

# OTHERWORLDLINESS: UNCANNY LITERARY DEVICES IN THE LIMINAL SPACES

CREATED BY TRANSNATIONAL AUTHORS

by

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May, 2021

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This thesis will argue that contemporary transnational authors, by virtue of their often complex, multicultural identities, have a unique ability to create “otherworldly” stories of global significance through their use of literary devices I will describe as uncanny. I define otherworldly as used in this thesis along common definitional guidelines: a place both familiar but at the same time unrecognizable – a reframing of the world the reader knows. In effect, these other worlds resemble ours, but they are not ours whether by a paradigm shift or because the windows into these worlds are different from our own. The otherworldliness in the stories of Mohsin Hamid, Kazuo Ishiguro, Elif Shafak, and Akwaeke Emezi moves beyond the fantastical, so often depicted in the magical realism of transnational literature, to plausible places that have a basis in social, political, scientific, or even spiritual reality. Collectively, these worlds are dreamt up through perceptions influenced by the authors’ transnationality, with deep intuition and a foreboding sense of what the world really looks like if readers take time to look through the author’s lens.



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A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department of English

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband Marc, my best friend and COVID quarantine partner, who encouraged me to pursue a master's degree simply for the joy of learning and the pride of accomplishment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis director, Dr. Richard Taylor, for introducing me to some fascinating works of transnational literature as well as guiding me and encouraging my writing in both classes and this thesis. His enthusiasm for the literature is contagious. I would also like to thank Dr. Su-ching Huang for helping me to discover the powerful effect that ethnic American literature can have, and for suggesting I read Freud's essay "The Uncanny," which became a central focus for my thesis. I would like to thank Dr. Andrea Kitta for her participation on my thesis committee as well as introducing me to the field of folklore. Her class led me to recognize that folklore is everywhere, even on the pages of this thesis.

Finally, I am forever grateful to my family, who have been great cheerleaders along the way.

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## INTRODUCTION

In developing my thesis, I selected four novels that had a deep impact on my studies in multicultural and transnational literature and which I felt offered something unique and profound to the international literary community. They have the dual effect of offering both a fresh approach to important issues that can be addressed through fiction, while adding a certain strangeness that appeals to the reader.

In each of the books to be discussed there is a sense of being pulled into another world. Each author takes an unusual approach to the plot. Mohsin Hamid uses his magic doors, which transport migrants instantaneously throughout the world. Kazuo Ishiguro's writes from the eerie perspective of a clone. Elif Shafak gives us a view of Istanbul through a dead prostitute's thoughts. And Akwaeke Emezi (they) introduce us to an ontology in which evil spirits can control a person's mind and body. I could only describe these literary devices, collectively, as "uncanny." Freud's essay "The Uncanny" has become an underlying concept in my thesis. Published in 1919, it was a groundbreaking and detailed analysis of the elements that make something uncanny. My thesis will connect Freud's theories in relation to the novels. Since Freud, there have been other more recent analyses of the uncanny, which offer perhaps more easily understandable explanations of the term and which I have also included.

In Chapter One I discuss the embracing of transnational literature and how my selected authors are relevant to the conversation. I propose that these authors' hybridity or multiculturalism has contributed to their unique perspectives. I connect their works to a more detailed explanation of Freud's theories of uncanny, and point out the main elements that cause anxiety within the reader of these novels. I discuss the authors' use of liminal spaces within

their narratives as well as the authors' own liminality. Finally, I address why these transnational voices are important to the work of literary criticism and other scholarly pursuits. Their stories matter because of their multicultural viewpoint, the duality of both insider and outsider, creating a "global" or transnational perspective that goes beyond the hegemonic and is needed in this ever-evolving world.

In Chapter Two I delve more deeply into stories depicting otherworldly physical places: Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Hamid's *Exit West*. Ishiguro's ill-fated clones show us a world that has played God with the terrible results of the using/abusing of bodies (and souls?). Hamid's *Exit West* speaks to the very real issues stemming from global migration and how it affects both center and periphery. The magical doors allow the reader to focus on the people and the physical and psychological effects rather than the journey itself.

Chapter Three examines stories that are more psychological and ontological in nature, revealing an otherworldliness experienced in the mind. The mind of another person is a world no one has ever entered before except in fantasy. In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World* the reader is moved by the thoughts of Shafak's dead prostitute, a victim of misogyny, abuse, and "othering." In Emezi's *Freshwater* the reader meets the metaphysical gods warring inside Ada's head, causing physical and mental harm as she comes of age in a search for self-identity. The otherworldliness stems from the ogbanje belief system; we may be familiar with spirits but their control of Ada moves beyond our reality.

Chapter Four discusses the transcultural effect on global conversations, literary criticism, the "noticing" of transnational authors, and literary canon. Certain stories/authors get the attention of critics, pundits, and scholars, creating conversations about issues of importance in

our globalizing world. Some critics have described a “reshaping” of relevant transcultural conversations in literary as well as political, economic, and social arenas. I argue that these authors, whose creative minds are influenced by their transnational identities, have helped drive literary criticism in a new direction, adding to the powerful impact of transnational literature.

CHAPTER ONE: THE UNCANNY: A FREUDIAN APPROACH TO THEMES OF  
IDENTITY, EXPLOITATION, AND THE 'OTHERED' IN TRANSNATIONAL NOVELS

“It is a truism that poems travel where poets cannot.”

– Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination*

Paul Jay in *Global Matters* argues that nothing has reshaped critical theory more since the 1970s than the embracing of transnationalism: “It has productively complicated the nationalist paradigm long dominant in these fields, transformed the nature of the locations we study, and focused our attention on forms of cultural production that take place in the liminal spaces between real and imagined borders” (Jay 1). For this thesis I will draw attention to forms of literary production. I propose that the four transnational authors discussed here have used these liminal spaces as sites for uncanny literary devices that effectively engage the reader with the story. Engagement is important for any reader, whether it be scholar, critic, or book lover. It is evidence of success. Any technique an author uses to achieve an effect or creatively tell a story can be considered a literary device.

Each of these authors has been identified for this analysis under the purview of a transformation within literary studies especially over the last three decades. Specifically, these authors and their works have gained recognition within the scope of transnational literature and modern-day literary criticism. This can be attributed to the fact that the postmodern period has brought more interest in transnational writing due to the increasingly diasporic, migratory, mobilized, and connected nature of our world. Literary studies have become less Eurocentric and more inclusive of other areas of the world, other cultures and languages.

This shift has been reflected in Western academia. Jay calls this a “shift away from sameness ... to difference – racial, class, and cultural” (22). The novels of Kazuo Ishiguro,

Mohsin Hamid, Elif Shafak and Akwaeke Emezi embody what Jay describes as an engagement with issues that cross national boundaries (22). However, beyond this general scope of inclusion, there is something (and sometimes several things) that feels unusual, indeed uncanny, within each novel; it is a foreboding sense of discomfort that is brought forth through the author's point of view. I did not realize when developing this thesis that I would be conjuring Freudian theories of the uncanny, which have become underlying concepts for my approach. Each author has cleverly tapped into the uncanny, perhaps without even realizing it.

In this chapter, following a short discussion of these authors as representative of transnationalism that has taken hold in Western studies, I will explain how they fit my thesis. My approach is threefold: First, I will describe the uncanny as Freud and subsequent thinkers have acknowledged it and point out the primary uncanny element in each novel. Then I will explain the importance of liminal spaces as hosts for the uncanny in these authors' works (and the significance of the authors' own liminality). Finally, I will address a commonality noted among the novels that is a result of these uncanny elements: a certain "otherworldliness" has been captured whether through a parallel universe, a paradigm shift, or the author's own unique reimagining of a place.

The authors discussed here have gained international recognition for their novels and, according to Jay's argument, have helped to reframe literary criticism in a way that moves beyond borders to universal themes of identity, community, exploitation, and acceptance. Each of the four works to be discussed is in part a commentary on one or all of these themes. An argument can be made as to the reasons for critical attention garnered by certain writers (and not others), and this analysis points to several common attributes among these authors and their distinctively different novels.

Hamid, Ishiguro, Shafak, and Emezi are all considered transnational because their lives have crossed international borders; I propose that this hybridity or multiculturalism has created within each author unique perspectives about real-world issues that they have addressed through their stories, which seek not only to entertain but to enlighten in some way. The novels themselves evoke a certain foreignness, even strangeness, but in ways that may be appealing to the Western reader intent on understanding alternative viewpoints on modern-day issues. In some cases, the work has addressed “hot” global or universal topics; in others the book has been singled out for its sheer ingenuity. In “Strangeness in World Literature” Mads Rosendahl Thomsen addresses the unique characteristics of the transnational writer: “In an age of cultural transformation, bicultural writers have important experiences of culture, which can make their works valuable. They serve as agents of transformation and proponents of a changing view on culture and identity” (4).

Transnational novelists are in part a product of globalization and increasing migration across borders in a modern world in which movement becomes easier. In fact, Jay argues that the “controversial” transnational turn in literary studies fell in line with, and began to intersect with, the study of globalization (Jay 2). Whether globalization is thought to be economic and political or more broadly cultural (Jay 2), the phenomenon has created authors (and other ‘creatives’) characterized through their multiculturalism who have found a voice on the world stage. Emezi’s *Freshwater* debut, deeply influenced by her Nigerian heritage, was widely acclaimed. While Jay sees the center-periphery model still flowing economically, in cultural (and that includes literary) terms he is more hopeful. “The field continually builds on the strength of new critical approaches and paradigm shifts, which may seem at first as though they are fragmenting the discipline when in fact they are renewing it. This is what has been happening as literary and cultural studies have

taken a transnational turn; and in my view this turn is both a positive and an exciting one, promising new forms and expressions of coherence” (Jay 4).

These new critical approaches and new forms of expression no doubt have contributed to transnational authors’ wider acceptance within the international literary community. Critics, pundits, and even a more general readership are taking notice of writers and works that once may have gone undiscovered or ignored. Their significance within contemporary discussions as well as determining why these works are effective are subject to both opinion and interpretation. I theorize that the authors themselves, as any writer would, want people to read their works and have gone to great intellectual and creative lengths to make their stories appeal to wide audiences of different cultures, languages, nation-states, and so forth. As Rachel Trousdale writes in *Nabokov, Rushdie, and the Transnational Imagination*, these and other authors are aiming to create a new critical framework for transnational literature, and with their “supernatural, science-fictional, and alternate-historical settings ... create communities that replace national cultures” (Trousdale qtd. in Yusin 317). These authors (and others) force the reader to “rethink national identities as intellectual and emotional, rather than geographical, affiliations” (Trousdale qtd. in Yusin 318).

Drawing on the intellectual and emotional, what sets some authors in all genres apart, is their ability to infuse important truths about the human condition and its myriad accompanying flaws and problems. The reader can still be entertained within the context of the narrative, but along the way he is being directed to look at some issue, perhaps in a way he had not thought of before. This skill is not unique to transnational authors but the ones mentioned here have acquired it and used it in very different ways. Ishiguro’s foreboding revelation about the devastating fate of cloned humans speaks to what happens when humans “play God.” Hamid

cleverly forces the reader to think about migration and its effects on the ones who must flee. Shafak's dead prostitute reflects on a female's world filled with abuse and exploitation. And Emezi explores her own coming-of-age struggles of gender identity, self-loathing, and mental illness through an alternative spiritual lens.

In connecting these transnational works to Freud's theories of the uncanny, Thomsen comments on the desire for "a certain kind of limited strangeness" in texts that tend to circulate internationally. "Obviously, an inherent desire for reading outside of one's local cultural environment is to experience something different, a certain kind of otherness, or strangeness. These are qualities of literature which are not dependent on cultural difference, but can be achieved in many ways" (Thomsen 3). I propose that one of the methods of achieving a certain strangeness is invoking the uncanny. In order to understand this concept, the reader must have a clear definition of "uncanny" (strange or mysterious in an unsettling way), even though some literary critics say defining the uncanny in literature is impossible (Windsor 51). However, Freud made the attempt in his psychoanalytical essay "The Uncanny," published in 1919. He begins his analysis with the German word *unheimlich* which is the opposite of *heimlich* meaning "familiar," "native," or "belonging to the home." Naturally, the opposite would mean something unfamiliar, strange, or unhomey (Freud mentions "uneasy, eerie, blood-curdling") (156). But Freud says these qualities alone are not enough to make something uncanny (Freud 154). In his essay he explains why there must be more to it. An uncanny feeling in the pit of one's stomach results from:

... a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be reactivated and that everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfills the condition of



stirring these vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. ... This class of morbid anxiety would then be no other than what is uncanny ... for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression (Freud 165-166).

To help the reader understand this psychoanalytical approach, Freud gives some examples of uncanniness, such as seeing a *doppelgänger*, or seeing a recurring number several times during a short time span, or wishing something aloud only to have it come true soon after. A full century after Freud's writing of "The Uncanny," British scholar Mark Windsor further expounds on Freud's philosophy of *unheimlich* as "that of our not-being-at-home in the world ('unheimlich,' or unhomely), which manifests in a feeling of anxiety or dread" (Windsor 54). Windsor's own conclusion in his essay "What is the Uncanny?" defines uncanny as "an anxious uncertainty about what is real caused by an apparent impossibility" (Windsor 60).

In the novels here we see many examples of this apparent impossibility that creates uneasiness within the reader. Hamid's magical doors appear out of nowhere and instantaneously lead migrants to other places in *Exit West*. This anxiety about the doors stems from both their power to transport humans and the fact that we cannot know ahead of time where the refugees will end up – will the place be better or worse than where they came from? In *Never Let Me Go* we hear the voices of the clones, who are not supposed to have a voice because science should never have allowed cloning in the first place. The uncanniness also stems from the subdued manner in which the narrator Kathy H. tells her story. Why does she so readily accept her fate? Revelations about Kathy's purpose and doomed destiny create this morbid anxiety that Freud speaks of.

In Shafak's novel, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World*, we wonder why the brain of a dead prostitute is still functioning in the minutes following her death. Everything we have learned to this point tells us that when a person's heart stops beating and they are no longer breathing they are dead. So why do we still hear Tequila Leila's thoughts? And in *Freshwater* we have to adjust our own ontological position when we are introduced to the warring ogbanje spirits that are controlling Ada's thoughts and actions. They cause anxiety because they are unfamiliar, evil spiritual beings, too powerful for Ada to handle, and she submits to their will. Notice, though, a caveat to the uncanny in *Freshwater*: this ontology may not seem uncanny to a person familiar with Igbo spirituality. The dialogue among the spirits may seem perfectly normal. Similarly, anyone who may believe in the power of spirits of any type may not feel the same discomfort that other readers may feel.

The novelists have used these uncanny literary devices in the liminal spaces of the narratives. Liminal is derived from the Latin *limen*, meaning "threshold," which can refer to "in-between" or "transitional" spaces. These are spaces which are not necessarily physical (transcending international boundaries) but through which the reader must negotiate. Importantly, they can be spaces for transformation. English scholar and critical theorist Homi Bhabha ties liminality to his theories of hybridity as it relates to postcolonial literature as being potentially disruptive (and therefore transformative): "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha *The Location* 38).

Liminal spaces give the writer a place to situate the uncanny. They are places of transition and passage to the alternate world the writer has created. They are sites of creation and creativity and can feel a bit unreal, even unreliable, at times. The liminal space in *Never Let Me*

*Go* is Kathy's memory as she recalls her childhood as a 31-year-old cloned woman. We are introduced through her own (often uncertain) memories to her sheltered life at the Hailsham boarding school. Thus, begins the slow unveiling of the children of Hailsham as clones, followed by Kathy's depressing life as a caregiver for the organ donors. Kathy's world seems unnatural and surreal.

Hamid's doors are built within the liminal space of passage. They are active agents in the narrative. Similarly, Bhabha points to the stairwell as a liminal space and the "temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities" (Bhabha *The Location* 38). Like Bhabha's stairwell, Hamid's doors signify opportunity and uncertainty and lead to a beyond that "signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very act of going beyond – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced" (Bhabha *The Location* 38). True to Bhabha's claim, in *Exit West* the young couple's passage through the doors leaves them disjointed, displaced, and changed for all time. When they finally make it back to their birthplace, they are not the same two people. The 'present' can never be regained.

In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, the liminal is that place between life and death. Leila, lying in a dumpster, is unable to move, breathe, or escape her situation. It is too late. Her heart no longer beats. But her brain continues to function momentarily. Shafak uses this idea, loosely based on scientific research, as an entry point into the novel. The liminal space in *Freshwater* is Ada's fractured mind; we enter the realm of the spirits who reside within Ada and we have no choice but to view the world through the lens of these otherworldly beings. In many

ways their voices drown out Ada's own version of herself as she navigates young adulthood and issues of self-identity.

In each of these works, the author's own liminality cannot be overlooked. The authors themselves often straddle liminal spaces of transition or "in-betweenness," with an ability to speak as both insider and outsider. The tunnel vision once prominent in many literary canons has widened to include peripheral or "othered" views, from voices that have this authority to speak due to their multiculturalism. Their voices have an authenticity and can be powerful forces for highlighting alternative points of view.

Especially in the case of Hamid and Shafak, they view themselves as straddling borders. Shafak is often referred to as a Turkish novelist but has been banned from the country for her writings; Hamid, born in Pakistan with ties to America and England, has mentioned feeling "mongrelized" in interviews. "So, I'm somebody who can blend in usually quite quickly — but inside continues to retain a sense of feeling foreign," he said (NPR Staff). He currently lives in Pakistan with his multigenerational family but also has British citizenship. At times Hamid has balked at being defined as a Pakistani novelist. He has been characterized among a group of writers who "neither have hyphenated identities nor can be considered Pakistani exiles, but write in liminal positions between West and East" (Chambers 124).

Emezi's (use the pronoun they) liminality stems not only from their crossing the Atlantic from Nigeria (they live in New Orleans) but also from influences from both their Christian upbringing and their cultural roots in the Igbo religion. And as their heavily autobiographical novel describes, their struggles with gender puts them in a liminal position as well. And Ishiguro, often described as a "Japanese-born British novelist," has said he does not have a "deep link with England" like some other British authors. "For me, it is a like mythical place," he said (Adams).

This “ingrained unsettledness” shows through in his novels (Adams). For these writers, liminality and transnationality go hand-in-hand. Trousdale writes, “If we are to understand any given work of transnational literature, we must understand not only the local allegiances of the writer but the broader framework of transnational fiction as a whole” (qtd. in Yusin 317).

If liminality is a state of “in-betweenness,” what is on the other side of this reference point is a certain “otherworldliness” in these transnational novels. The reader sees something familiar in them but there is also something different, slightly “off,” or strange, about them. Otherworldliness elicits certain ethereal feelings within the reader, but perhaps not with the same unease that is implied with the uncanny. Otherworldly relates to an imaginative place that is somehow different from the real world (Merriam-Webster), possibly more closely connected to the spiritual than the ordinary (Cambridge).

Certainly, two of the authors discussed in this thesis, Hamid and Ishiguro, have crafted places that are both strangely familiar and yet at the same time unrecognizable. There has been a paradigm shift. Hamid’s magical doors in *Exit West* take the reader to places that have names we know (London, California) but which we no longer recognize because of the political and civil unrest, as well as the instantaneous “magical” movement of people and the ad-hoc formation of factions due to migration. Ishiguro identifies the time (the late 1990s) and the place (England) in *Never Let Me Go*, but it becomes an eerie setting that Freud would call “unhomely” because of the skewed ethics and strange happenings that are revealed little by little. The England with which the reader is familiar becomes mysterious and unsettling. Some reviewers have described the setting as somewhat “gothic.”

The otherworldliness in Shafak’s and Emezi’s novels is a reimagining of place through the author’s distinct psychological lens. Istanbul becomes less an exotic, old-worldly,

cosmopolitan city and shifts to a view from the prostitute Tequila Leila's eyes. Her Istanbul is one less traveled by tourists, cold and uncaring, even dangerous. However, in the end she progresses to a truly ethereal, underwater world that acknowledges her in ways humans never did. In *Freshwater*, Ada's coming-of-age in the grasp of the ogbanje spirits places her struggles with sexual identity and mental health in an odd, but parallel universe. The places are familiar to us – Nigeria, an American college campus – but Ada's experiences through this unfamiliar ontology make them seem otherworldly, with much of the conflict taking place within the regions of her mind.

Anna Pavlova Murta in her dissertation on Paul Coelho in a postmodernist light, writes that transnational authors “are imaginative writers who, by choice or circumstance, live a transnational life characterized by multilingualism, exposure to the diversity of pluricultural spaces and identities” (45). “Imaginative” would be an apt description for any or all of the novels within this thesis. However, beyond that, these writers are purposeful in their objectives which serve not only to entertain but to reveal truths, create conversations, speak on behalf of the unvoiced, educate, and inform.

The stories that will be analyzed in more detail in later chapters give the international literary community a more individualized and fresh perspective on modern-day themes that have arisen in part due to cultural globalization. Linking back to Jay's theories on literature and globalization, Thomsen argues that immigrant and bicultural writers relate well to “the phenomenon of globalization, which is changing the way we think about the world and how people experience their own worlds ... Further, the literature of (im)migrants presents a certain double perspective on things by someone who is both at home and away at the same time. This is not just a quality of the content of this literature, but also a formal quality that provides the

opportunity to create a particular narrative voice” (Thomsen 8). One of the reasons these narrative voices become important within national and international discourses is that they represent something different than the hegemonic viewpoint. This may previously have been the only viewpoint certain readers have been exposed to when entertaining a given subject. This is an opportunity certainly not lost on transnational authors, who often feel they have something important to say to international audiences.

In Chapter Two I will explore in more detail the uncanny aspects of *Never Let Me Go* and *Exit West* and explain how these authors have created paradigm shifts that function to create otherworldly places.

CHAPTER TWO: CLONES AND MAGIC DOORS: PARADIGM SHIFTS IN ISHIGURO'S  
*NEVER LET ME GO* AND HAMID'S *EXIT WEST*

Two of the novels undertaken in my thesis have a noticeable reimagining of place. Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Hamid's *Exit West* have recreated places they have lived but with some type of paradigm shift. Ishiguro's England is now a world where cloning humans is not only possible but commonplace. Hamid imagines a world where movement is controlled not by physical borders but by mysterious magic doors; it is no longer possible to keep the "undesirables" out. This has an effect on both center and periphery, as seen in the journey of Saeed and Nadia.

Recalling that it is not the strange and unfamiliar but the "strangely familiar" that evokes the uncanny, I will describe the settings in the novels and how they fit this definition; several examples of the "strangely familiar" are exhibited in each novel. I will follow with the metaphorical possibilities available in both works as well as representations of the "othered." Finally, I will discuss the authors' backgrounds and how they may have contributed to the subject matter in their novels.

Not only was Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* noted for its understated prose and shocking conclusions, but scholars have viewed its eerie setting as an intentional play on gothic themes often found in horror stories. Set in the 1990s, in a rural English boarding school for cloned children, the novel feels dystopic or science fictional. Wen Guo in her article "Human Cloning as the Other in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*," refers to the author's purposeful "landscape of science fiction" when she states, "Hailsham is not created at random: it is allegorized to unhomeliness and connected with the clones' identity" (3). The scenery surrounding Hailsham, reminiscent of horror films, reinforces the children's fear of what is



beyond. “The juxtaposition of gothic materials such as trees, woods, hills, and gravestones are employed by Ishiguro to produce an ambience of horror. There are woods rising at the top of the hill behind Hailsham, estranging the internal world from the external world” (Guo 3). Readers of the novel will have an idea in their mind of an English countryside and perhaps the trope of the stately boarding school. It is the presence of the clones that adds the element of strangeness.

Similarly, *Exit West* could be described as dystopic but with fantastical elements. Hamid creates a feeling of displacement through his use of “magic” doors that instantly transport people from one place to another. He sets up this Narnia-esque detail within the first few pages: as an Australian woman sleeps, the door to her closet opens, and out of the darkness a man emerges. “He too was dark ... he wriggled with great effort, his hands gripping either side of the doorway as though pulling himself up against gravity. ... With a final push he was through ...” (Hamid *Exit* 8). The man exits through a window, yet another migrant seeking refuge. Hamid’s use of the doors had the literary world labeling his novel “magical realism,” a brilliant way to capture the hearts and minds of the refugees without having to view their long and arduous journey.

Hamid’s use of the familiar “doorway” can also be metaphorical. It functions as a portal and an active agent in the story. Doorways can signify hope, passage, and a glimpse of something new, once hidden, or out of reach. They are also liminal spaces of transition which provoke not only hope but fear and uncertainty for both the migrant and the native (beginning with an intruder into a woman’s bedroom). The doors appear unexpectedly, and those who pass through them seek a better place and better circumstances in a tumultuous world. This seems to be the mindset of so many refugees as they set off in boats and cross borders. And like so many real-world refugees, those who use the magic doors face many struggles in their new, temporary homes.

Nations are also overwhelmed by the influx. From the opening page Hamid deliberately sets the scene of an unknown city, “swollen of refugees but still mostly at peace” (Hamid *Exit 2*). It quickly becomes apparent that this anonymous city is somewhere in the Mideast: Nadia wears a black robe and wonders why Saeed doesn’t say his evening prayers. It is a city “teetering on the edge of the abyss” (Hamid *Exit 2*), thereby making it a discomfoting and unfamiliar urban landscape. “Refugees had occupied many of the open places in the city ... Saeed and Nadia had to be careful when making turns not to run over an outstretched arm or leg” (Hamid *Exit 26*). This scene would be unrecognizable in many parts of the globe.

In stories about migration, Scholar Maëlle Jeanniard du Dot argues that the translation of “uncanny” as “unhomely” “cannot be overlooked, as it underscores its crucial resonance with the notion of home in novels addressing the complexity of migration” (du Dot). This strangeness begins as Nadia and Saeed attend classes even as their city devolves into war and chaos. Du Dot states that Freud’s *unheimlichkeit* is particularly relevant with the de-familiarization they experience there, “patent in the changes war can bring to one’s home city” (du Dot).

There are still touches of the familiar – Nadia and Saeed have jobs and cell phones, and they date, smoke marijuana, and dream about traveling to other places. But their city becomes more and more dangerous when violence begins to escalate, neighborhoods fall to the militants, people vanish, businesses shutter, and windows become dangerous props: “A window was the border through which death was possibly most likely to come ... Saeed and his family rearranged their furniture. ... Nadia taped the inside of her windows ...” (Hamid *Exit 71*). The homes (in both the familial sense and the community at large) themselves become unhomely. Then the couple learn about the doors:

Rumours had begun to circulate of doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well removed from this death trap of a country. Some people claimed to know people who knew people who had been through such doors. A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all (Hamid *Exit* 72).

They begin their migration from city to city, passing through temporary places of unrest, factions, food scarcity, and violence. Homi Bhabha, deeply interested in home and displacement, argued in his essay “The World and the Home” that fiction is the site of “the deep stirring of the unhomely” (141). Indeed, the unhomely resonates “in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions” (Bhabha “The World” 142). This aptly applies to *Exit West*, for this clash of cultures comes to light throughout the couple’s journey. In London Saeed and Nadia take refuge among many other nationalities that have congregated there – Sudanese, Hondurans, Nigerians. Dark London has become frightening and dangerous, with murders, rapes, and assaults (Hamid *Exit* 146). When the power goes out in “dark London” the couple imagines what life is like in “light London” where people can dine out, go to work, and roam about freely. London’s dark zones are filled with “soldiers and armoured vehicles ... drones and helicopters” (Hamid *Exit* 135).

London is also where Nadia experiences the uncanny that even modern technology can bring about as she reads news on her cell phone. She sees a photo of a woman doing exactly the same thing, in the exact same position and “wondered how this could be, how she could both read this news and be this news, and how the newspaper could have published the image of her instantaneously, and she looked about for a photographer, and she had the bizarre feeling of time bending all around her ... that she would split into two Nadias” (*Hamid Exit* 157). Du Dot calls

her experience of a split self “highly uncanny, as the woman she sees is both familiar and unfamiliar [...] a form of alienation which noticeably calls to mind the anonymization of migrants in mass media” (du Dot).

In contrast, Ishiguro uses not displacement as described by Bhabha, but placement of the clones in England, which transforms it into a place that feels cold and uncaring, in a time that feels futuristic. Looking at England from the perspective of the cloned Kathy H., it is evident that an ethical boundary has been crossed. After Dolly, the first successfully cloned sheep, in 1996, ethicists drew the line at human cloning, arguing it would be highly unethical for many reasons. Ethicist Leon R. Kass, in his article “The Wisdom of Repugnance,” explains why cloning evokes such a deep visceral reaction in humans:

We are repelled by the prospect of cloning human beings not because of the strangeness or novelty of the undertaking, but because we intuit and feel, immediately and without argument, the violation of things that we rightfully hold dear. (...) Indeed, in this age in which everything is held to be permissible so long as it is freely done, in which our given human nature no longer commands respect, in which our bodies are regarded as mere instruments of our autonomous rational wills, repugnance may be the only voice left that speaks up to defend the central core of our humanity. Shallow are the souls that have forgotten how to shudder (Kass 20).

Kass goes on to list several problems associated with human cloning, among them the impossibility of getting consent from a clone and the freakishness of the clone’s identity as both child and twin to an already-created being (Kass 22). Scholar John Marks links the bioethical implications of cloning mentioned by Kass to a “comingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar” (Marks 341), which harkens back to Freud’s analysis. Echoing Freud, Marks posits that the

uncanny reveals what should remain hidden and uses cloning as an example: “First, there is Freudian sense of the uncanny as double ... the fictional figure of the double or doppelgänger. ... Second, there is a more general sense that there is something wrong about delving too deeply into biological life processes (of reproduction and development) that should properly remain hidden and unknown” (Marks 341). Clones are the epitome of “doppelgänger,” which Freud pointed out as a prime example of evoking an uncanny feeling within us: the realization that there is someone else in the world who, in appearance at least, has stolen our unique identity.

Aside from this doppelgänger effect, there are several instances of discomfort throughout the novel. From the beginning chapters there is something that seems “off” about the narrator Kathy H. It is in the subdued, matter-of-fact way she recounts her own horror story. The reader cannot understand how one could so readily accept such a dismal fate. Her recollections cause increasing uneasiness as the clones’ societal position, call of duty, and eventual death or “completion” are revealed. “Kathy simply does not seem to recognize the full horror of what she is telling the reader” (Marks 348). The clones’ existence gives rise to an unsettling feeling that the human race has allowed this nightmare to happen, which points to some moral deficiency or degradation. There has been a general acceptance of this Frankenstein-like, god-complex practice; ethically, humanity has taken a wrong turn.

The clones have one specific life purpose: to become organ donors for “naturally born” people who can afford such luxuries. At some point following adolescence the clones begin to donate organs until they “complete,” a euphemism for death or becoming so sick they can no longer donate. Even then, in a terribly twisted and nightmarish scenario, eyes and other more minor organs can continue to be plucked from their bodies while they are still cognizant. The visions in themselves that these words provoke are deeply disturbing and, to borrow a word from

Kass, repugnant. Even seeing someone with a missing body part can produce fear and discomfort. Freud said the castration complex of childhood “in especial excites a peculiarly violent and obscure emotion, and that this emotion is what first gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring” (Freud 161).

Because of their sheltered existence and the lies they are told at Hailsham, the cloned children only learn of their fate in bits and pieces, in a variety of discomfiting ways. Kathy becomes aware that Hailsham students are different from “the normal people outside” (Ishiguro 63). Kathy’s chance encounter with Madame further illustrates this difference as she sees herself “in others’ eyes” (Machinal). Kathy, who knows she is unable to have children, holds a pillow like it is her baby. When she realizes Madame is watching her and crying, she feels shock, alarm, and strangeness (Ishiguro 71). “For the first time, this straight face-to-face contact between a person and a clone stirs up an uncanny feeling: Madame was ‘seeing something that gave her the creeps’” (Guo 4). Both parties are affected by the encounter, therefore “it is uncanny to them both, a psychological trauma as if they were both aliens intruding to each other’s world. From the perspective of Madame, she knows that the person in front of her is an unreal double, a mere copy of some originally real human” (Guo 4).

While the clones, clearly human by all measures (but do they have souls?), elicit an aversion among naturally born humans, they also draw compassion. (Empathy, though, may be impossible.) Teacher Emily takes pity on her class and tells them:

If no one else will talk to you then I will. The problem, as I see it, is that you’ve been told and not told. You’ve been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way. [. . .] None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some

of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. [. . .] You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided (Ishiguro 81).

The teacher's speech is a shocking revelation of the unhomeliness exhibited at Hailsham. Kathy and the other students learn they are clones, "an unnatural creation" (Machinal) made for a specific purpose. Hailsham may have felt like home to the children, but in the end, it is revealed as a place where they were separated from the rest of society, lied to, medicated, and forbidden to talk about many subjects. Now, even the art work they had created (as "proof" they had souls) seems like a relic of a place now shuttered. Hailsham becomes unhomely even for the clones.

This altered perspective is revealed within the liminal space of Kathy's searching memory – the threshold between past and present. Hailsham and the cottages the clones inhabit as they await donation may seem nostalgic at first but in the end are recalled as inhospitable remnants of the clones' lives through Kathy's informed "adult" lens. She now views her childhood from her own doomed perspective and wonders why the "system" even bothered to educate these children who would never have normal lives with jobs and families. They live in this world, but separately and unequally. Their "otherness" and lower class are now utterly apparent as Kathy awaits her own fate.

Both novels offer a representation of peripheral or "othered" groups. Ishiguro's clones have no surnames and no parents. They have no real future. Accordingly, they refer to themselves as "people from Hailsham" (Ishiguro 4). "This term not only demolishes subjectivity and selfness, but also demonstrates that it is this unhomely home, a haunted house that is forever

linked to the identity and fate of the clones” (Guo 6). Their world is dystopic at best, a horror story at worst that is comparable to other tales from that genre.

In her juxtaposition against Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, literary critic Tiffany Tsao writes that both the clones and Frankenstein’s monster are examples of the uncanniness resulting from god-complex creators, with the end result being a “lesser” being both from a predominant perspective and self-reflection. Frankenstein’s monster longingly views the “delightful house” of the DeLacy family from a hidden spot; when the clones go searching for Ruth’s “possible,” they see an office where they will never work, and employees (like they will never be) having friendly conversations. Neither Frankenstein nor the clones will ever fit in. The clone Ruth despairingly declares, “We’re modeled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. ... If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter.” (Ishiguro 166).

These cloned beings, all created in a lab, will never be equal to their natural-born human counterparts. Still, they evoke our sympathy, but only to a point because there is one problem with the reader: like the non-cloned characters in the book, the reader will never quite understand the clones’ world. “We could describe the clones’ position as being behind the looking glass, they appear ... as our serialised doubles, mimicking our movements but they are forever imprisoned on the other side” (Machinal). The reader then is always grouped with “the normal people outside.” Frankenstein’s monster and the clones all belong in the world as spectacles born of human flaws, not their own but those of their creators. “Formed out of the metaphorical and literal lifeless waste of humanity, respectively, the clones and the monster can never become part of the world they observe with such fascination” (Tsao 217).



Rather than aligning himself with the “normal people outside,” Ishiguro, his transnational background contributing, rather associates with a peripheral group that is less certain about identity. Often described as a postcolonial, transnational, or even a migrant writer, Ishiguro admits that he is “stuck on the margins” (Vorda, Herzinger, Ishiguro 137). It is apparent from *Never Let Me Go* that it is this peripheral identity, uncertainty, and otherness that interests him rather than the science of cloning itself. Ishiguro was born in Japan and emigrated to Britain when he was five. His identity as a Japanese-British novelist is complicated because he admits he knows little of Japan, and therefore feels neither fully Japanese nor fully British. He stated in an interview, “My very lack of authority and lack of knowledge about Japan, I think, forced me into a position of using my imagination, and also of thinking of myself as a kind of homeless writer” (qtd. in Guo 2). Guo argues that this feeling of homelessness is a contributing factor to the novel’s feeling of disquiet and its many contextual examples of the uncanny: “The repression of Ishiguro’s identity, neither Japanese nor British, forces him to estrange reality and to replace the familiar with unease making the home unhomely and making literature uncanny” (Guo 3).

*Exit West*, too, makes strong reference to the “othered” while focusing on the experiences of peripheral individuals. Nadia and Saeed become migrants and refugees, competing for survival, struggling to find food, shelter, and employment while navigating new and unfamiliar territory. They are forced to mourn the death of family from afar. Their new status strains their own relationship, eventually pulling them apart. They represent so many real-world migrants facing similar struggles here in the United States and in other parts of the globe.

Ironically, while magic contributed to their displacement, technology helped keep them connected. Hamid contemplated the psychological power of technology when writing *Exit West*, realizing that the now ubiquitous “little black rectangle” could be as magical as those doors.

While living in Lahore and watching violence and war in Southwest Asia, “I was teleporting through black rectangles on a regular basis, the screens of my phone and computer, on video calls, and while watching television and films. And those two impulses came together and were a large part of the impetus to write this book” (Brice).

It is both elements, the doors and technology, that frame the couple’s journey; one allows for physical transport, the other mental and psychological. As Liliana Naydan explains in her essay “Digital Screens and National Divides in Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*,” technology keeps Nadia and Saeed “tethered” to their digital devices as they negotiate each new place they encounter, their phones like “wands” or “antennas” (Hamid *Exit* 39). This “enchanted digital technology” allows them to “live as simultaneously connected to and yet disconnected from one another, their homes, and the nations to which they migrate” (Naydan 434). Like the doors, smart phones and computers can instantaneously transport the viewer to another place, another reality – “the moon or Mars or Antarctica” (Hamid, PBS News Hour 2018) – places that can seem otherworldly simply because we have never been there, or will never in our lifetime get to travel there. In *Exit West*, we know these places, yet we do not know them. Nadia and Saeed’s temporary homes — Mykonos, London, and California — are familiar by name only because they have become frightening places of unrest.

Michael Chabon’s introduction in the book’s Penguin edition captures its global relevance: “Hamid’s novel – stretches the boundaries of the real just enough to make a point about the state of immigrants and refugees in the contemporary world – but it’s very much grounded in reality.” Perhaps due to his own worldliness, Hamid has his finger on the global pulse, subtly stating universal truths that evoke uncomfortable feelings because they hit so close to home. He has been named one of the world’s “100 Leading Global Thinkers” by *Foreign*

*Policy* magazine, which described him as “a master critic of the modern global condition” (122). Hamid has become something of an “intellectual” in what Stefan Collini describes as “the cultural sense” of the term (52).

In interviews Hamid has described himself as being “mongrelized,” born in Pakistan and having lived in several countries. There is no doubt his migratory, cosmopolitan life has affected his writing and his success as a transnational author; literary critics have embraced his work as transformational, especially in post-9/11 and postmodern contexts. His themes arise through the erasure of physical boundaries and the creation of cultural, social, and psychological ones.

His insights touch the reader to his core. He may feel convicted then, when reading this statement: “When we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind” (Hamid 94). How many of us have left parents, siblings, and grandparents behind? Hamid has moved around the globe since he was a child. He returned to his home city of Lahore so that his children could know their grandparents. But even those who remain in one place for a lifetime can feel like migrants, as Hamid offers, “We are all migrants through time” (Hamid 209). The place we once knew is no longer familiar; neighbors have come and gone, landscapes have changed, and new technologies have emerged. He offers in *Exit West* the example of a woman in Palo Alto who had become rich from her increasing property value over a lifetime, and “it seemed the world had moved, and she barely recognized the town that existed outside her property” (Hamid 207) – a stranger in her own town.

And what about those, like Nadia and Saeed, who have migrated and returned? “A central element of unfamiliarity – which is frequent in narratives addressing migration – is the gap which separates the migrants’ gaze on their country before leaving it from their changed perception when they return” (du Doc). It was half a century before Nadia returned to her

birthplace, “not a heaven but it was not a hell, and it was familiar but also unfamiliar ...” (Hamid *Exit* 98). Her old building still stood but most of the cafes had changed. Upon meeting Saeed again after so many years, they both were now old but gave each other looks “of particular recognition” (Hamid *Exit* 230). Back in their home city, the two had migrated through places and time, still recognizable to each other, still able to make a connection through their past and their failed relationship. Despite the tumultuous history, Hamid ends the book on a somewhat hopeful note.

The timely and relevant issues addressed by Ishiguro and Hamid earned both of their novels international attention. Two more recent transnational novels have also received positive critiques on the international literary scene: Shafak’s tale about a dead prostitute and Emezi’s coming-of-age story told through an unusual spiritual lens. In the next chapter I will explore these authors’ use of the psychological and metaphysical to address issues of abuse, “othering,” and struggles with self-identity and acceptance.

CHAPTER THREE: STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND: SHAFAK AND EMEZI  
ELABORATE ON THE TRANSCULTURAL SPACE

We now turn to two transnational works by authors who invent two very different worlds through their creative literary techniques. In both novels, the journey through the mind as it connects to place makes these stories otherworldly; we see the world as the protagonists see it, and it is different from our own view, disarmingly so, looking through these unusual lenses. By gazing in this way, we see problems that the author will not allow us to overlook.

These protagonists suffer because they are neither seen nor heard in the way that they should be. They are victims of abuse, abandonment, and patriarchal cultures with deep religious or spiritual roots; they suffer indignity and shame. One woman, the prostitute Tequila Leila, lives and dies in a city with little compassion for its downcast members; the other, the mentally fragile Ada, lives at the fringes of her own mind, stepping aside as the spirits take over.

I will begin with a comparison of these authors' literary techniques and their suitability for Freud's uncanny, followed by a discussion of the trauma exhibited in each story. I will also explore the opportunities for empowerment and agency as demonstrated in the narratives. Finally, I will look at how these authors' own liminality and multiculturalism have affected their chosen themes.

We are reminded that for something to be uncanny, it has to be strangely familiar in an unsettling way. The premise for Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* is partly scientific and partly folkloric. She begins with the quite familiar object of the brain but anticipates what it might do should it outlive the physical body by just minutes. The uncanniness results from what we believe we know about death. Technically, Tequila Leila is dead; she is lying in a dumpster, heart no longer beating, lungs no longer breathing, "and whichever way she

looked at her situation there was no denying that she was dead” (Shafak 71). What causes this sort of “morbid anxiety” that Freud describes is the question the reader must be asking himself: So why does she continue to think? Shafak’s primary literary device was prompted by her own curiosity and lightly based on scientific discoveries:

I became very interested in these studies – medical and scientific studies – that show after the moment of death, after the heart has stopped beating, the human brain can remain active for another few minutes. And in some cases, this could go up to 10 minutes. To me, the whole thing was fascinating. And maybe the question that I wanted to ask was, what exactly happens inside our minds in that limited amount of time? (Inskeep)

Shafak’s comments might bring to mind popular folklore about life flashing before our eyes in our final minutes here on earth. This is precisely what happens to Leila. Her final cognitive minutes transitioning from life to death become a liminal space in which she recalls her own history marked by abuse, misogyny, prostitution, and murder. Leila’s view from the dumpster is discomfiting and foreign. This is not the Istanbul that the Ministry of Tourism would have you see. It is a cosmopolitan city of old-world beauty if viewed from the social heights but much drearier if one is in the trenches.

In comparison, Emezi (who will continue to be referenced as “they”) have also placed us inside the mind of the protagonist, but Ada’s mind is held captive by beings from a spirit world. With the ogbanje spirits Emezi have introduced the international literary world to an obscure ontological concept rooted in their birthplace of Nigeria. The ogbanje spirits are “nonhuman” characters in the story, who refer to themselves as “We.” We learn that the spirits invaded Ada’s body while still in her mother’s womb and remained there after her birth, “no longer flesh within a house but a house itself, and we were the ones meant to live in it” (Emezi *Freshwater* 156).

Most readers are familiar with the idea of a spiritual world, even if they don't believe in one. What makes this very peculiar tale unsettling is that the spirits are telling much of the story, and they seem to be in control of earthly matters, more specifically of Ada. They dominate her mind and control her body. While this may not seem so unusual to those familiar with Igbo spirituality, from a western perspective the spiritual (psychological?) battles that continue throughout the book can only be described as bizarre. We begin to question the ogbanjes' nature, their purpose, and even the reality of their existence (is this a form of mental illness?). It is not even until well into the story that we hear directly from Ada, in chapter nine. She admits, "The world in my head has been far more real than the one outside – maybe that's the exact definition of madness, come to think of it" (Emezi *Freshwater* 1146).

By making the spirits major characters in the novel, Emezi are forcing us to acknowledge them as active agents in the story. They blame Ada's internal struggles on the gates not being closed behind them when they transitioned from their world to Ada's body. "But since the gates were open, not closed against remembrance, we became confused. We were at once old and newborn. We were her and yet not" (Emezi 171). In the early years of Ada's life, "We stayed asleep, yet our presence shaped the Ada's body and her temperament" (Emezi 249). The spirits' awakening arrived during a communal dance, the music drifting into their "sleep, our restless slumber; it called to us as clearly as blood" (Emezi 320). The spirits ponder if Ada would have gone mad had they stayed asleep. "The first madness was that we were born, that they stuffed a god into a bag of skin" (Emezi 342).

In some respects, Emezi's introduction of the spirits offers an alternate explanation to Ada's mental health problems – one that western medicine would not offer. Whether these spirits are a cause of, or the product of Ada's apparent mental illness, was unclear to me throughout the

book, which clearly depicted Ada as a troubled young woman. Despite its strange narration and disturbing details, *Freshwater*'s description as a coming-of-age story will resonate "for anyone who has experienced life as a misfit or outcast," writes reviewer David Wright of the *Seattle Times*.

Shafak's, too, is a story about misfits and outcasts. Leila experienced alienation and trauma throughout her life. Neither her childhood home where she was raped by an uncle and repressed by her father, nor the brothel in Istanbul where she sold her body and was assaulted with acid, were places of comfort. In an interview Shafak reflects on Istanbul: "It is a city of dreams and is capable of making promises to so many of us. But then again, it also has its own scars and wounds" (Saeed).

Leila's life on the fringes of Istanbul connects her to those who also have been cast out, "othered," or long forgotten by their families. Her "water family" of female friends have similar stories of isolation resulting from trauma, abandonment, and "otherness." Jameelah, escaping war, religious violence, and political insurgency in Somalia, was brought to Istanbul for sexual exploitation. Humeyra fled to Istanbul to escape an abusive husband. Leila's transgender friend Nostalgic Nalan came from Anatolia "to correct the mistake that God the Almighty had so blatantly made" (Shafak 906). It is from these informed traumas that another view of Istanbul is offered: a cold and uncaring place save for those few empathetic souls we happen to meet along the way. "Istanbul was an illusion. A magician's trick gone wrong. ... There were multiple Istanbuls – struggling, competing, clashing, each perceiving that, in the end, only one could survive" (Shafak *10 Minutes* 3100).

In an article for *Research Journal on the Fantastic*, María Jesús Llarena Ascanio writes of the trauma experienced by women and expressed through the writing of female transnational



authors: “Through stories, then, trauma is mobilised and ascribed a set of meanings, as well as a set of emotional reactions and, in these literary spaces, individuals live isolated lives in the aftermath of decisions taken in remote centres of power” (115). These centers of power in Shafak’s novel include Leila’s childhood home with its long tradition of patriarchy, where she has become estranged. She flees to Istanbul to escape a forced marriage. The power transfers from her unyielding father to a city where women are allowed to sell their bodies. In the ultimate misogynous act of power, one of Leila’s “clients” eventually murders her.

Trauma is apparent throughout *Freshwater* as well. Ada is a Nigerian woman who comes to America for college, where she begins an emotional journey toward self-transformation. In the process, she faces traumas both external and internal, presently and from her past. She is raped, only to be saved by the spirit Asughara, who takes over her mind when it happens. She recalls being abandoned by her mother, sexually abused by a neighbor boy, and physically abused by her brother. From the ogbanjes’ perspective, “The Ada was living in multiple realities at once ... For her it was deeply unsettling and felt like a developing madness” (Emezi *Freshwater* 2495). She acts out with promiscuous sex and physical changes, including self-harm. The cutting begins with “scratches and cuts” on Ada’s arms. She cuts her hair and gets tattoos of the ogbanjes, “who she was on the inside being revealed on the outside” (Emezi *Freshwater* 2502).

Finally, she has her breasts surgically removed. A discussion with friends highlights Ada’s emotional complications: “Before the surgery, the Ada had told her friends that she couldn’t wait for when she could wear dresses again. They were confused. They stared at her bound chest and boy clothes” (Emezi 2318). As previously related in chapter two with the clones, an uneasiness occurs when confronted with the removal of body parts. *Freshwater* exemplifies how this discomfort can be experienced by one group, in this case heterosexual or

cisgender, but not another. A transgender person more likely would see surgical change as a relief or the beginning of feeling more comfortable in one's own skin.

Despite the traumatic themes playing out in both novels, these female authors offer some encouraging displays of empowerment. To understand the significance of empowerment in relation to transnationalism, we look at Homi Bhabha's discussion of hybrid identity and Third Space in *The Location of Culture*. His Third Spaces of Enunciation are ambiguous or in-between spaces where the "cutting edge of translation and negotiation" occurs. (Bhabha *The Location* 56). More simply put, Third Space is created neither in the homeland nor in the place landed upon but in the intermingling of the two, which becomes an "interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative" space of possibilities (Bhabha *The Location* 341, 346).

Joan Conwell in her master's thesis reflects on the "possibilities for empowerment and potential for resistance inherent in Third Space" (24). Just as Conwell asserts that Shafak created Third Spaces in her previous novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* – a brick-and-mortar café and a virtual café (Conwell 24) – I argue that these spaces also exist in *10 Minutes*. The cafés in *Bastard* "serve as sanctuaries" (Conwell 24); similarly, Leila's apartment becomes a gathering place for the outcast female friends to watch movies and celebrate birthdays; here they shield themselves from the cold and uncaring outside world and forge a collective strength through mutual support. "If friendship meant rituals, they had them by the truckload ... at every opportunity, they would dine together, feasting on delicacies they could barely afford" (Shafak *10 Minutes* 2839). Shafak also notes of Leila, "She had never told her friends this, not in so many words, but they were her safety net" (Shafak *10 Minutes* 2845).

In keeping with Conwell's theme of empowerment and resistance, the apartment also becomes a site of rebellion. Following Leila's death, the friends gather there and make plans to

undermine the establishment by stealing and transporting Leila's body for a proper send-off in the waters of Istanbul. It will not end up for all eternity in the Cemetery for the Companionless, that graveyard for outcasts where plots are marked not by names but numbers.

Their rebellious acts are anticipated by Bhabha as interpreted by researcher Paul Meredith: "Despite the exposure of the third space to contradictions and ambiguities, it provides a spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that 'initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation'" (Meredith 3). In other words, these Third Spaces are liminal spaces of pushback, of challenging what is wrong with the world and calling out fault lines perceived by the author, who adds authority from her own transcultural "Third Space." Leila's friends see the injustice of an anonymous burial; it is obvious from Shafak's interviews that The Cemetery of the Companionless is a very real place in Istanbul that deeply disturbed her. She told an interviewer, "And nobody goes there. Nobody pays attention. It's completely neglected" (Inskip).

In the case of Emezi, the very writing of *Freshwater* can be viewed as agency, perhaps even a rebellious act against mainstream views on gender and sexuality. As discussed in interviews, Emezi were able to work through their own emotional problems and identity crisis through Igbo spirituality, stating it was a deliberate choice to part from a "mainstream" lens to make the central narrators "non-human." Their agency is further acknowledged through the story's autobiographical content. Emezi describe it as "a breath away from being a memoir" (Akbar), a reflection of Emezi's own empowerment:

I've looked at my life through the lens of Christianity [Emezi were raised Catholic]. Then I came to America, had therapy, and looked at my life through the lens of western mental health. None of it helped me. I had trouble staying alive.

When I began to look at my life through the lens of Igbo ontology and craft it as a story, then, for the first time, everything clicked into place” (Akbar).

Scholar Jacob Allen Crystal’s theories about African novelists reflect Emezi’s self-discovery and control of their own narrative. He argues that Emezi and others are in effect pushing back on their African heritage through their writing. They are taking “the agency that has been deprived of Nigerian women and attempt(ing) to paint a picture for what it might look like if women were allowed to consult with the supernatural to find their own agency” (Crystal 2). In essence, Emezi rediscovered themselves through a spiritual lens derived from their Nigerian heritage.

Shafak has found her agency through her many novels and articles, addressing issues of disempowerment and resisting norms if they seem unjust to her. She has a career track record of “giving voice to the voiceless” (Shafak TED). She has said her multiculturalism has shaped her writing. She was born in France but has spent lengths of time in Spain, Turkey, the United States, and the U.K. She identifies with Leila and her “outcast” friends. In her international school in Spain, she was the only Turkish student. Being Dutch or English was preferred; she and an Indian girl were looked down upon. When other students found out she is Turkish, “I’ll never forget these children shouting ‘Pope killers,’” she said in an interview, adding that foreigners are often “othered because of their background” (Chancy 57).

As multicultural authors (Emezi now live in the U.S.), both have experienced liminality – reflected in their work – but in different ways. When Shafak moved from Spain to Turkey, she realized she was an outsider in her homeland, too. “My feeling of being a stranger in a strange land never totally disappeared” (Chancy 57). She writes from a position of both insider and outsider, exemplifying that in-betweenness in a country where she is rooted but has not been

welcome; she was brought up on (and acquitted of) criminal charges of “insulting Turkishness” (Lea) for remarks made in *The Bastard of Istanbul*.

The title of her novel defines Leila’s liminal space as she teeters on the edge of brain death, but Leila’s recollections show Istanbul itself to be a site of liminality. It precariously straddles East and West physically, culturally, and metaphorically. One part lies in Europe and another part lies in Asia. Culturally, there is a clash of old world and new world, the religious and the secular, the haves and the have-nots. The city then becomes a metaphor for the in-betweenness experienced by its inhabitants.

“Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts” relates the value in post-colonial writing of “in-between” spaces in which cultural change can occur: “the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 117). Istanbul, and more precisely in Shafak’s novel, the Bosphorus Strait, is the transitional space through which Leila moves from the confines of the Cemetery of the Companionless to being “free at last” (Shafak *10 Minutes* 4603). Her friends take her body to the Bosphorus Bridge and shove it over, into the water. Once submerged, Leila feels content. She follows the beta fish, “not trying to get anywhere. There was no reason to rush anymore and nothing to run away from” (Shafak *10 Minutes* 4595). She can now see the universe in technicolor, and her soul is free. Through the last thoughts produced by Leila’s diminishing brain waves, we see another world; it is not Heaven as taught through religious tradition but another, otherworldly, version of an afterlife contained in the depths of the sea. Like Heaven, it is utopic, for “there was no pain down here” (Shafak *10 Minutes* 4603).

Looking at Emezi’s life experiences, it is evident that they have experienced liminality in several different ways, and this is reflected in their novel. In a paper for *Research in African*

*Literatures*, Chris Dunton argues that liminality is a major theme in *Freshwater*, even if Emezi do not use the term. “‘Liminality’ I see as being very close to ‘interstitiality’ ... though perhaps for liminality with the added dimension of a proclivity to move from one state or dimension to another” (Dunton 2). It is Ada’s inner (spiritual or mental) struggles, paired with her self-harm, physical transformation, and suicide attempt that highlight her liminality. She is caught between the spiritual and physical worlds; madness and sanity; childhood and adulthood; femininity and masculinity; and life and death itself. Before downing a bunch of painkillers, she laments, “I wish I could’ve said good-bye to everyone without them freaking out, you know? No crying, no trying to lock me up. As if I was just traveling. Plus, there’s no need for them to worry – I’ve got family waiting” (Emezi 2132).

Acknowledging that *Freshwater* is also a transgender story, we can link back to Freud’s concept of the self-doubt created by the doppelgänger through Pauline Palmer’s “The Queer Uncanny.” She notes Freud’s comments on the “‘doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self’” and “‘the doubt as to which his self is’ that this can trigger in the individual” (Palmer 91). Palmer connects this doubt to western binary definitions of sexual identity that can cause conflict within the transgender individual. Emezi have chosen to sort out their own conflicts through their Igbo roots. They reflect in their novel, “We have understood what we are, the places we are suspended in, between the inaccurate concepts of male and female ...” (Emezi 2318). Their narrative gives the mainstream reader an intimate look inside the world of a transgender person, and perhaps a better understanding of the difficulties involved with gender dysphoria.

Emezi are not the first to write about Nigerian spirituality. Nigerian author Chigozie Obioma narrates his mystical epic novel *An Orchestra of Minorities* through the poultry farmer Chinonso’s chi, which is a spiritual guide that “watches over human beings and

negotiates for them before the gods” (Nugent). The religion of which Obioma, Emezi, and others write is tied to the Igbo, the largest ethnic group of southeastern Nigeria. The “Ndigbo” believe in a supreme god and several spirits, powerful beings with various earthly and otherworldly duties. It is the ogbanje, from a group of evil spirits, that tend to possess women (Editors *encyclopedia.com*) and which invade Ada. A quote by C. Chukwuemeka Mbaegbu at the beginning of chapter seven further explains, “[The ogbanje are] creatures of God with powers over mortals. ... They are not subject to the laws of justice and have no moral scruples, causing harm without justification” (Emezi *Freshwater* 902).

Many Igbo are now Christians and practice a syncretic version of Christianity mixed with indigenous beliefs (Editors *Britannica*) that have become part of Igbo mythology. In the context of African literature, Dunton writes, “Major strands in the big tapestry of the African novel have always been myth and the fantastic ...” (11). Dunton points out that even before the first chapter Emezi make it clear that their novel will seem strange (and I say supernatural or otherworldly), especially to those with mainstream beliefs. “The novel’s dedication – has there ever been one quite like this? – reads ‘For those of us / with one foot / on the other side’; this is followed by the opening epigraph: ‘I have lived many lives inside this body. I lived many lives before they put me in this body. I will live many lives when they take me out of it’” (Dunton 12). Despite the spiritual overtones in *Freshwater*, Crystal warns Western readers to avoid “lumping the story into a gross category of possession ... something that is inherently wrong or corrupt ...” (Crystal 6). He adds, “It is imperative to not negate the cosmological history that Emezi is drawing from ...” (Crystal 6).

Emezi say their story is not one of possession but neither should it be categorized as fantastical, magical realism, or speculative fiction because “it’s what has actually happened”

(Akbar). Essentially, Emezi's is an ontological story. What is the nature of the ogbanje spirits? What is Ada's nature, both with and without them? Some answers are found toward the end of the book where it becomes clearer that Ada and the ogbanje are meshed, are one. Ada states, "It was difficult to accept not being human but still being contained in a human body. ... Ogbanje are as liminal as is possible—spirit and human, both and neither" (Emezi *Freshwater* 2683). A confirmation also comes from the author, who describe themselves as ogbanje (Emezi "My Surgeries").

Writing from their own transcultural spaces, Emezi and Shafak have added to conversations surrounding transnational literature. Their creativity, relevance, and talent as writers, combined with their multicultural perspective, has resulted in a certain unusual quality or "limited strangeness" in their books, which have received recognition by the international literary community. In the next chapter I will discuss how these and other transnational authors serves as bridges: connectors of ideas and cultures within literary and other contexts. Their works have impacted other cultures as well as our own and their narratives have served to overcome dichotomies often imposed by a center/periphery model.



CHAPTER FOUR: DISRUPTION BY THE “UNHOMELY INTELLECTUAL”:  
TRANSNATIONAL VOICES IN GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS, LITERARY CRITICISM,  
AND WESTERN CANON

In a summary for *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, Paul Jay describes the growing interest in transnational literature since the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. To be more specific, it is the “transnational nature of literary production and circulation” that has transformed literary studies from a nation-state model of organization to other means such as “comparative, multicultural, postcolonial, world, and global.” The increasing number of theoretical works on transnational as a concept, combined with literary critical analysis, has led to this “vigorous debate” in literary studies (Jay “Transnational”).

In fact, debates have played out in English as well as other college departments including political science, history, international, and foreign language studies. These debates reflect a growing need and desire in American studies of many kinds to understand (and include) a certain resistance from outside our borders to viewing history, politics, policies, and cultural inclusion within “a new form of contextualization” (Elliott 8). This trend can be traced to a 1994 essay by Carolyn Porter, “What We Know That We Don’t Know: Remapping American Literary History,” and possibly even earlier. Porter recognized a “major blind spot” (Elliott 8), especially in American literary studies, and encouraged a better understanding of the ways in which the United States is interconnected with other parts of the world by a “historicized politics of location” (Porter 521).

In the years following, many others in academia have expressed similar theoretical concerns. In many cases the debate has afforded more opportunities for studying transnational

literatures that once may have seemed too obscure, lacked translation, or escaped the appropriate attention to include in any syllabus. There may have been a time when at least some of the books discussed within this thesis would not have appeared on an English department syllabus. The purpose of this chapter is to describe these and other transnational authors' effect on American literary studies, literary analysis and comparative criticism, the "noticing" of transnational authors, global conversations, and literary canon.

As Jay mentioned, there has been a vast body of theoretical work on transnationalism and its effect on world literature. In her book *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, Arianna Dagnino writes of the greater freedom experienced by these writers, which I propose is true of the authors analyzed in this paper. Dagnino states that transnational writers' movements, both physically and imaginatively as they cross borders, allow them to be "less and less trapped in the traditional (im)migrant/exilic/diasporic syndrome and [they] are more able instead to embrace the opportunities and the freedom that diversity and mobility now bestow upon them. Due to this specific status, they are greatly contributing to the development of transcultural literature" (100).

At this point it is worthwhile to draw on interviews that Dagnino conducted with writers about their transcultural identity and what distinguishes them:

Their relaxed, neonomadic attitude when facing issues linked to displacement, rootlessness, nationality, cultural allegiance, and identity. Contrary to the past, they do not dwell nostalgically upon a perceived sense of loss or displacement. Instead, they aim at being culturally or geographically dislocated or "transpatriated"; they self-induce and somewhat indulge in their diasporic or exilic state in order to gain a new perspective on

the world, on different cultures, on humanity, and, ultimately, on themselves (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 159).

This description could, at least in part, pertain to any one of the authors discussed here. Hamid and Shafak have been especially vocal about their sense of not belonging to a specific “place,” however without a sense of nostalgia, displacement, or perceived loss. “I’m very comfortable as a hybridized mongrel,” Hamid stated in an interview (Pal). Emezi’s *Freshwater* highlights cultural difference through her Nigerian roots and reconnection with Igbo spirituality. Ishiguro has discussed his “cultural dislocation,” which literary critics have noticed has an impact on the topics he chooses as a writer (Guo 2). His novels tend to speak to themes of memory, loss, class, and social expectation as well as the effects of power and authoritarianism.

Even more importantly within this thesis, “by adapting they spur their creativity along a path which is not already set, or clear-cut” (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 160). It has been part of my proposal that transnational authors bring a certain creativity and insight that is borne of their multiculturalism. This is not to say that any talented or successful writer does not also have these qualities. But within the scope of this thesis, those transnational authors who are changing the discourse on world literature; transnational literature; multicultural, ethnic and diasporic literature; and literary canons of many types, have managed to do so through their own grit and ingenuity. As global citizens, they have their pen on the pulse of international issues where other writers may lack these perspectives, especially in relation to center/periphery, hegemony, and othering. Dagnino argues in her book, “Transcultural writers seem to be tuned into a different wavelength and thus are able to capture the first still embryonic, still incoherent, still mostly unexpressed or intercepted symptoms and signals of a different emerging cultural mood/mode” (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 102).

A good example of this last statement is Hamid. His controversial post-9/11 critique in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and his representation of the global refugee crisis in *Exit West* prove his literary instincts to be on a wavelength above and beyond his contemporaries in capturing emerging cultural moods. The mood post-9/11 was Americans' fear of the "other" – terrorists, Mideasterners, and Muslims. Hamid's aim with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was to explain the tragic rift from the other side. Shafak also has proven her grasp on emerging issues of the day. She has a large body of work (fiction and nonfiction) that highlights her advocacy for such causes as women's rights, LGBTQ rights, and freedom of speech. When Ishiguro wrote *Never Let Me Go* it was just two years after completion of the Human Genome Project, a sequencing of the entire human genome. Interest in genetics was growing.

Emezi are the newest writer of the four. Any reader of *Freshwater*, their debut novel, will note it is on a frequency that is beyond mainstream. To some readers the worldview offered in the book may seem off-putting and its graphic contents startling; the literary world took it as a brilliant achievement and a dark self-exploration on timely themes. Emezi followed *Freshwater* with a "genre-bending" young adult novel, *Pet*, about the trans girl Jam's friendship with a monster.

To demonstrate why these particular authors (and others) have become part of the conversation about transnationalism, I have to remind the reader about a certain strangeness, even if very subtle, that each author imposes within the narrative and which in my opinion has caused the literary world to take notice. Other critics have made similar observations. Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* writes, "One mark of originality that can win canonical status for a literary work is strangeness that we either never altogether assimilate, or that becomes such a given that we are blinded to its idiosyncrasies" (4).

Thomsen adds, “But what is the right kind of strangeness or the kind of strangeness that keeps works in the canon or allows them to have an impact across cultures?” (Thomsen 3). This question is rhetorical but can be answered in a general sense by judging the author’s ability to capture the reader’s attention and to keep him interested because the strangeness is not so bizarre that he is put off. Take Hamid’s magic doors, for example. We have accepted them, nearly forgotten about them, when we connect with the migrants’ plight. We have bought into the ethos that Hamid has created. Where will the doors take them next? What sort of mayhem will they find? Will it end, and when?

I propose that the strangeness in the works discussed here results from a combination of the uncanny elements previously described, a certain fresh perspective, and unique subject matter. What allows these stories to have impact is twofold: they are well-crafted stories or we would not be reading them. And they have an impact across cultures because of their timely and universal themes. In America (and perhaps other parts of the world), for instance, *Freshwater* could not have come at a better time, when dialogues about sexual orientation and gender identity, mental health, and other once taboo topics have lost much of their stigma. The British singer Sam Smith also prefers the nonbinary term “they.” More recently the actor Elliot Page shared that he is transgender. These discussions have found their way into entertainment, social media, politics (bathroom battles), and even private households where more “queer” individuals are coming forward.

Those who teach or write about literature know that it can have immense (educational, social, historical) value outside of entertainment, mass media, and pop culture. I believe it is important to acknowledge, however, that the two are also connected in some ways. It might not make a difference to the literary scope of *Exit West* that it is being made into a movie; likewise, a

series is planned for *Freshwater*. Yet the fact that these books have garnered this type of attention is a testament to the many conversations that they have helped to generate. This must say something about the impact of transnational writing and its increasing influence in areas outside of literature.

Dagnino makes an important point that the transnational writers within her realm of attention are a small subsection who are able to benefit from their opportunities as transnationals that may include better education or class privilege. (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 102). This connects to Peggy Levitt's consolidation of several theories on cosmopolitanism that have been proposed by other scholars. Among them: competent cosmopolitan writers, along with other types of cosmopolitans, should be able to navigate (not assimilate) other cultures. They have a sense of responsibility and care about other cultures, and they can participate in cross-cultural criticism and dialogue. These writers also incorporate "self-transformation" and reflections of their experiences with "otherness" (Levitt 275). Both skills and competencies are involved, but also, Levitt found, cosmopolitanism can be an "idea or ethos."

Similarly, Ulrich Beck in "The Cosmopolitan Vision" identifies cosmopolitan competence as involving both "situating and relativizing one's own form of life within other horizons of possibility" and "the capacity to see oneself from the perspective of cultural others and to give this practical effect in one's own experience through the exercise of boundary-transcending imagination" (89). It is an exercise certainly undertaken by the stated authors through their works, which transcend all sorts of boundaries: physical, spiritual, psychological, cultural, and ethical.

There are many definitions within social and literary studies that describe transnationalism and transnational writing. It behooves the academic to become familiar with

some of these descriptions because they do offer a collective vision for this subset of literature. Peter Morgan in “Literary Transnationalism: A Europeanist’s Perspective” argues the term has come about as a result of conflict between “national” and “global” literatures. He explains the term is the “literary recognition and representation of the flow of people, ideas and goods across cultural and national boundaries” (47). In addition, he points out that UNESCO adopted the term “trans-nationalism” in 2000 as it sought to identify the international themes resulting from globalization (Morgan 47).

Dagnino describes transcultural writers as “bridges” – “connectors of ideas, cultures, and stories; imaginative and linguistic translators of different ways of perceiving life and human relationships. In acting as bridge people ... transcultural writers may play a special role in a world where belligerent and clashing views of cultural identity and allegiance still prevail” (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 160). Emezi especially may be brought to mind here. Their introduction of the Igbo religion metaphorically makes them the bridge the reader crosses to begin to understand this belief system as well as issues of gender identity, self-harm, and self-reckoning.

Dagnino mentions other scholars’ definitions of transcultural literature. For instance, As’ad Khairallah’s definition is twofold: both works that are “intentionally transcultural in vision and scope ... regardless of [their] ability to reach or impact other cultures than [their] own; or not transcultural by intention, vision or scope, but acquire ... this characteristic through [their] ability to cross cultures and to play an active part in their literary worlds” (Dagnino *Transcultural Literature* 3). Dagnino has come up with her own definition: “I posit that transcultural literary works engage with and express the confluential nature of cultures overcoming the different dichotomies between North and South, the West and the Rest, the

colonizer and the colonized, the dominator and the dominated, the native and the (im)migrant, the national and the ethnic” (Dagnino *Transcultural Literature* 3).

In relation to these descriptors, Hamid’s *Exit West* hits on the hot topic of “the native and the immigrant.” Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* plays on themes of the “dominator and the dominated.” The issues highlighted in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World* are universal ones especially for women. And *Freshwater* has received international critical praise, her highly personal vision crossing cultures.

According to Dagnino’s definition these transnational works are all confluent. These and others represent “those artists, writers, and sometimes scholars who have already experienced in the flesh and in their creative minds the effects of global mobility, transnational patterns, neonomadic lifestyles, and that in their creative (or critical) works have already captured and expressed an emerging transcultural mood” (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 144). Collectively, Ishiguro, Hamid, Shafak, and Emezi write with deep intuition and a foreboding sense of what the world really looks like if readers take time to look through the author’s lens. Their themes cross real and imaginary borders, with the authors themselves serving as bridges to new perspectives.

In keeping with Levitt’s analysis, Hamid’s world view could be described as cosmopolitan. Essayist Ahmed Gamal describes Hamid as an “unhomely intellectual” and considers whether he (and others) “attempts to syncretize or disrupt both the local and the global” (Gamal 597). He expands on Abdul R. Jan Mohamed’s typology of the “specular border intellectual” and the “syncretic border intellectual” and asserts “those post-migratory writers or border intellectuals negotiate their relationship to the nation of the periphery (i.e., that of their birth), the history that precedes and threatens to determine them, and the centred, western canon



into which they strive to write themselves” (Gamal 597). Hamid claims such “literary credo” in his collection of essays, *Discontent and its Civilizations*:

Mongrel. Miscegenator. Half-breed. Outcast. [...] Our words for hybridity are so often epithets. They shouldn't be. Hybridity needs not be the problem. It could be the solution. Hybrids do more than embody mixtures between groups. Hybrids reveal the boundaries between groups to be false. And this is vital, for creativity comes from intermingling, from rejecting the lifelessness of purity” (Hamid *Discontent* xvii).

I am not equipped to comment on any particular work's inclusion in so-called literary canon. I do, however, believe that these and other writers have helped drive literary criticism in a new direction, adding to the powerful impact of transnational literature. Thomsen writes, “The importance of (im)migrant and cosmopolitan literature already has some empirical support in the form of circulation and recognition and there are also many indications of an on-going contribution.” (Thomsen 4).

Other scholars have long debated the complexities of canon amid hegemonic forces, tradition, power structures, nation-states, and postcolonial ways of thinking that move from borders to ideas. Levitt states, “What gets included in a canonical book such as the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* has implications for the worldview of generations of students to come. Literary festivals ... showcase the work of new writers and put it on par with their better-known contemporaries. But the politics behind who is included are, of course, riddled with power” (284). Dagnino also mentions the undercurrents within the international literary community. “All this keeping in mind that a text's visibility in the global literary arena can be amplified or undermined by the ‘dominant discourses and their control over the circuits of communication’ as well as by the market forces behind any decision to publish or not to publish,

to translate or not to translate, or to distribute globally or not to do so” (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 144). And Thomsen describes the western canon as “de facto relatively closed”; any openness is due to a text’s “affiliation with the western tradition, both when it comes to critical appreciation and to marketwise success” (4).

Specifically, in terms of the academy, David Damrosch makes a good point that if not for the scholars teaching courses, some authors may remain neglected. But, he says, it is a balance. Students may not sign up for courses if they see unfamiliar authors and texts on the syllabus. “Scholars are always seeking to intervene in the academic marketplace and ultimately to influence a wider public, directing attention to neglected authors, texts, and approaches” (Damrosch 223). He links the “opening up” of what had previously been an all-white-male canon to civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s (Damrosch 223). These changes have undoubtedly given more opportunities for transnational authors of all types including women, non-American or non-European writers (a fading of the Eurocentric canon), writers of non-hegemonic languages, and writers from peripheral countries and communities. Damrosch acknowledges that writers with “various contestatory, subaltern, or marginal perspectives” are being read more frequently. He throws in a caveat: but at what expense? He says the old “Western Masterpieces” are not taking a back seat but instead the literary canon has “morphed” into a multi-tiered one. He admits that “it remains as challenging as ever to be a major writer in a peripheral country whose language is also peripheral within the world linguistic system. Thus, the Nobel Prize winners Naguib Mahfouz and Knut Hamsun languish in the minor category, despite their seminal importance in the literary histories of their countries and their entire regions” (Damrosch 227).

It has been my attempt throughout this thesis to describe what I have noticed, collectively, in the works of four transnational writers who have helped to educate me on the subject of multicultural and transnational literature. I was introduced to Ishiguro's novel by my daughter, who read it for school. Undoubtedly, I would not have been exposed to the other three novels had it not been for graduate classes in literature. I have the feeling that this type of recognition most likely is deserved, but not gained, by so many other peripheral (or transnational) authors whose works I may never "meet." The system of publishing, worldwide, is complex. Pierre Bourdieu recognized that "To publish is to make public, to make the unofficial the official" (Metherd 8). In a final nod to Freud's essay (156), Bourdieu argues that publication "takes something hidden, secret, intimate or simply unspeakable ... and speaking it from a position of authority recognized by everyone" (Metherd 8). Perhaps most important is Hamid's emphasis on swaying from the "lifelessness of purity" to reach a thoroughly more interesting, and perhaps more truthful, world view.

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