EURASIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

2025

VOLUME: 7

ISSUE: 1

e-ISSN: 2717-9435

E-ISSN: 2717-9435

Type of Publication: Periodical Publisher: Karabuk University

Address: Karabük Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, 78100 Merkez, Karabük, TÜRKİYE.

Tel: 444 0 478

Date of Publication: June 30, 2025

Publisher: Karabük University

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature is published semi-annually, in June and December.

EJELL is indexed in **EBSCO** Host Academic Search Complete, **MLA** (Modern Language Association of America) International Bibliography, **ASCI** Asian Sciences Citation Index, and **ASOS** databases.

https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/jell

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: December 30, 2024
Accepted: February 13, 2025

English Language Students' Frequency, Perception and Purpose of Use of MT and CAT Tools

Đelaludina ŠUKALIĆ[1]

Edina RIZVIĆ-EMINOVIĆ[2]

Melisa BUREKOVIĆ[3]

Abstract

Machine and computer-assisted translation tools have become widely accessible and user-friendly in the modern digital age. English language learners, in particular, stand to gain significantly from utilizing machine translation (MT) or computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools such as Google Translate or Trados. This paper seeks to investigate the frequency of use of these tools by the English language students at the University of Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, outside the classroom, the specific tools utilized, the purposes of their application, and the students' perceptions of these tools, with a focus on features such as translation quality and usability. To gather data, a survey was used consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The findings indicate a lower frequency of MT and CAT tools usage and reveal notable differences in the students' perception of the features of MT and CAT tools analyzed. The insights derived from this research may contribute to understanding how these tools can be better incorporated into English language instruction and translation studies.

Keywords: machine translation, computer-assisted translation, English language

[1] Senior Teaching Assistant, University of Zenica, Department of English Language and Literature, djelaludina.sukalic@unze.ba, ORCID 0000-0002-0412-7725.

[2] Associate Professor, University of Zenica, Department of English Language and Literature, edina.rizvic-eminovic@unze.ba, ORCID 0000-0002-7629-3984

[3] Associate Professor, University of Zenica, Department of English Language and Literature, melisa.burekovic@unze.ba, ORCID 0009-0002-4036-9729

1. Introduction

Translation, historically one of the central components of the Grammar Translation Method (Bureković et al., 2023), is broadly defined as the process of transferring text from a source language to a target language (Poibeau, 2017). Over time, rapid technological advancements and increasing demands for global connectivity have driven the development of machine translation (MT) and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools. These tools aim to provide faster and more accurate translation solutions, reflecting significant shifts in the conceptualization of translation itself. Modern CAT tools, in particular, embody the understanding of translation as "a complex process involving high-level cognitive and linguistic capabilities" (Poibeau, 2017). Their sophistication allows them to address complex linguistic challenges such as "false friends" (Rizvić-Eminović et al., 2020), collocations (Rizvić-Eminović et al., 2015; Rizvić-Eminović et al., 2024), phrasal verbs (Bureković et al., 2024), derived nominals (Rizvić-Eminović, 2023), multiple negatives (Bureković, 2013; Bureković, 2023) and subjunctives (Brdarević et al., 2018).

In the context of globalization and technological developments, the English language stands at the forefront as the preferred language option. Consequently, the use of MT and CAT tools for translation to and from English is often the focus of various research studies. The scope of such studies has been the overview of the tools themselves (Han, 2020; Rivera-Triguero, 2022), as well as the attitudes and perceptions of their end users, be it translation students or professionals, specifically in the context of Chinese (Xu and Wang, 2011), Egyptian (Mahfouz, 2018) or Croatian (Borucinsky et al., 2022). However, similar studies involving Bosnian English language students are lacking.

This research paper aims to investigate the frequency, perception and purpose of use of MT and CAT tools among English language students at the University of Zenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These students study to become English language teachers and the use of digital tools in general in teaching is already incorporated in their classes. Thus, the paper explores how frequently these students use MT and CAT tools, such as Google Translate and Trados and for what purpose outside the classroom. Further, it aims to gain an insight into the students' usage patterns and their perceptions regarding the various features of translation tools, such as their quality of translation, ease of use and affordability. The study also examines the students' familiarity with the distinctions between different MT and CAT tools, which can aid in understanding how these tools can be better incorporated into English language instruction and translation study and practice.

The current students are digital natives, who welcome new technologies, platforms and apps (Prensky, 2012). Further, a study revealed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, students at the University of Zenica embraced a variety of language technologies (Bureković et al., 2020). Therefore, it was assumed that English language students at this university, whose proficiency levels range from B2 to C1, would demonstrate a high frequency of use of machine translation tools outside the classroom. The assumption was also made because in the course of their undergraduate studies, the students are tasked with translation of a variety of short texts. Since the students do not have an opportunity to master the use of MT or CAT tools at this level of

their studying, it was also assumed that they would not be substantially familiar with the tools and their features, despite numerous opportunities for informal online education and personal exploration. The results of the study have pedagogical implications. They might indicate how and to what extent MT and CAT tools should be introduced in the EFL teaching curricula at university level in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2. Literature Review

The true origins of machine translation, in the form that we know it today, can be traced back to the 1950s and Warren Weaver's publication (1949) on the topic of computer application in the translation process (Craciunescu et al., 2007; Ulitkin, 2011). It is a result of lasting interdisciplinary research and cooperation of computer scientists and linguists (Rizvić-Eminović & Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2024). In the 1950s, the United States showed great interest in this area with financial support for the various translation projects, most of which included the IBM company along with different universities (Hutchins, 2006). The very first machine translation programs appeared in the form of basically computerized bilingual dictionaries. Their work mechanism was quite simple as it relied on the "transformer" approach by which sentences of one language were directly, as the name itself suggests, transformed to the sentences in the target language (Ulitkin, 2011). Unfortunately, less than twenty years later, the entire process was halted due to the seeming ineffectiveness of machine translation (Hutchins, 1966). While the USA stopped its projects, the development continued elsewhere so, for example, a machine translation system called Systran came into use by the United States military and the European Union Commission and it was followed by a number of other machine translation systems across the world (Poibeau, 2017). On the other hand, computer-assisted translation tools came into use a short time later. In fact, some linguists (Wang, 2024) note that the very concept of computer-assisted translation (CAT) was first proposed by Yehoshua Bar-Hillel (1960), who had one of the leading roles in the development of machine translation as well (Poibeau, 2017). Others (Ulitkin, 2011) tie the CAT origins to Martin Kay, who published a memorandum in 1980 critiquing machine translation and proposing tools that would involve translators more directly. Kay (1980) was the first one to present the two windows approach in the translation process (Montalbán, 2019), and that approach remains in use even in most modern CAT translation tools.

2.1 Characteristics of MT and CAT tools

While both MT and CAT tools share certain characteristics, they are used differently for different purposes. MT strives towards direct, mechanical translation without human involvement. MT represents "a branch of computational linguistics that focuses on the use of e-devices to render a speech or text from an SL to a TL" (Jibreel, 2023: 1148). Therefore, this type of translation is, as Sofer (2006) defines it, a "translation performed by a computer software program as an alternative to human translation, performed by a human translator" (Sofer, 2006: 83). On the other hand, CAT tools serve as added help to assist the translators during the entire translation process. In other words, while the machine translation process is

not complete without the final editing and revising by translators, the computer-assisted translation entails the direct translator's involvement throughout every step of the translation.

While MT tools typically support a wide range of languages, their translation quality and collaboration options, among other features, may be lacking. In addition, in terms of the ethics of translation, data privacy and security, as well as the effects on the translators' job market are just some of the issues that need to be taken into consideration (Moorkens, 2022). However, despite their limitations, MT tools are valued for their speed and ability to handle vast amounts of text, making them useful for quick, large-scale translation projects.

On the other hand, in terms of their characteristics, CAT tools are designed to support and aid human translators by enhancing productivity and consistency in translation projects, which is achieved through one of their primary features, the translation memory databases (Han, 2020). CAT tools typically offer features such as terminology management and quality assurance tools that help in detecting errors and inconsistencies, as there are various types of errors that could potentially arise, such as changes in meaning or usage. Additionally, as CAT tools are designed to facilitate collaboration and because they depend on human input for translation, there is a better guarantee of more ethical use, data security, and confidentiality, along with a more positive impact on translators' work practices. As summarized by Wang (2024), while MT is cheaper and more readily available, easier to use, and faster, the CAT is more precise, offers more language, text formatting and collaboration options, as well as better quality assurance.

The examples of translation tools analysed in this research include Google Translate, Bing Translator, TranslateMe, Yandex.Translate, MateCat, Trados, memoQ, and MemSource. All the aforementioned MT tools are quite similar in the sense that they offer ease of access, simple use, multilingual interface, and good integration with other services. For example, Google Translate shows good integration with other Google services, Bing Translator easily works with different Microsoft services, and Yandex.Translate supports integration with various applications and websites. On the other hand, CAT tools differ more in terms of what they offer. For example, MateCat is an open-source CAT tool relying on a cloud-based translation memory system (Federico et al., 2014). SDL Trados, as probably one of the most commonly employed CAT tools, offers an enormous variety of options, but it is also not open source, so there is a considerable cost for its use.

3. Methodology

This research utilized an anonymous survey created to investigate the University of Zenica students' frequency, perspectives and purpose of use of MT and CAT tools outside their classrooms. It was distributed electronically via Google Forms. The survey consisted of ten questions, eight closed and two open-ended questions. A total of twenty-seven respondents participated, with an equal number of respondents among first (N=6), second (N=6), and fourth-year students (N=6), and a slightly higher representation of third-year students (N=9). The closed questions included options where respondents were able to select one or more answers, as well as options with a five-point Likert scale ranging from *very frequently, frequently, occasionally, rarely, never*, used to gauge the frequency of use, or from *very satisfied, satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied*, to assess the students' rating

of the features of the tools they used. Incorporating open-ended questions allowed for a deeper understanding of students' knowledge on the topic and, when combined with the analysis of other responses, aimed to identify patterns and gaps in awareness regarding the functionalities and benefits of various MT and CAT systems.

The questions included in the survey were as follows:

1. Do you know the difference between machine translation (MT and computer-assisted translation (CAT)?
2. How frequently do you use machine translation and/or computer assisted translation tools (tools such as websites - Google translate, Trados, etc.)?
3. Have you ever used: Google Translate, Trados, MateCat, Yandex Translate, Translate Me, Bing Translate, MemQ, Memsource?
4. Have you ever used any other websites, applications, software, etc. for machine translation and/or computer-assisted translation?
5. If you have used some other websites, applications, software, etc. for machine translation and/or computer-assisted translation, which ones did you use?
6. How do you use MT and CAT tools when translating? Selecting the correct degree to which the statement applies to you. - I use these tools to translate: words from English; words to English; sentences from English; sentences to English; paragraphs from English; paragraphs to English; entire documents from English; entire documents to English.
7. How frequently and why do you use MT and/or CAT tools? - I use them: as a dictionary; to check pronunciation; to find synonyms; to translate for me; to give me a draft to edit.
8. How would you rate the following features of the specific MT/CAT tools that you used: ease of use; price, availability, languages offered; format options; ethics; translation quality; collaboration.
9. Any additional comments regarding the use of MT and/or CAt tools or any of their features?

The data were analyzed using percentage presentation. The number of occurrences of a particular response option is indicated in brackets and tables as frequency (f). The frequencies of responses to specific question items were combined to get a better insight into the purpose of use of MT and CAT tools by the students, in line with the research assumptions.

4. Results and discussion

Almost two-thirds of the respondents (63%) answered that they did not know the difference between MT and CAT, which immediately leads to assumptions as to the proper use of these tools. Interestingly, among those respondents, 20% are fourth-year students, 16% are both first- and second-year students, and 11% are third-year students, which indicates that younger generations of students at this University are more familiar with the MT and CAT tools.

In terms of the frequency of use of CAT and MT tools, 48.2% of the students (N=13) use these tools occasionally, 33.3% (N=9) frequently, 14.8% (N=4) very frequently and 3.7% (N=1) rarely. There are no students who responded ‘never’. Such results lead to the conclusion that

all students at the University (100%) use MT and CAT tools, the difference only being in the extent of their use, however, the frequency of that use is rather low.

The next question focused on some of the most popular MT and CAT tools. Figure 1 indicates that, while Google Translate is used by all students (100%), other translation tools are less commonly utilized, specifically, Translate Me by 14.8% (N=4), Yandex Translate by 11.1% (N=3), Bing Translate and Memsource by 7.4% (N=2), and Trados and MemoQ by 3.7% (N=1) of the students. MateCat is not used by students at all, although it is an open-source alternative to Trados and similar CAT tools. These results may prove beneficial in terms of long-term planning of translation study practices or the creation of translation tasks for students. Additionally, they indicate a need to introduce CAT tools in translation classes, especially their open-source options, as students do not seem to be familiar with them.

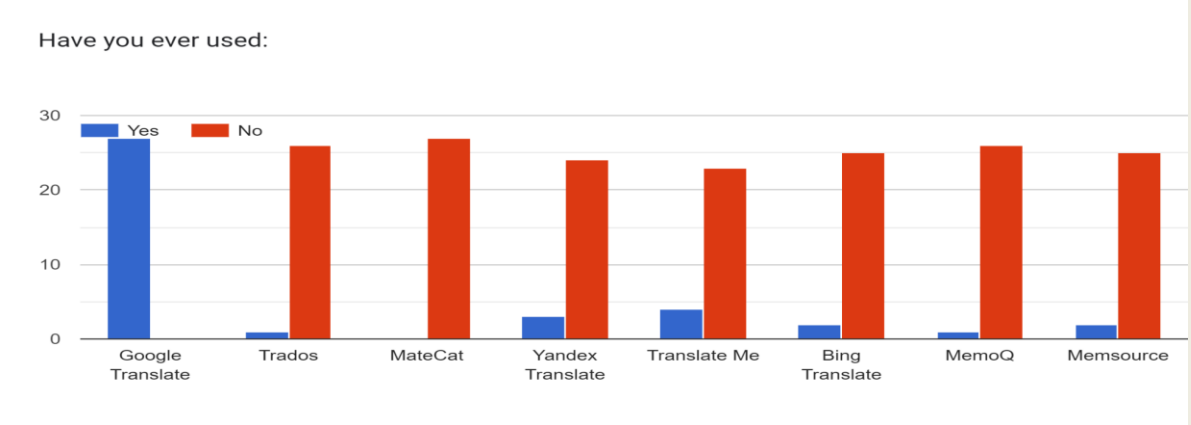

Figure 1. Types of MT and CAT tools used.

Apart from the offered choices of translation tools, another point of interest were any other possible MT, CAT, or similar translation tools that the students rely on and use on their own. 74.1% of the students answered that they had never used any other tools apart from the aforementioned ones, while 25.9% of them did use other translation tools, specifically, GlosBe and ChatGPT, a multilingual dictionary and an artificial intelligence assistant, respectively.

The next set of questions focused on the purpose of the students' use of translation tools.

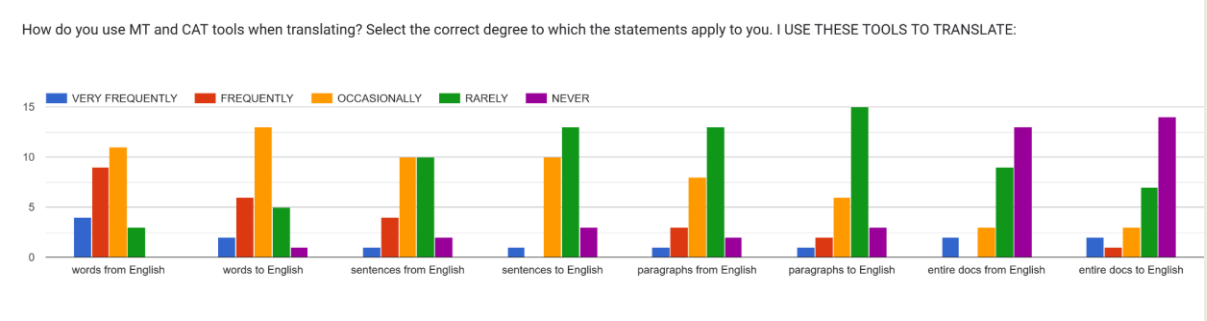

Figure 2. Frequency of use of MT and CAT tools for specific tasks.

As illustrated in Figure 2, students are more likely to use MT and CAT tools for less complex tasks, such as translating individual words or sentences, and less likely to rely on them for more complex translations, such as full paragraphs or documents. When it comes to the average

frequencies MT and CAT tools are used by the students for any type of translation offered - translation of words, sentences, paragraphs or entire documents, they are as follows:

Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage
very frequently	16	7.4%
frequently	25	11.6%
occasionally	64	29.6%
rarely	75	34.7%
never	38	16.7%

Table 1. Average frequency of use of MT and CAT tools for translation

A total of 83.3% of the students use MT and CAT tools for translation tasks ranging from words to entire documents, although with varying degrees of frequency of use, while 16.7% of the students never use MT or CAT tools for translation.

When it comes to the issue of whether the students use MT and CAT tools more for translating from English to their native language or *vice versa*, the results are the following:

Response	from English		to English	
	Frequency (f)	Percentage	Frequency (f)	Percentage
very frequently	8	7.4%	6	5.6%
frequently	16	14.8%	9	8.3%
occasionally	32	29.6%	32	29.6%
rarely	35	32.4%	40	37%
never	17	15.8%	21	19.5%

Table 2. Average frequency of use MT and CAT tools for translation from and to English

As indicated in Table 2, 22.2% of the students use the said tools for translation from English to Bosnian very frequently and frequently combined, as opposed to 13.9% of them who use these tools very frequently and frequently to translate to English. Such a low percentage of use of the MT and CAT tools for translation might be attributed to the fact that the students use these tools the most to understand the meaning of words rather than to translate documents, which may be related to their lower English language proficiency. Significantly, with regard to the average percentage of students who never use MT or CAT tools for translating from English to their native language and *vice versa*, it amounts to 15.8% and 19.5% respectively. The latter might seem surprising given that CAT tools abound significantly more in glossaries, terminology databases and translation memories in English than in the Bosnian language.

Question number 8 examines the frequency of use of MT and CAT tools to accomplish specific tasks - look up a word, check pronunciation, find a synonym, translate something or provide a draft translation for editing.

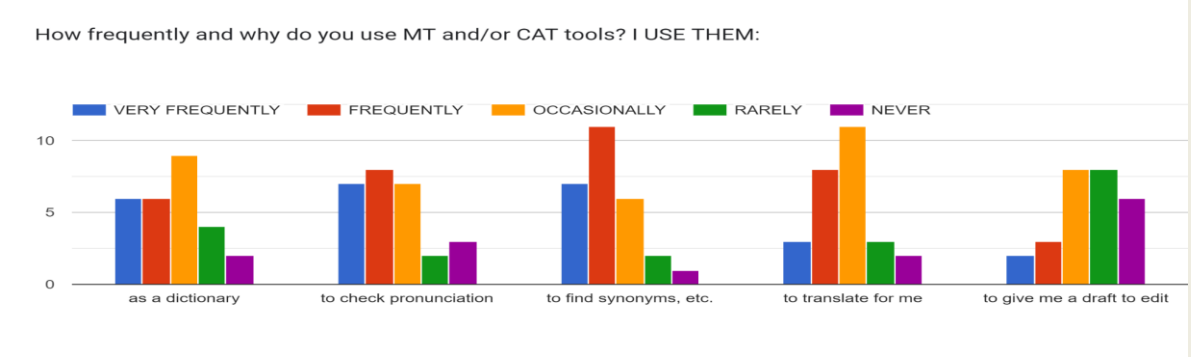

Figure 3. Frequency of use of MT and CAT tools for specific purposes.

As indicated in Figure 3, a total of 93% (f=25) of the students use MT and CAT tools as dictionaries, while 96% (f=26) of them use the tools as a thesaurus, even pronunciation checkers, 89% (f=24), although with a varying degree of frequency of use. Most did respond that they occasionally used them for translation purposes as well, but what is interesting is that more students used them as a thesaurus (96%) rather than a translation tool (93%; f=25). Further, more students seemed to be using these tools for final translation (96%) than for drafting an editable version to work on (78%; f=21). The student responses to question number 8 can be classified into two segments - the first three items revealing how often the students use MT and CAT tools to serve the purpose of common dictionaries (to look up a word, check pronunciation or find a synonym), and the remaining two items indicating again how often these tools are used for translation or draft translations. When combined in this way, the results reveal that a total of 78% (f=21) of the students use MT and CAT tools as common dictionaries, with varying frequency - 24.7% (f=20) very frequently, 30.6% (f=25) frequently, 27% (f=22) occasionally, and 9.8% (f=8) rarely, while 7.4% (f=6) never use these tools as dictionaries. Further, a total of 85.2% (f=19) of the students use these tools for translating or obtaining a draft translation, out of which only 9% (f=5) very frequently, 20% (f=11) frequently, 35% (f=19) occasionally, and 20% (f=11) rarely. Interestingly, 15% (N=8) of the students do not use MT or CAT tools for either translating or obtaining a draft translation.

Question number 9 was used to inquire into the students' satisfaction with specific features of MT and CAT tools - their ease of use, price, availability, languages offered, format options, ethics, translation quality, and collaboration. The results are presented in Table 3. below:

Feature	**Very satisfied**		**Satisfied**		**Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied**		**Dissatisfied**		**Very dissatisfied**	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Ease of use	4	14 .8%	14	51.9%	9	33.3%	0	0	0	0
Price	9	33.3%	7	26.0%	9	33.3%	2	7.4%	0	0

Availability	13	48.1%	9	33.3%	5	18.6%	0	0	0	0
Languages offered	9	33.3%	10	37.1%	8	29.6%	0	0	0	0
Format options	5	18.5%	9	33.3%	11	40.8%	2	7.4%	0	0
Ethics	4	14 .8%	9	33.3%	9	33.3%	4	14 .8%	1	3.7%
Translation quality	1	3.7%	7	26.0%	15	55.6%	3	11.0%	1	3.7%
Collaboration	3	11.0%	7	26.0%	15	55.6%	1	3.7%	1	3.7%
Total frequency (f)	48	**22.2%**	72	**33.3%**	81	**37.5%**	12	**5.6%**	3	**1.4%**

Table 3. Student satisfaction with MT and CAT tools' features.

Only a small percentage of students were overall dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the features of MT and CAT tools, 5.6% and 1.4% respectively. Interestingly, 37.5% of the students are on average neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with all of the features investigated, particularly so with the translation quality and collaboration, suggesting that they are not familiar with all the options these tools offer. The students expressed the highest level of satisfaction with the availability of MT and CAT tools (48.1% are very satisfied and 33.3% are satisfied), as well as with the ease of use (51.9% are satisfied). Further, 37.1% of them are satisfied with the languages offered and 33.3% with format options and ethics, and only 26% of them are satisfied with the translation quality and collaboration.

The last, open-ended question asking the students to provide any comments related to MT and CAT tools they used, reveals that students have a somewhat critical view of their use. They say that these tools "should be used only as a helping tool not as a means to replace humans and their jobs", or that these tools "are not very helpful when it comes to translating sentences from the Bosnian language because they lose the original meaning and are grammatically very incorrect". Further, "they have a good use for synonyms, transcription, and various meanings a word can have giving examples with different context".

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to investigate the frequency, perception, and purpose of the use of MT and CAT tools in the translation process among English major students at the University of Zenica to gain a better understanding of their use of these tools. Although the students are generally familiar with digital technologies (Prensky, 2012) and they have embraced a variety of digital tools (Bureković et al., 2020), this research shows that students do not use MT and CAT tools that often. Only 18.5% of the students use these tools very frequently and frequently, while only 19% of them do so for translation purposes, a finding contrary to the initial assumption that undergraduate English language students frequently use MT and CAT tools. Even when they do use these tools for translation, first of all, they resort to the most popular ones, such as Google Translate (100% of them), to a lesser extent ChatGpt and Glosbe and secondly, they rely on them for less complex tasks - predominantly for translating words from English to

Bosnian. Combined with the findings that 78% of the students uses MT and CAT tools as dictionaries, that 16.7% of them never use these tools for translation, and that 37.5% of them are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the tools, the results may lead to the conclusion that students are insufficiently familiar with the features and the potential these tools have in performing translation tasks. At the same time, the study also highlights a lack of the students' awareness of the distinctions between MT and CAT tools. The answers point to the need to provide students with a much better understanding and knowledge of MT and CAT tools and to instruct them about the proper use of their full potential. The results also provide valuable insights into the students' translation process habits, as they reveal a very low number of students who actually use these tools for drafting and then editing translation drafts, to create their own final versions. Consequently, this suggests that the students should potentially be encouraged to view these tools as more powerful helping tools rather than quick solutions for easy problems.

Although the survey was conducted among a relatively small number of students, the results highlight a need for improved education and instruction in terms of use of both MT and CAT tools. Additionally, they indicate the necessity for a long-term planning of translation study practices and the creation of translation tasks for students, as well as a need to introduce CAT tools in translation classes, especially their open-source options, as students do not seem to be familiar with them. By promoting the use of these tools in a more strategic manner, students can enhance their translation quality and overall learning experience. Encouraging better translation practices and helping students see these technologies as useful tools at their disposal could be achieved by providing a more knowledgeable and deliberate approach to using these tools to their true potential.

References

Bar-Hillel, Y. A. (1960). "Demonstration of the Nonfeasibility of Fully Automatic High-Quality Translation". Advances in Computers. Vol. 1, pages 158-163.

Borucinsky, M., Kegalj, J., & Vukalović, N. (2022). A review of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools used by Croatian translators. Hieronymus, (9), 83-105.

Brdarević-Čeljo, A., Bećirović, S., & Bureković, M. (2018). The Use of Imaginative Conditional Clauses by Bosnian University-Level English-Majoring Students, The Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education – JoLIE 11(2), 2018, Alba Iulia, 25-40

Bureković, M. (2013). Pregled proučavanja lingvističkog fenomena negacije, u Zbornik radova Islamskog Pedagoškog fakulteta u Zenici 11, 276-296.

Bureković, M. (2023). Negacija u engleskom i bosanskom jeziku: minimalistički pristup. Zenica: Meligrafprint.

Bureković, M., Rizvić-Eminović, E. & Pilav, M. (2023). Review of five methods used in English language teaching. Zbornik radova Islamskog pedagoškog fakulteta u Zenici. 447-464.

Bureković, M., Rizvić-Eminović, E. & Bujak, A. (2020). Students' Perceptions of On-line English Classes at the University of Zenica During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta. 35-46.

Bureković, M., Perenda, Š., & Rizvić-Eminović, E. (2024). Understanding the Different Meanings of English Phrasal Verbs. SaZnanje, 4, 643–654.

Craciunescu, O., Gerding-Salas, C., & Stringer-O"Keeffe, S. (2007). Machine Translation and Computer-Assisted Translation: A New Way of Translating?

Federico, M., Bertoldi, N., Cettolo, M., Negri, M., Turchi, M., Trombetti, M., Cattelan, A., Fariña, A., Lupinetti, D., Martines, A., Massidda, A., Schwenk, H., Barrault, L., Blain, F., Koehn, P., Buck, C., & Germann, U. (2014). The MateCat Tool. International Conference on Computational Linguistics.

Han, B. (2020). Translation, from Pen-and-Paper to Computer-Assisted Tools (CAT Tools) and Machine Translation (MT). Proceedings 63(1) 56.

Hutchins, J. (1954). "The first public demonstration of machine translation: The Georgetown - IBM system".

Hutchins, J. (1966). "Languages and machines: computers in translation and linguistics". Technical report, Automatic Language Processing Advisory Committee (ALPAC), Division of Behavioural Sciences, National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council, Washington, D.C".

Jibreel, D. (2023). Online Machine Translation Efficiency in Translating Fixed Expressions Between English and Arabic (Proverbs as a Case-in-Point). Theory and Practice in Language Studies.

Kay, M. (1980). "The Proper Place of Men and Machines in Language Translation".

Mahfouz, I. (2018). Attitudes to CAT Tools: Application on Egyptian Translation Students and Professionals. Arab World English Journal (AWEJ), Special Issue on CALL, 4: 69-83.

Montalbán, N. (2019). Using Cat (Computer Assisted Translation) Tools in Scientific and Tourist Texts. Verbeia, 4, 74–95.

Moorkens, J. (2022). Ethics and machine translation. In Dorothy Kenny (ed.), Machine translation for everyone: Empowering users in the age of artificial intelligence, 121–140. Berlin: Language Science Press.

Poibeau, T. (2017). Machine translation. The MIT Press.

Rivera-Trigueros, I. (2022). Machine translation systems and quality assessment: a systematic review. Lang Resources & Evaluation 56, 593–619.

Rizvić-Eminović, E. (2023). *Teorijska razmatranja tvorbe i osobina engleskih deriviranih nominala*. "Meligrafprint" d.o.o. Zenica.

Rizvić-Eminović, E., & Arnaut-Karović, K. (2015). The Use of Collocations by B1, B2 and C1 Level Students of English as L2 at the University of Zenica. Epiphany, 8(2), 115–130.

Rizvić-Eminović, E., & Kasumagić-Kafedžić, L. (2024). *Engleski jezik, učenje, podučavanje*. "Meligrafprint" d.o.o.

Rizvić-Eminović, E., Bureković, M. & Bujak, A. (2020). Translation of False Friends among B2 Level English Language Learners, Zbornik radova Islamskog pedagoškog fakulteta u Zenici, 253-268.

Rizvić Eminović, E., Šukalić, Đ., & Tursanović, A. (2024). Analysis of Collocations in English Song Lyrics and their Bosnian Translation Equivalents: Potential for English Language Learning. European Journal of Applied Linguistics Studies, 7(2), 56–67.

Sofer, M. (2006). The translator's handbook. Schreiber Pub. Systran: Past and Present.

Ulitkin, I. (2011). "Computer-assisted Translation Tools: A Brief Review." Translation Journal, (15) 1. 1-8.

Wang, Y. (2024). "The Impact of Technology on Human Translators and Translation Quality: A Study on Machine Translation and Computer-Assisted Translation Tools," English Linguistics Research, Sciedu Press, vol. 13(1), 1-19.

Weaver, W. (1949). "Translation memorandum". 'The Mathematics of Communication', Scientific American 181(1). 11–15.

Xu, M. & Wang, C. (2011). Translation Students' Use and Evaluation of Online Resources for Chinese-English Translation at the Word Level. Translation and Interpreting Studies. 6 (1), 62-86.

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: March 26, 2025
Accepted: May 5, 2025

Political Legitimacy in Crisis: A Weberian Reading of W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming"

Yakut AKBAY[1]

Abstract

W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1919) has long been regarded as a prophetic reflection on political and social unrest. This article examines Yeats's poem within the framework of Max Weber's theory of political authority. Weber categorises legitimacy into three forms: traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic. Yeats's evocative image, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold", conveys the fragmentation of both traditional and legal-rational structures and thus corresponds to Weber's notion of legitimacy in crisis. In "The Second Coming", the haunting vision of a "rough beast" approaching Bethlehem implies the emergence of a new charismatic force that is unpredictable, radical, and potentially destructive. However, while charismatic authority can serve as a means of renewal, Yeats's apocalyptic tone in the poem suggests scepticism about whether such figures restore order or merely accelerate disintegration. By portraying the transition from a crumbling system to an uncertain future, the poem raises a critical question: Does the collapse of legitimacy inherently invite the rise of tyranny rather than transformation? Combining Yeats's apocalyptic vision with Weber's socio-political concepts, this study explores how "The Second Coming" anticipates the conditions under which charismatic leaders rise in times of upheaval. It also considers Yeats's own ambivalence towards this transformation and asks whether charismatic authority in the poem represents a necessary renewal or a descent into deeper disorder. The Weberian reading of "The Second Coming" emphasises the continuing importance of understanding the fragile and cyclical nature of political legitimacy in moments of unprecedented crisis.

Keywords: Charisma, Legitimacy, Max Weber, The Second Coming, W. B. Yeats.

[1] Assist, Prof., Ankara Bilim University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of English Translation and Interpretation, Ankara, Türkiye, yakutakbay@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1557-232X

Introduction

> *The last act is the greatest treason. To do the right deed for the wrong reason.*
>
> – T.S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935)

W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1919) has been widely interpreted as a prophetic meditation on the political and social upheaval. The poem was composed in January 1919, shaped by the aftermath of World War I and the Russian Revolution, and foreshadowed the onset of the Anglo-Irish War (Greenblatt, 2006, 2036). In addition to these turbulent events, the immediate context for "The Second Coming" was the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which not only ended the war but also imposed punishing sanctions on Germany, setting the stage for the collapse of the Weimar Republic (Preston, 2020, p. 6). Yeats conveys a feeling of historical disruption and existential uncertainty by portraying a world in turmoil, where established systems are disintegrating, giving way to an impending and foreboding future. The poet's famous declaration, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold", has remained relevant for generations and is usually used to describe moments of crisis and transformation in political, social and cultural spheres. While much critical attention has been paid to the apocalyptic symbolism in the poem, its treatment of political legitimacy remains an area with rich interpretive potential.

This study examines "The Second Coming" from the perspective of Max Weber's theory of political authority to explore how the poem anticipates the conditions under which new and unpredictable forms of leadership emerge in times of unrest. The significance of the study lies in the unique interweaving of literary analysis and political theory, particularly through a Weberian perspective, which demonstrates how "The Second Coming" serves both as a poetic meditation on historical transformation and as a theoretical case study of Weberian authority in times of chaos. Building on this intersection, the article represents the first systematic analysis of W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" through the framework of Max Weber's concept of political authority. By doing so, it offers an original contribution to Yeats scholarship, situating the poem within a discourse on legitimacy and charismatic crisis. Weber's theory thus functions as a robust tool for literary analysis, especially when examining works that focus on political or social upheaval, the nature of authority, and how legitimacy is constructed or deconstructed.

Max Weber developed a tripartite classification of legitimate rule: traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic. In a traditional type of ruling, authority emanates from "long-established traditions and the legitimacy of those whose authority derives from these traditions" (Weber, 2019, p. 342). In a rational type, authority is based on "the legality of statutory orders and the right of those appointed to exercise rule to give directions" (Weber, 2019, p. 341). Charismatic authority is based on the extraordinary sanctity, heroic attributes, or exemplary character of an individual, as well as the orders established by this person (Weber, 2019, p. 342). While legal and traditional authority possesses strong stabilising forces, charismatic authority is fundamentally unstable (Weber, 2019, pp. 336-337). This instability does not stem from its unpredictability but rather from the process of routinisation. Over time, charisma transitions into a routine, becoming ordinary and losing its exceptional quality (Weber, 2019, pp. 336-337). This transformation creates an inherent tension, as the

very essence of charisma gradually becomes "an everyday matter" (Weber, 2019, pp. 336-337). Yeats's "The Second Coming" is particularly relevant to the study of charismatic authority because it vividly portrays a moment of legitimacy in crisis, a condition under which charismatic leadership emerges. The apocalyptic vision in the poem suggests that the dissolution of traditional and legal-rational legitimacy paves the way for the emergence of a new force, since the existing structures of authority are losing their capacity to govern effectively. Through a Weberian reading of "The Second Coming", this study sheds light on the ongoing relevance of the text in contemporary discussions of political instability, leadership, and the shifting grounds of legitimacy.

Yeats is described as an "occultist and mage, a mystical patriot, whose search for images involved magical visions as well as literary tropes" (Allison, 2006, p. 185). The poet's early work was strongly influenced by Romanticism and was inspired by English poets such as Edmund Spenser, Percy Shelley and later William Blake, whose works he edited (Greenblatt, 2006, p. 2020). Irish folklore also influenced his writing and contributed to his lyrical and mystical style, representing themes of Irish mythology and Romantic ideals (Greenblatt, 2006, p. 2020). Notable works from this period include *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889) and *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* (1890). Later in his poetic career, Yeats "compressed and embodied his personal mythology in visionary poems of great scope, linguistic force, and incantatory power" as in the poem "The Second Coming" (Greenblatt, 2006, p. 2021). The poem symbolises the main features of modernist literature, including fragmentation, ambiguity and a sense of historical rupture. It also deals with history, mysticism and his concept of "gyres", cyclical historical patterns that serve as important symbols, expressing "paradoxes of time and eternity, change and continuity, spirit and the body, life and art" (Greenblatt, 2006, p. 2021). The "gyre", otherwise called the "vortex" or "funnel" and "reported in many mystic visions of the other world", was adapted by Yeats "for his historical system" (Surette, 1994, p. 137). He explains that the "whirl-swirl" in his poetry is "no longer a mere word" (Surette, 1994, p. 137). Yeats elaborates on his notion of gyre as follows:

> [gyre] has this deeper magic that will show you, not only the thoughts you knew about before but other thoughts you did not know of, old, drowned thoughts, hereditary thoughts; it will awaken the slumbering ancestral ghosts that haunt the brain; you will remember things you used to know and feel long, long ago. (as cited in Surette, 1994, p. 198)

Bloom (1972) suggests that "Yeats's gyres rise rather out of an entirely cyclic movement that he held to be present in every human consciousness, a movement of pure process, in which subjectivity and objectivity constantly interpenetrate, and then spin around, each within the other" (p. 223). Accordingly, Yeats's concept of the "gyre" represents a spiralling historical progression in which civilisations rise and fall in patterned cycles, ultimately signalling the end of an era and the onset of chaos. Moments of political transition, such as the fall of empires, authoritarian takeovers, or social upheavals, not only represent Yeats's vision but also explain Weber's concept of the crisis of legitimacy. Reading "The Second Coming" from a Weberian perspective points out how the gyre becomes a powerful symbol of political collapse and the unpredictable emergence of new authority structures.

A Weberian Reading of W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming"

"The Second Coming" (1919) consists of two stanzas. The first stanza describes a world spinning into chaos, while the second envisions the emergence of a new, enigmatic force. The poem opens with a powerful image of disorder:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. (Yeats, 1919, 1-4)

By focusing on the imagery of disintegration and chaos that Yeats presents in the opening lines, the poem "announces the birth of the antithetical era that will replace the Christian era" (Ross, 2009, p. 140). Yeats's concept of history, which he developed as a cyclical system characterised by roughly two-thousand-year epochs initiated by the arrival of an Initiate or Messiah, lends "startling force" to the poem to depict an impending historical transformation (Jeffares, 2001, pp. 184-185). The poem conveys a moment of transition in which the old world is losing its grip and a new force, potentially charismatic but also dangerous, is taking shape, reflecting Weber's theory of historical transformation and political crisis. The falcon and falconer symbolise the disconnection between authority and those it rules. In the Weberian sense, this moment represents the decline of traditional and legal-rational authority as societal structures disintegrate. Weber (2019) argues that all forms of rule are based on a belief in the legitimacy of the ruler, whether this belief is derived from tradition, legality, or charisma (p. 401). For their part, all rulers "seek to arouse and foster belief in their legitimacy" (Weber, 2019, p. 339). However, when this belief is undermined due to a failure to uphold tradition or legal principles, charismatic rule emerges, taking over other forms of governance, particularly during times of crisis, upheaval, or radical transformation (Weber, 2019, p. 401). In "The Second Coming," the image of the falcon losing touch with the falconer conveys the breakdown of the connection between authority and its subjects. This parallels Weber's concern that legitimacy fails when authority is no longer viewed as justified by those it governs. This detachment, particularly in traditional or legal-rational systems, results in "things falling apart", leading to what Weber (2019) defines as "Legitimitätsglaube" (belief in legitimacy) breaking down (p. 339).

Given that "The Second Coming" was written after World War I, it is essential to consider Yeats's poetic stance on the destruction caused by the conflict. In this context, Kendall (2013) explains that during the Great War, Yeats was reluctant to support Britain fully, as it was an imperialist power that had yet to grant Ireland Home Rule, which was a measure of self-governance long demanded by Irish nationalists (p. 21). To Yeats, the war was not a conflict that directly concerned either himself or Ireland. Instead, he was more deeply affected by the 1916 Easter Rising, an Irish rebellion against British rule that had a significant impact on his thinking (Kendall, 2013, p. 21). Despite the many Irish soldiers who died fighting for Britain in France and Belgium, Yeats did not publicly acknowledge their sacrifices, emphasising his focus on Ireland's struggle for independence rather than its role in Britain's war efforts (Kendall, 2013, p. 21). Taking this perspective into account, "The Second Coming" can be read not only as a response to the devastation of World War I but also as a reflection of Yeats's nationalistic concerns regarding Ireland's turbulent path to independence. Accordingly, the imagery of a collapsing world order, anarchy unleashed upon

society, and the uncertainty of what is to come in "The Second Coming" alludes to both the destruction of the war and the upheaval caused by the Irish nationalist struggle.

Yeats's use of the "widening gyre" as a symbol of historical cycles suggests that an established order stemming from tradition is dissolving. The falcon's break with the falconer symbolises lost authority and overlaps with Weber's view that legitimacy fails when power is no longer valid. This disengagement, particularly in traditional or legal-rational systems, leads to "things falling apart", which Weber refers to as a breakdown in the belief in legitimacy. Moreover, Yeats's phrase "mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" recalls Weber's fear of the consequences of a legitimacy vacuum. When traditional and rational-legal forms of authority collapse, societies can either descend into chaos or turn to charismatic leadership from which a new authority figure emerges that redefines legitimacy based on personal appeal rather than institutional continuity (Weber, 1978, p. 244). This shift towards an antithetical order is precisely what Yeats foresees, suggesting that the world is on the brink of radical change.

The second part of the first stanza is remarkable in relation to Weber's theory of political legitimacy, particularly the transition between different forms of authority:

> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity. (Yeats, 1919, 5-8)

These lines symbolise a moment of societal chaos in which established norms and institutions, whether political, legal, or moral, are collapsing. The "blood-dimmed tide" could represent the violent consequences of a breakdown in traditional and legal-rational authority, akin to the disintegration of imperial powers after World War I or the destabilisation caused by the Irish independence movement. The line "the ceremony of innocence is drowned" suggests that previous social or political values, possibly the ideals that once legitimised traditional rulers, are now overwhelmed by the tide of disorder. From a Weberian perspective, when a governing system loses its legitimacy due to war, revolution, or public disillusionment, societies experience turmoil as old structures collapse and new ones struggle to emerge (2019, p. 119). This validates Weber's idea that legitimacy is essential to maintaining order, and when it crumbles, violence and instability follow.

On the other hand, "the best lack all conviction" suggests that those who might uphold legal-rational authority or traditional values, such as intellectuals, moderate politicians, or established elites, become indifferent, disillusioned, or powerless in the face of upheaval. This erosion of authority points to a legitimacy crisis, weakening their ability to inspire trust or maintain order. Consequently, with "the worst are full of passionate intensity", Yeats anticipates the rise of demagogues and populist leaders who rely on charisma rather than institutional legitimacy. Weber (2019) notes that such figures do not derive authority from rational governance but from their ability to mobilise mass sentiment, usually by exploiting societal anxieties and offering radical solutions (p. 407). He further argues that "wherever legitimacy for this kind of rule is sought, it makes use of plebiscitary recognition by the sovereign people", typically elevating leaders "on a charismatic basis from among talented plebeians" (Weber, 2019, p. 407). In this framework, charismatic authority emerges not from

tradition or legal rationality but from belief in the exceptional qualities of the individual leader.

While this classical understanding emphasises the leader's perceived outstanding traits, some scholars have sought to provide a more layered interpretation or even challenge the conventional reading of Weber's concept of charisma. Notably, Joosse (2014) offers a thought-provoking reinterpretation that draws attention to the social constructionist dimensions of charisma. He argues that while Weber is usually misread as promoting a mystical or trait-based view of charismatic authority, his actual writings suggest tools for understanding charisma as a relational, socially constructed phenomenon, shaped by the acknowledgement and validation of followers (2014, p. 272). Rather than stemming from divine essence or innate qualities, charisma emerges from a dynamic of reciprocal recognition between leaders and their followers (Joosse, 2014, p. 272). This perspective emphasises that charismatic legitimacy is not a fixed attribute, but a flexible and context-dependent construct, built upon collective belief, and particularly effective in times of uncertainty or institutional collapse.

Yeats's second stanza functions as a single, interconnected prophetic vision rather than a collection of independent images. The apocalyptic imagery does not simply describe a fragmented decline but rather presents a coherent narrative of political rupture and the emergence of a new, unsettling order:

> Surely some revelation is at hand;
> Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
> The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
> When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
> Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
> A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
> A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
> Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
> Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (Yeats, 1919, 9-22)

With "Surely some revelation is at hand", the poem marks a decisive moment of change. This points to the failure of the existing world order and is consistent with Weber's concept of a crisis of legitimacy through which traditional and legal-rational authority collapses. The repetition of "The Second Coming" emphasises a transformative event, similar to how Weber describes the transition of societies from a stable government to a charismatic authority in times of turmoil. Weber (2019) argues that,

> "Charisma" is the personal quality that makes an individual seem extraordinary, a quality by virtue of which supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or properties are attributed to the individual: powers or properties that are not found in everyone and that are thought to be the gift of God or exemplary, rendering that individual a "leader" (Führer). This extraordinary property was originally applied to prophets, to individuals thought to have special therapeutic powers or to possess legal wisdom, to those who led bands of

> hunters, or to military heroes. As such, magical powers were attributed to these individuals. (p. 374)

In "The Second Coming", Yeats describes the emergence of a "rough beast" that is moving toward Bethlehem to be born, an apocalyptic figure whose arrival forebodes a dramatic shift in the world. The "beast" is described as having a "lion body and the head of a man", with a "gaze blank and pitiless as the sun". This formidable figure, who embodies a sense of power and menace, is unlike any ordinary human being. The image agrees with Weber's concept of charisma, in which an individual is seen as extraordinary, possessing powers or qualities that set them apart from the average person. The "rough beast" could be interpreted as a charismatic leader in Weber's sense, someone who represents an extraordinary power or aura attributed to them by the people or society, potentially signalling a new, disruptive phase in history. The "rocking cradle" evokes the birth of this figure and suggests the arrival of a new force poised to redefine the world. Dramatically, the predatory movements of this creature resemble how charismatic leaders typically exert influence: slowly and with an unsettling certainty that leads to significant change.

Like the charismatic figures described by Weber, the "beast" in the poem seems to possess an inherent power that both fascinates and terrifies. Tratner (2015) argues similarly that even though "we cannot pin down Yeats's 'rough beast' to what any particular political movement was advocating, we can see that his poem is picking up on anxieties and projections in politics which were as uncertain and vague as his 'rough beast'" (p. 73). These anxieties were not only reflective of the global instability following World War I but also echoed Ireland's own political turbulence. The 1916 Easter Rising, which deeply influenced Yeats, exemplifies the kind of rupture and transformation evoked in the poem, mirroring the collapse of old orders and the emergence of uncertain new ones. Therefore, while "The Second Coming" describes a more universal sense of historical upheaval, it expresses Yeats's ambivalent attitude to Ireland's struggle for independence and emphasises his nationalist concerns within a far-reaching historical and poetic framework.

Being "suspicious of the political milieu", Yeats's uncertainty is further reflected in his scepticism in the final lines of "The Second Coming", where he asks, "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" (Allison, 2006, p. 187; Yeats, 1919, 21-22). By depicting the transition from a crumbling system to an uncertain future, the poem raises a critical question: Does the collapse of legitimacy inevitably invite tyranny rather than transformation? Yeats implies a transition from one historical epoch to another, but rather than heralding a progressive transformation, the poet hints at an ominous force emerging in the void left by the old order. This coincides with Weber's concern that the breakdown of a rational or traditional order does not necessarily lead to a positive transformation but can instead result in the rise of a new and potentially tyrannical and dictatorial structure (2019, p. 407).

Yeats's understanding of the "gyre" is based on "the essential element of growth and life, representing the cyclical nature of the Ultimate Reality with the recurrent pattern of growth and decay, ebb and flow" (Izzo, 2009, p. 98). Similarly, Weber's view of the validity of legitimacy is "not a fixed state, but something requiring constant renewal" (2019, p. 468). Weber (2019) believes that legitimacy is intrinsically precarious, requiring continuous validation through political, social, and ideological mechanisms (p. 339). In this sense, both

Yeats's gyre and Weber's notion of legitimacy point to the inevitability of change, illustrating how stability is always provisional and subject to historical forces that drive renewal and decay. This sense of inevitable upheaval can also be supported by Donald Weeks's earlier observation that in "The Second Coming", the "association of the hawk with mechanism" and the image of the "widening gyre" may recall for Yeats a passage from *Prometheus Unbound*, thereby intensifying the poem's apocalyptic atmosphere (1948, p. 289). Weeks (1948) also suggests that the final image of the "rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem" straightforwardly invokes the idea of the Anti-Christ, reinforcing the poem's vision of a monstrous birth rather than a redemptive second coming (p. 291). This unsettling vision echoes Yeats's earlier poem "The Magi", where the wise men, "by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied," seek once again in Bethlehem the "uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor" (Weeks, 1948, p. 291). Here, "the bestial floor" signifies not a reaffirmation of sacred order, but the emergence of a more primal and disquieting force, which corresponds to the larger issue of instability and transformation inherent in both Yeats's and Weber's understanding of historical processes.

Conclusion

The Weberian reading of W.B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" exposes the instability of political and social legitimacy in which traditional sources of authority have disintegrated. In Weber's terms, the collapse of 'traditional' and 'legal-rational' legitimacy gives way to a chaotic interregnum characterised by uncertainty and the potential rise of new, unpredictable forms of authority. Similarly, Yeats's "The Second Coming" conveys the fragmentation of traditional authority, particularly through the vision of a "rough beast" approaching Bethlehem, which symbolises the rise of charismatic authority. By juxtaposing Yeats's poetic meditation on disintegration with Weber's analytical framework, the present study demonstrates how the poem can be interpreted as a forewarning of charismatic figures who arise in times of crisis. These unpredictable and potentially destructive figures offer a paradoxical solution to the chaos: either by restoring order through unconventional means or by exacerbating the disintegration of societal norms. In this respect, Weber's view that charisma, while a source of renewal, is inherently unstable agrees with Yeats's scepticism about whether the "rough beast" heralds a necessary rebirth or a deeper descent into disorder.

On the other hand, Weber's assertion that legitimacy requires continual renewal parallels Yeats's cyclical concept of history symbolised by the widening gyre. Both suggest that stability is a temporary construct, inevitably undermined by change. Just as Weber warns that the routinisation of charisma can reduce its transformative power, Yeats's depiction of the "rough beast" implies that the emergence of new authority does not guarantee a positive transformation. The poet's use of ambiguous and ominous imagery leaves the question open: Does the collapse of old systems invite a regenerative change, or does it mark the dawn of a more oppressive, tyrannical era? Hence, the significance of this study for the literature lies in its contribution to the understanding of "The Second Coming" as a timeless commentary on political instability, leadership, and the fragility of legitimacy. By combining Max Weber's theories on authority and political legitimacy with Yeats's apocalyptic imagery, this study offers a fresh interpretation of the poem. It not only reinterprets the central themes in light of political thought but also provides a new understanding of Yeats's critique of political power and the cyclical nature of history.

References

Allison, J. (2006). *Yeats and politics*. In M. Howes & J. Kelly (Eds.), The Cambridge companion to W. B. Yeats (pp. 185-205). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bloom, H. (1972). *Yeats*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greenblatt S. (2006). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Vol. 2* (pp. 2019-2053). New York & London: WW Norton &Company.

Jeffares, A. N. (2001). *W. B. Yeats: A new biography*. London: Continuum.

Izzo, D. G. (2009). *The influence of mysticism on 20th century British and American literature*. McFarland City: McFarland.

Joosse, P. (2014). Becoming a God: Max Weber and the social construction of charisma. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 14(3), 266-283.

Kendall, T. (Ed.). (2013). *Poetry of the First World War: An anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Preston, C. J. (2020). Teaching "Problematic" Yeats: Relevance Without Recuperation. International Yeats Studies, 4(1), 2. https://doi.org/10.34068/IYS.04.01.01

Ross, D. A. (2009). *Critical companion to WB Yeats: A literary reference to his life and work*. New York: Facts on File.

Surette, L. (1994). *The birth of modernism: Ezra Pound, TS Eliot, WB Yeats, and the occult*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP.

Tratner, M. (2015). Politics and modernist poetry. In A. Davis & L. M. Jenkins (Eds.), *A history of modernist poetry* (pp. 68-80). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weber, M. (2019). *Economy and society: A New Translation* (K. Tribe, Ed & Trans.). Harvard: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1921)

Weeks, D. (1948). Image and Idea in Yeats' The Second Coming. PMLA, 63(1), 281-292. https://doi.org/10.1632/459419

Yeats, W.B. (2012). *Complete poetry and plays*. East Sussex, United Kingdom: Delphi Classics.

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: April 10, 2024
Accepted: December 31, 2024

ALIENATED CHILDREN IN THE LITERARY NARRATIVES OF MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Hülya TAFLI DÜZGÜN[1]

Abstract

Few literary and psychiatric accounts from various cultures and eras provide insight into the psychopathology of Parental Alienation Syndrome and the familial relationships, particularly between parents and children. Parental issues often arise from a parent's lack of emotional stability or mental health challenges, leading to harmful intentions towards their children, such as infanticide or filicide. This paper aims to move beyond the idealized image of a happy family to explore the complexities of parent-child relationships. This paper examines how Parental Alienation Syndrome can adversely affect a child who experiences instances of infanticide and filicide in medieval England. Ultimately, this paper focuses on the interaction between literature and child psychiatry during this period and how they reflect the current events of the time.

Keywords: Medieval England, Infanticide, Filicide, Parental Alienation Syndrome, Literature.

[1] Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hülya Taflı Düzgün, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Erciyes University, Türkiye, ORCID 0000-0001-8513-7951, htafli@erciyes.edu.tr.

Introduction

Why did medieval parents resort to infanticide, filicide, or familicide? Did they commit these acts due to being non-compos mentis? What are the painful consequences for a child's future in medieval England if they survive an attempted murder by a parent? In this context, it can be challenging to differentiate between parental alienation syndrome and acts of infanticide, filicide, or familicide in medieval England. The word infanticide is first used in English in the seventeenth century, and it is difficult to figure out the medieval synonym. While Latin documents provide information regarding homicide, some Old-English records use formyrthrian, bearnmyrdhran, or overlaying (Graham, 1998, 275). In medieval England, parents committed crimes for various reasons, with a specific focus on infanticide/filicide records. These records inform that infanticide/filicide is a common act of misdemeanors due to *non-compos mentis* of a parent. (Hurnard 1969, Kellum 1973, Helmholz 1974, Hanawalt 1976, Butler 2007). Hanawalt suggests that Margery kills her baby daughter and forces her young son to sit in hot coals (1976, 131), and another woman beats and kills her ten-year-old son (131). Hurnard points out that the court judges a woman killing her daughter and son with an axe to be supervised by her kin (1969, 162). Butler focuses on Anabilla, wife of William Carter of Bulcote who kills her son and two daughters; Alice, wife of Reginald of Tibthorpe strangles her daughter Agnes; and Maud who kills her children (two sons and one daughter) in 1329 and Goda, wife of John Attebek who slays her son John and daughter Beatrice (2007, 73). Boswell provides information about a woman who kills her husband with the help of a lover because an insane murder is easier than a divorce, and Juliana Matte of Killingbury who drowns her one-year-old son in a well (1984, 10). *Non-compos mentis* is considered an excuse for the penance of a parent. Also, Mull notes that a wife resorts to infanticide after being rejected by the husband (1987, 119). Parental Alienation Syndrome happens when one parent tries to sabotage the child's relationships with other family members after a separation or divorce, even if infanticide, filicide, or familicide may occur due to non-compos mentis. Children who are manipulated by one parent to alienate them from the other parent may display signs associated with Parental Alienation Syndrome. These signs can include extreme, unjustified fear, disdain, or hostility toward the targeted parent. This behavior can be observed in certain families involved in child custody disputes and may be diagnosed based on a specific set of indicators. Child custody issues often lead to parental alienation syndrome, which can arise between parents as well as involving stepparents, grandparents, or other relatives. This syndrome occurs when a child unjustly targets a loving parent, typically due to indoctrination from the other parent (Gardner et al., 2006, 5). It's important to note that a child's hostility may be justified in cases of real parental abuse or neglect. Parental alienation can severely damage or destroy a child's bond with a loving parent, constituting a form of emotional abuse.

Although medieval historical records provide a foundation for understanding the complexities of infanticide and filicide, the concept of non-compos mentis is not applicable in this context. Instead, it somewhat parallels the notion of Parental Alienation Syndrome found in the Old French narrative *Le Fresne* and in the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone* from medieval England. This paper explores how and why parental alienation syndrome can harm a child's soul by looking at incidents of infanticide, filicide, familicide, and parental alienation syndrome in medieval England. In other words, this paper examines how literature and child psychiatry experiences in medieval England reflect the current events of that time.

The child in *Le Fresne*: A Case for Infanticide?

While there is uncertainty surrounding the identity of Marie de France, the author of *Le Fresne*, Mari likely authored the twelve short narrative poems, along with a General Prologue, found in Harley 978. These poems, known as *the Lais of Marie de France*, were likely composed during the late twelfth century and were possibly created for the court of Henry II Plantagenet and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine. While Marie, a medieval writer, reworked traditional tales to include more positive representations of women, some of the lais do not suggest this. Marie de France's Le Fresne starts with two knights who are neighbors in Brittany. They are both strong. One of them has twin boys while the other has a wife but no children. The father of the twins decides to give one of his sons to his friend. This way, each man will have a wife and a son, and the symmetry will be restored. The knight is happy for his friend, but his wife is confused and wonders why her neighbor would give away one of his sons. She says that the birth of twins means the mother is unfaithful because two children must have two fathers:

Nus savum bien qu'il i afiert:
Unques ne fu ne ja nen iert
Ne n'avendrat cele aventure
Qu'a une suie porteüre
Une femme deus enfanz eit,
Si dui humme ne li unt feit
(Ewert, 1980, ll.37-42) [2]

The legal system of the story allows the mother to avoid shame by spreading false information to her neighbors, and only the women who attended her know the truth. The poem's opening scene introduces a woman with two husbands and a supposed lover:

Verité est que ceste dame
Ad mut esté de bone fame.'
La gent qué en la meisun erent
Cele parole recorderent.
Asez fu dite e coneiie,
Par tute Bretaine seiie:
Mut en fu la dame haie,
Pois en dut estre maubailie;
Tutes les femmes ki l'oirent,
Povres e riches, l'en hairent (Ewert, ll. 57-56).[3]

[2] Both he and she are disgraced by this;
we know the truth of the matter all too well:
it never was and never will be
possible for such a thing to happen'
that awoman could have
two sons in one birth
unless two men had lain with her (Hanning and Ferrante, ll. 37-42).

[3] The fact is that she's a woman
who's always had a good reputation.
But the people in the household

Making comments that question the reputation and lineage of a knight can have serious negative consequences for the speaker. These comments can cause her to be looked down upon by all women who hear her words. It is important to be mindful of the impact of the words and avoid making such statements that harm others. The envious lady had previously spread a false rumor becomes pregnant this time and is punished for her jealousy:

La dame que si mesparla
En l'an meismes enceinta,
De deus enfanz est enceintie;
Ore est sa veisine vengie.
Desque a sun terme les porta
Deus filles ot, mut lipesa
Mut durement en est dolente
(Ewert, 1980, ll. 65-21).[4]

The lais is driven by envy. The lady sees her neighbor's sons as a reflection of her inadequacy. She falsely accuses her neighbor of wrongdoing to ruin her good fortune, and by doing so, she makes both appear illegitimate. Moreover, she suggests that even though she hasn't yet given birth to a male heir, she is still a loyal wife who will not produce illegitimate offspring. However, this time the gossipmaker will be pregrant, she will be put down into the unfair position. This is the reason why; she gets rid of one of her twin daughters and commits infanticide with the help of her servant:

L'un des enfanz me baillez ça
Jeo vus en deliverai ja,
Si que hunie ne serez
Ne ke jamés ne la verrez:

---

repeated the wife's words;
the matter was widely spoken of
and became known throughout Brittany.
The slanderous wife was hated for it,
and later made to suffer for it.
Every woman who heard about it,
rich or poor, hated her
(Hanning and Ferrante , ll. 47-56)

[4] The wife who had spoken so evilly
became pregnant herself that same year,
and was carrying twins
now her neighbor has her vengeance.
She carried them until her time came;
then she gave birth to two daughters;
she was extremely upset
and terribly sad about the situation.
(Hanning and Ferrante, ll. 65-71

A un mustier lageterai,
Tut sein e sauf le porterai (ll.109-114).[5]

The mother's extreme harshness towards her child is emphasized. She was willing to kill her daughter rather than admit to society that she had given birth to twin daughters. The lady protects her reputation and honor by murdering one of her children, Le Fresne and compounds her sin with the crime of infanticide. Hence, the lady is not in the status of non-compos mentis but a deliberate act. Luckily Le Fresne was raised by a group of nuns, and the abbess showed her great kindness. The nuns adopted, baptized, named, and raised Le Fresne as their daughter, providing her with a caring family-like environment. However, to prevent Parental Alienation Syndrome, Le Fresne's personal history should be removed from the context of the private lives of women. This will make it possible for Le Fresne's true royal identity to become public, legitimate, and complete. Regarding Parental Alienation Syndrome, a mother may cause her daughter to reject her father and other family members, leading to the daughter feeling alienated from her family. This can ultimately result in the daughter feeling abandoned, even though she is still alive and growing up. As time passes, the daughter's identity is revealed, leading to a family reunion and reconciliation:

“De ceo sui liez;
Unques mes ne ful[i] si haitiez;
Quant nostre fille avum trovee,
Grant joie nus ad Deu donee,
Ainz que lipechez fust dublez (ll. 485-489).[6]

When a mother causes her daughter to reject her father and other family members, it can result in parental alienation syndrome, which makes the daughter feel cut off from her family. Even if the daughter is still alive and developing, this may eventually cause her to feel abandoned. A family reunion and reconciliation result from the daughter's identity being revealed over time. The Old French *Amie and Amile* details a case of filicide committed by the father, rather than the mother, akin to the infanticide mentioned in *Le Fresne*:

Biax tres douz peres, dist l’anfes erramment,
Quant vos compains avra garissement
Se de nos sans a sor soi lavement,
Noz sommez vostre, de vostre engenrement,
Faire en poéz del tout a vo talent’ (Dembowski, 3000–3004).[7]

---

[5] Give me one of the babies;
I'lltake care of her for you,
so that you won't be disgraced;
you'll never see the child again.
I'll abandon her at a convent,
to which I’ll carry her safe and sound (ll.109-114).

[6] Her husband said, I’m delighted by this news; I was never so pleased. Since we’ve found our daughter, God has given us great joy, instead of doubling the sin (ll. 485-489)Li sires dit:

While the child is aware of the filicide, he accepts whatever his father offers to heal the leprosy of his father's best friend, Amis. As soon as the blood touches Amis, he is cured of his ailment. The mother becomes despondent and rushes to the room where her dead children lie. However, to her surprise, she finds them alive and perfectly healthy. This is because a miracle has taken place to reward the loyalty of the friends, who have been purified of their sin through their suffering, therefore there is no parental alienation syndrome. Amile's filicide is not a matter of non compos mentis but a deliberate act like Le Fresne, but this Old French hagiographical-like narrative provides a miraculous act.

The Child in *Boeve de Haumtone*: A Case for Familicide and Parental Alienation Syndrome

In the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*, an elderly count of Southampton named Gui marries a young Scottish princess enamored with the Emperor of Germany. Boeve, son of Gui, narrates the story of the mother of Boeve plotting familicide. She sends a messenger to Germany to inform the emperor to kill her husband, Gui:

Messager, dist ele, en Alemaine ore tost alez!

En Alemaine ja ne demorrez,

a le riche emperur de la meii part dirrez,

ke jeo lui envoie saluz e amistez;

e dites lui, ke il ne lese pur homme ke seit nez

ke le primer jur de may ne seit aprestez (Stimming, ll. 51-56).[8]

The wife is conspiring to slay her husband, and her husband, Gui, is unaware. The wife's malicious intentions stem from her negative feelings towards her elderly husband. She pretends to be sick and asks Gui to hunt for fresh boar meat to help her recover. Gui, who loves his wife, goes hunting. However, despite his love and loyalty, Gui's trust and lack of suspicion towards his wife puts him in a powerless position. As a result, his hunting trip ends in tragedy and leads to his death. Gui becomes a victim of a perfidious consensus between the emperor of Germany and his wife, which ultimately leads to his downfall. Despite this, Gui remains loyal to his wife and son and is willing to protect and save them. Gui's love for his family is evident when he refuses to kill the count, pleads for mercy, and offers everything except his son and wife. The Lady of Hampton orders the Emperor of Germany to execute Count Gui by beheading him with his gilded sword, so her deliberate familicidal act takes place:

---

[7] Dear sweet father,' the child answers immediately,'Since your friend will be cured if he is bathed in our blood, you can do as you wish, for we are yours, from your engendering

[8] Messenger, she said, now go swiftly to Germany. Don't linger there, but say to the noble emperor on my behalf that I send him friendly greetings. And tell him no one alive should prevent him from beeing ready on the first day of May (Weiss, 9)

Lui glut sache le branc, dount le point fu deoré,

e feert lui quens Guioun, la teste lui ad coupé

un messager apele e lui dist ses voluntez:

“Frere”, dist il, “a la dame de Haumtone tost irez,

de la mei part saluz lui dirrez

e ceste teste ov vus lui porterez” (189-94)[9]

Upon receiving Gui's decapitated head, she becomes a widow with a son from her previous marriage. She fulfills her promise and marries the king of Germany. At their wedding ceremony, Boeve appears and recognizes the mother's familicidal wishes. According to Gardner, rage is a type of anger that is so intense that it can lead to irrational behavior (2006, 34). Similarly, Kohut argues that rage can arise from a desire for revenge or justice after experiencing harm or wrongdoing (1972, 360). The romance suggests an example of the lady's revenge-driven rage. The lady is forced to marry Gui instead of the Emperor of Germany, whom she loves. In response, she seeks revenge by punishing Gui for his lack of understanding about her relationship with the emperor. She also gives birth to a son, Boeve, but this does not diminish her desire for revenge. Her rage and desire for revenge are deliberate and purposeful rather than the result of mental instability.

When Boeve is ten years old, he witnesses the deteriorating condition of his deceased father and also his mother's desire to harm both his father and himself. Due to her anger towards Gui, his mother expressed hatred towards Boeve and threatened to take away his inheritance. She reveals her past and begins a new life with a new husband. Boeve responds by insulting his mother and calling her a prostitute. He loses his father, and his mother acts like an enemy toward him. This inadequate parenting leads to his alienation, and he insults the targeted parent due to his psychopathological vulnerability.

> While a child's reactions can be important, a mother's actions speak louder than words. During her wedding ceremony, she wishes harm upon her son and orders her tutor, Saboath, to kill him. Her desire to harm him stems from the fact that he is a reminder of her deceased husband. Though unable to carry out her wish, Saboath collects an animal's blood and covers the child's clothes with it to make it seem as if he is dead, before hiding him away for safety. Boeve, the child, becomes a shepherd and eventually claims his father's lands. He faces opposition from the porter, who accuses him of being born out of wedlock. Though Boeve does not confirm the accusations against him and his mother, he refuses to accept the label. Boeve's feelings of anger and hatred towards his mother resurface.

[9] ‘Brother’, The villain drew his sword, with its gilded tip, struck count Gui, and cut off his head. He called a messenger and told him his wishes. “Brother”, he said, go quickly to the lady of Hampton, greet her from me, and take this head to her (30).

Boeve kills a porter who mistreats him. He then goes to the palace to talk to his stepfather and claim his lands. However, his stepfather behaves inadequately and alienates Boeve. As a result of feeling alienated, Boeve strikes his stepfather and wounds him. This angers his wicked mother:

La dame prent son fiz, que mult out feloun quer,
deus chevalers apele si lor va demaunder
que il preissent l'enfaunt si l'alassent mener,
taunt que il venissent a port de la mer,
e si il trovent marchaunz que li volent achater,
que il le vendent saunz point delaier,
ou si nul ne trovent, que il le facent neer (346-52).[10]

Boeve's mother changes her mind regarding how to punish him. Instead of hanging or flaying him, she decides to banish him from his father's land and abandon him, with the intent of familicide. After her trade, the merchants sail to Egypt. Boswell explains that in medieval records, it was a common act of abandonment among Englishmen to sell or donate their children (1988, 281). This abandonment can be referred to as murdering babies and children, and it can be asserted with the terms of oblatio (donation of a child to a monastery) and exposition (1984, 18; 1988, 228). Boswell also provides an example from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who buys a five-year-old boy for a small amount and finds another boy at Caen, and these children grow up in the church (1988, 282). It is common to sell and buy children in medieval England, and Boeve reflects this. The mother sells her son Boeve to the Saracen merchants. Boeve's sale is not an oblatio but an exposio, leading to familicide after his father's death.

In the Old French *Le Fresne* and *Amie et Amile*, there is an attempt to murder infants or children by their family members. These children are abandoned by their family members, but the concept of Parental Alienation Syndrome is not as evident in Boeve's condition in the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*. Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) refers to a situation where a parent intentionally causes the child to feel alienated. This can ultimately lead to the child being abandoned, which is a form of infanticide/filicide. Gardner believes that prolonged conflicts between parents can lead to psychiatric disturbances (1985; 1999, 195). According to Johnston, an alienated child doesn't have positive feelings or beliefs towards their family due to negative experiences (2004, 762). In Boeve's case, the loss of his father makes him upset and angry. His mother then quickly marries the emperor of Germany after his father's death, which makes him hate her and reject motherhood. Boeve is filled with anger, fear, and a sense of alienation when he is sold to merchants and taken to Egypt. On his way, he weeps and remembers his deceased father. His mother commits filicide, and her actions cause parental alienation, which poisons his soul. Gardner (1999), Gordon (1998), Baker (2007), and Lowenstein (2006) argue that this type of psychological injury sets up difficulties for the child in their adolescent and adult life, including anger, lack of self-confidence, loss of self-esteem, and depression. When parents act destructively, the

[10] The evil-hearted lady took her son, called two knights, and asked them to seize him and take him into the harbor. If they found any merchant who wanted to buy him, they were to sell him without delay, and if not, they were to drown him (55)

child suffers, and as they grow up, they may also act destructively towards their spouse and children. Such psychological effects of the PAS work well with Boeve. He is now in Egypt with the merchants. He introduces himself to the court of king Hermine. While providing information about himself and his lineage, his rage towards his mother and step-father continues:

Dount dist li emfes: "En Engletere fu ne,

fiz au counte Guioun de Haumtone la cite;

ma mere le fist tuer a doel e a vilté,

un emperur l'ad pris estre ma volunté.

Mes si puse taunt vivre, si me eid la mere de!

ke puse porter armes, mult eher serra compré."

Lui rois le oi si en prist graunt pité (ll. 386-92).[11]

Boeve abandoned by his father and stripped of his lands, now lives far away from Southampton. Both physically and spiritually harmed, and his soul suffers due to parental alienation. Later, Boeve approaches the king with honesty and earns his pity. The king of Egypt likes Boeve and becomes his fostering father, teaching him everything he needs to know to become a knight. During his time in Egypt, the king's daughter, Josiane falls in love with the Boeve. However, his damaged soul by parental alienation pushes him to reject Josiane's hand:

il n'i ad roi, ceo crei, en tretut le mound

ne prince ne admiré ne counte ne baroun,

que il ne vus desirrunt, si il veient vostre fasoun (683-85)[12]

Boeve lacks self-confidence as he does not value himself as much as the other princes or counts, despite being the son of a count. He neither owns any lands nor trusts women, and he has no intention of getting married. According to Gordon, PAS passes from one generation to the next, and an alienated child may act negatively towards a spouse and children (1998). Similarly, Baker focuses on the transmission of narcissism, suggesting that a narcissistic child becomes a narcissistic partner, leading to alienation from childhood to maturity (2007). Boeve's relationship with Josiane exposes his awkward attitude stemming from his vicious mother. Despite Josiane's persistent efforts, Boeve refuses to have intimacy with her. However, Josiane offers to convert to Christianity: pur la vostre

[11] Then the child said: I was born in England, son of Count Gui of the city of Hampton. My mother had him killed in pain and ignominy, an emperor took her against my wishes. But so help me, mother of God, if I can live to bear arms, he will pay for it dearly'. The king heard him and had great pity (2008, 62).

[12] There is no king I believe in the whole world, no prince, emir, count, or baron who would not desire you if they saw your face (83).

amour prendrai cristienté (l.769).[13]

After a series of events, Boeve and Josiane get married. However, Boeve proves to be an unworthy husband, unable to take good care of his wife. Even though they have a usual husband-wife relationship, Boeve fails to be a supportive partner. For instance, when Josiane gives birth to twin boys in the woods, Boeve and Terri return to the shelter to find only the newborn twins, unable to locate Josiane. They search for her in far-off realms but eventually give up. They find foster families for the twins, and Boeve technically marries the princess of Civile for seven years instead of lamenting or searching for Josiane. After seven years, Josiane finds Boeve in Civile, and they reunite, take back their children from their foster parents, and live together again. Towards the end of the story, the affectionless mother-son relationship reappears. Boeve's mother dies, but Boeve remains idle and indifferent, showing no emotion towards her death. As a mature man, Boeve returns to Southampton to claim his father's lands. After his mother commits suicide by throwing herself from the top of the tower, Boeve looks unconcerned by her death and does not weep.

Literature within psychiatry produces writings about psychopathology and Parental Alienation Syndrome, with a particular focus on the Old *French Le Fresne* and the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*. Misdemeanors committed by parents can be attributed to their non-compos mentis, whereas psychopathology, as a psychiatric disturbance, refers to mental cases where parents have infanticidal, filicidal, or familicidal wishes. This paper explored how the relationship between parents and children is much more complex than traditional family structures suggest. In medieval England, infanticide, filicide, and familicide took place, which led to the damaged soul of the child through Parental Alienation Syndrome. Medieval historical and literary records provide an outline of the central elements of psychopathology in the literary narratives of medieval England. Psychopathology intersects with psychiatric disturbance, known as Parental Alienation Syndrome. Unlike Le Fresne, Boeve suffers from soul damage due to familial and spousal alienation from childhood to adulthood, culminating in a familicide, therefore to his parental alienation syndrome.[14]

Works Cited

Baker, A. J. L. (2007). *Adult children of parental alienation syndrome: Breaking the ties that bind*. New York: W. Norton.

Boswell, J. E. (1984). “Expositio and Oblatio: The Abandonment of Children and the Ancient and Medieval Family” The American Historical Review, 89,1, 10–33.

[13] ‘I’ll be a Christian for love of you’ (86).

[14] I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Dean of Research at Erciyes University for providing the essential office and research facilities at the ArGePark Research Center. Also, I would like to thank Erciyes University Scientific Research Project Center (BAP) for funding my project (SBA-2023-12524).

Boswell, J. E. (1988). *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to The Renaissance*. New York: Pantheon.

Butler, S. M. (2007). "A Case of Indifference? Child Murder in Later Medieval England. Journal of Women's History" 19, 4, 59–82.

Danon, S., & Samuel N. (1981). *Ami and Amile.* French Literature Publications Company.

Dembowski, Peter F. (1969). *Ami et Amile: Chanson de geste.* Librairie Ho- noré Champion

Ewert, A. (1980). Lais. Oxford, B. Blackwell.

Gardner, R. A. (1999). "Differentiating between parental alienation syndrome and bona fide abuse-neglect" *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 27, 2, 97–107.

Gardner, R. A. (1999). "Family therapy of the moderate type of parental alienation syndrome. The American Journal of Family Therapy, 27, 3, 195–212.

Gardner, R. A., Sauber, R. S., & Lorandos, D. (2006). *International Handbook of Parental Alienation Syndrome: Conceptual, Clinical and Legal Considerations*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Limited.

Gordon, R. (1998). "The Medea complex and the parental alienation syndrome: When mothers damage their daughter's ability to love a man". In *The mother-daughter relationship: Echoes through time*, 207–225, eds. G. H. Fenchel & J. Aronson. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson.

Graham D. Caie. (1998). "Infanticide in an Eleventh-Century Old English Homily" Notes and Queries, 45, 3, 275–276.

Greenacre, P. (1950). "Special Problems of early female sexual development. The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child" 5,1, 122–38.

Hanawalt, B. (1976). "The Female Felon in Fourteenth-Century England". In Women in Medieval Society, 125–40, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hanning, R. W., & Joan M. Ferrante. (1982). The Lais of Marie de France. Durham, N.C., Labyrinth Press.

Helmholz, Richard H. (1974-75). "Infanticide in the Province of Canterbury During the Fifteenth Century" *History of Childhood Quarterly,* 2, 379–90.

Hurnard, N. D. (1969). *The King's Pardon for Homicide before A.D. 1307*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Johnston, J. R. (2004). "Children of divorce who reject a parent and refuse visitation: Recent research and social implications for the alienated child" *Family Law Quarterly*, 38, 4, 757–775.

Kellum, Barbara A. (1973). "Infanticide in England in the Later Middle Ages" *History of Childhood*

Quarterly, 1, 3, 367–88.

Kerényi, Karl (1979). *Goddesses of Sun and Moon*. Texas: Spring Publications.

Kohut, H. (1972). "Thoughts on narcissism and narcissistic rage" *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,* 27, 1, 360–400.

Lefkowitz, M. R. & Maureen B. Fant. (2016). *Women's Life in Greece & Rome*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Lowenstein, L. (2006). "The psychological effects and treatment of the parental alienation syndrome". In *International handbook of parental alienation syndrome*, 292–301, eds. R. Gardner, R. Sauber, & D. Lorandos. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Mull, D. & J.D. Mull (1987). "Infanticide among the Tarahumara of the Mexican Sierra Madre. In *Child survival: anthropological perspectives on the treatment and maltreatment of children*, 113–134, ed. N. Scheper-Hughes. Reidel: Dordrecht.

Richard A. Gardner (1985). "Recent Trends in Divorce and Custody Litigation" *Academy Forum*, 29, 2, 3–7.

Wallerstein, J. S., & Blakeslee, S. (2004). *Second chances: Men, women, and children a decade after divorce*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Weiss, J. (2008). *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui De Warewic: Two Anglo-Norman Romances*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: January 17, 2025
Accepted: March 4, 2025

Interpreting Western Iraq Metaphor in the Scope of Food and Relationship - Semantic Study

Jumaah HAMAD [1]

Irfan TOSUNCUOĞLU [2]

Abstract

We can look at the ways of shedding light on regional cultural dynamics and personal communications through the metaphors on their food and social environment. In areas in which cultural traditions are strictly related to joint food experience, research on food bills are often emphasized in the transfer of complex social and emotional consequences. For example, research has shown that in many social and family contexts, serving food as a means of transporting emotions such as love, power or conflict. Food can be symbolized to compassion and hospitality, but he can also show energy dynamics, such as power structure or food use to create tasks in relationships. Lupton (1994) examination as a tool for communication and how to influence the rituals affect social relations (Teoh, 2023). Similarly, the food exchange and symbolic can be a reflection of the broader social institutions ideal and sharing, but detection of restrictions or injustice. This method is suitable for food studies that examine how food behaviors reflect cultural identities (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).

Keywords: Western Iraq, food, relationship, hospitality

[1] MA, KARABUK UNIVERSITY , Institute of Graduate Studies, Department of English Language and Literature, jomaaasad24@gmail.com, ORCID : 0009-0008-5271-735X

[2] Assist. Prof. Dr. KARABUK UNIVERSITY, FACULTY OF LETTERS, irtosun@yahoo.com, ORCID :0000-0002-0213-3574

1. Introduction

The term "metaphor" originates from the Greek word "metaphora," which means "transfer." The English translation of this word is "to bear or carry." According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, n.d.) The meaning of metaphor is hence the process of bringing about a transformation of something. In the realm of rhetoric, metaphors are recognised as a method that contrasts two things that appear to be quite different from one another (Aljanada & Alfaisal, 2020). In the world of literature, metaphors are utilised frequently, and they may be found in every type of writing, from poetry to prose and from essays to epics. Metaphors are very significant when it comes to reading carefully and enjoying what you are reading since they are used by authors like poets and novelists to bring their literary images to life. literary works (Dur, 2006). Once again, Aristotle should be credited with establishing the intimate connection that exists between metaphor and literature.

According to Steen (1994, p. 27), the relationship between metaphor and literature is the kind of relationship that is fairly close. The reason for this is that Aristotle's Poetics contains a section that discusses metaphor. "To be good at metaphor is a sign of natural genius," he remarked, and he explained that it is natural since it "cannot be consciously cultivated." learnt from anyone else's experience. As a result of the perception that metaphor served merely a rhetorical purpose, literary academics considered metaphor in writing to have an artistic purpose, and as a result, they neglected the significance of the reader's ability to comprehend the process or to participate in its production. According (Tay, 2014; cited in Aljanada, & Alfaisal, 2020) Tay explained that: "We don't only describe, but also understand one thing in terms of another by transferring or "mapping" knowledge about one concept (the'source concept') to another (the 'target concept')", (pp.52-53). (Al-Kadi, p. 513; cited in Aljanada, & Alfaisal, 2020) Al-Kadi states that “A language, in essence, is a vessel that contains and exposits culture, thoughts, and history of a given nation. In all languages, there are several devices to convey and perceive cultural aspects and ideas.” also Torlakova (2014, p. 1) stresses that “metaphors help people not only describe an issue in terms of their own way of conceptualizing it but also persuade their readers to see and construct reality in their way.” The Arabic language is diglossic as it has two principal variants: Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic. Informal Arabic possesses a wealth of metaphorical terms. Colloquial Arabic is rich in metaphorical phrases. To investigate Food Conceptual Metaphors in Arabic, it is essential to first examine the contributions of the renowned linguist of Classical Arabic, Abdulqader Aljurjani.

(Hashim, 1994; cited in Aljanada, & Alfaisal, 2020) Aljurjani defines metaphor as the transference of a word from its established meaning to an alternative interpretation, using the term in a manner distinct from its original understanding by users. For Aljurjani, this use is not fixed because it is "arriya / a:'ri:ya/" ; that is: borrowed, (p. 30). Classical Arabic (Al-Fusha) has two forms of metaphors according to Aljurjani:

1.True Metaphors (استعارة مُفيدة /isteʕara mufi:dəh/) which create new meaning when

used. Aljurjani provided several illustrations of the True Metaphor, the most straightforward being/ صافحت اسدا/safahtu asadan/ I shook hands with a lion), The term 'lion' is used here to denote a guy of exceptional bravery, so introducing an exaggerated connotation.

2.Untrue Metaphors (استعارةغيرمُفيدة / isteʕara ɣeir mufi:dəh/) that do not generate new meaning when used. The complex system of cultural practices, language and social relations are

recognized by interpreting the metabolic and relations between Western Iraq. In the Middle East, especially in Iraq, food serves more than just nutrition, but is a symbolic language transmission virtues such as hospitality, good and social peace. Imitation of food sharing is a reflection of further social societies. Bread and other specialized dishes have a symbolic meaning of friendship and trust in the Bedouin and the rural Iraqi tradition. Expressions like "breaking bread", which represents unity and reconciliation, are examples. Food systems such as "world salt" emphasize loyalty and humility. According to Al-Azzawi (2010), community meals serve to strengthen familial relationships and are frequently coupled with rituals that reflect togetherness and solidarity within tribes or families (p. 45). The idea of food also brings attention to the symbolic importance of communal meals in promoting social harmony. Also, family mealtimes are highlighted in the study by (Hamburg et al, 2014), which focusses on the emotional ties that form when people eat together. These meals act as forums for dialogue, strengthening bonds among the family and settling disputes. The role of communal rituals, such as eating together, in strengthening the "collective conscience" is further discussed by Emile Durkheim. They serve to maintain cultural continuity by serving as both pragmatic and symbolic manifestations of oneness (Durkheim, 1912, p. 47). Iraqi Arabic also makes metaphorical use of the cultural associations of sweetness and bitterness to represent feelings, connections, and events in life. Proverbs and poetry often use these metaphors to illustrate how language and food are combined to convey common cultural understandings. As pointed out by Holes (2004) in his linguistic studies of Arab culture (p. 76), these metaphors frequently represent personal and collective identities with deeper layers of meaning. Food analogies are extremely important for communicating feelings, attitudes, and cultural customs among Iraqi-speaking cultures. Idioms about food serve as representations of both real-life events and more abstract concepts like unity, loyalty, and reciprocity.

3. Short literature review

The primary objective of this research is to carry out an investigation into specific metaphorical expressions within the cultural framework of Western Iraq. The purpose of this study is to investigate the process of using or employing metaphorical language in communication, particularly with regard to terms that are associated with relationships, food, or work environments, for example, "You look like a cake" is used to describe a beautiful, kind person. In Western Iraq, the purpose of this study is to collect and analyze expressions in order to determine the fundamental reasons for their usage and the manner in which they communicate societal values, cultural beliefs, and norms that are associated with work and relationships. The Cultural Dimension such as examining how this metaphor manifests in Western society and how it influences cross-cultural relationships and divergent cultural identities and linguistic dimension, it involves analyzing the terms and ideas utilized in metaphors, as well as how to modify their meanings and use them in various situations in addition political dimension for example recognizing the ways in which this metaphor influences foreign policy, international relations, and the way in which nations engage with contemporary political challenges. Some narratives focus on the overall social and cultural repercussions of this happening on a societal level, while others may focus on the unique experiences of those individuals and how the metaphor affects their life. Both types of narratives are possible.

4. Related study

It necessitates an awareness of food and how it symbolizes relationships and societal Institutions. Studies indicate that communal eating customs function as metaphors for broader social and cultural dynamics in addition to strengthening links within families or communities. There is a lot of research on the cultural and symbolic significance of sharing food in regard to

Hospitality and Food in Arab Culture. In the scope of metaphorical expressions in Arab culture, El-Zahra (2019) explores food metaphors in Tunisian Arabic proverbs, highlighting their prevalence and metaphorical significance. It categorizes target domains using metaphor theories and emphasizes embodiment theory, identifying three main metaphors: HUMAN BEING IS FOOD, EMOTIONS ARE FOOD, and LIFE IS FOOD.

Additionally, a notable study by Abu-Shihab (2022), titled The Use of Metaphorical Expressions in Jordanian Arabic among Jordanians Living in Irbid District, his article examines food-related metaphors in Jordanian Arabic, analyzing idioms and proverbs collected through surveys. It categorizes these metaphors into various domains, illustrating how food serves as a source for conceptualizing ideas, experiences, temperament, and more. In scope of metaphorical expressions in Iraqi culture metaphors, for example, Al-Mohammed (2015) conducted a study on Metaphors of Iraqi dialects, focusing on how the metaphors in Iraq reflect social relations, he explores how abstract thought in Iraqi Arabic is understood through metaphorical mappings from the concrete domain of food and cooking, supporting the cognitive theory of metaphor. It analyzes idiomatic expressions reflecting this relationship, highlighting the metaphor's significance in language and cognition.

Similarly, in cross-cultural contexts, Lakoff and Johnson's seminal work, Metaphors We Live By (1980), the book emerges from a shared concern about the inadequacies of dominant views on meaning in Western philosophy and linguistics. Authors Mark and George, united by their interest in metaphor, argue that traditional theories overlook its significance in understanding language and experience. Their collaboration revealed that existing assumptions in Western thought hinder meaningful discourse. They propose an experientialist approach, emphasizing human experience and understanding over objective truth, to better address the complexities of meaning in everyday life.

In addition, Saban (2004) his study analyzed metaphors from 1,142 prospective Turkish teachers describing "teacher." Participants provided 64 valid metaphors, revealing 10 conceptual themes. Gender and study program type significantly influenced six themes, highlighting metaphors as valuable for understanding teachers' professional perspectives. in Western Iraq, may represent either more specific social standards like hospitality, generosity, and community solidarity, or more general ones like close connections and the reciprocity of care.

2. Methodology

We explore how food and relationships are used in Western dialectics in our work entitled "interpreting the Iraqi metaphors in scope of Food and Relationship." In this study, a qualitative descriptive approach was utilised, and the primary attention was placed on the categorisations of the ways in which food metaphors are utilised in everyday experiences. The conceptual thinking of the tires to analyze expressions represented by the food terms is metaphorically aspects of human relations, such as love or social relations. For example, a person described as a "the apple of one's eyes" means a person or thing that someone loves very much (from, Merriam-Webster. n.d.). Data were acquired from a variety of high school students participating in the study living in Hawija City, Ibn Al-Atheer private school, These metaphors, reflecting cultural values and social standards, confirm the integrated food role in

everyday life and their symbolic communication with personal relationships. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding of the cultural context in semantic analysis, as the metaphors are deeply rooted in the destitute experiences and traditions of the speakers.

3. Findings

The aim of this study is to interpret and analysis the western Iraqi metaphor, which was specifically selected for this study due to its geographical locations, historical significance and unique cultural and linguistic features formed by tribal traditions. This area is a crossroads and the effects of blending heritage for urban settlements and we try to find the main reasons behind using such specific expressions and how these expressions impact their way in their thought and mainly their life. To do that we have to break down and clarify the meaning of chosen metaphors from different students in different texts in order to expose their historical and cultural importance. Food metaphors topics are seen as relevant to people's everyday lives and are significant components of their cultures and customs. Additionally recognizing how metaphorical expressions are impacted on social and cultural relations among communities. In other words, investigating the ways in which the Western Iraq food metaphor interacts and influences cultural and social connections. Then studying historical context of the region. Among Iraqis residing in the Hawija district, an Arabic dialect where the western part of Iraq is located. The individual's age, gender, and a consideration given to educational opportunities were examined in detail (Abu-Shihab, 2022). The measuring device that was utilised in the research was presented to the participants in a concise manner with an introduction. First, the meaning of the metaphor was explained to the audience. To continue, a number of examples of metaphors were shown there. Then, they were given ten to twenty minutes in which to answer the questions. throughout the questionnaire (Saban, 2008).

Within a time, frame of around ten to twenty minutes, the students were given the opportunity to articulate the metaphors that they had in mind regarding the idea of food. The papers and data that make up the fundamental data source for the research in question are the sheets that were distributed to the students and that they were required to fill out.

In the data collection form, credentials of students were not requested. There was a beginning section asking their age, gender, and their class at the beginning of the survey. In the remaining section, they were asked to answer the following questions in their language (Arabic), and then I translated them into English (Aljanada & Alfaisal, 2020, p. 105):

1. Enumerate the most extensive collection of idioms and proverbs utilised in your dialect that incorporate the word "to eat.".

2. Enumerate the maximum amount of idioms and proverbs utilised in your dialect that incorporate the verb "to drink."

3. Enumerate the maximum amount of idioms and proverbs utilised in your dialect that incorporate the verb "to cook" alongside any other culinary verbs.

4. Enumerate the most numerous idioms and proverbs utilised in your dialect that include cooking utensils.

5. Enumerate the most extensive collection of idioms and proverbs utilised in your dialect that incorporate verbs related to eating, drinking, cooking, food preparation, and kitchen tools to characterise individuals' traits, habits, nature, appearance, and manners.

Many metaphors include a complex structure that is challenging to comprehend and susceptible to varied interpretations, as they incorporate straightforward elements derived from diverse concepts (Roth, 1993; cited in Saban, 2008, p. 2171). In this regard, grasping the true significance of metaphors is paramount. significant yet complex matter. Two unstructured enquiries were enquired of prospective instructors throughout the data gathering phase of this research aims to address this issue (Saban, 2004, 2008).

In this particular investigation, the method of content analysis was utilised in order to assess the feedback and data that was obtained from the students. The purpose of the content analysis is to arrive at conclusions that can be articulated in a coherent manner based on the information that was gathered from the students. The idea that is connected to this is that in descriptive analysis, data in the form of summary and comment are exposed to a procedure that is more in-depth and comprehensive in content analysis (Tosuncuoğlu, 2018).

The food metaphor separation was conducted in three phases. The following phases can be articulated as outlined by Saban (2008, p. 2171):

1. Naming metaphors/labelling
2. Classification of researchers, and
3. Determination of reliability.

Naming Stage:
When we reached this point in the process, the metaphors that were generated by the students who took part in the research were temporarily listed in alphabetical order. For this reason, it was determined whether or not the metaphors that were written on the papers of the pupils were understandable and unique (Tosuncuoğlu, 2018, p. 683).

Classification Stage:
The classification step consisted of separating each metaphor and listing them according to the similarities or characteristics that they shared with other metaphors.

Validity and Reliability Stage:
Determine if the research tool measures the concept accurately.

Table 1 The number of the participants, level education and gender

Level education	male	female
4th preparatory	8	6
5th preparatory	10	8
6th preparatory	10	10
Total	28	24

4. Discussion

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert that the conceptual framework of humans is fundamentally metaphorical. To elucidate that concept, they provide instances of concepts and conceptual metaphors in their book Metaphors We Live By.; such as argument is war, theories (and arguments) are buildings, ideas are food, ideas are people, ideas are plants, ideas are products, ideas are commodities, ideas are resources, ideas are money, (pp.124-127)

According to Torlakova (2014, p. 2) assures that "the reader interprets the text in his/ her own way because he/ she understands it in terms of personal background knowledge and a personal value system. He/ she is also influenced by the pragmatic effect intrinsic to metaphor itself and by connotation due to the context surrounding a particular metaphor."

5.1. Cooperation is sharing food: In Islam, sharing food signifies compassion and concern for others, a principle that is closely mirrored in Arabian culture. For example/حط خبزاته على خبزاتي/ hataati ealaa khubzatik/ (He added his bread to mine) This means a person shares their food (bread) with another. It is usually used to refer to cooperation between two people.

5.2. Ideas are food: This collection of phrases in Iraqi Arabic include food-related idioms and proverbs that draw parallels between concepts and food, since both may be bitten, tasted, consumed, swallowed, digested, and devoured (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 125). For example /هضم الفكرة / hadm alfikra (he digested the idea) it means A person is unequivocally convinced that a perspective, concept, or cause is valid after contemplating it for a period. This refers to an individual who is thoroughly persuaded of a notion after careful contemplation and analysis. The act of consuming food is not finalised until digestion occurs. This procedure requires time, as does contemplation. Upon full digestion, the meal becomes beneficial to the body. Following the same analogy, after a concept has been assimilated, it is now time to implement it (Aljanada & Alfaisal, 2020, p. 97).

5.3. Temperament is food: This collection of terms in Arabic signifies culinary idioms and proverbs that draw parallels between temperament and food, illustrating the essence of some individuals. Some individuals are as amiable as honey, while others possess a bitter disposition. Such as /اكل رأسي/ akul rasi(he ate my head). This indicates that someone persistently pressured me until I could no longer endure it and acquiesced as a consequence. It is typically employed to rationalise the speaker's acquiescence to actions they did not intend to undertake, or to characterise an individual who persistently pesters. (Aljanada & Alfaisal, 2020, p. 99).

5.4. Going through an experience is eating it: This collection of phrases in Arabic includes food-related idioms and proverbs that draw a parallel between experiencing something and consuming it, as both involve the act of placing something in the mouth. biting, masticating, and attempting to ingest it. The process occasionally requires time. is challenging and may potentially harm one's dental health. Bitter food induces an unpleasant sensation. flavour and a lesson to refrain from consuming it again. Like / اكل الكتب/akil alkutub/ (He ate the books) This indicates that an individual is accustomed to studying with such intensity that he consumes all material pertinent to the subject at

hand. This is analogous to the English metaphor in (He ate the books). (Aljanada & Alfaisal, 2020, p. 98).

5.5. Deceiving is mixing ingredients: This category of phrases in Arabic refers to culinary idioms and proverbs that link deception to the act of cooking. Such as / وضع السم بالعسل / wade alsum bialeasal (He puts poison into honey) This indicates that an individual's objectives are malevolent, as they attempt to offer seemingly innocuous assistance when, in truth, they have ulterior motives. Conspiring to get varied outcomes. It is typically employed to caution us against succumbing to the ostensibly benign and innocuous plots. (Aljanada & Alfaisal, 2020, p. 101).

In Arabic world language reflects human standards and social standards, often consistent with conceptual theory. In addition, the targets, such as those associated with aspects such as "higher" or "down", carry emotional or physical cases in Arab culture. It is necessary to comprehend the linguistic background and cultural significance of food in Western Iraq, in order to interpret metaphors pertaining to food and relationships. In this cultural and geographical context, food symbolism is frequently entwined with ideas of hospitality, kinship, and social hierarchies. For example, the metaphors used to depict relationships in many Middle Eastern countries mirror the deep-rooted sentiments of trust, and obligation that accompany the act of sharing food. Lévi-Strauss's structures view of food as a cultural code, Food metaphors are powerful tools for portraying relational dynamics in Arabic because they frequently have both literal and symbolic connotations. Such offering bread or particular dishes is a real act of hospitality as well as a symbolic gesture of connection in Bedouin and rural Iraqi in general, and it is strongly associated with friendship and trust. Food-sharing customs, which are frequently deep-rooted in traditional and tribal beliefs, represent mutual trust and obligation. For example, according to Abu-Lughod (2000), "breaking bread" is a symbol of unity and a reaffirmation of social relationships among Bedouin communities, in addition to providing sustenance (p. 30). He (2000) describes the family system in there region The Arabic tribal system is said to be based on the following: a husband and wife, their offspring, any sons or daughters who have not yet wed, any widows with children, and any women who have been divorced or widowed from his daughters. Given the diverse range of clans and families that made up ancient Arabic civilization (p. 20). Sharing bread is more than just a nice gesture, a strong society and a tag is estimated at each other, he (2000) explains how the Bedouin people use joint meals and bread as a means of establishing or promoting social relations. In addition, Al-Jumaili (2018) confirms that the preparation of meals in rural areas is a way to promote harmony and conflict resolution. Food acts as an article representing desire to accept and trust people in their social environment (p. 12). Furthermore, as pointed out by Becut and Marinescu (2016), food in Middle Eastern communities serves as a symbol of both ethical and emotional connection, going beyond its nutritional worth. Bread, frequently referred to as the "staff of life," has more symbolic implications than its physical form (p. 18). In Arabic where they shape social norms and relationships, metaphors have special cultural and cognitive importance. speech like / كلامه مالح Kalamah malih /"he has salt in his words," for example, Indicate the actual significance of salt as well as its symbolic association with sincerity and reliability(p. 1).The exquisite and symbolic role of interlocking values of hospitality, trust and solidarity. The participation of bread and salt in many traditions of the Middle East is a holy association

between mutual respect and sincerity that reflects the commitment to coexistence peacefully. Historically, this broken bread is social and culturally and often exceeded individual ties to reflect broader society values.

In Western Iraqi culture, the term/ بيناتنه خبز وملح / binatna khobz wamal7/ "bread and salt between us" summarize a deep sense of loyalty and honor created by doing food participation. These metaphors were also shocked in the traditions of rural and appearances, where such simple and nuclear elements, symbolic and conflicts were strengthened. Common food action is presented as a serious unspecified consent of goodwill and promotes ties that are considered to be wounded within these communities (Tower and Grass, 2001, p. 45). In Iraqi households, communal dinners or ceremonial feasts are frequently used to settle conflicts and promote harmony through common religious and cultural customs (Heffelfinger, 2016, p. 32). Additionally, it captures the ways in which social and cultural processes are influenced by customs around the exchange of food. Rituals, like the Ramadan iftar dinners, when people enhance community bonds by sharing meals, are emphasised. Belonging and trust are fostered through this practice, which includes social, cultural, and religious duties (Singer, 2013, p. 79). Furthermore, in tribal contexts, the practice of sharing food during life-cycle events, like weddings or funerals, further emphasises kinship, solidarity, reciprocity, and social honour. One important aspect of Middle Eastern hospitality is the maintenance of communal ties throughout generations, which is ensured by such activities (Singer, 2013, p. 79). Sharing food, or commensality, as pointed out by Claudine Cassar, does more than only bring people closer together; It also helps to solidify group identity and trust. To sum up shared meals are a show of hospitality and social responsibility on the part of both hosts and guests like Ramadan. During Iftar, people eat together as a symbol of their moral duties and mutual support, and it's a chance to strengthen their bonds with family and neighbors.

5. Conclusions

The social, cultural, and cognitive aspects of the language of the academic perspective can be studied to understand food and relationships. It encourages us to understand social concepts such as relationships, and is more than a tool to use language. According to Abbood and Mustafa (2014), successful practices are necessary in practice for successful imports. To determine the figurative importance, the interaction between the minor and the tool aspects compared to the borrowing is essential. Using these guidelines, the use of food bills may mean relational dynamics such as hospitality, fantasy or addiction, which will be consistent with social and cultural standards in Western Iraq. The studies of the metaphor indicate that this type of use carries clear and subtle social standards establishing intercultural understanding.

References

Abbood, H. K., & Mustafa, S. (2014). Metaphor in political and literary texts: A pragmatic analysis. Arab World English Journal, 5(1), 281–290.

Abu-Lughod, L. (2000). Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society. Berkeley: University of California Press. (p. 30).

Abu-Shihab, I. (2022). Metaphorical expressions in Jordanian Arabic: A study in the Irbid district. Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing, 6(3), 6655–6665. Retrieved from https://www.journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/download/8651/5658/9986

Al-Azzawi, H. (2010). Cultural Practices in Iraq: Food and Society. Baghdad Cultural Press. (p. 45)

Aljanada, Rose & Alfaisal, Aseel. (2020). Metaphorical Conceptualization of Food in Jordanian Arabic. International Journal of Language and Literary Studies. 2. 94-107. 10.36892/ijlls.v2i3.347.

Al-Jumaili, A. (2018). Food and Social Dynamics in Rural Iraq. Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 12(3), 12.

Al-Kadi, A. (2015). Towards idiomatic competence of Yemeni EFL undergraduates. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 6(3), 513–523.

Al-Mohammed, A. (2015). A cognitive linguistics study of food metaphors in Iraqi Arabic. IASJ

Dur, F. (n.d.). Understanding metaphor: A cognitive approach focusing on identification and interpretation of metaphors in poetry. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation].

Durkheim, E. (1912). The Elementary Forms of Religious Life. Oxford University Press. (p. 47).

El-Zahra, M. (2019). Food metaphors in Tunisian Arabic proverbs. Academia.edu.

Hamburg, M. E., Finkenauer, C., & Schuengel, C. (2014). Family Mealtimes and Communication. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. (p. 28).

Hashim, Z.Y. (1994). Metaphor According to Abdulqader Aljurjani (Unpublished Master's Thesis).Um Alqura University, Saudi Arabia.

Heffelfinger, A. (2016). Cultural reconciliation in Middle Eastern societies: The role of food. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 24(2), 32.

Holes, C. (2004). Modern Arabic: Structures, Functions, and Varieties. Georgetown University Press. (p. 76).

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors We Live By. University of Chicago Press. (Page 14 discusses ontological metaphors such as baking as processes).

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966). The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology. Harper & Row. library.georgetown.edu (pp. 7–9).

Lupton, D. (1994). Food, the Body and the Self. Sage Publications.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). The apple of someone's eye. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved December 24, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/the%20apple%20of%20someone%27s%20eye

Merriam-Webster's definition of "metaphor": http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor

Mintz, S. W., & Du Bois, C. M. (2002). The Anthropology of Food and Eating. Annual Review of Anthropology, 31(1), 99-119. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085356

Saban, A. (2004). Entry metaphors: The concept of learning among metaphor analysis of teacher candidates. Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 4(2), 461–495.

Saban, A. (2008). "Metaphors about School." Educational Administration: Theory and Practice.

Singer, A. (2013). Charity in Islamic Societies. Cambridge University Press. (p. 79).

Cassar, C. (n.d) From Sharing a Meal to Sharing Culture - How Commensality Shapes Social Identity. Anthropology Review. (p. 5).

Steen, G. (1994). Understanding Metaphor in Literature: An Empirical Approach. London & New York: Longman.

Teoh, A. (2023). The role of food in communicating family culture. UWL Journal of Undergraduate Research XXVI. (p. 4–6). https://www.uwlax.edu

Torlakova, L. (2014). Metaphors of the Arab Spring: Figurative construal of the uprisings and revolutions. Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies, 14, 1–15.

Tosuncuoğlu, İ. (2018). İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü öğrencilerinin "İngilizce" kavramına ilişkin metaforları. Türkiye Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, 22(2), 677-697. https://doi.org/10.2023/519541

APPENDIX,

Table 2 A sample was given to the students (Aljanada, & Alfaisal, 2020).

((SAMPLE IN ENGLISH VERSION)) We are undertaking a study on idioms and proverbs that use food terminology in colloquial Iraqi Arabic. We would appreciate your response to the following questions.
Level Education…...…….. Gender……
1. Enumerate the most extensive collection of idioms and proverbs utilised in your dialect that incorporate the word "to eat".
_____ _____ _____ ___
2. Enumerate the maximum amount of idioms and proverbs utilized in your dialect that incorporate the verb "to drink."
_____ _____ _____ ___
3. Enumerate the maximum amount of idioms and proverbs utilized in your dialect that incorporate the verb "to cook" alongside any other culinary verbs.
_____ _____ _____ ___
4. Enumerate the most numerous idioms and proverbs utilized in your dialect that include cooking utensils.
_____
5. Enumerate the most extensive collection of idioms and proverbs utilized in your dialect that incorporate verbs related to eating, drinking, cooking, food preparation, and kitchen tools to characterize individuals' traits, habits, nature, appearance, and manners.
_____ _____ _____ _____

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: January 1, 2024
Accepted: May 10, 2025

The Failure in Communication: Gaze and Gaze Back in "The Museum"

ZUOFENG ZHONG [1]

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between gaze and subjectivity construction, focusing on Shadia in "The Museum" written by Lelia Aboulela. Through the theoretical lens of gaze, the influence of familial, Western ideological, and imperial gazes on Shadia's self-perception is explored. The analysis reveals that these gazes initially render her passive and devoid of subjectivity. However, through gazing back, Shadia gradually reconstructs her subjectivity as a woman and as an African. Despite her efforts, the powerful imperial gaze in the museum context limits her ability to bridge the gap with Bryan. This study highlights the transformative potential and limitations of gazing practices and emphasizes the ongoing negotiation between individual agency and dominant gazes in shaping subjectivity.

Keywords: *Shadia, "The Museum", gaze, subjectivity, alienation*

[1] zuofengzhong429@gmail.com, Shantou University, CHINA.

Introduction

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2008) writes: "Look! A Negro" (p. 68), which is the first line to depict the lived experience of the black man. This sentence indicates that black people are looked at and gazed at by the white, and realize that they differ from others. Then, the blacks are aware that "here I am an object among other objects" (Fanon, 2008, p. 68). For a long time, the blacks have been gazed at and stared at by the white in literature, such as Marlow's gaze in Heart of Darkness and the unnamed black being gazed at by the whites in *Invisible Man*. Marlow and the whites unconsciously regard the black as being in a flock rather than in an individual, and also their gaze contains the power of alienation. However, in "The Museum", Leila Aboulela presents the readers with a dominating gaze or look from Shadia, a Sudanese woman, who stares at the surroundings around her.

"The Museum", for which Aboulela won the Caine Prize, follows the eye of Shadia, a Muslim female, who lives and studies abroad in Scotland, and her relationship with a fellow student, a long-haired Scot named Bryan, who accompanies her to an ill-conceived museum about Africa. Throughout the story, Shadia keeps looking at herself while recalling her family and having classes at the university. In the course of the looking, Alonso (2017) suggests that Shadia undergoes "alienation through a parallelism between the sociocultural system" of Scotland and "social rules that are explicitly written down"(p. 60). Thus, Shadia has disoriented herself and lost her own subjectivity. Moreover, when visiting the Scottish museum about Africa, Shadia is defined as "outside of the community of power" (Cooper, 2006, p. 339), and "the museum alienates Shadia because of its homogenous narration of empire through the colonial gaze" (Arora, 2021, p. 123). Therefore, both Arora and Cooper deem Shadia a passive and alienated figure under the gaze of the museum. Nevertheless, Aboulela's writing unveils "the ineffectual myth of the oppressed Muslim woman by illuminating and personalizing her experience abroad"(Zanchettin, 2013, p. 41). The "personalization" here can be understood as the very own look of the character; thus, Shadia does construct her own subjectivity in the course of looking back at herself, her family, Bryan as well as the museum and personalizing her experience. As for this paper, it is expected to discover how Shadia gradually constructs her subjectivity, transforming from being obedient to opposing being alienated and estranged, and also why the communicative bridge built through interaction between Shadia and Bryan eventually collapses in the museum.

Gaze and Gaze back

According to Hegel, the gaze is a way of seeing with power and desire, and the self-other relation chiefly concerns "the issue of individual recognition over the exchange of gaze" (Sharma & Barua, 2017, p. 62). The consciousness of self arises with the recognition of clashing with the other. With such concept of consciousness and recognition, Sartre discusses how the gaze of another person disrupts one's sense of freedom and transforms one's state of "being for itself" into "being for the Other" (Sartre, 2003, pp. 291-292). When a person senses the presence of the other and is aware of being observed, he may have the feeling of "shame", which is the fundamental mood of intersubjectivity (Sharma & Barua, 2017, p. 68). Sartre writes that "the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other" (Sartre, 2003, pp. 245-246). Such shame leads to a significant sense of alienation in the self. Consequently, Sartre deems look an alienating force that makes one conscious of oneself in a negative sense. It denies the capacity to freely interpret oneself and one's freedom is enslaved by the presence of the Other (Sharma & Barua, 2017, p. 64).

While Sartre also considers gaze as the indeterminate cause of vulnerability like the sound of footsteps followed by silence, the rustling of branches, or something like an unperceivable stranger (Sartre, 2003, p. 281). Therefore, anything that makes one vulnerable may be defined as a look. Differentiating from Sartre's gaze, Lacan differentiates the look of the eye from the gaze. Lacan's gaze does not derive from the subject, but from the side of an object without any possibility of becoming a subject. Lacan's example of the gaze is Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. When one looks at the painting, the looking gives him a sense of control; nevertheless, one then notices a blot at the bottom of the canvas, which is actually a skull staring back at him. Then, one is reminded of his own lack of control, and of the fact that the symbolic order is separated only by a fragile border from the materiality of the Real. It is the look of the subject that returns as a gaze causing anxiety to the subject itself (Sharma & Barua, 2017, p. 75).

Grounded on the gaze of Sartre and Lacan, gaze theory is substantially employed and developed in postcolonial study and culture study, especially in film study. *In Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon profoundly analyses the psychological experience of the black under the white gaze which contains "an unusual weight descended on" the black (Fanon, 2008, p. 69). While Laura Mulvey (2003) put forward the male gaze to conspicuously unveil the desire underneath the presentation of females in film making (p. 44). Besides, Bell Hooks (2003) maintains that black females are supposed to interrogate and oppose the stereotypes of black women in the film, take on an oppositional gaze to reject identification with the distorted images, and defiantly declare that "not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality" (p. 94). As for gazing back, Sartre also poses that individuals can resist the objectifying gaze and regain their subjectivity through a process of looking reciprocally. By turning the gaze back upon the one who is looking, individuals assert their own subjectivity and transcend the transcendence of the Other, by which the Other's subjectivity becomes a property of the object of one's look. This reciprocal looking can disrupt the asymmetrical relationship between the observer and the observed, affirming the individual's freedom and autonomy. Then in this way, "I recover myself, for I cannot be an object for an object" (Sartre, 2003, p. 313).

Thus, resorting to the theory of gaze, this paper aims to explore the relationship between gaze and the construction of subjectivity. Through internalizing the gaze of her family and Western ideology, Shadia becomes passive and obedient without any subjectivity and freedom. However, Shadia constructs her own subjectivity as a woman and as an African piecemeal via gazing back at Bryan, her family, and the museum. In addition, she also tries to bridge the gap between her and Bryan, which eventually fails under the mighty imperial gaze in the museum. It's supposed to be noted that the whole story is narrated from the perspective of Shadia, and the gaze for Shadia and gaze-back from her occur simultaneously to form a dynamic conflict inside Shadia. Therefore, the following discussion concerns the dominating position of gaze or gaze-back, impacting Shadia all the way in diverse degrees. Moreover, the breakdown of communication between the two characters also indicates that the dominating gaze of the museum overcomes Shadia, leaving her to cry.

Alienation under Gaze

As a Muslim migrant studying in Scotland, Shadia senses the culture shock for the first time when she looks at Bryan's hair and earrings. The strangeness encountered by Shadia makes her afraid and lost in the class as Shadia thinks she is someone "tossed around by monstrous waves-battered" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 2). When she takes courses, Shadia feels stressed and weary due to the lack of a certain background; meanwhile, although far away from her homeland, Shadia still lives under the shadow of her family, especially her mother and her fiancé, Fareed. Hence,

in the white society, struggling with statistics and burdensome expectations of her family renders Shadia vulnerable to the gaze of herself and the outside. The following will analyse how Shadia is alienated by self-gaze and gaze in the museum.

"As long as the black man remains on his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others" (Fanon, 2008, p. 68). When Shadia, with a collection from the third world, hears about the suicide of a Nigerian and racists, she shrieks and cries to express her anxiety and fear. In a totally strange circumstance full of white gaze, Shadia tends to belittle herself. First of all, Shadia reckons her collection and those white students as two predetermined groups, "the ones who would do well, the ones who would crawl and sweat and barely pass" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 2). Without the certain background the course requires, she flounders and does not know the system. Such division is led by the idea of Orientalism. According to Said, Orientalism is regarded as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1979, p. 3). In other words, Orientalism can be understood as a discourse informed by notions of Western masculinity in which the West is strong, rational, and male, while the Orient is weak, irrational, and female(Said, 1979, pp. 137-138). Shadia unconsciously deems herself as inferior to the white, and strikes herself in the division framed by the West. Then, in the course of their interaction with Bryan, Shadia tends to speculate what Bryan thinks about her. When Bryan looks at her, she presumes that Bryan regards her as an insect and is surprised that she can speak (Aboulela, 2013, p. 4) and she also assumes as if Bryan doesn't "want to come near her," and "want to talk to her" when he slides folders towards her (Aboulela, 2013, p. 6). Such assumptions and interrogations of herself expose Shadia's self-colonizing. When she confronts a white man, she unconsciously activates the awareness of the distinction between "us and them" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 2) and lowers herself as the inferior even though Bryan probably doesn't realize and is conscious of such discrepancy. Therefore, Shadia assumes Bryan's look disrupts her, but in fact, it is her self-gaze that alienates her subjectivity as an African, which is manifested in her gazing at her face in the mirror in the corridor as well. She dislikes her corrugated hair, and in the mirror her eyes are large. Then she speculates that her face is "the face of someone with HIV" which could have been printed on the mirror (Aboulela, 2013, p. 4). As Fanon said, "In the white world, the man of colors encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body is solely negating" (Fanon, 2008, p. 69). So, Shadia alienates herself by longing for the straight long hair the doll has and negating her hair and her face through her own gaze.

Apart from self-colonization, Shadia also belittles herself through internalizing the gaze of her family and always lingers on the guilty. Brought up only by her mother, Shadia and the other five sisters are told to behave with manners, owe their mother considerably and feel sorrowful for the suffering of their mother, including the illicit affair of their father, for which her mother imposes all the expectations and hopes on Shadia and her sisters. Shadia is molded by her mother, saying that she should be educated, otherwise she will end up like her mother who left her education to marry Shadia's father. Her mother's bitterness, nagging and expectation pester all along Shadia's growth so profoundly that despite the long distance, Shadia still carries all the burdens overseas; thus, Shadia takes on the gaze of her mother inside her mind. Such gaze hovers around her surroundings and makes her realize that she is not "being-for-itself" but "being-for-others" (Sartre, 2003, p. 262), rendering Shadia vulnerable, negating the capacity to freely interpret herself, and then slaving her freedom (Sharma & Barua, 2017, p. 64). In this sense, Shadia always behaves full of manners, a form of gaze which reminds of her visibility through which Sartre suggests that one encounters the other person in his subjectivity as a look (Sharma & Barua, 2017, p. 63). In this case, Shadia is adept at restraining herself and displaying

her proud manners. When she interacts with Bryan, she maintains her manners even if she thinks the behavior of Bryan is impolite. In the funeral of Fareed's father, Shadia even rubs soap in her eyes so that Fareed will reckon that she weeps for his father's death, which she considers as polite and full of manners. Even worse, such manners degenerate her into the state of obedience. Shadia is obedient not only to her mother but to Fareed. When she gets married to Fareed, her mother underscores that she is a "lucky, lucky girl," which has predetermined the uneven relationship between her and Fareed (Aboulela, 2013, p. 6). In the following interactions with Fareed and his family, Shadia displays her talent for pleasing people. During the call from Fareed, she listens to Fareed talking about his family and the decorations all the time; however, Fareed doesn't have time to talk about her course and has no space for her anxieties. Even, Fareed claims that he is so broad-minded to allow Shadia to study aboard that she should be grateful. All of these stress, expectations, and "charity" of her fiancé squeeze and distort the subjectivity of Shadia as an independent female.

With the gaze thrust into her mind, Shadia always registers and internalizes the sense of guilt, a representation of alienation, when she misbehaves herself in Scotland. Distinctively, the guilty manifests itself through some physiological reaction. For instance, she feels sick when realizing she doesn't learn but is daydreaming. Moreover, guilt is cold like the fog engulfing Shadia when she detects that the sterling she spends is enough to keep a family alive back home and she supposes that she will fail the exam and return home "empty-handed without a degree" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 5). Guilt is also a hindrance to her communication with Bryan. Owing to the guilty of betraying her mother and Fareed, Shadia tries to distaste Bryan and tells herself that what happens to Bryan is none of her business (Aboulela, 2013, p. 9). Consequently, the guilt caused by the gaze inside Shadia alienates her subjectivity as a female with attraction and desire. Perceived under gaze from inside and outside, Shadia tortures herself psychologically and physiologically.

In "The Museum", Shadia encounters the most forced colonial gaze as she walks through the museum about Africa with Bryan. As Shadia looks at the objects and pictures in the museum, she tries to find something representing her homeland and someone like her father, and also seeks the sense of belonging which she is eager for since residing in the strange land. However, on the contrary, Shadia feels as if she is an outsider in this museum for nothing belongs to her and her people. Most intriguingly, the first thing they perceive in the museum about Africa is a "Scottish man from Victorian times" surrounded by possessions from Africa (Aboulela, 2013, p. 15). As MacKenzie (2017) states in the introduction to *Museums and Empire*, "The museum was created by an essentially European vision and was intended to feed the white gaze. It offered a route into a global memory, the perquisite of western cultures" (p. 5). Although this is a museum about Africa, as Shadia asserts, the museum is under "Europe's vision, the clichés about Africa: cold and old" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 15). Nothing is belonging to her life. The aim of this kind of museum is to shape and support an "orientalist-racist worldview through a celebration of western culture as progressive and superior, and displaying the non-western other as primitive and exotic" (Arora, 2021, p. 122) and also Barringer and Flynn (2012) assess the historical role the museums play as "potent mechanisms in the construction and visualization of power relationships between colonizer and colonized," which Shadia acutely beholds in the museum (p. 5).

Shadia undergoes alienation as she stares at the distorted version of Africa. What Shadia expects isn't displayed in the museum, only to find that the museum tells lies and wrongly represents Africa and its people. During the look, Shadia tries to identify with the museum and teaches Bryan what is Africa; however, she is rejected by what she looks. That means Shadia's

look fails to determine her subjectivity as an African, and conversely, Shadia senses the look from what she looks at when she reads the tangible reminders and glances at those pictures of jungles and antelopes. This look is Lacan's gaze which refers to the look of the subject returning as a gaze causing anxiety to the subject itself (Sharma & Barua, 2017, p. 74). In the museum, the gaze of the distorted version of Africa negates Shadia's identification of being an Africa and disturbs the subjectivity of Shadia, causing her to think that "She wasn't right, she was too modern, too full of mathematics" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 16) and stirring bodily and emotional responses in her, such as the shiver she feels though she wears layers of clothes. Such shiver indicates that Shadia is intimidated by Scottish arms, "gunfire in service of the empire" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 18), and also the compelling representation of Africa acknowledged and studiously learned by people in Scotland, like Bryan.

The Construction of Subjectivity via Gazing back

Under the gaze from inside and outside, Shadia loses her subjectivity both as an independent female and as an African, and is trapped in the guilty and the state of inferiority. However, while being gazed at, Shadia also takes on an oppositional gaze at the surroundings around her and her family, and more importantly, she does gazes back at the museum via rejecting being coercively identified with the Scottish version of the museum. Meanwhile, in the course of gazing back, Shadia gradually constructs her subjectivity as a woman and as an African.

Being gazed at, Shadia is obedient and always listens to what others say, never hearing her own voice. She is trained to please people around her, so she is full of manners. She also imagines that there are audience in mind (Aboulela, 2013, p. 11), which means she allows and accepts others to gaze at her all the time. While through gazing back, Shadia constructs her subjectivity as an independent woman by her changing position from listening to others to speaking out her thoughts, and by uncovering the attraction and desire inside her.

Urged by her fear and anxiety about failing the course and letting her family be disappointed, Shadia musters all her courage to ask Bryan for the notes for he is the only one sailing through the course. Via the notes, she thinks that she can strengthen the background this course requires. In a sense, the notes are a source of power. After reading his notes, the gap between them is filled and Shadia feels connected with Bryan and begins to communicate with him. During the communication, Shadia gradually perceives the whole body of Bryan and speaks out her inner thought that she distastes his long hair and earrings which is strange to Shadia the first time she sees him. What surprises her is that Bryan does alter his appearance for her. It is the first time for Shadia that someone has heard her thought and then changed for her, which lightens the inner part of Shadia, "under the crust of vanity" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 9). She learns that she can be noticed and heard by someone. In this case, Shadia attempts to challenge the gaze of her family via further interacting with Bryan. As Shadia recalls, "To make herself pleasing to people was a skill Shadia was trained in. It was not difficult to please people. Agree with them, never dominate the conversation, be economical with the truth. Now, here was someone to whom all these rules needn't apply"(Aboulela, 2013, p. 11), she finds out that she speaks out "luxury words" and takes a dominating position to ask questions in the conversation, during which she doesn't need to apply the rules to please people and conceal the truth inside her which is what she does when talking with her mother and Fareed. Such an alteration of position indicates Shadia gazes back at her former position in the interaction with her mother and Fareed, disengages Shadia from the other, and wrenches her away by constructing the subjectivity of Shadia (Sartre, 2003, p. 307). Additionally, the fixed gaze punishing her for not learning in class temporarily disappears when Shadia concentrates on the transformation of Bryan. In the text, the direct quotations of the content of the class interject within the narration,

"Notes to take down. *In discriminant analysis, a linear combination of variables serves as the basis for assigning Cases io groups*"(Aboulela, 2013, p. 9), implying that they are having class. However, the alarming gaze doesn't manifest its presence as in the former narration. At this moment, Shadia's guilt for her mother and herself is alleviated, diverting her attention to her own feelings towards Bryan's transformation. This ephemeral absence of gaze also denotes that Shadia learns to overlook such gaze though not completely.

Meanwhile, such a change in Bryan's appearance transforms what Shadia thinks about him. Without the pigtail and earring, Bryan looks nice and decent in the eye of Shadia and glows the inner part of her, arousing her desire to be focused and liked. Yet haunted and tormented by betrayal of Fareed, Shadia still accepts the invitation to visit the museum with Bryan, as a sign of opposition against Fareed. Transcending the transcendence of gaze from Fareed, Shadia finally shouts out "I can't, I can't" when Fareed calls her for the purchase of fixtures (Aboulela, 2013, p. 14). It is the first time that Shadia has argued with others in the novel. Though this "can't" contains the feeling of being guilty of hanging out with Bryan, it underlines Shadia's opposition by articulating her aversion to gold toilet seats Fareed and his family favor. Even, she denies him in the name of Allah, saying, "Allah is going to punish us for this, it's not right…" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 14). Therefore, at this moment, Shadia controls her own subject-ness and negates the transcendence of Fareed by making him an object in his world, and then gains the freedom to express herself. Then in this way, as Sartre(2003) claims, "I recover myself, for I cannot be an object for an object" (313), Shadia, deracinated from her family and husband, recovers herself the desire to communicate with Bryan and receive the invitation to the museum.

The construction of the subjectivity of Shadia as an African has two parts, one is gazing back at Bryan and the other is looking in the museum. When Shadia watches Bryan to judge if he is approachable, on the one hand, Shadia perceives the gaze from Bryan's blankest look which is what Shadia assumes and actually her own gaze from inside as mentioned above; on the other hand, Shadia begins to assess Bryan by the standard of what she learns back in the homeland. In her judgment, Shadia thinks that Bryan is immature, "devoid of manners," and speaks with no respect to the lecturers (Aboulela, 2013, p. 3). In Shadia's eye, a poor English accent adds to Bryan's pitifulness which diminishes Shadia's sense of inferiority imbued by dominating Western society. Intriguingly, Shadia employs the metrics of Westerners to evaluate Bryan, the white student, to gain a sense of superiority. Moreover, the higher social status than that of Bryan also accumulates her sense of pride. Standing in the higher status, Shadia actively gazes back at the white student, saying, "The Nile is superior to the Dee. I saw your Dee, it is nothing, it is like a stream" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 11), which displaying Shadia's pride of having the Nile in Africa, longer and wider than the Dee which is nothing. Via the comparison, the inversion of relations set by the Orientalism is appreciable. In this contrast, Bryan is reduced to the inferior and the weak while Shadia realizes the oriental discourse is broken, gaining her sense of pride. Such pride in African culture is the sign of subjectivity of Shadia, which is also presented in her religion.

In "The Museum", religion is the protection of Muslim identity for Shadia living in a foreign land. Before living in Khartoum, Shadia isn't so religious as she is in Scotland. Back in the homeland, she never gets up to pray. However, when she resides in a foreign country, prayer is her clothes. Without praying, she feels like going "out into the street without any clothes" (Aboulela, 2013, p. 5). So, for Shadia, religion is a comfort and also a source of identification as a muslin African. When she learns Bryan believes in no religion, she again reckons him as pathetic. Compared with Bryan, Shadia increases her pride in her culture and constructs her

own subjectivity as an African, breaking the stereotypes of ignorance and savages as being an African. Withal, the gap of communication between Shadia and Bryan also is filling.

While walking through the museum, Shadia is disgusted and irritated by the Africa in Europe's vision, cold and old. Pictures of jungles, tangible reminders, and gunfire in service of the empire force Shadia to acknowledge and identify with Africa inhabited only by game; hence, the museum alienates Shadia due to its "homogenous narration of empire through the colonial gaze" (Arora, 2021, p. 122). Nevertheless, being gazed by the distorted version of Africa, Shadia still gazes back at this distortion and cries out to tell Bryan that lies are filled in this museum, as an oppositional pose to challenge the authoritative narration in the museum, just like Hook suggests, "Critical black female spectatorship emerges as a site of resistance only when individual black women actively resist the imposition of dominant ways of knowing and looking" (Hooks, 2003, p. 103). Though Hooks discusses about film spectators, in the museum, the visitor is also a spectator looking at the museum. Thus, via gazing back, Shadia becomes a site of resistance against the colonial gaze. Beholding Bryan studiously and carefully learning the distorted version of Africa, Shadia, at first, doesn't express her worry and irritation obviously. Then when she detects that the imperialists who had humiliated her history are heroes in his eyes, Shadia cannot tolerate the humiliation and distortion, so she cries out (Aboulela, 2013, p. 18). Being furious and helpless, Shadia rejects the representation of the museum and being the objects under the colonial gaze, and also refuses to identify with the game and jungles, crying that they have "things like computers and cars" just like people in Scotland (Aboulela, 2013, p. 18), an individual attempt to invert the representation of the museum. Therefore, through the negation of who she is told by the museum, Shadia constructs her own subjectivity as an African. Bell (2003) also defiantly declares that "not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality" (p. 94). Obviously, a singularly oppositional gaze doesn't suffice to rebel against the mighty gaze of the institute and change the reality distorted by the museum. In the end, Shadia's inability to sustain a conversation with Bryan signals a failure to challenge the dominant orientalist discourses represented in the museum displays, and the gap is shattered.

Conclusion

To conclude, in "The Museum", Aboulela provides a perspective of Muslim female migrant, Shadia, to present how Shadia undergoes alienation and construction of herself living in Scotland. The relationship between gaze and the construction of subjectivity is presented throughout the story. Looking at herself and being looked at by others, Shadia loses her subjectivity of being a woman and an African when living in the new environment and constantly lives in the guilt caused by the anticipation of her mother and the sense of inferiority.

However, Shadia also actively takes her gaze to look at the surroundings and the museum. Interaction with Bryan profoundly assists Shadia knows herself and fix the gap led by alienation. Although Shadia finally fails to build a bridge between her and Bryan because of the mighty gaze in the museum, rendering Shadia discovers that individual is small and has no strength to change the museum, her "can't" to Fareed and her negation of representation underscores the gaze-back of Shadia and the subject-ness within her.

References

Aboulela, L. (2013). The Museum. In W. Rampone & B. Solomon (Eds.), *An African Quilt: 24 Modern African Stories* (pp. 1-19). New York: Penguin Group.

Alonso, C. R. (2017). Islam as a Rhythmic Reality: Identity, Emotions and Urban Space in Leila Aboulela's Short Fiction. *Babel–AFIAL: Aspectos de Filoloxía Inglesa e Alemá*(26), 53-66.

Arora, A. (2021). Decolonizing the museum: Leila Aboulela's "The Museum". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing, 57*(1), 121-134. doi: 10.1080/17449855.2020.1847171

Barringer, T., & Flynn, T. (2012). Introduciton. In T. Barringer & T. Flynn (Eds.), *Colonialism and the object: empire, material culture and the museum* (pp. 1-8). London: Routledge.

Cooper, B. (2006). Look Who's Talking? *The Translator, 12*(2), 323-344. doi: 10.1080/13556509.2006.10799221

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks*: Grove Press.

Hooks, B. (2003). The Oppositional Gaze: Black female spectators. In A. Jones (Ed.), *The feminism and visual culture reader* (pp. 94-105). London: Routledge.

MacKenzie, J. M. (2017). *Museums and empire: Natural history, human cultures and colonial identities*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Mulvey, L. (2003). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. In A. Jones (Ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (pp. 44-53). London: Routledge.

Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*: Vinatge.

Sartre, J.-P. (2003). *Being and Nothingness* (H. E. Barnes, Trans.): Routledge.

Sharma, P., & Barua, A. (2017). Analysing Gaze in Terms of Subjective and Objective Interpretation: Sartre and Lacan. *Human Studies, 40*(1), 61-75. doi: 10.1007/s10746-016-9406-4

Zanchettin, L. (2013). Articulations of home & Muslim identity in the short stories of Leila Aboulela. In E. Emenyonu (Ed.), *Writing Africa in the Short Story* (pp. 40-51): Boydell & Brewer.

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: April 21, 2025
Accepted: May 19, 2025

A Sociolinguistic Reading: Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*

Senem ÜSTÜN KAYA[1]

Abstract

Linguistic discrimination exists in written and spoken language along with politics, social and economic fields. To demonstrate how some lexical choices might be characterized as feminine or masculine and how they are reflected in a literary text, the current paper provides a linguistic analysis of a play. Susan Glaspell's Trifles (1916) was chosen as an example to answer one important research question: To what extend Deborah Tannen's "rapport-talk" and "report-talk", explained in You Just Don't Understand (1990), could be clarified and exemplified regarding the language differences between men and women in fiction. To determine the gendered bias in language use at the sentence level, selection of grammatical structures and lexical preferences, a close reading of the text was done. The data was gained after the analysis of dialogues between and among female and male characters and excerpts were used to clarify and exemplify six categories, defined by Tannen. Based on the data, there are striking findings, which could exemplify Tannen's ideas on "genderlects". First, female characters (Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters) tend for social connection, seek sympathy and support, use suggestion phrases, and avoid conflict while speaking with other characters. Conversely, male characters (the Count Attorney, the Sheriff and Lewis Hale) seek power, provide facts for status, offer counsel, give orders via imperatives and create conflicts to gain authority and independence. Therefore, this study is significant by providing an example of a sociolinguistic reading to focus on the speech differences between men and women in a literary text.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic, Deborah Tannen, *Trifles*, rapport-talk, report-talk

[1] Assoc. Prof. Dr., Başkent University, Faculty of Education, ELT Department, efesenem@yahoo.com, 0000-0001-6537-9769

Introduction

Language is generally seen as a tool of thought, a transmission system that transfers a thought from one person to another, and linguists are more interested in the models with which language is organized in the mind and how the social structure of human societies reflects language through expression and interpretation (Finegan, 2008, p. 6). The study of language use in various social circumstances is known as "sociolinguistics", which blends sociology and linguistics. Sociolinguistics emerged as a branch of linguistic studies in the early 20th century and gained prominence during the 1960s and 1970s.

As the term indicates, sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field that studies the connections between language and society (Veith, 2005, p. 5). Even though the scope and functions of sociolinguistics vary, Achard (1986) clarifies the field as follows:

> What is called 'sociolinguistics' is, in my view, not a topic, nor a sub-division of a topic, but rather a meeting point (or a point of confusion) of three topics with different origins: the 'sociological' question of the place of language in human societies and the social process, the 'linguistic' question of language variations and the problems (supposedly describable in sociological terms) these pose to linguistic theory, and the 'practical' question of the social use of language (learning and teaching, standardization, terminology, context translation, linguistic planning, etc.) (p. 5).

A broad framework that encompasses different language acquisitions can be used to analyze the standard language factors linked to linguistic behaviors, such as gender, youth, elderly, group and professional, and educational language. Social groupings are formed in part by these linguistic attitudes, and each group develops its unique language usage. Language variations are the linguistic forms that emerge from these linguistic processes and categories for language variables include domain-specific or professional language, women's and men's language, youth language, political language, and educational register. As clarified by Labov (1966), the scope of sociolinguistics as:

> In the past few years, there has been considerable programmatic discussion of sociolinguistics at various meetings and symposia. If this term refers to the use of data from the speech community to solve problems of linguistic theory, then I would agree that it applies to the research described here. But sociolinguistics is more frequently used to suggest a new interdisciplinary field-the comprehensive description of the relations of language and society (pp. v-vi).

In its general definition and scope, sociolinguistics, an interdisciplinary field based on the analysis of the relation between language and society, considers language as the dependent variable and social categories as the independent variables to investigate the relationship between language behavior and social categories.

Linguistic discrimination exists in written and spoken language along with politics, social and economic fields. To demonstrate how some lexical choices might be characterized as feminine or masculine and how they are reflected in a literary text, the current paper provides a linguistic

analysis of a play. Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916) was chosen as an example to answer one important research question: To what extend Deborah Tannen's "rapport-talk" and "report-talk", explained in *You Just Don't Understand* (1990), could be clarified and exemplified regarding the language differences between men and women in fiction. To determine the gendered bias in language use at the sentence level, selection of grammatical structures and lexical preferences, a close reading of the text was done. The data was gained after the analysis of dialogues between and among female and male characters and excerpts were used to clarify and exemplify six categories, defined by Tannen. Based on the data, there are striking findings, which could exemplify Tannen's ideas on "genderlects". First, female characters (Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters) tend for social connection, seek sympathy and support, use suggestion phrases, and avoid conflict while speaking with other characters. Conversely, male characters (the Count Attorney, the Sheriff and Lewis Hale) seek power, provide facts for status, offer counsel, give orders via imperatives and create conflicts to gain authority and independence. Therefore, this study is significant by providing an example of a sociolinguistic reading to focus on the speech differences between men and women in a literary text.

Literature Review

Gender and language

The disciplines of linguistics, feminist theory, and political practice incorporate the first research on the relationship between language and gender (Weatherall, 2002). Research on the connection between language and gender was initiated by the feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s. The purpose of these studies, which were associated with the women's liberation movement, was to determine the relationship between gender inequalities and language usage. Since then, feminists have been examining how language perpetuates sexism and patriarchy (Coates & Pichler, 2011).

Questions of linguistic diversity and text analysis methodologies have peaked in the 1960s and sociolinguistics has become a subfield of anthropology. Besides, literature serves as a conduit, enabling research into the feelings and thoughts of characters through the comprehension of geographic location, gender dynamics, socioeconomic class, racial group, and interpersonal relationships.

As a branch of sociolinguistics, the analysis of different linguistic variants between men and women clarified the fact that what sets men and women apart, however, is not their biological characteristics but rather their gender-a socially constructed pattern of femininity and masculinity. The overall effect of "women's speech", which encompasses both language used exclusively by women and language that describes women exclusively, will be found to be that it subsumes a woman's personal identity by, on the one hand, preventing her from expressing herself strongly and, on the other, encouraging statements that imply triviality and ambiguity regarding the subject matter, and, when a woman is being discussed, by treating her as an object, whether sexual or not.

The biological difference between males and females is only one aspect of the gender factor. The roles that are allocated to men and women are the first step towards the status of being male or female and the connotations that go along with it. A person's biological distinctions become variances influenced by gender roles, which then acquire a social identity guided by education. In general, the biological distinctions between men and women are referred to as gender, however there are two categories of gender in sociolinguistics: biological and social.

The women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s brought the linguistic approach to gender, which in turn led to the development of feminist linguistics. Some sociologists and anthropologists have recently examined the ways in which men and women use their respective languages for communication, and they have seen this area as crucial to comprehending the differences between the sexes. Language and gender are among the many topics covered by sociolinguistics, according to Holmes (2008). In every language community, the degree to which men and women use different languages varies (p. 157). It would be proper to remember that there is no significant relationship between this differentiation and the object's characteristics. However, some languages have specific terms and constructs that are only used by men or women. These linguistic forms must be learned by every child during the socialization process. When it comes to defining social identities, these examples are essential. The terms and phrases that are used in society to refer to men and women are further instances that have been studied in sociolinguistics in terms of language and identity.

Research on language and gender became prominent after the 1970s, when women's movements became prominent. Language researchers known as sociolinguists distinguish between two types of women's writing and language: writing by women and writing about women (König, 1992, p. 26). Furthermore, the language used to discuss women frequently carries negative connotations. The physiological and psychological distinctions between men and women lead to differences in speech. To put it another way, men are more likely to be independent and to be interested in vertical relationships, which means they want power and hierarchy. Conversely, women enjoy interacting with others and have less authority than men.

Many people believe that Robin Lakoff's "Language and Woman's Place" (1972), along with some of her earlier research, marked the beginning of the study of gender and language in sociolinguistics and gender studies in the United States in the 1970s (Bucholtz, 2004). Deborah Tannen, Penelope Eckert, Janet Holmes, Mary Bucholtz, Kira Hall, Deborah Cameron, Jane Sunderland, etc. were the other notable scholars who studied gender and sociolinguistics and others. A hypothesis based on gendered communication styles is made possible by the notion that men and women differ from one another. Key distinctions between the two communication styles, known as masculine and feminine, are described and categorized in *You Just Don't Understand* (1990) by Deborah Tannen who foregrounded "difference theory" throughout the end of the 20th century.

Deborah Tannen and "rapport-talk" and "report-talk"

In the "Preface" of her book, *You Just Don't Understand* (1990), Deborah Tannen states her aim as a linguist, who dealt with male and female language, as follows:

> Each person's life is lived as a series of conversations. Analyzing everyday conversations, and their effects on relationships, has been the focus of my career as a sociolinguist. In this book I listen to the voices of women and men. I make sense of seemingly senseless misunderstandings that haunt our relationships and show that a man and a woman can interpret the same conversation differently, even when there is no apparent misunderstanding.

By coining the term "genderlects", Tannen (1990) underscores the differences of language between genders: "We try to talk to each other honestly, but it seems at times that we are speaking different languages-or at least different genderlects" (p. 42). Differentiating men and women as belonging to distinct "sub-cultures" because they have been socialized to do so since childhood is the two cultures (or difference model) approach to equality: "If women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence, then communication between men and women can be like cross-cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles. Instead of different dialects, it has been said they speak different genderlects" (Tannen, 1990, p. 18).

Tannen's cross-cultural perspective on gender disparities diverges from a large body of feminist research that holds that male-female interactions reflect men's attempts to control women. Based on her research on gender reflections on language, Tannen concludes that women utilize a "rapport style" that is more focused on establishing and preserving connections, while men tend to employ a "report style" that aims to convey information:

> Who talks more, then, women or men? The seemingly contradictory evidence is reconciled by the difference between what I call public and private speaking. More men feel comfortable doing "public speaking," while more women feel comfortable doing "private" speaking" …. For most women, the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships …For most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order… (Tannen, 1990, p. 76).

Tannen's "difference theory" is summarized into six categories to exemplify and clarify the contrasting uses of language by men and women (Talbot, 1998, p. 98). The first category is *status versus connection* in asymmetrical roles:

> The difference between public and private speaking, or report-talk and rapport-talk, can be understood in terms of status and connection. It is not surprising that women are most comfortable talking when they feel safe and close, among friends and equals, whereas men feel comfortable talking when there is a need to establish and maintain their status in a group (Tannen, 1990, p. 45).

According to Tannen, women view the world as a network of connections and use language to both seek and aid, while men view it as a competitive environment where speech and conversation are used to elevate status. This illustrates how men are concerned with status while women want human connection: "Men are more often inclined to focus on the jockeying

for status in a conversation: Is the other person trying to be one-up or put me down? Is he trying to establish a dominant position by getting me to do his bidding? Women are more often attuned to the negotiation of connections: Is the other person trying to get closer or pull away?" (Tannen, 1990, p. 16).

Based on this category, Tannen asserts that men ask the first and longer questions (Tannen, 1990, p. 36) and they desire dominance/status in a conversation. Hence, men avoid long period listening because they do not want to be the subordinate while women want to listen and respond questions positively to preserve connection (Tannen, 1990, p. 69). Moreover, men like interrupting or switching the topic both to gain status or to show that they are" bored by women's topics" (Tannen, 1990, p. 70). However, Tannen claims that "women' language" is "powerless" (Tannen, 1990, p. 111).

The second category is called by Tannen as *information versus feelings*, which refers to the theory that men talk about facts while women's speech involves feelings: "Since women seek to build rapport, they are inclined to play down their expertise rather than display it. Since men value the position of center stage and the feeling of knowing more, they seek opportunities to gather and disseminate factual information" (Tannen, 1990, p. 60). Men, for Tannen, tell stories in which they are the protagonists/heroes and aim at giving messages. Conversely, women "tell stories about themselves, about other women, and about men" (Tannen, 1990, p. 87).

As men consider themselves superior, providing information is essential in their speech whereas women focus on connection and intimacy. Besides, "some men resist receiving information from others, especially women, and some women are cautious about stating information that they know, especially to men" (Tannen, 1990, p. 29). Hitherto, women use hedges (uh-huh, mmm, right) and tag questions to avoid any disagreement: "Whereas women's cooperative overlaps frequently annoy men by seeming to cooperate their topic, men frequently annoy women by usurping or switching the topic" (Tannen, 1990, p. 212). *Advice versus understanding* is the third category, and according to Tannen, men look for solutions and tend to give advice while women need consolation and empathy:

> Men look for solutions while women need no advice and ask and talk more in private talks. Trying to solve a problem or fix a trouble focuses on the message level of talk. But for most women who habitually report problems at work or in friendships, the message is not the main point of complaining. It's the meta message that counts: Telling about a problem is a bid for an expression of understanding ("I know how you feel") or a similar complaint ("I felt the same way when something similar happened to me"). Women are frustrated when they not only don't get this reinforcement but, quite the opposite, feel distanced by the advice (Tannen, 1990, p. 23).

Therefore, women are distanced or alienated when they could not get the reinforcement to be understood. The fourth category is *orders versus proposals*. According to Tannen (1990), men like being the center of attention by telling jokes or stories while women suggest for intimacy. As explained by Tannen (1990), "men preferred and were more likely to tell jokes when they had an audience: at least two, often four or more…Unlike men, they[women] were reluctant to tell jokes in front of people they didn't know well" (p. 43). Hence, men tend to use imperatives

("Close the door", "turn on the light") and women propose ("Let's", "Shall we...?" How about…?") while speaking because "they are more concerned that they be liked" (Tannen, 1990, p. 18-19).

Conflict versus compromise is the fifth category, and for Tannen, men create conflicts to show their superiority or to boast while women avoid any conflict and preserve rapport: "males are competitive and prone to conflict whereas females are cooperative and given to affiliation…To most women, conflict is a threat to connection, to be avoided at all costs" (Tannen, 1990, p. 150). However, for men conflict is required for status whereas many women avoid "confrontation" (Tannen, 1990, p. 90).

Finally, *independence versus intimacy*, is another difference between the language of men and women. Men want independence while women want intimacy, and for Tannen (1990), "women's longing for intimacy threatens men's desire for freedom" (Tannen, 1990, p. 385). Tannen asserts that women, seeing the world as a network of connections and relationships, possess intimacy in conversations by minimizing differences and trying to enhance consensus whereas men, "independence is key, because a primary means of establishing status is to tell others what to do, and taking orders is a marker of low status" (Tannen, 1990, p. 10). In other words, men avoid consulting while making decisions while women "expect decisions to be discussed first and made by consensus" (Tannen, 1990, p. 10).

Analysis

At the height of the American Women's Suffrage Movement, Susan Glaspell's one-act play, *Trifles* (1916) is a feminist drama that reflects the complexity of women's hectic lives and challenges preconceived ideas about their lack of social influence, limited with their domestic roles. The play is "experimental in technique and puts forth in a moving way the plight of a woman brutalized by her husband-a woman who never appears in the play" according to Yvonne Shafer (2010, p. 78). Although Glaspell's play initially appears to have a typical detective plot, it delves deeper into the psychology of women who are suppressed by Midwest America's domesticated farming culture. According to Carter (1984) women were "decorative, and useful in the home, but that's all" (p. 188) during the beginning of the 20th century American culture. Most of the women's time was spent on cooking, doing laundry, and sewing in the kitchen, where they were confined.

One of those women who lost their freedom and individual rights was Minnie Foster, who played the role of Minnie Wright in Susan Glaspell's most well-known one-act play. Roles, duties, epithets, physical traits and responsibilities of men and women differ at the very early ages, either by the cultural impacts (societal coding) or biological traces almost in all cultures. Therefore, this study scrutinizes the language differences between male and female characters in Glaspell's *Trifles* in accordance with the above-mentioned theories of Deborah Tannen.

The play starts while Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters try to tidy the kitchen of Minnie Wright while their husbands are investigating the murder of her husband, John. Although the men in the play

mock women for fixating on "trifles" (trivial, womanly concerns), women discover the evidence that indicate that Mrs. Wright had probably killed her husband. Although Mrs. Wright was the only suspect in her husband's murder due to the lack of evidence, she was not considered a suspect by the Sheriff, the county attorney, or Mr. Hale, the neighboring farmer. Still, she was considered a prisoner. Without questioning Mrs. Hale or the Sheriff's wife, these three male characters were executed with blatant prejudice against Minnie, who had been arrested. When the two women went to the kitchen to look for clues regarding the alleged strangling of Mr. Wright, the male authorities, particularly the county attorney, humiliated them because they were unable to prove the motive while investigating the murder.

Glaspell gives voice to Minnie, who is the target of the men's criticism and biases while Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, other female characters, attempt to decipher the clues. Hitherto, the play represents an errand into "a narrative that is previously masculine in content", for "the (male) detective has not solved a mystery, and the answer lies with a woman" (Sussex, 2010, p. 1). When Mr. Hale enters the house and begins to recount the crime that occurred the day before, the female characters begin their errand. Even though he describes every detail of what he saw the day before his current account, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale silently take charge of the investigation by closely examining the clues in the kitchen.

The kitchen, which is constantly in the spotlight but is occasionally overlooked, is the play's first significant gender division. For a close look, only the female characters remain in the kitchen. The kitchen is never given much thought by the other two male characters because, to them, it is a place reserved for women and is unimportant for them. As a result, not only do men view the kitchen as a place for women, but women also view it as their own space. The sole distinction between these two perspectives is that, although men view it as a place of little importance, women view it as their space for independence, unhindered by the dominance of patriarchal power.

Methodology

This part of the study involves the analysis of the differences between male and female characters in Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles*, regarding Deborah Tannen's "genderlect" theory. The dialogues were selected to illustrate Tannen's theoretical concepts. Hence, in some parts, examples are given by considering the most striking types of speech between genders and more than one type of genderlect could be observed in the same dialogues.

Findings and Discussion

Status versus connection:

In contrast to men, who see the world as a competitive environment where speech and conversation are used to elevate status, women see it as a network of connections and use language to both seek and aid (Tannen, 1990, p. 24–25). Tannen's theory indicates that women listen and respond positively for connection and cooperation while men are more likely to interrupt, avoid listening and ask questions to gain power and status over other speakers. Below

are the examples of dialogues from *Trifles*, regarding status and connection difference male and female characters:

1. MRS.HALE: I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuler for John Wright's being in it.

COUNT ATTORNEY: I'd like to talk more of that a little later… [avoid listening to women]

2. MRS. PETERS: Why, here's a birdcage. Did she have a bird, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE: Why, I don't know whether she did or not…

MRS. PETERS: I s'pose maybe the cat got it. [cooperative overlaps between women]

3. SHERIFF: Now, Mr. Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr. Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday? [In this dialogue, Count Attorney tends to dominate the conversation by switching the topic].

4. MRS. PETERS. (nervously). I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS. HALE. I'll just finish up this end. (Suddenly stopping and leaning forward.) Mrs. Peters? [responding positively]

5. COUNT ATTORNEY: Well, ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt or knot it? [asking questions]

MRS. PETERS: We think she was going to-knot it. [responding positively]

The above dialogues illustrate the theoretical concepts of Tannen who stated that men are raised in a society where having a discussion is frequently a competition to gain power while women consider conversations as a way of exchanging affirmation and encouragement.

The dialogues clarify how the male characters seek **status** and dominance. Count Attorney, for instance, avoids listening to Mrs. Hale, changes the subject and dominates over the Sheriff by switching the topic. On the other hand, female characters try to create **connection** while speaking with others. To exemplify, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters develop cooperative overlap by responding each other positively. Therefore, the dialogues of female characters reflect female solidarity, which aligns with Tannen's notion of "rapport talk".

Information versus feelings:

Tannen (1990) states that men discuss facts, devise strategies, inform the listener, and tell stories in which they are the hero. Men's conversations are message-oriented, they frequently change topics, and they detest interruptions and receiving information from women. Conversely, women are cautious while giving information and narrate stories about others and

their conversations are essential to strengthen bonds. That's why, women frequently use hedges (umm, hmmm, right) and tag questions to enhance social ties:

1. HALE: Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place; and as I got here, I said, "I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone." I spoke to Wright about it once before, and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet-I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John… I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and she stopped and looked at me-scared… [telling stories in which they are the hero/protagonist]

2. COUNTY ATTORNEY: …. before we move things about, you explain to Mr Henderson just what you saw…I guess we'll go upstairs first—and then out to the barn and around there. (To the Sheriff). You're convinced that there was nothing important here-nothing that would point to any motive? [developing strategy]

3. MRS. HALE (examining the skirt): Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies' Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that-oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take?

MRS. PETERS: She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. (Opens stair door and looks.) Yes, here it is. (Quickly shuts door leading upstairs.)

[Women both support each other while feeling sympathy for Minnie].

4. MRS. HALE: It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it?

MRS. HALE: My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS. HALE: It would, wouldn't it? [tag questions]

5. MRS. HALE: I don't like this place.

MRS. PETERS: But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would be lonesome of me sitting here alone. [social connection through feelings]

6. MRS. HALE: I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. (A look around the room). Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that? [feelings for Minnie]

7. MRS. PETERS: My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a-dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with-with-wouldn't they laugh!

(The men are heard coming downstairs.)

8. HALE. Why, I don't think she minded—one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, "How do, Mrs. Wright, it's cold, ain't it?" And she said, "Is it?"—and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, "I want to see John." And then she-laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp. "Can't I see John?" "No," she says, kind o' dull like. "Ain't he home?" says I. "Yes," says she, "he's home." "Then why can't I see him?" I asked her, out of patience. "'Cause he's dead," says she. "Dead?" says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. "Why-where is he?" says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs-like that (himself pointing to the room above). I got up, with the idea of going up there. I talked from there to here-then I says, "Why, what did he die of?" "He died of a rope around his neck," says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might-need help. We went upstairs, and there he was lying'

MRS. HALE (under her breath). Maybe they would-maybe they wouldn't. [declaration of feelings]

In the above excerpts, it is apparent that male characters enhance **information** by giving details and narrating the stories in which they are the protagonists. the County Attorney develop strategies, the Sheriff explains the events in detail and the witness Hale narrates what he has observed in long sentences.

Conversely, female characters are more emotional and focus on **feelings.** For example, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters tend to narrate stories of Minnie Foster and her marriage, express more feelings, use hedges (umm, hmmm, right) and prefer tag questions to enhance social ties.

Advice-understanding:

According to Tannen (1990), women seek comfort, consolation and empathy ("I know how you feel…" "I also had the same feeling….") while men give advice and seek a solution to problems. Women, therefore, require understanding rather than advice and they tend to talk more than males in private conversations.

1. MRS. PETERS: She had bread set.

MRS. HALE: she was going to put this in there. It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs. Peters. Yes-here; (Holding it toward the window.) This is cherries, too. (Looking again.) I declare I believe that's

the only one. She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

MRS. HALE: Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here. It's wiped here. Wonder how they are finding things upstairs? I hope she had it a little more there. You know, it seems kind of sneaking. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her! [understanding of how others feel]

2. MRS. HALE: But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes she was here. I- (Looking around the room.)-wish I had.

MRS. PETERS: But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale--your house and your children.

MRS. HALE: I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful-and that's why I ought to have come. I-I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow, and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now… (Shakes her head.)

MRS. PETERS: Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs. Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until—something comes up. [understanding of others]

3. MRS. PETERS: When I was a girl-my kitten-there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes-and before I could get there...If they hadn't held me back, I would have hurt him. [empathy]

4. COUNTY ATTORNEY. Here's a nice mess.

(The women draw nearer.)

MRS. PETERS (to the other woman). Oh, her fruit; it did freeze. (To the Lawyer). She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF. Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE. Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

As stated by Tannen, men find it difficult to come up with a solution for a complaint and they favour giving **advice** rather than taking whereas women prefer **consideration** rather than receiving advice. In the play, as is seen in the above dialogues, while Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters try to understand Minnie's annoyances and depression while the Count Attorney judges the messy kitchen without considering what Mrs. Wright (Minnie) has been through.

Orders versus proposals:

As stated by Tannen (1990), women propose and suggest (Let's, Would you mind? Shall we?) and use hypercorrect grammar while men give orders by using imperatives:

> 1. COUNTY ATTORNEY: This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies. [imperative]
>
> 2. MRS. PETERS: Oh, her fruit; it did freeze..She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.
>
> SHERIFF: Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves [jokes]
>
> 3. MRS. PETERS: Well, I must get those things from the front room closet. You coming with me, Mrs. Hale? You could help me carry them.
>
> MRS. PETERS: My, it's cold in there [nice and polite requests]
>
> 4. MRS. HALE: If I was you, I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. (proposal)
>
> The excerpts demonstrate how male characters use imperatives for **orders** and female characters tend to propose. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale frequently make indirect **suggestions** and prefer a cooperation both in acts and conversations. However, the County Attorney uses imperatives and frequently give orders and the Sheriff makes irritating jokes about Minnie.

Conflict versus compromise:

For Tannen (1990), women are extremely courteous, but men instigate disputes to boast or demonstrate their superiority. To maintain goodwill and rapport, most women consider conflict as a threat to their relationships while men are more likely to use confrontation to resolve conflicts and to negotiate status (p. 149-151). That's why, women are politer than men and they use hedges and tag questions more:

> 1. SHERIFF (looking about): It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night, I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us-no use getting pneumonia with a big case on; but I told him not to touch anything except the stove-and you know Frank.
>
> COUNTY ATTORNEY: Somebody should have been left here yesterday.
>
> SHERIFF: Oh-yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy-I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today, and if I went over everything here myself… [Count Attorney creates conflict with Sheriff]
>
> 2. COUNTY ATTORNEY: And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? Dirty towels! Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?
>
> MRS. HALE: There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: To be sure. And yet… (With a little bow to her.) … I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels. (He gives it a pull to expose its full length again.)

MRS. HALE: Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors… [men create conflict while women need confrontation]

3. MRS. HALE: I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticizing.

MRS. PETERS: Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS. HALE: Duty's all right…[women compromise with each other to reach consensus].

4. MRS. PETERS: But, Mrs. Hale, the law is the law.

MRS. HALE: I s'pose 'tis.[confrontation]

5. COUNTY ATTORNEY: Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked up. (Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back.) No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS: Not-just that way. [unlike the women who try to have sincere, kind and supportive dialogues, men try to show dominance over the listener.]

The selected dialogues align with Tannen's theory, indicating that men are fond of creating conflicts to gain status and dominance over others while women desire compromise and avoid conflicts.

The Count Attorney creates **conflict** with the Sheriff by stating that "Somebody should have been left here yesterday" to complain about the cold kitchen. It is also obvious that the Sheriff tries to defend himself: "I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday". On the other hand, almost in all conversations between Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, it is apparent that women are in pursuit of **confrontation** (compromise) and avoid conflicts.

Independence versus intimacy:

According to Tannen (1990), women desire intimacy, try to reach consensus to avoid superiority while men require independence (p. 385) and decide without consulting to gain status. Moreover, intensifiers (so, very) are frequently used by women:

1.MRS. HALE: Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS: Do you think she did it?

MRS. HALE: Oh, I don't know.

MRS. PETERS: Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS. HALE: Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS. PETERS: No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a - funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS. HALE: That's just what Mr. Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS. PETERS: Mr. Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger or—sudden feeling. [intimacy between women]

2.MRS. PETERS: We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS. HALE: I knew John Wright.

MRS. PETERS: It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs. Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS. HALE: His neck, Choked the life out of him.

(Her hand goes out and rests on the birdcage.)

MRS. PETERS: We don't know who killed him. We don't know. [intimacy and consensus]

3. COUNTY ATTORNEY: I'm going to stay here awhile by myself (To the Sheriff). You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better. [independent choices]

4. COUNT ATTORNEY: Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to-what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS. HALE: We call it-knot it, Mr. Henderson. [intimate use of "we"]

The above excerpts exemplify Tannen's observations on how women support and maintain intimacy in their speech while men are more likely to emphasize independence because they are more concerned about status.

During the play, when Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are left in the kitchen while men seek evidence in the crime scene, there is cooperation and **intimacy** between them. They work, speak and decide together. Conversely, men tend to be more **independent** in their decisions and lack of consensus in their conversations with others. The Count Attorney decides "to stay" in the house alone while women decide to hide the evidence by calling it "knot".

Conclusion

Susan Glaspell's play *Trifles* is ground-breaking in terms of modern understandings of gender, feminism, and spatial discussions in addition to being revolutionary in terms of the status of

the American women in the 19th century. Although the play's major gendered division is the kitchen, where female characters are left by men who investigate the crime scene, there are also striking speech differences between the male and the female characters in the play.

Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* was examined in this study using Deborah Tannen's theories from *You Just Don't Understand* (1990). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the degree to which Tannen's "genderlects" could be found in a literary work. The information was gathered following the examination of conversations between and among male and female characters, and passages were utilized to illustrate and explain each of Tannen's "rapport-talk" and "report-talk" categories. This study could help us understand how Glaspell employed conversational methods to highlight power dynamics between the male and female characters in Trifles, even though the play was written before Tannen's theories on gender disparities between men and women emerged.

Based on the data from the play, the dialogues between and among male and female characters illustrate the theoretical concepts of Tannen's "rapport-talk" and "report-talk". The conversations make clear how the male players want for rank and power by ignoring listening, shifting the conversation, and switching topics. Conversely, female characters try to establish a rapport when conversing with others. Secondly, male characters augment information more by providing details and narrating the stories in which they play the main characters, but female characters are more sentimental and emotional about Minnie Foster. Third, female characters in the play require thought rather than counsel, while many men struggle to solve problems and prefer to offer advise rather than accept it. Also, female characters typically make proposals while male characters utilize imperatives to provide commands. As a fifth remark of the analysis, it is apparent that women prefer cooperation in both actions and talks, but men offer direct ideas and make jokes about Minnie's kitchen. Finally, men are more independent while giving decisions whereas women act, speak and decide together.

All in all, it would not be wrong to state that the dialogues of women and men in *Trifles* indicate the message of the writer in the deeper structure: women are emotionally, physically and verbally isolated, alienated and accepted as inferior when compared to men who dominate and oppress women. From a sociological perspective, ironically, Glaspell's message-that women who are confined to public spaces in male-dominated societies are just as resourceful and intelligent as men-allows female characters left in the kitchen to handle trivial tasks and solve the murder mystery while men investigate the crime scene.

References

Achard, P. (1986). Analyse de discours et sociologie du langage. *Langage et Société*, 37, 5-60.

Bucholtz, M. (2004). Editor's introduction. In R. Lakoff & M. R. Bucholtz (Eds.), *Language and woman's place: text and commentaries* (pp. 3- 14). New York: Oxford University Press.

Carter, R. (1984). *First lady from plains*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Coates, J. & Pichler, P. (2011). *Language and gender*: A reader. UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Finegan, E. (2008). *Language, its structure and use*. Boston, USA: Thomsen Wadsworth

Glaspell, S. (1987). *Trifles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holmes, J. (2008). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. England: Pearson Education Limited.

König, G. (1992). Dil ve cins kadın ve erkeklerin dil kullanımı. *Dilbilim Araştırmaları*, 3, 25-36.

Labov, W. (1966). *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Lakoff, R. (1973). Language and woman's place. *Language in Society*, 2(1), 45-80. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4166707

Shafer, Y. (2010). O'Neill, Glaspell and John Reed: Anti-war, pro-American reformers. *The Eugene O'Neill Review*, 32, 70-85.

Sussex, L. (2010). *Women writers and detectives in nineteenth-century crime fiction: The mothers of the mystery genre.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Talbot, M. M. (1998). *Language and gender: An introduction*. Cambridge:Polity Press.

Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Veith, W. (2005). *Soziolinguistik: Ein arbeitsbuch mit 104 abbildungen, kontrollfragen und antworten.* Auflage: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Weatherall, A. (2002). *Gender, language and discourse*. England: Routledge.

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: June 2, 2025
Accepted: June 26, 2025

The Fractured Prince: Trauma, Temporality, and the Suicidal Impulse in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Asım AYDIN[1], Sami AKGÖL[2]

Abstract

This inquiry examines the psychological landscape of William Shakespeare's Hamlet, positing that his renowned suicidal ideation transcends interpretations of mere melancholia or philosophical abstraction. It is argued that Hamlet's profound existential distress and contemplation of self-annihilation are significant symptomatic manifestations of unprocessed psychological trauma. Synthesizing trauma theories, particularly Cathy Caruth's "unclaimed experience" and Judith Lewis Herman's phenomenological framework (hyperarousal, intrusion, constriction), this analysis re-evaluates the impact of King Hamlet's death and Queen Gertrude's precipitous remarriage. These events constitute a foundational traumatic rupture, precipitating crises in Hamlet's experience of temporality, selfhood, and language. His initial cry, "O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt" (I.ii.133), is scrutinized as an immediate somatic expression of this breach. The "To be or not to be" soliloquy (III.i.64-98) is interpreted as a tortured articulation of a trauma-induced yearning for oblivion, complicated by "the dread of something after death" (III.i.86) amplified by traumatic anxiety. Hamlet's "delay" is reframed as traumatic paralysis—Herman's "constriction of agency" —a state suspended between the compulsion to act and the impulse towards self-destruction. The study explores Hamlet's linguistic fragmentation, his "antic disposition" (I.v.192), the Ghost as an embodiment of unprocessed trauma, and somatic expressions of his wounds as evidence of a besieged psyche. Situating Hamlet's suffering within Renaissance cultural frameworks and

[1] Assist. Prof. Dr., Karabuk University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature,Türkiye, asimaydin@karabuk.edu.tr, ORCID: 0009-0007-2557-4659.
[2] Inst. Sami AKGÖL, Karabuk University, Faculty of Letters, School of Foreign Languages, Türkiye, samiakgol@karabuk.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-0073-2119

contemporary trauma theory, this investigation illuminates the psychological verisimilitude of Shakespeare's portrayal, offering a nuanced understanding of trauma's literary representation.

Keywords: Hamlet, William Shakespeare, Trauma Theory, Suicidal Ideation, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Renaissance Drama, Unclaimed Experience, Existential Crisis, Psychological Trauma, Shakespearean Tragedy.

Introduction: Re-Reading Hamlet Through Trauma's Lens

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, remains a central text for exploring profound existential suffering. While traditional criticism has often focused on Hamlet's melancholy, indecision, or philosophical leanings to explain his suicidal thoughts, this paper offers a re-examination through the lens of contemporary trauma theory. It argues that Hamlet's pervasive distress and his recurrent meditations on "self-slaughter" (I.ii.136) are not merely products of an inherent disposition but are compellingly understood as symptomatic responses to severe, unprocessed psychological trauma. The sudden death of his father, King Hamlet, followed swiftly by the "o'erhasty marriage" (II.ii.57) of his mother, Queen Gertrude, to his uncle, Claudius, inflicts a foundational traumatic rupture. This breach catastrophically undermines Hamlet's existential stability, precipitating crises in his experience of time, selfhood, and language.

This analysis engages with conceptual tools from key trauma theorists. Cathy Caruth's work on "unclaimed experience" illuminates the belated and repetitive nature of traumatic memory that often bypasses immediate comprehension only to return insistently (1996, p. 4). The clinical insights of Judith Lewis Herman, particularly her delineation of trauma's symptomatic triad—hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction (1992, p. 33) —provide a framework for interpreting Hamlet's behaviors. By applying these theories, this paper aims to demonstrate that Hamlet's internal world is that of a traumatized individual, where suicidal ideation emerges as a complex response to unendurable psychological pain. This approach seeks to move beyond interpretations centering on character flaw, offering instead a view of Hamlet's suffering as a remarkably prescient depiction of trauma's impact.

The Primal Wound: Paternal Demise, Maternal Defection, and Spectral Mandates

The origins of Hamlet's profound psychological destabilization are clearly located in the rapid and morally shocking succession of his father's death and his mother's remarriage. Hamlet's embittered emphasis on the temporal compression—his anguished references to actions occurring "within a month" (I.ii.158) —powerfully highlights a critical aspect of traumatic experience. As Judith Lewis Herman explains, traumatic events typically overwhelm an individual's adaptive capacities, disrupting fundamental attachments and shattering core assumptions about safety and trust (1992, pp. 51-52). Hamlet's first soliloquy vividly expresses this psychic implosion: "O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!" (I.ii.133-134). This is a longing for annihilation in the face of a world rendered "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" (I.ii.139). His immediate invocation of the divine "canon 'gainst self-slaughter!" (I.ii.136) signals that suicide is already a potent consideration. The "wicked speed" (I.ii.161) of Gertrude's remarriage, violating culturally sanctioned mourning periods, intensifies this moral disorientation. This disruption of normative temporal processing is identified by Cathy Caruth as a key characteristic of how trauma is existentially experienced (1996, p. 6).

The initial trauma is then immeasurably amplified by the Ghost's nocturnal visitation and its harrowing revelation of "murder most foul" (I.v.32). This transforms Hamlet's grief into an isolating knowledge of profound criminality and imposes upon him a spectral command: "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (I.v.31). This injunction places Hamlet in the paradoxical position Cathy Caruth describes for the trauma survivor: the bearer of a truth that is almost impossible to assimilate or articulate (1996, p. 2). The Ghost itself, a "perturbed spirit" (I.v.203), functions as an externalization of unresolved trauma, a haunting reminder of the violence underpinning the Danish court. The weight of this "unclaimed experience" fuels Hamlet's subsequent psychological unraveling. The court's collective unwillingness to acknowledge these traumatic events further isolates Hamlet, creating what Herman terms an "ecology of denial" that compounds the psychological wounding (1992, p. 8).

"To be or not to be": The Suicidal Soliloquy as Articulated Traumatic Experience

Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy (III.i.64-98) stands as a profound articulation of suicidal contemplation, moving beyond abstract philosophical debate to express the "psychache"—unbearable psychological pain—that Edwin Shneidman identified as central to

suicidality (1985, p. 124). Hamlet weighs "whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them" (III.i.65-68). This framing, where Hamlet intellectualizes his suffering, might align with what Ruth Leys describes as an "antimimetic" stance—an attempt to maintain reflective capacity against overwhelming experiences (2000, pp. 38-42). However, the soliloquy's content is deeply saturated with trauma's residue. The longing "to die, to sleep— / No more— and by a sleep to say we end / The heartache and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to" (III.i.68-71) powerfully reflects the psychic exhaustion Judith Lewis Herman associates with chronic traumatic stress (1992, pp. 33-35).

This yearning for cessation is immediately complicated by traumatic anxiety: "To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub, / For in that sleep of death what dreams may come... Must give us pause" (III.i.72-75). This "rub" is the terror of the unknown, amplified by a traumatized imagination that, as Cathy Caruth's work suggests, struggles to conceive of a future free from suffering (1996, pp. 8-10). The trauma has shattered any illusion of a predictable or safe hereafter. The soliloquy's catalog of life's burdens—"the whips and scorns of time, / Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely" (III.i.78-79) —articulates a heightened sensitivity to systemic injustice, a common feature in those who have experienced profound violations of trust (Herman, 1992, p. 51). Ultimately, "the dread of something after death, / The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns," (III.i.86-88) "puzzles the will" (III.i.88). This "dread" signifies the profound epistemological uncertainty of a mind whose foundational beliefs about reality have been shattered by trauma. "Conscience," in this context, "does make cowards of us all" (III.i.91), but this is a "cowardice" born of a traumatized individual's inability to predict or control outcomes, even that of self-destruction. The soliloquy thus reveals the complex interplay of philosophical reasoning, emotional suffering, and the cognitive distortions wrought by trauma in shaping suicidal ideation. The universalizing rhetoric—"we," "us"—further suggests how personal trauma can expand into a broader questioning of the human condition itself. The fact that this intensely private contemplation is unknowingly overheard by Claudius and Polonius underscores the profound isolation characteristic of traumatic experience, where even one's deepest suffering can feel exposed yet uncomprehended.

The Paralysis of Will: Delay as a Manifestation of Traumatic Constriction

Hamlet's notorious "delay" in avenging his father's murder, a subject of immense critical debate, can be productively reinterpreted through trauma theory as a significant symptom of his psychological injury, rather than solely as a character flaw or philosophical quandary. Judith Lewis Herman's concept of "constriction" as a core trauma response—characterized by a narrowing of initiative, emotional numbing, and a paralysis of effective agency (1992, p. 42) —aptly describes Hamlet's state. This paralysis is not simply an absence of action but a dynamic struggle within a traumatized psyche. Hamlet himself is acutely aware of and tormented by his own inaction, most notably in his soliloquy following the First Player's emotionally charged performance of Hecuba's grief:

> O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit...
> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
> That he should weep for her? What would he do,
> Had he the motive and the cue for passion
> That I have? (II.ii.577-589)

This agonizing self-recrimination reveals what Cathy Caruth identifies as a fundamental paradox of trauma: the simultaneous and often conflicting imperatives to respond to the injury and the profound inability to access or integrate the experience in a way that allows for coherent, purposeful action (1996, p. 11). Hamlet recognizes the enormity of his "motive and the cue for passion" yet finds himself "unpregnant of my cause" (II.ii.595), unable to translate moral outrage and filial duty into effective retributive action. His later self-comparison with Fortinbras, who acts decisively for a seemingly trivial cause, further highlights this painful awareness of his own inertia: "How all occasions do inform against me, / And spur my dull revenge!" (IV.iv.34-35). He questions whether his inaction stems from "Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple / Of thinking too precisely on th'event" (IV.iv.43-44), acknowledging the cognitive confusion and "thinking too precisely" that Herman identifies as characteristic of traumatic states where normal evaluation and decision-making become profoundly disrupted (1992, p. 37).

This paralysis, however, is not static. It reflects an oscillation, as Ruth Leys might describe, between "mimetic" identification with the overwhelming horror and moral disgust of his situation, which can be emotionally flooding and thus behaviorally inhibiting, and an "antimimetic" intellectual detachment, where philosophical reflection or elaborate plotting (like "The Mousetrap") provides a semblance of control but simultaneously defers direct confrontation (Leys, 2000, p. 38). This "constitutive instability" (Leys, 2000, p. 38) inherent in the traumatized subject's relationship to experience means Hamlet is neither fully immersed in a way that might trigger impulsive, unthinking violence, nor sufficiently detached to allow for cold, calculated execution of revenge. This torturous suspension prevents not only the act of revenge but also, significantly, the enactment of his suicidal impulses. He is caught in a liminal space, a state of being unable to fully live or fully die, to act or to cease. The play's structure, with its pattern of aborted or misdirected actions—such as the killing of Polonius (III.iv.29-30) whom Hamlet impulsively mistakes for Claudius, or his elaborate staging of the play-within-a-play—further underscores this traumatic disruption of agency. These are not direct paths to resolution but rather fragmented expressions of a psyche struggling to cope with an unbearable burden, where direct action feels impossible. The "Mousetrap" (III.ii), while a strategic move to confirm Claudius's guilt, also serves as an intellectualized deferral of direct confrontation, a way for Hamlet to manage the "unclaimed experience" by re-presenting it, attempting to gain mastery through observation rather than immediate deed. This complex interplay between the urge to act, the paralysis of trauma, and the contemplation of suicide defines much of Hamlet's tragic trajectory.

The Fractured 'I': Linguistic Instability, Self-Representational Disintegration, and the Unsayable Trauma

The profound and pervasive impact of the unfolding trauma on Hamlet's intricate psyche is vividly, consistently, and often disturbingly manifested in the notable fragmentation of his language, the instability of his self-presentation, and ultimately, his very sense of a coherent, continuous, and stable self. His celebrated and often dazzling linguistic dexterity—his adept and multi-layered use of puns ("A little more than kin, and less than kind." (I.ii.67)), complex metaphors, philosophical paradoxes, unsettling non-sequiturs, and sharp, biting, often cruel wit—can be interpreted through a trauma-informed lens as more than simply the readily apparent evidence of a highly sophisticated and agile intellect or a carefully constructed, strategically deployed adoption of an "antic disposition" (I.v.192) designed to mislead and

confuse his adversaries. From this perspective, these distinctive linguistic characteristics also emerge with compelling clarity as symptomatic expressions of a disintegrating self, the audible and textual traces of a psyche struggling desperately and often futilely to articulate, manage, contain, and perhaps even master an overwhelming internal experience that fundamentally defies coherent, linear, or straightforward narration. As Cathy Caruth compellingly posits in *Unclaimed Experience*, trauma, by its very nature as an experience that often bypasses or overwhelms normative cognitive processing and linguistic symbolization at the moment of its catastrophic occurrence, intrinsically resists easy or direct representation through conventional language and narrative structures (1996, p. 91). Trauma often speaks in silences, fragments, repetitions, bodily symptoms, and indirect allusions rather than in clear, ordered discourse.

Hamlet's famous early, cryptic, and deliberately ambiguous exchange with King Claudius concerning the "clouds" of grief that supposedly still "hang on him" illustrates this dynamic of traumatic communication with striking precision and economy:

KING CLAUDIUS: How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET: Not so, my lord. I am too much in the sun. (I.ii.68-69)

The multivalent and bitterly ironic pun on "sun/son"—referring both to the literal sun (implying perhaps a feigned brightness or a feeling of being overly exposed) and his unwelcome new status as Claudius's "son"—is not merely a display of intellectual cleverness or defiant insolence. It functions strategically to create a deliberate linguistic ambiguity, a doubling and layering of meaning that powerfully mirrors the kind of psychic splitting, internal fragmentation, and profound sense of alienation that Judith Lewis Herman associates with the experience of severe psychological trauma (1992, p. 42). Hamlet's language throughout the play frequently becomes a contested and unstable site where multiple, often contradictory, meanings, intentions, emotional states, and even nascent identities (the grieving son, the wronged prince, the reluctant avenger, the feigned madman, the suicidal melancholic) jostle for expression, directly reflecting his internal disarray, his loss of a unified self, and his struggle to signify an experience that feels fundamentally unsayable yet demands to be spoken. His "wild and whirling words" (I.v.147) immediately following the Ghost's revelation are an early indication of this linguistic disruption under extreme stress.

The "antic disposition" that Hamlet formally resolves to adopt ("As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on" (I.v.191-192)) is itself a complex

and multi-layered manifestation of this trauma-induced psychic fragmentation and the crisis of representation it engenders. While it undoubtedly serves, on one crucial level, as a strategic performance, a calculated method of disarming his enemies, deflecting suspicion, and creating the necessary psychological and social space for observation, investigation, and eventual action, it also functions, perhaps even more profoundly from a psychological perspective, as an externalization of the terrifying internal chaos, the "sore distraction" (V.ii.234) with which he is afflicted, and the pervasive "sense of unreality" or derealization that Herman identifies as common features in the subjective experience of trauma survivors (1992, p. 38). This feigned (or perhaps, at times, genuinely experienced, as the boundaries blur under duress) madness allows Hamlet to articulate, albeit obliquely, through indirection, and under the protective, if precarious, veil of perceived irrationality, potent aspects of his intense psychological distress—including his pervasive suicidal despair, his corrosive cynicism about the state of the world and human nature ("Denmark's a prison." (II.ii.256)), and his tormenting awareness of Claudius's guilt—in ways that would be socially, politically, and personally inadmissible, and indeed highly dangerous, if expressed through conventional, direct, and ostensibly rational courtly discourse.

His interactions with Ophelia, particularly in the emotionally charged, deeply disturbing, and notoriously ambiguous "nunnery scene" (III.i), are characterized by this alarming linguistic and emotional volatility, showcasing the rapid, unpredictable, and often cruel shifts in his self-presentation and his expressed feelings towards her:

Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. (III.i.131-140)

This scathing and self-lacerating diatribe, lurching erratically from feigned humility ("indifferent honest") to sweeping, almost nihilistic condemnation of himself and all humanity ("arrant knaves, all"), is a powerful portrait of profound self-fragmentation. It depicts a self experienced simultaneously as excessively burdened by sin and potentiality for evil ("more offenses at my beck") and utterly inadequate, contemptible, and "crawling between earth and heaven." His subsequent, famously contradictory and emotionally devastating declarations to

Ophelia concerning his past affection for her—"I did love you once" (III.i.125) followed swiftly, inexplicably, and cruelly by "You should not have believed me... I loved you not" (III.i.127, 129) —are not presented as merely manipulative or misogynistic ploys, though elements of these may be present and debated by critics. More fundamentally, from a trauma perspective, they starkly reflect the profound emotional dysregulation, the inability to maintain a consistent or coherent affective stance, and the terrifying collapse of a stable, integrated sense of self that Herman outlines as a significant and debilitating consequence of prolonged traumatic experience (1992, p. 83). His language becomes a weapon, perhaps even against himself, reflecting the internal war trauma wages. The letter he writes to Ophelia, read aloud by Polonius, further exemplifies this crisis of stable meaning and representation, where love is asserted against a backdrop of universal doubt: "Doubt thou the stars are fire, / Doubt that the sun doth move, / Doubt truth to be a liar, / But never doubt I love." (II.ii.124-127). This poetic declaration, while ostensibly about love, speaks to a larger epistemological crisis where fundamental certainties have collapsed, a state highly characteristic of traumatic aftermath. This pervasive linguistic instability, this disturbing oscillation between moments of controlled, often barbed and brilliant eloquence and episodes of near-chaotic, fragmented, and emotionally volatile outburst, is the audible and textual evidence of a psyche struggling desperately, and frequently failing, to contain, process, and make sense of an unbearable internal pressure, a fractured sense of identity, and a world that has lost its moral and existential coherence.

The Embodied Trauma: Spectral Hauntings, Somatic Agony, and the Corporeal Burden of Grief

William Shakespeare, with characteristic dramatic mastery and profound psychological insight, memorably and powerfully externalizes Hamlet's deeply internalized and often unspeakable trauma through both compelling supernatural manifestations and strikingly palpable somatic expressions of profound suffering. The Ghost of King Hamlet, appearing wraith-like and armor-clad ("armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe" (I.ii.206)) on the cold, windswept battlements of Elsinore castle, is arguably the play's most formidable, resonant, and psychologically significant symbol of unprocessed, haunting, and insistent trauma. It is, as Cathy Caruth describes the fundamental and often perplexing nature of traumatic memory, the insistent, uncanny, and frequently terrifying return of an overwhelming past experience, an "unclaimed experience" that, having bypassed normative consciousness at the moment of its impact, "demands registration... even if it is not consciously available" or fully understood by

the individual who is its unwilling host (1996, p. 4). The Ghost's profoundly liminal and unsettling ontological status—its spectral, "questionable shape" (I.iv.47), its chilling pronouncements from a Catholic Purgatory (a theological concept officially abolished in Protestant England, adding to its ambiguity for a contemporary audience) ("I am thy father's spirit, / Doomed for a certain term to walk the night, / And for the day confined to fast in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away." (I.v.14-18)), its highly selective visibility to some characters (Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus, Bernardo) but significantly not to others (most notably, Queen Gertrude in the closet scene)—perfectly captures the peculiar, disturbing, and often disorienting quality of traumatic memory itself. Such memories, as Herman elaborates, are frequently experienced by the traumatized individual as simultaneously vividly present in their emotional intensity and sensory immediacy (flashbacks, intrusive images), and yet irretrievably past, disconnected from the flow of ordinary experience, and resistant to verbal narration (1992, p. 37). They are intensely real in their ongoing and often devastating psychological consequences, yet profoundly resistant to integration into normative, consensual consciousness, autobiographical narrative, and social sharing. The Ghost embodies this paradoxical nature of trauma: it is both a literal past event demanding address and a present psychic reality for Hamlet.

The Ghost's explicit and repeated command to "Remember me" (I.v.98) places upon Hamlet an immense and psychologically taxing burden: the burden of bearing witness to an atrocity, of carrying the weight of a terrible secret, and of enacting a retributive justice that seems almost impossible to achieve in a corrupt and treacherous world. This is a core dynamic in the experience of many trauma survivors, who are often compelled, whether by internal psychic pressure or external circumstances, to testify to an experience that defies easy articulation, comfortable social acceptance, or straightforward resolution. Indeed, when the Ghost reappears later in the play, during the highly charged and emotionally volatile closet scene with Queen Gertrude (Act III, Scene iv), its stark visibility only to Hamlet ("Do you see nothing there?" / GERTRUDE: "Nothing at all; yet all that is I see." (III.iv.150-151)) while remaining entirely unseen and unheard by his mother, powerfully and poignantly dramatizes the profound and painful isolation often experienced by the trauma survivor. This scene highlights with devastating clarity how the individual's deeply felt subjective reality of the haunting past, their acute perception of the intrusive traumatic presence, is frequently not validated, shared, understood, or even perceived by others, even those in close familial or emotional proximity. This profound lack of shared reality, this failure of empathic witnessing,

as the interpersonal theory of suicide developed by Thomas E. Joiner, Jr. might suggest, can significantly exacerbate feelings of "thwarted belongingness" and perceived burdensomeness, thereby potentially increasing the risk of suicidal ideation and behavior (2005, p. 96). Queen Gertrude's immediate and dismissive interpretation of the apparition as merely "This is the very coinage of your brain: / This bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning in" (III.iv.157-159) exemplifies the kind of unintentional, yet deeply wounding, secondary traumatization that can occur when a trauma survivor's intensely real and profoundly disturbing experience is invalidated, misunderstood, minimized, or dismissed as mere delusion, fantasy, or madness by those around them. The Ghost, therefore, is not just a catalyst for the plot but a continuous embodiment of Hamlet's internal, unprocessed traumatic state, a wound that keeps reopening. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" might also be relevant here, suggesting how traumatic experiences can be transmitted across generations, with the Ghost acting as a vehicle for an "inherited" psychological burden that shapes Hamlet's identity and actions (2012, p. 5).

Beyond these spectral manifestations of his murdered father's unresolved spirit and the burden of his traumatic knowledge, Hamlet's profound suffering finds palpable and consistent expression in his own physical body. From his very first agonized and self-abnegating wish for his "too, too sullied flesh" to "melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew" (I.ii.133-134), his suffering is depicted not merely as an abstract intellectual quandary or a purely emotional burden, but as a deeply somatic, intensely embodied experience. This portrayal resonates powerfully with contemporary understandings of trauma, articulated with particular force by leading theorists in the field such as Bessel van der Kolk, who famously and influentially emphasizes that "the body keeps the score" (2014, p. 53). This concept underscores the crucial idea that profound psychological wounds, especially those stemming from overwhelming or terrifying experiences, often manifest in tangible physical sensations, chronic pain, unexplained somatic symptoms, significant physiological dysregulation (such as disturbances in sleep, appetite, or arousal levels), and a profoundly disturbed and alienated relationship with one's own physicality. Hamlet's anguished lament, "O heart, lose not thy nature" (III.ii.412), suggesting a fear of his own emotional and perhaps even physical integrity collapsing under the strain, or his visceral, almost nauseated revulsion upon contemplating the grim reality of Yorick's skull in the graveyard scene—"Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on[1] his back a thousand times, and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it." (V.i.190-194) —are not presented in the play as mere literary metaphors for emotional distress. They point with stark clarity to a

profound disturbance in his lived, embodied experience, a deep sense of alienation from the physical self and the natural processes of life and decay. The world itself, filtered through his traumatized perception, has become a "rank unweeded garden" (I.ii.139), a place of pervasive decay, corruption, and moral ugliness. Consequently, his own physicality, his "sullied flesh," becomes a loathsome source of revulsion, a perceived prison of mortality, and a tangible site of his unbearable suffering, from which the act of suicide offers a potential, albeit terrifyingly uncertain and morally fraught, liberation. This profound and painful alienation from his own corporeal existence, this pervasive sense of his body as a site of contamination, pain, and existential burden, powerfully underscores the depth, severity, and all-encompassing nature of the psychological injury he endures. His physical expressions of distress—his noted pallor, his deep sighing ("Windlasses and assays of bias, / By indirections find directions out" (II.i.70-71), as Polonius interprets his behavior, though it can also be read as physical manifestation of his turmoil), and general bodily agitation—reflect what contemporary clinicians recognize as somatic markers of acute psychological distress and, potentially, suicidal crisis, as discussed by researchers like Kay Redfield Jamison (1999, p. 72). Ophelia's tragic drowning, described by Gertrude as a passive merging with the elements, "mermaid-like" (IV.vii.201), offers a contrasting, aestheticized image of self-destruction that further highlights the raw, visceral nature of Hamlet's embodied struggle with his suicidal impulses, which are tied to a desire for the dissolution of painful flesh rather than a watery assimilation.

Cultural Inflections of a Universal Wound: The Shaping Force of Renaissance Contexts and Beliefs

While the intricate psychological architecture of Hamlet's trauma demonstrates patterns of suffering and response strikingly resonant with contemporary trauma theory, its specific modes of expression and the societal frameworks available for its interpretation are deeply embedded in the cultural matrix of Renaissance England. Stef Craps compellingly argues that "trauma is not a universal, timeless phenomenon but is historically and culturally specific" in its manifestations and the meanings ascribed to it (2013, p. 14). The Renaissance was a period of profound intellectual dynamism and religious upheaval. Attitudes towards suicide, as documented by historians like Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy in *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*, were complex: dominant Christian theology condemned self-slaughter, yet classical Stoic ideals, which countenanced suicide under dire circumstances, also held sway (1990, p. 77). Hamlet's soliloquies, particularly "To be or not to be," vividly

reflect this cultural tension, weighing the divine "canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (I.ii.136) against the perceived nobility of ending unbearable suffering.

Furthermore, the religious uncertainties of the post-Reformation era, as Stephen Greenblatt argues in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, created a "crisis of mourning" and ambiguity concerning the afterlife and spectral apparitions (2001, p. 162). Hamlet's agonizing doubt about the Ghost's true nature—"The spirit that I have seen / May be the devil, and the devil hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape" (II.ii.627-629) —is not merely a plot device but mirrors genuine contemporary anxieties. This cultural ambiguity surrounding the supernatural profoundly impacts Hamlet's ability to process the Ghost's traumatic revelations and its demand for revenge. Similarly, Renaissance understandings of "madness," as explored by Carol Thomas Neely in *Distracted Subjects*, were more fluid than modern conceptions, allowing for a spectrum where an "antic disposition" could serve as both a symptom of genuine disturbance and a strategic cloak (2004, p. 50). Hamlet's engagement with these culturally specific frameworks—including revenge codes, concepts of honor, and the nature of kingship—shapes how his trauma is experienced and expressed. Dominick LaCapra's distinction between "absence" (a fundamental lack) and "loss" (a specific deprivation) is also insightful here; Hamlet grapples with both the specific loss of his father and the broader absence of moral order in a Denmark that has become a "prison," a condition potentially exacerbated by the cultural shifts of his time (LaCapra, 2001, pp. 50-52).

Conclusion: The Enduring Resonance of Hamlet's Traumatic Void, Fractured Psyche, and Tragic Destiny

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* offers a remarkably nuanced and psychologically astute portrayal of the devastating impact of trauma and its intricate connection to suicidal impulses. Reading the play through the clarifying lens of trauma theory allows for a perception of Hamlet not merely as a man afflicted by constitutional melancholy or paralyzed by intellectual indecisiveness, but as a profoundly wounded individual whose existential crisis stems directly from overwhelming and unassimilated experiences. The play meticulously charts the tragic trajectory from identifiable catalytic external events to the internal fragmentation of self, the distortion of temporality, the paralysis of agency, and the persistent, agonizing contemplation of self-annihilation. Hamlet's iconic soliloquies, his linguistic eccentricities, his notorious delay, and his somatic expressions of distress are revealed not as mere idiosyncratic character traits but as coherent, if devastating, responses to severe psychological injury.

William Shakespeare, with a psychological acuity that seems remarkably prescient, captures the complex phenomenology of traumatic experience—its intrusive repetitions, its suffocating constriction of life's possibilities, its shattering of fundamental beliefs—in ways that resonate deeply with contemporary clinical and theoretical understandings. The tragic culmination of the play, wherein Hamlet finally achieves his mandated revenge only through a maelstrom of violence that inexorably claims his own life, underscores the often-insurmountable difficulty of escaping the profound gravitational pull of severe, unprocessed trauma. A trauma-informed reading of *Hamlet* reveals the Prince's immense suffering as a powerful testament to the enduring human vulnerability to overwhelming psychic wounds. Shakespeare's masterpiece thus stands not only as a towering achievement of dramatic art but also as a profound and timeless exploration of the human psyche under siege. It offers enduring insights into the complex interplay between catastrophic experience, existential despair, and the dark allure of the suicidal precipice. The "readiness is all" (V.ii.226) that Hamlet eventually professes may signify a form of exhausted acceptance or fatalistic resignation, but it is an acceptance unequivocally born from, and irrevocably scarred by, the traumatic void that has so tragically defined his journey.

References

Caruth, C. (Ed.). (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Craps, S. (2013). *Postcolonial witnessing: Trauma out of bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Greenblatt, S. (2001). *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton University Press.

Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—From domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.

Hirsch, M. (2012). *The generation of postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press.

Jamison, K. R. (1999). *Night falls fast: Understanding suicide*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Joiner, T. E., Jr. (2005). *Why people die by suicide*. Harvard University Press.

LaCapra, D. (2001). *Writing history, writing trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Leys, R. (2000). *Trauma: A genealogy*. University of Chicago Press.

MacDonald, M., & Murphy, T. R. (1990). *Sleepless souls: Suicide in early modern England*. Clarendon Press.

Neely, C. T. (2004). *Distracted subjects: Madness and gender in Shakespeare and early modern culture*. Cornell University Press.

Shakespeare, W. (2008). *The tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (B. A. Mowat & P. Werstine, Eds.). Washington Square Press. (Original work published c. 1603)

Shneidman, E. S. (1985). *Definition of suicide*. John Wiley & Sons.

Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: December 20, 2024
Accepted: June 30, 2025

Dreams Deferred: A Critique of the American Dream in *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby*

Gözde Begüm MIZRAK[1]

Abstract

This paper offers a comparative Marxist analysis of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman (1949) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925), focusing on the psychological and social toll of pursuing the American Dream. It highlights how both authors expose the commodification of identity and relationships under capitalist ideology, despite the differences in historical context and genre. Willy Loman's downfall illustrates the alienation of the working class in a post-war, productivity-driven society, while Jay Gatsby's tragedy reveals the rigid class barriers and illusion of social mobility in the Jazz Age. By examining symbolic elements such as the jungle and the green light, this study demonstrates how both works critique the ideal of meritocracy and reveal the emotional and existential disillusionment beneath material success. The analysis contributes to understanding how literary representations of economic failure challenge the dominant capitalist narrative and portray the American Dream as a powerful yet ultimately contradictory cultural ideal, which is capable of both motivating ambition and perpetuating social inequality.

Keywords: American Dream, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Great Gatsby*, Alienation and Identity, Class and Capitalism in Literature

[1] Dr. Inst., Karabuk University, School of Foreign Languages, Karabük, Turkey, Email: begummizrak@karabuk.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-6365-2458

1. Introduction

The American Dream, a concept deeply instilled in the ethos of American society, has long served both as a source of aspiration and controversy. Promising boundless opportunities, upward mobility, and personal fulfilment through hard work, this ideal has captivated generations for ages. Nevertheless, as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) demonstrate, the pursuit of this dream often reveals its darker dimensions—disillusionment, societal alienation, and personal ruin. When examined through a Marxist lens, the American Dream emerges as an ideological construct that reinforces capitalism's exploitative nature by promoting the illusion of meritocracy while perpetuating systemic inequalities. Both *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* critique this dynamic, revealing how their protagonists are trapped within a socio-economic framework that commodifies human relationships and reduces individual worth to material gain.

Arthur Miller's Willy Loman embodies the plight of the common man who is seduced by the dream's guarantee of economic security and societal respect. Yet, as the story unfolds, Willy's obsessive belief in salesmanship as a path to success and his inability to adapt to a changing economic landscape lead to his downfall. Similarly, Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* exemplifies the self-made man who achieves material wealth, but is unable to gain the social acceptance or personal fulfilment he desires. Gatsby's tragic quest to reclaim a romanticized past highlights the unattainable nature of the dream he pursues eagerly.

Through an exploration of these two iconic characters, this paper argues that Miller and Fitzgerald use the stories of Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby to critique not only the personal consequences of chasing the American Dream but also its societal implications such as inequality of money and social stratum. These works expose the moral and psychological costs of a culture rooted in materialism and competitive individualism, offering a timeless reflection on the human cost of ambition. In analysing their journeys, this study sheds light on the enduring tensions between idealism and reality, success and integrity, and aspiration and disillusionment—issues that remain largely relevant in contemporary discourse.

While *The Great Gatsby* and *Death of a Salesman* differ in form and were written in distinct historical contexts—the Jazz Age of the 1920s and the post-World War II era of the late 1940s, respectively—both works serve as pivotal critiques of the American Dream. Their comparison offers a comprehensive exploration of how this ideal evolves across time; yet retains its inherent contradictions and flaws. Fitzgerald's novel captures the decadence and disillusionment of the Roaring Twenties, a period marked by economic excess and social lamination, while Miller's play reflects the anxieties and alienation of the post-Depression Era, where capitalism becomes increasingly ruthless. Despite their differences in genre, both works employ powerful symbolism, compelling characters, and narrative depth to expose the human cost of materialism and societal pressures.

By analysing Jay Gatsby and Willy Loman, two tragic figures who embody the pursuit and ultimate failure of the American Dream, this study bridges the temporal and formal gap between the works to reveal a broader cultural commentary. It demonstrates that the critique of capitalism, class disparity, and individual alienation transcends genre and

historical moment, underscoring the enduring relevance of these themes in understanding the American society.

2. Discussion

2.1. The Sale of a Dream: Willy Loman's Capitalist Conundrum

Arthur Miller's well-known play *Death of a Salesman* depicts the situation of America in the post-war period which coincides with the Great Depression. The social play uses the protagonist, Willy Loman—a traveling salesman in his sixties—and his family, including his wife Linda and their two sons, Biff and Happy, to portray the hardships they face, particularly Willy, due to the economic challenges posed by transforming capitalist society. Willy's personal depression, his constant flashbacks, fragmented state of mind, inconsistencies in his speech, loosened ties with his elder son and destroyed self-confidence are all in close relation to the depression that the society faces, to the changes in the market and in the salesmanship profession and to the priorities of people. As the American economy became "consumption-oriented rather than production-oriented, and society was turning more and more materialistic" (Benziman, 2005, p. 20), the socioeconomic shifts affected many families and individuals who were in pursuit of the American dream. As an outcome of the Great Depression between the years of 1923-1933 caused by the Wall Street crash in 1929, farmers and the black community were forced to leave the countryside and to turn to city life, which started the formations of the suburbs (Ansarey, 2013, p. 152). This unplanned urbanization led to the rise of all-concrete buildings and to the lack of green areas, which creates disappointment, agony and frustration in those who originated from rural life and felt more belonged there, but hoped to realize their American dreams in the city centers.

The term 'American Dream' was defined in 1931 by historian James T. Adams, who is believed to have initiated the term and gave place to it in his book entitled *The Epic of America* as a "better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank" (Adams quoted in Benziman, 2005, p. 22). According to Harold Crulman, as he put forward in 1958, the original American Dream creates the image of a "land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all" (p. 23) in people's minds. Later, some other definitions focused on brotherhood, unity, success, opportunities and wealth, so the definition has undergone slight variances. Despite this, the widely believed and still valid in the 21st century definition of the American Dream as Adams also implied in the first place is that it is "a vast country with ample opportunities, provides every citizen irrespective of cast, creed or religion with a chance to become rich through hard work and diligence" (Hadiuzzaman & Kabir, 2018, p. 72) because "American democracy legitimates achievement and naturalizes the pursuit of success, educational attainment, and the acquisition of wealth and resources" (Jordan, 2005, p. 47).

Willy is one of those who focuses mainly on the opportunities America provides ignoring the importance of education, dedication and hard work. He cannot be labelled as a lazy man since he worked for the same company for over a quarter of century, but was unable to keep up with the changing demands of the sector. He holds an unrealistically high opinion of himself and lives in a world of fantasies clinging to past when being a salesman meant to have a satisfactory salary, a respectable position and being rich was possible with acquiring a charisma. He states early in the play: "Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for

instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. "Willy Loman is here!" That's all they have to know, and I go right through" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 21). He is not able to comprehend that these are the temporary charms life presents and he obsessively believes salesmanship is the only profession that could provide him. Just as the past and present overlap in his mind through memory and hallucinations, he mixes the roles and duties that the society and family are responsible for. He is in constant need to prove himself to his family particularly to Biff, so he tries to show that the old glamorous days are still prevailing, which stems from his "delusory mode of thinking" (Benziman, 2005, p. 25) and from a play of his mind to him. This condition of Willy is not only a consequence of the misguided American dream but also his demand from the market and from his profession that is "some real return physically" as Miller himself acknowledges (Miller quoted in Otten, 1999, p. 288). He is looking for "self-dignity and with it something more, […] to recover the lost love of Biff and preserve the family" (p. 288). He holds the opinion that material wealth and success are means to declare his love to them. When this is the case, his point of view towards his job gains a transitionary feature as he loads too much meaning and significance to it and uses it to reach reconciliation with the family members.

In a symposium on the play, Miller expresses: "I think Willy Loman […] is seeking for a kind of ecstasy in life, which the machine-civilization deprives people of. He is looking for his selfhood, for his immortal soul, so to speak" (Miller, Vidal, Watts, Beauford, Dworkin, Thompson & Gelb, 1958, p. 66). While trying to survive in the newly constructed competitive market and a dehumanizing society, he also struggles for compensating what he has lost in his life on personal level. He implicitly and instinctively blames himself for Biff's wrong decisions and failures in life as after witnessing his adultery in a hotel, Biff puts up walls between him and his father and leaves home not continuing his university education. On that issue, it is Willy's misdirecting his son again saying that it is being well-liked that matters and opens doors at work rather than being well-educated like Bernard, who has become a successful lawyer, but is only liked, not well-liked. As a result, Biff ends up stealing items from every decent job he has, and he loses them one by one leaving himself with a lack of regular income.

Willy's disorientation is linked to his feeling of inefficiency as a father figure, which is "coupled with his misguided effort to measure his self-worth by the expression of love he thinks he can purchase in his family" (Centola, 1993, p. 32). He desires to be counted both in business and family, but the contradiction between his words and actions causes him to be underestimated and to vanish from the market through a kind of natural selection. Similarly, he tries to fill the gap in his life after his father leaves his family and says to his brother Ben: "…I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel—kind of temporary about myself" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 36). He seeks a filler to feel more completed and strives to compensate for the emptiness inherited by his father. Every time he focuses on his job, he is betrayed by the rejection of his offer to work in the office without travelling. Ultimately, his sense of betrayal culminates when he is dismissed by someone young enough to be his son, with the justification that, as a physically aging and mentally outdated man, he no longer meets the demands of the job.

From a Marxist perspective, such struggles of Willy Loman following the discharge from his job epitomize the alienation of the working class under a capitalist system. Marx

identifies alienation as the worker's estrangement from their labor, a consequence of being reduced to a mere cog in the machinery of production (Marx, 1844/2007, pp. 86-90). Willy, once a believer in the dignity of labor, finds himself dehumanized and discarded when his physical and mental capacities can no longer meet the demands of a profit-driven society. The system commodifies his existence, as seen when his decades of loyalty to his company are dismissed with indifference, reducing him to economic surplus. For Marx, "the crux of capitalism lies in the specific type of relationship whereby one class (bourgeoisie) is able to extract surplus value from the labor of another class (the proletariat)" (Tucker-Abramson, 2012, p. 293). In accordance with that, Willy's tragic insistence on salesmanship as the only viable path reflects his internalization of such capitalist ideology, which equates personal worth with productivity and financial success. Marx's critique of capitalism as inherently exploitative is mirrored in Willy's fate: A man whose value is measured solely by his utility in the market, which presents "a subtle picture of the birth of a new kind of American person, one for whom everything is at stake at every moment and nothing of true value is for sale" (Siegel, 2012, p. 30).

Willy's deeply held values—rooted in emotion, memory, and personal dignity—stand in stark contrast to the impersonal, results-driven culture of his professional world, leaving his personal struggles unnoticed and unacknowledged. "Society responds to him with an indifference that can only seem cruel in juxtaposition to the hopes he carries with him even to the point of death" (Jacobson, 1975, p. 249). The materialistic attitude of the American society paves way to the emergence of a rather selfish, target-oriented and insensitive community. In response to that as an ultimate act, he chooses death "not simply as an escape from shame but as a last attempt to re-establish his own self-confidence and his family's integrity" (p. 255). Ironically, although the audience is never informed of the specific product Willy sells, it becomes evident in this scene that he has, in effect, been selling himself. His decision to sacrifice his life in the hope of providing financial security for his family, particularly for Biff, highlights the extent to which capitalism commodifies human existence.

As "the essence of capitalism, of a transactional society, is its chameleonlike nature" (Siegel, 2012, p. 29), for the sake of providing satisfaction and fulfillment to his customers, it is highly possible that Willy sells multiple and various products to fit in, which are referred as "an unidentified product" (Otten, 1999, p. 287) or an "empty signifier" (Barker, 1995, p. 88) at times. This non-identification of the product whose exact value is unknown and negotiable hints Marx's "estrangement of laborer who lacks a direct relationship to the product he toils to sell" (Gleitman, 2015, p. 8). He carries everything in *The Inside of His Head*—the initially intended title of the play by Miller – including his sense of alienation, desperation, failures, expectations, and dreams in his salesman's bag along with the tangible products; thus, he is on sale, as well. He gives away a part of himself every time he makes a deal in order to keep the real humanistic interaction with people and to be accepted by them apart from conducting his business. It is what he does to fix his relationship with Biff when he offers himself to be consumed completely. In a way, he becomes a victim of his own dream and of the capitalist society by being in constant battle with the industrialized world that "allows a man to succeed only to the extent that he give up what makes him most himself: His freedom, his personality […] his belief that there is something worthwhile about being well-liked, his love for his son which finally he feels he can prove only at the cost of his life" (Lawrence, 1964, p. 548). However, what Willy does not take into account is that Biff, who is still unsure regarding

what to do with his future, may not want such money costing his father's life. He may not even receive it since Willy's is not a natural death—it is a suicide. Willy's reasoning and way of thinking are majorly materialistic in that sense making his death a capitalistic end. He dies believing in the power of money strictly "crushed by the American juggernaut" (Cardullo, 2007, p. 587).

No matter how misinterpreted and mistakenly formulated the idea of the American dream turning it into a juggernaut, Willy is a firm believer of the term to the core; he is a true romantic, who feeds his soul with nature and open skies. Feeling claustrophobic among the recently rising buildings in his surroundings, Willy feels trapped and deprived of the relaxing atmosphere of nature which he thinks is his right to maintain. During a conversation with Linda, Willy, increasingly frustrated, exclaims, "Why don't you open a window in here, for God's sake!", to which Linda patiently replies, "They're all open, dear" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 6). Upon this, Willy complains as such: "The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks" (p. 6). He feels that his humanly right to breathe fresh air has been taken away from his hands and has difficulty in accepting the situation. He goes on commenting on the scene:

> The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighbourhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? […] They should've arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighbourhood [Lost] (p. 6).

Even from the very beginning, indeed, the reader or the audience gets the clue that it is not only the neighbourhood that has been massacred, but it is also the common man's soul. The reason to live has been invaded by the rapid changes taking place in everyday life. In Willy's case, the symptoms seem to be more severe than the majority because seeing the collapse of his hopes and the meaning he attached to his American Dream make him start to prepare his own end by getting lost in this chaotic environment. Stephen A. Lawrence explains the duality that puts Willy in tragedy as such:

> The apartment buildings closing in on Willy are not closing in only on his house or his family. They represent the crushing of freedom, of individuality, of personality, and most of all, of love. Willy's problem is that he is human enough to think that the same things that matter in the family-especially his love for his son-matter everywhere including the world of social success (Lawrence, 1964, p. 548).

He is not a person who is open to changes. Still, the fact that he is not a person of principles leads him to experience the situation and its effects more deeply than anyone else in the play showing that he is a man of dreams, but not realistic ones especially when his stubborn character is added to the case. Though Biff believes his father "had the wrong dreams" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 111), Charley drops the charges made on him by summarizing his condition: "A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory" (p. 111). This hints that on this land, everyone somehow chases the American Dream, but Willy's problem is that he is not contented with the success itself and does not want it for the sake of having success itself, he wishes economic freedom, a respected position and reconciled relationships with his son in a collective and compiled way like a package offering

all these together. For this reason, as being someone who inherited the salesmanship profession from his ancestors trying to stick to the old traditions, Willy Loman can be identified as a "bourgeois romantic, an odd synthesis of Joe and Chris Keller, or of Everyman and Faust" (Jacobson, 1975, p. 247). He touches the audience with his "mediocrity and failure but with the frustrated energies of his outreach beyond mediocrity and failure toward a relationship to society constantly denied him" (p. 247). The emotional and ideological rupture between father and son reaches its most revealing moment in the restaurant scene, when Biff pleads with his father: "Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it anymore" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 105). In this emotionally charged confession, Biff relinquishes the illusions of success his father clings to, hoping Willy might finally accept the truth. The repetition of "I'm nothing" is not an admission of defeat, but a breakthrough of self-knowledge—one that highlights how deeply Willy's distorted vision of the American Dream has harmed not only himself but his son. His inadequacy and lack of capacity to combine or adapt his own values to those of the society compose the main clash of the play through the false implementation of the American Dream. To Miller himself, "the less capable a man is of walking away from the central conflict of the play, the closer he approaches a tragic existence" (Miller, 1996, p. 118).

Additionally, the fact that Willy's brother Ben is depicted as a symbol of the traditional American Dream through his constant remark, "...when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. […] And by God I was rich" (Miller, 1949/1998, p. 33), and that his appearances occur only as hallucinations, underscores the illusory nature of such success. The use of the word 'jungle' metaphorically evokes a ruthless, lawless environment where only the strongest survive, reflecting the brutal and predatory aspects of capitalist ideology. Ben's mythic journey thus becomes a critique of a system that glorifies wealth acquired through conquest rather than ethical labor, revealing the darker undercurrents of the American Dream. If one follows the dream with such aspirations, s/he is bound to get only temporary and unrealistic results just as Ben's appearance in the play, which is only for a few minutes every time he arrives proving its temporariness. Also, it is only in Willy's daydreams, not anyone else's showing its unreality and fantasy. In other words, Miller implies that the American Dream needs to be reconstructed in such a way that it should not drive people to mental distortion or to chase a vain dream. Rather, it should include a certain sense, logic, reality, hard work and good education presented through Charley-Bernard relationship as well as the sincerity, likeability and some humanistic values displayed through Willy-Biff relationship. Any intense inclination to either of the sides results in one's destruction demonstrated through Willy, who is sold on dreams and bankrupted by reality.

2. 2. Mr. Nobody in the Land of Opportunity: Gatsby's American Dream

Willy Loman's story in *Death of a Salesman* reveals the deep human cost of chasing an ideal that often feels just out of reach—a theme echoed in many portrayals of the American Dream in literature. F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby in his highly reputed novel *The Great Gatsby*, offers another poignant example of a man who, like Willy, becomes consumed by his pursuit of an unattainable dream. The two share quite similar characteristics and almost the same fate in the end with slight differences. Gatsby is a man who lives in a

mansion in the West-Egg and is famous for the flamboyant parties he holds for the upper-class society. The unclear details about Gatsby's origins, his family, and how he earns his fortune fuel rumors among the crowd, suggesting that he is involved in illegal underground activities. This implies that he is an outcome of the American Dream as someone who has not been born into aristocracy, but gets wealthy through the effortless way. However, "no matter how shadowy the origins of his riches can be, Gatsby has actively taken part in the construction and liveliness of the American dream of happiness and fulfilment of the period" (Dieng, 2016, p. 103). He is a decent example that fits into the widely accepted definition of the American Dream in regard to welcoming and embracing anyone on the land of freedom.

Unlike Willy, Gatsby does not have economic problems influencing his mental state, but he is obsessed with achieving something that is not material just as Willy's passion to regain the love of his son. By using his material wealth, he targets to get in touch with Daisy once again, whom he has been in love for years but lost contact with. Willy attempts to shape his son's future through ideals of success and financial security, while Gatsby seeks to win Daisy's affection by flaunting his wealth, lavish parties, and extravagant lifestyle. However, Daisy responds with only "insincere" and "artificial" attention (Yılmaz Kurt, 2007, p. 76), ultimately contributing to Gatsby's tragic downfall. As a symbol of old money and the aristocratic elite, Daisy represents the social class Gatsby yearns to join—a class marked not only by material wealth but also by inherited privilege and emotional detachment. Her allure lies not in genuine affection, but in what she represents: Status, refinement, and acceptance into a world forever closed to Gatsby, regardless of his success. Her character embodies the exclusivity and entitlement of inherited status, reinforcing the idea that true entry into the upper-class cannot be earned, only born into. Daisy's inability to reciprocate Gatsby's devotion and her eventual retreat into the comfort of her class highlight how entrenched social hierarchies resist the ideals of meritocracy. Her presence in Gatsby's dream underscores the American Dream's inherent contradiction: While it promises equality, it ultimately preserves the very boundaries it claims to dissolve. In this sense, Willy Loman's romanticism and emotional idealism find a parallel in Gatsby's devotion to Daisy, who becomes both his dream and his fatal flaw. Shama Rangwala notes: "The dreamer is on the one hand constructed as a figure of desire, a romantic and creative visionary who looks beyond convention; yet the American Dream is definitively conventional and sets the parameters for the cruel optimism that sustains hegemonic structures" (Rangwala, 2017, p. 100). Both Willy and Gatsby are victims of this cruel optimism, haunted by a past they idealize. In Gatsby's case, this is poignantly captured in Nick's observation: "He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then…" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 118).

No matter how Gatsby seems to have climbed the social ladder, he does not manage to get full admission to the upper-class community since he cannot erase the image of a "bootlegger" (p. 66) from their memories. As he has been approached as a threat by Tom—Daisy's husband, he verbalizes what most of the guests attending Gatsby's parties have in mind even though they keep exploiting the opportunities he provides for them. He views Gatsby as a "pale, well-dressed Negro" (p. 149) while he and the others belong to the "Nordic

race" (p. 16), which is obviously a superior status when compared to "a pale Negro" before their eyes. Despite Gatsby's wealth and public image, he remains excluded from the inner circles of old money. When Tom confronts him, he delivers a devastating blow: "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 138). This line reduces Gatsby to a social nonentity, dismissing his achievements and humanity by referencing his vague, lower-class background. The contempt embedded in "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" reveals the novel's brutal class dynamics where pedigree trumps merit and where origin defines worth. Despite all Gatsby has achieved, he is still treated as an outsider, someone who has trespassed into a world that will never truly accept him.

As an additional mark of his humiliation and exclusion, Gatsby is also vaguely associated with marginalized identities. He is described as "suggestively Jewish" (Meehan, 2014, p. 78), reinforcing the notion that he is never quite at home in the world of East Egg's inherited privilege. This aligns with Willy's outsider status, as well. Playwright David Mamet famously described *Death of a Salesman* as "the story of a few told by a Jew and cast in 'universal' terms." He continues: "Willy Loman is a Jew in a Jewish industry. But he is never identified as such. His story is never avowed as a Jewish story, and so a great contribution to Jewish American history is lost. It's lost to culture as a whole, and, more importantly, it's lost to the Jews, its rightful owners" (Mamet quoted in Cardullo, 2007, p. 583). Mamet supports his idea with Miller's approval of the Jewish identification (p. 583) and Cardullo shows the Lomans' Brooklyn Jewish diction as a plus to uphold the view (p. 584). Based on the perspectives above, one could argue that Willy and Gatsby are linked by another point in that the reason of their rejections by the transitionary societies of their times—the Great Depression and the Jazz Age periods—are not only because of their individual flaws or the need to recreate the American Dream, but also of being 'othered' by the society as minorities. As a result of this, their funerals share the same destiny by being left empty by the corrupted societies.

Gatsby's rise and fall leading to such tragic end, which occurs even before the novel is finished, can be examined through the Marxist critique of capitalist ideology and its emphasis on wealth accumulation as the ultimate marker of success. Although he achieved immense material wealth, Gatsby remains an outsider in the eyes of the established upper-class. His illegal ventures, while ethically questionable, display a structural flaw within capitalism: The unequal distribution of opportunities and resources. According to Marx, capitalism creates an illusion of meritocracy, promising upward mobility while preserving the entrenched power of the bourgeoisie (Marx, 1848/2002, pp. 219-222). Gatsby's inability to transcend his "bootlegger" label reveals this fallacy, as his wealth cannot erase the stigma of his humble origins. His pursuit of Daisy symbolizes his desire not only for love but also for full societal acceptance—an impossible goal in a system that privileges heritage over individual achievement. Gatsby's ceaseless attempts to achieve a reunion with Daisy places him symbolically "beyond the pleasure principle into the realm of *jouissance*, which functions as a surplus desire not unlike Marx's surplus value" (Meehan, 2014, p. 84). This insatiable desire is also encapsulated in the recurring image of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock, which for Gatsby represents both the promise of reunion and the unreachable

future. As Nick observes, "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us" (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 180). This sentence captures Gatsby's persistent hope and tragic idealism. The phrase "recedes before us" signals the ever-elusive nature of his dream—always visible, never reachable. The green light thus symbolizes not only Gatsby's longing for Daisy, but also the larger illusion of the American Dream, forever deferred by class barriers and economic myths. The light operates as a powerful symbol of false consciousness—Gatsby's belief in a better future sustained by the illusions of capitalism and romantic idealism, even as the reality remains out of reach. Through the character of Gatsby, Fitzgerald exposes how capitalism fosters alienation by commodifying relationships and reducing human value to monetary worth. Gatsby's tragedy lies in his belief that material success can buy happiness and legitimacy, a myth perpetuated by the very system that ultimately rejects him. Moreover, depending on Nick's character, his portrayal and admiration of Gatsby, Fitzgerald "was not entirely hostile toward capitalism, free markets, and the proverbial American dream […] whose fundamental orientation toward Marxism was that, at best, it could serve as a reminder of capitalist disillusionment" (Abu-Snoubar, Attiyat & Aldawkat, 2022, p. 191). This implies that though he may not be a devoted Marxist, Fitzgerald sensed that there was something going wrong with material capitalism and it was failing gradually as an outcome of opulent America, which is in rapid decline (p. 189).

3. Conclusion

Death of a Salesman and *The Great Gatsby* dwell on the idea of the American Dream and its devastating effects on its followers when it is overloaded with various values not related to succeed or to survive in the community. Both Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby serve as cautionary figures, embodying the traps of such an idealized pursuit of illusionary success. Associating the American dream with some personal expectations or hoping magical transformations in life without hard work result in failure as well as anguish indispensably.

Both *Death of a Salesman* and *The Great Gatsby* serve as Marxist critiques of the American Dream, revealing its complicity in maintaining systemic inequality and alienation. Marx argued that capitalist societies sustain themselves by promoting ideologies that obscure class conflict and exploitation. The American Dream functions as such an ideology, promising success through hard work while masking the rigid class barriers that prevent true social mobility. Willy Loman and Jay Gatsby embody the tragic consequences of believing in this illusion. Willy's adherence to the outdated notion of salesmanship as a path to dignity leaves him disillusioned and alienated, while Gatsby's pursuit of wealth and social status exposes the hollowness of material success. Both characters' downfalls highlight capitalism's inherent contradictions: Its promise of equality and opportunity is undermined by its exploitation of the working class and preservation of class hierarchies. By reviewing the duality of the American Dream with its power to inspire and potential to destroy, Miller and Fitzgerald challenge the reader to recognize the destructive forces of a capitalist system that prioritizes profit over humanity and perpetuates the myth of limitless opportunity.

Therefore, the vision of the American Dream calls for a fundamental transformation, one that prioritizes values extending beyond mere personal gain. It must be reimagined to encompass principles such as social responsibility, moral awareness, generosity, fairness, and integrity. The novels in question criticize society for its cold-hearted materialism and overwhelming capitalist tendencies, portraying them as corrosive forces that undermine human connection and ethical conduct. However, they simultaneously acknowledge that material success remains an essential component of an individual's sense of security and fulfillment. This duality suggests that while financial stability is important, it must be pursued in balance with a broader commitment to ethical and social ideals to create a more humane, sensible and sustainable dream. Any kind of overemphasis on the material attainment results in one's experience of dehumanization. Likewise, too much commitment to emotions or humanitarian values entails disappointment blocking the way to success in such competitive environment. As Miller and Fitzgerald argue, living on the edges may lead not only to psychological but also to physical destruction of the self if balance is not managed; otherwise, no matter how 'Great' one's life seems outside, being a 'Lo(w)man' may be the utmost consequence.

References

Abu-Snoubar, T. K., Attiyat, N., & Aldawkat, I. (2022). Capitalism and the Fall of the American Dream: A Marxist Reading of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams*. *The IUP Journal of English Studies, 17*(1), 189-200.

Ansarey, D. (2013). Death of Salesmanship and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. *ASA University Review, 7*(1), 151-160.

Barker, S. (1995). The Crisis of Authenticity: *Death of a Salesman* and the Tragic Muse. In M. C. Roudané (Ed.), *Approaches to Teaching Miller's Death of a Salesman* (pp. 82-101). The Modern Language Association of America.

Benziman, G. (2005). Success, Law, and the Law of Success: Reevaluating *Death of a Salesman*'s Treatment of the American Dream. *South Atlantic Review, 70*(2), 20-40.

Cardullo, B. (2007). *Death of a Salesman*, Life of a Jew: Ethnicity, Business, and the Character of Willy Loman. *Southwest Review, 92*(4), 583-596.

Centola, S. R. (1993). Family Values in *Death of a Salesman*. *CLA Journal, 37*(1), 29-41.

Dieng, M. (2016). Kinship and Friendship in Hardship: A Comparative Analysis of Aminata Sow Fall's *Le Revenant* and John Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies, 9*(4), 97-110.

Fitzgerald, F. S. (1925). *The Great Gatsby*. Retrieved from https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/the-great-gatsby.pdf

Gleitman, C. (2015). Saint-Mamas, Strudel, and the Single Man in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman. The Arthur Miller Journal, 10(1),* 3-17.

Hadiuzzaman, K. Md., & Kabir, Md. Z. (2018). Unveiling the Glamour of Salesmanship in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. *ASA University Review, 12*(2), 71-78.7

Jacobson, I. (1975). Family Dreams in *Death of a Salesman*. *American Literature, 47*(2), 247-258.

Jordan, E. (2005). The Fallacies of Cultural Narratives, Re-enactment, Legacy, and Agency in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*. *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS), 11*(2), 45-62.

Lawrence, S. A. (1964). The Right Dream in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. *College English, (25)*7, 547-549.

Marx, K. (2007). *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (D. McLellan, Ed.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1844)

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2002). *The Communist Manifesto* (G. Bedggood, Trans.). Pluto Press. (Original work published 1848)

Meehan, A. (2014). Repetition, Race, and Desire in *The Great Gatsby. Journal of Modern Literature, 37*(2), 76-91.

Miller, A. (1996). *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. Martin, R. A., & Centola, S. R. (Eds.). New York, NY: Da Capo.

Miller, A. (1998). *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem*. New York, NY: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1949)

Miller, A., Vidal, G., Watts, R., Beauford, J., Dworkin, M., Thompson, D.W., & Gelb, P. (1958). *Death of a Salesman*: A Symposium. *The Tulane Drama Review, 2*(3), 63-69.

Otten, T. (1999). Death of a Salesman at Fifty - Still "Coming Home to Roost". *Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 41*(3), 280-310.

Rangwala, S. (2017). Race and the Thickening of Mediation in Repetitions of *The Great Gatsby. ESC, 43*(2-3), 91-116.

Siegel, L. (2012). Willy Loman's Secret. *The Nation, 30 April 2012*, 28-30.

Tucker-Abramson, M. (2012). Is Marlowe a Marxist? The Economic Reformation of Magic in *Doctor Faustus. Rethinking Marxism, 24*(2), 288-301.

Yılmaz Kurt, Z. (2007). Social Reality Versus Ontological Reality: The Differing Sense of Reality in *The Great Gatsby* and *Heart of Darkness*. *Çankaya University Journal of Arts and Sciences, 8*, 67-83.

Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature

2025 VOLUME: 7 ISSUE: 1

E-ISSN: 2717-9435 Research Article

Submitted: June 12, 2025
Accepted: June 30, 2025

Lacanian Transference in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

Zeliha IŞIK[1]

Abstract

This article explores the intersection of Lacanian psychoanalysis and subaltern theory in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, focusing on the female protagonists Mariam and Rahel. It examines how each woman internalizes the figure of the Other which is mediated through their respective mothers, Nana and Ammu, within both familial and socio-political contexts. The transmission of subaltern identity and maternal trauma positions Mariam and Rahel as silenced, marginalized subjects shaped by patriarchal and colonial power structures. Nana and Ammu, cast out and silenced for their transgressive relationships with Jalil and Velutha, respectively, become emblematic of the abject maternal Other. Their social exclusion prefigures the daughters' own descent into silence and passivity. This article argues that the Lacanian mechanism of transference offers a crucial model for understanding the reproduction of subaltern consciousness, demonstrating how the maternal Other becomes the primary site where macro-political oppression is psychically internalized and transmitted across generations. Nana and Ammu's marginalization, resulting from their socially transgressive relationships with Jalil and Velutha, becomes a formative force in shaping their daughters' inward, subdued identities. The emotional and social consequences of these maternal experiences are transmitted to Mariam and Rahel, who come to embody the silence, shame, and dispossession inherited through maternal bonds. Transference, in both novels, emerges as a process through which the structures of domination reproduce themselves within the psyche, binding the personal to the political. Therefore, the fusion of Lacanian and subaltern perspectives provides a critical framework for analyzing how desire, power, and colonial legacies shape feminine subjectivity in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: *Transference, Subaltern Identity, the Other, A Thousand Splendid Suns, The God of Small Things*

[1] Title, Affiliation (if any), faculty, department, email, ORCID.

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* present poignant narratives of female subalternity shaped through intimate familial relationships and the broader sociopolitical hierarchies operating within postcolonial India and war-torn Afghanistan. This paper offers a comparative analysis of the characters Mariam and Rahel, focusing on how their identities are formed through the psychological process of transference from their mothers, who themselves occupy subaltern positions within patriarchal and colonial structures. In response to Gayatri Spivak's seminal question, 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988), I argue that the subaltern's subservient position is constituted through a transfer from the parental Other, where it is established as a normative position within the symbolic order. Within the family structure, the subaltern is systematically conditioned socially, psychologically, and physically not to speak. That is, this paper argues that Mariam and Rahel do not simply inherit subalternity as a social category but psychically internalize it through a process of Lacanian transference. In this dynamic, the traumatized maternal figure functions as a distorted 'subject-supposed-to-know,' offering a Symbolic Order already saturated with powerlessness, which the daughters are compelled to repeat. Both Ammu and Nana function as the first significant figures of authority, repression, and desire in their daughters' lives. They shape the daughters' earliest understandings of identity, silence, and limitation. The transmission of the mother's emotional world, comprising shame, desire, and resistance, becomes foundational in the construction of Mariam's and Rahel's subjectivities.

Khaled Hosseini depicts Mariam as a child raised in a rural and patriarchal Afghan society, where she inherits her mother Nana's bitterness, shame, and feelings of abandonment. This emotional legacy becomes more deeply entrenched after Mariam's failed encounter with her father, Jalil. Her later experiences with Rasheed and Laila are marked by a deep internalization of guilt and submission that reflect the mental universe she inherited from her mother. In a parallel narrative, Rahel in *The God of Small Things* absorbs the marginality and voicelessness of her mother, Ammu, who is socially stigmatized as a divorced woman living within a rigid caste and gender system. Rahel's fractured selfhood and emotional detachment in adulthood echo the psychological trauma and social alienation passed on by Ammu.

This study applies a critical close reading methodology grounded in the theories of Jacques Lacan and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Through Lacan's theory of transference, particularly his concepts of the Other and transference, the analysis explores how early interpersonal dynamics are inscribed onto the subject's unconscious. At the same time, Spivak's reading of subalternity interrogates the silences imposed on women who are positioned as marginalized, passive, and subservient. These theoretical frameworks together illuminate how Mariam and Rahel, as daughters, model themselves on their mothers' internal worlds, adopting patterns of self-perception and emotional response shaped by gendered oppression and cultural exclusion.

Reading *The God of Small Things* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through the perspective of Lacanian transference offer a new critical perspective to the existing literature combining

postcolonial theory and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. It reshapes the relationship between the reader, the text, and its characters. This approach moves beyond surface-level reading and prompts readers to engage with the unconscious forces that shape identity, desire, and narrative, both within the characters and within themselves. In doing so, it brings a largely unexplored psychoanalytic perspective to postcolonial literature and broadens the methodological approaches available in contemporary literary studies.

Agustina and Budiman argue that "various types of violence and atrocities, both physical and psychological, are experienced by the female characters, revealing hegemony and domination" in the Afghan social context (2024, p. 237). Actually, in Indian social settings, Rahel goes through similar experiences too. Mariam and Rahel grow up within distinct yet comparably restrictive environments, shaped by the historical consequences of colonialism and the deeply entrenched structures of patriarchy. The differences between rural and urban life, the separation of ethnic and racial affiliations, and the various cultural codes that regulate women's roles all contribute to the formation of unique but comparable subaltern identities. I argue that the transference of the mental universe from mother to daughter reflects not only private familial dynamics but also larger ideological and structural forces. The familial relationship emerges as the most powerful site of transference, assigning each daughter a social, emotional, and intellectual position within the world. In tracing these intergenerational projections, this article contributes to an understanding of postcolonial subjectivity through the perspectives of psychoanalysis and subaltern theory.

Lacanian Transference in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini

Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* illustrates a complicated connection between a father and his daughter. This fragile relationship compels Mariam to rely on her mother's perceptions regarding the world and to embrace her mother's conception of the Other as her own. In light of the protagonist's conflicted and complicated relationships, this article investigates how Khaled Hosseini portrays the transference that occurred when Mariam modeled the Other of her mother, or, in other words, how Mariam transferred the mental universe of her mother, whom she perceived as omniscient in a colonial and patriarchal social setting. Raised within the intersecting dynamics of Afghan patriarchy and enduring colonial power, Mariam's subjectivity is shaped by a transference that illuminates both her intimate relationships and the broader sociohistorical context. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, "male misogyny is largely drawn from the character of Rasheed, who violently abuses Miriam and later Laila for his interpretations of household disobedience" (Lam, 2009, p. 258). While Rasheed represents the most overt form of patriarchal violence, this analysis posits that the foundational structuration of Mariam's subaltern identity occurs not through this direct abuse, but through the earlier, more subtle transference of the maternal Other.

I unravel the internalized image of subjugated and objectified Afghan women through Mariam's transference experience. The theories of transference by Jacques Lacan and subaltern theory have overlapping areas of concern and can be mutually reinforcing when examining the effects of "the strongly gendered structures in Afghanistan" on Afghan subjectivity, desire, and

identity, as well as the experience of transference between mothers and daughters (Von der Lipe, 2012, p. 28). For this reason, I employed an analytical approach and used postcolonial psychoanalysis to figure out how interpersonal power positions influence Nana's and hence Mariam's intrapersonal qualities. This paper concludes that familial relationships have the highest relevance for the construction of the ego and assigning a social, emotional, and intellectual place in life.

The concept of the Other in Afghanistan—encompassing social structures, law, language, social norms, and ethics—must be understood within the context of the country's deeply fragmented sociopolitical landscape, which has been profoundly shaped by historical conflicts, ethnic divisions, and enduring colonial and foreign interventions. The disassociation between social groups and the rigid adherence to ethnic and tribal norms emerged in part due to prolonged foreign involvement in the Middle East, notably the intervention of Western powers, including the United States. These tensions, which can be traced back to the early 19th century, gave rise to layers of regional, ethnic, and cultural distinctions that continue to influence Afghan society.

Multiple historical processes, including internal conflict, imperial disruption, and shifting power dynamics, have contributed to the formation and reconstruction of distinct ethnic, social, and gender identities throughout Afghanistan. During the internal conflicts, Mujahidin groups who demanded the control of the country "used rape as a strategy to frighten people and keep the soldiers happy," which played a significant role in shaping sociocultural structures of the Afghanistan (Asif, 2024, p. 2). Muhammad Asif discusses the reasons for the subjugation of women within the context of internal conflict:

> Men killed their wives, sisters, and daughters to protect their honour from being disgraced by the enemy. During the reign of the Mujahidin (1992–1996) and Taliban (1996–2001), female education was prohibited, and women were not allowed to hold any job. They were restricted to their houses and could only leave the house in the company of a male near relative. (Asif, 2024, p. 2).

As a result, the country's diverse ethnic groups not only occupy different geographical regions but also sustain unique cultural practices, languages, folklore, and ethical systems. For instance, the majority of Pashtuns inhabit the plains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while Tajiks are predominantly located in northern provinces such as Badakhshan, Parwan, Takhar, and Baghlan. These geographic and cultural distances have reinforced social divisions, with each group maintaining its own norms to regulate social life.

Regarding the Other that shapes Mariam's identity, her upbringing in an isolated mud hut in rural Herat situates her worldview firmly within a conservative and patriarchal framework of religion, ethics, and law, deeply embedded in the traditional cultural codes of her ethnic and regional context. Fitzpatrick (2009) argues that "characters in the books reject values that are characterized as 'Western,' such as the education of women, intellectual freedom, self-determination (of women), and all types of Western culture (movies, books, etc.)" (p. 246). However, Laila, Mariam's co-wife, raised in the more urban and comparatively progressive

environment of Kabul, is exposed to a more liberal, educated, and cosmopolitan perspective, which significantly informs her sense of agency and capacity for resistance. This is because Mariam and Laila belong to distinct ethnic and cultural groups from different regions and therefore inherit unique cultural codes shaped by Afghanistan's diverse ethnic landscape. While Mariam has Hazara culture in Herat, Laila belongs to Pashtuns in Kabul.

These divergent upbringings mean that Mariam and Laila internalize different versions of the symbolic order, what Lacan refers to as the Other. According to Lacanian theory, the Other encompasses the social structure, the law, religion, and ethical codes that precede and shape individual subjectivity. In this sense, Mariam and Laila acquire and transmit different manifestations of the Other based on their distinct social positions and cultural conditioning. The disjunction in their internalized values and identities is not simply personal but reflects broader sociopolitical dynamics, namely, the fragmentation of Afghan society along ethnic, regional, and ideological lines. Therefore, the mental and emotional landscapes of Mariam and Laila are products of historically embedded social structures, shaped by war, occupation, ethnic segregation, and cultural divergence. These factors not only define their individual experiences but also illuminate the broader mechanisms by which identity is constructed and contested in times of national upheaval.

I argue that Mariam internalizes her mother's subaltern position within Afghan society in Herat and carries this marginalized and silenced identity into adulthood, where it shapes her responses to abuse, love, and self-worth. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly the concepts of the Mirror Stage and the Other, this analysis demonstrates how Mariam's internal world is shaped through the internalization of Nana's perceived the Other.

Mariam is the harami (illegitimate child) of Jalil, a wealthy businessman, and Nana, Jalil's former servant. From birth, she occupies a marginalized position, reflecting how Afghan society devalues women, especially those born outside the confines of a socially accepted family structure. Nana, having been cast out by Jalil and forced to raise Mariam in isolation, embodies the consequences women face when they are no longer useful to men. She constantly warns Mariam about the world's cruelty toward women, insisting that a woman's fate is to endure suffering. Nana, a socially ostracized and psychologically broken woman, becomes the child's first mirror and voice of the law. Her contempt, self-hatred, and resignation are absorbed by Mariam, who later reproduces this inherited sense of shame and inferiority in her relationships with Rasheed and Laila.

Lacan's Mirror Stage explains how the infant first identifies with an image of wholeness in the mirror, mediated by Nana's, that is, the caregiver's gaze. As Bailly (2023) states, "The mother's gaze is the child's first mirror; the child's identity or notion of itself as a whole being is first formed in that gaze" (p. 37). Accordingly, Mariam's perception of the image is influenced by Nana's, the caregiver's, gaze. Nana serves as Mariam's primary mirror, shaping and framing her ego. Nana pushes Mariam to identify with herself and conform to gender and societal roles in Afghanistan, claiming that "there is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school. Look at me (Hosseini, 2007, p. 17). In

this way, Nana instils in Mariam her own internalized the Other that is shaped by social structures, legal constraints, and prescribed gender roles, urging her to accept the serving, silent, and submissive subaltern position to which Nana herself has long conformed.

For Bailly (2023), if the caregiver says encouraging words during the experience of seeing the image of itself as a whole, the baby will have a favourable self-perception. Otherwise, the occurs. That is, the baby's sense of self and ego are formed through interactions with the caregiver, who is typically an omnipotent mother with knowledge of society standards, regulations, and laws (Lacan, 1938). In this way, Lacan explains the existence and influence of the caregiver who helps the baby encounter the objectified image and posits the baby in the realm of the symbolic order through the concept of the Other. In Mariam's case, Nana communicates her knowledge and experiences with the stereotyped image of women and an illegitimate child produced in a long-established society that praises the patriarchal system while devaluing women. "Mariam was five years old the first time she heard the word *harami,"* which means that Nana ingrains the object image of an inferior and unwanted image of an illegitimate child in Mariam's mirror stage (Hosseini, 2007, p. 3). Nana has internalized the inferiority of being a woman and mother of misfortune in Afghanistan, and she imprinted her own sense of worthlessness and helplessness in Mariam. Through the discourse of Nana (the Other), Mariam acquires her mother's language, norms, social and religious precepts, and ideals for women.

Mothers transmit the Other to the child, and "as the child's language develops, it begins to attach ideas to the objectified self, which is to become ego" (Bailly, 2023, p. 35). Mariam wishes to identify with the image of a schoolgirl, but Nana destroys Mariam's ideal self-image and relegates Mariam's ego to the socially established subject position of Afghan women, affixing signifiers such as "ugly, lowly" girl like Nana herself (Hosseini, 2007, p. 18). Mariam daydreams of what life would be like if she could attend school.

> Thoughts of classrooms and teachers had rattled around Mariam's head—images of notebooks with lined pages, columns of numbers, and pens that made dark, heavy marks. She pictured herself in a classroom with other girls her age. Mariam longed to place a ruler on a page and draw important-looking lines (Hosseini, 2007, p. 17).

She imagines what life would be like if she could live with her father in his home in the city, and Nana reproaches her and reminds her that women, like herself, are expected to adopt a subordinate role in life. She readily accepts oppression, as she believes it is their duty to endure all the suffering inside a culture dominated by men. This is nothing unusual to her. Therefore, Nana forces Mariam to yield to the object-image of the oppressed and degraded Afghan woman, which is created by the sociopolitical and religious doctrines of Afghan society. Nana advises Mariam to adopt the object-image of Afghan women and "tahamul, endure" for all the torment and contempt towards women, especially in the case of being a bastard in Afghan society (Hosseini, 2007, p. 21).

For Mariam, Nana's gaze is profoundly ambivalent—her love is entangled with contempt, and her words of affection are undercut by fatalism and rejection. Nana functions as

the primary Other, the voice of social law and maternal knowledge, impressing upon Mariam an object-image that is deformed, degraded, and fixed in passivity. Nana positions herself as a model for Mariam, urging her to internalize endurance in the face of degradation and suffering, just as she has.

As Lacan (1938) explains, the mother helps usher the child into the Symbolic Order—language, norms, law—through her own place within that order. Nana, having internalized Afghan patriarchy's devaluation of women, offers Mariam a symbolic world that is already contaminated with powerlessness and submission. Accordingly, Nana continuously dissuades Mariam from dreaming of school, self-worth, or recognition by her father, Jalil. However, Mariam continues to "[picture] herself sitting in the private balcony seats,…[eating] ice cream, alongside her siblings and Jalil" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 27). In contrast to Nana's isolated and constrained existence, Mariam aspires to a life of freedom, symbolized by her fascination with birds. She envies their ability to transcend boundaries and imagines herself in their place, free to explore the world beyond her confined reality: "She was envious of these birds. They had been to Herat. They had flown over its mosques and its bazaars. Maybe they had landed on the walls of Jalil's home, on the front steps of his cinema" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 27). When Mariam expresses a desire for agency and seeks her father's love, recognition, and acceptance, Nana responds with bitterness and reproach, saying:

> What a stupid girl you are! You think you matter to him, that you're wanted in his house? You think you're a daughter to him? That he's going to take you in? Let me tell you something: a man's heart is a wretched, wretched thing, Mariam. It isn't like a mother's womb. It won't bleed; it won't stretch to make room for you. I'm the only one who loves you. I'm all you have in this world, Mariam, and when I'm gone, you'll have nothing. You'll have nothing. You *are* nothing! (Hosseini, 2007, p. 26).

Mariam is denied value, inheritance, legitimacy, and love in the eyes of the father in the male dominated world, by extension of symbolic language and the Law of the society. Her symbolic position is marked as absence—lack. Through harsh language, the mother inscribes Mariam's subjectivity as deficient, preparing her for a life shaped by exclusion and silence. In Lacanian terms, it is not just a scene of emotional abuse—it is a scene of symbolic violence, of entry into a world where the subject is fundamentally split and gendered through language.

Despite Nana's warnings, young Mariam idolizes Jalil, believing he loves her. However, when she seeks his acceptance by visiting his home, she is humiliated and abandoned, left outside like an unwanted burden. Instead of being welcomed into her father's home, as she dreamed, she would be, she remains an outsider. Later, she tries to sneak onto Jalil's home grounds, but he rejects her attempt.

> Their gaze skimmed over all of these things before they found a face across the garden in an upstairs window. The face was there for only an instant, a flash, but long enough. Long enough for Mariam to see the eyes widen, the mouth open. Then it snapped away from view. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 32).

The 'face' that Mariam refers to is Jalil's face, as readers later find out; this image of her father as the 'face' reiterates how disillusioned by reality she is the moment she spots him in his home. This pivotal moment shatters her illusions and reinforces the brutal reality that women, particularly illegitimate daughters, have no power in a patriarchal system. After Nana's tragic suicide, Mariam is married off to Rasheed, a much older man, emphasizing how women are transactional objects with little agency over their futures.

Following her disillusionment with her father, Mariam undergoes a psychological transformation shaped not only by her strained relationship with Jalil but also by the broader oppressive forces of patriarchal and colonial structures that define her social reality. Therefore, Mariam internalizes the subaltern position, internalizing the repeated teachings of Nana: "She understood then what Nana meant, that a *harami* was an unwanted thing; that she, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 4). Jalil neither listens to Mariam nor permits her to articulate her desires or assert her needs. Instead, she is relegated back to the margins, both socially and spatially, to the outskirts where she is kept out of sight. As Spivak (1988) argues, the subaltern cannot speak because dominant discourse predefines what can be expressed and acknowledged. In Mariam's case, her status as a *harami* (bastard) renders her unreadable within the dominant symbolic order. Her mother, exiled to a rural existence after being cast out by Jalil, embodies the lowest strata of the social hierarchy, a position she internalizes and subsequently imposes upon Mariam.

When Jalil rejects Mariam for fear of losing his reputation and avoids being seen with an illegitimate daughter, Mariam confronts her own abject object-image, as perceived by others in society. Mariam has to face up to the negative perception of herself held by others in society. Mariam is driven to reunite with her mother due to her recognition of her mother's inherent virtue. However, when she returns home, she discovers her mother, Nana, has died, and her hopes of being loved are dashed. Nana's desperate plea, "I'll die if you go," is tragically fulfilled when she takes her own life, thereby reinforcing the validity of her earlier assertions (Hosseini, 2007, p. 36). The suicide consolidates Nana's claim that she is Mariam's sole source of love and protection while simultaneously underscoring Mariam's harsh reality as a worthless and unwanted *harami* in the eyes of society.

Consequently, Mariam—having internalized and mirrored Nana's embodiment of the Other—submits to patriarchal authority and gender-based oppression through her coerced marriage to Rasheed. By replicating her mother's subaltern position, Mariam undergoes a form of psychological and social transference. Mariam submits to the arranged marriage, thereby internalizing and succumbing to a subaltern identity—as symbolized by her being "sent away because she was the walking, breathing embodiment of their shame" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 45).

Mariam comes to embody the quintessential figure of the submissive and silenced woman, assuming a subaltern role through her endurance of Rasheed's violence and abuse. Although Rasheed insults or curses Mariam, saying, "You know nothing, do you? You're like a child. Your brain is empty." Mariam never resists or talks back, but she "[bears] his scorn,

his ridicule, his insults, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 89). Her silence reflects the internalization of patriarchal norms and her acceptance of a subaltern position within an abusive domestic sphere. Her acceptance of this position is deeply informed by the internalized gendered discourse imparted by her mother, as reflected in Nana's teaching, "Only one skill: And it is this: tahamul. Endure" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 17). Mariam's relation to the patriarchal order is mediated by her subaltern mother, who inscribes in her a sense of duty that naturalizes endurance as an expected mode of being; and, so does she.

Rasheed constantly finds trivial excuses to blame Mariam and beats her. Regarding this, Nana had once warned Mariam, saying, "Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 7). Rasheed blames Mariam for not cooking the rice properly and subjects her to a cruel punishment, and Mariam complies with his orders and endures the suffering of domestic violence.

> He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, his upper lip curled in a sneer. "Now chew," he said. Through the mouthful of grit and pebbles, Mariam mumbled a plea. Tears were leaking out of the corners of her eyes. "CHEW!" he bellowed. A gust of his smoky breath slammed against her face. Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 94).

Throughout her miserable life, Mariam repeats whatever has been dictated by her mother and inherited the traditional subaltern woman identity Nana exemplified to her. Throughout her life of suffering, Mariam internalizes and reproduces the values instilled by her mother, ultimately inheriting the traditional subaltern female identity that Nana embodied and imparted to her. Like her life, Mariam's death also mirrors Nana's way of expressing love. Just as Nana took her own life to demonstrate that a life without Mariam held no meaning for her, Mariam accepts responsibility for Rasheed's death and sacrifices herself, choosing execution in Laila's place to save Laila and Aziza and to express her deep love for them. In doing so, Mariam transcends the silence and invisibility that once defined her subaltern existence. Much like her mother, she reclaims agency through sacrifice. As the narrative affirms, Mariam ultimately leaves "the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, and a guardian. A mother. A person of consequence at last" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 329). Thus, her death becomes not only an act of love but also a moment of existential affirmation and moral significance.

Lacanian Transference in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

Maninder Kapoor states that "*The God of Small Things* displays just such a marked inclination to resort to "inversion" as a subversive narrative strategy that allows the woman writer frequent occasion to disrupt the hegemony of patriarchal structures" (Kapoor, 2021, p. 47). Through the portrayal of Ammu and her Untouchable lover Velutha, Arundhati Roy amplifies subaltern voices and critiques the rigid hierarchies of caste and gender. In this sense,

Kapoor characterizes *The God of Small Things* as an "explicit articulation of those absent and invisible histories that are generally overlooked in the larger narratives of history and politics" (Kapoor, 2021, p. 48). In this article I argue that Rahel in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* mirrors her mother's silenced, subaltern existence, gradually embodying the same introversion and marginalization. As a result of Ammu's transgressive love affair with Velutha, who is lower than the lowest caste in India, Rahel witnesses firsthand how rigid social and gender norms erase Velutha's existence and render Ammu invisible. These observations deeply shape Rahel's understanding of relationships, leading her to internalize passivity and emotional restraint as a response to the bitter consequences of defying societal boundaries.

As Shing Yi (2003) notes, "the novel is ultimately concerned with marginality, absence, and loss: in other words, the invisible narratives that are consumed by power, politics, or imperialism" (p. 1). Building this perspective, I examine how Rahel, the daughter of the marginalized Ammu, transfers and reenacts patterns of subaltern identity. Like her mother, Rahel becomes increasingly invisible and silent, embodying the generational transmission of marginalization. Ammu herself is represented as a silenced and marginalized subaltern figure within the deeply patriarchal structure of Indian society. As a divorced woman, she is stripped of social legitimacy and denied a voice, even by her own father, Pappachi. His admiration for British colonial values leads him to dismiss Ammu's report of abuse and sexual coercion by her British husband. This internalized colonial mindset is made explicit in his statement, "an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man's wife" (Roy, 2002, p. 42), a remark that not only invalidates Ammu's lived experience but also underscores the familial and cultural forces that reinforce her subjugation.

In addition to being marginalized as a divorced woman, a status that is largely stigmatized in Indian society, Ammu further violates social conventions by engaging in a relationship with Velutha, a man from a caste traditionally referred to as "Untouchable." As a Dalit, Velutha belongs to a community systematically excluded from social and physical contact with members of the upper castes. Due to the rigid social rules and systemic exclusion imposed by the caste system, Velutha, as an Untouchable, is "not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched" (Roy, 2002, p. 73). Ammu's romantic involvement with him, however, defies these deeply entrenched boundaries, resulting in severe consequences for both individuals. As an upper-caste woman, Ammu's transgression challenges the established caste and social hierarchies, leading to her expulsion from the family home, her social ostracization, and eventual separation from her children. Velutha, in turn, faces the ultimate punishment: he is brutally murdered for crossing caste lines and engaging in a relationship deemed unacceptable by the dominant social order. In other words, Baby Kochamma ensures Velutha's erasure from both the social and physical world.

In the novel, "Baby Kochamma, who misuses and (fearfully) enforces the status quo," represents the authority figure within the symbolic order of Kerala, India (Tickell, 2007, p. 28). Therefore, I interpret Baby Kochamma as a figure of the Other, exerting control over Ammu's forbidden love, "an act that denies the dehumanizing, exploitative separations of caste, class, or ethnic difference and becomes, in the process, a symbol of future change" (Tickell, 2007, p.

31). Baby Kochamma perceives the love affair as a transgression and swiftly moves to put both Ammu and Velutha in their place. Upon discovering their socially unacceptable relationship, which makes "the unthinkable thinkable," she emphasizes the act's intolerability by framing it as something beyond both imagination and symbolization within Kerala's prevailing symbolic order (Roy, 2002, p. 256). In response to this perceived violation, Baby Kochamma orchestrates the erasure of the stigma, and as a result, "death came for" Velutha (Roy, 2002, p. 320). When it comes to Ammu, who crosses the boundaries set by the class and caste system, Baby Kochamma scapegoats her, takes her children away, and banishes her from the family, thereby casting her out of the symbolic order, saying that "a married daughter had no position in her parents' home." As for a divorced daughter—according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all" (Roy, 2002, p. 45).

Alongside personal emotions and thoughts, long-established social structures and cultural norms are equally crucial in Lacanian psychoanalysis. In line with the Lacanian approach, Joanne Lipson Freed highlights Roy's treatment of the intertwined relationship between personal trauma and the symbolic order, stating that Roy does not depict a "psychological healing that divorces[s] individual suffering from the social and political structures that cause it: the complex interactions among colonialism, class, caste, and religion that define the rural town in southern India where her novel is set" (Freed, 2011, p. 222). In this context, Rajeshwar Mittapalli (2018) offers an account of the Other, that is, social rules, class, caste systems, and law in Kerala, India:

> An unsettling fact about India is that more than seventy years of democracy have made no real difference to the exploitative social and economic structures of the country. Basic institutions continue to be as feudal, hierarchical, hidebound, obscurantist, and casteist as they have always been. In fact, the ruling elites have never even tried to democratize them. They have never sincerely striven for collective good, social justice, and poverty alleviation. (pp. 45-46)

Baby Kochamma exercises authoritative power to erase subversive identities such as Ammu and Velutha, rendering them silent and invisible within the dominant symbolic order. In doing so, she upholds and perpetuates the existing social hierarchy. Her complicity in Velutha's death and Ammu's subsequent ostracization inflicts profound trauma on Rahel, who internalizes and replicates her mother's worldview. Arundhati Roy underscores Velutha's invisibility through the evocative description that he "leaves no footprints in the sand, no ripples in the water, no reflections in mirrors," symbolizing the erasure of marginalized identities. Yet, the trauma of witnessing Velutha's brutal death, following his false accusation of kidnapping the twins and raping Ammu, casts a long shadow over both Ammu and Rahel. Ammu's experience of systemic marginalization, humiliation, and silencing within the patriarchal and caste-bound society of Kerala leads Rahel to co-identify with her mother and internalize Ammu's perceived symbolic order, or in other words, the Other.

Confronted with the tragic consequences of violating the class and caste boundaries rooted in Kerala's social order, most clearly illustrated through the cross-caste love between

Velutha and Ammu, Rahel witnesses her mother's impoverishment and silencing. She internalizes the gendered expectations and oppressive norms of the symbolic order, which "imprints itself on those who lived in it" (Roy, 2002, p. 309). As a result, Rahel mirrors Ammu's reclusive and silenced demeanour and ultimately submits to the rigid social hierarchy and gender roles enforced by their community. "Estha's muteness, like Rahel's vacant gaze, is a legacy of Ammu's helplessness in the face of rigid caste and gender constraints" (Freed, 2011, p. 225). Sharing the burden of guilt with Ammu for violating social norms by loving someone deemed unlovable and ultimately contributing to his death, Rahel never recovers from the trauma of her involvement in Velutha's tragic end. She feels emotionally distant from her husband, burdened by a sense of sinfulness even during their moments of intimacy. Figures such as Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, and Pappachi, who represent the dominant social structure, legal authority, and moral code, offer no comfort or absolution. No one tells Rahel or Ammu, "You're not the Sinners. You're the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You are the victims, not the perpetrators" (Roy, 2002, p. 191). As a result, the absence of guidance from authority figures leads Rahel to internalize her mother's shame and trauma, which later affects her ability to form healthy relationships.

Ammu's marginalization and condemnation as a result of her relationship with Velutha leave a profound psychological imprint on Rahel, instilling in her a deep caution toward romantic and intimate relationships. Fearing similar punishment and exclusion, Rahel internalizes her mother's fate, recognizing that Ammu's expulsion from the symbolic order was not merely personal but a consequence of transgressing rigid caste and gender norms. This inherited trauma shapes Rahel's adult identity, rendering her emotionally distant and disconnected from intimacy, both sexual and emotional. In this way, Rahel not only inherits her mother's shame but also continues her unresolved struggle against patriarchy and the deeply entrenched class and caste structures that perpetuate inequality, even though India has been governed by a parliamentary democracy since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

Conclusion

In conclusion, The God of Small Things and A Thousand Splendid Suns reveal how female subalternity is not only socially constructed but also psychologically transferred through maternal Other within patriarchal and postcolonial systems. By examining Mariam and Rahel through the combined frameworks of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Spivakian subaltern theory, this paper has demonstrated how the internalized subject positions of the mothers, Nana and Ammu, are transferred to their daughters, shaping the daughters' perception of self, their place in society, and their capacity, or incapacity, to speak. Both Mariam and Rahel are situated within different geopolitical landscapes, war-torn Afghanistan and postcolonial India; however, their psychological and emotional trajectories echo one another. Their experiences reflect the deeply gendered and intergenerational legacies of marginalization and voicelessness. Their family becomes a primary site for the reproduction of subaltern consciousness. Their maternal bond functions not just as a source of care or abandonment, but as a formative mirror through which their identity and desire are formed. These daughters,

Mariam and Rahel born into systems of entrenched inequality, come to embody the inherited traumas and repressions of their mothers. As a result, Mariam and Rahel's subaltern voice, as Spivak argues, is not merely silenced by external structures of dominance but is also internalized through familial affect, where silence, shame, and submission become normalized within the symbolic order. Ultimately, reading these novels through the lens of transference reveals that the political project of giving voice to the subaltern must also contend with the profound and often unconscious ways in which powerlessness is psychically inherited, repeated, and embodied within the most intimate of human bonds.

REFERENCES

Agustina, H. N., Budiman, M., & DSR Publishers / The University of Jordan. (2024). Focalization of Afghan women's repression and resistance in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *My Forbidden Face*. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences, 51*(3), 234–241. https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v51i3.2

Asif, M. (2024). Unveiling the veil: An examination of gender oppression in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. *Journal of International Communication*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2024.2362704

Bailly, L. (2023). *Lacan: A beginner's guide*. Oneworld Publications.

Ballestrin, L. (2022). Postcolonial and decolonial subaltern feminisms. *Postcolonial Studies, 25*(1), 108–127.

Burman, E. (2016). Fanon's Lacan and the traumatogenic child: Psychoanalytic reflections on the dynamics of colonialism and racism. *Theory, Culture & Society, 33*(4), 77–101.

Cheng, A. A. (2001). *The melancholy of race: Psychoanalysis, assimilation and hidden grief*. Oxford University Press.

Fiaz, A. (2023). Prospects of studying the marginalized communities of Pakistan in subaltern studies framework. *Pakistan Vision, 24*(2), 104–121.

Fielder, T. (2022). Psychoanalysis and antiracism in mid-20th-century America: An alternative angle of vision. *History of the Human Sciences, 35*(3–4), 193–217.

Fink, B. (2016). *Lacan on love: An exploration of Lacan's Seminar VIII, Transference*. Polity Press.

Fitzpatrick, C. (2009). New Orientalism in popular fiction and memoir: An illustration of type. Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 4(3), 243–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/17447140902972305

Freed, J. L. (2011). The ethics of identification: The global circulation of traumatic narrative in Silko's *Ceremony* and Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Comparative Literature Studies, 48*(2), 219–240. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/complitstudies.48.2.0219

Heat, J., & Zahedi, A. (Eds.). (2011). *The land of the unconquerable: The lives of contemporary Afghan women*. University of California Press.

Hook, D. (2008). Postcolonial psychoanalysis. *Theory & Psychology, 18*(2), 269–283.

Hosseini, K. (2008). *A thousand splendid suns*. Bloomsbury.

Kapoor, M., & IUP. (2021). *The God of Small Things* versus *The Devil of Big Things*: Narrative technique and Arundhati Roy. *The IUP Journal of English Studies, 16*(2), 46–48.

Lacan, J. (1938). Family complexes in the formation of the individual (C. Gallagher, Trans.). Unpublished manuscript, St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin.

Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits: The first complete edition in English*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Lam, M. (2009). The politics of fiction: A response to new Orientalism in type. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 4*(3), 257–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/17447140903198496

Nasio, J.-D. (1998). *Five lessons on the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan*. State University of New York Press.

Peters, M., & Apple, S. (1996). Positioning theory: Discourse, the subject and the problem of desire. *The International Journal of Anthropology, 40*, 120–141.

Rostami-Povey, E. (2007). *Afghan women: Identity and invasion*. Zed Books.

Roy, A. (2002). *The God of Small Things*. Penguin Books India.

Roy, O., & Banerjee, J. (2022). Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed*: An exposé of the hegemonic gender-power relations in the legitimized social structure of hierarchy. *The IUP Journal of English Studies, 17*(4), 14–29.

Shing Yi, N. (2003). Peripheral beings and loss in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, 2*(4). http://www.qlrs.com/essay.asp?id=329

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), Marxism and the interpretation of culture. https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/Spivak%20CanTheSubalternSpeak.pdf

Tickell, A. (2007). *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: A Routledge study guide*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Vanheule, S., Hook, D., & Neill, C. (2019). *Reading Lacan's Écrits: From "Signification of the Phallus" to "Metaphor of the Subject"*. Routledge.

Von Der Lippe, B. (2011). The white woman's burden: "Feminist" war rhetoric and the phenomenon of co-optation. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 20*(1), 19–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2011.618811