and more contested and revealed as a structure of power by rising marginality and subalternity. Women and 'homosexuals' people the world, like they do Hemingway's and Baldwin's fiction. They become more and more outspoken and belligerent, and demand, by their very presence, counter-narratives and material assets, a 'place' in the social space as equals. As both expatriate artists dramatize in *Garden* and *Giovanni*, the new and the old coexist in culture, but the new is advancing faster. In *Garden*, Catherine's car is symbolically represented as being faster than Marita's, which needs a lot of repair according to David who entertains the idea of a car having enough space for the three of them (*GOE* 136). Diversity and difference are areas that must be negotiated to reconstruct a democratic experiment sustained by law and compassion, Hemingway communicates through such an allegorical narrative representation. Here, Catherine and Marita are symbolically represented as the two conflicting halves of David's gendered identity that he fails to reconcile. He tells Catherine tongue-in-cheek that he can resolve the problem of the threesome if he were a Muslim living in the Orient: "We could in Africa if I was registered Mohammedan. You are allowed three wives" (144). She rejoinders by suggesting that "it would be much nicer if we were all married […] then no one could criticize us" (144). Hemingway's new world order is never born in the narrative. He "may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change" (Bhabha 40). In *Garden*, Hemingway dramatizes an identity in transit. Indeed such an effort in reviewing identity in the context of modern alienation and historical change via the expatriate's unique perspective is what both Hemingway and Baldwin are up to in their modernist and modernizing literary gestures. Both artists are organic intellectuals who pioneer the conversion about the ideal models for organizing the social space in modern democratic society in order to contribute to bringing about social change.[20]

---

[18] Cornel West's version of the quotation reads: "all I want to be is an honest man, and who like Hemingway endures in my work" (West).

[19] In his speech titled "The Artist's Struggle for Integrity," Baldwin says that "art is here to prove, and to help one bear the fact that all safety is an illusion. In this sense, all artists are divorced from and even necessarily opposed to any system whatever" (51).

Baldwin writes eloquently in *Giovanni's Room* of the scandalous murder of French citizen Guillaume by 'alien' Giovanni, an incident that brings forth once again the yet unsettled pivotal issues of difference and migration in modern Western society (343–344). Whether it is a black man or a homosexual, this scenario consists in reducing the problem of the marginalization of the other in such a society to a 'national security' matter whenever it pops up on the surface. It will be repeated ad infinitum since the root causes of the social crisis are still unaddressed.[21] This is a quasi-republic and a torn social fabric that uses its institutions and discursive strategies to give the air of a national consensus threatened by the 'stranger' in order to avoid dealing with the crisis in a radical and honest way, and preserve instead a semblance of innocence. Now that homosexuality is considered less and less of a "crime" and queer marginality is gaining more ground in the social space in terms of material and discursive resources, the "nation" devises new ways of control in which forms of segregation are mitigated by the discourses of tolerance. In such a discursive practice, difference is represented as "*les goûts particuliers*," a new/old language that exhibits a crisis-packed social situation in which otherness can neither be embraced nor ignored.[22]

---

[20] For a discussion of the idea of expatriation and organic intellectualism in Hemingway and Baldwin, see Toumi 5–26.

[21] The role of the artist, Baldwin writes, is "to tap the source" (*Notes of a Native Son* 7).

[22] As Baldwin puts it in his speech titled "On Language, Race, and the Black Writer," "We cannot be exiled and we cannot be accommodated. Something's got to give" (141). In the dynamic of the social conflict, "the state of emergency is also always a state of *emergence*" (Bhabha 41).

For Baldwin and Hemingway, the management of the social space in terms of the discourses of tokenism or tolerance is more or less a way of keeping the marginalized other in its place. As the African-American writer and activist explains in *The Fire Next Time* in 1963, the explosive social situation in America "[has] been dealt with […] out of necessity—and in political terms, anyway, necessity means concessions made in order to stay on top" (336). Similarly, "tolerance is racist" because it implies a monopoly on the value of "truth" ("Poet and Thinker Adonis"). In his revision of personal identity, Hemingway comes to the realization that "tolerance" is not enough to sustain a democratic experiment. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes endeavors "to be tolerant" towards homosexuals as merely an exercise in self-restraint to prove to be civilized (20). In later works such as "The Sea Change" and *The Garden of Eden*, Hemingway replaces the notion of "tolerance" with the idea of "ambiguity" in reconstructing personal and collective identity in the context of an American society which is still struggling to come to terms with difference in private as well as public life. In Hemingway's and Baldwin's ambitious social project, "tolerance" must be sustained by love and intellectual humility. This is a huge cultural project in which social upbringing and education play a vital part, as both Hemingway and Baldwin suggest in *Garden* and *Giovanni*.[23]

The feverish struggle to preserve innocence in this climate of social ferment is depicted by both Hemingway and Baldwin in *Garden* and *Giovanni* as an act of violence and a struggle to maintain the changing social order: "There had been too much *emotion*, too much *damage*, too much of everything and his *changing of allegiance*, no matter how sound it had seemed, no matter how it *simplified* things for him, was a grave and *violent* thing" (*GOE* 238; emphasis added). The protagonists' attempts to preserve innocence by engulfing themselves in a trance-like state of disavowal[24] by the end of the narratives are panic-stricken "violent resolutions" (Baldwin, "Preservation of Innocence" 599). They violently divide the self into warring entities (man vs woman/masculinity vs femininity/gay vs straight) and arrange the social space around notions of polarization which prevents achieving individual identity and community.

* * *

---

[23] Hemingway often refers to "the problem of our upbringing" (*Selected Letters* 8). It must be noted here that a detailed discussion of the ideas of "tolerance" and "education" in relation to the novels is beyond the scope of the present work.

[24] Referring to America's unwillingness (even under Obama) to 'see' its atrocities at home and abroad, Cornel West describes the country as an "empire living in denial" (West).

Works Cited

Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and State Ideological Apparatuses.” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New Left Books, 1971, pp. 127–186.

Baldwin, James. “As Much Truth As One Can Bear.” *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, edited and introduced by Randall Kenan. Pantheon, 2010, pp. 34–43

---. “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity.” *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, edited and introduced by Randall Kenan. Pantheon, 2010, pp. 50–58.

---. *The Fire Next Time. Collected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison. The Library of America, 1998.

---. “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood.” *Collected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison. The Library of America, 1998, pp. 814–830.

---. *Giovanni’s Room. James Baldwin: Early Novels and Stories*, edited by Toni Morrison. The Library of America, 1998.

---. *Go Tell it on the Mountain. James Baldwin: Early Novels and Stories*, edited by Toni Morrison. The Library of America, 1998.

---. “The Man Child.” *Going to Meet the Man. James Baldwin: Early Novels and Stories*, edited by Toni Morrison. The Library of America, 1998, pp. 797–814.

---. *Notes of a Native Son. Collected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison. The Library of America, 1998.

---. “On Language, Race, and the Black Writer.” *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, edited and introduced by Randall Kenan, Pantheon, 2010, pp. 140–144.

---. “Preservation of Innocence.” *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison. The Library of America, 1998, pp. 594–600.

---. “The Uses of the Blues.” *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, edited and introduced by Randall Kenan. Pantheon, 2010, pp. 70–81.

---. “The White Problem.” *The Cross of Redemption: James Baldwin: Uncollected Writings*, edited and introduced by Randall Kenan. Pantheon, 2010, pp. 88–97.

---. Interviewed by Mavis Nicholas. “Civil Rights.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Thames tv, 2 Nov. 2014, https://youtu.be/3Wht4NSf7E4.

---., and Nikki Giovanni. *A Dialogue*. Lippincott, 1973.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Cowley, Malcolm. “Review of Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not*.” *Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Jeffrey Meyers. Routledge, 1982, pp. 180–182.

“Ernest Hemingway: Wrestling with Life.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Karin Ek, 20 June, 2015, https://youtu.be/sPvBXsiA9Zs.

Foucault, Michel. “The Order of Discourse.” *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited and introduced by Robert Young. Routledge, 1981.

Hemingway, Ernest. *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, edited by Carlos Baker. Scribner’s, 1981.

---. "An Interview with Ernest Hemingway" [1952]. Interviewed by George Plimpton. *Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises: A Casebook*, edited by Linda Wagner-Martin. Oxford UP, 2002, pp. 15–32.

---. *A Moveable Feast*. Bantam, 2000.

---. *The Garden of Eden*. Scribner, 2003.

---. "The Sea Change." *The First Forty-Nine Stories*. Arrow, 1993, pp. 375–379.

---. *The Sun Also Rises*. Arrow, 1993.

Hemingway, John. "Ernest Hemingway, the False Macho." *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2012, pp. 424–431.

Holcomb, Gary E., and Charles Scruggs. "Hemingway and the Black Renaissance." *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance*, edited by Gary E. Holcomb and Charles Scruggs. The Ohio State UP, 2012.

Martin, Wendy. "Brett Ashley as New Woman in *The Sun Also Rises*." *Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises: A Casebook*, edited by Linda Wagner-Martin. Oxford UP, 2002, pp. 15–32.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Vintage, 1993.

Oliver, Charles M. *Critical Companion to Ernest Hemingway: A Literary Reference to his Life and Work*. Facts on File, 2007.

"Poet and Thinker Adonis on the Root Causes of Violence in Arab History." *YouTube*, uploaded by BBC News/Arabic, 16 Jan 2015, https://youtu.be/5nS_0aC1JYY.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Penguin, 2003.

Toumi, Rachid. "James Baldwin and Ernest Hemingway: The Expatriate Artist as Organic Intellectual." *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2021, pp. 5–26.

West, Cornel. Interviewed by Christopher Lydon. "As Blues-Like a Moment As We Can Imagine." *Return of the Prophet: Baldwin in the 21st Century. Radio Open Source*. 25 May 2017, www.radioopensource.org/return-of-the-prophet-baldwin-in-the-21st-century/.

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (LLIDS)

ISSN 2457-0044
CC Attribution-No Derivatives 4.0 International License
www.ellids.com

“Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī”: A Study of Vaiṣṇava Aesthetics in Tagore’s Poetry

Ujjaini Chakrabarty | Tezpur University
http://ellids.com/archives/2023/05/5.3-Chakrabarty.pdf

Abstract | Rabindranath Tagore’s poems have been the subject of much analysis and discussion for their poetic beauty and philosophical strain. Enriched with metaphor and symbolic imagery, his poems express the experiences of the phenomenal and spiritual world with equal finesse. This same dexterity can be witnessed in “Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī,” his first published work as a poet. These poems follow the *padāvalī* style of poetry popularized by the *Vaiṣṇava* saints of medieval Bengal, where Rādhā is portrayed not as the divine consort of the God Kr̥ṣṇa, but as a lovesick woman suffering in the absence of her lover, Kr̥ṣṇa. The sensuality of the poems, however, do not compromise with her status as a devotee par excellence. Tagore’s portrayal of Rādhā is akin to the trend that began at least in the 1st century AD, when Rādhā became the muse of both sacred and secular artistic productions. In the sacred tradition, her stature rivals that of Kr̥ṣṇa’s, where her devotion served as a model for the founders of *Vaiṣṇava* sects in formulating their spiritual practices, while in the secular tradition, her pan-Indian popularity alongside Kr̥ṣṇa is reflected in the performative traditions where their sports in Vrindāvana have inspired music, dance, and the arts of different regions, as well as the popular culture of modern times. The *Vaiṣṇava* aesthetic theory, which bridges the gap between aesthetics of dramaturgy and religious practices, also owes its development to Rādhā. The present paper explores the development of Rādhā in both secular and religious literary traditions, with special reference to *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* of Bengal. The paper further attempts to study Rādhā as Tagore’s heroine which was influenced by *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics and themes, and popularised by poets in Bengal since the 12th century AD.

Keywords | Rabindranath Tagore, *Padāvalī*, Rādhā, Kr̥ṣṇa, Narrative poetry, Medieval Bengali poetry, Devotional literature, *Vaiṣṇava* aesthetic theory, *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*

Rabindranath Tagore was an Indian poet, novelist, playwright, and composer, whose talent and fame have transcended spatio-temporal boundaries. Written during the colonial era in Bengal, his works remain as popular in the 21st century, and his compositions appear ever-new even while being adapted to newer formats. His works echo the wisdom of the Vedic seers, the sacred sensuality of the medieval poets, and also pulsate with the spirit of renaissance that was blowing over Bengal during his time. Tagore's entry into this 'world of words' began with the publication of "Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī"[1] in 1877, at the mere age of 16, penned under his sobriquet, Bhānu Singha. Written in the *padāvalī*[2] format, the genre of lyric poetry used by the medieval Bengali *Vaiṣṇava* poets, this collection of poems depicts the misery of Rādhā, the consort of Kṛṣṇa and the muse of *Vaiṣṇava* devotional literature. The empathy Tagore shows towards Rādhā in these early poems is reflected in the treatment of women characters throughout his literary career.

Tagore derives inspiration from varied sources, chief among them are the medieval saints of India like Kabīr,[3] the Bāuls,[4] and particularly, *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*.[5] In spite of differences in their theo-philosophical outlook, all three are similar to each other in many ways. By breaking all rules of puritanical propriety, they modified the practice of devotion that suited one and all. Their followers included people from all denominations and different religions, paving the path for a syncretic religious ambience to exist. They also share a common theme in poetry, that is, they visualize God as their beloved and the most intimate of their relations. For them, the fulfilment of love is in merging one's consciousness with God through constant contemplation of his *līlās*.[6] While Kabīr and the Bāuls dedicate their poems to the *nirguṇa*[7] aspect, the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* worship Kr̥ṣṇa, the incarnation of Viṣṇu. For them, Rādhā, the consort of Kr̥ṣṇa, is the ideal lover and devotee. Just like the Bāuls and Kabīr, the idea of one Supreme Being pervading the entire creation appealed to Tagore. He was also highly impressed by the depiction of Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa love stories in *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics. Tagore's songs often take the *Vaiṣṇava* route; for instance, the long-awaited arrival of the monsoon after the scorching summer reminds him of the pangs of separation felt by the *Gopīs* in the absence of Kr̥ṣṇa.[8] In another of his songs, Tagore assumes the persona of a young maiden who has already fallen in love with Kr̥ṣṇa after hearing his flute, without ever having seen him.[9] Even though such poems do not explicitly mention anyone by name, the references Tagore uses are all common to the *Gopī*-Kr̥ṣṇa episodes. In his songs, Tagore intertwines language, music, and *Vaiṣṇava* metaphors in a manner which, instead of restricting, rather enhances his creativity to merge devotion and poetic aesthetics that appeal to his readers.

---

[1] Literally translated as "The Collection of Poems of the Sun-Lion."

[2] *Padāvalī* refers to a collection of poems, often associated with religious poems, mainly with the *Vaiṣṇava* poets of east India. An individual poem is called a *pada* and a collection of pada is called a *padāvalī*. The words *podābolī* and *padāvalī* are same. Since 'v' is pronounced as 'b' and 'a' as almost 'o' in Tagore's native language, Bengali, the difference between the two words is only phonetic.

[3] Kabīr was a 15th century saint-poet in medieval north India who was revered by people of all religions. He propounded on the *nirguna* aspect, that is, One, Absolute, formless, and attributeless, of God who was beyond any differentiation and distinction. He composed couplets based on moral, social, philosophical, and religious themes which remain popular to this day. He was the disciple of Swami Ramānanda.

[4] Bāuls are the itinerant singing saints of eastern India, particularly Bengal, belonging to a heterogenous group, comprising of *Vaiṣṇava* and Sufi concepts of devotion. They do not believe in any form of organized religion, offering their devotion to the god that dwells in the heart of man.

[5] *Vaiṣṇavism* is one of the major denominations of Hinduism, which worships Viṣṇu, one of the members of the Holy Trinity, and/or his incarnations. Bengal *Vaiṣṇavism,* also called *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism,* is one of the major sects in *Vaiṣṇavism*, founded by the 15th century Bengali saint Śri Chaitanya. Kṛṣṇa, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, is the major deity of the *Gauḍīya*s, along with his consort, Rādhā. However, followers of all sects of *Vaiṣṇavism* are called *Vaiṣṇava*s.

In "Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī," Tagore utilises *Vaiṣṇava* themes and tales that had been popular in Bengal from the time of Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda* (12th century AD). Jayadeva's poems describe the erotic longing and union of Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa by evoking devotional element in their love. The sensationalism that *Gīta Govinda* caused was quickly subsumed within the sacred and secular traditions, and was incorporated into temple performances, literature, and schools of painting as far as Rajasthan. Through poets, performers, and saints, Rādhā's figure gradually rose to prominence. With the spread of Bhakti movement in medieval India, women devotees were given particular importance, and Rādhā served as a role model for the movement, directly and indirectly. Rādhā became a metaphor for power, love, devotion, and oneness of the deity and his devotee in the literature of medieval poets (Pande 70). Later poets of Bengal like Vidyāpati (14th century) and Chaṇḍīdāsa (15th century) carried forward the artistic legacy of Jayadeva and elaborated on the relationship of Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa which bordered on jealousy, separation, union, and surrender (Pattanaik 31).

In the religious sphere, the poetic themes of union, separation, and union in separation through contemplation became a characteristic feature of the religious sects that based their practices on devotion. Within these sects, Rādhā became the ideal devotee because of her singular love towards Kr̥ṣṇa. In *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, especially, Chaitanya transformed Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa's love affair as a symbol of man's ascent towards god-realisation (Sen 16). In their enquiry, emulating Rādhā was both the process and the goal of every devotee. The spiritual practices of the *Gauḍīya*s resonated with the masses and were adopted by them promptly because of the freedom they offered and the more 'people-friendly' description of the non-duality of Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa legend. People could connect with the themes of unsanctioned love, separation, and the fear of social taboo during clandestine meetings—emotions which were very human but could also be imposed on a devotee's longing for deity. Thus, through engagement with devotional practices, the path of sensuality led to the blossoming of spirituality. In his *Podābolī*, Tagore fuses these philosophical themes of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* with the empathy of *padāvalī* poets towards the rueful state of Rādhā during her separation from Kr̥ṣṇa. Tagore's poems, however, were not sacred in character, that is, they were not written with any philosophical or devotional intent and were not meant to be used during *kīrtana*,[10] although their use in religious gatherings was not prohibited. Since its publication, Tagore's *Podābolī* has been used in music and dance performances, as well as movies in recent years. The present paper, therefore, aims to provide a narrative analysis of the poems in "Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī," with reference to Rādhā as Tagore's heroine. The paper further aims to explore the role of *Vaiṣṇava* literature in popularising Rādhā's eminence in the legend of Kr̥ṣṇa and the influence *Vaiṣṇava* aesthetics had on Tagore's poetry, particularly on his portrayal of Rādhā.

---

[6] *Līlā* is defined as the 'divine sport' or 'divine play.' It is often used in relation with the incarnation of Kr̥ṣṇa who grew up in a small village in North India called Vrindāvana, which is also called Vraja, hence the name Vraja-līlā is given to his pastimes in Vrindāvana.

[7] See footnote 3 for definition.

[8] In his poem, "Esho Shyamala Sundara," he welcomes the onset of monsoons. Since the clouds and Kr̥ṣṇa are both dark, the word *Shyamala*, literally meaning dark, is used to refer to both Kr̥ṣṇa and the clouds.

[9] In the poem, "Ekhono Taare Chokhe Dekhini," Tagore assumes the voice of a *gopī* who has fallen in love with Kr̥ṣṇa without having met him and is sharing 'her' experiences with a friend.

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7th May 1861 in the famous Tagore family of Jorasanko, where art, religion, and philosophy were woven into daily life. Although Tagore practiced nearly every literary form, his primary mode is the lyric poetry, comprising of 4500 poems, of which almost 2200 are songs (Anisuzzaman 21). His collection of poems, *Gītānjalī*, earned him the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, making him the first Indian to have received the honour.[11] Not bound to any particular literary movement or genre, his pen worked assiduously to give expression to every facet of life. His literature reflected the social, political, and cultural changes that India was going through during his time (Ghosh 3). The environment he grew up in cultivated an acute sensitivity towards the world in him, which was stabilized and directed by the philosophical moorings of Vedanta. His spirit grew in close association with nature, a relation whose intimacy is evident in most of Tagore's works. Through his literature, he expanded the aesthetic sensibility of his audience, led their attention to important social issues, and imparted them with a depth of vision that was befitting his title, *Gurudev* (great teacher).

Influences of both Vedic and *Vaiṣṇava* trends of thoughts are conspicuous in Tagore's poetry. Tagore's spiritual inspiration was derived from the Vedas and diversified by the *Vaiṣṇava* dualism that maintains a distinction between human and the divine in order to show how they both realise each other (Ghosh 174; Chaudhuri 76). What manifested in Tagore was the perfect blend of India's sublime Vedic tradition and the modern view that was gradually penetrating into the culture and society of Bengal (Thakur 73). The philosophical strain noticeable in many of Tagore's poems, where he visualizes the Creator as the sovereign ruler of the universe, was the result of studying the Upaniṣads[12] since an early age. His poems have a hymnal quality, and like the Vedic seers, his poetry visualizes the presence of the divine in the harmony of all creation. He worships the Lord of his life, his *Jīvan Devatā*, with an offering of songs. In most of his poems he calls out to this inner deity, is anguished by His absence, pines for Him, and accosts Him for not revealing Himself (Tagore "Gītabitān" 99).[13] At the end of all his efforts, when Tagore realizes his eternal unity with his deity, he sees himself engulfed by This Universal Spirit, who makes Tagore's existence fragrant with His divine presence (204).[14] This ubiquitous presence marks a distinct feature of Tagore's poetry where he 'becomes' the voice of all creation—in his exuberant celebration of the onset of monsoons, his ecstasy at the sight of spring, his nostalgic outpours on autumn evenings, and in his search for warmth on cold winter nights.[15] Through his poetry, Tagore establishes a crucial link between the world of humans and nature, where "love is plotted against myth and classical poetry, nature and the cosmos" (Chaudhuri 53).

---

[10] *Kīrtana* is a form of religious congregational singing common to Hinduism, but particularly important in *Vaiṣṇavism*.

[11] Tagore was also the first non-European recipient of the Nobel Prize.

[12] Upaniṣads are the foundational texts of non-dualism which especially deal with metaphysics. These texts inspired later Indian philosophers like Shankarāchārya, Rāmānuja, and others in the formulation of both dualism and non-dualism.

The devotional aesthetics evident in his poems is a blend of the philosophical vision of the Upaniṣads and the unrestrained expression of love of the *Vaiṣṇavas*, who assume the persona of the *gopīs*[16] for union with their divine lover. Probably as a result of growing up in a traditional *Vaiṣṇava* environment, Tagore continued to be moved by Kr̥ṣṇa's story all his life, not necessarily as a devotee but as a *rasika*, an aesthete, while being aware of the philosophical underpinnings of the myth (Bhattacharya 380). About his association with *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics, Tagore writes in "The Vision" that he came across a collection of *Vaiṣṇava* poems when he was very young. Through these poems he became aware that the poets were talking about "the supreme lover, whose touch we experience in all our relations of love" (379). He further suggests that the *Vaiṣṇava* religion carries the message of God's love finding its finality in man's love, that "the lover man, is the complement of the lover, God, in the internal love drama of existence" (380). With regards to *Vaiṣṇava* influence on Tagore, A.K. Coomaraswami states, "*Vaiṣṇava* art is correspondingly humanistic, and it is from this school of thought that the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore derives. In it are echoed the teachings of such prophets as Śri Chaitanya and poets such as Jayadeva and Chaṇḍīdāsa, who sung of the religion of love" (qtd. in Thakur 84).

Tagore's concept of aesthetics is also akin to the *Vaiṣṇava* concept of *rasa*, literally meaning "essence." K.S. Ramaswami states, "Tagore has gone back to the past age of the great *Vaiṣṇava* movement and has affected a revolution in the realm of taste by so going back to the age of beauty, freedom, love, and rapture. He has revived and re-kindled our sense of the wonder of things, our perception of the beauty and grace and love of God" (qtd. in Thakur 84). He gives the name *rasa sāhitya* (literature of the essence of emotions) to literature that results from the effort at expressing not his need but his *ānanda*, his bliss (Chattopadhyay 371–372). Tagore claims that if a person surrenders himself completely to the universal flow and sport (*līlā*) of expression (*prakāśa*), the need for expressing his joy will have an immediacy (Chattopadhyay 371–372). An artiste's endeavour (*sādhanā*), hence, should be to make oneself the receptacle for the flow of this universal expression. This echoes the idea of the *Gauḍīya*s for whom the Absolute is of the nature of bliss and manifests itself in the aesthetic experience of *rasa* (Goswami 74), reaching its pinnacle in what Graham Schweig refers to as the "dance of divine love," or *rāsa*[17] (1). Like Tagore, *Gauḍīya* aesthetics also acknowledge the intricate relationship between emotions and *bhakti*,[18] which they direct towards Kr̥ṣṇa, the source, object, and receiver of all *rasas*, who descends on earth to relish and soak his devotees in his divine *rasa*.

---

[13] In his poem, "Aami bahu bāśonāy," Tagore expresses his regret for pining for material things, while his God carefully 'removed' these objects so that Tagore's dedication to his God is bereft of any desires.

[14] In his poem, "Ei Lobhinu Songo tobo," Tagore describes, in an indirect way, his own experience of self-realisation—his eyes have been opened by radiance, while a gentle breeze has carried the fragrance of his Lord into his heart, that the touch of his Lord has breathed a new life into him; by doing so, Tagore feels, his Lord has made him live many lifetimes in this one life. The same idea is reflected in many of his songs and poems that are classified in the "Pūjā Paryā." For Tagore's poems, see *Gītabitān*. Sandip Book Centre, 2003; and for discussion on Tagore's ideas on spirituality, see Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Religion of Man*. George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1922, pp. 93–98.

[15] His poem, *Aaj Jyotsnā rate,* portrays his pain of being lonely on a moonlit night; in *Sharat tomār arūn ālor Anjali*, Tagore describes the onset of winters. For details, see, "Prakritī Paryā." *Gītabitān*. Sandip Book Centre, 2003.

[16] *Gopīs* are the cowherd women of Vrindāvana, a town located approximately 144 km. away from India's capital, Delhi. It is the land associated with the legends of Kr̥ṣṇa and his childhood. According to *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, the earthly Vrindāvana, also called Vraja, was created as a replica of the celestial Vrindāvana, the eternal abode of the divine couple Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa, where they live with their attendants, the *gopīs*.

During the medieval times, Bengal, especially Navadvīpa (a town in the Indian state of West Bengal, the birthplace of Chaitanya Mahāprabhu), the headquarters of *Navya Nyāya*,[19] was a sought-after seat of learning. As a result, *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* was nurtured by the greatest minds of medieval India, who made significant contribution to the growth of theology, aesthetics, and philosophy. The credit for the successful fusion of these three branches goes to the scholars and poets of the tradition, which attracted the hearts of the devotees and the minds of the intellectuals alike. The early *Gauḍīya* saints were renowned scholars of Sanskrit drama and scriptures, who wrote extensive commentaries and treatises on aesthetics and rhetorics, and utilised religious narratives as examples to formulate the theo-philosophy of the *Gauḍīya* school. The core idea of *rasa* as the essence of all artistic activity, propounded by Bharata in his *Nāṭyaśāstra*,[20] (Masson 1) was borrowed by rhetoricians like Rūpa Goswāmī of the *Gauḍīya* school, who applied this idea to gain an insight into the nature of religious experience, "the role of emotions in spiritual practice [and] the novel application of Sanskrit literary theory to devotion" (Lutjeharms 218). Bhoja's (11th century) works on poetics, *Sarasvatī*

---

[17] *Rāsa līlā* or simply *rāsa* is the sport dance of love that Kr̥ṣṇa and his *gopīs* engaged in. The arrangement of the *rāsa-mandala*, or the circle of *rāsa*, holds esoteric significance for the *Vaiṣṇava*s. It is believed to be the aim of all devotees to merge in union with Kr̥ṣṇa through the *rāsa*. The five chapters dealing with *rāsa līlā* in the Srimad Bhāgavatam are thus called the heart of Bhāgavatam by the scholars and saints of the *Vaiṣṇava* tradition.

[18] *Bhakti* here stands for devotion which transforms into *bhakti rasa*, or devotional *rasa*, due to their engagement with Kr̥ṣṇa.

[19] The Indian school of Neo-Logic, founded in the 13th century by Gangesha Upadhyaya, a philosopher from Mithila, and developed by Raghunatha Shiromani of Navadvīpa.

[20] Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* lists eight permanent or dominant emotions (*sthāyi bhāva*), of which one or a combination of any of them is the main theme of an artistic activity. For these dominant emotions to have effect, a secondary set of emotions, which are the proper causes of these dominant emotions must be present. Bharata calls them *vibhāva* (excitant), *anubhāva* (ensuant), and *vyabhichārī* (transient) emotions. A combination of these three emotions gives rise to *rasa*.

According to Bharata, *vibhāvas* are two-fold: (a) *ālambana* (primary excitants), that is, the object on which the dominant emotion rests, (b) *uddīpana* (stimulating excitants) which includes scenery, moonlit night, etc. *Anubhāvas*, Bharata says, are the physical reactions to the dominant emotion, such as crying, laughing. The *vyabhichārī bhāvas* such as joy, envy, etc., further enhance the dominant emotion.

Kaṇṭhābharaṇa (Sarasvatī's Necklace) and *Śṛiṁgāra Prakāśa* (Light of Passion), also profoundly influenced the authors of early *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* (218). The latter's discussion on erotic love (*śṛiṁgāra*) was modified by Rūpa Goswāmī and other teachers at the school for developing *śṛiṁgāra,* the dominant emotion upon which *mādhurya bhakti* of Bengal *Vaiṣṇavism* rests. The *śṛiṁgāra rasa* expressed through *rati* in literature (term associated with human desires and love) was transformed by Goswāmī and other *Vaiṣṇava* rhetoricians into *madhurā rati* or divine love, the sentiment which transcends all mundane limitations to depict the ethereal love of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa (Bhaduri 384).[21]

Following the exposition of *bhakti* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* believe that man's love for the divine takes five forms: of parent-child (*vātsalya*), friends (*sakhya*), servants (*dāsya*), through tranquility (*śānta*), and as lovers (*mādhurya*) (Kumar 171; Bhaduri 390). Of these, *mādhurya* is believed to be the greatest form of love, as a devotee can achieve the highest spiritual state by going through enhanced pain and pleasure of a relationship not sanctioned by society, just like the relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. In their practice of devotion, the *Vaiṣṇavas* follow the example of the *gopīs*, the unlettered cowherd women who sported with Kṛṣṇa in Vrindāvana. *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* believe that love is intensified in the absence of the object of devotion, that is, Kṛṣṇa. For them, it is in this absence of Kṛṣṇa that their *madhurā bhakti*[22] is transformed into *bhakti yoga* or *yoga* of devotion through their constant contemplation of Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*. When the mind transcends this plane of contemplation, it is completely relished by the devotee as *rasa.* All the secondary emotions that supported this heightening of the dominant emotion are absorbed into the essence of love and enhance its experience with their unique flavour (Lutjeharms 219). This experience is effected mutually; the divine assumes human form and defines himself in human, and human perfects himself in its association with the divine. Kṛṣṇa here represents the divine, while his human counterpart in this relationship is Rādhā, his favourite *gopī*. Rādhā on her way to midnight tryst with Kṛṣṇa symbolises the human soul's quest to reach its own perfection. Klostermaier hence observes that among all the religious traditions in India, "perhaps the most subtle and detailed system of gradual ascent to God by means of love has been developed in the Chaitanya school of *Vaiṣṇavism*" (qtd. in Schweig 97).

To make these complex concepts a part of the religious and cultural life of the masses, the bulk of *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics in Bengal were not written in vernacular or Sanskrit, but in an artificial literary language developed by the poets in the 15th–16th century, called Brajabuli, which was a mixture of Maithili, Bengali, Hindi, and Brajbhasha (Sen 1). From Bengal, Brajabuli spread to Odisha, Asom,[23] and some other parts of India. Here also it was primarily used to compose *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics. The mixture of regional languages made the vocabulary of Brajabuli expansive. The unique feature of *Vaiṣṇava* poems composed in Brajabuli was the use of localized language and symbols, along with the expressions of classical Sanskrit, which made these poems popular. With the works of poets like

---

[21] According to Rūpa Goswamī, the dominant emotion of devotion is *kṛṣṇaviṣaya rati* or love towards Kṛṣṇa.

[22] Another name for *mādhurya bhakti* or devotion based on romantic love.

[23] India's north-eastern state of Assam is also called Asom in the local language, that is, Assamese. Assam was officially renamed to Asom in 2006. However, both the names are interchangeably used.

Śākar Mallik, Persian words also came to be used in the composition of *padāvalīs*. Kr̥ṣṇa's *Vraja-līlā* (his sports in Vrindāvana) forms a major portion of these poems.

Padas (*pada* is an individual poem in a *padāvalī*) belong to the genre of poetry. The *padāvalī* poets took up episodes from Kr̥ṣṇa's life and narrated a scene from a *līlā* which read like a story with a proper beginning, middle, and end. The content of the *padas* have a rhetorical, argumentative, and emotional sequence (Roy 6). They are mostly either written as a dialogue between two *gopīs* about their experiences, a conversation between the *gopīs* and Rādhā, or a narrative where *gopīs* are empathizing with Rādhā. However, not all the poets followed this sequence. The *padas* are usually 12–14 lines in length. The story beginning in one poem may thus be divided into many *padas* to give a collection of similar poems a thematic structure. The *padas* were composed with the intention of being sung. Composing them in proper metre was as such imperative. The metres generally used for the composition of *padas* were *marahatta, chaupāī* (quatrain), *charchari, dohā* (both are couplets, but use a set number of syllables in every line), and *payār* (6–8 syllables per line).[24] The *padas* are typically performed with the accompaniment of cymbals and *khol*, a two-sided drum commonly used in Bengal, Odisha, Asom, and Manipur during *kīrtanas*. They are used in composing odes to Kr̥ṣṇa and saints.

The *padāvalī* writers took many themes from the *gopīs* and Kr̥ṣṇa episodes and infused the narrative with "poetic beauty, a passionate intensity and a spiritual meaning" (Ghosh 57). Almost 8000 such poems are attributed to the medieval *Vaiṣṇava* poets of Bengal.[25] These lyrics were instrumental in bringing *gopīs*' devotion in the direct experience of people. Another important feature of Brajabuli is that the words mostly end with vowel sounds. This made it easier for the lyrics to be composed as a song that could be used during congregational singing or *kīrtana* (Roy 14). Since singular devotion to Kr̥ṣṇa is the aim of human life according to the *Gauḍīya*s, *padāvalīs* and *kīrtanas* became their medium to engage with people belonging to all sections of the society. Due to the popularity of the *padāvalīs*, *Vaiṣṇava* themes gradually came to be used to compose folk songs, especially in Bengal, where they became a regular feature of fairs and festivals but could also be sung at any time during the day as a form of *smaraṇa bhakti*.[26]

With regards to their historicity, available literary evidence suggests that *Vaiṣṇava* lyric poetry was written by poets serving in the courts of medieval Bengal at various posts. Even though the *padāvalī* genre was adopted by the *Vaiṣṇava* poets, the oldest Brajabuli poem in Bengal is attributed to Yashoraj Khan, a court officer, who wrote a poem dedicated to Sultan Hussain Shah, the king of Bengal, sometime between 1493–1519 AD. The oldest, datable narrative poem related to Kr̥ṣṇa in Bengal is *Shri Kr̥ṣṇavijaya* of Maladhar Basu (15th century), who was given the sobriquet Gunaraj Khan by Sultan Ruknuddin Shah (Sen 1–2). Another narrative poem, *Kr̥ṣṇamangal*, was written by Yashoraj Khan. However, no manuscript of the said poem is available. As *Vaiṣṇavism* rose in significance starting from the 13th–14th century, Brajabuli was used to compose *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics. Sen notes that lyric poetry based on Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa was greatly influenced by Bengal *Vaiṣṇavism* and continued to grow under Chaitanya, his followers, and later scholars of the tradition, whose works are counted amongst the best on poetics and *Vaiṣṇava* lyric poetry (11–12). Poets like Chaṇḍīdāsa, Govindadāsa, Narottamadāsa, and others carried forward the glorious literature towards even greater heights. According to J.C. Ghosh, the allegory and symbolism found in the *padas* give them an "essential unreality of a romantic-spiritual arcadia" (57). These poems, Dimock notes, are not limited only to the *Vaiṣṇava* sect, "but are the valued property of all Bengalis" (xi).

---

[24] For details, see Bhattacharya, Tarapada. *Chhanda-tattva O Chhandobibartan*. Calcutta University, 1971.

[25] J. C. Ghosh has broadly classified *Vaiṣṇava* padas under four heads:

1. Poems dedicated to Kr̥ṣṇa's incarnations.
2. Poems that depict the sports of Kr̥ṣṇa with his friends when herding cattle or of Chaitanya with his playmates.
3. Poems which deal with the childhood of Kr̥ṣṇa and Chaitanya.
4. Poems which treat the love of Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa (19).

Of these, poems dealing with the fourth category form the bulk of the compositions.

[26] According to Prahlāda in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* (VII.5.23), devotion can be practiced in nine forms referred to as *navdhā bhakti—śravaṇa* (hearing the holy narratives of God), *kīrtana* (singing), *smaraṇa* (remembering the narratives and deeds of God), *pāda sevanam* (service), *archana* (worship), *vandana* (singing His eulogies), *dāsya* (service), *sakhya* (friendship), and *ātma nivedana* (surrender one's own self).

In the *madhurā bhakti* of the *gopīs*, portrayed in the *padāvalī* literature, the lovers, especially Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa go through the following stages: *purvarāga* (advent of love by hearing or seeing before the actual meeting), *dautya* (communication through intermediaries), *abhisāra* (tryst), *sambhoga* (union), *viraha* (separation), and *bhāva milana* (reunion in spirit) (Ghosh 60). The dominant theme of the *padāvalī* literature is *viraha* or separation. The idea of *abhisāra* (midnight tryst) is also another important theme in *Vaiṣṇava* poetry. In spite of their status as common women, the *gopīs* have become the epitome of *bhakti* due to their unparalleled love and devotion for Kr̥ṣṇa. The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* gives details of the *gopīs*' devotion where they contemplate on Kr̥ṣṇa and his *līlās* while being engaged in their household duties (10.44.15).[27] Although on the surface the *gopīs* seem to look upon Kr̥ṣṇa as their lover, their conversations with him during the *rāsa*[28] reveal that they were not unaware of him being the Supreme Lord. This is proven by the *gopīs*' exhortation of Kr̥ṣṇa at the beginning of the *rāsa* and in *Gopī Geet* where they refer to him as the supreme soul that pervades the entire creation.[29] In fact, their supremacy as the greatest of his devotees was recognized by Kr̥ṣṇa himself. This is evinced by the fact that he sent Uddhava, his cousin, to Vraja to gain practical experience of devotion from the *gopīs*.[30] Furthermore, *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*, the authoritative instruction manual on the practice of devotion, also directs people to emulate the *gopīs* if they want to inculcate Kr̥ṣṇa *bhakti* in their lives (Bhuteshananda 21).[31] Joseph T. O'Connell suggests that the devotional ethics of the *Gauḍiyas*, which are based on a "dynamic, inter-personal" and "intensely emotional" relationship between Kr̥ṣṇa and His devotees are integral to the "collective philosophical-cum-theological system" and the devotional way of life that the followers of Chaitanya aspired to live (174). Thus, by making the *gopīs*, especially Rādhā, their role models, the *Gauḍīya* saints revolutionised the practice of religion, and brought the terse philosophy of non-dualism as well as the dualistic mode of worship[32] within the grasp of common man.

---

[27] "*ya dohane āvahane mathanopalepa prenkhkenkhanar bhārudi toṣana marjanādau/ gāyanti chaiva manuraktādi yoasrau kaṇṭhyo dhanya vrajastriya urukrama chittayānā//.*" ("Hail the *gopīs* who sing the līlās of Kr̥ṣṇa while milking the cows, or engaged in other works, and through this contemplative meditation have imprisoned the Lord of Lords within the enclosure of their heart.") Translated by author from the original Sanskrit version of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*.

[28] They were lectured by Kr̥ṣṇa to go back to their husbands, that they should not be in the forest at midnight. At this, the *gopīs* feel hurt and ask him, since they have left their homes for him, what should their future course of action be now? Instead of seeking to unite with him, should they go back to their earthly husbands and live a limited life? By seeking Kr̥ṣṇa, they are seeking eternity, then why is he forcing them to bondage? Kr̥ṣṇa is pleased with their answer and then fulfils their wish by engaging in rāsa-līlā (*Srimad Bhāgavatam* X.29.31–41).

[29] *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, X.30.1–19 is called the *Gopī Geet*, the Song of the *Gopīs*, which they sing after Kr̥ṣṇa leaves them during the *rāsa*. In verse 4 of the song, that is, X.30.4, the *gopīs* say that they know of Kr̥ṣṇa's identity. He is not just the son of Nanda and Yashoda who sports in Vrindāvana, but is the friend of Brahmā, the creator. Kr̥ṣṇa, they say, is the Supreme Soul who has incarnated in the family of the Sātvatas for the benefit of the world.

The first indication of Rādhā's story is found in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, the hagiography of Kr̥ṣṇa, where her name is both concealed and revealed. Her name and significance in the life of Kr̥ṣṇa is both veiled and revealed in the *rāsa līlā* episode where she is referred to as the 'special *gopī*' with whom Kr̥ṣṇa disappears leaving the other maidens during the *rāsā līlā* (Schweig 19). While her personal name is never exclusively mentioned in the text, Śukadeva, the narrator of the *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, 'reveals' her name through the cryptic term *ārādhitā*, which contain the first letters of Rādhā's name (*ā-rādh-ita*) meaning both "the worshipped" and "the resplendent" (148). In her primordial form, she is Kr̥ṣṇa's *āhlādini śakti*, his power, who exists eternally in inseparable union with Him. She is the stream of devotion that links the devotee with Kr̥ṣṇa. In her mortal form, she represents the quest of the individual to be with the Supreme Being. Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa are at the same time the source, receiver, and 'experiencer' of *rasa*. Enjoyment elementarily implies a relationship between the object and the subject, the enjoyer and the enjoyed, and this duality manifests itself in the aesthetic experience or *rasa* as *rāsa* (Goswami 75). Thus, Rādhā, the *āhlādini śakti*, is of the nature of pure bliss and also leads others to experience this bliss (75). If Kr̥ṣṇa is *raseshvara,*[33] Rādhā is *raseshvari.*[34] She is the *āśraya*, the support, without whose blessings even Kr̥ṣṇa cannot perform *rāsa*. Therefore, the *Gauḍīya* tradition accords a high status to Rādhā. Her singular devotion towards Kr̥ṣṇa is the essence of *Gauḍīya* philosophy and emulating her *madhu-sneha* (honey-like affection) is the goal of every devotee. She is an important figure in the legend of Kr̥ṣṇa. She rivals him in fame and prominence as a major deity of the *Vaiṣṇavas*.

Rādhā's exalted position in the tradition is evidenced by the statement of Srila Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura (the spiritual guru Srila Prabhupāda),[35] "a devotee of

---

[30] "*Bhagavati Uttamashloke bhavatibhiranuttumā/ bhaktih pravartita dishtya munināmapi durlabha//*" (*Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* X.47.25). Uddhava praises the *gopīs* in this shloka for their devotion to Kr̥ṣṇa which he says, cannot be rivalled even by the greatest of the sages. (Translation by the author)

[31] "*Yathā vrajagopīkanam*" ("emulate the *gopīs* in your devotion"). Translated by the author.

[32] In the religious practices inspired by dualist philosophy propounded by Madhvāchārya in the 13th century, the deity and the devotee are, for functional purposes, believed to be different from each other, and as such a hierarchical relationship exists between them. This is in contradiction to the non-dualist philosophy of Ādi Śankara, who expounded the unity of the individual being and the Supreme Being. For details on the Bhakti Schools of Vedānta and Non-dualism, see Sheridan's *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhagavata Purana*.

[33] The Lord of Rasa

[34] The Goddess of Rasa

[35] The founder of the International Society for Kr̥ṣṇa Consciousness, ISKCON.

Viṣṇu is a *Vaiṣṇava*, a devotee of Kr̥ṣṇa is a Kār̥ṣṇa, and a devotee of Sri Rādhā is a *Gauḍīya* […] we are *śuddha śāktas* [pure worshippers of the divine feminine]. We are concerned with Kr̥ṣṇa because our mistress Rādhārāni has connection with him" (qtd. in Rosen 56). Rādhā is a frequently mentioned figure in Indian literature, at least from the time of Hala's *Sattasai,*[36] an anthology of almost 700 poems compiled by the Sātavahana king Hāla (Vaudeville 2). However, her status as the beloved of Kr̥ṣṇa was firmly established after the composition of Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda*. *Gīta Govinda* was instrumental in instituting and legitimizing Radha's supremacy in *Vaiṣṇavism* (Paranjape 106). Yet, "the lack of any textual references to Rādhā in the *Mahābhārata*, and the only indirect allusions in the *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, establish that the rebellious figure of Rādhā was born of the ahistorical collective consciousness of religion and culture. She was born of the need to establish a direct emotional and mystical relationship, a sensual, tactile, immersive connect, with the sacred" (Gokhale 9).

Hardy, in his book *Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kr̥ṣṇa Devotion*, notes that the *Gopī* episode is treated differently in the epic, secular, and *purāṇic* traditions (19). While the epic tradition restricts itself to the lovemaking between the *gopīs* and Kr̥ṣṇa, the *puranic* tradition ignores Rādhā and the earthlier aspects of the *gopī* story. However, the *Purāṇas* introduce the *rāsa* dance and the theme of the final separation of the *gopīs* and Kr̥ṣṇa. The secular poetic tradition, meanwhile, portrays Kr̥ṣṇa's love sports in Vrindāvana in a more human and earthly manner. With the use of allegory and other poetic devices the poets describe Rādhā's sorrow poignantly. Especially the poets of *padāvalī* literature give the *gopīs* an opportunity to express their grief and uninhibited anger against Kr̥ṣṇa's apparent ignorance of their plight. The poets identify Kr̥ṣṇa as the Supreme Lord, but they do not forgive him for his 'mistreatment' of the *gopīs*, especially Rādhā. They believe that the clever Kr̥ṣṇa had beguiled the innocent Rādhā through his handsome features and suave manners. His flute was another culprit whose seductive 'call' the *gopīs* could never ignore. The *gopīs* spent all their days thinking of him, and when he came back home in the evening after grazing cows, they came up with excuses to meet him. Their pastimes together are described in great detail in the *padas*, verging on the sensuous, which might confuse an uninitiated reader regarding their usage in devotional practices. But the *Gauḍīya*s did not see any difference between the carnal and the spiritual. For the poets especially, Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa were a pair of rustic and unsophisticated human lovers. This portrayal was necessary because the human mind tends to understand everything based on its own experiences in the phenomenal world. By depicting the divine couple in human terms, the poets brought the love of Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa into the experience of common men and women, whom they could relate with. This was the great contribution of the *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics to both religion and arts—for the devotees, the lyrics were a tool for worship; for the artists and poets, the lyrics were an ocean of inspiration that inspired their creativity.

Tagore is one such poet, who was inspired by the *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics which he emulated in his very first collection of poems and continued to utilise in many of his later creations. Tagore's portrayal of Rādhā was the result of his long association with *Vaiṣṇavism*, especially *Vaiṣṇava* literature. A distinguishing feature of Tagore's works is that they explore, on the one hand, the "formative relations between immediate and particular experiences of social organisation, and a larger philosophical understanding," on the other (Bannerji 240). This understanding applies especially to his heroines. The female characters in Tagore's novels (Dāmini in *Chaturaṁga*, Bimalā in *Ghare Bāire*, and others) risk their social respect, family ties, and also their safety in pursuit of their desires (Bannerji 245). The archetype of such a heroine is Rādhā for whom Kr̥ṣṇa is supreme, and no bondage of either society or family could stop her from uniting with her beloved. Unlike the *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics, however, the poems in Tagore's "Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī" were not written with the purpose of enhancing *rāganugā bhakti*[37] but are considered to belong to the genre of *padāvalī* due to their thematic treatment of the Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa legend, the metres used, and the style of their composition. In their poetic beauty they rival the poems of seasoned authors. The poems are a dialogue between Rādhā and her confidante Bhānu, a persona assumed by the poet himself. This confidante figure is a regular in *padāvalī* literature, often portrayed as an older lady. For example, in *Śrī Kr̥ṣṇa Kīrtana* of Chanḍīdāsa (1380 AD), we find mention of an old woman, *baḍāi* (old mother) who acts as an intermediary between Kr̥ṣṇa and Rādhā. At times of pleasure, she helps in arranging midnight trysts between Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa, while during their separation, she consoles and cares for Rādhā so that she can bear the pain borne of their separation.

---

[36] It is an anthology of poems that was collected from regional sources and compiled by the Sātavāhana King Hāl̥a in the 1st century AD, where Kr̥ṣṇa is always depicted with one *gopī* who appears to be his favourite amongst all the others. In her regional variations, her name maybe different; however, the stories have a common theme and plot development that was used in later works like *Gīta Govinda* of Jayadeva, the *padāvalī* literature of Bengal and the poems of North Indian saint poets like Sūrdās.

The love portrayed in Tagore's poems is predominantly emotional than sensual. They present the innocence of both—the teenager poet, that is, Rabindranath, and his protagonist, Rādhā. According to Stewart and Twichell, the charm of the poems in Bhānusingha's *Podābolī* lies in the fact that they are woven around the "physical and emotional landscape of devotion" (14). Just like other texts, Tagore's poems also suggest that Rādhā was the favourite *gopī* of Kr̥ṣṇa (Stewart and Twichell 10). It is her utmost and unselfish love and devotion for Kr̥ṣṇa that attracts him towards her. For Tagore, Rādhā is symbolic of intense human emotions, an exemplar of what the poet calls the "religion of man" (O'Connell 151). This dynamics between the divine and the human is perfectly captured by the *Gauḍīya*s and is applauded by Tagore himself. In his talk titled *Samanjasya* in Shantiniketan, Tagore says, "'the amazing courage and candour' with which *Vaiṣṇava* spirituality proposes the idea that 'God has bound himself to the living being (*jiva*)': that is the 'supreme glory' upon which the latter's existence rests" (qtd. in Bhattacharya 380).

The story of Bhānusingha's poems begins with Rādhā visiting the *nikunja*[38] in the absence of Kr̥ṣṇa, to relive their joyous moments. These were the groves where Kr̥ṣṇa and Rādhā would have their secret rendezvous in the past. The groves provided both privacy and anonymity; by shielding the lovers, the groves also became their secret-keepers. Tagore makes abundant use of symbolic imagery to both contrast and corroborate her feelings. Though monsoon is used to portray the separation of lovers in classical Indian poetics, Tagore uses spring’s bounty and youth to express the opposite mood in these poems, that is, Rādhā’s pining for Kr̥ṣṇa. In the poem 1, “basanta āulo re,” the poet presents us with a view of the onset of spring, contrasting it with Rādhā’s sorrow: flowers have blossomed in the groves, yet the fresh lotus-like face of Rādhā presents a dreary sight. All of nature seems to be enjoying her sorrow. Tagore presents Rādhā’s lament in the following words:

---

[37] *Rāgānugā bhakti* is defined, by Jīva Goswami in his *Bhakti Rasāmr̥ta Sindhu* (1.2.6), as the desire to worship Kr̥ṣṇa in the way the people of Vr̥ndāvana worshipped Him when He was in Vraja. This worship took the form of a personal relationship with God.

[38] Groves in Vrindāvana where Kr̥ṣṇa and Rādhā meet during their midnight tryst.

> Spring at last! The Amuyas flare
> Half-opened, trembling with bees. A river of shadow flows through the grove…
> Am I not a flame in his eyes? …
> Even the bee-opened flowers mock me:
> “Where is your lover, Rādhā?
> Does he sleep with you?
> On this scented night of spring?” (Stewart and Twichell 22)[39]

The groves which had once witnessed the love of Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa are now devoid of such pleasure. In the first four poems, (according to the sequence of poems published in the *Gītabitān*), Rādhā is represented as the *virahotkaṇṭhita nāyikā*,[40] the heroine suffering from pangs of separation. The *ālambana,* the source of her sorrow is Kr̥ṣṇa, who has long gone to Mathurā and has not returned since. Her sorrow is intensified by the melody of Kr̥ṣṇa’s flute or its echo in the “plaintive cry of the bird or by a myriad of any other reminder” (Stewart and Twichell 12).

The spring breeze once soothing to the senses, now billow with the grief of Rādhā; the whole universe is celebrating the coming of spring while Rādhā is drowned in self-pity. In the poem 2, titled “sunala sunala bālikā” (literally translated as “Listen, listen O Girl!”), Tagore uses the analogy of ‘night’ referring to it with the feminine form *yāmini,* whose existence is illumined by the presence of her ‘husband,’ the moon,[41] while there lies Rādhā, who is ‘widowed’ in the absence of her beloved. The opening verses of the said poem depict her yearning thus:

> You innocent one, So careless with your lapful of red flowers
> Eyes searching the moonless woods
> For his eyes looking back
> Not there tonight. No sound but the bees rummaging through the

---

[39] All translations of “Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī” are taken from Stewart and Twichell’s *The Lover of God,* unless mentioned otherwise.

The original quote in Bengali is as follows: “Basanta aaulo re! / Madhukara gun gun, amuyā manjari / Kānana chhāulo re…/ Kahi re o priya, kahi so priyatama, / Hridi basanta so Mādhā?” (“Bhanusingha Thakurer Podaboli” 519).

[40] In classical Indian dramaturgy, heroines have been classified into 9 types: 1) *virahotkaṇṭhita,* the heroine who is suffering because of separation from her beloved; 2) *vasakasajjā,* the heroine who is decorating herself in anticipation of meeting with her lover; 3) *svādhinabhartrikā,* the woman who has her man entrapped in her charms; 4) *kalahantāḍita,* woman who is restlessness on account of her lover’s absence due to her jealousy; 5) *khandita,* the enraged woman on account of her lover having left her for another woman; 6) *vipralabdha,* the deceived heroine, whose lover has not come to her; 7) *proshitabhartrikā,* woman whose husband is away; 9) *abhisārikā,* woman on her way for a secret rendezvous. For details, see Sen’s *A History of Brajabuli Literature*.

[41] In Indian poetics, moon is often referred to as the lord of night, or the lord of stars.

Twilight, whispering, you startle like a deer, Rādhā.[42] (Stewart and Twichell 23)

In poems 1–7, Tagore borrows and enhances the aesthetic and eulogic treatment of *viraha* or separation from medieval *Vaiṣṇava* literature, which influenced and marked a unique aspect of the poems in Bhānusingha's *Podābolī*. *Viraha* is expressed in many of Tagore's poems, where he explores the pleasurable pain that *viraha* offers to both, lovers and devotees. Both separation and union are essential moments in Tagore's spiritual love-quest. Perhaps due to his introduction to Bengali *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics at a young age, the idea of *viraha* had a profound effect on his writing. Having been associated with *Vaiṣṇavism* since childhood, he inherited both the devotional and poetic brilliance of the *Vaiṣṇavas*. As Bhānusingha, his heart reaches out to Rādhā whose sorrow is heart-wrenching. But, in sympathising with Rādhā, he does not forget that Kr̥ṣṇa loves her equally and reciprocates her yearning. Kr̥ṣṇa makes a rather late entry in the poems, but his longing for Rādhā is as intense as hers. From the beginning of the poem, the audience is introduced to Rādhā's pain, whereas Kr̥ṣṇa's yearning can only be inferred. After leaving Vrindāvana, he becomes the prince of Mathurā. However, in spite of his engagements at Mathurā, he comes to Vraja in the middle of the night to meet Rādhā. He knows about her sorrow but cannot meet her as freely as he used to when he lived in Vrindāvana. But Tagore does not include Kr̥ṣṇa's perspective perhaps due to two reasons. Firstly, the legend of Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa is known to most Indians and Tagore may have felt it unnecessary to repeat it in his poems. Second, the theme of the poems is in consonance with the *padāvalī* literature. That is why Tagore brings Kr̥ṣṇa to Rādhā in the middle of the narrative so that they can be united, even if for a brief while. Kr̥ṣṇa's joy after meeting Rādhā is palpable. Rādhā is nervous, and so is Kr̥ṣṇa. When Kr̥ṣṇa comes to meet her, Rādhā's joy knows no bounds. Yet, she is bashful. It is her beloved that has come to meet her at midnight, but her sorrow stops her. She thinks it is only her imagination, but Bhānu convinces her to meet him. Their union is due, and this *abhisāra*, this tryst is about to be over. The night which was pricking her until now is again delightful. She expresses her joy:

When we're together, nights like this delight me
But when the clouds come down between us
And thrash around so rudely in the trees, then I fear, Lord,
Imagining your breath-taking words
Lost out there among the swords of lightning.[43] (Stewart and Twichell 36)

The pain borne of *viraha* is now replaced with *śriṁgāra*. In describing her anticipation Tagore says:

There's thirst in Rādhā's eyes,
Longing sown the pathway, seeing nothing,
Thirst in her fingers stringing flowers,
She tosses the garland aside, whispering: Listen, friend, can you hear it?

---

[42] The original quote in Bengali is as follows: "Sunala sunala bālikā, rākha kusuma mālikā / Kunja kunja heranu sakhi / Śyāṁachandra nāhi re / Dulai kusumamunjarī, bhramara firai gunjari / Alasa yamuna bahayi jāy Lalita geet gāhi re" ("Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī" 519).

[43] The original quote in Bengali is as follows: "Bārada barakhana, nīrada garjana / Bijuli chamkan ghor / Upekhayi kaichhe, aau tu kunje / Niti niti Mādhaba mor / Ghana ghana Chapala chamkay jab pahu / Bajar paat jab hoy" ("Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī" 523).

> Kālā's flute pierces the forest's under-dark, and the Yamunā's.[44] (30)

In poem 8, titled "gahana kusuma kunja mājhe" (literally translated as "in the deep flower groves"), Rādhā and Bhānu both hear Kr̥ṣṇa's flute coming from the deep groves. Bhānu asks Rādhā to prepare herself to meet her Kr̥ṣṇa. Rādhā, who found the night and stars chiding her for being alone at night, now finds the moon pouring ambrosia. Rādhā's joy is evident when she sees Kr̥ṣṇa whose radiant face seems to shame even the beauty of the moon. Tagore's Bhānu calls out to Rādhā:

> Draped in fine blue
> Your heart overflowing with love
> Carrying a soft smile in your doe-like eyes
> Come, come to the kunja[45]

After Kr̥ṣṇa's arrival, Rādhā forgets her sorrow and wants to relive the past memories with him. But Kr̥ṣṇa remains elusive, or so it seems. In these poems, Tagore's Rādhā is an innocent girl who apparently has not yet learned the art of seduction. She entertains his antics for a while and then gives up. Her failed attempt at coquetry amuses Kr̥ṣṇa and he yields. She has surrendered herself to Kr̥ṣṇa, yet he still does not seem interested in staying with her for long, or so Rādhā, as well as the readers are made to believe. He keeps talking about his impending return to Mathurā. Even when together, Rādhā is scared to lose him again. Tagore juxtaposes this agony of Rādhā against the indifference of Kr̥ṣṇa in the concluding poems (Kumar 174). Separation is an ancient theme in Sanskrit drama, and the ideal lover is exemplified by a woman, who is often left behind by the hero. In the case of Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa, this separation at the phenomenal level is only aimed at increasing the devotion of Rādhā, as ultimately there cannot be any separation between the two. Kr̥ṣṇa is present within Rādhā as her Self, and externally as the support of the world she lives in (Sheridan 114). But keeping with the theme of *padāvalī* literature, that is, union in separation, Tagore gives preference to Rādhā's pain over Kr̥ṣṇa's.

Towards the end of the poems, Kr̥ṣṇa returns to Mathurā. Rādhā is angry but cannot bring herself to hate him. Her entire being breathes his existence. She is heartbroken, yet she awaits his return. Tagore closes his collection of poems with Rādhā's pitiful state etched in the heart of Bhānu and the readers. In the poem, "sakhi re-pirīt bujhbe ke" ("O Friend, who will understand this love?"), Rādhā expresses her grief at having to separate from her lover. She accosts her friends who are slandering Kr̥ṣṇa, and defends him and her love thus,

> I have asked you, my friends,
> Not to revile him…
> I know that men from the town slander my Dark Lord's name.

---

[44] The original quote in Bengali is as follows: "Triṣita nayāne, bana-pathe pane / Nirakhe byākula bālā / Dekh nā pāwe gāthe bana phoola māla / Sahasā Rādhā chāhala sachakita / Dūre khepala mālā. / Kahala sajani suna, bāśari bāje / Kunje aaula Kāla" ("Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī" 521).

[45] Translation by author. The original quote in Bengali is as follows: "Pinaha chāru neela vāsa / Hridaya praṇaya kusuma rāāśa / Harina netre bimala hāsa / Kunja ban me aao lo" ("Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī" 521).

> They know nothing of love.[46] (Stewart and Twichell 45)

At the end of the poem “sakhi re pirīt bujhbe ke,” Tagore, as Bhānu, says,

> Now you understand my own heart,
> Which bore long ago the fire that sears you.
> Flames still flare up, in both body and mind.[47] (Stewart and Twichell 45)

Should the audience berate Kr̥ṣṇa, or should they accept that Kr̥ṣṇa has to fulfil the purpose of his life, for which he has to leave Vrindāvana; Tagore leaves it to his audience to decide. In the true *Vaiṣṇava* spirit, he upholds the dignity of Rādhā, as a devotee, and as a lover, who is ready to sacrifice her most precious asset for the benefit of the world. As the divine couple who reside in the celestial realm, however, the *Gauḍīya*s believe that Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa will forever remain united in spirit or *bhāva milana*, and no sorrow can ever touch them. At the end of Bhānu’s narrative, the reader gets a glimpse of the reconciliation between the poet Tagore and the aesthete Tagore, both of whom are inspired by *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics. Tagore comes to terms with the eternal wait that the lover and the devotee have to go through if they want to unite with their beloved and cross over to the realm of love where all distinctions of the phenomenal world cease to exist. The poetic style adopted by Tagore in *Bhānusingher Podābolī* is reminiscent of the style of the medieval *Vaiṣṇava* poets, who used the experiences and relationships of the mortal world and imposed them on the relationship of Rādhā and Kr̥ṣṇa. For the saint-poets of *Gauḍīya* school, Rādhā holds an eminent position. Her devotional practices and feelings are to be emulated by the devotee to be able to unite with Kr̥ṣṇa, who finds pleasure in remaining elusive. Tagore’s *podābolī* poems also reflect the same themes. While the intention of the *Vaiṣṇava* poets in composing their poems was to enhance the devotional fervour of their poems, Tagore’s poetry was not intended towards forwarding a seeker’s spiritual practices. Tagore merely borrowed his plot from Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa’s love sport to compose poems about a couple that go through various stages of love. Describing his religious affiliation, in the book *The Religion of Man*, Tagore insists that his religion is a poet’s religion, and all that he ‘feels’ comes from his vision and not knowledge (107). In his conversations with Einstein,[48] Tagore says, “My religion is in the reconciliation of the Super-personal Man, the Universal human spirit, in my own individual being” (225). This same realisation of the self, or the individual as being in indivisible union with the Ultimate Being, or Kr̥ṣṇa of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, is the underlying theme of Tagore’s *podābolī*, as well as many of his later poems.

This realisation also echoes the aim of *Gauḍīya* philosophy in which, Rādhā, symbolic of the individual being, is in constant companionship with Kr̥ṣṇa and they are lovingly infused into one form (Rosen 49). While devotional practices had gradually gained prominence over the course of time, it was due to Chaitanya’s efforts that emulating Rādhā’s singular love towards Kr̥ṣṇa became a standard, “making her unique brand of burning devotion peculiar to the Gauḍīya tradition” (56). Since Bengal was the birthplace of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, it influenced the socio-cultural and religious life of the people, especially in the sphere of literature, where saint-poets composed poems in honour of Rādhā-Kr̥ṣṇa which added the force required to establish the nascent sect of Chaitanya. Belonging to a traditional family of *Vaiṣṇavas*, Tagore was naturally attracted to *Vaiṣṇava* aesthetics. In Bhānusingha's *Podābolī*, Tagore utilises themes common to *Vaiṣṇava* lyrics, and like the *Gauḍīyas*, his empathy is directed towards Rādhā, not as a devotee par excellence, but as the quintessential heroine of Indian dramaturgy. Tagore's Rādhā, unlike the *Gauḍīyas*, is not pining for Kr̥ṣṇa who is the Supreme Lord of the Universe, but her lover Kr̥ṣṇa who has left for Mathurā and has not come even once to visit her. Tagore's Rādhā is a naïve young girl who does not know how to use coquetry to charm her lover. In her heart she knows and has accepted her fate, and so has Bhānu. In the poem, "hum sakhi dārid nārī" ("I am a pitiful woman"), Rādhā says,

---

[46] The original quote in Bengali is as follows: “Sakhilo, brindāban ko durujan mānukha / Pirīta nāhika jāṇe / Brithāi nindā kāha rāṭāyata / Hamār Shyāmaka nāma” (“Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī” 524).

[47] The original quote in Bengali is as follows: “Kahe Bhānu ab bujhbe nā sakhi / Kohi marama ko baat / Birale Shyāmaka kahiyo bedana / Bakkhe rākhayi math” (“Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī” 524).

[48] Conversation between Tagore and Einstein at the latter’s Kaputh residence on July 14, 1930.

> Unlucky, star-crossed birth.
> I long only to sit within the shadow,
> Of his flute and taste from afar his dark smile
> Rādhā is the Dark Lord's Mistress!
> May her pleasure be endless!
> But it's grief that's endless, a river of unseen tears.[49] (Stewart and Twichell 46–47)

This state of separation and union in separation through contemplation is the aim of the *Gauḍīyas*' spiritual practices. Tagore keeps the theme of *padāvalī* literature intact by introducing stages of *viraha*, *abhisāra*, and *bhāva milana* after separation, within the purview of poetic aesthetics, so that the reconciliation he seeks between the aesthete and the devotee, rather than being contradictory, can enhance the aesthetic experience of the poems that is soaked in the spiritual nectar of divine love, and expressed in the language of man.

---

[49] From the poem, "sakhi hum dārid nārī." Translation by Stewart and Twichell. The original quote in Bengali is as follows: "Janama abhāgī, upekhita hum / Bahut nāhi kari āāś / Dūra thāki hum rūpa heraibe / Dūre śunaiba bāśi / Dūra dūra rahi sukhe nirīkhiba / Shyāmaka mohana hāsi / Shyāṁa preyasī Rādhā! Sakhilo / Thāk sukhe chiradina!" ("Bhānusingha Thākurer Podābolī" 524).

Works Cited

Anisuzzaman, "A Garland of Many Tagores." *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore,* edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri, Cambridge UP, 2020, pp. 12–24.

Bannerji, Himani. "Women, Gender and the Family in Tagore." *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore,* edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri, Cambridge UP, 2020, pp. 239–253.

Bhaduri, Nrisinha P. "Bhakti (Devotion) As an Aesthetic Sentiment." *Journal of Indian Philosophy,* vol. 13, 1988, pp. 377–410.

Bhattacharya, France. "Rabindranath, *Bhakti*, and the *Bhakti* Poets." *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore,* edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri, Cambridge UP, 2020, pp. 379–390.

Chattopadhyay, Jayanti. "Tagore's Aesthetics." *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore,* edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri, Cambridge UP, 2020, pp. 366–378.

Chaudhuri, Sukanta. "Tagore's Poetry: An Overview." *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore,* edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri, Cambridge UP, 2020, pp. 49–84.

Dimock, Jr., Edward C., and Denise Levertov, translators. *In Praise of Krishna: Songs from the Bengali,* Anchor Books, 1967.

Ghosh, Jyotish Chandra. *Bengali Literature.* Oxford UP, 1948.

Gokhale, Namita. "Introduction: The Dream of the Awakened." *Finding Radha: The Quest for Love*, edited by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal, Penguin Books, 2018. Kindle. Loc 7–11.

Goswami, Shrivatsa. "Rādhā: The Play and Perfection of Rasa." *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, edited by John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, Motilal Banarsidass, 1995, pp. 72–88.

Hardy, Friedhelm. *Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kr̥ṣṇa Devotion*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2014.

Kumar, Lalit. "Lovelorn Rādhā, Forlorn God: Tagore's *Bhanusingher Padavali.*" *Finding Radha: The Quest for Love*, edited by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal, Penguin Books, 2018. Kindle. Loc 165–175.

Lutjeharms, Rembert. "Aesthetics: An Ocean of Emotion: Rasa and Religious Experience in Early Caitanya *Vaiṣṇava* Thought." *Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Philosophy: Tradition, Reason and Devotion,* edited by Ravi M Gupta, Routledge, 2016, pp. 215–246.

Masson. J. L. *Aesthetic Rapture: The Rasādhyāya of The Naṭyaśātra in Two Volumes*. Deccan College, 1970.

O'Connell, Joseph T. "Tracing Vaishnava Strains in Tagore." *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2011, pp.144–164.

Pande, Alka. "Becoming Radha." *Finding Radha: The Quest for Love*, edited by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal, Penguin Books, 2018. Kindle. Loc 70–79.

Paranjape, Makarand R. "Enjoying God: The Divine Paramour." *Finding Radha: The Quest for Love*, edited by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal, Penguin Books, 2018. Kindle. Loc 91–118.

Pattanaik, Devdutt. "A Milkmaid Called Radha." *Finding Radha: The Quest for Love*, edited by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal, Penguin Books, 2018. Kindle. Loc 29–34.

Rosen, Steven. *Sri Chaitanya's Life and Teachings: The Golden Avatara of Divine Love*. Lexington Books, 2017.

Roy, Kalidas. *Podābolī Sāhitya.* A. Mukherjee and Co. Pvt. Ltd. 1961.

Schweig, Graham. *Dance of Divine Love: India's Classic Sacred Love Story. The Rāsā Līlā of Krishna from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2007.

Sen, Sukumar. *A History of Brajabuli Literature: Being a Study of the Vaisnava Lyric Poetry and Poets of Bengal*. U of Calcutta. 1935.

Sheridan, Daniel P. *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhagavata Purana.* Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.

Stewart, Tony, and Chase Twichell, translators. *The Lover of God*. By Rabindranath Tagore, Copper Canyon Press, 2003.

Swami Bhuteshananda. *Narada Bhakti Sutras.* Advaita Ashrama, 2009.

Tagore, Rabindranath. "Bhanusingha Thakurer Podaboli." *Gītabitān*, Sandip Book Centre, 2003, pp. 519–526.
---. *The Religion of Man*. George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1922.

Thakur, Sayantan. "Vaishnava Theology's Lyrical Legacy in the Twentieth Century: An Analysis of Tagore's *Gitanjali* and *Bhanusingha's Padabali*." *Journal of Bengali Studies*, vol. 6. no.1, 2018, pp. 73–96.

Vaudeville, Charlotte, "Krishna Gopala, Rādhā and the Great Goddess." *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, edited by John S. Hawley and Donna M Wulff, Motilal Banarsidass, 1995, pp. 1–12.

Vyasa, Veda. *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. Gita Press, 2017.

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (LLIDS)

ISSN 2457-0044
CC Attribution-No Derivatives 4.0 International License
www.ellids.com

Reifying, Reinscribing, and Resisting Manicheanisms in Representations of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda[1]

Lauren van der Rede | Stellenbosch University
http://ellids.com/archives/2023/05/5.3-Rede.pdf

Abstract | The genocide which unfolded in Rwanda in 1994 remains one of the most harrowing examples of annihilatory violence in recent memory. It is framed infamously as an expression of violence which in 100 days saw the murder of approximately one million people, the displacement of millions more, and psychological, social, and economic devastation that remains immeasurable. This paper seeks to explore how the literary makes legible the ways in which Manicheanism, which in many ways was foundational to the genocide in Rwanda, is translated into the categories of "perpetrator" and "victim," and how this contributes to the perpetuation of the single story of the genocide. This paper reads three texts (Uwem Akpan's short story "My Parents' Bedroom," Alan Whelan, Eoghan Rice, and Elena Hermosa's documentary *Let the Devil Sleep: 20 Years after Genocide in Rwanda*, and Hugo Blick's Netflix series *Black Earth Rising*) which literarily trope the Rwandan Genocide and abide by a logic of Manicheanism according to which the world can be split between good and evil, and its inhabitants organized accordingly. The selected texts gesture toward the unboundedness of trauma but abide by the logic of Manicheanism that textured the colonial legacy in Rwanda, which was in many ways foundational to the genocide. They are distinct in form but individually stage and make available for critique expressions of Manicheanism, before, during, and well after the massacres of 1994. This paper offers a critique of these texts' literarily troping of the Rwandan Genocide and argues, in abiding by the unboundedness of trauma as it is staged in these texts, that genocide be read as, what Barthes calls, a *text*. Thus, the paper, in turning to the literary as itself a mode of reading but also a mode of writing grand narratives, attempts to think what is at stake in representations that reify and reinscribe, but also invite resistance to representations that do not abide by plurality.

Keywords | Rwandan Genocide, Colonialism, Tutsi, Hutu, Twa, Victims, Perpetrators, Manicheanism, Mahmood Mamdani, Roland Barthes, "My Parents' Bedroom," Uwem Akpan, *Say You're One of Them*, *Let the Devil Sleep: Rwanda 20 Years after Genocide*, *Black Earth Rising*

---

[1] This paper reflects a larger research project, which draws from and also elaborates on research developed as part of my doctoral dissertation titled *The post-genocidal condition: Ghosts of genocide, genocidal violence, and representation* (2018), and is in conversation with my other published works.

Introduction

The Rwandan genocide,[2] as it is popularly referred to, was intimate, as Mahmood Mamdani notes, perpetrated not only before the very eyes of the Rwandan people, as President Kagame posits in *Organic Law* No. 40,[3] but by perpetrators who were not only often friends or neighbours to their victims, but also their family. Mamdani, in *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and Genocide in Rwanda* (2016),[4] provides a reading of the question of the Rwandan experience of genocide that charts the ways in which the bloodiness of 1994 is entangled in the charge of Hutu and Tutsi as political identities, and the ways in which colonialism has come to shape these. Mamdani argues instead that Hutu and Tutsi are political rather than cultural identities, and that as such "their history is likely to be coterminous with that of the institutions of power, particularly the state of Rwanda" (73–74) and that if we are to understand Hutu and Tutsi as historical identities, then "we must be open to the possibility that the definition of Hutu and Tutsi may have changed over time, and that there may therefore not be any single answer to the question asked so often: Who is a Hutu and who a Tutsi?" (73). Colonialism, as Mamdani explains, racialized these political and historical identities, and in so doing hierarchically ordered Rwandan society through privileging the Tutsi, who were considered Hamites and thus "actually Caucasians under a black skin" and oppressing and subjugating the Hutu (82). It is in this way that Belgian colonial rule and discourse produced the identities Tutsi and Hutu as Manichean counterparts.

Mamdani argues that the genocide which unfolded in Rwanda must thus be thought "within the logic of colonialism" (4), within the tension of settler and native genocide. Positing that "the genocidal impulse to eliminate an enemy may indeed be as old as organized power" (9), he warns that it is important to keep in mind two important issues. The first is that, since the genocide of the Nama and Herero at the start of the 20th century, the technology of genocide has come to differ significantly. For example, in the context of the genocide of the Nama and Herero, guns were used in conjunction with a scorched earth policy in which the harsh environment of the Namibian desert was used to enact mass killing. In the context of the genocide of Europe's Jews, Gypsies, Poles, and other groups targeted by the Nazis, they were murdered en-masse through the industrialized chemical weapons, guns, and the like. Whereas in the context of the genocide which targeted Rwanda's Tusti ethnic group, the weapon technology ranged from machine guns and grenades to machetes and clubs. The second issue pertains to how what Mamdani refers to as the "genocidal impulse" "is organized and its target defined" (9), the latter of which, he explains, was textured by colonialism. As such, he argues that the example of genocide in Rwanda must be thought through within the logic of colonialism. Said differently, we should not consider the violence of the genocide which unfolded in 1994 spontaneous, but rather a consequence of the ways in which colonialism has ordered Rwandan society as it did many other African civilizations, subjugating one group while privileging another. He argues further that the horror of which gave rise to two types of genocidal impulse: "settler's genocide" and "native's genocide" (9–14).[5]

---

[2] Gregory H. Stanton, the president of Genocide Watch, notes that "in 1994, 500,000 to one million Rwandan Tutsis along with thousands of moderate Hutus were murdered in the clearest case of genocide since the Holocaust" (Stanton). The genocidal massacres which took place in Rwanda are marked as having begun after the assassination of the Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira, in a plane crash on the 6th of April 1994. The massacres, officially recognized taking place between April and July in 1994, are considered as the genocide of the Tutsi, perpetrated by Hutu extremists.

[3] See also, *Rwanda: Organic Law No. 08/1996 of 1996 on the Organization of Prosecutions for Offenses constituting the Crime of Genocide or Crimes Against Humanity committed since 1 October 1990*, 1 September 1996, www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4f64.html.

[4] Hereafter referred to as *When Victims Become Killers*.

In *Discourse on Colonialism,* Aimé Césaire (2000)[6] posits that colonialism is "thing-ification," the process which, through relations of domination and submission, turns "the colonizing man into a class-room monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production" (6). From this follows that the colonizing man is figured as the operative(s) of the various Repressive State Apparatuses as identified by Althusser,[7] and is thus staged as the proxy of the state or rather the Nation; whilst the 'indigenous man' or colonized person is reduced to being thought of as the labour power that produces the commodities of the state—an object of the state and its proxy. The policeman, prison guard, teacher, and other wardens of the Repressive apparatuses unconsciously facilitate the process of interpellation, which, in the context of colonization, transforms the indigenous individual into a colonized subject who, in turning when hailed, affirms themselves, within the discourse of colonialism, as inferior or rather barbarous. It is through the Ideological Apparatuses of the state that the individual is taught that they are barbarous, that they are interpellated into the ideology of colonialism, are disciplined into being "good" subjects; and colonization is registered as "a campaign to civilize barbarism, from which there may emerge at any moment the negation of civilization, pure and simple" (Césaire 4). As such, the enterprise of colonization was justified as a mission of civilization, though between the two, as Césaire notes, there is an "infinite distance" (2). He explains that colonization "works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism" (1). Césaire writes,

---

[5] "Settler's genocide" refers to the attempted annihilation of the native by the settler, which is intertwined with the expansionist violence of colonialism, and which increases in force when Western settlement expands (10). As a point of illustration, he draws on "the German annihilation of over 80 per cent of the Herero population in the colony of German Southwest Africa in a single year, 1904," as what he refers to as the prototype of settler violence in African colonies (10). Mamdani explains that General Lothar von Trotha designed the destruction of the Herero as a purge, "after which 'something new' would 'emerge'"; planning first to have the army kill as many as possible, then cutting off any escape routes of those who fled with the exception of crossing the desert to Botswana, all the while separated from their cattle and water (11–12). Those who survived were put in concentration camps, where they were exposed to the elements and disease, the men of the group were slave labour and the women were turned into sex slaves (Mamdani 12).

Mamdani explains that in so far as native's genocide is concerned, if "its outcome would be death, of settlers by natives, it would need to be understood as a derivative outcome, a result of a prior logic, the genocidal logic of colonial pacification and occupation infecting anticolonial resistance" (13). It is this which underscores the logic of genocide as textured by the dialectic of the settler and the native which colonialism inscribed as political world order, as its great crime was not that it expropriated the native ("the name it gave to the indigenous population"), but that greater than this it politicized indigeneity (Mamdani 14).

[6] First published in 1972.

[7] See, Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)."

> [C]olonization […] dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out. (5)

What Césaire describes above may be understood as the ricochet of colonialism's barbarity and, conceptually, as a deferred return of the (modern) subject to what Eurocentrism marks as the barbarity of the natural world. This is to say that the very civilising gesture that Europe took as its mark of its own civilization—colonialism—is in fact a barbarism. In this sense the figure of the colonizer and the figure of the genocidaire are not dissimilar as both presume the Other (enemy) group to be sub-human, treating them as such through brutal acts, which in turn render the perpetrating of him/her/them as an "odious scourge."[8] Moreover, both attempt to bring into the fold this Other people through a process of assimilation, but if this process proves unsuccessful, they are willing to and in fact have turned to campaigns of physical extermination of the group. It is after all Nazism which is the "supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism of all the daily barbarisms," as Césaire puts it (3). Europe, as he explains further, tolerated this barbarism, indeed was accomplice to it, "before they were its victims […] because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it" (Césaire 3). In this sense it is the 'civilized world' and the civilizing mission that produce the condition of barbarity and configure its Other as always already genocidal.

Indeed, the term genocide has over the course of the last sixty years become synonymous with mass killing as an attempt to exterminate a particular group of people. However, as Raphael Lemkin who coined the term "genocide" explains in *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (1944), it is a term that names a "coordinated plan," the purpose of which "would be [the] disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups" (79). For Lemkin, genocide has two phases, the first of which is "the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group" (81). This refers to the destruction of a group's cultures, traditions, and the suppression of a group's collective modes of expressing its identity. This is familiar in the African context as the project of civilization purported by European expansionist colonialism. The second phase Lemkin describes is "the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor" (79). This may be understood simply as the project of colonialist assimilation, through which members of a nation or culture are folded into the nation, cultures, and traditions of the oppressing or settler nation at the cost of negating the culture and traditions of the oppressed group.

---

[8] The description of a perpetrator of or participant in genocide as an odious scourge is the language of the Preamble in the *Rome Statute*. See, UN General Assembly. *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (last amended 2010)*, 17 July 1998, ISBN No. 92-9227-227-6, www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3a84.html.

This bloodless expression of genocide, as Fanon posits, is also named colonialism (315); an understanding of genocide which demands that it be read as text, and not work, in the literary sense. In this reading of genocide as work, as conceptualized by Roland Barthes in "From Work to Text," we must accept that its manifest bloodiness is only "a fragment of the substance" (57). Said differently, attempts to physically annihilate a people are a culmination of attempts to destroy what Lemkin refers to as the "national pattern" of a people: their histories, culture(s), language(s), traditions, and other hallmarks of their civilization. Thus, although genocide is recognizable by its physical expression, or its bloodiness, it begins more subtly and moves more slowly than the infamous tagline "approximately one million in 100 days" might suggest. In this way genocide is more than a work in the literary sense: physical, observable, and a faithful confession revealing something of its author. It is these things in its final incarnation, but ultimately, genocide operates like a text: finding expression pluralistically—hate speech, discriminatory laws, and social practices—it is produced, and ultimately only legible, through reading the problem.

The text, as Barthes explains, is demonstrated rather than seen, and held in language rather than in hand and existing only when caught up in a discourse (57). Moreover, it is "experienced only in an activity, in a production" (58); which is to say that the text is produced through reading, the joint venture of the scripter and the reader. As such, genocide as text is, conceptually, the product of the genocidaire who scripts/imagines/plans it and its discourse, which in turn produces the Other of the civilized subject, as always already genocidal and as such, barbarous. Furthermore, the text is plural, which refers not only to it having several meanings, as Barthes explains, but to "fulfilling the very plurality of meaning: an irreducible […] plurality" (59); and this plurality depends on what Barthes calls the "stereographic plurality of the signifiers that weave it," for as he notes, "etymologically, the text is a fabric" (60). Using the example of an "idle subject" strolling along a hillside, Barthes explains that all of the components of the experience of the activity "issue from known codes, but their combinative operation is unique, it grounds the stroll in a difference which cannot be repeated except as difference" and that the text, similarly, is "entirely woven of quotations, references, echoes: cultural languages (what language is not cultural?), antecedent or contemporary, which traverse it through and through, in a vast stereophony" (60). It is this intertextuality in which the text is understood. This intertextuality of the text, which renders the text itself "an intertext of another text" and as such undoes the filial bind between the author and the text, can have no origin (60).

Thus, with the metaphor of the text, we can grasp genocide as having no origin, no point of inception from which it can be traced and through which its development can be observed. Furthermore, the text "cannot stop," as Barthes puts it, in the sense that it is not bound, its movement is that of traversal. Thus, to think genocide through the metaphor of the text is to understand that genocide permeates the limits imposed on it through the discourse of international law, and reaches beyond the end of its bloodiness. It is in this sense that colonialism, as Fanon put it, was a bloodless genocide (314). Moreover, "to assign an Author to a text is," as Barthes argues, "to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing" (53). Certainly, one would want to halt the onslaught of genocide, there is no question about that; but what is at stake in the misunderstanding of genocide as work and as such imposing on it an author is precisely that it is too easily presumed that if the perpetrators of the crime of genocide are dealt with, the problem of genocide has been dealt with and this, I worry, is not the case.

Barthes explains that "once the Author is found, the text is 'explained' and the critic has won" (53), but the text must be "disentangled" and though its structure may be followed, it has no end. This impossible end of genocide as text, given its irreducible plurality, refers to its intertextual reach, the innumerable chains within the network that cannot be traced to an origin but speaks also to its latent violence often continuing without the imposition of a break. In other words, if we agree that genocide is trauma, in the sense that it is a violence that sears, it cannot be bound temporally and often is not limited to the spatiality implicit in the name: "Rwandan Genocide." For example, as *Black Earth Rising* shows, the genocidal violence was not contained within the borders of Rwanda. However, the bloodiness of genocide, its manifest violence, must be brought to an end that is necessarily discernible and demarcated, although this, as I have argued before, is not the limit of genocide and as such is not where thinking through the problem of genocide should rest. As John Mowitt argues, its theorization, like that of the text, is incomplete, or "unfinished" (1; 18). Thus, what follows, turns to the literary to gesture toward thinking the genocidal violence of 1994 in Rwanda as pluralistic in that it was not a singular historical event, and that in many literary representations of the genocide in Rwanda, there is a tendency to reify who can be marked as victim or perpetrator. In this way the literary reads the problem but also partakes in it.

Reification

> Without his ID, you'd never know that Tonton Andre is Papa's brother. He is a cross between Papa and Maman – as tall as Maman but not quite as dark as Papa.
>
> – Monique, "My Parent's Bedroom"

Uwem Akpan's "My Parent's Bedroom" (2009), the last in the collection of short stories titled *Say You're One of Them,* is set in Rwanda during the first days of the genocide. Narrated by Monique, a young girl of both Tutsi and Hutu parentage, the text illustrates the layered intimacy of the genocide and staged the often flat, stereotyped, raced, and reified categories Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. The narrative opens on a "Saturday evening, and the sun has fallen behind the hills" and Monique explains that silence outside her family's bungalow is only interrupted when "the evening wind carries a shout to [them]" (265). Over nineteen pages the reader learns of the many intimacies that textured the violence of the genocide, told by a nine-year-old girl. Monique, or Shenge as she is referred to, explains in the crisp authenticity of the confusion of the raiding of her home by family, friend, and neighbour, of the man in the "yellow trousers" who attempts to rape her, and the murder of her mother which simultaneously turns her father into a "wizard."

Through her parentage, Monique represents the seamless suturing of Hutu and Tutsi and as such may be read as the weaving together of the different racial and ethnic categories that had divided Rwandans during the genocidal violence of 1994. In the short story, Monique explains the archetypal features of each ethnic group of the population, beginning with her mother. She explains that Maman is "a very beautiful Tutsi woman," who has "high cheekbones, a narrow nose, sweet mouth, big eyes and a lean frame" (Akpan 266). Elaborating the portraiture of her mother, Monique explains that Maman's complexion is "so light that you can see the blue veins on the back of her hands, as you can on the hands of Le Pére Mertens, our parish priest, who is from Belgium" (266). What is significant about the details of Maman's appearance is that they are precisely the features Belgian colonialists listed as the markers of the Tutsi race and anthropological "proof" of the Hamitic Hypothesis,[9] which contended that the Tutsi were foreign settlers in Rwanda originating from Ethiopia. It is in the context of colonialism, and Belgian colonial occupation, that the Tutsi, "a group with a privileged relationship to power before colonialism, got constructed as a privileged alien settler presence, first by the great nativist revolution of 1959, and then by Hutu Power propaganda after 1990" (Mamdani 14). Mamdani argues that the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda needs to be understood, thus, as a native's genocide; a genocide perpetrated by those who saw themselves as sons and daughters "of the soil" seeking to clear "the soil of a threatening alien presence" (14). The young protagonist also explains that she looks like her mother and will grow up to be "as tall as she is"; and it is for this reason that her father and his friends refer to her as "Shenge": "my little one" in Kinyarwanda. What is at stake, however, in the possessive pronoun "my" is precisely the tension held between an ethnicity inherited (Rwanda was a patrilineal society) and reified, racialized stereotypes which make the individual susceptible to the misreading. Said differently, Monique does not look like her father, who looks "like most Hutus." She describes him in similar detail to her mother, though his features are undeniably in contrast to that of Maman. Papa, Monique explains, is "very black [having] a round face, a wide nose and brown eyes. His lips are full as a banana. He is a jolly, jolly man who can make you laugh until you cry" (266). As with Maman, Papa is assigned the features assigned to the Hutu ethnic group and reified as such by the discourse on colonialism.[10] There are several dualisms in this juxtaposition of mother and father, which make plural the Manicheanism within Rwandan society.

---

[9] Edith Saunders explains the Hamitic Hypothesis and discusses extensively its impact. In "The Hamitic hypothesis: its origin and functions in time perspective" (1969), she explains:

> The Hamitic hypothesis states that everything of value ever found in Africa was brought there by the Hamites, allegedly a branch of the Caucasian race. This hypothesis was preceded by an earlier theory, in the 16th century, that the Hamites were black savages, 'natural slaves' - and Negroes. This view, which persisted throughout the 18th century, served as a rationale for slavery, using Biblical interpretations in support of its tenets. The image of the Negro deteriorated in direct proportion to the growth of the importance of slavery, and it became imperative for the white man to exclude the Negro from the brotherhood of races. Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 became the historical catalyst that provided the Western world with the impetus to turn the Hamite into a Caucasian. The Hamitic concept has as its function the portrayal of the Negro as an inherently inferior being and to rationalize his exploitation. (Saunders 521)

"The colonial world is a Manichean world," writes Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, first published in 1963 (41). He continues: "To begin with, the affirmation of the principle 'It's them or us' does not constitute a paradox, since colonialism, as we have seen, is in fact the organization of a Manichean world, a world divided up into compartments" (84).[11] This dividing up into parts, and in abiding by the logic of colonialism and thus eurocentrism, juxtaposes native and settler, Black and White, colonized and colonizer, bad, dangerous people and good messianic people. In the juxtaposition established by the discourse of colonialism, Africans are othered by being positioned as bad, dangerous, and needing to be civilized, whilst European colonialists are framed as "good," safe, and civilized. Interestingly enough, after independence from Belgian colonial rule in Rwanda, the logic of this Manicheanism remains intact but becomes inflected by the Hamitic hypothesis and as such the Tutsi become framed as the settler/foreign/colonizing group and the Hutus are framed as the indigenous group, and the Manicheanism inverts whereby the "settler" Tutsi group is framed as dangerous and bad, and the "indigenous" Hutu group is framed as "good" and needing to protect itself.[12] This Manicheanism found its bloody expression through the genocidal violence of 1994 in Rwanda. In each of the texts this article focuses on, there is a pattern in the texturing of the figure of the perpetrator or genocidaire, and *the/ir* victim.[13] In "My Parents' Bedroom," as is the case in *Let the Devil Sleep* and various other texts such as *Shooting Dogs* and *Sometimes in April*, the person or character marked as a victim of the genocide is a female and a Tutsi. The person or character marked as a perpetrator or genocidaire is by contrast male and Hutu; and these two individuals, indeed these two figures as they are produced in these texts, are bound to each other as counterparts.

---

[10] The racialized reification of the Twa is also staged by the short story, through the figure of Helene, Monique's friend and peer. As with her parents, Monique focuses her description of Helene around her physical appearance, explaining that "she is petite and hairy, with a flat forehead like a monkey's" (Akpan 281). "Most Twa are like that" and "they are few" in Rwanda explains the protagonist; and so as with Papa and Maman, Helene is framed as a proxy for her ethnic group. The unsettling and problematic descriptions echo the fictions of colonial discourse and the racial "science" that together shared a symbiotic mutualism not only in their language but also in their ordering which mirrors Belgian colonialism's hierarchical ordering of the three groups.

[11] Although, in this paper, I deploy specifically the Fanonian concept of Manicheanism in the context of colonialism, and specifically European colonialism in Africa, and although it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer an adequate tracing of the genealogy of the term Manicheanism, it must be noted that Manicheanism has a long history, formulated at inception as a religion. Founded by the prophet Mani, Manicheanism espoused a dualism describing the fraught tension between a world of light and goodness, presided over by the Father of Greatness; and a world of darkness and evil, presided over by the King of Darkness (Sundermann). As Peter M. Venter explains,

> Basically, it is a dualistic system 'grounded on the distinction between "the two principles" (Light and Darkness) and "the three times"' (Klimkeit 1993:5–6). The myth includes details of the way in which Light fought against Darkness, how this resulted in the creation of the world and the imprisonment of light particles within the dark elements (cf. Pettipiece 2005:248), and narrates what had gone wrong and shows the way in which the problems facing humankind could be solved (cf. Baker-Brian 2011:96). The two principles of Light and Darkness existed independently from the beginning of time (cf. Heuser & Klimkeit 1998:7). The central focus of Manichaean religious ideology falls on the problem of evil and redemption of that which is by nature good and pure from the power of evil. (6)

It is this dualism, and the desire of darkness to occupy and assimilate the realm of light—ultimately destroying it—that remains central to the translation of this principle in the religion of Manicheanism, into the psychosocial critique of colonialism developed by Fanon.

[12] For a more detailed discussion on this, see Mahmood Mamdani's *When Victims become Killers*, in which he explains the two kinds of expressions of what he calls the "genocidal impulse": the genocide of the native by the settler, and the genocide of the settler by the native (9–14).

Despite the crisp framing of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa in "My Parents' Bedroom" as "categorically different" people, it also challenges the assumed discreteness of each of these ethnic groups, especially as founded on racialized difference. There are three characters belonging to the same (Hutu) family through which it does this: Monique, Tonton Andre, and Tonton Nzeyimana—the Wizard. Each of these characters take out of focus the crisp image of each ethnic group purported by what was referred to as "nose politics"—the belief that one could assume a person's ethnic designation based on their physical appearance. Tonton Andre, for example, needed to provide police his ID to prove himself a Hutu (Akpan 268), until during the genocide when proving oneself a "true Hutu" required the sacrifice of wives, children, friends, and neighbours (285). Understanding the increasing stakes of this illegibility for Monique, Maman instructs her daughter to declare herself "one of them," regardless of who asks, which suggests that, within the context of the genocide, it is better to be one of the perpetrators than it is to be one of the victims. However, in the moments during and following the sexual assault she is subjected to, the language to name the trauma is not available to the young protagonist. The scene is written as follows:

> Before I can say anything, he wriggles out of his yellow trousers and reaches for me. But I avoid his hands and slip under the bed with Jean. He pulls me out by my ankles. Pressing me down on the floor, the naked man grabs my two wrists with his left hand. He pushes up my nightie with the right and tears my underpants. I shout at the top of my voice. I call out to Tonton André, who is pacing in the corridor. He doesn't come. I keep screaming. I'm twisting and holding my knees together. Then I snap at the naked man with my teeth. He hits my face, this way and that, until my saliva is salted with blood. I spit in his face. Twice. He bangs my head on the floor, pinning down my neck, punching my left thigh.
> "*Oya!* No! Shenge is one of us!" the Wizard tells him, rushing into the room.
> "Ah … leave this little thing … to *me*," the naked man says slowly. His short pee is pouring on my thighs and my nightie, warm and thick like baby food. I can't breathe, because he has collapsed on me with his whole weight, like a dead man. (Akpan 271; emphasis in original)

There are several things to reckon with in this moment. The first is perhaps that of the double intimacy of the violence. On the one hand, it is intimate in the sense of its physical expression, as sexual assault, and sexual assault that takes place in the space that the protagonist most associates with sanctuary—her parents' bedroom. On the other hand, it marks the intimacy of the genocide itself as framed by Mahmood Mamdani in *When Victims Become Killers* in which the persons involved in the violence, whether as active participants or bystanders, are often known to the victims. In this instance, Monique's uncle, Tonton Andre, is just beyond her parents' bedroom's door, pacing in the corridor, and yet he does nothing to intervene. The second is that Shenge, as it is explained in the short story, means "my little one" in Kinyarwanda (Akpan 266). Thus, Tonton Nzeyimana (the Wizard)'s claim that "Shenge is one of us," a Hutu, is somewhat tautological: my little one is one of us. It is thus through the individual's claim to possession (my) that Shenge is affirmed as a member of the group (us). Thirdly, and for the purposes of this paper perhaps most importantly, Monique is so young—just shy of being ten years old—and so innocent, that she does not yet know the words "sexual assault" and instead describes what is happening to her and the man's sexual climax using words that are devoid of the charge of the event: "[h]is short pee […] thick like baby food" (Akpan 271). The language used to describe the secreted semen demonstrates the protagonist struggling to articulate what she is experiencing, grasping at words like puzzle pieces to try and fit together to depict accurately an event she does not understand. Monique seems to understand how to care for a baby, as the text makes clear at various points, but does not know how babies are made. She knows what urine is and knows what its consistency should be, and knowing that "this is not that" tries to mark where the secretion is coming from, the man's genitals, but also that what precisely the secretion is she does not know. This is an example of how the text stages trauma as that which often resists language and resists being bound by words and the politics of naming. Importantly, it is worth holding onto Monique being a child for whom undoubtedly this encounter is a memory for the future, and as such the moment also marks the impact of the violence of the genocide as transgenerational, by virtue of a child living as both survivor and witness.

---

[13] In this gesture I mean to play with the tension between the word "the" which distances the perpetrator and the victim, and the word "their" as a word indicative of possessiveness and as such gesturing toward a perpetrator's taking responsibility for the impact they have had on a person's life.

Reinscription

> In this village there are only two types of people: The people whose families were killed […] and the people who killed them.
>
> – Juvenal Mudenge, *Let the Devils Sleep: 20 Years after Genocide in Rwanda*

As a literary text which "obviously" avails itself to staging the turn toward a project of national reconciliation in the years following the Rwandan genocide and framing this project as successful, *Let the Devil Sleep: Rwanda 20 Years after Genocide* (2014),[14] its textures repeat the same dichotomized and Manichean framing of victims and perpetrators of the genocide that Akpan's text does, 20 years "after" the event of the genocidal violence. It too textures these categories of victim and perpetrator as Hutu and Tutsi, male and female, but diverges in its framing of the persons marked by these categorizations as neighbours.

Set and shot on location in Gikongoro and Kigali, Rwanda, the narrative is framed through the voiceover of an unidentified narrator, who is aided by two pairs of victims and survivors. The mise-en-scene of the opening moments of *Let the Devil Sleep* is unlike that of filmic texts such as Michael Caton-Jones's *Shooting Dogs* (2005), Raoul Peck's

---

[14] To view the film, use the link: https://youtu.be/Wl50BeeNLAQ.

Sometimes in April (2005), Laura Waters Hinson's *As We Forgive* (2008), and even Blick's *Black Earth Rising* (2018). It does not open with a map of Africa and zoom in to the country that is the location of the narrative. Rather a black screen is broken by white type font and the first cut is not to a map, but to a cornfield set against the backdrop of a setting or rising sun, shot from low angle. A voice explains that "in this village [Cyanika] there are only two types of people. Those whose families were killed, and those who killed them" (00:21–00:34).

Told to the viewer in Kinyarwanda, this is not the voice of the film's narrator, but rather, as the viewer will discover, of Juvenal Moudenge—one of the individuals who took part in a massacre in Cyanika. Moudenge represents one of the "types of people" that he refers to and one half of two "reconciled" pairs presented in the film. He is a Hutu male who had participated in the genocide of 1994, and is as such the very same "type of person" as Jean-Baptiste Gatera. Juvenal Moudenge is described as someone who "took part in the Cyanika massacre" (00:59), while Jean-Baptiste is described in the documentary as someone who "hunted Frida [a survivor of the genocide] and her family" (01:27). Frida Kamuzima, who was "hunted" by Gatera, along with her family, is staged as Gatera's Tutsi and female counterpart, while Maria Mukagasana, whose husband and children were murdered in the massacre in Cyanika, is staged as the survivor, female counterpart of Moudenge. Thus, each reconciled pair is constituted by a Hutu male, who admits to having participated in the massacres of 1994, and a Tutsi female who had been directly affected by the acts of her male counterpart. Juvenal is correct in his diction in the sense that Hutu and Tutsi are being type-cast, male and perpetrator, and female and victim, respectively. As the film begins narrating the manifest violence of genocide as it unfolded in Rwanda, these pairs are at first pictured individually, but are then very quickly presented alongside each other. Sitting, standing, at times looking at each other, at others holding hands, these partners in what the narrator describes as "unlikely friendship" are marked as illustrative of a reconciled Rwanda, embodying the mantra of the Kagame regime: "We are all Rwandans."[15] There is not the sense that, as the narrator puts it, these are "unlikely friendships" but friendships, nonetheless. Rather, there is something like the irony held in Nyamata, in Rwanda—an uncanny good-neighbourliness, which will be discussed in the conclusion of this paper.

Moudenge, a perpetrator of the genocide, identified as Hutu, reflects on the intimacy of the genocide and explains that he/they "knew most of the people that were killed that day, if not all of them, because we were neighbours" (03:52–03:58); whilst Marie Mukagasana, reflecting on Rwanda's then present, explains: "We created an association of survivors and perpetrators. And they showed to us that they wanted to change. Life continues. We are living together. But it won't stop us remembering our loved ones who died brutally" (12:50–13:15). What this living together in past and "present" gestures toward is the inadequacy of thinking genocide as a bound, discrete event and only phenomenon, in that it highlights how people lived together, died together, and must now live together again.

---

[15] Consider for example the gestures in the discourse of "RPF top priority is the interests of all Rwandans," on paulkagame.com, accessible via this link: www.paulkagame.com/rpf-chose-dignity-of-all-rwandans-over-dependency/.

Resistance

> [W]hen we were finally allowed to return to the camp, it was completely empty – and I mean completely. Not a single vestige to indicate that less than a week before, some 50,000 people had been living there.
> Women, children, babies. Many too ill to move.
> It was as if they never existed. And I never saw any of them again, ever.
> Except for one. Someone my colleague Ed Holt took with him on his last airlift out.
> A little girl
> A Hutu child.
>
> – Eunice Clayton, *Black Earth Rising*

On 10 July 2017, I entered a church in Nyamata, marked as a site of genocide, where the guide informed us that 5,000 people are said to have been murdered. Staked piles of their tattered and blood-stained clothes punctuate its floor and remaining benches as testimony. Offering its witnessing, the gate which had been defeated by the Interahamwe[16] still bears the marks of its struggle, and the walls, ceiling, and altar of the church are still pockmarked with bullet holes. Outside the church is the grave of Tonia Locatelli, an Italian woman who was killed during the genocide, and who is memorialized as part of the Nyamata Genocide Memorial, as someone who tried to alert the international community about the killings and called for intervention. A few meters from Locatelli's grave are the mass graves which are now the final resting place of the people who died at Nyamata. White tiles cover their interior and exterior, and trap doors made of glass open onto a steep stairwell, one story deep, which leads down into tombs filled to the brim with coffins, into which sets and fragments of the skeletal remains of people have been placed. Some of these coffins contain the remains from as many as seven individuals. Another contains within it a glass pyramid of sorts, deprived of its capstone, which is divided into three strata. Within the highest of these are what appear to be numerous femurs, fibulas, tibias—presumable amongst other bones of the extremities. In the middle layer are the skulls of some of the victims, placed neatly alongside each other, never quite touching, none quite whole. At the very bottom of the structure is a long coffin, covered with a white cloth which, like the white façade of the mass grave itself, is decorated with a cross. In it is the remains of a young Tutsi woman; the guide pointed out to me that they knew she was Tutsi because of how tall she was. She had been the victim of rape and sodomy with various objects, so extreme that it was determined to be the cause of her death.

---

[16] The Interahamwe began as the youth wing of the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (French: Mouvement révolutionaire national pour le développement, MRND), the ruling party in 1994 (Des Forges, "Those Who Stand Together or Those Who Attack Together" 8). However, the Interahamwe would later develop into a militia group which was essential to the execution of the genocidal agenda of Hutu Power extremists in 1994. As Filip Reyntjens explains, "the notion of 'Interahamwe' changed dramatically during the genocide. Before, they were the youth wing of the former single party MRND" ("Rwanda's Untold Story"). Reyntjens continues, explaining that:

> A limited number of them (certainly much less than the 30,000 put forward in the letter) received a paramilitary training. When the genocide started, these distinctions were no longer made, as all those manning barriers and hunting down and killing Tutsi, including those from other political parties, were referred to as "Interahamwe." In other words, it would be impossible to say how many of them were killers because it is unclear which entity we are talking about. What we do know is that about 70 percent of all Hutu males who were adult at the time of the genocide were convicted by Rwandan courts.

See also, Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*.

The Nyamata Genocide Memorial, adorned with a grey and purple ribbon on the front of the church, is enclosed by a metal mesh fence. One of the four sides of this boundary is shared with a primary school. The score for my visit to Nyamata was the sound of children laughing whilst some played in the school yard and others began their journey home. There stemmed from this all too stark a juxtaposition within me, a disturbingly uncanny sense of a politics of "good neighbourliness"—the synonym Hendrik Verwoerd used for, indeed preferred over, Apartheid.[17] In a speech to the international community, Verwoerd explained that "[a]ccepting that there are differences between people, and that while these differences exist, and you have to acknowledge them, at the same time you can live together, aide one another, but that can best be done when you act as good neighbours always do."[18] This sentiment was expressed through the legislation of the time. Such legislation included the Population Registration Act (1950) which required that South Africans be classified according to a racial designation, much like the classification of Rwandans according to ethnic designation implemented during Belgian colonial Rule (1933), and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), which like the Hutu Ten Commandments published in Kangura in 1990, prohibited marriages between people who did not belong to the same racial or, in the case of Rwanda, ethnic group. Nyamata embodies a living together of life and death, and the past and future, entangled with the genocide of 1994.

The force of the experience, and in the experience of the memory of this experience, is that it demands a confrontation with the politics of living together, as a question of method. It dares us to ask about the truth of reconciliation and what it means to live with genocide and its residues: genocide reincarnate. The charge of filling a site of mass slaughter with the sounds of children laughing and playing is its holding of the tension and irony of Rwanda's attempt to live with death. This sense is something staged in various literary texts attempting to represent life in Rwanda before and after the genocide of 1994 which, to the point of establishing tropes of representation, follows a simple formula traced alongside the fault lines of ethnicity and gender: perpetrators of the genocide are Hutu and male, whilst the surviving victims of the genocide are Tutsi and female.[19] The tendencies to texture the categories of perpetrator and victim with ethnicity and gender, however unintentional, translate the language of raced difference and in doing so reproduce the conditions that culminated in the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda. This staging is, however, not merely problematic but is in fact reading the problem of the residue of genocide in Rwanda.

---

[17] See, www.news24.com/News24/Good-neighbourliness-20140211 and https://fabryhistory.com/2015/05/11/apartheid-a-policy-of-good-neighborliness/.

[18] A recording of his speech is available here: https://youtu.be/vPCln9czoys.

[19] Two of the texts discussed in this paper do precisely this: Akpan's "My Parents' Bedroom" and Whelan, et al.'s *Let the Devil Sleep: 20 Years after Genocide in Rwanda*. Other films which follow the same "formula" include *Shooting Dogs* (aka *Beyond the Gates*), *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), *Sometimes in April* (2005), *Ghosts of Rwanda* (2004), and even more contemporary texts such as Netflix's *Trees of Peace* (2021) among others.

Apartheid, the National Party's policy of governance for South Africa from 1948–1994 when it held power, was (falsely) advertised as a policy of separate but equal development of the races.[20] In reality, however, the National Party's policy of Apartheid hierarchically ordered racial groups and endeavoured to resolve the 'poor white problem' and ensure the privileged supremacy of the white minority through the subjugation of the Black majority.[21] After decades of this crime against humanity, South Africa held its first democratic election in 1994, which was followed by the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1995, which, like the Gacaca courts, was a body of transitional justice. The Gacaca predates western colonial settlement in Rwanda, at which point it operated as an informal mechanism for attending to offenses and administering justice in communities, a sentiment that remained intact when after the genocide of 1994 the Gacaca Courts were established in Rwanda. The Rwandan judiciary was decimated during the genocide of 1994, and as such, the Gacaca courts were established as a local solution to the problem of thousands of perpetrators and the question of national reconciliation. While the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) oversaw the prosecution of category 1 offenders (architects of the genocide), the Gacaca courts oversaw the prosecution of categories 2–4 offenses and were tasked with facilitating reconciliation, nationally but also within communities, of victims and perpetrators.[22] Both the Gacaca Courts and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in their individually limited scope, gesture toward and abide by the concept of *Ubuntu*.[23] I invoke South Africa here not to suggest that the crimes of Apartheid and Genocide are comparable, nor do I wish to suggest that Apartheid was a genocide. Rather I want to point to the potential of their ideological reach and how these bodies of transitional justice simultaneously were constituted by the violence they sought to address and constitute the frame through which that violence is addressed and a future beyond it is imagined.

---

[20] See, Muller, Hilgard. "Separate Development in South Africa." *African Affairs*, vol. 62, no. 246, 1963, pp. 53–65.

[21] There is a vast field of scholarship on the question of Apartheid and indeed the postapartheid. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss at length this field, the work of Premesh Lalu, Maurits Van Bever-Donker, Harold Wolpe, John Peffer, Nicky Rousseau, and Ciraj Rassool critically engage with the question of Apartheid and the postapartheid, as lived experience, concept, and theoretical problem. Literary scholarship has also focused in particular ways. Scholars who have approached the question of Apartheid through the literary include Zuretha Roos, Alan Paton, Zakes Mda, Zoe Wicomb, Sindiwa Magona, Andre P. Brink, and Antjie Krog amongst many others.

[22] See, Ingelaere, Bert. "Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences." *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences*, edited by Luc Huyse and Mark Salter, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008, pp. 25-59; Clark, Phil. *The Gacaca Courts, Post-Genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice without Lawyers*. Cambridge UP, 2010.

[23] *Ubuntu* is an established concept in Africa and African Philosophy, that has also found expression in jurisprudence such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In the discursive framing of the TRC, the then Archbishop Desmond Tutu described *Ubuntu* as the principle that stipulates that "a person is a person through others" (Tutu 31). In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Tutu explains that "'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.' We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'A person is a person through other persons.' It is not, 'I think therefore I am.' It says rather: 'I am human because I belong. I participate, I share'" (Tutu 31). In other words, *Ubuntu* is the idea that the individual and the community are intrinsically linked, and as such, concern for the wellbeing of the community should be the concern of the individual. In the context of the TRC, this informed the ways in which the "revealing" of the "truth" was framed as facilitating reconciliation between victims and perpetrators as individuals but also communities as national reconciliation. Other noteworthy scholars concerned with this question include Gobodo-Madikizela, Mahmood Mamdani, and Thaddeus Metz. This conceptualization is specifically informed by the South African context, as is appropriate for the purposes of this paper. However, its conceptualization is textured somewhat differently in other spaces and contexts across the continent, though the essence of the idea remains the same. The term is also one that has been the subject of critique and contest. Such scholarship includes the work of Precious Simba, Bernard Matolino, and Wenceslaus Kwindingwi.

Hugo Blick's Netflix limited series *Black Earth Rising*[24] complicates and attempts to resist the grand narrative of the Rwandan genocide, which for decades has been unchallenged in its explanation of the genocide as a singular event perpetrated by Hutu extremists against the country's Tutsis. The plot of the series centres around Kate Ashby, adoptive daughter of Eve Ashby—an International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor—who was born Hutu, raised Tutsi, and a victim of genocidal violence regardless of her ethnicity. Through the focalized narrative of the protagonist's process of encountering the truth of her past, *Black Earth Rising* stages some of the juridical, historical, and political tension produced by the Manicheanism of Europe—as a marker of the West—and Africa—as a marker of the Rest. Unlike the previous two texts considered, the Netflix series does not locate itself only in Rwanda, though it is the knot to which the internationally diffused pursuit and evasion of justice is bound.

What sets the narrative aside from conventional narratives concerning the Rwandan genocide is not only its focus on the globality of the genocide, especially, as a question for justice, but also its focus on the atrocities committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)[25] in the years immediately after the genocide of 1994. A pivotal example of this is the massacre of approximately 50,000 Hutu refugees in a camp in what was then called Zaire. In pursuit of the extradition and prosecution of genocidaire, Patrice Ganimana, assistant Secretary at the Bureau of African Affairs within the US State Department, Eunice Clayton explains:

> The genocide of '94, it has no comparison. 800,000 Tutsis, at least murdered within 100 days.
> The most intensive ethnic slaughter in modern history. The RPF ended that genocide, no doubt.
> And no doubt either, they did not cause it.
> […]

---

[24] Some clips from the series are available at BBC Two: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bk8t10.

[25] The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) is currently the ruling party in Rwanda, led by President Paul Kagame. The inception of the RPF traces back to 1987, when the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (established in 1979, in Uganda after the dismantlement of the Amin regime) rebranded. The RPF is credited with having stopped the genocidal massacres of 1994 and has held power in Rwanda since then. The years following the immediate aftermath of the genocide have seen a developing critique of the regime and the techniques deployed in and after 1994 genocide, supported by witness testimony amongst other forms of evidence.
See, Waldorf, Lars. "The Apotheosis of a Warlord: Paul Kagame." *Warlord Democrats in Africa: Ex-Military Leaders and Electoral Politics*, edited by Anders Themnér, Bloomsbury Academic/Nordic Africa Institute, 2017, pp. 68–94. iles.webb.uu.se/uploader/1576/Warlord-Democrats-in-Africa.pdf#page=79; Caplan, Gerald. "Rethinking the Rwandan Narrative for the 25th Anniversary." *Genocide Studies International*, vol. 12 no. 2, 2018, pp. 152–190; Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*; Reyntjens, "The Rwandan Patriotic Front's information and communication strategy."

> By '97, the RPF sent its own military leaders into the ranks of this new Tutsi army to help coordinate the dismantling of these final camps. And it's true, in the camps I attended, Ganimana and his people were there. But I contend they were using these refugees as human shields.
> Of an estimated 50,000 people, 9,000 were children, many more were women, and almost all were catastrophically ill. They couldn't have gone anywhere if they'd wanted.
> Then one day in April, all Western aid workers were ordered to leave. We were taken to a cordon about a mile away, out of sight of the camps. A few workers, including a colleague of mine, Edward Holt, remained until the very last. So I cannot say I saw it. I cannot say I saw anything. What I can say is that four days later, when we were finally allowed to return to the camp, it was completely empty – and I mean completely.
> Not a single vestige to indicate that less than a week before, some 50,000 people had been living there. (Blick, Episode 7 00:26:51–00:30:41)[26]

However, as Michael Ennis, Eve's long-time friend and Kate's mentor, explains to Kate, upon finally revealing that her life as a Rwandan Tutsi and genocide survivor was in part fictional, that there was evidence of her history as a Hutu survivor of an RPF led massacre. Eve, he continues:

> […] wanted to take the recordings to the ICTR and use it to prosecute the new government – for you, for your family, for Ed, for justice. Except everyone knew it wouldn't be allowed. It couldn't be. Not by the US, the UK, the UN. Not even by me.
> What was happening out there, to you, your family, how many others […]
> […] as terrible as it was, on the scale of things, it couldn't match what had already happened.
> There's no possible equivalence.
> And that's what we were there to prosecute. The genocide of almost a million people. (Blick, Episode 7 00:32:41–00:33:28)

There is in this difficult staging, the complexity and nuance of the genocide, which seared the social fabric of the region for years, but also an uncomfortable unsettling of the idea that the genocide was contained within the borders of Rwanda and, more so, that the RPF acted to stop the genocide without succumbing to the temptation of retaliatory violence. This is, however, swiftly denied and negated, and the singular, grand narrative of the genocide in Rwanda is preserved. Said differently, there is, although veiled, again a turn toward Manicheanism, which in this instance produces the Tutsi as perpetually victim, hero, good African and the Hutu as perpetually perpetrator, villain, and bad African. Kate, enabled by her belief of her status as victim of the Rwandan genocide—that she is a Tutsi—brings the Manicheanisms of the Rwandan genocide, the dichotomy between good and evil, victim and perpetrator, Tutsi and Hutu into stark relief. "It really is that simple" for Kate Ashby, before she learns the story of her survival. This echoes the

---

[26] For transcripts of each episode, see, subslikescript.com/series/Black_Earth_Rising-7660730. For additional material on *Black Earth Rising*, see, studioaka.co.uk/black-earth-rising/, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-45447840, and www.mirror.co.uk/tv/black-earth-rising-rwandan-genocide-13225571.

Afropessimist archetypes described by Martha Evans and Ian Glenn in "'TIA—This is Africa': Afropessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film" (2010). According to Evans and Glenn, Afropessimism refers to the "consistently negative view that Africa is incapable of progressing, economically, socially, or politically" (14–15). In their discussion of various afropessimist tropes, they explain also that there is a traceable constellation of various stereotypes often deployed in films about Africa, intended for global audiences. These include corrupt officials, the "white-do-gooder" (32). Extending this line of thinking, Diana Adesola Mafe argues that these stereotypes have the potential to, and often do, become archetypes. In "(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: *The Constant Gardener* and *Blood Diamond*" (2011), Mafe argues that there are "trenchant archetypes in fiction and non-fiction films" which include "the White Queen, the White Hunter, the Good African, the Dangerous African and so on" (69). In a global moment, following the pandemic, which certainly negatively impacted cinema, and saw a pull toward streaming services, *Black Earth Rising*, despite its challenging if the grand narrative of the Rwandan genocide, demonstrates the translation of cinematic tropes of Africa. In so doing, it reflects the inherent contradiction of the Manicheanism it stages.

The accepted grand narrative of the genocide in Rwanda as it is represented in various popular literary texts often flattens the textures and nuances that reflect the complicated nature of humans and the collectively shared historical trauma of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Instead, this popularly staged and accepted narrative offers a simple delineation: 1) the perpetrators of violence were exclusively Hutus and the victims of this violence were Tutsi and 2) the RPF heroically ended the genocide (though no atrocities were committed by any members of this group). *Black Earth Rising*, however, explicitly deals with the allegations of crimes against humanity and acts of genocide reportedly committed by the RPF while fighting against the genocidal violence incited by Hutu Power extremists within the borders of Rwanda, but also, importantly, it represents the testimony that the RPF was committing genocidal motivated atrocities in refugee camps outside of Rwanda and well after the infamous "100 days of genocide." In so doing, Blick's limited Netflix series does resist the single story of the Rwandan genocide. However, it also adheres to the politics of the Manicheanism that textures the distinction between Hutu and Tutsis. The Tutsi General Simon Nyamoya, for example, is indicted on counts of War Crimes, as opposed to Genocide, for the atrocities he coordinated in Congo despite the targets of these atrocities often being Hutu. What is at stake in a critique of these tendencies and tropes is a potential reckoning with something like a politics of good neighbourliness that was palpable when I visited Rwanda in 2018.

This good neighbourliness is echoed in *Let the Devil Sleep*, whilst *Black Earth Rising* stages what is at stake when "victim" and "perpetrator" morph from category to quality and ultimately identity—which is precisely the Manicheanism which renders impossible a living together. There is a living with history, a living with genocide that cannot be left veiled and unattended by national reconciliation; and these literary texts, in precisely their staging and re-presenting of the reification and reinscribing of the Manicheanism between Hutu and Tutsi surrounding the genocidal massacres of 1994, are calling for attention to it, while the narrative of *Black Earth Rising* seems to call for resistance to it.

Conclusion

In offering a reading of three literary-cultural texts, both fictional and non-fictional, this paper has attempted to argue that the patterns of representation of the Rwandan Genocide trope the categories of victim and perpetrator. As the paper has explained, there is something like an emerging tradition in representations of the Rwandan genocide which often reify and reinscribe the colonial Manicheanisms which saturated Rwandan society and underscored the genocide of 1994. Texts such as Uwem Akpan's "My Parents' Bedroom" stage and in so doing make available for critique the reified difference between the Hutu and Tutsi people established through colonial discourse. Through its narration by Monique, whose father is Hutu and mother is Tutsi, the short story offers a crisp snapshot of the assumed features of individuals belonging to either the then Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa ethnic groups, or their thing-ification. However, it also troubles and muddies these supposedly obvious distinctions through characters, such as Monique herself, who highlight the fictional quality of these beliefs, or her uncle, Tonton Andre, whose character is used to show that often the ethnic identity of a person could not be read on the body. However, the text does also rely on the single-story of the Rwandan genocide, producing the perpetrators of the genocide as exclusively Hutu and its victims as exclusively non-Hutu. It is, like JP Stassen's graphic novel *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda*, an example of a text that acknowledges the Twa as a group of people who, although not directly targeted in the genocide, were not left unscathed by it. The text is, however, set in the first days of the unfolding of the genocide of 1994, and beyond Monique and her brother Jean's survival does not gesture to the trauma of the genocide which continues to sear more than 20 years later.

However, as its title suggests, the short documentary *Let the Devil Sleep: 20 Years after Genocide in Rwanda* focuses on life after the genocide and the success of the national project of reconciliation, which it marks as being facilitated by the Tricador Foundation. The narrative of this text focuses on two couplets of individuals, reinscribing the categories Hutu and Tutsi—now disavowed by the Kagame regime—as perpetrator and victim, respectively. Moreover, like Akpan's short story, it also genders these categories, texturing the victims of the genocide as female and the perpetrators thereof as male. The dualisms are also charged with the Manicheanism that polarized Rwandan society prior to, during, and as the documentary shows, 20 years after the genocide. In its reinscribing of the designations—Hutu and Tutsi as perpetrator and victim—it also reinscribes the qualities of evil and goodness, disdain and desirability, of the Manicheanism of colonialism—itself a bloodless genocide through the annihilation of the culture of African civilizations.

Through its distinctly divergent narrative focus on the genocidal atrocities committed by the RPF in the wake of the genocide, *Black Earth Rising* resists the tendency to assume that the bloodiness of the Rwandan genocide is a) contained within the 100 days of massacre in 1994 and b) so simple a single story as "evil" Hutus killing "good" Tutsis. Instead, it attends to the question of retaliatory violence and in so doing calls into question the similarly flat narrative of reconciliation in Rwanda as, although difficult, ultimately successful in facilitating the living together of perpetrator and victim. This is due in large part in its unsettling of the marking of Hutu and Tutsi as victim and perpetrator, respectively. Through the complicated colliding of Kate Ashby's past and present, *Black Earth Rising* reveals the flawed heroism of the RPF and the danger of producing the categories of victim and perpetrators as well as the question of identity as impenetrable. However, although it does complicate the binary between victim and perpetrator, it also abides by the binary of Hutu and Tutsi. In so doing, even in its resistance to reification and reinscribing of the Manicheanism of other representations of the Rwandan genocide, it abides by a politics of dichotomy.

Thus, what this paper attempts to demonstrate is the ways in which these texts, in highlighting the inherent contradiction of assuming that trauma such as genocidal violence, which is to say violence that sears, can be temporally and spatially bound. Moreover, this paper attempts to show that the literary texts read here stage the problem of assuming that victims and perpetrators are always absolutely discrete figures, as their operation as legal categories insists. Said differently, what this paper tries to demonstrate is the limit of understanding the work, in the Barthesian sense, as a metaphor for genocide: observable, “held in the hand,” or merely physical, neatly bound and its origins as a knowable problem. Rather, what these texts gesture toward, in their fraught staging of racial stereotypes, the intimacy of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and reconciliation as ongoing process, is the unboundedness of trauma. Moreover, the most recently released of the texts, *Black Earth Rising*, also speaks directly to the geographic unboundedness of the genocidal violence that unsettles the established grand narrative of the genocide in three ways: 1) that the violence entangled with the politics of the genocide unfolded within the borders of the Rwandan state, 2) that it lasted only 100 days, and 3) that it was only Hutus, whether Hutu Power extremists or coerced participants who committed atrocities. In these ways, these texts invite and facilitate an understanding of genocide which is pluralistic in its expression, not only physical but psychological, economic, as well as social. In *Let the Devil Sleep*, for example, the process of reconciliation between perpetrators and victims is shown to be ongoing, as is the struggle with poverty in the community shown on screen. “My Parents’ Bedroom” illustrates the various intimacies of the genocide: that the violence was public rather than clandestine, and that perpetrators and victims had for years prior cultivated relationships as family members, friend, and neighbours. Moreover, its ending, like *Black Earth Rising*, calls attention to the question of retaliatory violence and in so doing unsettles the assumptions, regarding perpetrators of atrocities, maintained by the grand narrative of the genocide in Rwanda. Thus, these texts simultaneously stage and question the single story of the grand narrative of the Rwanda genocide, and gesture toward the innate plurality of lived experience. These texts invite us to consider what might be at stake in attending to the distinction between life after genocide and life beyond genocide, as well as the difference between living alongside each other/good neighbourliness and living together/*ubuntu*.

* * *

Works Cited

Akpan, Uwem. “My Parents’ Bedroom.” *Say You’re One of Them*, Abacus, 2009, pp. 263–289.

Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation).” *Lenin and Philosophy’ and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, 1971, pp. 85–126.

Barker, Greg. *Ghosts of Rwanda*. PBS, 1 Apr. 2004. www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ghosts/.

Barthes, Roland. “From Work to Text.” *The Rustle of Language*, U of California P, 1989, pp. 49–76.

Blick, Hugo, creator. *Black Earth Rising*. Netflix, www.netflix.com/title/80145141.

Caton-Jones, Michael, director. *Shooting Dogs*. BBC Films, 2005.

Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Monthly Review Press, 2000.

Des Forges, Alison. *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. Human Rights Watch, 1999.

Evans, Martha and Ian Glenn. “‘TIA—This Is Africa’: Afropessimism in Twenty-First Century Narrative Film.” *Black Camera*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2010, pp. 14–35.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* Translated by Constance Farrington. Harmondsworth, 1967.

George, Terry, director. *Hotel Rwanda*. Twentieth Century Fox, 2004.

Hinson, Laura W, director. *As We Forgive*. MPower Pictures, 2009.

Lemkin, Raphael. *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law, 1944.

Langford, Sasha, creator. *Untitled*. CAFOD, 2014. https://youtu.be/qYXYYrmVHHs.

Mafe, Diana Adesola. “(Mis)Imagining Africa in the New Millennium: *The Constant Gardener* and *Blood Diamond*.” *Camera Obscura*, vol. 25, no. 3(75), 2011, pp. 69–99.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Fountain Publishers, 2016.

Mowitt, John. *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object.* Duke UP, 1992.

Organic Law no. 40/2000 of 26/01/2001 Setting up <<Gacaca Jurisdictions>> and Organizing Prosecutions for Offences Constituting the Crime of Genocide or Crimes Against Humanity Committed Between October 1, 1990 and December

31, 1994. www.jurisafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ORGANIC-LAW-N0-40.pdf.

Peck, Raoul, director. *Sometimes in April*. HBO, 2005.

Reyntjens, Filip. "The Rwandan Patriotic Front's information and communication strategy." *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond*, edited by Thompson, Allan, Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019, pp. 133–155.

---. "Rwanda's Untold Story. A reply to '38 scholars, scientists, researchers, journalists and historians.'" *African Arguments*, 21 October, 2014, https://africanarguments.org/2014/10/rwandas-untold-story-a-reply-to-38-scholars-scientists-researchers-journalists-and-historians-by-filip-reyntjens/.

Saunders, Edith R. "The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective." *The Journal of African History*, vol.10, no. 4, 1969, pp. 521–532. www.jstor.org/stable/179896.

Sundermann, Werner. "COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY iii. in Manicheism." *Encyclopædia Iranica*. Encyclopædia Iranica Foundation, 2001. www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cosmogony-iii.

Stanton. Gregory. H. "Could the Rwandan Genocide have been prevented?", presented on 27 January 2002 in London, England at a conference, "Generations of Genocide," sponsored by the Institute of Contemporary History and the Weiner Library, 2002.

Stassen, Jean-Phillipe. *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda*. Translated by Alexis Siegel, First Second Books, 2006.

Tutu, Desmond. *No Future without Forgiveness*. Image, 1999.

Venter, Pieter M. "Mani (216-276 CE) and Ethiopian enoch." *HTS Theological Studies*, vol. 70, no. 3, 2014, pp. 01–09. www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v70n3/10.pdf.

Whelan, Alan, et al. "Let the Devil Sleep: Rwanda 20 Years after Genocide." *YouTube*, uploaded by Trocaire, 3 April 2014, https://youtu.be/Wl50BeeNLAQ.

This page has been intentionally left blank.

This page has been intentionally left blank.

www.ellids.com
editors@ellids.com