

# Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* and the Mimic Bildungsroman

## Hari Kunzru'nun *Gölgenin Gölgesi* Adlı Eseri ve Taklitçi Oluşum Romanı

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#### Abstract

According to Tobias Boes the much-debated Bildungsroman has proven to be an “unparalleled success as a model by which writers and critics alike can understand the world around them” (2006, p. 242). In the changing perception of the humanistic subject, the word bildung (formation, development) has a precarious relationship with contemporary British fiction. Commenting on the representational possibilities of contemporary literary narratives, Mark Stein proposes that they “have a dual function: they are about the formation of the protagonist as well as the transformation of British society (Britishness) and cultural institutions” (2004, p.22). Drawing on these observations I argue in this study that Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* is one such novel that mimics the classical Bildungsroman and problematizes it through its subversion of the traditional characteristics of the hero who is supposed to reach a stable and integrative end point in society and become the model citizen. Hari Kunzru's *The Betty Trask Award 2002* winning novel, *The Impressionist* is a multifaceted narrative that ranges across a multitude of geographical settings. As Murat Aydemir (2006) contends, “The narrative tries out, tries on, different conceptualizations of inter- or cross-cultural identity” (p. 205). At the same time, the exploitative regime of “empire” manifests itself in the synchronized presence of connection and the segregation of the new “citizen of the world”. By focusing on how performativity resonates throughout the novel, I discuss the ways in which the novel mimics and performs the genre Bildungsroman, and offers new modes of belonging.

**Keywords:** Bildungsroman, mimicry, performativity, Hari Kunzru

#### Öz

Tobias Boes'a göre, çok tartışılan Bildungsroman, “hem yazarların hem de eleştirmenlerin çevrelerindeki dünyayı anlayabileceği bir model olarak benzersiz bir başarı” olduğunu kanıtlamıştır (s. 242). Hümanist öznenin değişen algısında, Bildung (çağdaş oluşum, gelişme) kelimesinin çağdaş İngiliz kurgusu ile ikircikli bir ilişkisi vardır. Günümüz edebi anlatılarının temsil etme kapasiteleri üzerinde duran Mark Stein, bu romanların “ikili bir işleve sahip olduğunu: kahramanının oluşumu, ayrıca İngiliz toplumunun (İngilizliğin) ve kültürel kurumların dönüşümüyle” ilgili olduğunu öne sürüyor (s. 22). Bu gözlemlerden yola çıkarak, bu çalışmada Hari Kunzru'nun *Gölgenin Gölgesi* adlı eserinin, istikrarlı ve toplumla bütünleştirici bir son noktaya ulaşması ve örnek vatandaş olması beklenen kahramanın klasik Bildungsroman'ı geleneksel özelliklerini bozması yoluyla onu hem taklit eden hem de sorunsallaştıran bir roman olduğu savunulmaktadır. 2002'de *The Betty Trask Ödülü*'nü kazanan Hari Kunzru'nun ilk romanı *Gölgenin Gölgesi*, farklı coğrafyalarda geçen çok katmanlı bir anlatıdır. Murat Aydemir'in (2006) belirttiği gibi “anlatı, kültürlerarası ya da kültürlerarası kimliğin farklı kavramsallaştırmalarını tekrar tekrar denemektedir” (s. 205). Aynı zamanda, “imparatorluğun” sömürücü rejimi, kendisini yeni “dünya vatandaşı” bağlantısının ve ayrıştırmanın eşzamanlı mevcudiyetinde ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışmada performatifliğin roman boyunca nasıl yankılandığına odaklanılmakta ve romanın Bildungsroman türünü taklit ederek kendini gerçekleştiren yolları ve yeni ait olma biçimleri sunduğu ortaya konmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bildungsroman, taklitçilik, performatiflik, Hari Kunzru

#### Introduction

Modernity is a reverberating and contested topic in diverse fields of research. Anthony Giddens (1991) laid the groundwork for later studies of modernisation and modernity when he examined modernisation as the presence of methods of public activity or association which developed in Europe from about the late sixteenth century onwards and which in this way turned out to have global impact (p. 1). The timeframe Giddens refers to covers Europe's Great Transition, which is tacitly related to the time of Enlightenment industrialisation, free enterprise, and urbanisation. It could be said that the change Giddens proposes has reached a point in which we notice the supposed unilinearity of social advancement, progressing in a similar track for social orders everywhere throughout the world. Such a line of thought conceives history as a procedure which has a particular route and its objective is modernity (Hunt, p. 107), at which all social orders will unescapably arrive. In this specific circumstance, social development

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comes full circle in a majestic scene that dehistoricise[s] non-western people groups, or, rather, confers them a history just from the point of view of the Empire (Pieterse, 2010, p. 20). The linearity underlined by the possibility of advancement additionally makes a period grouping that proposes either a retrogressive or a forward development along the hub of advancement. This Eurocentric observation works as a manual for the majestic administration of social orders at various transformative stages (Pieterse, 2010, p. 21).

The idea of modernisation depends on the polarity among the two concepts, contemporariness and tradition. Seen in this light, social orders need to pursue a direct way from the crude to the cutting edge. In Talcott Parson's words, this perspective on advancement grasps "a uniform, unambiguously organized example in advancement towards agreeable joining" (quoted in Kaya, 2004, p. 36). In this case, the possibility of development from the specific to the widespread is underlined. This view depicts traditional society as a phase that must be supplanted by the phase of present day society, which sees convention as something contrary to innovation. Current social orders are those that have in one way or another freed themselves from the hold of the past to make objective foundations; conventional social orders are those that stay joined to the past both socially and institutionally and can not, in this manner, break into advancement (Dirlik 2000, p. 150). From this perspective, the backward and the traditional are practically seen as synonymous while progress is related with advancement toward the standards that are encapsulated by European social orders.

The emergence and evolution of the Bildungsroman genre is closely linked with the concept of modernisation as it both defines and describes European cultural life. Originally, Wilhelm Dilthey coined the expression in Friedrich Schleiermacher's biography and then promoted the concept in his 1906 study, *Poetry and Experience*. Dilthey claimed that the Bildungsroman could be understood as the "poetic expression of the Enlightenment concept of Bildung," referring to the process of purpose-based growth of the character (quoted in Boes, 2006, p. 237). The development of personal identity is the integral characteristic of the Bildungsroman. Thus, the psychological growth of the subject is gradually observed in its relation to the outer world. The ways in which European quotidian life came to be expressed through Bildungsroman assumed so great an importance that in fifty years time, German critics started to use the term to celebrate the tradition of the Bildungsroman in contrast to the "decadent" French and English novels and promote German nationalism. Boes (2006, pp. 232-233) suggests that German literary critics were prone to consider the genre as an artifact of modern Germany's descent in to fascism.

Intricately associated with the rise of capitalism in Europe, the Bildungsroman is considered as a narrative of a protagonist's normalisation into the bourgeoisie social order. According to Franco Moretti (2000), the Bildungsroman corresponds with the emergence of nineteenth-century market capitalism and the resulting social transformation from aristocratic to bourgeois rule and it is a genre that shows the integration of the adult into a transitional society shaken by the "new and destabilising forces of capitalism" (p. 4). In this context, the novel of formation provides the framework into which the new model of human experience could be incorporated. As previous forms of the novel such as the "Picaresque" proves ineffectual in describing the paradoxical relationship between the new individual and society, the two themes of progressiveness and communality and the crisis of the coexistence of the two form the backbone of the Bildungsroman.

Contemporary British authors such as Zadie Smith, Monica Ali and Hari Kunzru tackle questions and issues arising from the precarious relationship of contemporary British identity with the society and the institutions surrounding it. In their works, they particularly point at the playful subversion of the principles of Bildungsroman in an attempt to lay bare the dynamics

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of the new British identity as it is repetitively re-defined via hyphenated identities such as British-Asian and British-Muslim. It raises questions about which side of the hyphen the person belongs to, giving the impression that the person oscillates between two cultures. Given this context, how present narratives speak to the issue of the time lag that surrounds the postcolonial subject is the main concern of my article. If the novel as a literary form mirrors the transformation of the hero through the acquirement of knowledge and internalisation of societal expectations, it should also be clear to us that the development of the individual also transforms society. The question is: what are we to make of *The Impressionist* in the face of the contemporary interconnectedness of disjunctive times and spaces? In what sense is the novel of formation and education supposed to influence the character who has come to this end point with a time lag of his or her own?

Kunzru's protagonist demonstrates the truth of key defining moments in the turbulent history of a violent locality from the beginning. The white-skinned Pran Nath, is born during a flood-desolated night in a cave in India. After the decease of his mother, Pran is raised by her mom's well-off spouse until he learns that he is not the father of the child. The youthful Pran is then tossed out of the only home he knows, into the boulevards of Agra, after which he takes on different jobs, including that of a prostitute named Rukhsana, in whose character he turns into an object of desire due to his white skin, and then becomes performing "Bobby", a local hireling to a teacher minister in Bombay. Finally, he takes on the character of Jonathan Bridgeman, a youthful "newly rich" Englishman who is about to embark on a journey to England. For some time Pran/Jonathan appears to maintain a steady way of life as a collaborator to the Oxford human sciences teacher Henry Chapel. Yet, that personality starts to unravel, following a chain of events, one of which is Jonathan's confrontation with darkness at the Empire Exhibition. In the end, his whole persona breaks down while going with Professor Chapel on a hands-on work campaign to a British African state, where Pran finally is healed in the hands of an African healer. Along these lines the short scene at the show is a true defining moment in the novel, where Jonathan reluctantly starts to stand up to the false characters he has imagined for himself.

Each section in the novel is titled after the various identities Pran Nath assumes in his journey to adulthood, namely, Pran Nath, Rukshana, White Boy, Pretty Bobby, Jonathan Bridgeman, and lastly, the impressionist. After being cast out from his stepfather's house, the first identity he acquires is Rukshana, a transvestite and a sex worker in the service of Nawab of Fatehpur. Then he runs away, becomes Robert and lives in Bombay with a repressed Scottish missionary, a Reverend Macfarlane, who teaches him English. He also acquires another identity, Pretty Bobby, working as sex dealer and hanging out with other English people, mimicking their accents. As Tüzün (2016) suggests, self-presentations are goal-directed activities that are performatively constructed and revised through social interactions (p. 347). Through his various self-presentations under adopted identities, Pran navigates tricky social environments and grows as an individual by becoming a versatile social actor.

Read through the lense of Homi Bhabha's perception, mimicry becomes a significant strategy for Pran Nath. In this respect, his repeated attempts to craft a different identity for himself offers us fertile ground for an analysis of the politics of mimicry and its association with Bildungsroman. A significant element in Bhabha's thinking is that agency is only feasible with subjection (1984, pp. 131-132). We are not acting under circumstances of our own choice; we are, in fact, acting within a specified discursive framework. Yet Bhabha argues that, despite the dominant narrative, the doer (agent) may behave subversively in the discursive domain (1984, p. 132). In that sense, agency is a particular reaction, but also an obstacle to discursive power. Therefore, no agency is viable without discursive subjection. The concept of repetition

is key to the concept of acting only with and within a specified discursive terrain. Jacques Derrida pointed out that all utterances are repetitions, so that one can efficiently re-articulate when he or she articulates them (1982, p. 307). In addition, each iteration is never the same, as it is marked by a difference in the very structure of language. The implication for politics is that agency is exactly the performance of this repetition.

It is important to note that in playing with the fundamentals of Bildungsroman, *The Impressionist* does not just renegotiate the breaking points of “transitioning” books, but also offers a performative glance which renders it conceivable to perceive a given way of life as a procedure of identity formation, something that is continuously repeated as opposed to something that is intrinsic to the person. Judith Butler’s hypothesis of performativity attends to this interpretation as she suggests that personality is performatively comprised by the very articulations that are said to be its outcomes (1990, p. 25). Subjects ceaselessly perform personalities that are already constructed by hegemonic discourses. It is possible to see these discourses as “scripts” which are always already determined within this regulatory “frame” from which to make a constrained choice of gender style. The body, then, is a significant aspect that Butler builds “not as a surface... but as a series of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained” (1990, p. 33). In perhaps her most concrete statement, Butler describes becoming: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990, p. 33). In the novel, we can observe such performance on two distinct levels: the protagonist and the text as a whole.

For the protagonist of the novel, identity is likened to a “pile” and here he refers to himself as “A pile of Pran rubble. Ready for the next chance event to put it back together in a new order” (Kunzru, 2002, p. 65). As a person capable of absorbing various personalities, Pran Nath’s first identity is Rukshana, a transvestite whose name means “star”. Two distinct ideological overlaps can be discerned here: his whiteness and his transvestisim. While his white skin may imply a part of the attempt to undo the categories that are rendered indiscernible through privilege, it also makes him more appealing to his customers. As Sara Ahmed (2007) remarks in “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” whiteness can best be described as “an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space (p. 150). What we see in Pran Nath’s whiteness is the sum of his genetic history fused with eroticism and commodification of the body. So this first character Pran Nath assumes is a venture that is complicit with its own object. Another ideologically charged concept in the text is travesty. When Pran Nath is enforced to make a transition from a Kashmiri boy to a hicra girl who is to be offered to the coloniser, his act of cross-dressing as a girl assumes additional significance. In her analysis of the significance of dressing, Marjorie Garber (1992) draws attention to the role of cross-dressing as transgression of gender distinctions which, in Pran Nath’s case, is just one among many other attempts at transgression such as the categories of black and white; the coloniser and the colonised as well as the adult and the child (p.16). Everytime Pran Nath crosses gender boundaries, cross-dressing acquires a performative and critical importance, both empowering the character as well as revealing his vulnerability at life-changing moments. Pran Nath uses performative acts as a survival mechanism in coping with coercion.

The ease with which Pran Nath makes his transition into different identities is worth consideration as this smoothness accentuates the influence of imitation. Mimicry is a means of subverting colonial power. Bhabha defines his perspective of colonial mimicry as a discursive procedure in which the surplus or slippage generated by the ambivalence of mimicry serves both to undermine the power of the colonial system’s dominant discourses and to transform them into an uncertainty that fixes the colonial system and to turn them into an uncertainty

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which the colonial topic as a 'partial' presence (1984, p. 127). By way of mimicry, Bhabha claims, the representation of identity and significance is rearticulated through the frame of metonymy (1984, p. 131). Mimicry resembles cover, not a harmonisation or constraint of distinction, yet a type of likeness that safeguards similitude by showing it to a limited extent, metonymically. It also exposes how Pran Nath's world is implicitly structured by the laws of the colonial other.

The next character Pran Nath assumes is "White Boy." Since he understands that it is impossible for him to pass through unnoticed as a white boy, he takes advantage of this situation so as to perform Englishness in the most extraordinary way. In the text, the city has just experienced the Amritsar incident (known also as Jallianwala Bagh incident) which was a massacre of Indian civilians, conducted by British troops under military law. In order to create his own comfort zone Pran enters the phantom town, which is watched by British officers whom he bypasses by faking a British accent, and afterward continues to the train station where white colonials are waiting to be transferred back to England. The scene portraying his passageway into Amritsar pertinently shows the connection between camouflage and mimicry:

He is a trespasser, a black cuckoo in the nest. He tries to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, acutely aware that there are no other boys of his age present. The real English boys are all away in boarding schools at Home. Some of the women start to watch him, visibly sifting through their memories, trying to place his face. Each time he spots someone fixing on him, he moves, takes up position elsewhere. For a long time he stands beneath a peeling poster. *Visit Bombay. The Gateway of India.* (Kunzru, 2002, p. 183)

Kunzru describes Pran's entrance as 'Walking into whiteness' (2002, p. 187), proposing the impermeability and supremacy of 'whiteness' as a practically obvious space distinct from the spaces occupied by others. The passage demonstrates Pran Nath's entry into the space of otherness together with his peaking anxiety as he transgresses the boundary of whiteness. He likens himself to a young black cuckoo, a migratory bird, known for its aberrant character. Pran is aware of the extraordinary demands of each setting he finds himself in. He is the only outsider and the only fake "white" boy. He shifts positions in order to avoid being the centre of attention as people look at him suspiciously. Thus mimicry becomes a habit which teaches him how to make it in life. It is a reflexive behaviour that helps him survive and acclimatize himself to his surroundings through its repetitive pattern. As he stands beneath the poster "Visit Bombay. The Gateway of India" one can notice his intermediary position between the colonial power and the exotic otherness of the colonized. It is also a sly commentary on the formation of identities.

Pran Nath's arrival in England (as a white boy with a fake passport) requires him to find his place, to feel in rapport with his surroundings and to superimpose his own map. But he also needs to find his own place in Britain, which is not his in a straightforward way. He brings his own text (luggage) with himself to New (multicultural) Britain, the host culture that has begun to be transformed by the arrival of the outsider. Apparently, we see the old that has been mixed with the new, creating a more modern and diverse society. On the other hand, the protagonist himself is the effect of the abusive regime of the colonizer. Through his performative acts, Pran (who has become Jonathan Bridgeman now) both plays out and is moulded by this culture. This means that considering one's place in the world in today's political atmosphere demands a more multi-layered approach towards concepts such as belonging and citizenship. This approach constitutes ideologies of colonialism in manufacturing hybrid identities, which become visible in the transformation of contemporary fiction as tools for political and creative resistance, what Gayatri Spivak calls "strategic essentialism" (quoted in Landry and MacLean, 1996, p. 214).

Jonathan soon becomes a proper English gentleman. Later on in the novel when he enters a Parisian cabaret bar where performers entertain the audience through playing ethnic stereotypes, he recognises his own process of formation. The evening's prime act consists of an

impressionist whose act (or mimicry) creates a cathartic effect on Jonathan and mirrors the incongruous vision of an identity that is perceived as a sequence of surreal performances:

One after the other, characters appear. One with a deep baritone voice. Another with a little cap and a hectoring way of talking. Each lasts a few seconds, a minute. Each erases the last. The man becomes these other people so completely that nothing of his own is visible. A coldness starts to rise in Jonathan's gut, cutting through the vodka. He watches intently, praying that he is wrong, that he has missed something. There is no escaping it. In between each impression, just at the moment when one person falls away and the next has yet to take possession, the impressionist is completely blank. There is nothing there at all. (Kunzru 2002, p. 419)

Peter Childs and James Green read this form of identity as “a chain of discontinuities, each assimilating the last,” which renders impossible to return to the essence (2013, p. 73). The time lag that has been mentioned before speaks to the protagonist's reality, and in the face of the contemporary era of capitalist globalization, the stability of his roots has been transformed into the transience of routes. The continuous changing and performance of identity becomes the protagonist's way of living.

Towards the end of the book, Jonathan consents to going with Professor Chapel on a field trip to Fotseland so as to contribute to the field of anthropological research. He has also inadvertently consented to encourage the reproduction of Professor Chapel's views on white supremacy with regard to the fictitious Fotse tribe. At this moment, Jonathan begins feeling uneasy about his own oscillation from the object position to subject position. As a person who has gone for white, Jonathan faces the truth that his procedure of swiping characters has relinquished his entitlement to a genuine individual personality.

Becoming some one else is just a question of changing tailor and remembering to touch the bottom lip to the ridge of teeth above. Easy, except when that becoming is involuntary when fingers lose their grip and panic sets in that nothing will stop the slide. Then becoming is flight, knowing that stopping will be worse because then the suspicion will surface again that there is no one running. No one running. No one there at all (Kunzru 2002, p. 463).

The passage aptly illustrates the fundamentals of ‘becoming’ according to the narrator. First, adaptability is a requirement that the person has to possess. It is also about submission: one has to be aware of its consequences as well as accept them even if they prove to be incompatible with one's identity. What Jonathan witnesses while observing the Fotse worshipping their gods, denouncing what lies outside of their circle of trust, is the white coloniser. Here it is possible to resituate Jonathan's position, right in between the traditional and the modern, but this time his inbetweenness is spotted at the very heart of the Fotse people. In this primeval darkness, Jonathan finds himself in the cave where he was conceived, while the novel draws to its end. Similar to the implication found in Plato's cave allegory which requires the individual to descend back into the darkness to see goodness and justice, both the text and the tale of the protagonist end in the cave which signifies old life being transformed into new. In Jonathan's case, it marks the end of his shape-shifting experience.

As it has been mentioned earlier, Butler's performativity can be traced through not only the characters, but also on the narrative level as well. During a 2006 interview with Frederick Luis Aldama, Kunzru describes *The Impressionist* as “a book about books” (p. 114). Comparison lies at the heart of every attempt in writing. It is a key to quotidian experience, scholarly articulation, and disciplinary just as interdisciplinary learning. It lies at the core of the demonstration of making associations crosswise over conventions, limits and characters. In any case, as Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan suggests, the epistemology of correlation is willed into reality by a specific will to control learning. Such a will is never honest of history and its weight (2013, p.16). The act of comparing is never impartial: it hierarchises or compartmentalizes disparity for the benefit of a predominant subject. However, it also acquires new forms at different stages

of literary history. And when it comes to the much-discussed and endorsed form of fiction, the Bildungsroman, *The Impressionist* mimics and performs through re-interpreting the social transformation occurring in the mindset of the de-colonized other as a result of changes in European cultural life which have been taking place since the Enlightenment. In that sense, when analyzed further, the novel yields new insights into the history of European textual relations.

Playing with other books of historical significance, the narrative suggests an alternative mode of reading. Mieke Bal (2003) proposes that scholars of literature should investigate writing and its potential as a reflection of cultural force and in its own context, pointing that the cultural object can be liberated from its historical baggage of being either a reflection of society or an instrument of control, either an object of formalist aesthetics or a minor archive of thoughts (p. 192). Bal's recommendation to consider writings to be social witnesses encourages resistance to the Western scholarly tendency as the authoritative mode for perusing all of world writing. Besides, it additionally renders it possible to resituate contemporary fiction in the global space of writing whose limits outspread the boundaries of the nation.

In its aim to establish its connection with the Bildungsroman, Kunzru's novel of transformation reaches out beyond the text. The text depicts the process of "coming of age", but this transformation is not only inscribed by the culture it inhabits; it in turn moulds this very culture. It is not only about the protagonist's coming of age: it describes and provides the transformation, the repeated transformation of British cultures under the influence of "the outsider". This is a performative function of Kunzru's *The Impressionist*. Indeed, Kunzru himself admits to the influence of Pran Nath's surroundings. According to him, his protagonist's mind is a tabula rasa, without any trace of fixed-identity traits. So, the colour of the book does not necessarily emanate from psychological complexity, but the synchronised transition in his personality as he moves from set-piece scene to set-piece scene as the pageantry of empire plays out all around him (Aldama, 2005, p. 12).

Mediating between the individual and his community, the traditional Bildungsroman connects the two antagonistic topoi by means of travelling protagonists reaching into maturity and achieving some form of compromise between their personal ambitions and the demands of society. In other words, the novel of formation is about the centrifugal forces behind the formation of a nation which necessitate a sense of belonging as the primary element of self-realization. In this sense I contend that *The Impressionist* can be read as a mimic Bildungsroman precisely through its self-reflexive attempts of depicting the process of identity formation. If the Bildungsroman is to be understood as a mirroring surface of European cultural life, then the mimic Bildungsroman is about the ways in which postcolonial agency proves incapable of linking itself with the realities of Western-induced identity concepts. It is about both the attempt to be a member of a canon and the impossibility of such efforts for reasons inherent in its construction. It is based on the idea of haunting: the will to shed new light on the history of colonialism and revise the meaning of contemporary forms of belonging problematise its essence.

Earlier, I have read Pran Nath's diverse performances of identity in connection with acclimatisation, a biological concept which explains how an individual organism adjusts to changes in its environment. To be precise, acclimatisation refers to the process whereby an organism adjusts in a smooth way to absorb the stress or shock condition that occurs in the environment. Taking into account the imitative qualities of *The Impressionist* it is possible to argue that the novel particularly attempts to acclimatise and adapt itself to the conditions of the Bildungsroman. It discloses the process of coming into consciousness and raises awareness of inter-personality that stems from the postcolonial condition which, in turn, symbolizes a new notion of bildung.

## Conclusion

The story of Pran Nath perfectly illustrates that new modes of belonging are still being tried and contested. Likewise, *The Impressionist* deliberately reworks the principle of Bildungsroman through distinct performative instances. Seen from this perspective the novel 'is out of sight' with regards to the construction of Bildungsroman, as it does not offer a vision beyond the dynamic between the individual and the nation. However, the parody that is generated from the constant iteration of identities evokes a theatricality that allows us to see the refusal to be regarded as a part of "coming of age" novels.

In its inclusion of the immigrant with his limitations and possibilities the novel speaks to "the incongruous juxtapositions that characterise modern social history, especially those generated by massive migratory movements and the cultural melting-pots to which they have given rise" (Gasiorek, 2012, p. 177). To borrow the term from Salman Rushdie, this is how "newness" enters the world. This is a significant issue that needs to be rethought by way of the postcolonial stance towards novels of formation: this owes much to the aftermath of the Second World War which pushed the novelists to re-conceptualise realism in their works "as powerful anti-humanist thought from structuralism to poststructuralism and postmodernism were starting to make their influence felt" (Nicol, 2004, p. 11).

The analysis of *The Impressionist* as a cultural construct underlines the significance of change in contemporary British fiction: in line with the Bildungsroman's dynamics, literature constantly evolves. The constant transformation of identities that have been examined in this study all relate to this dynamism in mimic Bildungsroman. So what are we to make of the question I have posed at the beginning of this paper? In mimicking the Bildungsroman, yet performing it, what does the novel render possible with regards to this new citizen of the world? Or to put it differently, especially considering the end of the novel, what should we think about Jonathan's transformation? I suggest that we should read it as a step towards the space of difference which allows a Western-induced modernity to see itself from the space of the otherness. This makes possible for us to recognise the mutually constitutive histories of colonialism and anti-colonialism as markers of the global age, while allowing room for producing new modes of interpretation.

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