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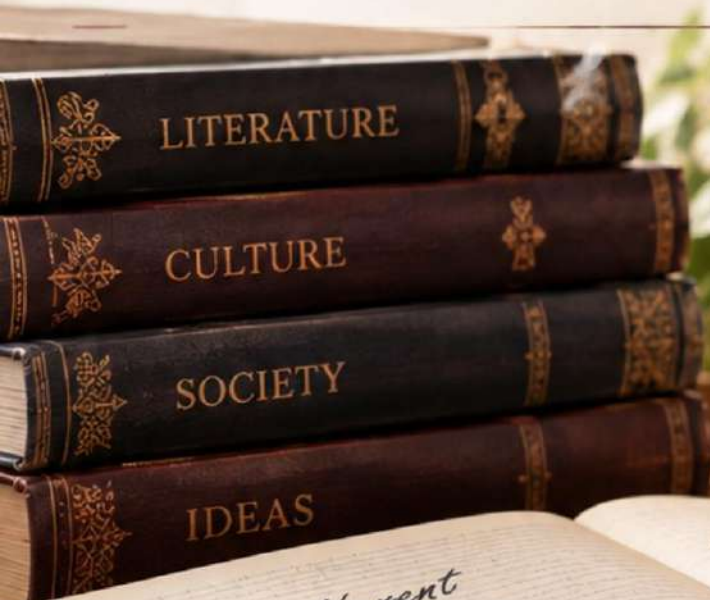


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Preface

We are delighted to present, with great pleasure, the **Volume-2, Issue-9, September 2026** of the **Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture (JCRELC)** — a peer-reviewed international journal devoted to the exploration and advancement of literary and cultural scholarship.

JCRELC is part of the **SPARC Institute of Technical Research** publication series and was envisioned to meet the growing global demand for an academic platform that unites critical thinking, creative inquiry, and interdisciplinary research in the field of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**. The journal aims to serve as a bridge between scholars, educators, and practitioners, providing an inclusive space for diverse voices and perspectives.

The mission of JCRELC is to foster intellectual exchange, innovation, and academic excellence by publishing original and thought-provoking research in areas such as:

English Literature:

Literary theory and criticism, comparative literature, postcolonial studies, modern and contemporary literature, diaspora studies, gender and identity, eco-criticism, digital humanities, narrative and stylistic studies, and creative writing.

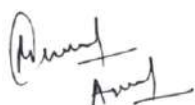
Cultural Studies:

Media and popular culture, film and performance studies, cultural theory, identity politics, globalization and culture, heritage and memory studies, translation and intercultural communication, visual arts, and linguistic representation in literature and media.

Each article published in this inaugural issue exemplifies the journal's commitment to promoting meaningful scholarship and fostering dialogue that connects literature and culture with the evolving dynamics of society.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all **Editorial, Reviewer, and Advisory Board Members** who have contributed their expertise, as well as to the **authors** whose valuable research enriches this publication. Our appreciation also goes to the **editorial team of the SPARC Institute of Technical Research** for their consistent guidance and support in bringing JCRELC to life.

We hope that this inaugural issue of JCRELC will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and readers alike, inspiring continued exploration and critical engagement in the vibrant domains of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**.



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Narrative Empathy in Myth and Folklore: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Emotional Resonance and Moral Understanding

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Abstract— This paper examines the role of narrative empathy in traditional myths and folklore across diverse cultures, investigating how these ancient stories facilitate emotional understanding and moral development. Through a mixed-methods approach combining narrative analysis of 150 folktales from six cultural traditions with empirical studies measuring empathic responses, this research explores the mechanisms by which mythological narratives generate empathy and transmit cultural values. The study analyzes folktales from European, African, Asian, Indigenous American, Middle Eastern, and Oceanic traditions, focusing on recurring archetypal patterns and their empathy-inducing properties. Results indicate that certain narrative structures—particularly those featuring vulnerable protagonists, moral dilemmas, and transformative journeys—consistently evoke stronger empathic responses across cultural boundaries. The research reveals that folklore employs specific literary devices including perspective-taking cues, emotional mirroring, and moral exemplars to cultivate empathy. Cross-cultural analysis demonstrates that while surface elements of myths vary significantly, underlying empathy-generating mechanisms remain remarkably consistent, suggesting universal cognitive processes in narrative comprehension. These findings carry implications for understanding the evolutionary function of storytelling, the role of folklore in moral education, and applications of narrative empathy in therapeutic and educational contexts. The paper concludes that myths and folklore function as sophisticated empathy-training mechanisms that have evolved to promote prosocial behaviour and cultural cohesion through emotional engagement with archetypal human experiences.

Keywords— Archetype, Cross-Cultural Analysis, Folklore, Moral Cognition, Narrative Empathy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The capacity for empathy—understanding and sharing the emotional experiences of others—represents one of humanity's most distinctive psychological achievements. While empathy manifests in various forms, narrative empathy, defined as the emotional engagement readers or listeners experience with characters in stories, occupies a unique position in human cognition and culture [1]. This phenomenon becomes particularly compelling when examined through the lens of traditional myths and folklore, which have served as vehicles for moral instruction and cultural transmission across millennia.

Folklore and mythology represent humanity's earliest systematic attempts to encode wisdom, values, and behavioural norms through storytelling. These narratives, passed down through generations, demonstrate remarkable persistence across cultures while maintaining their capacity to evoke emotional responses and facilitate moral understanding [2]. The intersection of narrative empathy with these traditional forms suggests that mythological thinking may have evolved specifically to enhance human capacity for understanding others' experiences and developing prosocial behaviours.

Recent research in cognitive narratology has illuminated the mechanisms underlying narrative empathy, revealing that story comprehension activates cognitive processes associated with empathy, theory of mind, and moral reasoning [9]. When individuals engage with narrative characters, their responses parallel those activated during real social interactions, suggesting that fictional experiences may contribute meaningfully to empathic development [1, 6]. This paper investigates how traditional

myths and folklore function as vehicles for cultivating narrative empathy across cultural boundaries. By analysing recurring patterns in mythological narratives and examining their empathy-inducing properties, the study aims to understand both the universal mechanisms of narrative empathy and the cultural specificities that shape empathic responses to traditional stories.

1.1 Purpose/Objectives

This research addresses three primary objectives. The primary objective is to identify and analyse the narrative mechanisms through which myths and folklore generate empathic responses across different cultural contexts. The secondary objectives are: (1) to examine cross-cultural variations and universalities in empathy-inducing narrative structures within traditional stories; (2) to investigate the relationship between archetypal patterns in mythology and their capacity to evoke empathic responses; and (3) to explore the implications of narrative empathy in folklore for understanding moral development and cultural transmission.

The research questions guiding this investigation are: How do traditional myths and folklore facilitate narrative empathy? What universal patterns exist across cultures in empathy-generating narrative structures? How do cultural variations in mythological content affect empathic responses while maintaining cross-cultural resonance?

II. METHODOLOGY/APPROACH

This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative narrative analysis with quantitative empirical measurement of empathic responses.

2.1 Corpus Selection

A systematic corpus of 150 traditional tales was compiled from six major cultural regions: European (25 tales), African (25 tales), East Asian (25 tales), Indigenous American (25 tales), Middle Eastern (25 tales), and Oceanic (25 tales). The six cultural regions were selected to maximize cultural and geographic diversity while maintaining manageable scope for analysis. Selection criteria included: (1) recognised status as traditional folklore within the culture of origin; (2) availability in reliable ethnographic sources; (3) narrative complexity sufficient for empathy analysis; and (4) cultural authenticity verified through consultation with cultural experts.

2.2 Narrative Analysis Framework

Each tale underwent systematic analysis using a modified version of Propp's morphological approach [11] combined with contemporary empathy research frameworks. Key analytical dimensions included structural elements (character archetypes, narrative functions, plot progression, resolution patterns), empathy markers (perspective-taking cues, emotional descriptors, character vulnerability indicators, moral choice points), and cultural specificity (culture-specific symbols, values, and behavioural norms embedded within universal narrative structures).

2.3 Empirical Validation Study

To validate findings from narrative analysis, an empirical study was conducted with 240 participants (40 from each cultural region represented in the corpus). Participants were recruited through universities and community organizations in each cultural region. They read culturally diverse folktales while completing validated empathy measures, including the Interpersonal Reactivity Index [3] and narrative-specific empathy assessments. Participants completed baseline empathy measures, read assigned folktales (selected randomly from the corpus, with participants reading tales from multiple cultural traditions), and immediately completed post-reading assessments measuring empathic concern, perspective-taking, and emotional engagement with story characters. Cross-cultural validity was ensured through rigorous translation protocols (including back-translation and cultural consultation), and cultural equivalence was maintained through consultation with cultural experts who verified the accuracy of translations and cultural interpretations. Data were analysed using multilevel modelling to account for cultural clustering, with empathic response as the dependent variable and narrative structural features as predictors.

III. FINDINGS/RESULTS

3.1 Universal Narrative Patterns

Analysis revealed five universal narrative patterns consistently associated with heightened empathic responses across all cultural contexts, summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1
UNIVERSAL EMPATHY-INDUCING NARRATIVE PATTERNS AND ASSOCIATED EFFECTS

Pattern	Description	Empathic Effect
Vulnerable Protagonist	Protagonist faces significant disadvantage (poverty, disability, exclusion)	Highest across all regions; M = 4.23 vs. M = 3.41 for privileged protagonists
Moral Dilemma	Character faces complex ethical choice	23% higher empathy scores than tales without ethical conflict
Transformative Journey	Hero's-journey structure: departure, ordeal, return	Ordeal phase shows highest empathy activation
Helper-Hindrance Dynamic	Supportive vs. antagonist characters	Highest response to helpers; conflicted response to complex antagonists
Restoration	Resolution through justice, healing, or restoration	Sustained empathic satisfaction; reinforces prosocial values

The Vulnerable Protagonist pattern produced the strongest and most consistent effect: stories featuring protagonists facing significant disadvantages generated significantly higher empathy scores ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.67$) compared to stories with privileged protagonists ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.72$), $t(238) = 8.94$, $p < .001$. Narratives incorporating clear moral dilemmas scored 23% higher on empathy measures than those without such conflict, and the ordeal phase of the transformative-journey structure showed the highest empathy activation of any narrative stage.

The Helper-Hindrance Dynamic produced the most complex empathic pattern: participants showed the highest empathy for benevolent helper figures, while responses to hinderers were more conflicted, sometimes involving empathy for the hinderer's backstory or motivations. This suggests that folklore often encourages complex, rather than simplistic, emotional responses to antagonists.

3.2 Cultural Variations

While universal patterns emerged, significant cultural variations were observed in empathy expression and narrative preference. European traditions emphasised individual agency and personal transformation, with empathy often directed toward characters overcoming internal obstacles. African traditions featured community-centred empathy, with the strongest responses to characters whose actions affected collective well-being. Asian traditions demonstrated complex empathic responses to themes of duty, honour, and intergenerational relationships, frequently involving conflicted loyalties. Indigenous American traditions showed heightened empathy for characters in relationship with natural environments and animal beings. Middle Eastern traditions emphasised empathy within contexts of hospitality, justice, and divine intervention. Oceanic traditions featured empathy patterns connected to ancestral relationships and maritime environments.

3.3 Empathy-Inducing Mechanisms

The research identified specific literary devices that function as empathy catalysts across cultural boundaries: perspective-taking cues (direct narrative statements about character thoughts and feelings, internal monologue, emotional description); embodied experience descriptions (detailed accounts of physical sensation associated with suffering or joy); moral exemplar presentation (characters modelling prosocial behaviour, generating identification alongside empathic concern); emotional escalation patterns (gradual intensification sustaining engagement more effectively than constant high emotion); and resolution satisfaction (empathically satisfying endings reinforcing positive associations with empathic engagement).

3.4 Cross-Cultural Empathy Patterns

Despite surface cultural differences, underlying empathy patterns showed remarkable consistency. Factor analysis revealed three primary dimensions of narrative empathy that transcended cultural boundaries: Compassionate Concern (37% of variance), reflecting empathic responses focused on character suffering and need for assistance; Moral Admiration (28% of variance), reflecting responses centred on character virtue and ethical behaviour; and Identificatory Engagement (23% of variance), reflecting personal identification with character experience. Together, these three dimensions accounted for 88% of the total variance in empathic response, suggesting that these represent the primary pathways through which folklore generates empathy across cultural boundaries.

IV. CONCLUSION/IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

This research demonstrates that myths and folklore function as sophisticated empathy-cultivation systems that have evolved to enhance human capacity for understanding others' experiences across cultural boundaries. The identification of universal narrative patterns suggests that certain story structures may represent adaptations for empathy development, while cultural variations reflect the diverse ways societies express and channel empathic responses.

The findings support theories of narrative empathy as an evolved mechanism for social learning and moral development [9, 10]. The consistency of empathy-inducing patterns across cultures suggests that storytelling may have emerged as a crucial adaptation for maintaining large-scale social cooperation and contributes to understanding how cultural values are transmitted through emotional engagement rather than explicit instruction. These findings contribute to a growing body of evidence suggesting that storytelling, particularly through traditional forms like myth and folklore, may have played a crucial role in the evolution of human social cognition and the capacity for large-scale cooperation.

These findings carry implications across several domains. In education, traditional folktales can be systematically employed to develop empathy, with selection criteria based on empirically validated empathy-inducing features. In therapeutic contexts, bibliotherapy and narrative therapy approaches can draw on the empathy-cultivation mechanisms identified here. For cross-cultural communication, understanding universal empathy patterns in folklore may facilitate intercultural understanding. In digital storytelling, contemporary media can incorporate the empathy-inducing narrative structures identified in traditional tales to promote prosocial outcomes.

Future investigations should explore developmental studies examining how empathic responses to folklore change across developmental stages; further empirical work identifying cognitive and affective activation patterns during folklore engagement; intervention studies testing the effectiveness of folklore-based empathy interventions in varied populations; and research into how traditional empathy-inducing mechanisms transfer to contemporary digital storytelling formats.

This research is not without limitations. The corpus, while extensive, represents only a fraction of global folklore traditions. Cultural consultants provided valuable input, but deeper ethnographic investigation could reveal additional cultural nuances, and the empathy measurement instruments, while validated, may not capture all dimensions of empathic response relevant to traditional narratives. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study offers a replicable framework for future cross-cultural narrative empathy research.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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From "Comfort Women" to "Survivors": Politics and Performativity of Naming in Jan Ruff O'herne's Fifty Years of Silence

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Abstract— The acts of naming and labelling have emerged as contesting cultural practices that have persistently shaped the narratives and discourse surrounding the history of Japanese military comfort women. Terms such as comfort women, sex slaves, victims and survivors are interchangeably used to identify the Asian women subjected to the system of sexual slavery under the Japanese military regime during the Second World War. Such terminological homogenization, however, not only obscures the violence underpinning the system, but also erodes individuality, by regulating public memory and socio-political recognition. Drawing primarily on Butler's theory of injurious speech and performativity, this study undertakes a critical discourse analysis of Jan Ruff O'Herne's memoir *Fifty Years of Silence*, positing that the politics of naming is a performative and cultural phenomenon, which is neither inherently injurious nor emancipatory, rather conditioned by discursive practices through which euphemistic labels are imposed and institutionalized. The study further examines the counter-discourse enabled by reiterative acts of public testimony, reclamation of proper name and self-assertion as survivor, in resistance against historical and cultural erasure within the discourse of comfort women.

Keywords— *Comfort Women, Performativity, Naming, Survivorhood, Jan Ruff O'Herne, Judith Butler.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Naming is essential in the sense that it attributes identity and recognition to the unidentifiable. Primo Levi observes "To give a name to a thing is as gratifying as naming an island", while citing the risks that accompany such acts of naming, particularly when the "phenomena so named" (Levi, 126) becomes essentially defined by the very name. Indeed, naming or christening becomes a part of the identity and renders a sense of belonging and context to the bearer of the name. However, it may also be employed to impose stereotypes and shatter the sense of belonging, dignity and identity when corrupted through unethical and derogatory practices, as is to be found in the case of comfort women.

The origin of the comfort woman system can be traced back to the Japanese military imperialism during the Second World War, when the comfort stations were established with the motif to engage as many women as possible for the sexual gratification of the soldiers, following the tragedy of Nanjing massacre, which resulted in mass genocide and rape of Chinese civilians between 1937 and 1938 (Tanaka, 1999). The public testimony of the former comfort woman Kim Hak Soon in 1991, revealing her identity as a comfort woman as well as her former identity, brought into limelight the lost history of these women who appeared in glimpses of the war history as labelled prostitutes. This euphemism formally appeared in the seminal work of Yoshimi Yoshiaki in 1992, making its course into the mainstream public, academic and media discourse, with the surge of activism, testimonies by former victims and advocacy drives by Korean NGOs and feminist welfare associations such as the Korean Council in the early 1990s (Ward and Lay, 2018). While initially the system was strictly restricted to the recruitment of professional prostitutes of Japanese and other nationality, with the territorial expansion the procedure developed into a systematic state sanctioned drive as women aged between 12 to 21 years were recruited through coercion, deception, or were

simply sold to the military brothels named "comfort stations". However, these women have been denied recognition and justice by Japan and their native nations ever since, framed as legally and consensually recruited prostitutes in the political discourse. After 50 years of oblivion, misinterpretation and stigmatization since the end of the war, the former victims as well as their supporters denied the tag of 'comfort woman' and demanded that the victimized comfort women be addressed as "sex slaves", "war victims" or "survivors" in recognition of their traumatizing experiences during World War II, under the Japanese military imperialism.

The primary issue that forms the focal aspect of this study lies in the homogenization effected through linguistic and cultural practices which are made apparent through the stereotypical classification of all the comfort women as prostitutes, regardless of whether their involvement was voluntary or coerced (UCLA, 1944; Seaton, 2006). This study critically scrutinizes the layered nuances of naming as a cultural practice, analysing its performative force.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Contemporary scholarship on comfort woman issues reflects extensive interdisciplinary engagement with diverse thematic concerns such as politics of trauma, memory, testimony, geography, ethics of representation and identity. Significant scholarship has also emerged within diaspora and displacement studies.

Mijeong Kim (2020) examines the untranslatability of trauma and narrative and positions narrative practice as a contested space for ethical testimony. Similarly, Shim Young Hee (2017), drawing upon Ulrich Beck's theory of emancipatory catastrophism, demonstrates the transformative potential of the catastrophic experience of Han, which can facilitate narrative healing. On the other hand, Khushbu Verma and Nagendra Kumar (2022) analyse the devastating impact of repetitiveness and delayed re-enactment in narrative retelling practices.

Another major strand of comfort woman research conceptualizes the body as a contested site of violence, transmission of power, trauma and resistance. Paula Ruth Gilbert (2012) analyses how processes of de-silencing challenge regimes of imposed visibility, while Leo T.S. Ching (2019) treats the body as the locus of colonial and macho-nationalist violence. Dr. Shu-Hua Kang and Frank T. Y. Wang (2025) further develop this perspective by examining how early-life structured oppression shapes lived experiences in retrospect. Moon Cassinelli (2019) and Yonson Ahn (2018) draw attention to the development of queer bonding as a coping mechanism among survivors, which manifests in the form of lesbianism and trauma bonding. Collectively, this research transcends the portrayal of comfort women as passive victims to foreground the questions of agency, identity and embodied resistance.

Yoo Hannah (2022) builds her analysis on the guilt-shame dynamics and perpetrator-survivor interactions, demonstrating how moral responsibility is inverted by reinscribing blame onto the perpetrator. While relevant research by other scholars, such as Deborah L. Madsen (2017), Xiaoyang Hao and Jiabao Pan (2025), and Katharina R. Mendoza (2003), similarly examine the ethics of narrative representations of trauma, cautioning against risks of over-sensationalisation, commodification, and normalisation of the survivors' traumatic experiences. In a similar vein, C. Sarah Soh (2009) critiques the dominant master narratives that marginalize the comfort women's narrative voices.

More recent studies reflect upon the political and discursive practices embedded in comfort women narratives as instruments for shaping testimony, witnessing, representation and remembrance. Aisha Al Kuwari's (2022) study of comfort woman memorialization foregrounds public memorialization as central to reconstruction of historical memory, privileging commemorative practices over diplomatic efforts, employing a feminist perspective to interrogate the contested national narratives. Kyounghee Cho and Siyao Xing (2025) examine memory politics as a political and discursive practice that takes effect through institutionalization of memory mediated through non-state civil society intermediaries, a process in which discourse functions as an apparatus of power in shaping remembrance, diplomatic negotiations and construction of national identities.

In a similar vein, Dionisio (2025) addresses the intersectional dimensions of the comfort woman discourse and the need for an inclusive enquiry, critiquing the revisionist and activist paradigms of binary narratives in comfort women discourse. This study situates comfort women discourse at the heart of the feminist enquiry of the patriarchal influence on remembrance and forgetting, demonstrating that discursive practices can inadvertently lead to the perpetuation of idealization and normalization of gendered violence and injustice.

Seo-Young Kim (2026) pays a tribute to the comfort women by naming them as miracles, citing the importance of naming as a sign of recognition, compensation and reassertion of identity. This work also addresses the linguistic nuances of terminology

found in comfort women discourse, that reinforce semantic transformations. For instance, the preference of framing comfort women within single inverted comma is read as a form of denial of the perpetrator's perspective—a significant discursive practice that signals the author's rejection of the term's validity while still acknowledging its existence in public discourse.

Despite the sustained scholarly engagement with comfort women discourse, cultural politics of language and its performative agency within a discourse appear underexplored, often featuring as a part of broader debates on history, diplomacy and representation. Existing research largely employs terms like comfort women, victims, survivors, sex slaves as descriptive and definitive categories, rather than examining how such acts of labelling can potentially negotiate identity, historical memory and ethico-political recognition. The present study addresses this lacuna by investigating the performative force of the linguistic acts of naming and labelling and their broader cultural and political implications. The paper differs from the existing scholarship in its treatment of naming as the primary analytical lens through which the politics of identity, recognition and historical memory are re-interpreted.

III. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT

The paper adopts a qualitative and interpretative framework, employing in-depth textual reading and discourse analysis of Jan Ruff O'Herne's memoir *Fifty Years of Silence* as its primary text. The analysis focuses on the discursive formation of subjectivities through the performativity of language, arguing that naming is a linguistic act whose cultural and performative force is conditioned by discursive practices of reiteration, institutionalization, and resignification. The colonial re-ascription and the consequent discursive act of renaming of the comfort women is equally emphasized, accentuating the subsequent performative reconfiguration of identity through reclamation of proper names, as well as the self-assertion of survivorhood. Besides that, this study also takes into consideration the naming and renaming of institutions and spaces, to trace the production, institutionalization and normalisation of particular forms of subjectivity and historical memory through euphemistic nomenclatures.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is primarily informed by Judith Butler's theory of performativity and injurious speech as articulated in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Butler's conception of language as performative provides the central analytical framework for understanding naming not merely as a descriptive linguistic act but as a practice capable of constituting, regulating, and re-signifying subjectivity. Her notion that the force of language is contingent upon its reiteration and discursive context forms the basis of the present analysis. To contextualize the institutional production and circulation of naming practices, the study also engages Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse and subject formation. While Butler explains the performative effects of naming upon the subject, Foucault offers a complementary perspective on how discursive regimes authorize, normalize, and sustain particular modes of designation. Together, these frameworks facilitate an examination of naming as both a political practice of power and an agential force of resistance.

V. NAMING, RENAMING AND PRODUCTION OF SUBJECT

Names especially in political context often create an illusion of neutrality that conceals the political nature of power. However, every system of power functions within a hierarchical structure, where context is generated and imposed. This section analyses the institutional function of names and how acts of naming and renaming within the Japanese military system participate in the production of "comfort women" as subjects. Drawing upon Butler, naming is understood as not a singular outcome but a continuous discursive process. The continuity is sustained because meaning itself is deferring in a Derridan sense. Subject formation and discourse formation occur simultaneously, with the naming of the subject. In this sense naming and subject formation are intrinsically intertwined, since naming itself performs the initiation and sustenance of meaning through repetitive discursive practices.

Within the Japanese military system, the comfort women were not only physically confined but discursively reorganised through a carefully structured politics of naming. However, the process of naming to be political requires an anchor—a correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that presupposes and constitutes at the same time power relations (Foucault, 27); the naming of the comfort women to be an active force of subject formation within the mainstream discourse requires the power of meaning-making and the very source of power requires the field of knowledge produced through the act of naming and meaning-making. In the context of comfort women, the term "comfort women" was used within the military discourse to name the subjects who were already deemed as prostitutes. The name acquired its meaning the moment they were identified as prostitutes while labelled as comfort women. However, the name gained its agential force through circulation and usage

within political, cultural and social discourse where this interpretation dominated over other interpretations of comfort women. This validated and fixed their identities as prostitutes. Such act of naming, thus, becomes a political act that hegemonizes the meaning produced thereby, by granting it sustenance through coercion and control.

This transformation into "comfort women" exceeds their functions as institutional classification and becomes a process through which a new social identity is produced. The renaming and transformation of the military brothels into comfort stations happens simultaneously, replacing the language of coercion with the language of care and administrative urgency. Together these designations constitute a discursive framework that normalizes systematic sexual violence and slavery, while legitimizing the institution and the identities produced within it, thereby regulating how comfort women and the system are perceived in the official military discourse. The production of subjectivity extends beyond institutional labels to the practice of renaming. In *Fifty Years of Silence*, O'Herne recalls that the comfort women were assigned Japanese floral names upon their arrival in the comfort stations. This act of renaming doesn't just substitute names; it also displaces all social anchors that constituted their former identities.

This study investigates and evaluates this process of naming the comfort women as a cultural practice, whose political force lies in the repetition of the imposed names and circulation of power and control through discourse. Butler's insight of performative speech acts is particularly essential here to map the transformation of contingent institutional designations into seemingly stable social realities and the consequence of such performance. Naming and renaming, therefore, may be understood as performative practices that possess active agential force and more than merely describing the comfort women, become active participants in the production of the subjects.

VI. PERFORMATIVITY, LINGUISTIC INJURY AND POLITICS OF NAMING

This study employs the lens of Butler and Foucault to posit that naming is not merely a linguistic act of labelling and categorizing an individual or phenomenon but a discursively performed act that governs the constitution of identities, semantic regulation and enactment of power. This theoretical framework is essential to the understanding of the politics surrounding the institutional vocabulary of comfort women and comfort station. Generally, the terms comfort women and comfort stations are used to categorize and inform of the employment of sex slaves in military brothels. Now the question arises whether these terms can be considered as injurious or not. And if yes what qualifies them as injurious and what is the degree of their injuriousness. In the military context these terms are labels that function as descriptors or classifying markers. According to the dominant political narratives on 'comfort women', 'comfort stations' were erected for the purpose of providing relief and comfort to soldiers suffering from sexual frustration, categorizing it as a state sponsored initiative to prevent its uncontrollable consequences in the form of war rapes. The term comfort itself legitimizes the nobility of purpose, euphemistically glossing over the violence inherent in the experience of the event.

The memoir *Fifty Years of Silence*, and every other comfort woman narrative for that matter, resist this narrative revisionism, revealing brutal and dehumanising versions of military brothels where the act of comforting commenced. Ironically the sexual violence and inhuman conditions of habitation in the comfort stations strips them of any signs of comfort and care it is supposed to offer. The terms comfort women and comfort station, hence do not merely designate an individual or describe a place; they actively disguise their true functions, transforming legacies of systematic sexual violence into an act associated with comfort and care. The violence enacted is thus not limited to the physical institution of power but is reproduced linguistically through the name itself by replacing language of coercion with language of care. In doing so these euphemisms function as performative camouflage that performs the dual function of concealing violence from public and bureaucratic scrutiny while effectively forcing them to inhabit a label and the identity that it creates through repetitive discursive practices. They become injurious labels, in Butlerian sense, that metaphorically enables vulnerability (Butler 1997, 2), through erasure.

A label is not supposed to define an individual, by overwriting their realities. To quote Butler, "Linguistic injury appears to be the effect of not only the words by which one is addressed, but the mode of address itself ... that interpellates and constitutes a subject" (1997, 2). For instance, O'Herne's identity and character come to be defined by the imposed tag of comfort woman and its derogatory connotation. She shares an experience where she is labelled as a "whore" without the word being directly uttered in reference to her, even though the implication is unmistakable:

"She turned rudely away from me and I heard some other women whispering, 'Look, there goes one from the whore camp.' It made me feel so ashamed and so I suffered more humiliation and the silence continued" (O'Herne, 2011).

The roots of such discursive practices can be traced back to the initial stage of constitution of comfort women as prostitutes. The sustenance of this imposed identity is therefore credited to the continuous repetition of the act; what makes the naming injurious is the reiterative performance of the speech act. Through the interchangeable use of the terms comfort woman, prostitute and whore the speakers continually perform and reproduce the injury sustained, while O'Herne becomes the subject upon whom the performance is enacted.

Thus, the reference to comfort station as a whore camp enacts the contemporary representation of comfort women as whores within public discourse rather than merely describing them. Butler argues that linguistic injury leaves one derogated and demeaned (Butler 1997, 2). The derogation is amplified when the victims have to bear becoming subjects of sexual exploitation and simultaneously having their individuality eroded with vocabulary that sanitizes, legitimizes and perpetuates that exploitation. When O'Herne feels derogated and demeaned by the speech acts performed by the speakers, she experiences what Butler describes as "the disorientation of [her] situation as the effect of such speech" (1997, 3). This unfolds another aspect of linguistic performativity; the threat of semantic determinism that threatens the immense creative potential of language, in simple terms the desire to fix the meaning, in this context the meaning of name.

Interestingly the designation through euphemisms itself is paradoxical underlining a layered politics of naming. In the memoir, O'Herne describes the comfort station she inhabited during the war was named Nanakai-Tei which literally translates to House of Seven Seas (O'Herne, 2011). While comfort station functions as an official euphemism that reinforces violence implicitly through the rhetoric guise of care, it creates a layered politics of naming in which one performative label is superimposed upon another.

A similar politics of naming governs the renaming of the women themselves, with Japanese alternatives. The reattribution of Japanese flower names to these women reinscribes the subjective reality they have lived and experienced as comfort women. The impact is observed to be dehumanizing. The act of renaming doesn't simply mean superimposing new identities, it also signifies the erasure of the original identity. By replacing their given names with interchangeable Japanese variants, the women are stripped of their identities that connected them to their families, cultures and histories, reducing them to subjects intelligible only through the institutional logic of comfort station.

VII. RECLAMATION, SURVIVORHOOD, AND THE COUNTER-POLITICS OF NAMING

"The contemporary scene of cultural translation emerges with the presupposition that the utterance does not have the same meaning everywhere, indeed, that the utterance has become a scene of conflict (to such a degree, in fact, that we seek to prosecute the utterance in order, finally, to 'fix' its meaning)" (Butler 1997, 92).

This argument emphasizes the volatility of language that irrespective of performative speech acts holds "word-making and sense-making possibilities" (1997), which when unleashed can trigger semantic, contextual and paradigmatic shifts.

In *Fifty Years of Silence* the term "comfort women" appears within inverted commas juxtaposed against the term 'war rape victim', signifying the intentional dissociation of the term comfort woman from the preferred identifier 'rape victim'. O'Herne repeatedly voices her disapproval of the euphemistic label:

"And how dare the Japanese call these poor abused women 'comfort women', I thought, as I watched them on the television. The euphemism 'comfort women' is an insult and I felt it was a pity that the media were also continually using these words. We were never 'comfort women'. Comfort means something warm and soft, safe and friendly. It means tenderness. We were war rape victims, enslaved and conscripted by the Japanese Imperial Army" (O'Herne, 2011).

It is to be noted however, that despite her strong disapproval for its usage in broader discourse, O'Herne continues to use the term 'comfort women' throughout the memoir. The deliberate denouncement of the label doesn't indicate its denial; rather this act commemorates the resistance against nonconsensual infringement of identity through forced acceptance of that label. This response is consequential for someone whose struggle and survival was undermined by the very designation and whose identities were denied public and political recognition within the broader war narrative, being institutionally classified as prostitutes performing the role of comfort providers. While the label comfort woman appears disparaging, it still functions as a marker of their existence as historical subjects, and victims. As Butler observes, "One exists not only by the virtue of being recognised, but in a prior sense, by being recognizable" (Butler 1997, 5). O'Herne and the other comfort women as historical subjects are already recognizable as comfort women within public discourse. Hence, her enduring utilisation of the term may be read as a defensive strategy for concretizing their historical identities without allowing those identities to be wholly determined by the label itself. It is to be remembered once again that a name is not injurious or emancipatory in itself, rather

what renders it injurious or emancipatory is the performative force and the broader cultural and discursive practices within which it operates.

O'Herne makes multiple references to the term 'war rape victims' across the memoir. Although the label appears as a part of a broader discourse surrounding the diverse wartime experiences and its aftermath, each occurrence reflects a significant rhetoric, semantic and contextual shift. At the initial stage she identifies herself through the burden of shame, recalling "I still carried within me the shame of having been a war rape victim" (O'Herne, 2011). Towards the conclusion of the memoir the same designation is accompanied by a sense of recognition and a collective consciousness as reflected in the statement, "By speaking out and meeting other war rape victims and being able to forgive, I had found healing for my tortured mind" (O'Herne, 2011). The changing context of the same term may be interpreted as a positive indicator of discursive evolution and a counter-measure against the erosive politics of naming enabled by dominant revisionist narratives. Rather than solely functioning as a reminder of victimhood the designation "war rape victim" gradually becomes a mode of recognition of their survival through reclamation of the lost self, reconfiguration of the politics of naming and assertion of survivorhood.

"I was proud to be an O'Herne. The O'Hernes were always energetic, they never sat back. I was an O'Herne and proud of it. As I looked at my name, I saw before me in a flash my whole life: my idyllic childhood in Java, my years in prison camp, my marriage to Tom, my role as a mother, my migration to Australia, my life as the teacher, Mrs. Ruff, and finally, at eighty-four years old, I am once again an O'Herne" (O'Herne, 2011).

This excerpt from the memoir highlights the cultural nuance of naming that makes it emancipatory. Her flashback navigating the transitional phases of her life reflects her realization and acknowledgment of her survivorhood. O' Herne recognizes herself by her root identity and her "self" prior to her engagement as a comfort woman, that had remained in the shadows of oblivion and denial. This realization of self-identification doesn't, however, remain confined to individuals, rather extends to a collective level. O'Herne and other comfort women are united by a collective consciousness, that renders them a shared identity of "survivor". O'Herne recalls keeping the original names of her fellows at the comfort station in a handkerchief to commemorate the violence, brutality and injustice they survived. (O'Herne, 2011)

The weaponization of the derogatory euphemism, compounded with the strong assertion of the proper name, self-recognition as a survivor and identification of other victims as survivors, marks O'Herne's departure from infamy and victimhood to survivorhood and the reclamation of her lost self, highlighting the power of performative naming. This heralds the idea of counter politics of naming, where name performs an inversive function of emancipation, which is observed in this case through O'Herne's attempt to counter the politics of naming that threatened her erasure from history, memory and existence.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This inquiry ultimately points out that language itself becomes a part of the traumatic apparatus, while simultaneously providing the means of resistance, recovery and emancipation. The final movement from "comfort women" to "survivors" signifies a movement from mere terminological alteration; it maps the trajectory of transformation in the politics of naming itself, revealing the dynamic capacity of language as a contested space for the enactment of violence, power, resistance and emancipation. In the memoir *Fifty Years of Silence*, language does not appear as a passive witness to wartime sexual violence and trauma. It becomes a contested political terrain with active agential force where history, identity and power are constantly performed, challenged and negotiated. This demonstrates writing as a creative and effective medium, capable of facilitating the performative force of language.

At a broader level, this study may be situated within linguistic and discourse-oriented critical studies by foregrounding naming as a significant analytical mode of inquiry in understanding the reciprocal relation between history, politics and subjectivity. This framework further contributes to the broader field of postcolonial inquiry by demonstrating how naming operates as an active agential force paradoxically facilitating subjugation as well as resistance, and by substantiating the significance of politics of naming in understanding the relationship between language, power, and historical memory in postcolonial and post-conflict contexts.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Shadows of the Metropolis: Repression, Guilt, and the Unconscious in Anjum Hasan's *Difficult Pleasures*

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Abstract— Anjum Hasan's short story collection *Difficult Pleasures* navigates the fractured psychological landscapes of contemporary urban life, exposing the profound emotional dissonance hidden beneath the surface of modern society. This paper explores the intricate manifestations of repression, guilt, and the unconscious across Hasan's narratives, arguing that the modern cityscape acts as a catalyst for her characters' internal moral conflicts. By employing a psychoanalytic framework, the study examines how individuals grapple with the shadow self, often evading moral responsibility and repressing the weight of their choices. For instance, the analysis highlights the profound moral blindness of the academic figure in "Immanuel Kant in Shillong," who ruins a student's future yet stubbornly fails to recognize his own culpability. Furthermore, the paper delves into the affective paralysis that characterizes interpersonal relationships throughout the collection, examining the severe psychological impact of fragmented family units on vulnerable children who face parental abandonment or divorce in poignant stories like "Birds" and "Hanging on Like Death." It also explores the suppressed desires and devastating physical consequences experienced by the protagonist in "The History of Touch," who is left completely isolated and deprived of human contact after pursuing an illicit romantic affair. Ultimately, the metropolis emerges as an oppressive psychological space where traditional bonds dissolve, leading to a pervasive sense of alienation. This research asserts that Hasan's characters remain caught in a perpetual, agonizing struggle between their conscious identities and repressed impulses, highlighting a postmodern condition where guilt is internalized and the unconscious dictates the trajectory of human connection.

Keywords— Shadow Self, Unconscious, Repression and Guilt, Anjum Hasan, Carl Jung.

I. INTRODUCTION

Published in 2012, Anjum Hasan's short story collection *Difficult Pleasures* captures the profound affective dissonance of modern Indian urbanity. The metropolis, in Hasan's rendering, is not merely a geographical setting but a sprawling psychological arena where the conscious self constantly wrestles with its repressed underbelly. Much like the narrative fragmentation and theoretical depth required to unpack the complexities of Hasan's longer fiction, such as the novel *The Cosmopolitans*, the brief, piercing narratives of this collection demand a rigorous psychoanalytic lens. The characters populating these stories are deeply entrenched in the isolating machinery of city life, navigating spaces like Bangalore, Mumbai, and Goa where traditional moral compasses frequently falter. This introduction sets the stage for examining the collection through a Carl Jungian framework, specifically focusing on the archetype of the "Shadow"—the repository of repressed desires, unacknowledged guilt, and moral ambiguities that the conscious ego refuses to accept or integrate.

In Jungian psychoanalysis, the Shadow represents the dark, unrecognized aspects of the personality, harboring instincts and impulses that society—and the individual's own moral standards—deem unacceptable. In *Difficult Pleasures*, this psychological shadow is externalized through the cold, transactional nature of the urban environment itself. The metropolis acts as a catalyst for moral conflict, stripping away the communal surveillance of traditional society and leaving individuals face-to-face with their darkest, most selfish inclinations. In the short story "Revolutions," for example, the city serves as a backdrop for profound disconnection; the narrative points out the cold city culture where true friendship has been reduced,

highlighting how people have started to use others for their benefits in their life. This collective shadow of the modern world infects the personal psyches of the characters, forcing them into corners where they must either confront their hidden motives or succumb to the neuroses born of severe repression.

The refusal to confront one's shadow often results in a paralyzing moral blindness, a theme Hasan masterfully dissects in stories of academic and intellectual evasion. In "Immanuel Kant in Shillong," an anonymous, widowed professor travels to escape his trauma, yet he remains deeply blind to the destructive consequences of his own professional actions. Even when confronted by his best student, John, regarding his role in ruining the future of another student named Francis, the professor does not seem to recognize his mistake. This evasion is a classic manifestation of the repressed shadow; the conscious ego protects itself by completely denying culpability, leaving the unconscious guilt to fester unresolved. The professor's intellectual engagement with Kantian philosophy serves as a mere defensive mechanism, a fragile intellectual shield against the heavy, unspoken weight of his moral failure and the lasting impact of his decisions.

Furthermore, when the shadow is continually repressed, Jung argues that it inevitably finds destructive ways to surface, often disrupting the physical and emotional reality of the individual. This is vividly illustrated in "The History of Touch," where Dweepa's engagement with her repressed, neurosensory desires outside of her marriage leads to devastating consequences. The price she pays for pursuing an affair with Akvir is contracting leprosy, forcing her into a hospital stay where she longs for the touch of other men but is deprived of any human contact. The physical illness becomes a stark, metaphorical manifestation of her internal moral conflict and resulting isolation. Similarly, the deep-seated guilt and anxiety of fractured families materialize in the domestic sphere. In "Hanging on Like Death," the young boy Neel prepares for a school drama by wearing a mushroom umbrella, where the mushroom signifies the newly grown difference between Neel's father and mother, expanding relentlessly like a fungus after rain. The vulnerable child becomes the unwitting recipient of his parents' projected shadow, his life hanging in uncertainty due to their decisions.

The postmodern urban landscape in *Difficult Pleasures* is replete with characters who treat interpersonal relationships as disposable, further highlighting the dominance of the shadow self over ethical consciousness. In "Birds," the extreme manifestation of this shadow is seen in Samir's father, who flees to start a new life with his new girlfriend, leaving his son behind in India because he views him as a hindrance for his happy life. This complete dissolution of the parent-child bond underscores a society where individuals are utterly unable to integrate their moral responsibilities with their selfish desires. Even the radical attempts to awaken others from this moral slumber are tinged with the shadow's chaotic energy, as seen in "Saturday Night." Here, the maid Savita abducts her masters' child simply to grab their attention, attempting to force them to look beyond their materialism and value simple things in life.

Ultimately, this paper argues that the characters in *Difficult Pleasures* are trapped in a Jungian landscape of their own making. By consistently refusing to confront their shadows—whether through intellectual evasion, physical escape, or outright abandonment—they are condemned to a metropolis of the mind defined by repression, guilt, and an inescapable affective dissonance.

II. THE INTELLECTUAL PERSONA AND THE UNINTEGRATED SHADOW

In Jungian psychoanalysis, the "Persona" functions as the social mask an individual constructs to interact with the external world, often shaped by professional identity, cultural capital, and societal expectations. When this Persona becomes too rigid—particularly within academic and intellectual spheres—it necessitates a severe repression of the Shadow, which houses the primal, irrational, or morally compromised aspects of the psyche. In *Difficult Pleasures*, Anjum Hasan frequently interrogates this dynamic, revealing how characters employ intellectualism not as a tool for self-discovery, but as a formidable psychological defense mechanism. By adopting the respectable veneer of the scholar, the philosopher, or the cultured expatriate, these characters attempt to distance themselves from their internal chaos. However, because the Shadow remains unintegrated, it inevitably ruptures the polished surface of their lives, exposing a stark dissonance between their elevated social masks and their underlying predatory or fractured realities.

The deceptive nature of the intellectual Persona is acutely dismantled in the short story "For Love or Water," where the pursuit of higher education in a congested metropolis intersects with concealed predatory instincts. The narrative follows a pharmacology student grappling with the environmental anxieties of Bangalore, yet the most immediate threat emerges from a figure cloaked in scholarly respectability. Edwin Dominic initially presents himself to the protagonist as a harmless, physically challenged well-wisher. His Persona is carefully constructed through visual markers of intellectual and social status, notably his "scholarly spectacles" and his "big car". However, this facade violently shatters when he uses a fabricated stumble

to physically violate the protagonist, caressing her bottom while pretending to merely labour to get back on his feet. The protagonist's sudden, chilling realization that "Everything was a lie, suddenly" perfectly encapsulates the terrifying moment the Persona drops to reveal the unintegrated, predatory Shadow. Dominic's intellectual guise is exposed as a calculated instrument of manipulation, highlighting Hasan's critique of how urbanites use perceived sophistication to enact their evil plans upon vulnerable emigrants.

Similarly, in "Good Housekeeping," Hasan explores the failure of the intellectual Persona to contain aggressive, primal impulses. The story navigates the disoriented family dynamics of Tara John and her daughter Anaya, who seeks to forge an individual identity by moving to England for her studies. In this foreign, ostensibly enlightened academic environment, she encounters Jagdeep Singh, also known as Jack, who holds the prestigious position of a university professor. As an academic, Jack's public Persona would ideally project rationality, authority, and stability. Yet, the narrative quickly subverts this expectation when Anaya is deeply startled by his unexpectedly aggressive behavior, prompting her to flee from him. Hasan effectively emphasizes the shock of the psychological rupture itself; the prestigious title of 'professor' provides no sanctuary from the volatile, unintegrated Shadow of the man holding it. The academic environment, rather than fostering intellectual connection, becomes a site where the aggressive shadow emerges to alienate and traumatize the younger female subject.

The tragic consequences of prioritizing an intellectual Persona over emotional integration are further underscored in narratives involving profound loss and the inability to process grief. This disconnect between high intellect and raw emotional reality is painfully evident in "Banerjee and Banerjee." When the expatriate Banerjee, living a cosmopolitan life in Paris, receives a final parcel sent by Ludmilla Halmstad containing what his brother wished to give him before committing suicide, his intellectual Persona anticipates a grand, complex revelation. Tearing open the packet, he is deeply disturbed and disappointed to find only a "simple book," feeling that his dead brother had nothing special or profound to say to him from the threshold of death. Banerjee's inability to comprehend this mundane object reflects a psyche so rigidly attached to intellectual expectations that it cannot process the unintegrated, bleak despair of his brother's reality. The Christian echoes of resurrection he contemplates—"Certainly we shall all rise"—function merely as abstract intellectual comforts that fail to alleviate his own underlying despair and his confrontation with the lack of permanency in life.

This reliance on high-minded abstraction over grounded empathy echoes the thematic core of "Immanuel Kant in Shillong." Here, the protagonist's deep immersion in Kantian philosophy acts as a sophisticated Persona that effectively blocks any meaningful confrontation with the emotional fallout of his own actions. Philosophy, in this context, is stripped of its moral utility and reduced to an academic fortress that shields the ego from the guilt residing in the Shadow. When confronted by his best student, John, about the ruined future of Francis, the professor relies on the sterile distance of his intellect rather than acknowledging his culpability.

Through these varied characters, Hasan suggests that the intellectual Persona is inherently fragile when it operates in active opposition to the unconscious. Whether it is the predatory academic hiding behind scholarly spectacles, the aggressive overseas professor, or the cosmopolitan brother unable to read the simple text of human tragedy, the failure to integrate the Shadow results in profound moral and interpersonal failures. The intellect, rather than elevating the individual, becomes a complicit agent in their affective paralysis, rendering them incapable of genuine human connection or ethical accountability within the unforgiving landscape of the modern world.

III. THE TRICKSTER ARCHETYPE AND THE ERUPTION OF THE COLLECTIVE SHADOW

In Jungian psychology, the Trickster is an archetype of subversion, boundary-crossing, and chaotic energy. Operating outside the bounds of conventional morality, the Trickster disrupts rigid social structures and exposes the hypocrisies inherent within a society. In Anjum Hasan's *Difficult Pleasures*, this archetype becomes a crucial narrative device used to rupture the "collective shadow" of the modern Indian metropolis—a shared, unacknowledged repository of urban apathy, materialism, and institutional cruelty. When the societal Persona becomes overly sterile or oppressive, Hasan deploys marginalized figures as Tricksters to enact chaotic interventions, forcing the privileged or the powerful into a sudden, uncomfortable confrontation with reality.

This dynamic is vividly illustrated in the short story "The Wild Things," which utilizes dark humour and irony to dismantle the collective shadow of institutional authority and the mythos of urban migration. The protagonist, Prasad, is explicitly framed as a "mischievous schoolboy," instantly aligning him with the disruptive, rule-breaking nature of the Trickster archetype. Operating within a rural setting that looks toward the city with naive aspiration, Prasad is subjected to the rigid, hypocritical discipline of the school principal, Mr. Hosaralli. The educational institution here represents a collective shadow of authoritarian

control disguised as moral instruction. Mr. Hosaralli enforces his dominance physically, choosing to cane Prasad most liberally while refusing to engage with him personally. The narrative notes that the principal "has conversations with none," a calculated distance that Prasad recognizes as "the man's way of being neutral and powerful".

Prasad's subversive Trickster energy is evident in his mechanical, almost parodic chanting of reform: "I am sorry for my bad behavior and I will reform myself according to the precepts of Basava". His outward compliance masks an inner unruliness that institutional violence cannot tame. Driven by the illusion that the grass is greener on the other side, Prasad attempts to cross the geographic and social boundary into Bangalore. However, in true Trickster fashion, his short adventure serves to demystify the urban utopia, ultimately forcing his return to the village after realizing that city life is above his reach. Through Prasad's mischievous transgressions and inevitable failure, Hasan exposes the cruel irony of a society that punishes the rural poor while simultaneously dangling the unattainable dream of metropolitan success before them.

While Prasad's disruptions are mostly contained by his socio-economic limitations, the Trickster's capacity for profound domestic sabotage is fully realized in "Saturday Night." Here, Hasan shifts her focus to the affluent, metropolitan household of Mohan and Keya, whose lives are entirely consumed by the collective shadow of extreme materialism. They are portrayed as deeply self-absorbed, constantly in motion—epitomized by Keya getting ready at night to catch an aeroplane—and completely disconnected from the emotional realities surrounding them. To puncture this impenetrable bubble of urban privilege, Hasan introduces Savita, a maid working in another house, who operates as the ultimate Trickster figure.

Savita is entirely marginalized, yet she possesses the cunning required to dismantle the ruling class's illusions. Driven by a desire for "excitement in life," she orchestrates a radical, transgressive scheme: she decides to steal the child she is hired to look after, deliberately aiming to "annoy her master". The abduction of the baby is a classic Trickster maneuver—morally reprehensible on the surface, yet symbolically necessary to shatter a stagnant psychological order. By placing the abducted child inside the car of Mohan and Keya before running away, Savita forcefully imports chaos into their carefully curated, materialistic sanctuary.

The resulting confrontation is startling and primal. When Mohan turns around, he is met with the sight of a baby "without its blanket," with "eyes half-opened and his mouth shaped into a grimace," looking "straight into Mohan's eye". This crying child functions as a metaphorical representation of the simple, vulnerable things of the world that the affluent deliberately ignore. Savita's Trickster intervention successfully hijacks the couple's busy, upwardly mobile trajectory. By utilizing shock and transgression, she forces her masters—and by extension, the materialistic world—to wake up, look at their surroundings, and acknowledge their blindness to the ordinary pleasures in life.

In both "The Wild Things" and "Saturday Night," the Trickster archetype is essential for navigating the oppressive collective shadow of modern existence. These mischievous or radical figures do not necessarily solve the moral failings of the society they inhabit; rather, their function is purely disruptive. They break the polished surface of institutional neutrality and urban materialism, unleashing chaotic truths that the conscious, collective ego of the metropolis desperately tries to keep hidden.

IV. THE ORPHAN ARCHETYPE: INHERITING THE PARENTAL SHADOW

Within the framework of Jungian psychoanalysis, the Orphan archetype emerges when the fundamental illusion of childhood safety is shattered, initiating the individual into the harsh, unvarnished realities of the world. While this archetype is traditionally associated with the literal loss of parents, in the postmodern, urban landscapes of Anjum Hasan's *Difficult Pleasures*, the Orphan is frequently birthed through psychological and emotional abandonment. As adult characters succumb to the pressures of the metropolis, they often fail to integrate their own moral conflicts, selfish desires, and relational failures. Consequently, this unintegrated parental Shadow is violently projected onto the most vulnerable members of the family unit: the children. In Hasan's narratives, the child does not merely witness the breakdown of the adult world; they actively inherit it, bearing the full, crushing weight of their parents' unacknowledged psychological debris.

The profound trauma of this archetypal inheritance is most starkly realized in the short story "Birds." The narrative centers on a small boy, Samir, whose entry into the Orphan archetype is twofold: he is bereaved by the physical death of his mother and subsequently subjected to the emotional erasure orchestrated by his surviving parent. The story opens with a visceral confrontation with absence, as Samir and his father travel to India to dissolve his mother's ashes. Hasan captures the boy's desperate yearning for maternal connection when his father opens the carton; Samir hopes to smell his mother's familiar perfume, but is met with the bleak reality that the ashes carry no scent.

However, the true devastating blow of the Orphan's journey comes not from the deceased mother, but from the living father's complete surrender to his own selfish Shadow. Driven by a desire to escape his responsibilities and start anew with a new girlfriend, the father actively plots to leave his son behind with his grandparents in India. To the father, the child is no longer a bond to be nurtured but a direct hindrance to his own pursuit of a happy life. Through this devastating betrayal, Hasan highlights a dark facet of postmodern society where parents prioritize their identities as separate individuals, ruthlessly choosing to snap their relationship with their offspring. Samir is thrust into an isolated existence, and his intense pain is expressed through his rebellious behavior and tears. He becomes a living receptacle for his father's unresolved guilt and selfishness, inheriting a profound, unearned abandonment.

This inheritance of the parental Shadow takes on a more insidious, atmospheric quality in "Hanging on Like Death." Unlike Samir, the young protagonist Neel is not physically abandoned across continents, but he is psychologically orphaned by the impending dissolution of his family. Neel is trapped in the liminal space of his parents' divorce, an environment thick with unarticulated adult conflict that he is too young to process but is forced to endure. Hasan brilliantly uses the mundane rituals of Neel's preparation for a school drama to illustrate how the parental Shadow infects the child's domestic sanctuary. As Neel practices his lines while wearing a tiny umbrella painted to look like a mushroom, he looks into a mirror "flecked with his father's toothpaste spit". This physical residue on the mirror serves as a powerful symbol of the messy, lingering, and careless imprint the father leaves on Neel's self-image.

The costume itself becomes a heavy metaphorical burden. As Neel repeatedly asks his reflection, "If a mushroom could talk what would it say?", the mushroom signifies the corrosive, rapidly expanding difference between his father and mother that grows relentlessly like a fungus after rain. Neel is burdened with wearing the physical manifestation of his parents' marital decay on his head. The title of the story perfectly encapsulates the Orphan's psychological state; the child in the broken family must struggle through an existence where their life is entirely uncertain due to their parent's decisions. Neel's emotional security hangs precariously like death, completely at the mercy of adults who are too consumed by their own interpersonal failures to shield him from the fallout.

In both "Birds" and "Hanging on Like Death," Hasan utilizes the Orphan archetype to critique the moral failures of the contemporary adult world. The children in these stories are innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire of metropolitan neuroses. Because the parents refuse to confront or integrate their own Shadows—choosing instead to flee, divorce, or erase their pasts—the chaotic energy of those Shadows flows downward. Samir and Neel are forced into premature psychological maturity, inheriting a fractured world devoid of permanence or unconditional love. Through these young characters, Hasan warns that the ultimate consequence of an unexamined life is the tragic, generational transmission of despair.

V. TAPPING THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS: MYTH, FAIRY TALE, AND REBIRTH

Beyond the personal repository of repressed traumas and unacknowledged guilt, Carl Jung posited the existence of the "collective unconscious"—a deeper, inherited layer of the human psyche populated by primordial images, archetypes, and universal myths. In *Difficult Pleasures*, Anjum Hasan explores how individuals, when overwhelmed by the stark alienations and temporal anxieties of modern life, instinctively reach into this ancestral wellspring. Characters attempt to tap into fairy tales and creative expression not merely as forms of escapism, but as profound psychological mechanisms for survival, striving to transcend their immediate suffering and achieve a sense of permanence or symbolic rebirth.

In "Fairytale in the 12th Main," the collective unconscious manifests through the desperate invocation of mythic time as a defense against the agony of separation. The narrative centers on Inayat and Hina, an unwed couple whose intense, intoxicating romance forces them into a hyper-vigilant existence, preferring the archetypal cover of night where they believe their love can prosper away from societal scrutiny. When a phone call dictates that Hina must depart, the unbearable reality of their parting drives Inayat to seek refuge in universal myth. Hasan explicitly incorporates the ancient narrative of Sleeping Beauty to articulate Inayat's profound desire to completely halt the progression of time. He fixates on the image of the princess falling asleep at the spindle, the kingdom ceasing to function, and the thorny hedge rising to enclose its inmates for a hundred years.

For Inayat, the fairy tale is a vital psychological blueprint. He equates the distance between himself and his lover to a century of separation, desperately wishing to freeze time so that their youthfulness and passion might be perfectly preserved. He conceptualizes liberation from his pain through drastic, symbolic ruptures of reality: drinking poison, stopping the clock, and the skipping of a stuck record. However, the collective unconscious is vast and contains terrors as well as salvation. When Inayat realizes he cannot actually stop the passing of time—that he cannot prevent the rising sun or the changing seasons that lead inevitably to old age and death—his unprotected psyche spirals into a hyper-real state. His intense loneliness unleashes

catastrophic, apocalyptic visions drawn from the darkest corners of the human mind; he hallucinates babies slipping from their mother's grasp and aircraft catching fire. Hasan masterfully uses this fairy-tale framework to decode the overwhelming neurosensory emotions of love, ultimately demonstrating the tragic impossibility of living within a magical, fantasy-flavored world devoid of logical, earthly constraints. The myth provides a temporary psychological container, but it shatters against the relentless forward motion of reality.

While Inayat fails to harness myth to arrest time, other characters successfully engage the creative layers of the unconscious to facilitate psychological healing and individuation. Jung argued that engaging with art allows the ego to process profound trauma, bridging the conscious and unconscious minds to initiate a process of rebirth. This restorative aspect is central to "The Big Picture," which chronicles the psychological journey of Mrs. Ali, a fifty-two-year-old widow who turns to painting to cope with her deep-seated bitterness.

For Mrs. Ali, the act of painting is devoid of external, ego-driven ambition. As the narrative states, "She didn't paint to get somewhere. She painted to stay where she was". This profound stillness represents a deliberate descent into her own interiority. By shutting herself in a study room to paint the things that have captured her mind, she actively channels the contents of her unconscious onto the canvas. Through this creative engagement, she achieves a form of psychological rebirth; the passion of painting keeps her continuously occupied and allows her to forge a new identity independent of her grief. Her journey culminates in a literal and symbolic voyage to Europe to display her work in an art museum, facilitated by her introduction to Frieda.

Yet, Hasan brilliantly grounds this transcendent psychological rebirth in the inescapable realities of the physical body. Amidst her artistic triumph, Mrs. Ali suffers from severe bleeding, a physical affliction that puts her in highly uncomfortable situations and causes her anxiety about what her younger traveling companions might be thinking. This bodily reality serves as a potent anchor. It juxtaposes her soaring artistic actualization with the messy, painful, and mortal constraints of human existence.

Through these narratives, Hasan illustrates the lengths to which individuals will go to find meaning and refuge when traditional social structures fail them. Whether seeking the temporal stasis of a classic fairy tale or the healing permanence found within a painted canvas, the characters in *Difficult Pleasures* continuously reach into the depths of the collective human psyche, utilizing its ancient tools to navigate the fractured landscape of the postmodern world.

VI. CONCLUSION

In Anjum Hasan's *Difficult Pleasures*, the journey toward Jungian individuation—the psychological mandate to integrate the conscious ego with the darker, repressed elements of the unconscious—is depicted not as a triumphant arrival, but as an agonizing burden. Through her masterful use of narrative fragmentation, Hasan reveals how the modern metropolis relentlessly tests the fragile boundaries of the human psyche. Rather than achieving psychological wholeness, her individuals frequently buckle under the weight of their own unresolved moral conflicts, retreating into isolation or defensive postures when forced to face their inner darkness.

This aborted individuation and the heavy cost of unintegrated emotions are acutely visible in the story "Eye in the Sky." When Dawn flees to Goa on a coach following a misunderstanding with her husband Jasim, she acts on a chaotic, unintegrated impulse, believing she can take revenge on him by venturing out alone. However, her attempt to assert a fiercely independent, individuated self is quickly compromised by the predatory reality of the city, embodied by Vinay, who perceives her solitude as a vulnerability to be exploited. The inconvenience and fear created by Vinay's unwanted advances force Dawn to seek protection from strangers like Patel and Johnny in a bar. Through this terrifying ordeal, Dawn arrives at a profound realization: acting purely out of anger does not solve the underlying issue, and impulsive decisions driven by unexamined emotions only lead to adverse consequences. She is forced to confront the harsh limitations of her own agency in a space that strips away her defensive illusions.

Ultimately, the fragmented structure of *Difficult Pleasures* perfectly mirrors the fractured psyches of its protagonists. The collection asserts that in contemporary urban spaces, true individuation demands an excruciating, honest confrontation with the Shadow self. For Hasan's characters, the failure or refusal to bear this psychological burden results in a perpetual state of affective dissonance. They remain suspended in the shadowy corridors of the metropolis—caught between who they pretend to be and who they actually are—haunted by the guilt of their evasions and forever alienated from the elusive promise of a whole, integrated existence.

Ultimately, Hasan's collection offers a profound meditation on the psychological costs of modern urban existence, demonstrating that the failure to confront and integrate the Shadow self leads not only to personal suffering but to the transmission of trauma across generations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Fusion of Fiction and Philosophy: Human Existence in a World Without Eternal Return

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Abstract— The postwar European novel has added a new dimension to modern man's perception of himself and his relation with the world of his own making. In this respect, the great Czech-French writer Milan Kundera (1929–2023) has deeply fascinated contemporary novelists and critics. In his fusion of fiction and philosophy in his magnum opus *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), which the paper aims to discuss, he has discovered a new art of composition. His profound philosophical reflections on power and truth, human existence and the fragility of human values, read like a lamentation on the death of the ideas and values of European Modernity, as the paper argues. Written against a very palpable historically and politically charged atmosphere, Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is also a scathing criticism of the tyranny of the Communist regime imposed in the wake of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. But the historicity of the novel should not be overemphasized. Its philosophical and symbolic ramifications go far beyond the historicity of the text as explored in the paper. It would be far more rewarding to read it as a symbolic work which makes one conscious of a disposition of tyranny of power which one can perceive in the behaviour of contemporary political dispensations irrespective of political ideology. Furthermore, the novel makes the reader conscious of what man has made of man in a world developed on the design of the image of Christian anthropology and the idea of progress.

Keywords— Kundera, Modernism, Progress, Totalitarianism, Existence, *Lightness of Being*.

I. INTRODUCTION

In her reflections on Nietzsche's idea of eternal return, Hannah Arendt observes that the doctrine of eternal recurrence signifies the very nature of life for all organisms. The idea profoundly fascinated Milan Kundera's imagination. His *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* draws by negation for its thematic paradigm upon the Nietzschean myth of cyclical sempiternity. Kundera's novelistic essay on the idea of eternal return, a discursive digression on the paradox of human existence, is of central significance to understanding the existential dilemma of the characters, particularly of Tomas—that is, the lightness of being in a world without eternal return. Authorial interventions and philosophical digressions are important elements of Kundera's repertoire of narrative techniques. In this respect, Kundera is, as Kussi observes, "an astonishingly inventive author who uses a variety of structural ways to question his themes" (6). If Nietzsche, influenced by Wagner, as Arendt believes, brought philosophy so close to poetry, Kundera brought fiction so close to philosophy and music in his art of composition and reflections on human existence.

Kundera examines the myth of eternal return by negation. If a human phenomenon recurs as it once happened, it will alter our consciousness; if it does not recur, it will disappear and will be forgotten. Nonrecurrence signifies weightlessness. If the idea of eternal return is the heaviest burden, as Nietzsche presumed, then, to Kundera, lightness is the most splendid condition. The idea is that in human life what happens happens only once. The absence of eternal return is the terminal paradox of human existence. It is in this context that Kundera conceives Tomas and Tereza's relationship based on a series of fortuitous events and coincidences in the backdrop of political upheaval in Prague. The narrator draws upon an analogy tinged with irony to drive home that the dynamics of human life and that of physical reality do not follow the same course. One can conduct a

number of experiments in a physics lab in order to verify certain hypotheses. "But man, because he has only one life to live, cannot conduct experiments to test whether to follow his passion (compassion) or not" (Kundera 33).

Although Kundera insists that his novels are neither realistic nor autobiographical, these elements hardly fail to suggest themselves to the reader. "Characters are not born like people, of woman; they are born of a situation, a sentence, a metaphor containing in a nutshell a basic human possibility." Since historical reality is so concrete, it is not difficult to identify the plight of the characters in the novel with that of certain historically identifiable figures including the author himself; yet Kundera continues in the same vein of effacement to foreground what T.S. Eliot calls the 'objective correlative,' to set art apart from self, ideology and history. "The novel is not the author's confession, it is an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become" (Kundera 218).

II. FORTUITY OF HISTORY AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

There is a strong determinism in Kundera's perception of human existence, a denial of freedom and individuality. He draws a philosophical parallel between the existence of the individual and the destiny of a nation. That is, in the world of nonrepeatability, there are certain situations, events and even decisions which determine everything. "Human life occurs only once, and the reason we cannot determine which of our decisions are good and which bad is that in a given situation we can make only one decision; we are not granted a second, third or fourth life in which to compare various decisions" (Kundera 219). While contemplating the existence of Tomas, the authorial narrator draws upon the history of Czechoslovakia since the birth of the Modern Era, seventeenth-century Europe up to the 1968 invasion.

"History is similar to individual lives in this respect. There is only one history of the Czechs. One day it will come to an end as surely as Tomas's life, never to be repeated ... if Czech history could be repeated, we should of course find it desirable to test the other possibility each time and compare the results. Without such an experiment, all considerations of this kind remain a game of hypotheses. 'Einmal ist keinmal.' What happens but once might as well not have happened at all. The history of the Czechs will not be repeated, nor will the history of Europe. The history of the Czechs and of Europe is a pair of sketches from the pen of mankind's fateful inexperience. History is as light as individual human life, unbearably light..." (Kundera 219-20).

In the nonrepeatability of history lies the relativity of human truth. It also renders the alienated characters in the novel nostalgic, whose lives have been determined by a series of fortuitous events while their small and powerless country came under Soviet invasion and its history erased and cultural values mutilated—a tragedy that also symbolises the fate of the small and powerless country against their powerful neighbour, which constitutes the central preoccupation of Kundera. It is in the context of non-recurrence and man's utter ignorance that Kundera explores modern man's unbearable lightness of being. Individual life consists of a series of fortuitous incidents like the plot of a work of art. The fortuity or uncertainty of life is not a new idea; it has been conceived in religious metaphysics. But Kundera conjures it up in the context of postwar European historical and political realities: the rise of Nazism and Fascism, Soviet imperialism during the Cold War and its invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and imposition of a totalitarian Communist regime. These unprecedented developments serve as a dominant motif in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* where the behaviour of political power takes the appearance of a metaphysical reality. The rise of totalitarianism, which Kundera calls 'catastrophic,' Arendt considers as "the greatest evil" of the twentieth century (*Essays* 271). The paradox of postwar Europe with which Kundera is grappling in his novel, Arendt explores its history in her seminal work precisely since the Great War which exposed the very structure of European civilisation before it was taken over by totalitarian politics and mutual hostility. The rise of imperialist powers in Europe undermined the very sovereignty of small nations, a reality which Kundera deplores. Arendt writes: "Modern power conditions which make national sovereignty a mockery except for giant states, the rise of imperialism, and the pan-movements undermined the stability of Europe's nation-state system from the outside" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 269-270). Arendt thinks that if one traces the genealogy of tyranny since the ancient age, totalitarianism is a phenomenon peculiar to the modern age which, she thinks, has repudiated the present from the past. There were indeed despotic rulers exercising arbitrary power and equally unruly people, constantly afraid of each other. But totalitarianism is unique. Arendt further argues: "If we apply these findings, whose fundamental idea, despite many variations, did not change in the two and a half thousand years that separate Plato from Kant, we are tempted at once to interpret totalitarianism as some modern form of tyranny, that is a lawless government whose power is wielded by one man" (461).

III. PROGRESS OF KNOWLEDGE AND PURSUIT OF POWER

Man's pursuit of epistemological, technological and economic progress—a phenomenon simultaneous with the birth of the modern age in Europe, which as Grayling considers "was a revolution across the whole range of enquiries—and it required a liberation of the mind"—changed the very course of human history (16). Since the beginning of these developments, concomitant with great turmoils, which culminated in the catastrophic war in Europe, the state has acquired so much power that the individual has become insignificant. "Caught up in the vortex of this bellicose age," as Freud writes with great disillusionment, modern man seems to have no escape (169). The external forces have become so overwhelming and omnipresent, to which development of modern communication technology has added an unimaginably complex dimension for the functioning of state power, that individual will carries no weight. Freud's diagnosis is psychological while for Kundera it is an existential phenomenon. The state in possession of such power can reduce the individual to a non-entity. The power has assumed such a transcendental authority that in the face of its aggression the individual is induced with futility, a negation of individual freedom and will. The 1968 invasion, according to Kundera, by a belligerent state against a small country in central Europe offers one an insight into the tendency of power which has grown of late with discernible menace.

Totalitarianism has permeated the behaviour of modern power irrespective of political ideology. Understanding this phenomenon is indispensable to grasp the contemporary world and the world Kundera saw in the making and in which his characters are trapped—that is, a world Kundera's great contemporary thinker Arendt considers obligatory upon human imagination to address and understand. She makes an emphatic statement: "if we want to be at home on this earth ... we must try to take part in the interminable dialogue with the essence of totalitarianism" (*Essays* 323). In his novelistic enunciation Kundera aims his imagination to probe into the dynamics of a totalitarian power and its propensity to reduce its subjects to their physical existence. This tendency of dehumanisation is a far cry from the political evil of the past like tyranny, despotic oppression and coercion.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being is a groundbreaking work in its fusion of fiction and philosophy, fiction and history, ethics and aesthetics, variation on art and existence. The story of four Czech artists and intellectuals caught up in the brief lull of Prague Spring that ended with Russian invasion. The story in seven parts interwoven and developed like musical variation describes the lives of Tomas and Tereza, Franz and Sabina symbolising the fragility of individual lives and the turbulence and crisis of world events. As a novelist, Kundera is highly innovative. Since he is preoccupied with the predicament of the individual and his existence in an age when political power has become so omnipotent that individual will carries no significance, he tries to explore the possibility of individual freedom at a time when historical and political conditions have become so overwhelming. In this process, he has developed his own theory of the novel. Therefore, his novels symbolically, as Ownbey rightly observes, "embody his rejection of totalitarianism, authoritarianism, and any other system that devalues art by putting it to political use" (2). The way Kundera has maintained textual freedom by deploying a set of narrative strategies is at variance with the oppressive world the novel is set in, as Kundera's critic Pichova argues: "the narrator's choice of narratological strategies and organization reflects his desire to create a textual world that in no way resembles the oppressive world he describes thematically..." (217).

IV. AESTHETICS AND IDEOLOGY

Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, like *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979), is primarily concerned with certain ideas and concepts of existential significance. He conceives of the novel, with remarkable aesthetic finesse, as an existential exploration with an anti-lyrical attitude, that results in what Just calls "poetics of novelistic truth" which cannot be reduced to unequivocal proposition (176). Kundera's projection of the relativity of human truth is rooted in European culture with which the novelist strongly identifies. The argument is that Kundera's creativity cannot be separated from his critical and intellectual indebtedness to European Enlightenment, as Webb rightly underlines in his study: "He is a rationalist and sceptic devoted to imagination and creativity. His rationalism, nevertheless, is the rationalism of one who employs reason to comprehend the utter unreasonableness of experience and for whom therefore one of the cardinal features of the rational is its absurdity in the face of truth" (357).

In order to problematise the equation of truth with power and that of aesthetic with ideology, Kundera deploys humour and irony in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in a fashion quite innovative. These are not merely technical devices; rather they are permeated with his attitude to human existence. In this respect, Weeks rightly draws a distinction between Kundera and his predecessors. That is, there have been and in fact are "funnier writers than Milan Kundera" but probably no great modern writer

pursued humour as persistently and seriously as Kundera (130). This aesthetic element is saturated with philosophical implications in his writing.

For Kundera irony is an attitude; it is a way of looking at human phenomena beyond their appearance. It is through this disposition that he seeks to demystify and expose totalitarian kitsch which embodies institutions of power that dehumanise individuals. Part six in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is a variation on Kitsch, that is, ugliness. It is an aesthetic concept, an attitude to exclude or deny everything from human existence that is essentially unacceptable. Kundera deploys it as a metaphor to expose the hypocrisy of totalitarian politics, its tendency to impose conformity which Sabina loathes at the level of life and thought. It is invariably a denial of the plurality of ideas and relativity of truth. However, Tomas's reflection in his article on the myth of Oedipus is a philosophical digression in the same vein. Individuals with such an attitude in Kundera's writing become victims of their own laughter. Donahue thinks that "Kundera's protagonists are threatened... by people and institutions that are able to laugh out—and frequently destroy—those who do not share their truths. Thus, characters with a sense of humor are tragic victims while those with truth laugh the malicious laughter of absolute certainty" (68).

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera has augmented and achieved the techniques of narration with which he experimented in his earlier works. The novelist employs a variety of incidents and events—historical and political, literary and nonliterary allusions—selects events and arranges them in an elliptical mode of narration in which the ending is unfolding while displacing the beginning, creating suspense, a technique he seems to have borrowed from Laurence Sterne (1713–1768). Since he is preoccupied with existential problems there is an element of repetition. As a novelist, Kundera places himself in the tradition of European literary culture and admires its great novelists from Cervantes and Sterne to Proust, as Steinby's comprehensive study also shows. The novelist in fact insists on European identity in the same sense in which Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot did under somewhat different conditions. He believes that the tendency to classify, in the words of Steinby, "authors according to their nationality is misguided and argues that in European literature national boundaries are not essential. He claims to represent European culture as a whole" (11–12).

V. DILEMMA OF CENTRAL EUROPE AND AMBIGUITY OF HUMAN FATE

Kundera is deeply rooted in postwar European history, particularly central Europe, in the dilemma of which the 1968 invasion was the last nail in the coffin, with the rise of Communism as an ideology and the Soviet Union as a political power in the age of the Cold War and bipolar world order, and the subsequent attempt to erase the cultural values and identity and the memory of the past—a recurrent theme in his writing. All these factors have gone into the making of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. But despite all the determinants, the book has transcended beyond history in offering a philosophical and symbolic vision of power and individual existence, the powerful and the powerless. Nevertheless, the historical factor is so overwhelming that his polyphonic fiction can also be studied as a historical discourse.

The uncertainty of the world and futility of individual existence and fragility of freedom, the predicament of the small and powerless state and its hapless people against the tyranny and aggression of the powerful, still loom large with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It has led, as Rupnik notes, to "the rediscovery of Kundera's text" and "renewed interest" in his works (256). It has revived the debate on "civilizational break," observes Rupnik. In the backdrop of such a political and historical paradox, Kundera deploys his characters in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* to explore the existential possibility in a world that has become a trap in which life cannot be planned because the traditional line between the public and private no longer exists. Tomas, a prominent doctor in Prague and a womaniser who seeks pleasure and freedom through his erotic adventures, meets Tereza by chance, a waitress in the bar of a restaurant in suburban Prague. In Kundera, coincidence, like counterpoint, plays a very vital role. How Tomas and Tereza met, the narrator displaces the cause after the effect. The relationship between the two protagonists can be seen through the prism of a set of fortuitous events the cause of which is suspended and displaced till the end of part one of the story when the reader is informed that they met by sheer coincidence seven years before the Russian invasion when Tomas was asked by the chief surgeon of the hospital to attend a patient in Tereza's town. The town had several hotels but Tomas was accommodated in the one where Tereza was a waitress and she happened to attend the table Tomas was sitting at. "It had taken six chance happenings to push Tomas towards Tereza, as if he had little inclination to go to her on his own" (Kundera 35). The way Kundera integrates incidents into narrative structure is quite intriguing. The elliptical arrangement reads like musical variations in which events and coincidences serve for existential fortuities.

Tereza was a photojournalist before she became a waitress in a bar. She was fired from her job several months after she returned from Zurich in the wake of the invasion. The regime could not forgive her for photographing Soviet tanks as revealed in part

four of the novel. Similarly, there were other victims of the ire of the regime who were forced into dehumanising conditions. They had been forced into existential plight by the totalitarian regime. Characters in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, as in Kundera's other novels, are rootless entities, war fugitives and émigrés under an unprecedented political condition whose very being serves for existential code to probe into the futility of individual existence and relativity of the values of European Modernism, Humanism and Enlightenment. The symbolic nuances have been encoded and communicated through a set of coincidences, words, metaphors, images and literary and mythical allusions which are played out throughout the novel in seven parts like variations. This art of developing the polyphonic novel is Kundera's unique contribution to the development of the European novel. Antakyaliloglu is right to underline that "Kundera was a writer with a poetics of his own" (145).

Human existence is bombarded with daily coincidences of which one is hardly conscious. The happening of two incidents is often unexpected. Tereza often carries Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* under her arm. In the novel Anna and Vronsky meet in curious circumstances. They are at the railway station when someone is run over by a train. At the end of the novel, Anna throws herself under a train. The correspondence between the composition of a novelistic plot and the nature of human life is amazingly insightful in Kundera. Such philosophical analogy on art and life, scarcely drawn without humour, leaves one amused.

The relationship between Tomas and Tereza is based on sheer coincidence. In the very first meeting, Tomas was taken up with compassion. That is why he always recalls her in terms of biblical myth: the child in a basket. When she first came to stay with him, a few days after her departure, Tomas was unable to decide whether he should call her back or not. He is taken up with compassion; subsequently, he finds himself in a bind. If he calls her back he is afraid lest she should offer herself to him; otherwise, she will remain a waitress. Since Tomas has already divorced his wife and leads a life of liberty, in his existential code love and fidelity symbolise weight and responsibility. Tereza suddenly enters his life. She becomes jealous of his promiscuous life. He eventually married her in order to keep her happy yet kept on his erotic game with his mistresses. Since he is unable to give up his erotic adventure, Tereza is growing suspicious of his infidelity. As Tomas is unable to come out of the predicament of his private life, he faces a monster from outside in the form of the Soviet invasion of 1968. Kundera blends the historical and fictional with great artistic lucidity. He baffles the reader with the fact that in the contemporary world individual choices are determined by political situations. At such a critical juncture, Tomas is not able to join the job offered to him at a hospital in Zurich because he does not want to leave Tereza behind in his country under occupation. Tomas's compassion for Tereza is his fate. On the other hand, Tereza is unhappy after she discovers that he is unfaithful. Therefore, all her dreams are dreams of infidelity, jealousy and lightness. Meanwhile, Tomas is getting more comfortable with Sabina but is equally conscious of their secret meetings in her studio. Tereza and Sabina represent separate and irreconcilable poles of life, yet equally appealing. That is why he is not able to live without her in Zurich when she returns to Prague. Tomas gets melancholic over the time he had spent with Tereza. Consumed with compassion after less than a week of her departure, Tomas returns to Prague. Compassion is Tomas's fate: "*es muss sein*" (Kundera 31). The phrase from Beethoven's symphony serves as a motif for Tomas's inevitability: fate.

On the basis of his choices, Tomas bears his fate as a snail carries its shell. Kundera has deployed a set of symbols to explore Tomas's existential dilemma. Thus, unlike Parmenides, in Beethoven's binary, fate is bound with something heavy and only what is heavy has value. Paradoxically, when Tomas tries to cross the Czech border he is confronted with the columns of Russian tanks. Overcome by compassion, it was difficult for him to leave Tereza on her own in the streets of Prague. On the ambiguity of human existence, Kundera makes a philosophical observation that sheds light on the dilemma of Tomas. That is, one can conduct a number of experiments in a physics lab in order to verify certain hypotheses. "But man, because he has only one life to live, cannot conduct experiments to test whether to follow his passion (compassion) or not" (Kundera 33).

Political dissent is not a new phenomenon. Individuals have been at loggerheads with establishments. There was a time when man could reverse or change the course of his life. He could abandon the past and find a new role in the future. But in the technologically advanced world where each trace of the individual is already accessible to the power structure, such a possibility is now a thing of the past, hence the unbearable lightness of being. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* offers one an insight into the depersonalisation of individual feelings in an unidyllic age. Human emotions have lost their traditional sanctity. They are fortuitous. Had Tereza not entered his life, she would probably have fallen in love with anybody. "Tomas often thought of Tereza's remark about his friend Z, and came to the conclusion that the love story of his life exemplified not 'Es muss sein' (it must be so), but rather, 'Es konnte auch anders sein' (it could just as well be otherwise)" (Kundera 34). It reads like a parody of the traditional perception of love. It is rendered to something light and weightless. In his gloomy flashback, Tomas often goes back to seven years ago when a set of fortuitous events led him to meet Tereza. The uncertainty of life is an

old idea conceived in metaphysical philosophy and theology, but in Kundera its exacerbation beyond the pale of imagination is played out as a historical and political proposition with a dismal prospect.

Kundera's art of characterisation follows from the preceding proposition of existential condition. In this respect, he departs from the tradition of realism. His characters are not like real people or historically identifiable individuals, yet they cannot be discarded altogether. They hardly look totally divested of historical and realistic elements. They are in fact byproducts of certain situations. If Tomas was born out of 'so it must be,' Tereza was born out of the rumbling of the stomach. The reader is made aware of her dilemma through the revelation of her genealogy, her relation with her parents, particularly her mother, personification of a woman reduced to her body. The tyranny of power has dehumanised them into non-entities. The humiliation which Tomas and Tereza undergo at the hands of the regime bears correspondence with the one Alexander Dubcek had to suffer at the hands of the Russians. That is why all dreams of Tereza are dreams of weakness and vertigo. She identifies with the weak people of her country under occupation.

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* the line between the public and private does not exist. A totalitarian society erases individual privacy. It can even project it as something sinister, as the morning radio programme containing the private conversations of Czech émigrés bugged by a Czech spy who had infiltrated the émigré community. It contained insignificant prattles and remarks about the regime. These trivial materials were the point of the broadcast. It all started with Jan Prochazka, a forty-year-old Czech novelist criticising public affairs even before the invasion. Shortly after the invasion the press initiated a smear campaign against him. But his popularity increased more with the smear campaign. In 1970 the Czech radio broadcast a series of private conversations that took place two years before the 1968 invasion between Prochazka and a professor friend of his. For a long time, neither of them had any idea that the professor's flat was bugged and their steps dogged. Prochazka loved to regale his friend with hyperboles and excesses. Now his excesses have become a weekly radio series. While listening to the broadcast one morning, Tereza turned off the radio and recalled an incident from her childhood regarding the raping of one's privacy. The entire incident is laughable and ludicrous. The underlying irony renders the behaviour of the power irrational and preposterous. The dynamics of communication is such that when a private communication is bugged and breached it resumes a significance little known to the subjects. Individuals keep on telling all types of things in privacy but once it is breached it acquires a very strange meaning inducing a feeling of guilt. In a totalitarian state all traces of privacy and individuality are suspected. It tends to obliterate all such signs. When people are deprived of their privacy and forced into conformity, they are reduced to their physical existence, like in a concentration camp; Kundera metaphorically calls this the lightness of being. They lose their ability to know and remember.

A totalitarian state obliterates memory either through the falsification or erosion of facts. After the invasion, all the buildings and streets in Prague were named after Russian history and geography as if the past of the country had been confiscated. It alienates Tereza when she visits places in and around Prague and finds them nameless. Moreover, life is so lacerated with spies and informers that the individual can be trapped anytime. Tereza had left her mother's home to be the master of her privacy without ever realising that her mother's room has extended over the whole world.

VI. MYTH OF OEDIPUS

It is peculiar of Kundera to develop philosophical rumination on even certain small incidents of European political history which he perceives to have passed unnoticed. His ironic reflections, interspersed with condemnation, on the Communist regime in Eastern European countries serves as a leitmotif. The beginning of part five is connected with the opening part of the novel when Tereza unexpectedly came to see Tomas in Prague. They made love the very day she felt feverish. While she was sleeping with Tomas, the latter imagined her as a baby put in a basket and sent downstream to him. All seven parts of the novel, interspersed with essayistic digressions and philosophical reflections, are variations on the author's central preoccupation with the lightness of being in an age of the tyranny of power. The philosophical essay on the paradox of Sophocles's legendary character in the eponymous play inserted in the narrative is a reflection on the behaviour of power, conscience, ignorance, guilt and punishment. Kundera wrote *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* four decades ago; its prognosis is gaining greater prominence in the twenty-first century in the age of unprecedented technological progress, the menace of which Huxley and Orwell had forewarned. The myth of Oedipus aims to offer an insight into the idea of knowledge and ignorance of power. One can find a profound analogy between the reaction of the Communist enthusiasts in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and that of Eichmann in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Arendt. Both denied to have done anything wrong, as if there was no one to be responsible, a situation in which power neutralises and depersonalises itself in a way to become faceless, a quintessence of the totalitarian power in the modern age. The story of Oedipus is so evocative and perplexing. It seems to suggest that if man is a

rational being, his true identity lies in his capability to think, to distinguish between right and wrong. When power gets intoxicated by ideology it loses all distinctive qualities which Oedipus symbolises.

Kundera thinks that it is often assumed by historians that the Communist regimes in central Europe were the works of criminals. One in fact overlooks a basic fact that these regimes were established and run by Communist enthusiasts who believed they had discovered the only way of establishing paradise on earth and ruthlessly removed those who stood in the way. Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* cuts through the reality of the iron curtain, its ideology of terror and oppression, more so at a time when totalitarian tendencies are on the rise and liberal values on the wane. The Communist enthusiasts killed the people who stood up in their way to paradise. Later it was discovered that there was no paradise. Hence, they happened to be murderers. Faced against the growing outcry that they are responsible for the misfortune of their country they responded that they did not know. They are innocent at heart, that they have been deceived. At the end, the debate zeroed in on the single line: did they really not know, or were they pretending? Tomas followed the debate closely like millions of countrymen and was of the opinion that there were definitely Communists who were not completely unaware of the atrocity and oppression. It was quite possible that most of them were not.

But Tomas thought that the question is not of knowing or not knowing. The question is whether a man is innocent simply because he did not know, is a fool in power relieved of all responsibility simply because he is a fool? One can further analogise differently: that is, a public prosecutor who called for the death penalty of an innocent man was deceived by the secret police of his country. But later he came to know that the executed individual was innocent. How does the prosecutor defend himself against such an egregious and irresponsible guilt? It was in this context that Tomas recalled the myth of Oedipus. Oedipus did not know that he was sleeping with his mother. But when he realised what he had done he did not consider himself innocent. Contrary to the conscience of Oedipus, Tomas found the defense of his countrymen banal. He was so fascinated by the tale of Oedipus that it permeated all his conversations with his friends. Eventually one day he wrote down his reflections on Sophocles's great hero to a weekly newspaper. A month later he was summoned by the editorial office and asked to change the syntactical and semantic order against his will in the process of amputation and mutilation. It happened in 1968 when Alexander Dubcek was still in power. After the 1968 invasion, as Tomas returned from Zurich to Prague and joined his duty at the hospital, he was asked by the chief surgeon to retract his article on Oedipus lest he should lose his job. Tomas perceived the tendency of censoring freedom of expression as medieval. The chief surgeon wanted to persuade Tomas to retract his article while the authorities further demanded self-criticism.

VII. TOTALITARIAN POWER AND THE NEGATION OF THE VALUES OF HUMANISM

Tomas as a doctor had a very good reputation, regarded by the people as a man of competence and individuality. Hence, the matter of retraction caught public attention, under the pressure of which he started losing his sleep. Since, unlike a politician, a professor lives a very closed life, in the circle of his immediate colleagues, Tomas had never experienced the pressure of public gaze. But nothing came to his help. He eventually was forced to leave the hospital and went on to join a country clinic far away from Prague. Since commuting daily was exhausting, he found work in a clinic on the outskirts of Prague in an inferior position as a general physician. But his problems did not end. He found himself under constant interrogation. An official from the Interior Ministry, during a conversation, asked him whether he really wanted the Communists to put out their eyes, an inference which shocked Tomas into self-defense.

Tomas eventually fell into depression as officials kept on blaming him for creating an anti-Communist hysteria, for instigating violence against the establishment. Once accused, he loses his sense of privacy as if being constantly gazed at and chased. Tomas gradually realises the entire process of entrapment. He was more shocked and flabbergasted with the official demand not only of retraction but loyalty with the Soviet Union and the Communist regime. It is peculiar of the totalitarian regime that it does not only seek obedience but demands fidelity to its ideology and loyalty with the establishment. As the pressure increased on him, he resigned from the hospital and assumes that perhaps by making himself socially insignificant and inconspicuous he will cease to interest the authorities. This is how he became a window washer. That is, in a totalitarian state, the individual can escape the power only through self-humiliation and depersonalisation, hence the unbearable lightness of being. The metamorphosis of Tomas symbolically reveals how power operates on human consciousness.

Tomas's relationship with Tereza was led by a series of laughable coincidences. It shows the futility of human existence in such a way that takes the appearance of metaphysical determinism as one finds in Thomas Hardy in a different context. Kundera deploys a set of words, symbols, metaphors, myths and allusions as a motif to explore his preoccupation with man's existential predicament. Allusions enrich his narrative with discursivity. A frivolous note, experience or idea is elevated to a philosophical

discourse, a hallmark of Kundera's narrative fusion to explore the lightness of being. As Tomas undergoes relentless interrogations and surveillance, he experiences constant humiliation. As he roams the streets in Prague and washes windows of shops for a living, he looks utterly bereft. One day Tomas shares with Tereza during an intimate conversation his experience of harassment and humiliation. She suggests an escape, which, given the pace of the progress of communication technology, offers little escape today. "'The best thing would be to move away.' 'I agree' said Tomas, 'but there's nowhere to go.'... 'What about the country?' she said. 'The country?' he asked, surprised. 'We'd be alone there. You wouldn't meet that editor or your old colleagues. The people there are different. And we'd be getting back to nature. Nature is the same as it always was'" (Kundera 230).

Tomas and Tereza eventually went to live in a small village, a life reduced to bare minimum. The natural world still provides them shelter and protection from the gaze of power. "Life in the country was the only escape open to them, because only in the country was there a constant deficit of people and a surplus of living accommodations. No one bothered to look into the political past of people willing to go off and work in the fields or woods; no one envied them" (Kundera 277). The narrator also provides a view of the countryside and life not so accessible to state power. Tomas and Tereza became familiar with the villagers on the collective farm and got friendly treatment from its chairman though he could do little for his former surgeon. Tomas became driver for a pick-up truck that took the farm workers out to the field and hauled equipment. Tereza was charged with looking after the cows. She took them out to pasture twice a day. Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* offers scathing criticism of the Communist rule.

"Under Communism, however, the village life no longer fit the age-old pattern. The church was in the neighbouring village, and no one went there; the tavern had been turned into offices, so the men had nowhere to meet and drink beer, the young people nowhere to dance. Celebrating church holidays was forbidden, and no one cared about their secular replacements... The country offered them nothing in the way of even a minimally interesting life. Perhaps it was the fact that no one wished to settle there that caused the state to lose its power over the countryside. A farmer who no longer owns his own land and is merely a labourer tilling the soil forms no allegiance to either region or work; he has nothing to lose, nothing to fear for. As a result of such apathy, the countryside had maintained more than a modicum of autonomy and freedom" (Kundera 278–79).

Kundera exposes the dark side of a society without private property and privacy. If private property is the source of all types of evil, a maxim which resonates Marxist thought with philosophical profundity, the novelist exposes the reality beyond the Marxist Kitsch. When people are divested of all signs of the private and personal their allegiance to the reality of their surroundings and its abstract meaning ceases to exist. One's loyalty to a society is in proportion to his share in the power and property.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Since the dawn of the modern age, European civilisation has been in pursuit of progress and set its goal beyond the pale of imagination of its ancestors. In the illusion of creating paradise on earth, it has tried to transcend its own identity. "The longing for paradise is man's longing not to be man" (Kundera 293). *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* alludes to the Christian anthropology that man is a being created in the image of God. Yet the plight of the protagonist of the novel offers the reader an insight into what man has done to his fellows. Man, in pursuit of becoming superman, seems to have forgotten the basic tenets of his genesis. Kundera's philosophical reflection on human existence and the relation with other non-human beings, Tereza and Karenin, between the powerful and the powerless with reference to Christian anthropology in the light of the genesis is really revealing. Tereza perceives her relation with the ailing dog as more authentic than with Tomas and even her mother. Her reflections on the relation between man and animal bring to the fore what mankind has lost in pursuit of progress and power and what he has made of his fellow being, hence the nostalgia. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is a kind of novel which in the words of Wirth seeks "to illuminate the ever-unfolding mystery of all things human" (15).

It is the loss of that idyllic existence that makes Tereza so nostalgic. "Raised as we are on the mythology of the Old Testament, we might say that an idyll is an image that has remained with us like a memory of Paradise: life in Paradise was not like following a straight line to the unknown; it was not an adventure. It moved in a circle among known objects. Its monotony bred happiness, not boredom. As long as people lived in the country, in nature, surrounded by domestic animals, in the bosom of regularly recurring seasons, they retained at least a glimmer of that paradisiac idyll" (Kundera 292). It is a critique of European modernity and its eventual outcome and implications for human existence. In an allusion to the Cartesian idea of animal being without soul and the Cartesian idea of time and space Kundera writes: "Human time does not turn in a circle; it runs ahead in

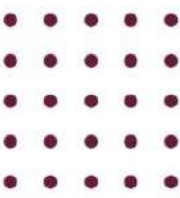
a straight line. That is why man cannot be happy: happiness is the longing for repetition" (Kundera 295). In the world of unilinear progress of time, everything happens only once. In the age of speed and unprecedented technological progress, increasing dominance of state power over man, the individual is losing the image conceived in religious and philosophical thought.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

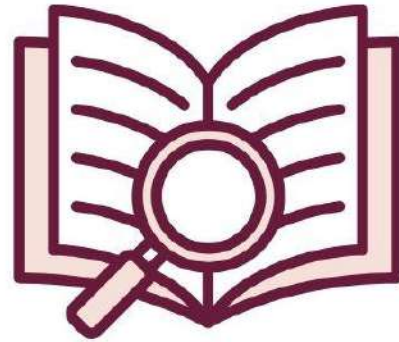
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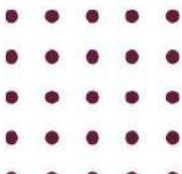
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