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The View from Somewhere: Ambivalence in The Fiction of Jonathan Franzen and Amitav Ghosh

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand experiential ambivalence in the later works of American novelist Jonathan Franzen (1959-) and Indian writer of English Amitav Ghosh (1956-). Both authors note that there is an uncertainty and resistance inherent to our experience of the world, as rooted in contested notions of the past. In Franzen's *The Corrections* (2000), *Freedom* (2013), and *Purity* (2016), a disturbing picture of an America at the mercy of financial markets, rampant surveillance technology, and cultural trauma caused by 9/11 emerges. In Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and the *Ibis* Trilogy (the final volume published in 2016), we also find individuals reaching for an authentic cultural memory only to find such memory imbued with the experience of the British Empire, which often works actively against India's attempts at self-understanding and self-identity. Following the tenets that Peter Boxall has set out in his *Critical Introduction to Twenty-First Century Fiction*, I suggest that the first decades of the new millennium are unmoored from, yet still haunted by, the recent past. Experience and ideas become unsettled, rendering them transient and newly dependent upon liquid definitions of power, to borrow a term from Zygmunt Bauman. While the novels of Franzen and Ghosh address different aspects of contemporary existence and approach the implications of these issues from diametric positions, it is, I contest, a deliberate and positive mode of ambivalence which places these two authors and their writings in conversation with one another. Such modes of ambivalence find expression within intimate spheres of the individual subject (through revised notions of self and society), the self as a function of family, and those anxieties that impinge on individual liberty and, finally, that systemic institutions of knowledge that promote more flexible thinking about, and towards, the future.

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Introduction

"An Illegible Present": Ambivalence, Resistance, and the Novel

When Amitav Ghosh, a writer of Indian background, who writes predominantly in English, found out that his 2000 novel *The Glass Palace* was submitted, without his knowledge by his publishers to the 2001 Commonwealth Writer's Prize (then run by the Commonwealth Foundation), he wrote an open letter of polite protest to Sandra Vince, the Prize Manager of the Commonwealth Foundation. In this letter Ghosh objected to being named the Eurasia regional winner and, therefore, by implication, a finalist for the prize.[1] Ghosh expands upon his objections to being associated with the prize in his letter but, in doing so, was careful to draw a fine line between noting that "[his] objections to the term 'Commonwealth Literature' are [his] alone", as well as tempering his criticism with a laudatory note, recognising that many of the individuals associated with the Commonwealth Prize, including previous recipients and judges are "writers whom [Ghosh] greatly admire[s]." Despite being in good company, Ghosh seems to have felt it appropriate to remove himself from consideration for the prize in order to uphold a certain set of principles and keeping in line with his public opinion.

Furthermore, Ghosh explicitly questions the genealogy of the term "Commonwealth," which he takes to represent a "disputed aspect of the past" and its continued assured presence as a prize of some literary repute (past winners of the Prize have included J. M. Coetzee and Salmon Rushdie, the lattermost who has been identified as a precursor to Ghosh's writing) does not inspire a future wherein these disputes might be challenged on a deeper level. Ghosh draws a telling, if ironic, comparison meant to highlight the problematic designation, as if the "familiar category" of English literature be renamed literature "of the Norman conquest." This observation sheds valuable

[1] Amitav Ghosh, "The Conscientious Objector", Outlook India, 19 March 2001.

light on how language, both in this particular example and throughout this thesis, often times embodies a singular and narrow set of concerns, which depends on questionable histories amplified in the present as fact. At the heart of Ghosh's critique, he is not only concerned with the precarious position of the English language, but also alludes to the ways in which such precariousness is maintained at the expense of other spectres and across other venues of knowledge. If language is not flexible, then it runs the real risk of alienating communicable human experiences.

These questions about colouring the past with an ambivalent understanding of what could be considered "colonial" history is paramount for Ghosh as he himself identifies this kind of dubious curation of cultural memory as central to *The Glass Palace* and other novels since. Anshuman A. Mondal has written extensively on Ghosh's oeuvre in light of the author's reluctance to participate in politics. This brand of reluctance naturally extends itself into an enriching textual ambivalence in his novels. For Mondal, Ghosh is continuously interested in "problematising the 'givenness' of the 'Western historiographical record.'"[2] Ghosh sees the term "Commonwealth" as one such means of "givenness," preserving the past which ignores "choices" and "judgments" that make possible a more nuanced understanding of the present.

In 2001, around the same time, as Ghosh was objecting to the nomination of *The Glass Palace*, the American writer Jonathan Franzen's third novel, *The Corrections,* won the National Book Prize. On the back of its commercial success (a far cry from his two previous novels) the novel was selected for Oprah Winfrey's book club, complete with a sticker of her book club affixed to the cover. Franzen was quoted as seeing the choice in a negative manner: "I see this book as my

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[2] Anshuman A. Mondal, "Allegories of Identity: "Postmodern" Anxiety and "Postcolonial" Ambivalence in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* and *The Shadow Lines*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 38 (2003), 19-36 (p. 20).

creation and I didn't want that logo of corporate ownership on it."[3] On the back of these comments, *The Corrections* was swiftly de-selected as part of her book club and Franzen himself was similarly disinvited to appear on her show. More than a decade later, when *Freedom* was published, Franzen and Oprah put aside their differences and there have been murmurs about how the whole debacle worked out so well for Franzen that he must have masterminded the entire affair as a publicity stunt. In an interview with Matthew Sweet in the *Independent*, Franzen remained adamant that the "media image" of him was "ridiculous," attempting to paint him as some "raging ivory tower elitist" and that such a set of assumptions could only have come about if journalists continued to quote him "very selectively."[4]

While many critics have refrained from commenting in depth about the row, the most balanced observation comes, in my view, from Colin Hutchinson, who explains the event using a series of ambivalences as he portrays Franzen's disengagements from social critique and high postmodernism in the style of difficult books by William Gaddis, one of young Franzen's literary heroes.[5] In an essay disavowing the literary value of difficult books, Franzen eschews Gaddis as representative of what he calls "the Status model," in which the difficulties inherent to postmodern works attest to their value. Starting from *The Corrections*, Franzen reinvents himself as the bringer of the "Contract" model, an approach to the novel that prioritises the presence of his reader.[6] For Hutchinson, the unease surrounding Franzen's celebrity status is in some ways a seismic event, pitting Franzen and his inherent masculine, majoritarian privilege against the likes of Oprah, whose

[3] Matthew Sweet with Jonathan Franzen, "Jonathan Franzen: The truth about me and Oprah", *The Independent*, 17 January, 2002.
[4] Sweet, *ibid*.
[5] Colin Hutchinson, "Jonathan Franzen and the Politics of Disengagement", *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 50 (2009), 191-207 (p. 191).
[6] Jonathan Franzen, *How to Be Alone* (London: HarperPerennial, 2004), p. 240. Subsequent Citations abbreviated as *HBA*.

whole branding is based on challenging white, male privilege and a positive understanding of how minor identities are represented in the media. Hutchinson points out that the same situation could equally represent the difficulties faced by a marginalised intellectual presence (here embodied by Franzen), who finds himself, conversely, oppressed by corporate and mainstream interests as upheld by a television personality like Oprah. While Franzen's dilemma does not carry as much weight as the historical obligations felt by Ghosh, what these two examples illustrate together is that ambivalence is broadly felt as a defining characteristic in the early decades of the new millennium. While the Commonwealth Prize and being deselected from Oprah's book club are not of the same order of magnitude, they are both addressing the same issue.

As Samuel Weber notes, ambivalence is never far from the study of literature. The ambiguity which perpetuates this uncertainty of discourse can again be found in language and the cultural influences that it carries. While asked to participate in a multi-disciplinary conference hosted by the *Institut for die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* (in English: The Institution of the Human Sciences of Man) in Vienna, Weber is struck by the "unusual" phrasing, describing it as nearly a "neologism," a recent word yet to enter common conversation.[7] Weber compares the German term phrase, *Humanwissenschaften* ("human sciences") as an attempt to answer to the French *les sciences humaines*, a term he notes blooms out of poststructuralist thinking. Eventually, Weber circles back to the category of the "human" and what it represents in relation to the sciences. The English notion of the "humanities," Weber writes, does not "correspond" to the idea as espoused by their German and French counterparts; instead, the English idea of the human is in a constant state of flux due to negotiating the relationship that the human condition has to what

[7] Samuel Weber, "Ambivalence, the Humanities, and the Study of Literature", *Diacritics*, 15 (1985), 11-25 (p. 11).

Weber calls "practical, social, and civic virtues," that are directly shaped by art (presumably also crafted by human hands):

> The English idea of the Humanities is not centered upon the Spirit, not at least in the sense of Hegel or of Dilthey, nor is it focused primarily upon 'the life of the mind.' Rather, it is closer to the ideal of Renaissance Humanism, which in turn is related to the Roman origins of the word in the emphasis it places upon the more practical, social and civic virtues felt to derive from the cultivation and mastery of certain "arts."[8]

Keeping Weber's designation in mind and understanding modes of existence and experience as being at the mercy of a conflicted definition of the human, my thesis juxtaposes Franzen and Ghosh as authors whose literary output seemingly could not be more different. Franzen has billed himself first as an ambitious social novelist in the stages of his early career, but has since matured to become a dramatic storyteller of character focused stories.

However, by understanding their point of departure as a shared unhappiness with structural narratives of the time, there are a number of striking similarities between the two writers and their works, which are respectively a reaction, and a proposed solution, to surviving a world that increasingly trades on its "illegibility."[9]

Peter Boxall's recently published monograph surveying the course of twenty-first-century literature so far explicitly addresses this problem. Boxall makes the argument throughout his book that it is the "shape of our culture" which is at stake, as the "privilege of the human" -- or the ambivalent needs of the human for unchangeable structure and associated modes of knowledge -- now lessens the possibility of the new and different and increases the uncertainty of our time.[10]

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[8] Weber, p. 12
[9] Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 2.
[10] Boxall, p. 85.

Difference and innovation have now been displaced to the fringe of human experience, marginalised as the once homely and familiar concepts of time, self, and society are increasingly impossible to understand without a degree of self-alienation:

> . .[T]he increasing frictionless synchronisation of global culture rather than delivering an increasingly secure sense of. . . homeliness in our space and time, has delivered us to a condition in which the time. . .is out of joint, in which the narrative forms we have available seem no longer to be well adapted to articulating our experience of passing time.[11]

Boxall's statement carefully articulates what it means to live in a world of instant gratification and other means of immediacy. The speedy technological advances of the last twenty years, such as the various ways of preserving one's digital self, have become inextricable from our physical selves and are largely responsible for this sense of distance. The sudden externalisation and the availability of outsourced, notions of subjectivity are yet other ways to ostracise ourselves from the past. For Boxall, this failure to exercise experiential judgement points to the structural limits of the new millennium. These precise limits are keenly felt in the works of both Franzen and Ghosh. In Boxall's estimation, the shift of the new century is towards uniformity in order to ensure the continued survival of the human as the apex definition of identity and, more broadly - through how we continue to perceive the world around us -- is a detriment to new experiences. As Boxall rightly implies, current narrative forms are made redundant and ambivalent in that they are no longer suited to new experiences.

My thesis conceives of Ghosh and Franzen's recent novels, written in the twenty-first century, as qualifying to some degree how such limitations shape and continue to contribute to deep-seated ambivalences. As Franzen points out in another one of his personal essays, "We live

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[11] Boxall, p. 15.

in a country obsessed with lists."[12] Lists are a way of an individual or a collective consciousness pruning itself of excess (often knowledge that disagrees with what is already known) in order to preserve a certain way of knowing in the wake of trauma. The idea of trauma and a fresh urgency for order in one's life in the aftermath of this chaos is embodied in the list. Instead of simply drifting along *somewhere* as a result of such negative experiences, it is only human instinct that *somewhere* must be imbued with *specificity* so that the world does not seem so broad or foreign. Stephen J. Burn reads this unmistakably Franzanian statement into Franzen's second novel *Strong Motion* (1992), which is written before the turn of the century, but is anticipatory of many of the issues that his later novels address. In an attempt to seek meaning from chaos, the seismologist, Renee Seitchek, organises her bookshelf to create meaning in the aftermath of a series of large-scale earthquakes. These quakes were generated by the malfeasance of Sweeting-Aldren, a fact that Seitchek herself uncovered. Renee, as if anticipating the earthquakes uses the activity of sorting to find a system that offers some sort of narrative to her life. She sorts through children's fiction like *Watership Down* to writing by the Buddhist philosopher D. T. Suzuki, the latter which is worth mentioning because it is the only mention of nonfiction on Renee's list. Furthermore, the mention of Suzuki points to a recurring lack of engagement with non-white, non-middle-class, and non-Western modes of thought in Franzen's novels. Throwing out these books and Suzuki, Burn argues, is Renee's attempt to "cleanse herself of the contamination of her previous personal failures."[13] The fact that Burn figures Renee's culling of her bookshelf as an admission of personal failure is significant because there does not seem to be any future possibility for Renee to learn from her previous self. This impossibility also manifests itself quite clearly at the end of *The*

[12] Qtd. in Stephen J. Burn, *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism* (London and New York, NY: Continuum, 2008), p. 28.
[13] Burn, p. 29

Corrections, when the matriarch Enid Lambert decides that all of her corrections had been "for naught" and that she is going to "make some changes to her life."[14] Enid's decision comes at the end of a long list of "corrections" in the final chapter of the novel. Not only is she last on a list, full of recurrent hopeful recoveries otherwise enacted by Enid's grown children, one wonders, as James Annesley does, whether any meaningful changes could be made in Enid's life as to not disturb the "narrow determinism" which guides the novel to its close.[15]

Burn further notes the presence of a list that is central to Alfred Lambert's experience with Alzheimer's. In Alfred's list, he doles out blame to everyone by "catalogu[ing] the faults of humanity" and names "God" and "frivolous, easygoing townspeople" (*C*, 244). For Burn, Alfred's list is "a temporary solace for his ills."[16] For Renee and Alfred, and also Enid who does not get her own list, then, there emerges an understanding that the presence of a list and their ownership of such a catalogue is but an interim solution to their personal sense of loss. In *Freedom,* the presence of the list takes on a much more insidious, but mostly positive connotation in its assumed permanence that is absent in Renee's and Alfred's lists so that Patty may continue to live her life without grappling with an overbearing sense of loss. In the opening paragraph of Patty Berglund's third-person autobiography, she provides this list:

> If Patty weren't an atheist, she would thank the good Lord for school athletic programmes, because they basically saved her life and gave her a chance to realise herself as a person. She is especially grateful to Sandra Mosher at North Chappaqua Middle School, Elaine Carver and Jane Nagel at Horace Greeley High School, Ernie and Rose Salvatore at the

[14] Jonathan Franzen, The Corrections (London: Fourth Estate, 2002), 653. All following quotations hereafter cited in-text as *C*.
[15] James Annesley, "Market Corrections: Jonathan Franzen And The 'Novel Of Globalisation'", *Journal Of Modern Literature*, 29 (2006), 111-128 (p. 126).
[16] Burn, p. 29.

> Gettysburg Girls Basketball Camp, and Irene Treadwell at the University of Minnesota. It was from these wonderful coaches that Patty learned discipline, patience, focus, teamwork, and the ideals of good sportsmanship that helped make up for her lack of self-esteem.[17]

This list serves a double purpose, one to clearly outsource Patty's upbringing to her coaches (rather than her family); this denotes an understanding of the lack of support she receives, and undoubtedly feeds into her lack of self-confidence. There is no mention of Patty's biological family in this list, but rather than framing it around the unfortunate absence of her parents and siblings, the paragraph is brimming with gratitude about the presence of her coaches and notably, even God in whom she does not believe. The second, we note the lack of male influences in a sport that, while segregated, still heavily marginalises its female counterpart, but Patty is still able, by virtue of this list, to discover her own place and render her feelings of loss and inadequacy as secondary in her life.

Lists also occupy an ambivalent position throughout Ghosh's fiction. In contrast with Franzen's sense of lists as a preservation of established order, Ghosh's uses lists either to point towards a transformative nature of the novel as written in English, or to point towards chaotic and disorderly possibilities. In the second volume of the *Ibis* trilogy, *River of Smoke*, which is seen as a tangential sequel (as the first and third volumes are more connected to one another), Ghosh provides a catalogue of Indian foods that would not look out of place on the menu of a curry house. As Christopher Rollason notes, in his comments on *River of Smoke,* Ghosh continues to expand on his interest in how the presence of other languages (often languages subjugated and lessened by the British Empire) destabilise the English language including Cantonese and Mauritian Creole. English, in *River of Smoke* and also other volumes, is what Rollason terms "matricial." Such a term expands the possibility of the novel in English:

[17] Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), p. 29. Subsequent citations given in-text as *F*.

> I use the word "matricial" deliberately to describe the book's English, for the matrix of this novel is provided by a third-person, extradiegetic narratorial voice that speaks the International Standard English of our day. At the same time, that matricial English is frequently, though not invariably sprinkled with words and phrases from Asian languages. Meanwhile, [the] dialogue. . .[is] often in either a visibly Indianised English or in a tongue that strictly speaking is not English at all. . . [18]

English in this way takes a secondary role and works in tandem with those marginalised identities, which Ghosh endeavours to represent rather than to replace or silence. On the menu of a kitchen boat that serves Indian food, "reassuringly familiar" items are found, with "real masalas and recognisable oils," a "chicken curry" and sometimes "pakoras and puris" (*RS*, 303), but Rollason comments that "tawa-fried fish," or fish prepared in a type of frying pan and "puris" are items that might bemuse the non-Indian reader. Something similar occurs with Ghosh's use of a sartorial list. When Bahram, a well-off Parsi trader is getting dressed in order to meet Napoleon Bonaparte, unfamiliar terms like "salwar" or "Acehnese leggings" join the very recognisable "pajamas" and "turban" (*RS*, 216). For Rollason, Ghosh's strategy of "connoting that-which-is-Indian through lexical terms" is a way that non-Indian readers might be assimilated into Ghosh's enriched tapestry of a much lesser-told history.[19] Ghosh's lists as present in *River of Smoke* signify reconciliation of different cultures rather than merely curating lists of a specific, narrow, understanding which would cut off those less familiar parts of the world.

The one instance in which a list in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* resembles Franzen's attempt to catalogue the self occurs when Kanai, a city businessman who runs a translation bureau in Delhi

[18] Christopher Rollason, ""Apparently Unbridgeable Gaps in Language: Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke* and an Emerging Global English?", Dr. Christopher Rollason: Bilingual Culture Blog, 23 September 2011.
[19] Rollason, *ibid*.

lists every language that he speaks only to note that there is "no money in Bengali literature"; and yet this particular pronouncement is itself undermined by the presence of the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke's influential cycle of poems *The Duino Elegies*; the *Elegies*, which lends *The Hungry Tide* a sense of structure argues strongly against Kanai's priorities, as languages are valued only for their alleged economic value. It is only later that he comes to realise the error of his ways.

The Duino Elegies is a form of poetry that engages with a world that no longer aligns with the expectations that have long being associated with facets of human experience. In the opening lines of the "First Elegy," the speaker of the poem places the consciousness of an all-seeing animal as more capable than our own at present, as our gaze is marred by our own expectations of how we ought to be living. The animal has no such expectation or inner turmoil and can tell that "we are not comfortably at home in our translated world."[20] Ambivalence and associated contradictions that have resulted from this discomfort have led me to draw on a wide range of influences, who have shared this discomfort. The ideas and works of authors such as Kafka and the Viennese satirist Karl Kraus, anchored by the comments of the thinker Walter Benjamin all draw from interbellum social unrest. The French thinker Gilles Deleuze and his collaborator the psychoanalyst Felix Guattari have collected these marginalised affectations under the late capitalist umbrella of "deterritorialisation." Other influences that have found purchase in these ideas, availing themselves to us in the works of both Franzen and Ghosh, include more familiar sources such as Charles Dickens (whose influence is especially prevalent in Franzen's *Purity*) and Shakespeare. Ghosh and Franzen are also duly influenced by their contemporaries, such as the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty for Ghosh and fellow writers David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers for Franzen.

[20] Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (Boston: HarperCollins Publishing, 2004), p. 206. Subsequent citations given in-text as *HT*.

That Franzen and Ghosh are both struggling with the inefficacy of expression is signalled by their different attempts to render lists in their fiction meaningful even as the twenty-first century threatens their validity as a means to order our experience and make sense of the world. Lists, as a means by which to orient one's perspective, is well-documented by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, in his influential book *Liquid Modernity*. Unlike traditional notions of postmodernism, which see the disintegration of grand narratives, as suggested by Jean-Francois Lyotard, Bauman argues that the current state of the world is "liquid" rather than "solid."[21] Bauman's position attempts to avoid the trap of the binary (or its lack) by emphasising a liquidity that takes account of the speed of technological advancements and the subsequent inadequacy of linear models of time to efficiently contain the possibility of eminent authority. Boxall sees Bauman's notion of "power. . .becom[ing] extraterritorial" as fundamental to understanding the twentieth-century novel.[22] Accordingly, I have organised my chapters into discrete sites of struggle, where ambivalence is read as a literary device that permits the limits of the human to be repositioned through understanding new experiences without familiar referents. Consequently, what is addressed in my thesis in relation to the fiction of Franzen and Ghosh echoes the concerns found in Bauman's Liquid Modernity. These concerns are threefold: identity, freedom (in the context of familial emancipation), and different modes of knowledge.

For both Franzen and Ghosh, this ambivalence arrives first and foremost in the mode of language. Language is not only the cornerstone of any literary work, but also a tool by which individuals communicate with one another. In recognising the significance of ambivalence, both authors understand that language also plays an imminent role in upholding certain prejudices and

[21] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London: Polity, 1999), p. 3.
[22] Boxall, p. 4

narrow-minded perspectives. After offering an outline of what they each understand to be the limitations of language, these limitations are then applied to names and first impressions, which I argue is the starting point to all conceptions of identity. Following that, I expand on the ambivalence of names and connect them with certain challenges that are particular to Ghosh's 2006 novel, *The Hungry Tide.* The novel is chiefly about the nature of language, both incommunicable and communicable, and develops a keen understanding of how language is connected to human experience. Ghosh's understanding of ambivalence is most unusual because he does not fall into the usual traps of "postcolonial" experience and instead uses the plight of marginalised individuals, such as the illiterate fisherman, Fokir, to underscore the deracination and deterritorialisation experienced by minority literature figures to point up a universality of experience.

Conversely Franzen, as an American writer who is indelibly influenced by middle-class ideals, is encumbered by a different sense of marginalisation. His perceived limitations are read as encapsulating the difficulty recently faced by authors who do not have the support of a marginalised position from which to offer effective criticism; this noted absence leaves Franzen in a difficult state when it comes to espousing an opinion which is often criticised as not expressing an opinion for the sake of its subversiveness. It also is used as a way to affirm the fact that he possesses the platform that is in turn readily denied to those who remain in need of a way to express these very criticisms. As we have seen from his very public row with Oprah, Franzen's identity as a member of what could be construed as the stereotypical "middle-class intelligentsia" has caused controversy. As a result, Franzen actively faces another form of institutional backlash that is clearly at play in all of his novels since *The Corrections* (2001). This backlash takes form by using Franzen's own perceived privileges to invalidate and, thusly, silence the voice of the middle-class

critic. The Lamberts, Berglunds, and even Pip's complicated family in Franzen's latest novel, *Purity*, all seem to impinge upon certain privileges, whether the privileges in question are financial or intellectual, usually a combination of both. This perceived sort of oppressive silence further leads to certain experiences to be incommunicable. We can see this very clearly in Patty Berglund's third-person autobiography in *Freedom* and also its indebtedness to David Foster Wallace's 1998 short story, "The Depressed Person," in which the eponymous Depressed Person struggles to understand her prevailing unhappiness.[23] Unlike Ghosh, who uses marginalisation to reach for a universal experience, Franzen's writings appear to be marginalised by the way others perceive his attitudes to universality and these types of misunderstandings plague many of his characters.

The second chapter follows on from the analysis of the deterritorialised self and extends the same deterritorialisation to the construct of family, one of the self's most formative understanding of society. In the works of both Ghosh and Franzen, "traditional" notions of family —by which I mean structures that are either sanctioned by law or cultural norms—are deconstructed to showcase a degree of ambivalence. This ambivalence is necessarily present because individuals are consistently crippled by versions of themselves as enacted upon them by others; the same applies for family as each member of the family seems to impinge upon its own familial unit their own expectation of what the family must stand to offer to the individual as a son, mother, or father. Furthermore, the disintegration of the family is possibly much more keenly felt by the individual because the family is the first instance of knowable social experience. Both authors recognise the concept of family as a "zombie" category wherein evidence for such connections is no longer self-evident; in the event they are taken for granted, familial bonds are quickly replaced and displaced by more practical concerns, chief among them purchasing a

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[23] David Foster Wallace, "The Depressed Person", *Harper's Magazine*, (1998), pp. 57-64. All subsequent in-text citations given as "DP".

comfortable life by whatever means necessary.[24] The idea of family seems to have become an extension of a capitalist system. The moral sensibilities usually imparted by the parent-to-child relationship assumes a secondary position in this new order, to ensure that the continuity of an upcoming generation each held hostage by the idea of capitalist gain. This in turn leads to an upheaval of perspective, as traditional families are presented as inextricable from political views, personal ambitions and beliefs, and bound by legislation. To take it one step further, families are also viewed, in light of this, as having degenerated from a cornerstone of social morality to an imperative, fluid tool without confines in order to uphold a collective consumerist mentality; this means that families in their private sphere are no longer able to effectively speak to their children's upbringing when it comes to imbuing them with a moral sense.

I also claim, after an overview of these families in crisis, that these seemingly disparate circumstances can be understood via the disintegration of family in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. As René Girard argues, Lear is a premier example of a "crisis of degree."[25] Degree and "intense human conflict" are at the heart of most of Shakespeare, and in the case of *Lear*, this crisis illuminates itself when the elderly Lear foregoes his fatherly duties in order to fulfill a selfish need for continuous authority.[26] This action turns his daughters, Goneril and Regan, into not Lear's daughters, but independent agents of desire, competing not for their father's affection, but for Lear's authority and the representations of such power (i.e. his kingdom), resulting in what Girard calls "a mimesis of desire." Only Cordelia, who remains a daughter to the bitter end, is punished by death, as she refuses to take part in the mimesis. In the novels of Jonathan Franzen, this

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[24] Bauman, p. 6
[25] René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 175.
[26] Girard, *ibid*.

translates into a conformist, narrow perspective in which socio-economic superstructures rob individuals of meaning and ambition.

However, where critics might see Franzen's stance as narrow-minded and privileged, this privilege gains a new profundity when read alongside marginalised family structures in Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy, where individuals are oppressed by various pressures of belonging to a family. Most tellingly, Franzen's idée fixe of a family imprisoned by its own making comes true in the final volume of Ghosh's trilogy. Here, colonial authority and the greed it sanctions, disembody the newfound family of the Ibis's ship-siblings, which is itself hard won by rejecting authoritative models of family rooted in antiquated ideas of nationalism. I close with some further reflections on the institution of marriage, exemplified by both Ghosh and Franzen, as a complex extension of familial difficulty.

Throughout the first two chapters, I have suggested that freedom remains a personal ambition, sometimes impacted by one's obligation towards family. The third chapter looks at a virtue that is made possible by ambivalence, namely freedom. Freedom remains an ambivalent and contrary goal with inextricable ties to problematic discourses such as race, sex, and class. In the three examples I offer various types of freedom are underlined by three very different iterations of maternal anxiety, each exemplified by incidents of excessive masturbation. This anxiety then abides by a concatenation of circumstances which narrows the definition of freedom. Freedom, then, is made ambivalent being informed by not just by lesser virtues and prejudices, but also by innate anxiety which is brought on by a disdain for difference. In the case of Zachary Reid, an American sailor with a freewoman mother in Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy, he willingly gives up his freedom of experience in order to inhabit a narrower freedom confined by language and outdated sartorial rules. Zachary is told to become a *Sahib* (an individual of gentleman standing) by a group

of sailors, but in experiencing the freedoms of excess, he in turn sets himself up for a different kind of failure: the failure that comes with being ordinary and being unable to connect with others any longer. His freedom is then ruled by greed and material wealth, which impoverishes him as an individual.

The obstacles to freedom as embodied by Franzen's Joey Berglund (*Freedom)* and Andreas Wolf (*Purity*) are presented on a localised, contemporary, scale, rather than the metahistorical approach offered by Ghosh in Zachary's case. However, it is still telling that Ghosh's and Franzen's construction of a certain mode of masculine identity is, inextricably, tied to a generalised anxiety which has maternal roots. Unlike the more obvious notion and well-documented struggle of paternal anxiety, it is the long silence of the mother, or indeed her over-affection (or her desire to overcome her identity as a mother) that paralyses the son.

Finally, the concluding chapter examines the possibility of ambivalent thought. I address here Ghosh's and Franzen's unease towards the academy. Ghosh and Franzen seem to find common ground in pointing out the precarious nature of higher education and its academics in their respective works. Piya from *The Hungry Tide,* the well-read Raja-turned-convict Neel Rattan in the *Ibis* trilogy (who is not strictly speaking an academic but fits within the privileged notion of having access to an education not readily afforded to others), as well as Chip Lambert in *The Corrections* and Andreas Wolf in his associative role as the son of an affluent English professor in East Germany, are each hampered in different ways by systemic and bureaucratic privilege. It is this same privilege and stubbornness towards knowledge that calls for the tempering of ambivalence. In *The Hungry Tide*, this is demonstrated by Piya's lack of understanding towards the residents of a tide country village as she works to protect an endangered tiger. In *Freedom*, it has been pointed out that Walter and Lalitha's planned solution to overpopulation privileges a

single species of bird (the Cerulean Warbler) rather than the indigenous people. By understanding these patterns of thought as ambivalent and consequently flexible, we will be equipped to handle the challenges of the coming decades.

Chapter One
Views From Here and There: Navigating Identity and the Self

Introduction: Deterritorialised Subjects

In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, T. E. Lawrence remarks that there is a "certainty in degradation" of the human condition.[27] This certainty manifests itself today in a sense of ambivalence, implicit in ongoing debates about the tenets of identity and self-expression. This sense of ambivalence, of being neither here nor there, of compromising oneself in order to be better understood by others, becomes an especially critical tool in the hands of a "displaced" writer. In considering the novels of Amitav Ghosh and Jonathan Franzen together, I take a broad understanding of what it means to be displaced, and argue that ambivalence in the hands of a culturally displaced writer like the Indian writer Ghosh, and an author who sees himself as intellectually displaced, such as Franzen, becomes instrumental in scrying for a cohesive definition of identity in the beginning decades of the new millennium. While most of their views are diametrically opposed to one another, the works of Ghosh and Franzen, retrospectively, appear to suggest that the question of identity is incapacitated by the absence of descriptive language and further handicapped by a society that unconsciously recognises these limitations. In other words, we are not able to say what we mean because we no longer really recognise the world that we live in.

In a series of public essays regarding the curious lack of serious fiction around the issue of climate change, the Indian writer of English, Amitav Ghosh, notes that, although the environmental crisis has been part of our lives for a long time, the language used to describe such climatological disasters remains inadequate. Ghosh, the son of a diplomat and a housewife, has a very personal connection with the problem of climate change. He writes: "My parents were ecological refugees

[27] T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 581.

long before the term was invented."[28] They had to escape from their homeland of now-Bangladesh, on account of a change in the river that flooded their village in 1956, the year of Ghosh's birth.[29] This nomadic experience informs much of Ghosh's oeuvre and reinforces his dedication to the representations of marginalised experiences.

Several decades later, and on another continent, in 1988 the limitations of literary language performed another remarkable feat of separating man from his surroundings. This time, the fracture is a cultural one, at home in the upper echelons of middle-class intelligentsia rather than any far off "minor" natural calamity. The then twenty-nine-year-old budding American provocateur, Jonathan Franzen, had high hopes for both his literary career and the strength of his vision to spur his readers into action. However, Franzen's debut novel *The Twenty-Seventh City*, a sprawling tome about the corrupt workings of St. Louis, Missouri, became the antithesis of a "culturally engaging" social novel, spawning only "sixty reviews in a vacuum."[30] His vision became nearly synonymous with the parody of himself he presents in another piece of personal writing: "I am a fundamentally small and ridiculous person."[31]

These two disparate instances of language failing to uphold a vision of identity are further united by two pressing themes that have emerged in the works of both Franzen and Ghosh. The first is that both authors recognize a deterritorialising factor in language, which necessarily precludes the portrayal of certain experiences for the added validation of others, thus making them "minor." "Minor experiences," the crux of "minor literature" trades on its supposed distinctiveness as foregrounded by marginalisation. Writing about the works of Franz Kafka, Gilles Deleuze and

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[28] Amitav Ghosh. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 3.
[29] Ghosh, *GD*, p. 3. The year is misprinted in the essay; the essay misprints 1850s for the 1950s.
[30] Franzen, *A,* p. 61
[31] Jonathan Franzen, *The Discomfort Zone: A Personal History* (New York: Picador, 2007), p. 52. All subsequent citations abbreviated as *DZ*.

Felix Guattari note that minor literature must always be necessarily "political," "collective," and "effected with a co-efficient of deterritorialisation."[32] For Ghosh, his parents' plight is left defined by silence and the absence of appropriate terminology. They become displaced persons disavowed by both their geography and their language, a double-edged marginalised experience that continues to bear rich pickings in Ghosh's other works. In a similar vein, Franzen finds himself unable to link socially conscious words with socially active discourse, perhaps, to such a degree that becoming a writer trapped him by both the notion and reality of his own privilege. The cognizance of deterritorialisation (and its somewhat hopeful sibling reterritorialisation which works to reintegrate instances of deterritorialization) by Franzen and Ghosh has spurred them towards the shared literary register of ambivalence as they negotiate complex issues surrounding identity.

"Deterritorialisation" is a nomadic philosophy first put forward by Deleuze and Guattari. The term initially appeared in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* to describe the disintegration of the modern subject held captive by the confines of a capitalist society. As Mark Seems puts it, "deterritorialisation is the product of a subject understanding that he is alienated from society."[33] He is no longer seen as an individual with an essence and worthy of personhood, but instead as a cog in the capitalist machine. Albert Camus' narrator M. Meursault, from *The Stranger*, is a standout example of this difficulty; Meursault is a figure who has already comfortably retreated to the fringes of society. Cyril Connolly describes Meursault as "an *homme du midi*, and yet one who hardly partakes of the traditional Mediterranean culture."[34] Meursault is still not immune to the unhappiness of his boss for taking a Friday off to attend his mother's funeral

[32] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature,* translated by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 16.
[33] Cf. Mark Seem. "Introduction," *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004), p. xxiii
[34] Cyril Connolly, "Introduction to the First English Edition (1946)" in *The Outsider* by Albert Camus, translated by Stuart Gilbert (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p, 5.

and is unable to avoid the insidious presence of work culture. Meursault seems eager to pass on the blame to his departed mother: "Sorry sir, but it's not my fault, you know."[35] Meursault holds value only as an employee during the working week and is otherwise disposable. Nearly a century later, Franzen's parody of a modern academic in *The Corrections* shows that even the fringes of society are dominated by the question of financial means; penniless and unemployed, Chip Lambert is "without money . . . hardly a man" (*C,* 121). Zachary Reid, Ghosh's American sailor in the *Ibis* trilogy, comically worries about paying his exorbitant legal fees and fails to take any real comfort in the fact that he is cleared of murder charges against him in *Flood of Fire*, the final volume of the trilogy. The clearing of his name and his newfound freedom are quickly superseded by a debt of "almost one hundred rupees."[36] In all of these instances, money and the confines of one's identity are for all practical purposes the same.

It is not only the practical notion of acquiring capital that has made modern citizens less than themselves. Ambivalence and deterritorialization have much in common with one another and participate equally in prohibiting and avoiding change. The former has inevitable ties to a society which has little choice but to trade upon its inherent instability for the comfort of sameness. As we have already encountered (see introduction) Boxall's delineation of the uncertain nature of the twenty-first century novel, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre, that the present is nothing but "a disordered rumour" makes the construction of selfhood in an uncertain space doubly challenging when the deterritorialised self does not even retain the advantage of external objectivity.[37] On this point, Boxall reaches for the Italian critic Giorgio Agamben, who describes the task of being contemporary as neither here nor there: "those who truly belong to their time, are those who neither

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[35] Albert Camus, *The Outsider*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 13.
[36] Amitav Ghosh, *Flood of Fire* (London: John Murray, 2015), p. 10. All subsequent quotations cited in-text as *FF*.
[37] Qtd. in Boxall, p. 3.

fully coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands."[38] In both Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Franzen's *Freedom* which occupy much of the focus of this chapter, this uncanny distance between experience and the narrative of such experience plays a central role in understanding a newfound fragility when it comes to speaking about identity. Previously undisputed norms of knowing oneself and judging others become destablised and deterritorialised by the proximity of others. In a world which increasingly demands that selfhood is shed for the good of others, this collective alienation is magnified tenfold.

Hannah Arendt clearly articulates this crisis of selfhood and failure of language in her introduction to Walter Benjamin's essay collection *Illuminations*. Arendt observes - and rightly prefaces - the following statement with the proviso that the systemic nature of all categorical and hierarchical thought also contributes to most forms of social discrimination:

> The point is that in society everybody must answer the question of what he is – as distinct from who he is – which his role is and his function, and the answer of course can never be: I am unique, not because of the implicit arrogance, but because the answer would be meaningless.[39]

As Pip states in Franzen's *Purity*: "And never mind. . . specialness means nothing when every kid is special."[40] Specialness, or the idea of individuality is less of a concern when function takes a clear precedence over form in the recent decades of this century, not least of which because function translates into order keeps things as they are; the status quo remains a touchstone for human experience. Form here also becomes dependent upon function, suppressing uncertainty of our contemporary life. Ghosh and Franzen are two authors who recognise, in spite of important

[38] Qtd. in Boxall, *ibid*.
[39] Hannah Arendt, "Introduction" to *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, by Walter Benjamin, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 3.
[40] Jonathan Franzen, *Purity* (London: Fourth Estate, 2016), p. 233. All subsequent quotations cited in-text as *P.*

cultural and social differences, the difficulty of reconciling the question of who versus what as the crux of human consciousness. Both authors illuminate the path of ambivalence as a conduit for the reterritorialisation of language as a means to move forward.

In the following sections, I explicate Ghosh and Franzen's respective positions about language and its ambivalent position in literature, and then discuss that ambivalence in practice in terms of given names in *The Hungry Tide* and *Purity*. If names, as a paramount signifier of personal identity, are ambivalent and open to interpretation, then ambivalence is implicated in the question of representation. For Ghosh, this ambivalence is discussed in relation to issues of postcolonial representation, a subject from which he tries to distance himself; through Ghosh, we come to see that the problems surrounding postcolonialism are self-imposed, as an issue that betrays deep anthropological insecurity. For Franzen, a more generalised form of ambivalence takes the shape of a self-imposed silence, as a comment to such insecurity generated in comfortable "cul-de-sac" circles couched in all manners of privilege and where "niceness" remains an asset."[41]

"Whose Language?": Circumscribing Margins in Narrative

Following Jacques Derrida's "prophetic" notion that "Man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine. . .upon our horizon," Gayatri Spivak reminds us of the need to consider the context of the approaching horizon in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"[42] As the title of her piece implies, she asks, "to whom does [the horizon] belong?"[43]

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[41] Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), 8. All subsequent quotations are cited in-text as *F*. For more on Franzen's deployment of "niceness" in *Freedom*, see Philip Weinstein, *Jonathan Franzen and the Comedy of Rage* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), pp. 160-164 Weinstein concludes that this recurrent obsession with being nice is but a recognition that the protagonists of *Freedom* (Patty, Walter, and their friend Richard Katz) are only playing at nice, and unable to escape the reality that they are "supersaturated with competitive urges" (Weinstein, p. 163).

[42] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, edited by Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (New York, NY: University of Columbia Press, 1993), p. 87.

[43] Spivak, *ibid.*

Whose language do we speak? Ghosh's answer cleverly avoids Spivak's usual denotation that a subaltern voice must necessarily be impoverished and silenced, secondary to, and circumscribed, in all instances by an authoritative (usually Western) figure. Ghosh appears to indicate that language is for everyone, even those who do not subscribe to conventional means of language. Ghosh's inclusive attitude towards language means that he does not see himself as a representative of a minor voice. However, this does not prevent some critics, such as Lisa Fletcher, from arguing in terms of *The Hungry Tide*, that Ghosh is not only "speaking up about the Sundarbans, he is speaking up for the Sundarbans."[44] Fletcher's observation underlines two critical features of Ghosh's writing that, while he himself is ambivalent about the complexity behind his work in representing others, Ghosh still manages to capture the experiences of others in his narratives in a way that is recognisable to his readers. This reflective quality, then, enables others to see themselves in and through Ghosh's writing, which, in turn empowers their own narratives.

In an interview with Alex Tickell and Neluka Silva, Ghosh says that his works are not meant to "supplant the visions of others" and considers himself an "ethical" writer.[45] Anshuman A. Mondal offers this assessment of Ghosh's attitude towards language, which points away from the finer points of categorization between languages to encompass the possibilities of language as a whole. According to Mondal, Ghosh moves away from language as "a thematic" (which concentrates more on the categorisation of language) and towards a sense of language as a "metaphysic."[46] Mondal emphasises the unity of a system of language, rather than abiding by the

[44] Lisa Fletcher, "Reading the Postcolonial Island in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*", *Island Studies Journal*, 6 (2011), 3-16 (p. 3)
[45] Neluka Silva and Alex Tickell, with Amitav Ghosh, "Interview with Amitav Ghosh" in *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Brinda Bose (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003), p. 215.
[46] Anshuman A. Mondal, *Amitav Ghosh* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2007), p. 51.

categorization between languages, which then are necessarily differentiated into distinct definitions. Broadly, language under a more generalised metaphysic is no longer singularly limited to singular understandings, such as "English, Bengali, Arabic" and so on. Ghosh advocates evolving beyond the specifics of language to encompass a holistic system of knowledge. Language becomes a way of knowing the self and also represents the possibility of knowing someone else. In *The Hungry Tide*, the American scientist Piya rebukes the city translator Kanai, when he makes fun of her inability to communicate with Fokir, an illiterate, mostly mute crab fisherman. She points to the transformative power of this linguistic metaphysic: "There is already so much in common between us, it doesn't matter" (*HT*, p. 205).

The understanding of language-as-metaphysic enshrines Ghosh as someone who is aware of his personal relationship to displacement and this awareness seems to continue into his desire to understand the drive behind narrative assumptions. Ghosh's approach to categorisation and its claim to uphold the function of society thereof, is to question not only the validity of systems and labels based upon their face value, but also to point towards the instability of such assumptions by looking towards the margins and how these assumptions continue at the expense of repressing marginalised histories. This is a meditation upon difference and multiplicity that does not merely descend into appropriation and fetishization, as Neil Lazarus criticises Spivak for doing, by propping up difference under a rubric which prioritizes "difference" to the detriment of other points of literary context.[47]

To that end, the German Romantic poet Rainer Maria Rilke, whose *Duino Elegies* functions as an eminent intertext for *The Hungry Tide*, perfectly encapsulates the reality of a singular language and its consistent need for validation in a world that is increasingly devoted to the

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[47] Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 3.

understanding of singularities. Attuned to Rilke's sentiment, Ghosh uses the intrinsic dislocation of many of his third-world, marginalised characters, to his advantage and through them widens his perspective rather than trying to understand the limitations of writing from a marginalised perspective. In fact, Ghosh disparages such a self-imposed, narrow perspective. In the same interview cited above with Silva and Tickell, Ghosh expresses his dislike of so-called "minor," marginalised positions, and wonders how critics such as Homi Bhabha could stand to write from a position that privileges, in Ghosh's view, such marginalisations and have no choice but to become "the representation of a representation. . . it's like they have retreated into a house of mirrors."[48] A similar observation has also been made by Louis A. Renza about the shortfall of post-colonial approaches to minor literature. Renza contends that the distinction of minor literature does not aid its endeavour in actually becoming a minor literature as minor literature is meant to produce its own language, or to stand in reproach to more "official," "major" literatures. It is then entirely possible to perpetuate the continued isolation of minor literature while working towards the acceptance of minor literature. Renza warns that we run the risk of making a "minor literature" more "minor" as the criticism trades upon its outsider perspective.[49] The presence of a "major" minor literature necessitates the creation of lesser "minor" literatures.[50]

Brinda Bose is one critic who offers the following definition of deterritorialization as present in Ghosh's work and who remains sensitive to Ghosh's hesitation to be included among those authors who trade so heavily upon notions of marginalization; Bose acknowledges the ambivalence that characterizes an author resigned to deterritorialized language. Ghosh sees deterritorialization neither as a form of nostalgia (a "romantic detachment") nor, indeed, as a

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[48] Silva and Tickell, p. 216.

[49] Louis A. Renza, *"A White Heron" and the Question of Minor Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 35.

[50] Renza, *ibid*.

definition which presents a form of absence, a lack in which often drives modern society to be presented as "a cosmopolitan rootlessness."[51] Such "rootlessness" must be subtended by a presence which is only made possible by its minor origins. Bose notes that deterritorialisation is "peculiarly apt" to apply to Ghosh's work because Ghosh understands that which seems to privilege the enriching act of reterritorialisation over deterritorialisation. Bose asserts that "prior states of the homeland are not reducible to an imaginary origin."[52] In many cases, the search for straightforward origins collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. Ghosh uses the ambivalent undertone of deterritorialization to discover his own voice, undeterred by the usual obligations which normalise marginalised identity.

In order for an identity to be marginalized, we must understand its boundaries, and Ghosh makes clear that sometimes such boundaries are not so easily discerned. The etymology of the Sundarbans, where *The Hungry Tide* is largely set – rebuking familiar spectres of New Delhi and the United States – is a clear instance that language is vital and nonconformist to the needs of tourists and colonialist reduction. The Sundarbans is located in Lower Bengal on the Megha River and, as if to preface his etymological conundrum, Kanai's late Uncle Nirmal offers this compelling description of the landscape:

> There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometres inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily – some days the water tears away entire promontories and

[51] Brinda Bose, "Introduction", in *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Brinda Bose (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003), p. 30.
[52] Bose, *ibid*.

> peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before (*HT*, p. 7).

Unique to the swiftly changing geography of the area are a series of confluences that Nirmal refers to as "mohanas," a term in the native language that bears no direct translation, but also has no need of one, as the word, for Nirmal, already suggests "layers of beguilement" (*HT*, p. 7). The Sundarbans embodies ambivalence through words and the local language. While Nirmal observes that there is "no prettiness here to invite the stranger in," most of the world knows the area as the Sundarbans, which translates to "the beautiful forest" (*HT*, 7). Nirmal further contemplates the possibility of the Sundarbans being derived from *sundari*, a common species of mangrove trees.

Nirmal lastly notes a possible etymology not found in Bangla itself, but within a meaning lifted from the "record books of Mughal emperors." The record indicates that the Sundarbans have a connection with the bhati, the tide. The local name "tide country" takes its name in reverence of one particular tide, the "ebb-tide" which allows for the odd miracle of the high tide "falling. . . to give birth to the forest" (*HT*, p. 8). Nirmal shows a clear preference for the origins of the tide country, not for its seeming authenticity as it is in widespread use with the natives, but for the metaphor of birth and creation that is inherent within the description; birth holds true to possibility and rejects demarcations set by human oppression. The tide, bound by no other characteristic save for change, is the only etymology capable of encompassing the other two meanings. The flood is able to swallow the trees and give birth to the forest once more. These marginalised, localised, meanings serve to undercut colonial presence, but also still allows for its ambivalent existence.

If margins are the starting point of Ghosh's postcolonial project, then the margins are the idealised end point for Franzen. As Jeremy Green aptly puts it about Jonathan Franzen and his well-documented struggles with public perception: "those in the middle desperately search for the

margins."[53] Similarly, Colin Hutchinson notes that the "white, middle-class, white male author is in crisis," and proceeds to argue that such a label, once applied to Don DeLillo, is now passed onto Franzen. Franzen himself confirms the passing of such a baton as he writes to DeLillo, despairingly about the muddled state of the social novel. In an e-mail correspondence to Philip Weinstein, Franzen puts the idea of the holistic self into question, as if the idea of a fractured self would better allow him to write from a marginalised position: "I am a divided person; I have multiple selves."[54] While these various selves are put into place to serve different functions in Franzen's life both as a public authorial figure and as a private citizen, the curated existence of these somewhat separate selves only points to the possibility of a holistic self, and yet do not guarantee its existence. We are selves in conflict, subject to continuous discomfort and Franzen's multiple selves underline -- in the modern human -- a sense of loss. Weinstein connects this ambivalent sense of self to vacillating observations that Franzen makes about his first marriage. Weinstein quotes the following from *The Kraus Project*:

> That we do things that we're not aware of doing; that we often, and without hypocrisy, say the opposite of what we really mean. . .because a motive is irrational doesn't mean it makes no sense, that we strenuously deny precisely the things that are the truest about us. . .we so often unaccountably sabotage ourselves. . . And I went ahead and did a thing that makes no sense to me now: I married somebody I was unlikely to stay married to.[55]

Weinstein puts it this way, regarding the restrictions upon language as inherent to the craft itself rather than a sense of connecting language to its craftsman; language becomes not instrumental towards communicability, but rather to preserve a sense of unease:

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[53] Jeremy Green, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 89.
[54] Weinstein, p. 13.
[55] Jonathan Franzen, *The Kraus Project* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), p. 215.

> Language appears. . . not as a truth telling resource, but as an estranged medium, manipulated by its users, incapable of accurately re-presenting what it purports to represent. To make its estrangement appear, Franzen need only bug it – make it rebound on itself, reveal its reliance on predictable cliché. Only those who have grasped the conventional heart of language are capable of exploiting range of deployment.[56]

In many of Franzen's novels, Franzen seems to latch onto a distanced sort of language to ensure the strangeness of language's presence in the lives of his characters. In *Freedom,* Patty Berglund's sprawling third-person autobiography, which makes up at least a quarter of *Freedom*, the language is twice removed. Patty is neither an authoritative *I*-figure, who commands the attention of her readers, nor, as we will see in a discussion about her rape, a *you*, a sympathetic character made to affectively grab at her "Reader." Her language is impersonal, in the third-person, with curious meta-interruptions such as "the autobiographer is mindful of how dull it is to read about someone else's drinking, but sometimes it's pertinent to the story" (*F,* p. 65*)* and "this was not an interesting or plot-advancing thing to have said" (*F*, p. 74). These two tangents, Weinstein notes, speak more to "Franzen's need to get on with his novel" and erodes Patty's agency in telling her own story. Walter, her husband, also experiences shades of this as he rages against the fact that "there is no controlling narrative: he seemed to himself a reactive pin-ball" (*F*, p. 318). Franzen's meta-interruptions demarcate Walter's inability to harness language to rediscover and anchor himself as a person of meaning. As such, Franzen's characters are speaking for themselves, but they are intentionally deterritorialized from their own narratives. By embodying the white male author in crisis, Franzen seems to affirm the Derridean notion that a horizon where language is overtaking the human possibility of expression is imminent. However, it must be accounted for that Franzen

[56] Weinstein, p. 51.

himself remains ambivalent to such a crisis because it affords him the advantage of continuing to write from a minor position.

The seeming lack and ambivalent distance which continues to hold through much of Franzen's novels is on full display in a telling moment in *Freedom*. Jessica Berglund is trying to connect with Bengali-born Lalitha, her father's new assistant at work by telling her parents' friend Richard Katz that she (Jessica) "knows quite a bit about Indian regional cooking. Because a lot of my friends in college were Indian?" (*F*, p. 353). Franzen painstakingly emphasises practicality as a key aspect of Jessica's character as other members of her family are stuck between versions of themselves that they dislike. By contrast, Jessica is supposedly a well-rounded young woman brought up with just the appropriate amount of attention from her parents and as such her quarrels with the world and those around her start with other people. Lalitha's response to Jessica's gesture of friendliness is that she "couldn't even cook an egg" (*F*, p. 353). Jessica's ignorance which leads her to conflate knowledge about regional cooking and having friends is the invariably shallow affectation of someone in the throes of a liberal arts education, an experience which Franzen remains keen to ironise.

In attempting to understand Lalitha's culture, it would appear that she has none, outside of being a product of the American melting pot. Lalitha's lack of culture outside of what is available to her in turn-of-the-century America counts against her. Jessica's ignorance is superseded by Lalitha's lack of connection to her Bengali heritage and this nod towards culinary discord places Franzen away from the familiarity and connection of Ghosh's Indian menus; moreover, Lalitha is seen as mostly unsympathetic, as her main role in the Berglund household is chiefly that of a homewrecker. Similarly, the sartorial is also disconnected as Richard Katz, who fancies himself an admirer of women, picks up on Lalitha's accent: "subtle subcontinental. . . percussive, no-her

face is everrynonsense" (*F*, p. 209). Katz also surveys Lalitha's body, "hoping [she] would prove to be big in the butt or thick in the thighs" (*F*, 211). Katz's desire to catalogue Lalitha into a certain class of attractiveness or even to relegate her into the confines of plainness, is a jealous response to Lalitha's lack of interest in him. Both food and clothing, instead of offering Franzen a position of capacity, work to marginalise him as someone who essentially places blame on characters from other cultures who do not have experiences to align with their appearance. Yet this ambivalent pattern in Franzen's work is revealing in itself, because as Jesus Blanco Hidalga points out, most of the antagonists who appear in Franzen's novels occupy either end of the social spectrum, from either the very poor Appalachian farmers symbolised by Coyle Mathis, or the members of the upper-middle-class (sometimes of dubious Jewish origin) like Howard, the father of Joey's roommate.[57] Franzen's favoured identifier, that of the middle class to which he himself belongs, manages to stay above the fray.

"Is That Your Real Name?": On Expectations and Uncertainty

One thing that is clear in the fictions of Ghosh and Franzen is that they are both interested in the dubious nature of first impressions I argue in this section that Franzen and Ghosh reveal in their own way, the name of an individual as an ambivalent signifier which sometimes gives credence to unhelpful assumptions about another person. Furthermore, a name is used as a way of foregrounding an individual's identity, or the identity of a certain place; it is relied upon as a label of introduction and offers a perspective, rightly or wrongly, through which the individual must be seen and judged. Yet the notion of names failing to provide an accurate representation of either a

[57] Jesus Blanco Hidalga, *Jonathan Franzen and the Romance of Community: Narratives of Salvation* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 30-33.

self or a place, as we have already seen from the explication of the tide country's etymology, is rather a commonplace experience.

The ensuing confusion is mostly due to the multiplicities of language, as described by Walter Benjamin in "On Language as Such and the Language of Man." While Benjamin asserts that man "communicates his mental being (in so far that it is communicable) by naming all other things" and also observes that by identify[ing] naming language with language is to rob linguistic theory of its deepest insights. -- It is therefore the linguistic being of man to name things."[58] In trying to preserve language and assure its relevance to quotidian life, names are downgraded to a generalised cohesive glue meant to waylay an experience of "alteriority" as given to names.[59] Remarking upon the question of representation in Benjamin's personal writings, Gerhardt Richter describes Benjamin as "a self that remains to be defined."[60] Even at just a cursory glance, names are given an impossible task: to take up the difficult mantle of judge and jury and to traverse this lacuna in a singular vein. At best, this undue pressure renders the name as a degraded, often unreliable signifier of identity, sometimes even becoming an instrument of irony which works against accruing a reliable understanding of any given individual.

Names similarly mislead and complicate the main trio of protagonists in *The Hungry Tide*. Unlike Benjamin, who only seems to imply that the naming nature of man's language takes away from a deeper meaning, Ghosh seems to imply that these deeper meanings are simply not yet accessible to an individual who has not yet come to terms with his own relationship towards language, a nod towards Benjamin's own construction of "kinship," wherein each singular

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[58] Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and The Language of Man", in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), p. 64
[59] Gerhard Richter, "Acts of self-portraiture: Benjamin's confessional and literary writings" in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, edited by David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 221
[60] Richter, p. 221.

language does not appear to be connective to its siblings, but is instead understood as a deeper desire to communicate across languages.[61] Clearly distancing himself from the colonial position which assumes that language must always be in the possession of whoever speaks it, Ghosh suggests a gentler linguistic osmosis, whereby an individual understands that there are inevitable gaps in language which provided much needed fresh perspective for its speaker.

The Hungry Tide is set chiefly in the Sundarbans, where we are introduced to two outsiders who are first portrayed as narrow-minded and ill-suited to a location that trades upon a distinct lack of boundaries. The translator, Kanai, and the cetologist, Piya, each embody carefully curated systems of thought which prioritize knowledge that does not allow for flexibility of thought. This, in turn makes both Kanai and Piya ambivalent in the way they approach the tide country. Throughout the novel, Ghosh presents them with a set of challenges which leads to a more enriched understanding of their experiences.

As a translator who is fluent in a number of languages, Kanai clutches on to his "addiction" to language and fancies himself a seasoned judge of character (*HT*, p. 4). Just like an addict, Kanai is overly dependent on language as a paramount aspect of his worldview and he assumes that language is comparably as important to everyone he meets. Writing about the difference between addiction as experience and addiction as destruction of experience, Agamben, notes in relation to the addicts of the nineteenth century that they "could still delude themselves that they were undergoing a new experience, while for the [modern addict] this is nothing more than the discarding of all experience."[62] When we are first introduced to Kanai, he finds himself drawn to Piyali "Piya" Roy, an American cetologist of Bengali descent, who has come to the Sundarbans in

[61] Benjamin, "Language", p. 73.
[62] Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience, translated by Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), p. 16.

hopes of conducting a dolphin survey. His linguistic addiction carefully lessens her as another person and reduces her to his thinking. While he admires that she "is not without some experience in travel," this compliment is overshadowed by the fact that he also seems to view her as a sexual object, priding himself on possessing the "true connoisseur's ability to praise and appraise women" (*HT*, p. 3).

Their first conversation, spurred on by Piya spilling chai over Nirmal's papers, is rife with further misunderstandings. Despite sharing English as a common tongue, the language fuels resentment between them and is not a suitable instrument to bring them together. For Piya, Kanai's bitter retort over his ruined papers – "Does anyone have a choice when they're dealing with America these days?" – seems to conform to her belief that Kanai is the "last person" who she would have wanted to offend in the train carriage (*HT*, p. 10). Kanai continues to feed onto his certainty of being able to parse out others at a glance; he thinks that he is justified in minimising her experiences in favour of the more generalised assumptions which accompany her gender. Kanai and Piya are bound by their first impressions of each other, and it is through learning each other's names that their respective identities become more complex. Even though Kanai has already ascertained her Indian background, he can't help but be "surprised by the unmistakably Bengali sound of her name" (*HT*, p. 12). It is significant that Kanai sees Piya's name as a cultural anomaly, in that an American name would have aligned with his diatribe on the encroaching presence of American tourists. This postulate again contradicts itself, when Piya mispronounces Kanai's name. Kanai recognizes Piya's lack in understanding Bengali culture and displaces himself in order to connect with her, reaching for an American landmark: "Say it to rhyme with Hawaii" (HT, 13).

Kanai's seamless extension towards America implies that Piya's identity is rootless and able to be easily taken up by others. Sandra Meyer observes Piya is "formally homeless," in that being American becomes a nearly meaningless tenet of identification because it is defined by the absence of any formal boundary.[63] Meyer argues that "it becomes clear that she does not feel at home anywhere at all, and occasionally has the feeling that she uses avoidance so as to not admit her inner emptiness."[64] In a similar vein, Ismail S. Tahlib has remarked upon Piya's "distrust" of language, as her experience of verbal language has been largely hostile and limited.[65] Piya's discomfort with her American identity and her daily contention with the alienation of her Bengali heritage can be extrapolated from these arguments. America, rather than standing in for the land of opportunity represents here—on the train to Canning—as an omnipresent sense of exile. Any expectation of American greatness is overtaken by the reality of America as an invasive amalgam of culture. Piya's American identity is most ironically embodied by Piya's minority presence as a "mascot" within her department, which emphasizes its role as an ambivalent signifier, born out of Piya's Bengali heritage rather than celebrating her American identity (*HT*, p. 74).

Completing this trio of protagonists is Fokir Mondol, a local illiterate fisherman who becomes Piya's guide in the tide country. He possesses a connection to Kanai, in that Kanai used to be friends with Fokir's mother Kusum, although Kanai fails to use this fact to establish a meaningful connection with Fokir. Both Kusum and Fokir stand in reproach to the ambivalence embodied by Kanai and Piya, because their names both signify a lack or a disconnection with who they purport themselves to be. Meanwhile, Fokir stands in reproach to such lack, and signifies that

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[63] Sandra Meyers, "'The Story that Gave this Land its Life': The Translocation of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*", in Postcolonial *Translocations: Cultural Representations and Critical Spatial Thinking*, edited by Marga Munkelt, Markus Schmitz, Mark Stein, and Silke Stroh (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2013), p. 153.
[64] Meyer, p. 153.
[65] Ismail S. Talib, "Ghosh, Language, and The Hungry Tide" in H*istory, Witness, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction*, edited by Chitra Sankaran (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 141.

he is quite happy to live in conjunction with the land and forego expectations of material comforts. This distance from the cosmopolitanism inhabited by Kanai and Piya is implied in Fokir's name, derived from the term "fakir," refers to spiritual figures who reside solely upon necessities provided to them by their environment. However, Fokir's vocation as a crab fisherman is clearly under threat by political movements which continue to sanction the use of catchall nets. Fokir's peaceable existence, while in line with nature and self-sufficient, is mostly seen by others (namely Kanai and Fokir's wife, the enterprising Moyna) as unsustainable. It is only with Fokir's death at the end of the novel during a flood, that Piya and Kanai come together to assess a possible path towards sustainable conservation. In the end, Fokir fulfils his namesake by illuminating such a future possibility for his companions.

A comparable vein of displacement is revisited and extended in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, the first of three books set during the First Opium War in the 1840s. Ghosh furthers this theme of displacement to suggest that one's name is a product of being nameless and a way to assure continued avoidance with recognisable personhood. Kalua and his wife Deeti are on the run after he rescues her from being burned alive, and the pilot of the Ibis enquires about Kalua's name in order to register him. Kalua uses his father's name to avoid detection from the authorities; his father's name "Madho" is immediately corrupted on paper as "Maddow" and pronounced "apt."[66] Kalua is subsequently pressed for his father's name for no reason other than a Kafkaesque bureaucratic exercise that is never explained; left without choice, Kalua gives his own name. This is an odd inverse of the Western-centric narrative in which the father frees the son from his duties and allows for him to circumvent authority rather than to be constrained by his heritage. However,

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[66] Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* (London: John Murray, 2008), p. 261. Subsequent citations noted in-text as *SP*.

even this symbolism dissolves under a misunderstanding. Kalua is asked to spell his father's name (in this case also his own) in accordance with English custom:

> "If I can moot out one proposal, sir, why not do like this? First write C-o-l—just like 'coal' no?—then v-e-r. Like-this like-this we can do."
>
> . . . "Theek you are," said the pilot. "That's how I'll put him down then – as Maddow Colver."
>
> . . . "Deeti, standing beside her husband, heard him whisper the name, not as if it were his own but as if it belonged to someone else, a person other than himself. Then he repeated it, in a tone of greater confidence, and when it came to his lips again, a third time, the sound of it was no longer new or unfamiliar: it was as much his own now as his skin, or his eyes, or his hair: Maddow Colver (*SP*, pp. 261-2).

Kalua's new name, though he is quick to take to it, should not be glossed over as merely a bastardisation of his origins. The pilot Mr. Doughty and Baboo Nob Kissin the well-meaning but complicit gomusta are deliberately emphasised as neither menacing nor particularly authoritative, as they are unable to qualify Kalua as a person until they wrongly contextualise his name to assert power over him. This is an instance of Ghosh using inaction (here the failure to learn Kalua's correct name inasmuch as it can be learned in a deceitful context) to stand in for an interaction that prioritises power rather than truth. Yet these displays of power are not born out of specifically created authority to cement the grasp of Britain over India, and instead should be understood as gestures of ignorance.

This ignorance, or what Ghosh calls "colonial conditioning" maintains a currency in the other side and can also be found in the incapacity of former colonies to reflect "upon [their place]

in the world."[67] In an interview with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh asserts that these ironies and mistranslations remain common in the ex-colonies and are also found in the collective intellect of the former colony's past subjects. The interview with Sankaran takes place in Singapore, and Ghosh points out the "self-unaware[ness]" that comes to light in the naming of establishments such as the Ellenborough Café, which celebrates Lord Ellenborough, an advocate of smuggling opium.[68]

Resisting colonial conditioning also plays a large role in the broader project of resignification. As Shanthini Pillai's article, "Resignifying Coolie: Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace", argues that although "coolie" is a term used to refer to Indian labourers, frequently in hand with a deep humiliation through the course of colonial history, the broadness of "coolie" slowly gains specifics which then distances them from the generalisations impressed upon them by colonial discourse. Labourers are seen as "docile" and such meekness is therefore compounded by their "outsider status" when then assures them of being "less than human" and more as a "unit of production" as they migrate from colony to colony.[69] In *The Glass Palace* (2000) Rajkumar's description as a coolie of agency, according to Pillai is "reflective of Ghosh cutting through older, docile depictions. . . that [the coolie] has the ability to shape his own narrative, which can be juxtaposed against pejorative depictions."[70] I contend that Ghosh continues the resignification of the coolie with Kalua, Deeti, and later "Fami Colver," a term used to encompass all of their descendants (SP, p. 262). Although Kalua's name is taken away from him under bureaucratic circumstances that directly lead into his migrancy, it is also this enforced identity that has ensured

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[67] Chitra Sankaran with Amitav Ghosh, "Diasporic Predicaments: Interview with Amitav Ghosh", in *History, Witness, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction*, edited by Chitra Sankaran (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012, p. 2.

[68] Sankaran, *ibid.*

[69] Shanthini Pillai, "Resignifying 'Coolie': Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace" in *History, Witness, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction*, edited by Chitra Sankaran (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 47.

[70] Pillai, p. 48.

him his freedom. Such freedom is again a product of colonial ignorance through which he regains his capability of shaping his own narrative.

Among the later generations of Fami Colver, the name "Maddow" recurs frequently in the family tree. While it cannot be denied that the origins of Maddow derive from Kalua's docility, as he is not even given the opportunity to speak his own name, Kalua's mishap with the pilot and the gomusta presents his descendants with unprecedented possibilities for self-fashioning. We learn that only a few of Kalua's and Deeti's grandchildren and subsequent generations abide by Maddow's humble beginnings. Others prefer to imagine and invent much more "fanciful" and "grandiose" mythos for the name (SP, p. 262).

Where the names present within Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies* work to undermine certainty behind names, the significance given to names by Franzen emphasises a confounding of expectations. Even though some individuals will eventually gain the privilege of changing their names of their own accord, names are chosen for a variety of reasons and then given to an individual in question. The idea of potentiality behind a name should be seen as distinct from the individual naturally embodying the narrative possibilities of the novel, as names are chosen in order to subvert, emphasise, or obfuscate expectations. In Franzen's most recent novel *Purity*, names are at the forefront of Pip Tyler's mind. The Dickensian echoes that are present in her name are pointed out by Charles Blenheim, "I like your name. I have *great expectations of you*" (*P*, p. 206).

Blenheim is a has-been professor whose namesake not only evokes the author of *Great Expectations*, but also bears more than a passing resemblance to the unhappy Chip Lambert of *The Corrections*. In addition to sharing a name and a profession, Chip and Blenheim both share a career-threatening taste for younger female students. Chip's liaison with Melissa Paquette ends

with him losing his tenure-track job and Charles' second marriage to former student Leila Helou ends up stagnant. Charles Blenheim is one possible evolution of a life that Chip Lambert might have had, although this contention is not without its caveats. This comparison also depends upon the slightly distasteful idea that both men further display a like-minded disdain for women.

This is significant because while Franzen is somewhat well regarded as a novelist, an enduring critique is that his various portraits of masculinity have often been made at the expense of lesser female agency or even the prevailing problematic belief of female privilege. Where Melissa is represented as intelligent, and yet vapid and rebellious on account of her youth, Leila's redeeming trait remains her maturity. Interestingly, Leila herself implies this when she starts up a relationship with Tom Aberant, a level-headed journalist. Tom has an ex-wife (Pip's mercurial mother) but Leila underscores the idea that their relationship should in fact be free of guilt also on the account of her age: "I'm forty-one, older than Anabel was when you divorced her. You don't have to feel as if you're trading up" (*P*, p. 233). While she later reflects upon her relationship with Tom as "New Testament" rather than "Old Testament," like her marriage with Charles, it is significant that Leila sees her "New Testament" liaison with Tom as one that is defined by both "choice" and fate (*P*, p. 233). Still, the addition of "choice" to such an act of fate is cheapened by a willing absence of female agency. The same can be said for the "expectations" that are bestowed upon Pip. Rather than being "her" expectations, Blenheim takes over her hopes and dreams.

The significance of Franzen's names has not gone unnoticed by critics. My designation of Chip Lambert as an earlier draft of Charles Blenheim is touched upon by Stephen J. Burn. Burn argues that the names of the Lamberts (Alfred, Chip, Denise, Enid, and Gary) link them as a family. When the names are put in alphabetical order, a pattern emerges that leaves the Lamberts unable to deny their closeness as a family. Burn notes that the A-C-D-E-G pattern signifies who in the

family is close to whom.[71] Chip, under these parameters, is close to his father Alfred and his younger sister, Denise. However, Burn extends the tie between Chip and Alfred beyond the fiction of *The Correction*s. If we assume, as Burn does, that Chip's name is a diminutive of Charles, then buried within letters of Charles is also E-A-R-L, the name of Franzen's father, and Shakespeare's King L-E-A-R which will be explicated in the next chapter. However, this interpretation of Chip's family ties is made slightly dissonant by the fact that he is never outright stated to be "Charles" in *The Corrections* although at one point, Alfred does refer to him as "Chipper" as if reiterating that any nickname bestowed upon him would still pull him closer to his father instead of putting much needed distance between them (*C*, p. 401). Whether the figure of the father is implicit or explicit, there is little doubt that he is present in the text.

Conversely, Pip's name makes her out to be an orphan and an individual with scant personal connections. Although her mother is all at once too-present in her life, and Pip cannot help but occupy an inordinate amount of her mother's attentions – "she was like a bank in her mother's economy that was too big to fail" (*P,* p. 3), it is the absent figure of the father that drives both Pip's motivation and the main plot of *Purity*. Her mother Anabel (only known to Pip as Penelope, because she keeps her real name a secret) also seems to be missing a man in her life, although she is characterised as a radicalised feminist. Anabel brings to mind Poe's "Annabel Lee;" as if to distance, and yet call attention to this comparison, Franzen notes that Anabel is "vain about her name and spelled it for whoever was over the phone" (*P,* p. 372) Her insistence on the spelling also suggests, that Annabel only exists within the memory of her lover, and any attempts that she makes to curate her own existence renders her incomplete as Anabel. Anabel's alias Penelope is not much better, as the name harks back to Penelope, the loyal wife of Odysseus, who

[71] Burn, p. 124.

is waiting for her husband's return. Therefore, no matter how much Anabel wishes to become a person on her own, her origins will always lie with her ex-husband.

Pip too, is waiting, if not for a father figure that she desperately needs, then for her life to start and to get out of debt. Blenheim asks her about her "expectations" in a seemingly tired pun (*P*, p. 157). The expectations which Blenheim saddles upon her are more reminiscent of his own past achievements and more recent failures while ignoring Pip's own traumas and experiences. On account of her name, Blenheim's expectations of Pip are notably not her own, but rather a reflection of his expectations for himself. Wanting to join the ranks of literary greats, Franzen even manages a dig at the innate privilege of his own name through Blenheim's petty assertions: "Do you like Jonathan Safran Foer?" and that the *New York Times* Bestsellers' list is under siege from "a plague of literary Jonathans" (*P*, p. 158). Blenheim, in a typical show of masculine force, seeks to erase Pip's identity and instead impose upon her the possibility of expectations not yet fulfilled, as if to grant himself a second chance.

Even though Pip plays along with Blenheim and pronounces his analysis of her namesake as "succinctly put," Blenheim's expectations are founded upon patently false information and therefore are more telling of Blenheim's own shortcomings than Pip's herself (*P*, p. 206). For one, even though Pip shares Pip Pirrip's destitute circumstances towards the beginning of the novel, it is significant that Dickens' Pip "came to call himself" Pip.[72] Pip Tyler's name is a distinct nod to one's lack of expectation and fulfillment and this sense of futility is absent in Dickens. In *Purity*, after a failed "retreat into casual sex" with Jason, he takes issue with not just her lack of commitment ("coitus interruptus maximus!") but also tries to imply that her being unable to perform this act of ritual intimacy is due to her either being a lesser person or simply a dishonest

[72] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1992), p. 3.

individual (*P*, p. 25). Jason suggests as a parting shot to Pip that her personhood is invalid because, "Pip. . .Pip, I don't know. It just doesn't sound like your name when I say it" (*P*, p. 26).

Pip's name is "Purity" and rather than carry the name with her as an initial form of identification, her name becomes something that is imbued with deep "shame" (*P*, p. 61). Purity gives the novel its title, and yet as Tim Adams points out in his review of the novel, all forms of purity in the text stay elusive.[73] As an outspoken proponent against social media usage and a self-proclaimed Luddite, Franzen presents the World Wide Web as a strangely corseted version of the Wild West. Anything goes on the Net, so long as its users are happy to remain subjects of mass surveillance.[74] Security concerns are twinned with lewd behaviour and perpetuate Pip's shame. The looming presence of the Internet, Franzen later tells us through the ever charming and "aptly named" predator Andreas Wolf, has become just as common in our daily lives as oxygen (*P*, p. 59). Whether "sitting in prison" or elsewhere, Wolf argues that it is impossible to "opt out" of the system of the Internet (*P*, pp. 447-8). Hidalga finds this assertion "compelling", as it is under the strangulation of the internet that Pip gives away her dearest secret: her name.[75] Adams additionally notes, that as long as Pip is a part of Purity she remains unable to find real peace, as she cannot place herself at the centre of an experience that by all rights should have been hers.[76] She seals her own fate when she gives away her name to Wolf, entrusting him with the power that is inherently attached to her name and also allowing for Wolf to shape who she is.

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[73] Tim Adams, "Purity by Jonathan Franzen review – piercingly brilliant", *The Guardian,* 6 September 2015, n.p.
[74] A compelling counterpoint to the negativist vision set out by Franzen in *Purity* might be found in Dave Eggers' technophilic novel *The Circle*, wherein the main character Mae is slowly swallowed up by various technologies and ceases to be able to contend with the chaos that is real life. See Dave Eggers, *The Circle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).
[75] Hildalga, p. 313.
[76] Adams, "Purity", n.p.

While Pip's name has assured her position as Wolf's hostage, he, too, is held hostage by his name and the indelible connection to his WikiLeaks-like organisation, The Sunlight Project which stands for lofty ideals including "freedom" and "truth" (*P,* p. 22). These allegedly egalitarian properties take on dark, ambivalent meaning in the third chapter about the self-imposed limits of personal freedom, but even at a glance, Wolf's name stands in stark contrast to his wish to uphold these principles. Wolf's name recalls Fenrir from Norse mythology, a figure who not only devours the sun but is also the bringer of Ragnarok, the end of the world. The latter could be seen as corresponding to the spread of mass surveillance through the Internet. Although Wolf claims to be the bringer of sunlight, the opposite is true. Wolf is another individual who is constrained by expectations of his name, and the ubiquity of the Internet holds him to account. Despite espousing a certain brand of purity and crowing that "sunlight is the best disinfectant!" before leaving the east German bloc under the protection of a television crew, he is once again asked to repeat himself for the television (*P*, p. 167). Here, Wolf is hamstrung by his own branding; even though he wants to expose truth to the wider public, he is still stuck paying homage to the performative ways of television and media, which is also a tactic for shying away from the truth in favour of sensationalism. Wolf's flair for the dramatic is not so much tied up in trying to rid the world of corruption but more about protecting the charitable reputation of his organisation.

By understanding Wolf's pathology and the way his identity actively works against his brand (in the name of preserving the brand), the loss of Pip's name to Wolf via electronic communication is first a strategic connection on her part to "feel closer to an Internet celebrity," (*P*, p. 67) an act which is swiftly punished by the reminder of the "existence of" all of Wolf's "other women" (*P*, p. 147). Secondly, it is a re-confirmation that something as simple, and yet as significant, as a name can work insidiously against the identity of an individual. Information is

used not to add to the enlightenment of the community, but to control and detain individuals from within. Such performative undercurrents of ambivalence necessarily lend novels their narrative drive.

"Her Face is Everywhere": Postcoloniality in *The Hungry Tide*

The specific signifier of names is implicated in broader issues surrounding representation in postcolonialism and postmodernism especially focusing on minor voices (broadly defined here to include non-Westernised experiences, problematically-Westernised experiences, working class experiences, and experiences of women). The idea of representation being "postcolonial" occupies a pertinent position in Ghosh's writing despite his desire to distance himself from this mode of discourse. Regarding the ongoing issue of representation in postcolonial representation, Neil Lazarus writes:

> It is important to problematise the question of representation and the issues around it where a writer's desire to speak *for* others (emphasis in the original) – to endow 'them' with consciousness and voice, – shades over to ventriloquisation, into speaking instead of them: what starts out as an attempt to speak on behalf of others, or at least about others (in the interest of putting them 'on the map') ends up paradoxically as a silencing of 'them' through the writer's own speech.[77]

Lazarus is sceptical about an author's ability to keep the delicate balance between the author's own intellect and the limits that are sometimes inherent to the othered voices they endeavour to represent due to various constraints upon opportunities whether educational, financial, or something else. Lazuarus's reading of *The Hungry Tide* underlines Ghosh's commitment to a form

[77] Lazarus, p. 139.

of humanism which succeeds in completing, to borrow a phrase from Theodor Adorno, "the almost insoluble task [of letting] neither the power of others, nor our own powerlessness stupefy us."[78] Incommensurability is the theorised distance between a specific (often marginalised) individual and the perceived incapability of such a repressed subject to give voice to his own experience in his own terms.

The Hungry Tide commits to making sure that all manners of experience are presented to the reader on an equal footing and incommensurability in particular takes centre stage as a new possibility that is not beholden to history. Both semantic and semiotic communication are entangled together to suggest a symbiotic relationship. I would further contend that verbal communication in the novel is secondary to gestural language. English as a language is dominant in the novel, but is eventually superseded by broader means of communication; whenever the language of gestures and spoken English are made to confront each other, Ghosh does not hesitate to illuminate the possibilities of incommensurability to neutralise some of the more problematic aspects of English. Incommensurability and the perceived inability to communicate does not give way to English. Instead, during Piya's and Fokir's first meeting, Ghosh makes clear that the English deployed by the the Mej-da and the forest guard should be seen as indicative of a "cosmopolitan rootlessness," to borrow an earlier term used by Bose, to distinguish Ghosh's writing as anchored in lesser histories. Fokir, who does not have the traditional access to English, realises silence as a powerful weapon. The Mej-da and the forest guard accuse Fokir in broken English of being a "poacher" (*HT*, p. 32). Piya can see right away that this is only a ploy to bring trouble to Fokir. English asserts itself here as a dominant and culturally overwhelms all other possibilities around it. Gareth Griffiths describes the role of silence in *The Hungry Tide* as a

[78] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* translated by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 57.

"process of revision," traversing from the need to "acknowledge silenced human beings" to "listening to. . .the many other 'silenced' entities of the Tide Country."[79]

At first, Piya too, makes a version of the same mistake, using her previous understanding of local fishermen to impose an initial identity on him. As Piya is a field scientist who frequently works with locals, the basis for her understanding is not entirely out of place and should not be blamed for her assumption. Seeing that Fokir possessed a "grizzled look of an experienced hand," she stops the boat and interviews him using display cards about the presence of dolphins on the river (*HT*, p. 42). It is not until later when Piya approaches him, that she realises:

> . . . He was not the elderly graybeard that she had taken him to be -- he was about her own age, in his late twenties. His frame was not wasted but very lean, and his long stringy limbs were almost fleshless in their muscularity. . . Yet there was a defiance in his stance at odds with the seeming defencelessness of his unclothed chest and protruding bones (*HT*, 46).

There are several things of note in this passage which lessens the power of the Mej-da's English, and also demands that Piya change her initial assessment of Fokir and his station. Fokir's nakedness not only speaks to to Mej-da's command of English, but poses a threat that pales in comparison to non-manmade threats, which Fokir has already experienced, such as the ever-present threat of the man-eating Sundarban tiger. Fokir's nakedness also speaks to the clarity with which he sees the world.

Ghosh seems to suggest that the confined and defined ways in which Western-oriented individuals like Piya and Kanai approach language as a singular project leads to feelings of hostility and discomfort. An antithesis to these seemingly self-inflicted visions is Fokir, who does not see a division between language and the self. This is quite evident in Nirmal's surprise, when

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[79] Gareth Griffiths, "'Silenced Worlds': Language and Experience in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*", Kunapipi, 34 (2012), 105-112 (p. 107).

Fokir as a boy is able to recite the local legend of Bon Bibi, a nature goddess, from memory. Nirmal's first reaction is that Fokir has become a savant who has become literate over a short period of time, but Kusum's response is, "I have told him so many times that it is all inside his head" (*HT*, p. 133). The knowledge of Bon Bibi in fact enriches Fokir's ties to his surroundings, rather than dislocates him from how he sees the world.

Although Fokir does not have direct access to the channels of education so prized by the likes of Kanai and Moyna, a mode of education has come to him through experience and oral tradition, a pedagogical channel esteemed by Walter Benjamin. In his essay "The Storyteller," Benjamin distinguishes between oral tradition and the relatively recent formulation of reading novels. Oral tradition invites community, as a narrative is told to an audience and actively absorbed. This differs from the novel, which is both produced (written) and consumed (read) in isolation. Benjamin notes that novels prevent individuals from seeking "counsel" from the imagination of others. In other words, humanity has sustained a great loss in collective experience. Benjamin observes:

> But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding.[80]

For Kanai, Piya, and even Kanai's radical, Marxist-reading Uncle Nirmal, language paradoxically appears to be the common thread of this incommunicability as each of them are careful to curate their own boundaries of identity as seemingly impervious from exterior influences. Fokir, an

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[80] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 86.

individual who has grown up reading rivers as texts, holds no distinction between language and the human being. It would not be accurate to say that he is without language, as his wife does in a joke. Moyna makes a "clever" pun in *gan* (knowledge) and *gaan* (song) to suggest that her life would be much easier if her husband had more of the former rather than the latter (*HT*, p. 212) .However, all this joke manages to showcase is that its teller and its listeners are constrained by language and are not able to look beyond such a prescriptive understanding. The discomfort here is played out within an elitist understanding of knowledge, one that deliberately chooses to forego any sense of inclusivity and trades upon a person's inability to understand.

This experience not only serves to alienate Fokir, who is full of "song" but remains unable to share his "knowledge" with others but also Piya, whose sense of knowledge is still untethered from local experience. As Moyna's joke trades upon its bicultural and bilingual exclusivity, Lazarus observes that Kanai appears to approve of the joke, adding an element of "symbolic violence."[81] In other words, Kanai moves to preclude Fokir's experiences because they are unlike his and he does not understand them. This is a more serious invocation of the ignorant coloniser that we have already discussed above in *Sea of Poppies*. In trying to showcase their understanding of the English language, both Kanai and Moyna highlight language's shortcomings in their own respective prejudices. Without paying closer attention to the experiences which language purports to describe, we do so at a detriment to ourselves.

Fokir's knowledge is incommensurable so long as those who speak to him remain unable to look outside of themselves. On a rare occasion, Fokir opens his mouth to ask Kanai "if he is a good person?" It is no coincidence that this exchange takes place on the mystical island of Garjontola near Lusibari, where much of the novel is set. Fokir offers Kanai the gift of

[81] Lazarus, p. 142.

understanding experience outside of oneself, and it is this boundless understanding of nature which allows for Fokir to feel a connection with his mother even after her death. He tells Kanai, "How could I miss her? Her face is everywhere" (*HT*, p. 305). However, Kanai is only able to take his question within the context of the pressures of modern society. He finds himself angry and unable to express himself – to the point where he realises the irony of the well-trodden expression "beside himself" (*HT*, p. 348). The difference between Kanai and Fokir is made clear; Kanai is left without language in that particular experience because he remains incapable of reconciling himself with language, to work alongside it rather to dominate it. He admits to Piya after his ordeal: "at Garjontola I learned how little I know of myself and of the world" (*HT*, p. 353).

"At the Suggestion of Her Therapist": Loss of Self in *Freedom*

Kanai's realisation that he is indeed a "citizen of the world" rather than a "citizen *above* the world" underlines Ghosh's resolutely humanist perspective across cultures. Kanai and Piya have gained a measure of themselves by being in conjunction with the world. Conversely, the plight plaguing the Berglunds, Franzen's liberal well-to-do family at the heart of *Freedom* is perhaps the exact opposite, suggesting that such connections should be viewed on a spectrum and Spivak's notion of a continued silence which precludes minor voices from representing themselves. As Bauman points out:

> Identities seem fixed and solid only when seen, in a flash, from the outside. Whatever solidity they might have when contemplated from the inside of one's own biographical experience appears fragile, vulnerable, and constantly torn apart by shearing forces which

> lay bare its fluidity and by cross-currents which threaten to rend in pieces and carry away any form they might have acquired.[82]

How each individual's identity is crafted and presented to others for judgement forms the crux of *Freedom*'s human drama. Each family member, save the curiously "even keeled" daughter Jessica, is wrapped up in a deeply private, individualist crisis in which the world is deliberately unkind to them and they struggle with the personal mores, public expectations, and navigating the daily difficulty of maintaining a cohesive identity (*F*, p. 235).

To extend this astute observation about the fleeting existence of one's holistic existence, we might go on to wonder whether or not our growing fascination with community, or more broadly, how any individual might fit and be functional within society is a poor attempt at preserving an idealised sense of self. The closed, airless suburban community envisioned by Franzen in the novel acts as a threat to individual freedom and subsequently drives its participants towards decisions that usually go against the safeguarding of one's personal liberties. Sam Tannenhaus clearly articulates this contradiction in his review of *Freedom*, emphasising an emergent contradiction that hovers over the fissure of collective manners and the near impossible expectations placed upon the individual to fulfill and perpetuate these norms:

> Franzen grasps that the central paradox of modern American liberalism inheres not in its doctrines but in the unstated presumptions that govern its daily habits. Liberals, no less than conservatives – and for that matter revolutionaries and reactionaries; in other words, all of us – believe some modes of existence are superior to others. But only the liberal committed to a vision of communal pluralism, is unsettled by this truth.[83]

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[82] Bauman, p. 78.

[83] Sam Tanenhaus, Peace and War: Book Review of *Freedom* by Jonathan Franzen", *New York Times*, 19 August 2010.

Tannenhaus defines a distinct difference between the manneredness of the suburban middle class and the underlying assumptions which assure the continued fragmentation of the self. It is quite telling that Franzen represents the fragmentation of the human psyche in *Freedom* as depression. Depression not only becomes an affectively ambivalent experience on the part of the individual, but also deterritorialises the language which is available to the individual, making sure they are excommunicated socially and unable to discuss their feelings. Franzen's portrayal of Patty's depression expresses a deep distrust of language and self-censorship. Understanding depression is the logical first step to untangling Franzen's remark in Sydney about "happiness been largely unwriteable" during a visit in 2003.[84] Happiness, translated narratively into a sense of closure, does not necessarily guarantee a great story. As Leo Tolstoy, whose masterpiece *War and Peace* features as reading material for Patty after the consummation of her affair with Walter's friend, Richard Katz, remarks: "Every family is unhappy in its own way." Happiness here, then, is perhaps not viable as a literary form because happiness necessarily points towards the end of conflict. In her unhappiness, Patty's reading of *War and Peace* becomes not a sprawling adventure romance that represents a form of escapism, but a form of competitive consumerism, emphasising the inevitable form of human freedom as one that fosters unhappiness and that continues to uphold capitalist values.

Depression creates a much-needed distance between how a subject (in this case, Patty) sees herself and how she is seen by others. A contradictory self emerges from this tangle between personal understanding and personal responsibility towards others. This is clear in her third-person autobiography titled: "Mistakes Were Made: The Autobiography of Patty Berglund (By Patty Berglund At the Suggestion of her Therapist.") (*F*, 21). The title is passive and implicates a move

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[84] See Camilla Nelson, "Life, Liberty, and Happiness in Jonathan Franzen's Freedom", *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 32 (2013), 1-12 (p. 1.)

away from an individual taking responsibility for their actions. Instead, someone's mistakes (most likely Patty's, but at the same time, we cannot be sure) are in full view, and the question remains whose mistakes? Who should be atoning for them? The person allegedly responsible for the mistakes, or perhaps a separate party whose carelessness has made possible for these mistakes to occur in the first instance? The whole of the paratext is meant to decentralise the reader's distance from Patty and also makes us question whose perspective of Patty Berglund we are seeing right now. Patty is less a person, than a strange depiction of a person who wants to please her therapist, who also threatens her selfhood.

Even when Patty's inner personhood and goodness is not in question and she is in fact held up as the paragon of her neighbourhood, Franzen makes sure to undermine such a perception of her by snipping away at parts of her personality: "a game could be made of trying to get Patty to agree that somebody's behaviour was 'bad.'" As a long-timer in her slowly gentrifying neighbourhood of Ramsey Hill, Patty is described as not a person, but "already the thing" strove by the rest of her street. While Patty is upheld as an ideal, "perfect" mother figure, an ideal neighbour with whom one could consult about the ins-and-outs of communal politeness, Franzen sets up a tangled web which Patty appears to navigate with deft light-footedness, and yet, in the face of her ardent "niceness" her neighbours, the better adjusted Paulsen's remark on Patty's un-personhood: "I don't think they have yet learned how to live" (*F,* p. 20). Instead of using her autobiography as a way to safely "migrat[e]" through her social life, and also to realise "a number of possible identities," Patty is trapped by the way others define her.[85]

It is implied that Patty does not have the tools to learn how to live, because she has never been allowed to step out of the shadows of selves that other people have foisted upon her. Though

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[85] Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernisation and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 73.

she doesn't mention her therapist in her list of thanks, her autobiography starts with an extended list of acknowledgements, mostly basketball coaches who have instilled in her the sense of competitiveness. Patty's competitiveness is notable here, as a cry for help and attention, a bid for a self, outside of fulfilling a purpose. Patty's competitiveness has repeatedly won her the validation that she so desperately needs from others, but later, without her identity as an athlete, or a wife, or a mother, she ambivalently floats from signifier to signifier, hoping for someone's attention. When Patty goes to live with Richard as his lover in Jersey City towards the end of the novel, one gets the sense that she ceases to be a person, only someone that Richard comes home to, an entity separate from his scores of women. Although Patty respects Richard's needs for other women "in the abstract," this still doesn't stop her from "feel[ling] lonely" (*F*, p. 510).

Patty's abstracted sense of self as understood through her relation to others has always been particular to her person, which seems to be a comment regarding the deterritorialized nature of oneself in a bout of depression and yet a person in a depressive state must necessarily be self-centred. This odd balance is at the forefront in the way Patty recounts her rape. She is raped by a son of a family friend, Ethan Post during a party. While Philip Weinstein's monograph, which attempts to make sense of Franzen's writing in light of a "comedy of rage" of largely champions Franzen's novels without putting his subject's treatment of women to task. However, his reading of Patty's rape is a standout and recognizes not only the wrong that has been done to her, but also forces us to recognize that she continues to be disempowered by this experience, and that the rape becomes a present and informative absence which colours her perception of men throughout the novel. One wonders why this level of caution isn't followed in Weinstein's other interpretations. Weinstein illuminates the lack of Patty's own presence in her own ordeal. Weinstein writes that instead of a "you (emphasis in the original)," employing a certain kind of "specialness" now

rendered all but meaningless in the face of Patty's failure to give meaning to the words which would otherwise inform her of the communicability of her experience. Weinstein even goes on to suggest that should the rape have happened to Patty's more creatively-inclined sisters, the affective measures of the rape would likely be in full force, but as Patty has already dismantled the meaning of words behind her experience, such affective measures are rightly absent. The whole experience is removed from her as its "epicentre" and as such, she plays no part in the experience of her own rape. Her victimhood does not make her special, but in fact renders her even more invisible.

The distance between Patty's perception of the rape and how others treat her because of her experience is already stated by Patty's own confusion. As she states, she is a "nobody," the furthest possibility away from a special *you* (*F*, p. 34).[86] The aftermath of her rape, therefore, is dedicated to not her personal struggles as a victim, but to a series of translations, so that others are able to make sense of, and take advantage of, her situation. Weinstein observes, Patty is not a "you" and thus is discounted from her own experiences. Patty's rape is at odds with her mother's liberalised, political ambitions, and such ambitions are secondary to her role as Patty's mother. There is something uncanny about the parroting language she uses when she reminds Patty that she "has to" tell her, because Joyce has the seeming right as "[Patty's] mother" to this information, Joyce appears to grasp that reminding her daughter of their relationship to one another is faintly ridiculous and Franzen conveys this vague layer of irony in Joyce's "embarrass[ment]" (*F*, p. 34). Joyce being embarrassed (just a hair away from individuated shame) is wholly an external emotion that is for the most part self-centred. Embarrassment represents Joyce's politicised ambitions as she distances herself from her daughter and her troubles.

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[86] See Weinstein, p. 68.

Similarly, Weinstein views Patty's well-meaning coach and her court judge father as incapable of understanding the magnitude of his daughter's dilemma. The coach, whose job it is to foster teamwork, values leadership, competitiveness, and through Ray's derisive comments regarding Patty's coaches, there is an added element of heavy-handed feminism as her father tries to figure out whether the coach is a lesbian. I think it would be unfair to say, as Weinstein has heavily implied, that her coach has removed Patty from her trauma and hopes merely to make a name for herself as an educator who looks out for her students. Rather, it would probably be more fitting to note that Coach's concern for Patty is all the more heart-breaking and postmodern; Patty's pain and injury is understood, but the trauma is taken away from Patty to be displaced among Ethan Post's future (as yet non-existent victims). Even the very physical, practical aspect of her pain and trauma is rendered without meaning when applied to Patty as an individual.

As for Ray's conversations with Patty, he echoes Joyce and in fact, underlines the validity of Coach's position but also the difficulty that surrounds the Coach's perspective. Ray, a seasoned officer of the court, both minimises and emphasises Ethan's supposedly harsh punishment; "let me see if I can't talk to Mr Post about a deferred prosecution. . . a quiet probation. . .a proverbial sword over Ethan's head." The language goes from strangled legalese designed to mislead the average person, to finally, a violent metaphor deferred for Ethan, rubbing further salt into Patty's wounds. As Franzen notes in one of his essays, "the self is full of contradictions," and Franzen within his narrative of Patty's autobiography, in which the account is first buried by deterritorialized concerns (again alluding to the fluid borders between personal life and public community) notes a devastating consequence. Under these difficult circumstances, Patty becomes, in her own words: "a nobody," merely an idea of a person beaten down by both expectation and (Coach), reality

(Joyce and Ray respectively). These two viewpoints arguably make up the community at large, which Patty is still unable to join.

A curious lack of personalised language also characterises David Foster Wallace's 1998 short story, "The Depressed Person." As Foster Wallace and Franzen were personal friends as well as literary colleagues, one can see shades of influence in Franzen from Foster Wallace's earlier work. Foster Wallace's short story tells the story of the eponymous "Depressed Person," a young, middle-class woman and her shifting relationship with both professional and unprofessional therapy. Its opening sentences reads:

> The depressed person was in terrible and unceasing emotional pain, and the impossibility of sharing or articulating this pain was itself a component of the pain and a contributing factor in its essential horror. Despairing then, of describing the emotional pain itself, the depressed person hoped at least to be able to express something of its context—its shape and texture, as it were – by recounting circumstances related to its aetiology. ("DP", p. 57)

The Depressed Person seems to take refuge in the exactingly difficult causes of her disease. Her depression is most obvious when she attempts to explain it to others. The cognition of depression as a disease further removes the Depressed Person from reliable communication. Like Patty, the never named depressed person is beleaguered the by lack of language. Even though she is invited to express herself, she remains unable or unwilling to do so and her many attempts to explain herself leaves her as a "nobody." Her therapist, who she considers to be a best friend, is never named. Perhaps the lack of names is a nod to the lack of judgment as discussed earlier. The depressed person, we learn is the course of her story remains unable to communicate her problems in as much as put herself at the centre of attention. While the narrator does not want to play "The Blame Game," she makes sure to talk about her unfortunate role as a bargaining chip in her parents'

acrimonious divorce, her difficulty with making friends in boarding school, and her belated experience with her orthodontist ("DP", p. 59). Her friends, who are mostly from her graduate school cohort are referred to not as friends, but as a Support System that seems, to the depressed person, to be constantly annoyed with her, which raises serious questions about what kind of they are able to provide .

Patty's and the Depressed Person's lack of language is on par to the social role that depression places on individuals who are feeling oppressed (rightly or wrongly) by society, which relates back to deterritorialization and an isolation that is now inherent to the individuals of contemporary society. This situation is seamlessly observed by Darian Leader, who writes, depression is a way of saying 'no' to what we are told to be."[87]

Franzen's officious use of silence contributes to an ambivalent understanding of identity as held hostage by orderly codes. This is a variant of incommensurability that has its place in the echelons of middle-class intelligentsia, as what is special about these individuals is not found in the way they speak for themselves, but in the way they keep up an injured silence. Patty and the Depressed Person hold no language for judgment nor progress because it is not within their best interests to upset their place in society, and so they turn to depression as a possibility of personal expression. Moreover, depression further cements this silence, securing the ambivalence of their position. In the next chapter, we see the same stringent society turned on the newly ambivalent notion of family.

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[87] Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia, and Depression* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 3.

Chapter Two

Family Views and Political Values: The Question of Degree

Introduction: Families in Crisis

The family, asserts the sociologist Ulrich Beck in an interview with Jonathan Rutherford in 1999, is a "zombie category," an institution that is - to all intents and purposes "dead, but still alive."[88] As Beck explains:

> Ask yourself what actually is a family nowadays? What does it mean? Of course, there are children, my children, our children. But every parenthood, the core of family life, is beginning to disintegrate under conditions of divorce. . . [G]randmothers and grandfathers get included and excluded without any means of participating in the decisions of their sons and daughters. From the point of view of their grandchildren the meaning of grandparents has to be determined by individual decisions and choices.[89]

This definition of family as a category that has outlived the tenets of the family's natural indicators echoes the distance found between individuals in the new millennium. Where the previous chapter has taken a wider view of the relationship between the individual removed from society by the expectations of others and structural capitalism, this chapter extends the argument and assumes that this burden is conferred upon the family. In this scenario, the family is similarly left with little choice but to conflate public and private projections of one's "self". Most of this has to do with the perceived function of choice within the family unit. New definitions emerge by way of consumerist behaviour, thus allowing for the public to subsume the private. Under this recent inclination towards structural capitalism, Families come to resemble miniature corporations and group units more concerned with production than affection by way of biology. In the family units

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[88] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 6.
[89] Bauman, *ibid*.

represented by Franzen and Ghosh, the authors each seem to take up the family in particularly Baumanian terms, as a newly liquid formation no longer protected by solid traditions such as caste, parental authority, or even gender roles. These families are instead, dependent upon and at the mercy of the choices of the individual. The choices of the individual frequently go against the models of the previously self-evident family unit and in turn contributes to an added sense of ambivalence within the family.

In this chapter, I discuss the intrinsic ambivalence found in the family units in Franzen's family sagas *The Corrections* and *Freedom*. Franzen takes an ironic eye towards how capitalist ventures shape the family and strip away any sense of private agency. Conversely, Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy is focused on a found family unit which stands against a stringent political and caste system used to work against the individual. Ghosh's ship-siblings thereby reconstitutes the meaning of individual agency. Where Franzen's ambivalence can be seen as rooted in a fear of capitalism and its ability to disenfranchise the family, Ghosh makes use of this fear to drive the creation of the ship-siblings on the *Ibis.*

The construct of family in the works of both authors enacts what René Girard interprets in his reading of *King Lear* as a "crisis of degree."[90] Girard suggests that the family unit is thrown into a state of chaos and into "crisis," as previous hierarchies are lost and delegitimised. This is due to natural cycles of conflict, which then cause cultural norms to be broken down and repeated. The only way to resolve these is to find a scapegoat: Girard cites Julius Caesar though Caesar's death sparked a long period of civil unrest it enabled the creation of the Imperial Age of Rome and its artistic golden age. More contemporary models might be found in Franzen's patriarch Alfred

[90] Rene Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 6.

Lambert, and Ghosh's greedy businessman Benjamin Burnham. While the absence of both of these figures signal fresh starts, it also signals a loss.

As such, Girard sees these cycles as both positive and negative: "The omega of one cultural cycle is the alpha of another."[91] This then requires individuals to realize troubling public problems within the private sphere. A close explication of Girard's ideas as present in *King Lear* will proceed this introduction, which attempts to read beneath the surface of impressions of family and its ambivalences in Franzen and then in Ghosh. This order also makes narrative sense, as the paternal struggles as realised in Franzen's fiction mirror the first half of Shakespeare's play. The ageing Lear, who is aware that he is losing grip on the more public forms of power seeks consolation in his private role as a father. In this vein, Lamberts and the Berglunds struggle with various degrees of authority complicated by ambivalent definitions of the public and private. Ghosh's ship-siblings on the *Ibis*, formed in a transnational setting and without the complex relationship of caste (yet another translation of the public/private divide), embody more of the sentiments present in the latter half of the play. Lear is forced without his kingly authority, to examine other aspects of his identity and discover another side of fatherhood without the constraints of added considerations. However, as Girard also shows in his insightful reading of the play, Lear continues to be held hostage by the question of "degree" and it is the lingering presence of degree and public otherness that keeps families from realising their full potential.

The publication of *The Corrections* in 2009 marked a turning point in Jonathan Franzen's career. His two previous novels were nearly unreadable long postmodernist tomes, more dedicated to the ideas as enacted by people rather than the plight of being human in a world that is increasingly becoming more ambivalent against the existence of the individual. Nowhere --

[91] Girard, *ibid*.

Franzen asserts during an interview with the *A. V. Club* in 2010 -- is the plight of the human and its innate impossibilities clearer than looking at the family:

> Family's the one thing you can't change, right? You can cover yourself with tattoos. You can get a grapefruit-sized ring going through your earlobe. You can change your name. . . But you cannot change who your parents are, who your siblings are, and who your children are. So even in an intensely mediated world, in a world that offers the illusion of radical self-invention and the radical freedom of choice, I as a novelist am drawn to the things you *can't* get away from. Because much of the promise of radical self-invention, of definition yourself through this marvellous freedom of choice, it's just a lie. It's a lie that we all buy into, because it helps the economy run. Family is one of the clubs I reach for to beat up on that particular lie.[92]

For Franzen, the idea of family is an unchangeable genealogy translated into an unconditional obligation between parent and child, child and parent, sibling and sibling, and so on. It is this sense of unconditionality that gives family a postmodern sense of being entrapped in an intimacy that in turn is itself ensnared by the very political ideas Franzen hopes to "beat up on" with his familial-club. Yet this understanding is often marred by a defeatist move that we have already seen applied to his first two novels. S. Jammu and her cohort are defeated by political apathy and an ill-timed football game in *The Twenty-Seventh City* and the corporate conglomerate Sweeting-Aldren remaining unpunished for its part in causing severe earthquakes along the Eastern Seaboard in *Strong Motion*. Family, rather than standing up to these complex ideas, become a retreat from political commentary. The novels following *The Corrections*, Franzen seems to come to a new understanding that family is not so much a way to upheave social unhappiness, but to understand

[92] Jonathan Franzen with Gregg LaGambina, "Interview: Jonathan Franzen," *The A.V. Club*, 9 January 2010.

how this particular register of ambivalence affects contemporary notions of what it means to be family.

In a flashback scene in *The Corrections*, this hellish family dinner and its subsequent effect upon the Lambert children recalls the poetry of William Wordsworth, who extols that the "child is the father of the man."[93] In Franzen's construction, the child is already crushed by layers and layers of parental obligation and unhappiness and even the slimmest chance of the child's private life disappears in favour of more public parental strife. In the middle of the famous "dinner scene", the second son Chip Lambert is held hostage by some rutabaga. It becomes clear as the dinner progresses that Chip's dislike for root vegetables is only a thin veneer for a larger battleground, even though the Lambert parents have "agreed for the sake of the boys' welfare never to allude to [Alfred's] own dislike of vegetables" (*C,* p. 257). Enid takes advantage of this agreement, unhappy with her husband's work habits and perceived lack of ambition, and seeks to punish him with his least favourite meal.

Furthermore, the meal gains the troubling symbolism of the archetypal power struggle in the family, starting with the parents and then conferred upon their offspring without the offspring's knowledge. According to Freudian symbolism, Enid in her position as the matriarch of the Lambert household enlists the phallic object of the rutabaga in her struggle with the patriarch, her husband Alfred. Even though Enid still sees herself as a mother and in charge of traditionally womanly tasks such as cooking in the kitchen, this does not stop her from attempting to reclaim the phallic symbol by subjecting Alfred to a dinner which would take away from his patriarchal power. This event then generates a complex psychological neurosis in Chip: an Oedipal complex combined

[93] William Wordsworth, *Selected Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 122.

with a castration complex that would later inform his sexual infidelities with Julia and Melissa Paquette.

Nine-year-old Gary, Chip's seemingly better-adjusted older brother, is subject to a different perspective of his parents' unhappiness. During the same evening, Gary attempts to exercise creativity alongside his keen eye for detail by recreating a jail for a school project. At first glance, the project appears innocent enough, requiring ordinary school supplies such as glue and popsicle sticks; materials that should be just as benign in the hands of a boy. However, Gary's project soon grows to have disturbing implications when he adds an electric chair, made out of "semi-soft glue and broken popsicle sticks. . .in the jail's largest room" (*C*, p. 271). Gary's understanding of the electric chair and its purpose suggests that he has lost his childhood innocence before he has even had a chance to experience it. This can also be considered as one of Gary's first experiences with death, though an indirect one. Yet it is his clarity in constructing the electric chair that foreshadows his unhappy marriage to his wife Caroline and his inability to engage with his sons.

The theme of the traumatising dinner overall is that of imprisonment and a clear lack of choice on all of the parties involved. Gary attempts to stand up for Chip, saying to his mother, "he really doesn't like vegetables." Instead of offering an explanation for her behaviour, Enid attempts to bestow some misguided affection back towards the family unit, telling her son that his concern is appreciated and that he "should always be this loving" (*C,* p. 268). That said, Chip's dislike of said vegetables remain only a passing concern for his mother, and baby Denise, as Philip Weinstein reminds us, is an unwitting sufferer of this family discord before she is even born.[94] In this single meal, Franzen has clearly demonstrated the "imprisonment" felt by individuals of the contemporary family, but at the same time, this sense of "family" and the way in which it

[94] C.f. Philip Weinstein, *Jonathan Franzen and the Comedy of Rage* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 132.

understands each member of the family -- the overworked mother, the distant father, the suffering sons, and the yet unborn daughter already subject to such trauma before birth -- it is a prison of their own making. As such, there is some truth to the rather scathing way the critic James Annesley interprets Franzen's grasp on the metaphor of family-as-world:

> [Franzen's approach is] informed by a sense of determinism. Private lives are tied to social change, with the stock market providing a dominant and defining correction. The result is a homological novel that sees capital, technology politics, and industry as parts of a base upon which superstructures of individual lives are built.[95]

Annesley's comments regarding the novel's end, that "as if sensing that he has overplayed his hand, Franzen allows the novel to unravel its rigid scheme and correct itself."[96] The Lamberts then become a product of a socio-political system impervious to personal decisions.

However, where Annesley's notion of a consumerist base upholding the private lives of Franzen's families may appear deterministic, Ghosh seems to be reaching for the same set of deterministic circumstances when attempting to illuminate the hardships of minor characters, who are often disenfranchised by this very sense of determinism. When considered in tandem with Ghosh's championing of marginalised figures, Franzen's deterministic choices for the family unit provides much needed context. As we shall see in varying incidents, family as legitimised by wealth and privilege, and what Anshuman A. Mondal terms "colonial dissonance", openly threatens the well-being of the individual.[97] Regardless of whether the opposing, authoritative, individual in question might share a similar position of being secondary to the British Empire,

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[95] James Annesley, "Market Corrections: Jonathan Franzen And The 'Novel Of Globalisation'", *Journal Of Modern Literature*, 29 (2006), 111-128 (p. 124).
[96] Annesley, p.126.
[97] Anshuman A. Mondal, "Allegories of Identity: "'Postmodern' Anxiety and 'Postcolonial' Ambivalence in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* and *The Shadow Lines*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 38 (2003), 19-36 (p. 20).

which elicits authority only by structural means. This observation is further supported by Andrew N. Rubin's observations with respect to how British colonialism continues to preserve itself with a physical presence, where postcolonial (or in the case of the *Ibis* trilogy, fledging colonial) subjects are drawn into a hegemony that carefully preserves British authority.[98] Therefore, where Franzen's families are seen as privileged and narrow-minded, Ghosh's representations of an inherently marginalised so-called found family against the confines of imperial rule appear to contribute new dimensions to Franzen's apparent unwillingness to engage in social critique through the family. Conversely, it is through understanding Franzen's problematic construct of the family which leads Ghosh to see colonial authority through an ironic lens during the First Opium War.

In the first pages of *Sea of Poppies*, the notion of family is presented in the tenuous relationship that Deeti, a young woman crushed by familial obligations, shares with her daughter Kabutri. Deeti is painfully aware that "in three or four years, the girl would be married and gone; in her few remaining years at home she might as well rest" (*SP*, p. 5). Deeti reinforces the idea that even as Kabutri's mother, she would be cut off from her daughter's married life with her husband, which stands in stark contrast to Pip's mother Penelope/Anabel, who cries: "I have the right to love you more than anyone in the world." (*P*, p. 73). The sense of determinism is once more inverted and yet emphasised when Deeti agrees to subject herself to a great amount of debt on behalf of her daughter:

> Deeti resisted the offer till she thought of Kabutri: after all, the girl had just a few years left at home -- why make her live through them in hunger? She gave in and agreed to place the impression of her thumb on the seth's account book in exchange for six months' worth of

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[98] C.f. Andrew N. Rubin, A*rchives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 71.

> wheat, oil and gurh. Only as she was leaving did it occur to her to ask how much she owed and what the interest was. . . Better to eat weeds than take out such a loan: she tried to return the goods but it was too late (*SP*, p. 143).

Deeti's experience with the money-hungry seth implies that the comfort and obligation of one's family (in this case, Deeti's relationship with Kabutri) is only legitimised though her having the means to provide her daughter with enough comfort. The threat to the mother-daughter bond is imminent, as Deeti's incapacity to provide for Kabutri also means that their familial bond is just as tenuous as the relationship that Kabutri will have with the family of her future husband, which is defined by not comfort nor intimacy, but work and productivity. Marginalised presences, which are consistently excluded from the most basic of considerations have no choice but to adhere to societal structures that hold little regard for them.

From this exchange, we can see that Ghosh uses family as a way to delegitimise the authority of institutions which rely upon a capitalist definition. Again, we return to the move away from the initial assumption of cultural dominance of the British Empire, represented here as a greedy seth (a title generally given to a wealthy individual). Ghosh understands that the reach of the British Empire as an "incoming stain" of the "Red Empire," and that the reach is not only limited to English speaking authorities (*SP,* p. 207). This can be seen as an effort on Ghosh's part to recognise "colonial dissonance," which goes in hand with his consistent (later, this trope inverts itself as Neel, a well-to-do Raja who is accused of forgery) attempts to make himself as an alienated subject of the British; as a prisoner, one of the first words he encounters from an English sarjeant is "syphilis," a venereal disease. Likewise, Neel's initial sway towards British culture and its supposed fineries is akin to a metaphor of ill-health, as trying to conform to the presupposed limits of the illness Neel seized this opportunity to communicate with his captors in English, perhaps

underlining not the nature of his crime, but what the crime purports him to be. Neel decides that "as a prisoner, he would only speak English" (*SP,* p. 216). Though it is only when Neel lets go of his prejudices and his devotion of English language, even as a means of subverting his new identity as a that he finds himself finally able to experience othering perspectives that was previously closed off to him due to his rigid religious and classist beliefs. By the trilogy's final volume, Neel's idea of what constitutes a family has shifted considerably. As he explains to Zhong Lou-Si, a Chinese acquaintance in Hong Kong with whom he has become friendly, the idea of family has come to take on a flexible meaning, but Neel discovers that he "could think of no word [in Cantonese] for 'caste'" and has to settle for "clan." (*FF*, 47). This compromise serves to underscore in the distance between languages how different families are from place to place. The exchange, which tapers off because Neel cannot seem to adequately discuss to Zhong's satisfaction why Indian sepoys would want to fight for the British, also emphasises that Neel has gained important insight from the perspectives of others, rather than just ignoring them, as he previously would have, given his prejudices that are hereditary and familial in the first book. However, even with the enlightenment of this knowledge, a new ambivalence in Neel's knowledge that allows him to understand others without giving up his own point of view. Neel is still hard-pressed to circle back to the problem of familial oppression: as he tells them that many of the soldiers in questions are "not from poor families," and are in fact "from families who own their own land" (*FF*, 47). As such, they do not fight due to "necessity," but rather because the notion of "loyalty" is tied to how they make their living (*FF,* 47). Family, even in a circumstance that does not oppress the individual is still passed over, overshadowed, by singular notions of the nation, a dominant construct that Ghosh has often argued as problematic. The fluidity (and therefore the absurdity) of nation is put this way by Neel: "At one time their leaders were Indian kings, but some years ago it was the

British who became the major power. Since then sepoys have been fighting for them just as they did for rajas and nawabs. For them there is no great difference" (*FF*, 47). Neel's dismissal of a lack of difference is meant to imply that there is indeed a difference, and this dismissal is likewise interrogated by Zhong, in order to underscore its contrarian nature.

The *Lear* Model: Understanding the Crisis of Degree

As Stephen J. Burn reminds us, Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a shadow which looms large when speaking about Franzen's father figures, being an anagram of E-A-R-L Franzen (See Chapter one, p. 27). Franzen's treatment of his literary fathers have gotten successively more benign, from the dictatorial Alfred Lambert, to the "nice" liberal conservation lawyer Walter, and finally, to the amiable absentee father Tom Aberant. This progression poses certain questions about the impact of ignorance and the absence of knowledge. These are all father figures who either abstain their duties through a lack of knowledge, or they become obsessed and crippled by the perceived confines of fatherhood. Since they are Franzen's fathers, Alfred, Walter, and Tom are also coerced into understanding fatherhood through the means of a base superstructure that has little regard for parental authority. As Tom describes his job as editor of a student run paper to Anabel: "Authority can be delegated in various ways" (*P*, p. 344). In other words, authority becomes a question of degree, to be exercised according to the context at hand which intrinsically goes against the nature of authority.

In his explication on the nature of the crisis of Degree in Shakespeare, Girard reinforces that such a crisis only prevails in circumstances wherein human conflict seems to be directionless and, to borrow a word from Bauman, lacking in "velocity," the crisis takes a hold of human conflict

and transforms them into meditations on subjective selfishness and very human insecurity, which again touches upon the question of human privilege:

> . . . Human conflict in Shakespeare takes the form of mimetic rivalry, [itself] the product of internal mediation; internal mediation does not normally occur until a society becomes "undifferentiated." The comic and tragic process par excellence is none other than this vicious circle of "destructuration" or "desymbolisation" that we heard Ulysses call "the wizarding," "the choking" and "the neglection" of Degree. We ourselves now call it "the crisis of Degree."[99]

Girard's "degree" is contingent upon the question of conflict between characters, and also how characters tend to misinterpret conflicts which unsettles and reconstitute the conflict at hand with added dimensions which keep the characters from resolving the conflict, which leads the narrative to take on an ambivalent quality. In *King Lear*, on its surface about an ageing king who struggles to validate his authority in a manner that also seems to mirror the conflict between a nation's identity, and the identity of insecure fathers. Lear does not appear to understand that his kingdom should be separate from the affections of his daughters. Private concerns become matters to be solved with public policy meant to give structure to an individual's emotions. There is no small amount of irony present in Lear's approach to trying to become a human being via public policy. Even as he attempts to "shake all cares and business form our age/ conferring them on younger strengths," his desire for power still remains.[100] As Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "there where the state ceases, only there does the human being begin who is not superfluous."[101] This can be translated to illuminate the urgency found in Girard's crisis, where Lear's inability to

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[99] Girard, p. 174.
[100] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, edited by R. A. Foakes, (London: The Arden Shakespeare 2003), 1.1.28-39.
[101] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, edited and translated by Graham Parks, (London: The Folio Society, 2012), p. 39.

maintain a degree of separation, or his incapacity to accept to some degree the ambivalent relationship between King and Father, causes his downfall.

While *King Lear* admittedly holds less of an immediate sway in the writings of Ghosh, the connection to Shakespeare's play is still important, in that Ghosh appears to assign the idea of family as being critically distanced from the sometimes overwhelming idea of nation in the postcolonial imagination. This idea of established distance (either in its direct proximity to nation or its enforced separation and detachment from being able to participate with any meaning towards the project of nation) is clearly linked to the problem of degree. The problem encountered in the *Ibis* trilogy is also one curated by the context of untenable degrees, as Ghosh obfuscates the role of the nation in relation with family. In a series of published letters with the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty about the former's book, *Provincialising Europe*, Ghosh similarly attempts to call the ambivalence role of nation in the lives of everyday individuals by repositioning the family into focus. As Ghosh tells Chakrabarty, my using the "family to displace the nation should not be seen as a compensatory move" in postcolonial literature.[102] By decentralising the idea of nationhood, Ghosh may have found a way to accent aspects of family life that is prone to being relegated to the realm of minor experience, but we must not forget that by not putting them on a scale does not completely remove the threat of nationalism. Whereas Ghosh successfully subscribes to a critical distance in order to exercise the family as a means of "displacing the nation," such a move can only make sense and maintain its critical energy when it maintains nationalism as part of the discourse.

In trying to distinguish Ghosh's position from that of other authors, who more easily accept the postcolonial context as a place from which to write, Mondal cites a list of success stories

[102] Dipesh Chakrabarty and Amitav Ghosh, "A Correspondence on Provincialising Europe", *Radical History Review*, 83 (2002), 146-172 (p. 151).

including Ghosh's fellow authors Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul. Both Rushdie and Naipaul also discuss the fragmented nature of diaspora in their work and very much featuring intrinsic struggles that comes with individuals who are alienated by their community. M. K. Naik argues that the narrator of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* Saleem, is left to fend for himself in a hostile world, where his identity is regularly challenged ("reduced to animal level,") by his talent of "giving birth to parents."[103] This leaves him constantly 'handcuffed to history,' and unable to move forward. Naipaul's observational memoir *The Middle Passage* conversely clings on to history because it gives a sense of coherence to the communities in Trinidad, who would otherwise have little in common. They have no other choice but to hold on to their "Britishness, our belonging to the British Empire, which gave us [a] sense of identity."[104] All this would point to postcolonialism and the diaspora struggling to come to terms with a distinct lack of culture. Ghosh in turn argues that it is not a lack, '[the lack] is in itself the form of Indian culture. . .to be different in a world of difference is irrecoverably to belong.'[105] Where Rushdie's and Naipaul's approaches to understanding "Indian-ness"with trying to distance themselves from the idea of the British Empire, Ghosh approaches the same idea with nation not as a given, but as very much a construct.

A question of degree also arises from the constructive view with which Lear appears to view both his kingly authority and fatherly privileges as given, but in recognising them as a given, Lear is still further dependent on these ideas that have long governed his sovereignty as having an ambivalent presence in his life. This ambivalence is then challenged and contested when Lear misunderstands the fluidity of this power and instead tries to conform and confer his power to much narrower means. We already know that something is amiss within the play's first lines, as

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[103] M. K. Naik, *Dimensions of Indian-English Literature* (India: Sterling Publishing, 1984), 47.
[104] V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies - British, French and Dutch in the West Indies and South America* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 138.
[105] Amitav Ghosh, "Diaspora in Indian Culture," *Public Culture* (1989), 73-79 (p. 79).

Kent and Gloucester wonder why Lear does not decide the fate of his kingdom and the inheritance of his three daughters based on the character of the Duke of Albany and the Duke of Cornwall, who are married to Lear's older daughters Goneril and Regan respectively; the utilisation of the two husbands would draw a fine line to keep Lear from using his identity as ruler (sometimes transliterated easily into a role of a tyrant) to impose patriarchal ideas upon his daughters. Here, the word patriarchal elevates itself to become *patriotic*, or one who is loyal to the nation. Facing this daunting task, the daughters do not only have the affection of their father at stake, they also have to contend with each as loyal citizens of their father's kingdom. For Girard, *King Lear* exemplifies the difficulty of authority when the individual who occupies the position of power does not understand the collective nature of his authority. Girard suggests that Lear only understands his desires on a selfish level, which holds consequences for those who refuse to participate in his dark venture of self-validation. Lear, overcome by competitiveness in that he shirks his kingly duties, his "dark purpose" takes on proponents of what is understood as "dark leadership." Put simply, dark leadership describes a set of negative behaviours which might leader individuals to "direc[t] themselves to personal rather than organisational goals." Such is the case with Lear.[106]

Additionally, Girard describes Lear's plight in the terms of a man who is unable to free himself from the confines of human experience, which is limited to entirely selfish emotions:

> Lear is a father and a king who, in both capacities, ceases to be the model of external mediation that he should be for his children and his subjects. Thus *King Lear* combines the two domains of the mimetic crisis that we regard as inseparable. . . The mimetic desire of the sisters first takes the form recommended by Lear but he can no longer inspire respect,

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[106] See Sonny Fascia, "The Value of Dark Leadership," *Journal of Strategy, Operations, and Economics*, 3 (2018), (1-6) p. 1.

> so the rivalry for his favours quickly turn into a competitive reduction of the rights and privileges that the old king had reserved for himself. [107]

As Girard further points out, degree, or the differentiation of individuals and their desires always must remain in conversation with how an individual sees himself or herself, it becomes not a question of an individual's desire, but the ambivalence which necessarily must accompany one's desires because desires are the representation of something entirely selfish. This selfishness first manifests itself within the immediate sphere of the family rather than at the level of an entire kingdom, left without a ruler.

Harry Berger, in an extensive reading of the play as a family romance which predates but supports the notion of degree, notes that the play carries with it "simplistic modes of. . .parable."[108] The simplicity of inherent to parable, being a subset of narrative, which is more concerned with the message than the messenger, is a premier example of the question of degree. Each of Berger's set examples only makes sense when degree is at the forefront of how these various relationships are held in perspective. Tropes, as long-respected tenets of narrative are perhaps themselves a forerunner to the idea of Degree, which questions the precise relationship between such ideas and how the ideas might resist or react to change. Berger provides a comprehensive list including "the Good and Bad Sibling. . .the Terrible Father and Helpless Child (or Helpless Father and Terrible Child)."[109] Berger argues that these stock labels for characters serve to heighten the character's "inevitability of plight," which calls to an uncontested degree because the hardships experienced by the characters.

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[107] Girard, p. 181.
[108] Harry Berger, Jr, "King Lear: The Family Romance", *The Centennial Review*, 23 (1979), 348-376 (p. 350).
[109] Berger, *ibid*.

These tropes also allow for the same inevitability to play a part in a political narrative and less so a familial one, as Lear says one thing and means another. He means to gain reassurance from his family in his twilight years that even without the burden of kingship (a step's translation to patriarchal power), still means something to those closest to him. Lear is aware, more than anyone else of political ambition, as he himself exemplifies the trait in his ask for his daughters. Tropes are easily subverted and changed in language, and in asking "Which of you [daughters] shall we say doth love us most, / that our largest bounty may extend" (i.i.56-7) Lear turns what could have been a touching, vulnerable moment into a power play. Instead of preventing strife, Lear inserts himself into political competition with his family and continues to stir hostilities among his family.

The following readings are concerned with how an upset of degree colours an individual's perspective with their family. Instead of posing oneself as being open to the plight of a loved one, individuals are more often rewarded for understanding and pursuing goals that are aligned closely with not their own personal goals, but instead goals that are more readily seen as part of delineating the project of degree.

"America's Basement": Franzen's Shrinking Family Values

The above quote in the subtitle is taken from *The Corrections*, in a telling moment where Alfred Lambert has fled to the basement in order to soothe what Stephen J. Burn cleverly terms Alfred's "reptilian brain" riddled with Alzheimer's.[110] As he has matured into a keen observer of family dramas, Franzen has found a new way in which to implicate wider social ills upon the unhappiness of the family. Franzen's families, while not exactly representative of the country, are familiar with all registers of the way families are unhappy in ways that are deeply emotive, so far to perhaps

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[110] Stephen J. Burn, Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism (London and New York, NY: Continuum, 2008), p. 121.

become even emotionally manipulative. Yet, Franzen seems to want us to regard such intimate manipulation of those closest to us as another consequence laid out in Gary's toy-sized prison: that a family knows little alternative, especially in a shrinking America.

While the family unit is unsuited to realising social critique, what Franzen manages to do with the microcosm of the family snapshot is yet unrivalled and brings to mind Melvin Jules Bukiet's notion of a "crackpot realist" novel which he defines as separate from a novel which transcends the times; a crackpot realist novel "perfectly reflects [the times in which it is written]."[111] Bukiet names among its proponents David Foster Wallace, Richard Powers, and Jonathan Franzen. Susanne Rohr uses crackpot realism to elevate *The Corrections* to a new brand of the novel form, the novel of globalisation.[112] While Rohr's reading has been heavily disputed by both James Wood and James Annesley, it is worth noting both sets of opinions to show how a text can sustain its own ambivalence. Both Annesley and Wood note that as a novel *The Corrections* is too conservative to stand as a novel critical of the new millennium with Wood casting the sharp comment that *The Corrections* is left like a "glass-bottomed boat."[113] However, in the face of such critiques, I would like to return to Franzen's familial club; if he has truly set out to reflect contemporary times as he is living in them, they are impossible to critique. In the words of Giorgio Agamben, "Those who coincide too well with the epoch. . .are not contemporaries." Boxall takes this to mean that in order to have the "capacity" to "frame" the specifics of our time we must be at least a little "ejected" from it.[114] Taking into account the notion of Girard's

[111] Melvin Jules Bukiet, "Crackpot Realism: Fiction for the Forthcoming Millennium", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 16 (1996), 13-22 (p. 13).
[112] Susanne Rohr, "'The Tyranny of the Probable'—Crackpot Realism and Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*", *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 49 (2004), 91-105 (p. 92).
[113] Annesley, p. 122.
[114] Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 18.

comments about human conflict being a result of difference *in absentia*, but the idea of Degree can also help to understand why conversations within the family is so often plagued with unhappiness.

Further, even if Franzen is hampered by the Girardian question of degree, which from a certain angle could be made to resemble determinism, his novels still work to increase the volume of domestic discontents. Along the lines of Philip Weinstein's proposed "comedy of rage" in which he becomes the novelist that he is by understanding the dispassionate, "domestic white noise" of family squabbles.[115] It is worth visiting one of those arguments, as the startling remarkable engine which continues to give drive to Franzen's writing through to *Purity*. The argument gives his 2006 collection of personal essays *The Discomfort Zone* its name. The titular "discomfort zone" circles one of Irene's and Earl Franzen's ongoing arguments regarding temperature in the house. Small details take on worldly importance:

Earl: Leave the GOD DAMNED THERMOSTAT ALONE.

Irene: Earl, I didn't touch it.

Earl: You did! Again!

Irene: I didn't think I even moved it! I just looked at it, I didn't mean to change it.

Earl: Again! You monkeyed with it again! I had it set where I wanted it. And you moved it down to seventy

Irene: Well if I did somehow change it, I'm sure I didn't mean to. You'd be hot too, if you worked all day in the kitchen.

Earl: All I ask at the end of a long day at work is that the temperature be set in the Comfort Zone.

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[115] Weinstein, p. 26.

Irene: Earl, it is so hot in the kitchen. You don't know because you're never in here but it is so hot.

Earl: The low end of the comfort zone. Not even the middle. The low end! It is not too much to ask![116]

At the core of this marriage is rancour amplified, and later. Franzen takes this exchange to its extremes, as deep, familial unhappiness eventually plays out on the world stage. Chip marvels at the guns in Lithuania; Walter trades his ethics for money and oversees the mountain top removal of a patch of rural West Virginia. Like father, like son, Walter's son Joey, who is by now registered Republican and in great defiance of familial obligations, becomes a dealer of rusted tank parts collected from South America to sell to the U.S. military.

This exchange is just as poignantly disturbing between father and son. In *Freedom*, Walter berates teenager Joey as he prepares to move next door to be with his girlfriend Connie and her blusterous Republican family. Connie's mother, Carol, especially relishes any chance to retell the story of Joey's exodus from his family:

> ". . .And that's when Walter loses it. Just loses it. He's got tears running down his face he's so upset – and I can understand that, because Joey's his youngest, and it's not Walter's fault Patty is so unreasonable and mean to Connie that Joey can't stand to live with them anymore. But he starts yelling at the top of his lungs, like, YOU ARE SIXTEEN YEARS OLD AND YOU ARE NOT GOING ANYWHERE UNTIL YOU FINISH HIGH SCHOOL. . .DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE DOING TO YOUR MOTHER?" (*F*, p. 23-4).

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[116] Jonathan Franzen. *The Discomfort Zone* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), pp. 50-1.

Here, we have a retelling of *King Lear* in its close-cut contemporary cloth where it is also worth. Walter is Lear, who has asked for family loyalty from his son, who refuses to grant it. As a result, most of the conversations between Walter and Joey, including a telling moment when Joey starts selling customised watches to Connie's unsuspecting schoolmates. When the school finally catches up with Joey's scheme, banning watches with text on the wristbands. Walter offers a dry response: "You were benefiting from an artificial restraint of trade. I didn't notice you complain about the rules when they were working in your favour" (*F*, p. 13). Joey and Walter fail to have any real familial conversation and most of their dealings more or less end up being arguing over certain territories that are familiar and American like money, authority, and the state of the Middle East. However, this exchange in its practicality is one that is sanctioned by society. Walter is in turn dispensing good financial advice about how to survive in a world dominated by liquid power. When Joey decides to "accoun[t]" to his father after a disastrous showy in South America, Walter is disinterested at his son's predicament (*F*, p. 442):

> "Yeah, well, so, I guess the thing is, I'm sort of in trouble."
>
> "What?"
>
> "I said I'm in some trouble."
>
> It was the kind of call that every parent dreaded getting, but Walter, for the moment, wasn't feeling like Joey's parent. He said, "Hey, so am I! So is everybody!" (*F,* p. 344).

Read in the most uncharitable way, Walter's own fiscal and political problems overwhelms his previous natural responsibilities as Joey's father.

Near the end of the novel, Walter tells Connie who has married Joey, in a vague echo of Joyce-the-politician: "I like *you* a lot. I'm really glad you're part of the family" which emphasises the thinness of the familial bond (that it has to be said out loud) and the fact that he is perhaps

saying it to convince himself (*C,* p. 477). *Jessica*, on the other hand, chooses silence after her father's affair with his assistant Lalitha not only to keep the peace in the family but also to illustrate that the Berglund family might not be capable of seeing each other as family while they are in the public eye. Her phone message to Walter, "carefully timed while he was out to dinner" carries a public cautiousness in the vein of someone handling a PR crisis: "I'm sorry I haven't return your messages. . . I hope you had a nice day. . .Maybe we can talk sometimes, although I'm not sure when I'm going to have a chance" (*F*, p. 470). Jessica is an expy of Cordelia in the contemporary world: one who understands her own worth in keeping silent; unlike Shakespeare's Cordelia, who is imprisoned by her lack of language, Jessica is granted both agency and salvation in her silence in hers.

"Ship-Siblings": Beyond Traditional Family Structures in The *Ibis* Trilogy

The *Ibis* Trilogy is Ghosh's latest work, featuring three large volumes, which details the fantastical journey of an unlikely set of ship-siblings, all of whom have found an uncommon familial bond aboard the eponymous ship at the height of the Opium War during the early part of the nineteenth century. The *Ibis*, a schooner which carries opium to be traded and human chattel to be auctioned off as labour upon reaching the island of Mauritius, represents at its surface, the diametric between intimate familial connections and the fluid, expansive reach of colonial power, which structurally erodes the meaning of family. Yet, the ship is given meaning distinct from its colonial powers, as it is first described to Deeti, a recent young widow from Ghazipur (*SP*, p. 9). Owing to her "colour[less]" eyes, she is first given an image of the ship through a vision (*SP,* p. 5). Such a vision so vivid that even "seasoned sailors" found her drawing of the ship in her family shrine to be an "evocative rendition of its subject" (*SP*, p. 9).

The uncanny likeness of the ship as portended in Deeti's vision has heralded the uncanny of dangerous ideas, this time involving the notion of sisterhood, a familial structure that bypasses patriarchal power. Certainly, sisterhood continues to play a secondary role to a family structure that has traditionally valued patriarchal power and has long serviced its ongoing dedication to caste. Whereas women, most often in the role of a housewife, are expected to play a complex role of acknowledging the order and discipline that is embodied by *mem-sahibs* (British women). Writing about the modern Bengali woman in 1920, Indira Devi envisions the Bengali housewife as "unaffected by nature, of pleasant speech, untiring in their service [to others], obliviously of their own pleasures. . . and capable of being content with very little."[117]

Only a woman of such an idealised calibre is fit to be within society. In the ship's hold, in the company of other women, Deeti finds the courage to use her own name: "No sooner had she said it than it becoming real: this was who she was – Aditi, a woman who had been granted, by a whim of the gods, the boon of living her life again" (*SP*, 216). In the most unlikely of circumstances, Deeti has been given a voice of her own and in her own name and is not beholden by the name that reminds her of. Unlike Kalua, who finds a new freedom in his father's name, it is important that we recognise Deeti as a woman who finally can negotiate the world on her own terms, although the idea of Deeti as a married woman still going by her own name is "not lost on the others" (*SP,* 216). Personal identity has no place in a familial structure that is first concerned with caste, and then concerned with marriage and children.

It is notable that one of the other women on the ship, Heeru pities Deeti too. The description that Ghosh provides of Heeru curiously does not have much of her in it and depicts her as a woman who is all but invisible save for:

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[117] See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", Representations (Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories), 37 (1992), (1-26) p. 17.

> [Heeru] too, had been a mother once, and her name was, properly speaking, Heeru *ki-ma*. Although her child had died a while ago, through a cruel irony of abbreviation, his name had lived on in his mother (*SP*, 216).

Heeru's history is mired not by a failed marriage, but the death of her son, who according to tradition would have grown to become the head of her household. And yet, by such "cruel abbreviation," (one wonders perhaps, who started calling her by that name, given the incidental birth of Maddow Colver) she is still accepted in society more so than Deeti, who carries with her the freedom of her name. This freedom, according to the other women, is only granted to her because she is childless and therefore her freedom is rendered as "less" and a status to be pitied. Juxtaposing Heeru's freedom as a mother of a dead son and Deeti's freedom gained as a result of her supposed childlessness challenges the notion of family and nation as earlier evoked by Naipaul and Rushdie.

Ghosh recognises the problems standing behind an Indian undertaking the task of representing their own experiences. The slow construction of family in the *Ibis* trilogy exemplifies Ghosh's understanding of how British culture has assimilated into India. Even though Ghosh is looking back into the past with contemporary eyes, he does not ignore the cultural difficulties presented to him. The assimilations lead characters to make complicit decisions in order to undermine the project of nationalism – to "displace" nationalism as such, the idea of Deeti abandoning her (or, in this case, Kalua's) caste in order to complete her escape from her whole life. If her caste had not been "an intimate part of herself" the idea of all of the women becoming "sisters" would have carried with it such narrative emotion (*SP*, 217). Munia, one of the younger girls who is eager to claim Deeti as her *bhauji-hamar* (sister in law) is rebuked by the others, who see the added sense of specialness as a barrier to the newly achieved quality of apolitical equality.

In other words, they are keen to : "What's wrong with you? How does that all matter now? We are all sisters, aren't we?" Munia's insistence and the other women's annoyance suggests that they are aware of the intimacy of their bond now as a sisterhood, and therefore aware of the traditional legal statutes that sets such intimacy against them.

When Deeti meets Paulette, who has also run away from an impending marriage with Judge Kendelbush, Paulette's revolutionary inclinations cements their sisterhood. Paulette bluntly shuns the idea of "losing caste":

> On a boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same[.] From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship siblings. . .to each other. There'll be no differences between us. [She said.] This answer was so daring, so ingenious, as fairly to rob the women of their breath (*SP*, 328).

This moment is one of the first throughout the *Ibis* trilogy which privileges the agency of the individual over the role that the individual must play in order to satiate a frequently oppressive system. This is only possible, Binyak Roy argues quoting from Bill Ashcroft's influential *The Empire Writes Back*, when the space aboard the *Ibis* is seen as a "transnational" space, that is a space that isn't only reliant upon a singular, prefigured and oppressive definition, transcends singularity and moves towards a mode of ambivalence, in that in understanding transnationalism as a negotiable "relation," it then becomes

> Transnation is neither simply universal, nor simply between or across nations, but is the "embodiment of transformation: the interpolation of the state as the focus of power, the erasure of simple binaries of power. . .[118]

[118] Bill Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), p. 8.

Ashcroft's formulation, Roy claims, afford those who are taking this journey different ways of seeing their often tragic circumstances: "Cross-cultural caste, class, gender, and national collaborations blur all sorts of boundaries and enable the formation of new alliances."[119] The individual begins, as Lear does in his madness and lack of personhood in the latter half of the play, to realise that there is yet a complete world beyond the sliver of it they have been allowed to experience due to legislation and traditions which are mostly familial.

Paulette's radical reconfiguration of their destiny aboard the *Ibis* is remarkable enough for its direct way of injecting the notion of individuality and choice within a group of migrant labourers who have not had the chance to fully recognise themselves as subjects who are just there to provide "coolies" for a planter since "[he] may no longer have slaves in Mauritius" (*SP*, 20). Paulette's pronouncement, which can be seen as conservative (meaning that the idea isn't necessarily new to her and that she is the expected messenger to deliver this message to others, being the daughter of a failed French revolutionary, Pierre Lambert, should be contrasted with the transformation of Neel, the former Raja who is branded as a "forger" (*SP*, 269). He comes onboard the *Ibis* as a prisoner. This identity of being falsified, or indeed given his position under slightly precarious conditions, takes Neel away from a stringent understanding of his family, in which he has never made to understand as family. However, after taking pains to clean up after his fellow prisoner Ah Fatt, that Neels thinks to enquire after Ah Fatt's home and family. This is something he would have never done in his position as the Raja of Rakshali. Ghosh interposes the passing of the Rakshali estate as to give the impression of two ships passing in the night. Neel must embrace his new life without wealth and the immediate protection of others if he is to survive:

[119] Binyak Roy, "Reading Affective Communities in a Trans-national Space in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*", *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 15 (2016), 47-70 (p. 54).

> It was not because of Ah Fatt's fluency that Neel's vision of Canton became so vivid as to make it real: in fact, the opposite was true, for the genius of Ah Fatt's descriptions lay in their elisions, so that to listen to him was a venture of collaboration, in which the things that were spoken of came gradually to be transformed into artefacts of a shared imagining. So did Neel come to accept that Canton was his own city as Calcutta was to the villages around it -- a place of fearful splendour and unbearable squalor, as generous with its pleasures as it was unforgiving in the imposition of hardship. (*SP*, p. 345).

Neel's newfound ability to connect with Ah Fatt, who is himself alienated from all walks of his life, is better known by the name Leong Fatt, given to his mother, a Chinese boat woman rather than the name bestowed on him by his father whose name for Freddie links him to an impressive Parsi family who has made much of their wealth in trading opium. Freddie's mother, Chi Mei, "who knew far better the probable fate of children who were neither Dan nor Fanqui," alienates Freddie from his father's side of the family in order to protect him.[120] However, this connection is then restored and revalidated by Shireen, Freddie's father's widow, after his death. In the most obvious of Ghosh's moves, the family is removed from being patriarchal and therefore is no longer so obligated to the nation (*SP*, p. 346). And yet, Ghosh still understands that these agencies must at some point answer to the power of the British Empire and also to simple human greed within the historical context of the trilogy. This too, is another transformation of Lear's degree.

Scenes from a Marriage

Lastly, we come to marriage, a dearly personal institution that has caused much political upheaval, and yet offers, at least in America through means of spousal privilege, the greatest amount of privacy and intimacy, as such that husband and wife cannot legally incriminate each other. And

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[120] Amitav Ghosh, *River of Smoke* ((London: John Murray, 2011), p. 72. All subsequent citations given in-text as *RS.*

yet, it is because of this particular protection that there exists no privacy within a marriage which erodes upon an individual's personal liberties. We again return to the scene of surveillance that underlines the marriage of Gary Lambert, the oldest Lambert progeny in *The Corrections* to the fickle Caroline, yet another version of Irene Franzen who wants to understand her husband's feelings. It is the oppressive nature of her feelings that tightens the impossibility of fatherhood around her husband's neck. As Weinstein aptly puts it: Caroline takes full advantage of Gary's anxieties and his blooming depression in the wake of such anxiety, pushing his buttons "to perfection," as only befitting of "a long suffering spouse."[121] She has even involved Gary's sons in a scheme to make him more compliant to her whims. Notably, where depression is a tool used for political self protest, Gary's depression is another prison which helps him win back his family. He has the following conversation with his son, Caleb:

> "Surveillance is not a hobby." [Gary] said.
>
> "Dad, yes it is! Mom was the one who suggested it. She said I could start with the kitchen." It seemed Gary another Warning Signs of depression that his thought was: *The liquor cabinet is in the kitchen*. (*C*, p. 156)

While this conversation is not explicitly about the state of Gary and Caroline's relationship, his concerns over liquor and the fact that his son appears to view surveillance as child's play states without words the crushing extent of Gary's depression. As we have seen in Patty's case in Chapter 1, that depression could be retooled as a way of standing up for one's beliefs and self-hood, the crushing notion of depression as a familial tool leaves Gary with little choice. He is trapped in his family and all of his opinions about the financial markets and his father's medication are only

[121] Weinstein, p. 122.

secondary to the needs of his family. Depression then, becomes an all-consuming family affair, in which Gary becomes imprisoned, and the first of these steps is his marriage.

Ghosh too, understands the difficulties of the English notion of "companionable marriage." In trying to arrange a suitable match for Paulette in the *Ibis* trilogy, from which she runs away, Ghosh employs a range of complex manoeuvres between the legal and the personal, but all of these scenarios seem to not include Paulette, as a way of critique a woman's role in her marriage. Early in *Sea of Poppies*, Paulette has caught the interest of local judge, Justice Kendalbushe. Mrs. Burnham, who acts as Paulette's surrogate mother is thrilled at the prospect of Paulette "scoring such a hit" (*SP*, p. 243):

> "Are you not glad of the judge's interest? It is a great triumph, I assure you. Mr Burnham approves most heartily and has assured Mr Kendalbushe that he will do everything in his power to sway you. The two of them have even agreed to share the burden of your instruction for a while" (*SP,* p. 252).

Kendalbushe's interest in Paulette also solves the majority of her financial situation as an orphan, because Mrs Burnham directly reminds Paulette of her "situation" (*SP,* p. 252). Paulette attempts to give her material gains that would come from marrying the judge and pronounces them "dross," only to be rebuked by Mrs. Burnham as being ungrateful. Mrs. Burnham's scolding of Paulette in this matter is Ghosh's irony at work, implying that although Mrs. Burnham is a staunch Christian who believes in strict adherence of the Bible, she is unable to see the misalignment between Paulette wanting to throw away her material wealth for a real chance at a companionable marriage. Notably, this irony continues further with Mrs. Burnham's eventual affair with Zachary Reid in the final book. Mrs. Burnham's Christian morals also renders her blind to her husband's sexual

abuse of Paulette, something that she continues to not acknowledge, as Mr. Burnham disguises his abuse of Paulette under the veneer of her "instruction" (*SP*, p. 251).

Since Paulette's instruction is entangled with sexual abuse, the idea that she "could learn to love the judge," a charge which Mrs. Burnham places on her becomes absurd and chilling. Paulette accidentally admits that she has romantic feelings towards Zachary Reid, but since he has no money to his name, Mrs. Burnham tells her that she must marry Judge Kendalbushe, a fact that might have been more palatable to Paulette had Mrs. Burnham allowed her to understand the arrangement as a point of law. Given her romantic feelings towards Zachary Reid, it is also of interest to understand how emotions and legal jargon fails to point towards marriage, willing the collapse of a family before the arrangements are even made. Paulette beseeches Zachary to help her escape from her impending nuptials with the judge, and he at first rejects her proposal that she be allowed to travel on the *Ibis*. However, given a new "instinct of protectiveness," he offers her a possibility that "if I had the means to be a settled man, I would this minute offer to make you…" (*SP*, p. 281). While this goodness only exists in his imagination, it doesn't achieve the desired effect. At this point, Zachary is open to other experiences, but he is too, beginning to realise the very present effects of this openness, as this openness is quickly judged and negated by others with a narrower perception.

Given the idea of marriage and the legal precedents that are set against her were emphasised as cornerstones of Paulette's reality from her conversation with Mrs Burnham, Zachary says exactly the wrong thing. Paulette now views marriage as a fatherly "adoption" and states that "I am not a lost kitten . . .in search of a husband" (*SP*, p. 281). None of her romantic feelings towards Zachary are visible here, nor do they appear anywhere in her thoughts. Although Mrs. Burnham has tried to sweeten the girl towards the idea of a companionable marriage, her idea of order and

contradictory values has robbed Paulette of any possibility of romantic feeling. Later, she meets Neel the disgraced Raja on the *Ibis* and his idea of her alleged station is wholly unkind: Neel had heard Elokeshi speak of a new class of prostitute who had learnt English from their white clients" (*SP*, p. 362). Paulette's misadventures with marriage and romance only serve to cement Deeti's idea of a marriage: "a child exiled from home" (*SP*, p. 366).

Overall, family, and by extension the institution of marriage, must in some way fit into and therefore be made ambivalent by those political institutions that have long circumscribed our sense of self and further how these politics have shaped and deterritorialised the family. Families, as examined here through two very different perspectives, are no longer culturally nor sociologically bound. Parents used to experience culture with their children to cultivate some sense of identity. Family now is about one generation of people teaching the next generation how to be better consumers only for those lessons to oftentimes be ignored. This then leads to deterritorialisation as each person becomes disenfranchised from his or her means of production and identity becomes fragmented as man is, by nature, a social animal.

This fragmentation is obvious in the remains of language and to explicate upon it would provide a telling link to the next chapter. Nowadays children can seek emancipation from their parents. This was originally a word used when a slave was released from slavery in Roman society. However, there is a psychic schism involved in this: Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* describes our pre-capitalist morality as a *slave* morality: [122] in our freedom we are still slaves and it is the inability to resolve this seeming paradox that causes psychic trauma and, perhaps leads to (or makes us more disposed towards) the idea of mimetic desire. We are still enamoured of the concept

[122] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil / On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated by Adrian Del Caro (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1995), p. 170.

of the self as supreme but unable to make judgements for ourselves, hence we seek out what has been pre-validated by someone whose values in that area we respect. This lack of choice, we shall see in the next chapter, is dangerously masqueraded as freedom, one of the impeachable virtues in the human condition as perceived in the West.

Chapter Three

Freedom, Anxiety, and Ambivalence in Ghosh and Franzen

This chapter understands the different "modes" of freedom as enacted in the novels of Ghosh and Franzen. Following on from the previous two chapters, which have addressed the unstable nature of social relations, it seems prudent to dedicate some time to the prized idea of Western civilisation of freedom that has long informed such relations. I am specifically interested in how "modes" of freedom are impacted by discourses of race, class, and sex and also comment on a wider sense of social anxiety. This prolonged anxiety is indelibly connected to a sense of surveillance and uncanny which is propagated by a world which ambivalently understands its own place is increasingly delineated by anxiety, whereby notions of freedom become necessarily beholden to lesser, more worldly virtues. In turn these virtues further impose confines upon individual freedom. In other words, illusion of choice and the control it purports to afford to uphold an individual's sense of self is then to the detriment of the individual's experiential self. Freedom is only then imparted to the individual as a sense of loss and, instead of pushing for liberty, freedom underlines a sense of censorship within these novels.

In this introduction, I offer three different modes of freedom and its relation to choice and anxiety. Then, in the following sections, I will show that, applied to the narratives of the ship's carpenter-turned-captain Zachary Reid of the *Ibis* Trilogy, the privileged Joey Berglund of *Freedom*, and the lawless but idealist Andreas Wolf of *Purity*, all these archetypes embody ambivalent freedoms, as shown by their contradictory choices and underlined by their anxiety. These models represent the contradiction between law and freedom as proffered by John Locke; "creaturely" freedom as exemplified by Rainer Maria Rilke's "Eighth Elegy" and theorised by Eric L. Santner, which seeks to understand the contradiction of freedom, society, and status and

Santner argues via Rilke that freedom is only understood outside of societal confines.[123] Within such confines, it is easy to descend into the third circumstance, a situation readily governed by Jean-Paul Sartre's depiction of "bad faith," which raises questions about freedom, personal responsibility towards freedom, and willing self-deception.[124] The most willing deception perpetrated by Zachary, Joey, and Andreas is that they each seek emancipation from their lives as such, but return to troubling points in their psyches, manifested as maternal anxiety.

First, Ghosh and Franzen are disparately interested in the intersections between freedom and the law. In his *Second Treatise of Civil Government, w*ritten in 1690, John Locke perceives that there is no break between the ideals of freedom and choice. He argues that choice expands the largesse of freedom and that this generosity in turn is protected by an individual's will to follow the law:

> The end of the law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom: for in all states of created beings capable of laws, where there is no law, there is no freedom: for liberty is, to be free from restraint and violence from others; which cannot be, where there is no law: but freedom is not, as we are told, a liberty for every man to do what he lists: (for who could be free, when every other man's humour might domineer over him?) but a liberty to dispose, and order as he lists, his person, actions, possessions, and his whole property, within the allowance of those laws under which he is, and therein not to be subject to the arbitrary will of another, but freely follow his own.[125]

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[123] Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 13.
[124] Jean Paul Sartre, On Being and Nothingness, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993), p. 47.
[125] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 306.

For Locke, the guiding hand of the law becomes naturally entwined with the task of expanding and protecting notions of freedom, and liberty is granted to the individual precisely because they freely choose to follow the law, rather than to view themselves as subjugated to the letter of the law without choice. Locke understands the capacity of jurisprudence to protect the idea of freedom is born out of the human capability of choice. Locke assumes too, that freedom remains intimately guarded by law so long as its citizens have made a choice to obey the law.

Locke's position regarding the integration of law and order is demonstrated clearly in *Freedom*, where Franzen dwells at length on Patty's visit to her daughter Jessica's small liberal arts college for a Family Weekend. Patty, as ever a collection of reliable contradictions, is faced with a plaque donated by the class of 1920: "Use well thy freedom" (*F*, p. 184). This "wisdom" appears to imply that freedom has clearly demarcated boundaries and individuals entrusted with such freedoms must make temperate use of them or else risk existential dread which Patty represents. In 1920, temperance and prohibition clashed with society's natural instinct for excess. The year saw the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment, which banned the production and consumption of alcohol. Alcohol in *Freedom* is a recurring physical manifestation of Patty's misbehaviour. This highlights the impossibility of one's freedom being used while also being cognisant of the law. This irony is further embodied by Patty, who is narratively bound to misuse her freedom and stands outside of such expectations. Patty is aware that Jessica poses as "the real grownup of the two of them" (*F*, p. 185).

The Lockean spectre as provided by Jessica enhances Patty's lack of freedom, rather than to circumscribe the better circumstances of Jessica's own life. Jessica's freedom is made contradictory because she has no function but to act as a foil to the lesser freedoms pursued by her family: "Mom, I make your life so *easy* for you. . .I don't do drugs, I don't do any of the shit that

Joey does, I don't embarrass you, I don't create scenes, I never did *any* of that[.]" (*F*, p. 185). Jessica's tirade against her mother does not only serve as an example of an idealised freedom, but emphasis the distance by which Patty is removed from it. It is worth noting here that Jessica, who Patty loves only "an appropriate" amount, is not given due attention in the novel (*F*, p. 112); the novel concentrates on the excesses of freedom, the unhappiness caused by these excesses, and Jessica's seemingly normal appearance is remarked on as the envy of others, but of course, is not treated as particularly interesting.

Patty's inability to spend quality time with her daughter leads into the second of our narrative modes: the mode of "bad faith" as described by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*. "Bad faith" is a way of understanding the limits of freedom through the act of externalisation. In this sense Patty "exercised her self control" and "behaved" like a grownup, even if such actions are immediately detached from her (*F*, p. 184). Through bad faith, agency and responsibility -- what Sartre calls "intentionality" -- is removed, while freedom is idealised and deemed impossible when confronted with human choice.[126] Franzen also demonstrates the contradiction between personal freedom and bad choices that are entrenched in human expectation. A prime example is Joey Berglund, who embodies a traditional model of bad faith in his handling of his affair with Connie and Jenna, wherein he blames not himself, but Connie and Jenna, for his choices. A starker example is found in Andreas Wolf, who uses his position of power as a church counsellor to prey on young women. He is able to keep up this pretence by abiding to his own rules, that the girls cannot be "underage or abused" (*P*, p. 200). They both hunger over desires that stand diametrically opposed to freedom, but all but ignores these contradictions. In catering to personal desires to the

[126] Sartre, p. 48.

detriment of others, Joey and Andreas Wolf may be seen to face consequences of their actions, but their consequences are in fact more a move towards narrative salvation.

Zachary Reid is one of Ghosh's original passengers of the *Ibis* who goes through a remarkable transformation throughout the trilogy. From his initial position as the lowly ship's carpenter in *Sea of Poppies* through to his ascendance to the *Ibis'*s captaincy in the final pages of *Flood of Fire* in the final volume, Zachary represents a series of compromised freedoms within each stage of his narrative. Ghosh underlines the consequences of Zachary's actions and changed belief systems in very real terms from a deckhand without a definitive place in the crew to a man who clearly clings onto the tenets of his newfound station. Unlike Joey and Wolf, Zachary's descent into a practitioner of ambivalent freedom is not couched in terms of forgiveness. Zachary's actions in the name of freedom is rife with loss, causing both the death of Mrs. Burnham, and the suicide of Freddie Lee after Zachary sells him out to the triad boss Lenny Chan. Sartre's bad faith has supplanted a "creaturely freedom" which moves away from a self-conscious understanding of one's inner life and instead showcases the "open," a realm of direct understanding as embodied by the "animal" of Rilke's "Eighth Elegy. Unlike Fokir, who remains in the state of exception until his death, Zachary's progress from a state of exception, which allows him to embody the experiences of others, is removed, as he takes up a colonialist understanding of what it means to be free. While Rilke's understanding of "the open" seems to suggest that Zachary represents an extended distance from the man he is destined to become; however, a closer look at his relation to "creaturely freedom" and his ambivalent social status as a son of a northern freewoman from Baltimore exemplifies the anxieties which lead him to take up a narrower view of freedom, thereby safeguarding his freedom to choose, or what Dean Franco notes as the rights to desire above the freedom of experience.

Zachary Reid: “No Small Pride”

In the *Ibis* Trilogy, the following conversation happens between Mr. Benjamin Burnham, a shrewd opium trader and Zachary. At this point in the narrative, Zachary is only a lowly ship’s hand who has spent the *Ibis*’ difficult maiden voyage working as its carpenter. The following conversation exposes not only the fragility of freedom, but also the complex intentions a capitalist mindset such as Burnham’s seeks to impose upon it which would profoundly change its meaning:

> The suggestion startled Zachary: “D’you mean to use [the *Ibis*] as a slaver, sir? But have not your English laws outlawed that trade?”
>
> That is true,” Mr. Burnham nodded. “Yes, indeed they have, Reid. It’s sad but true that there are many who’ll stop at nothing to halt the march of human freedom.”
>
> “Freedom, sir?” said Zachary, wondering if he had misheard.
>
> His doubts were quickly put at rest. “Freedom, yes, exactly,” said Mr. Burnham. “Isn’t that what the mastery of the white man means for the lesser races? As I see it, Reid, the Africa trade was the greatest exercise in freedom since God led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Consider, Reid, the situation of a so-called slave in the Carolinas – is he not more free than his brethren in Africa, groaning under the rule of some dark tyrant?”
>
> Zachary tugged at his earlobe. “Well sir, if slavery is freedom then I’m glad I don’t have to make a meal of it. Whips and chains are not much to my taste.” (*SP*, p. 73)

On the one hand, the conversation is superficially about liberal ideals such as the progress of culture and the continued propagation of freedom within the human race. On the other hand, the exchange is more focused upon the situational irony that becomes apparent in Burnham’s rhetoric and turns conversation into dangerous territory. Burnham’s unfettered usage of slavery to mean

freedom highlights the disembodied nature of his beliefs. Burnham appears to be an individual who values an excess of economic freedom, going so far as to displace other forms of freedom for financial gain.

Furthermore, Burnham's absurdist attitude towards the problematic relation gains a practical dimension and implies possible consequences to Burnham's thinking, at least on the part of Zachary while Burnham himself avoids any repercussions. Burnham's rhetoric linking freedom and slavery is one that is marked by not only the apparent freedom of choice, but also calls to Zachary's innate anxieties. Zachary makes clear that this sort of freedom is not to the liking of his stomach or indeed his ear and his bodily gesture can be read as an attempt to distance himself from Burnham's troubling ideas. The telling movement of Zachary tugging on his earlobe recalls a specific moment in *The Hungry Tide*, where Kanai bids Piya to "pull out her ears and listen" while he tells her about a local legend (*HT*, p. 429). This moment, a key to representing the sharing of experiences in *The Hungry Tide* and results in Kanai and Piya recognising that they can in fact understand each other while being respectful of their divergent backgrounds. Zachary's fiddling with his earlobe and his proclamation of slavery not being a hearty meal suggests the opposite this time around. Bodied terms in this particular circumstance become a powerful form of abstract irony. By associating physical gestures with slavery, Ghosh further creates an ironic juxtaposition between the sign and intent. While Zachary's gesture is intended to solicit intimacy and understanding, he is only met with a sense of alienation.

Zachary is first introduced as an optimistic, hardworking boy who becomes a standout for the "brilliance of his gaze" (*SP*, p. 10). In the tangential second volume of the trilogy, Zachary's gaze is the unique feature that is inscribed in Deeti's shrine, and she describes him to her descendants as she'd known him in the beginning of the first novel: "That is *Malum Zikiri*, he

saved us all" referring to the plight of the group at the end of the first novel (*RS*, p. 3). The shrine does not seem to account for Zachary's adventures in the third volume, where he actively retracts his sense of belonging as part of the *Ibis*' ship-family and cements his place amongst the very forces that have made the *Ibis* a slave ship. Zachary's lack of hesitation is on the one hand, seen as sudden, but on the other hand, his transformation once he has been assured of a real place in society, and told that he can exercise the freedoms afforded to a "Sahib" or a gentleman, is a clear product of anxieties of his matrilineal freedom, as granted to him as a son of a freewoman from Baltimore (*SP*, 10). Compounding this very anxiety is also the fact that his father is never mentioned.

One of the first things we learn about Zachary is his staunch belief in Christian values, imparted to him by his freewoman mother. As a way to mind his "sharp tongue," it becomes Zachary's habit to think of "at least five praiseworthy things" with which to quell his boyish temper (*SP*, p. 10). The externality of this habit allows for Zachary to temper his inner anxieties. It is not a coincidence that the tongue, used to consume food and to verbalise his praiseworthy thoughts, is used to defend against Burnham's blatant attempt to legitimise slavery. This active displacement is aligned with his mother's circumstances. As a freewoman, his mother would have been more than a free black woman and to understand his discomfort with his status, we have to first understand what it means for Zachary's mother to be a freewoman in early nineteenth-century America, as well as what it means for Zachary to be considered "black" in the *Ibis'* manifest (*SP*, p. 12). During the first national women's suffrage conference ever held in Washington D. C. in 1869, Robert Purvis, an American abolitionist of mixed-race like Zachary, argued that black women should not be disenfranchised from the vote just because the Southern black gentlemen

has need for the need to vote to contest the wrath of former slave owners.[127] Quoting the historian Paula Giddings, Jean Fagan Yellin points out that black women still retained control over the domestic sphere, just like their white women counterparts. Black men, however, did not have this parity and would continue to "vindicate their manhood largely through asserting their authority over women."[128] However, Zachary is free by virtue of his mother's authority as a freewoman, and this lack of selfhood have a telling influence upon his actions after the events of *Sea of Poppies.*

Despite the contradiction which complicates his status, Zachary's personal freedoms is at first a point of great pride; he thusly acknowledges this freedom, which allows for him to retain his own name and the knowledge of his personhood: "he took no small pride in. . . knowing his precise age and the exact date of his birth" (*SP*, p. 10). These personal, specific details further allow Zachary to hold a ship-mate's license, and earn a living, rather than being constrained to a life of indentured servitude, despite the ship manifesto's damning categorisation of his person as "black." Even though some other passengers wonder if he "changi colour," the true nature of Zachary's identity doesn't quite yet pose a problem because his "colour," - the fact that he might change from "blue to black" - is not a matter of categorising him out of a societal place which feels obligated to police its own borders (*SP*, p. 140). Zachary's origins at the moment holds no precise value to those wondering about his heritage. Moreover, his bicultural heritage is also not a threat to a society built upon an ironic hierarchy; Zachary is not subject to passing privilege, and his freedom is not at the expense of someone else's ability to exercise their power. As we shall see, Zachary's heritage in the volume practically removes him from such discourses. In fact, Zachary's first voyage with the *Ibis* also strongly denies these assumptions, as he receives a varied schooling

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[127] See Margaret Hope Bacon, "The Double Curse of Sex and Color": Robert Purvis and Human Rights", *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 121 (1997), 53-76 (pp. 53-4.)

[128] Jean Fagan Yellin, "'Race' and Nineteenth-Century American Womanhood", *Legacy*, 15 (1998), 53-58 (pp. 54-55).

from the ship. His "stern schooling" as part of the Ibis's crew betrays the privileged state of his position of being neither here nor there, therefore remaining open to experiences that might be considered "other" (*SP*, p. 11). As the second-mate falls ill during the first leg of the Ibis' maiden voyage, it falls on Zachary to mediate between various parts of the ship. Not only has Zachary incurred valuable experience in the role he originally signed on for, he has gained a working knowledge of how the other parts of the crew ought to be run without taking part in full or limiting himself to just a singular role in the crew.

Zachary's in-between status is akin to the idea of the "creaturely," which Eric L. Santner describes as

> ...a piece of the human world presents itself as a surplus that both demands and resists symbolisation, that is both inside and outside the "symbolic order". . . what I am calling creaturely life is a dimension of human existence called into being at such natural historical fissures or caesuras in the space of meaning. These are the sites where the struggle for new meaning – in Nietzsche's terms, the exercise of will to power, is most intense.[129]

This freedom is also explicated at length in Rilke's "Eighth Elegy" where two types of subjectivity are discussed at length. The first is the "open[ness]" of the animal, who is able to understand its experiences "naturally" and in full.[130] Rilke's animal remains a reproach to these human limits and still keeps "its progress behind it," meaning that the animal does not hold itself to its own past, nor does it question the freedom it possesses in relation to whatever might have happened in the past. The animal's freedom is closely entwined with all possibility of the future and shrugs off any obstacles which might stand in its way, including, as Rilke notes towards the end of the poem: death. As death represents the most surreal and yet the most certain of human boundaries, Rilke

[129] Santner, p. 13.
[130] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1982), p. 49.

considers it human nature to be inclined towards death, so much so that life becomes secondary to the business of ending of a human life: “So we live here, forever taking leave” (*DE*, “Eighth Elegy”, p. 53).

This creaturely, uncanny freedom which allows for an individual to understand a world outside of one that he preoccupies though the act of un-belonging is also present in *The Hungry Tide* in the representation of Fokir. Zachary’s embodiment of the “creaturely” now highlights its tendency to alienate those who are in possession of it, leading to its urgent disavowal. Perhaps the creaturely aspect of Zachary’s freedom is most obvious in the nickname that is given to him by the lascars, a group of migrant seamen. The lascars take to calling him *Malum Zikiri*, while instilling in him the ambition of becoming a gentleman. The name they give him run counterproductive to their ambition for him and acts as a warning Zachary is ultimately unable to heed. When Zachary meets Paulette Lambert, she refutes his previous assumption that his nickname is only a slip of the tongue, and proceeds to imbue the name with real meaning: “it means one who remembers” (*SP,* p. 147). His nickname Malum Zikiri embodies Zachary’s greatest failing: he forgets all of his experiences from the past as he trains his gaze upon wealth and modernity. Most of all, he forgets and forgoes a freedom which keeps him from partaking in fulfilling experiences that is not just dependent on escapism and self-referential hypocrisy.

As such, the freedom which Zachary embodies in the trilogy is one that is couched in increasingly alien turns and falls away from a subjectivity that is open to others to one that is blind to new opportunities. The estranged nature of his freedom aboard the *Ibis* is increasingly felt by Zachary as an individual. Instead of recognising his unique status as one that rebukes problematic taxonomies and upholding practices that are decidedly diametric to freedom like indentured

servitude and slavery, Zachary instead latches onto a definition of absence, so as to emphasise the absence of status and place rather than freedom of movement.

During a banquet held by the Raja Neel Rattan, whose name and station are one and the same, Zachary's name, previously able to stand in for a creaturely freedom, is seen as incapable of participating in discourse and loses its meaning and functions not as a means towards transformation but is relegated to a silent and non-participatory role. Neel's position as a Raja, betrays his inability to connect to others as anything other than "foreign" (*SP*, p. 100). Neel further expands upon these prejudices and pronounces all of his guests "unclean" (*SP*, 100). When Neel and Zachary first become acquainted with each other during a banquet hosted by Neel on his estate, Neel mistakes Zachary's hometown of Baltimore, Maryland to mean that Zachary himself is a relation of Lord Baltimore; Neel asks Zachary outright, "Lord Baltimore was an ancestor of yours, perhaps?" (*SP*, p. 101). Zachary, who proudly views his hometown in relation to his freewoman mother, is left to suffer this awkward misunderstanding, as other well-known names of the time such as John Locke and David Hume are discussed in an exercise of name dropping.

We now know, remembering Locke's devotion to the connection between freedom and personal choice, that the mention of Locke, as well as Hume, who is known for his secular moral philosophy, that Ghosh is making a point that these tendencies to uphold freedom are ironic practices that instead uphold British rule in the nineteenth century and defend the enslavement of the subaltern to the production of opium. It is also interesting to note that because Zachary is still at this point in the novel more of a representation of a "creaturely" freedom, he is unable to communicate effectively with Neel. Neel's mode of language and his subservience to British rule (although this changes as he becomes - in the second book - a devotee of language rather than merely English), Zachary's insistent refusal of this false heritage is seen as modesty, as not to

disrupt Neel's structure of thought, isolating Zachary even further. Zachary's definition of a freewoman's Baltimore is unable to carry any purchase at the dinner table. More importantly, this definition isn't subsumed as part of a "lesser" Baltimore and put alongside a discussion of slavery, either. Zachary's "Baltimore" is merely misunderstood and rendered void of meaning. It is also outside of the symbolic order as upheld by polite manners and India's complicated caste system.

In understanding Zachary's predicament at this party, we also understand his anxiety as situated between the discourses of race and class and his being alienated from both. As Zachary begins to realise his previous pride of place - as upheld by matrilineal freedom - is not sustainable alongside a colonial, patriarchal freedom, he begins gradually to buy into a materialistic freedom as afforded him by the lascars' ambition. Where Zachary is at first happy enough to "pass muster," as the lascars buy him new clothes, he begins to work harder at upholding this guise as he notices that others take to treating him with more respect (*SP*, p. 48). He is also given a watch inscribed with the name Adam T. Danby. It transpires later that Danby's watch is a foreshadowing of Zachary's uncertain origins, as Danby is revealed to be a notorious pirate (*SP*, p. 308). Danby's watch and status, conferred with the ambiguous rituals of what it means to be a gentleman, both emphasise the difficulty of being a gentleman in a society in which no one is entirely certain of how they are perceived by others, and that being a gentleman necessarily comes with pressure to be wealthy, which are sometimes or even mostly achieved through illicit ways within the trilogy. In *River of Smoke*, Bahram, a Parsi trader expresses his surprise as his Armenian companion Zadig Karabedian shows up to visit him wearing Western-style garments: "Zadig Bey, you have become a white man!" (*RS*, p. 51).

Gentlemanliness and wealth are co-mingled with notions of playing at a privileged whiteness. As Deleuze and Guattari observe in *A Thousand Plateaus,* the institution of racism is

not a matter of negotiating meanings of ourselves and those who are "othered," they point out that most systems of exclusion operate in degrees:

> European racism as the white man's claim has never operated by exclusion. . .Racism operates by the determination of deviance in relation to the White Man face, which endeavours to integrate non-comforming traits into increasingly and backward ways. . . From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be.[131]

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that racism too is not a matter of binary choices, but an ambivalent order which carefully protects itself. This echoes the crisis of degree experienced by the family now transposed again upon the individual in terms of his or her relationship. On the surface, this mode of distinction-via-the possibility of inclusion (rather than exclusion) seems to suggest a society that is open to social mobility. The lack of a certain "outside," however, actually works to remove any certainty of an individual's place, and is contingent upon a sense of "inside" that must position itself as the only possible option. For Zachary, this means that his previously embodied freedom must be traded in for something ambivalent, abstract, and also non-threatening to a discourse that is constantly without definition.

Zachary's ambitions erode his connections to a creaturely, bodily, freedom and takes several forms, each transforming his previous contentment in life to channel a sense of excess. In *Flood of Fire*, he is released from jail only to waylay celebrating his freedom and worry about earning money as his previous plight aboard the *Ibis,* which is also a clear break from his openness to experience in *Sea of Poppies*. He begins working on the Burnham estate as a "Mystery" who takes care of odd jobs around the place (*FF*, p. 133). Mrs. Burnham, horrified at Zachary's uncouth

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[131] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 208.

living arrangements at a boarding house in Kiddipore, insists that he move into a budgerow - a houseboat - to do work on it. This isolation is ironic because it provides him with the privacy needed to become ill; the budgerow, a moored barge that serves as Zachary's accommodation, is also in conversation with the *Ibis*, a vessel whose main purpose is to travel freely at sea. It is when Zachary falls into the comfort of a vessel that is necessarily precluded from travel that he becomes ill. This illness is vivaciously described in the scientific literature of the time as "onanism," presenting symptoms which pushes its patient to "practice it seven to eight times a day," eventually driving the patient to an "emission" so difficult to be only represented by "only a few drops of blood" (*FF*, 118). This natural act of the body is depicted as "immodest" and "without a place" in the Burnhams' "Christian household" (*FF,* p. 98).

The insistence on the Christianity of the Burnham household holds the weight due to not only Mrs Burnham's unhappiness but also her husband's colonial conditioning towards her. Zachary's own Christian views, first instilled in him by his mother, are subsumed and disembodied by the preoccupations of both Burnhams, and his mother's Christian teachings of gratefulness are quickly forgotten. While Zachary's status as a "Mystery" folds him carefully into a discourse of race and class which has previously rejected him, his newfound sense of privacy and privilege begets yet another kind of anxiety, which leads him to question his choices; his choices are ones born out of anxiety which, previously, led by his mother's matrilineal freedom, is now displaced and overtaken by Mrs. Burnham's guilt. We learn that Mrs Burnham's given name is "Cathy," which echoes Emily Bronte's Gothic heroine in *Wuthering Heights*, but this irony is two-fold as she is a Cathy without her Heathcliff. Also in this formulation, Heathcliff's absence is understood as a lack in Mrs. Burnham; in her parting letter to Zachary, she so confesses: "I am a vain unhappy creature" (*FF*, 594). All of the men in Mrs Burnham's life, her economically minded husband Mr.

Burnham, the ambitious Zachary, and the civil minded, cash-poor Captain Neville Mee, all share the dangerous common denominator of not having her in mind.

Under Mrs. Burnham's well-meaning yet entirely misguided instruction, Zachary's view of freedom becomes one that is contingent upon self-deception, or what Jean Paul Sartre calls "bad faith."[132] This re-framing of freedom suggests that freedom is not defined by its lack of restraint on one's personhood but act instead as a mask rather what freedom is meant to hide. It is held captive by secrets which others can use against you. It is a freedom which entails self-punishment and repressed guilt. Sartre's "bad faith" circumscribes a specific kind of self-deception which eventually leads to beliefs which may not be accurate or helpful to an individual's existence but this belief is what sustains the individual's being in spite of whatever consequences it might hold for the individual. We are meant to "hide freedoms from ourselves" in order to avoid taking "responsibility" which freedom necessarily bestows upon its takers.

By declaring freedom as too much responsibility, the individual is reduced to not being in control of his freedom but is given a specific version of it to consume as a party not responsible for its form. While this definition is easily recognisable as the mantra of colonial enslavement, of a dangerous reimagining of Kipling's white man's burden, a more insidious version of such an ambivalent freedom emerges when the subject in question is by all accounts free without need to justify his freedom to others. Bad faith so visits Zachary in several forms and he fails to understand the choice presented to him via bad faith, which in itself is a slave to economic freedom. Zachary's first experience of this freedom isn't one so entwined with money as it is with his body, in fact, his affair with Mrs Burnham strongly contributes to the erasure of his previous bodily freedom.

[132] Sartre, p. 50.

Zachary's illicit liaison with Mrs Burnham begins as an act of good Christian charity, as she sees that Zachary is suffering from chronic masturbation. Instead of seeing this as a chance to widen Zachary's scope of experience as to not rely upon masturbation, she distils his person and the whole of himself down to the "malignancy of his malady" and refuses to see other parts of him (*FF*, p. 158). Much like Franzen's notion of depression, we see Mrs. Burnham's language as carefully curated to lead into only one possibility: the fact that Zachary must be ill with "onanism" can be interpreted as an expression of her guilt towards her husband in itself rather than Zachary's actual claim to have this illness. Under the guise of bad faith, Zachary's primary freedom connecting him to his body is slowly erased and shamed, to ensure its continued impracticality. He changes his diet and "only ate crackers" to rid himself of his habits (*FF*, p. 200). Zachary's new diet is a response to his previously embodied sense of freedom, as he enslaves himself to narrow goals and Wherein Mrs Burnham has expressed to Zachary her unhappiness of his habits, it is his newfound ambition to be productive within his society that pushes him into leading an emaciated existence with an eye towards "progress" (*FF*, p. 500).

Joey Burglund: "Something Deeply Wrong"

Zachary's anxiety is linked strongly to the absence of women in his life and this idea gains purchase in Franzen's writing as well. We first get to know Joey Berglund as himself and not as an idealised charming presence to so have terrorised the community of Ramsey Hill with his effortless presence in a chapter called "Womanland." As Philip Weinstein observes, the tone of the chapter is deeply misogynistic and views women and their sexual organs as ultimately "chartable territory."[133] However, I argue that this almost galling representation of Joey's attitude

[133] Philip Weinstein, *Jonathan Franzen and the Comedy of Rage* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 167.

towards the female sex is this way and points to unsettling notions of maternal anxiety. Such notions are connected primarily to Joey's newfound penchant for masturbation but also include and reinforce notions of how one might live confined by anxiety. This anxiety is problematic for them as their masculine privilege does not exempt them from anxiety. It is also paradoxical in that maternal anxiety and male excessiveness seem to be inextricable from each other. While male competition (between Joey and his father Walter; between Walter and his seemingly more successful friend Richard Katz; between even Joey and his Jewish roommate Jonathan) is prevalent throughout the novel, I would like to argue that it is the male anxiety as expressed in maternal, undoubtedly female terms that is the source of the male drives in the novel. "Womanland" chronicles Joey's life in college and halfway through "life as he knew it, but only better," we are hit with this telling passage that describes Joey's descent into chronic masturbation, a habit he used to be exempt from because of Connie:

> Masturbation itself was a demeaning dissipation whose utility he was nevertheless learning to value as he sought to wean himself from Connie. His preferred venue for release was the Handicapped bathroom in the science library at whose Reserve desk he collected $7.65 an hour for reading textbooks and the *Wall Street Journal* and occasionally fetching texts for science nerds. Landing a work-study job at the Reserve desk had seemed to him another confirmation that he was destined to be fortunate in life (*F,* p. 236).

This insight into Joey's character and his circumstances remains telling on several levels. First, is that he is very much his mother's son while any mention of her is absent within this passage. Franzen is careful to couch Joey's experiences as a first-year undergrad as exceedingly average, and Joey's matriculation into a public institution like the University of Virginia stands in clear rebuke to the other possibilities that might have been otherwise offered to Joey at an Ivy League

institution or perhaps even somewhere more intimate and prestigious like Franzen's own Swarthmore. We remember that Patty, Joey's mother, also chose the average public university in Minnesota, and that her choice is indelibly connected to facilitate the unhappiness of Patty's mother, Joyce: "Joyce's transparent aversion to Minnesota along with Minnesota's distance from New York, was a key factor in Patty's deciding to go there (*F*, p. 50).

From this maternal link which now informs every part of his university experience, the female-oriented nature of Joey's anxiety becomes much more complicated in its overtness. The idea of romanticised and sexual love is entangled with maternal desire. Joey "wean[s]" himself off Connie, another term that has acquired widespread use as a substitute for dependency, but it is a term which retains the connection between mother and child. So too, is Joey, with all facets of fortune, unable to escape Carol Monaghan's phone call, blaming him for Connie's depression and the fact that he has been "absent" (*F*, p. 237). Joey's absence in Connie's life is in fact the trade in for Joey's freedom, but at the presence, this freedom is being redefined as absence (and therefore, as loss) and it is this loss that continues to plague Joey's time at university. He is "Handicapped" (capitalised in both instances) by his masturbation to such an extent that he starts to see its value, in order to continue justifying its presence. Like Zachary, Joey's penchant for masturbation becomes the postmodern allegory for anxiety and the lack of self control.

While sex (both practical and imagined) with Connie punctuates Joey's narrative in "Womanland," it is the presence of Jenna (no last name) as if to reinforce her status as a fantasy, the older, sophisticated sister of Joey's college roommate that represents anxiety outside of sex. Jenna is someone who embodies sex as discourse while sex, as circumscribed by Connie, is bound up with internalised maternal anxiety. Joey's failed courtship with Jenna implicates Joey's sexual urges in the discourses of race and class. While Weinstein only devotes one line to describe Joey's

and Jenna's lack of consummation, pointing out that "the pair collapses under the weight of its own incompatibility," [134] I think a closer look at this perceived incompatibility draws out Franzen's consistent allergy when it comes to addressing certain issues of race and class. Had Jenna and Joey consummated their relationship through sex, then Joey, being from a small town in the Midwest, risks rising in the ranks of the upper echelons of society without putting in the work, which is against Franzen's ethos.

Additionally, in "Womanland," his roommate Jonathan comes to the revelation that Joey is Jewish and promptly invites him to Thanksgiving. Joey is reluctant at first, downplaying his heritage and avoiding his mother's shadow:

"My grandmother's a politician, in the state legislature or something. She's this nice, elegant Jewish lady who my mom apparently can't stand to be in the same room with."

"Whoa, say that again?" Jonathan sat up straight on his bed. "Your mom is Jewish?"

"I guess in some theoretical way."

"Dude, you're a Jew! I had no idea."

"Only like, one-quarter," Joey said. "It's really watered down" (*F*, p. 252).

But while Joey insists that his Jewishness is "watered down," he also follows in his mother's footsteps in denying her own parents, thus in a perverse way, bringing mother-and-son closer together in almost a perverse way, implying a severe. Franzen then follows this What follows is an unmistakably male bonding exercise which manages to include, in the same breath, the contested existence of the state of Israel, along with the biological disposition of Jonathan to enjoy "Israeli Goddesses" on the Internet (*F*, p. 252). Joey's avoidance of his Jewish heritage transports Zachary's matrilineal anxiety to the twenty-first century and gives it material dimensions, but fails

[134] Weinstein, p. 69.

to follow up on its political implications. Having previously disregarded Franzen as having no critical position from which to write, Jesus Blanco Hidalga accepts on some level that by attaching himself to Jewish identity, which he sees as an "ideological fetish," patterned after Slavoj Zizek's remarks on Westernised Buddhism. The ease of these identities and the manner in which they might be applied and discarded to suit an individual is found in the way that they must be "user friendly."[135]

The idea of Jewishness as an instrument of ideological fetishisation provides another important link for sex (specifically masturbation) as applied to the discourses of race and class. This approach is at the centre of Dean Franco's revisionist approach to Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint.* This novel not only highlights possibilities for *Freedom*, but again demonstrates Franzen's retreat from social issues.

The parental anxiety is nominally present in Portnoy is both Oedipal (between Alex Portnoy and his father Jack), which represents the tension between blacks and Jews during the 1960s and also maternal, in that an instance of Portnoy's "purity-obsessed" mother washing a knife previously used by the family's coloured maid, Dorothy. Franco interprets the knife as a symbol of Portnoy's fear of castration, as well as a symbol of "prohibition" against his chronic masturbation. The knife also represents the Jewish practice of "circumcision," racialising the male body in practical terms and supplementing the matrilineal nature of identifying as Jewishness. *Portnoy's Complaint* is a novel which brings together sex and race as not disparate topics but one "inextricably related" under the "analytic of rights."[136]

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[135] Jesus Blanco Hidalga, *Jonathan Franzen and the Romance of Community: Narratives of Salvation* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 216.

[136] Dean Franco, "Portnoy's Complaint: It's about Race, Not Sex (Even the Sex Is about Race)", *Prooftexts* 29 (2009), 85-116 (p. 87).

However, this possibility is more or less lost upon Franzen, who appears to separate the discourses of race and class with sex, which is understandable as there are a number of silences which prevail in Franzen's work. Hidalga offers the following list:

> A great part of the silences and denials in Franzen's work are related to class issues. Some examples of what Franzen's novels resist recognising or showing are the persistence of class struggle and the novelist's own partaking in it; the reality of class domination that underlies his liberal stance; the failure of the latter to cope with pressing social contradictions. . . [137]

In almost all of his writing, Franzen continues to subscribe to outdated modes of the American Dream that involves a white working-class character (Alfred Lambert of *The Corrections*, Martin Probst of *The Twenty-Seventh City*, and most recently Walter Berglund of *Freedom*) who are rewarded for their hard work. And yet, Franzen's hardworking fathers seem to have all passed on these opportunistic freedoms to offspring who refuse to honour their hardworking ethics, although an exception might be Gary of *The Corrections*, but this pattern again repeats in Gary's sons, who take advantage of their father's success.

In a sense, the "incompatibility" between Joey and Jenna is bound by such a pattern and reinforces these silences and does not just make little narrative sense for Franzen. Had Joey fulfilled his dream of copulating with Jenna, his sexual practices would have gone a step beyond maternal anxiety to broach castration. According to Freud, the castration complex creates various neurosis, one of which is narcissism.[138] Joey doesn't get the Princess in this instance, because he hasn't yet done the work and the freedom which Jenna represents to him is a freedom that goes

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[137] Hidalga, p. 18.
[138] See Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London & New York, NY: Penguin 1991), pp. 358-359.

against Franzen's notion of class consciousness. Joey could have gone to work for Goldman Sachs from his encounter and closeness to Jenna, but early on in their relationship, she makes sure to set him apart: "No offense? But you seem too nice for that." (*F*, p. 257). Franzen here distinguishes between two modes of capitalism, one that allows for rampant prostitution, and one that casts morality at its centre. By choosing the route of moral capitalism, Joey earns a chance at a new life and is allowed to get out of trouble without too much fuss.

That said, Joey is redeemed and offered a freedom which does not cause him anxiety. He sits comfortably as an antithesis of his father, who has at this point, given into his own anxiety and carried out an affair with his assistant Lalitha, only to have this affair end when she dies in a tragic accident. Joey is redeemed and rescued by virtue of Franzen being "an emotions guy." Characters are felt for and given a tremendous amount of leeway to accept their flaws and to be accepted by others by virtue of recognising their own weaknesses. *Freedom* continues to put women in compromising positions as men come to these realisations about themselves. In the next section, we see Franzen's Wolf grapple with freedom-as-surveillance, and that his choices are likewise narrowed and driven by maternal anxiety.

Andreas Wolf: Freedom, Privacy, and the Gothic

Andreas Wolf in *Purity* bears the distinction in Franzen's work as someone who is established to the readers as a person who is certainly pitiable and wanting reader sympathy, but such rehabilitation is denied him in the end. The confines of freedom which Wolf inhabits appear to be awarded to him by privilege, which as we have seen, is a contentious position in most of Franzen's writings. The careful veneers of "maternal anxiety" are given a certain elevated privilege. Consider this description of Katya Wolf, entwined with Wolf's early childhood:

> Andreas's real love affair was with his mother Katya, who was no less perfect and much more available. She was pretty and lively and quick; rigid only in her politics. She had boyishly short hair was unrivaled redness, blazing but natural looking redness, the product of a Western bottle obtainable only by the very privileged. She was a jewel of the Republic, a person of great physical and intellectual charm who'd elected to stay behind (*P*, p. 104).

Katya falls into a long line of Franzen's women who are subjected to a gaze which is undoubtedly male, but unlike any of Franzen's mother figures before her, Katya appears to be an independent spirit who also is, to recall a turn of phrase in *Freedom*, "very into her son," (*F*, 10). However, this motherly adoration is uncoupled from any real critique of its inherent inappropriateness and exalted to echo and emphasise the privilege embodied by the Wolf family. Katya's sense of privilege is underlined by her "natural" yet "privileged" red hair, and this contradiction is further blurred by her choice to stay behind. Unlike the other choices previously discussed in this chapter, this choice is not couched by anxiety or the desire for more, but it is a choice that flouts practical issues and impresses the impossibility of such a choice for everyday citizens of the Republic.

Where Joey is clearly bothered and anxious about his closeness with Patty and this closeness is set out in *Freedom* as in beyond the norms of accepted parental involvement, Katya's closeness to her son is exalted and moulded as a privilege of a privilege, as most mothers in East Berlin (and therefore subject to the "two-dimensionality" of the Wall), are unable to devote such so much time to childrearing (*P*, p. 70). Privilege is the concept that continues to resonate through this passage which is meant to sing praises about the advantages of communist Germany, conversely a society which goes against the very idea of privilege and inequality. Franzen seems to imply through this contradiction that due to the nature of such freedoms, characterised as hard won (in Joey's case) or simply compromised (in Zachary's case) Wolf's innate freedom seems to

live somewhere beyond compromise and remain haunted by privilege. Unlike Joey, Wolf is not able to tell apart his privilege from a more moral way of being and therefore, his freedom continues to be contaminated by an urgent sense of excess.

In addition, the language which Andreas uses to describe his mother and his youthful adoration of her seems to cut dangerously close to the sort of poetic convention reserved for a lover and his beloved and therefore is inappropriate. Katya's numerous other achievements appear to highlight the fact that she is a rare figure who is only incidentally a mother. In Franzen's other permutations of the mother figure, their identities are mostly centred on their wish to be a good mother; they are mothers who are overly inundated with a maternal sense of duty. Wolf figures Katya as a queenly individual and rarified in her immediate surroundings. Katya Wolf is to her son three dimensions in a world without dimensions and Franzen's notion of East Germany as *flat* likely takes some inspiration from the minimalist art movement that had its beginnings in rejecting the fundamentals of art. As Kazmir Malevich points out in 1913, "Art no longer cares to serve the state and religion it no longer wishes to illustrate the history of manners, it wants to have nothing further to do with the object as such, and believes that it can exist in and for itself without things."[139]

The same concept of abstractness can be said to describe Wolf's relationship to his mother. Because he is offered dimensions in his relationship with his mother, it is this rarefied quality which continues to blur Wolf's upbringing is key to the way he deals with anxiety and also the way he sees freedom. If his whole life is abstract, it seems only fair that he would like to maintain some sense of practical self; Wolf's freedoms are made continuously ambivalent as he continues to search for a sense of self. The novel offers several modes of freedom to Wolf, but each of these

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[139] Kazmir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*, translated by Howard Dearstyne (Chicago: P. Theobald, 1959), p. 74.

options are, ultimately, unworkable because they conflict with Wolf's inner turmoil and recalls the presence of his mother. Masturbation also features heavily as a bourgeois malady for which fifteen-year-old Wolf is sent to a psychologist (*P,* p. 108). Wolf is perhaps best described in connection with Joey Berglund as a version of Joey who is withheld reader sympathy; as Franzen is an author who carefully trades on emotion in order to forgive his actions. Throughout most of the novel, in which the meeting with his psychologist is exemplary, Wolf has bought into a persona which voids him of any real sincerity. Irony becomes his only register, and as we shall see, it is giving up irony for sincerity that gives Wolf his freedom, but also robs him of his own life.

The conversation between teenaged Wolf and the psychologist is flat and ironises the sense of flatness in Wolf's own life. The session concludes with Wolf suggesting that he "supposes he should feel bad for the psychologist for only having one job and not being very clever at that. Wolf's newfound hobby carries new dimensions of his relationship with his mother, and while Hidalga leans heavily upon the "ambiguity" of the relationship, going so far as to cite the purely sexual relationship between Wolf and the actress Toni Fields who is around Wolf's own age, but is assigned to play his mother in an upcoming biographical film. I find that the connection between Wolf and Katya is made excessively abundant and inappropriate and it is this uncertainty which leads to much of the Gothic threat of incest within *Purity*, a possibility which again deconstructs the capacity of purity in the novel.

Hidalga goes to some lengths in order to establish the connection between *Purity* and the way Franzen utilises Gothic conventions. He starts with the idea that excess moves to make the most intimate aspects of our lives foreign, strange, and even ambivalent, as we are no longer equipped with the discerning eye needed to understand its subtlety. Hidalga writes, " Melodramatic excess takes on a new distinctive quality in *Purity*. Melodrama is here deliberately tinged with the

eerie flavour of the Gothic in an attempt to invest it with a measure of the latter's own sublimity - the uncanny of family relationships."[140] For Hidalga, the of the "Do you know what it's like to live with a man who is haunted by a woman he has not seen for 25 years?" (*P*, p 223).

By underscoring the Gothic conventions inherent to *Purity,* Blanco attempts to focus in on other aspects of the Gothic novel, not least of which Wolf's continued tortured relationship with his mother, which he reads as "ambiguous," to give some credo to the Gothic trope of incest or the fear of incest. However, I feel that it is the strong implications of a mother-son relationship that is intimate *outside* of what the culture feels is right or moral, which holds Wolf hostage. There is nothing inappropriate about his relationship with Katya outside of the ironic dimensions which Wolf prescribes to their relationship, and for good reason. His only sin towards his mother, if we accept the Edenic definition of the original sin, which understands that all human evil is derived from knowledge, is one of knowing. Around the time when Wolf was sent to the psychologist as a teenager, he finds out that he was likely born out of wedlock and his biological father is one of his mother's former students at the university. This makes Wolf's very existence uncanny and should be excised as a point of law. Wolf's crimes are best described by the Marxist critic Mikhail Bahktin, who circumscribes Wolf's final turn into a fatal blindness caused by a lifelong devotion to Irony. As Linda Hutcheon notes, irony is wholly Bahktinian an "equivocal language of modern times' for he saw it everywhere and in every form -- from the minimal and imperceptible to the loud which borders on laughter. In other words, the existence of one signifier "irony" should never blind us to the plurality of its functions as well as effects.[141]

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[140] Hidalga, p. 313

[141] C.f. Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony (*London and New York: Rutledge, 1994), p. 48.

Wolf gains freedom in death, which is the highest form of ambivalence, as he carries with him secrets to the grave. Throughout this chapter, I have showcased freedom in its ideological forms, but the disseminations of such forms of freedoms give way to fairly practical expressions of anxiety such as masturbation. This also underscores the question of certain privileges and freedoms as long established under traditions of patriarchy. The next section which concludes this thesis looks to dismantle these stringent ways of thinking in order to offer a more ambivalent, "expectant" view of the coming decades.

Coda

"A Really Serious Glitch": Competing Views of Knowledge

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that ambivalence is an important artistic and psychological survival mechanism for the new millennium. Such survival strategies are vital to a reconstitution of themes, such as the self, family, and the notion of freedom. Ambivalence is a key technique in all of the novels considered by my thesis. It is, however, worth noting the different types or degree of ambivalence that is presented by Franzen and Ghosh, is especially prevalent in their understanding of knowledge and its subsequent impact upon identity. On the one hand, Franzen presents a pessimistic form of ambivalence which works against itself. Franzen's ambivalence is mostly born out of a discomfort with his own privilege as a white middle class male.[142] On the other hand, Ghosh presents a more humanistic form of ambivalence as he attempts to renegotiate what could be seen as impeachable, privileged, silences (maintained thusly in Franzen's fiction) into something that resembles more a political ambivalence that welcomes new ideas rather than shirking away from their contrarian implications.[143]

This dichotomy has real-world implications for various modes and venues of knowledge, not least of which include the much contested role of the university, environmentalism and socio-economic inequality. The uncertainties which surround these previously solid ideas can be explained through Marshall McLuhan's theories of hot and cold media, wherein "hot" sensationalist media encroaches upon aforementioned cold spaces enriched in context.[144] Throughout this chapter a surprisingly diverse range of authors, including Don DiLillo, Terry

[142] Cf. Colin Hutchinson, "Jonathan Franzen and the Politics of Disengagement", Critique: Studies in *Contemporary Fiction*, 50 (2009), 191-207 (p 191).

[143] Anshuman A. Mondal notes that ambivalence is an "appropriate position" for a novelist such as Ghosh because "it can be read as a register of an ethics that recognises the inescapable duality and impossible paradox of the postcolonial predicament. See Mondal, *Amitav Ghosh* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 110.

[144] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Oxford: Routledge, 1964), p. 24.

Pratchett, David Foster Wallace and even the horror writer H. P. Lovecraft—with stunning prescience for someone writing in the 1920s and 30s—-have each recognised the ambivalence that is now a mainstay of our world, which is characterised more by its crowdedness than by its vastness. In other words, the immediacy of the world today, championed by soundbites and truncated tweets, becomes antithetical to an examined life as these fragmentary, sensationalist pieces often obscure the bigger picture or whole. My coda reflects on ideas in previous chapters to delineate Franzen's and Ghosh's respective positions regarding the application of knowledge in contemporary society. I show how their respective positions gain a liquid possibility (to borrow a term from Zygmunt Bauman) when considered together, which hints at a new form of ambivalence as an approach to life.

In this unsteady dialectic between knowledge and experience, it is only natural that the lingering spectre of trauma has emerged from a lack of resolution to this interplay. As Walter Benjamin puts it in his influential essay "The Storyteller," experience and knowledge are circumscribed anew by the traumatic experiences of World War II. Soldiers returned home not "richer but poorer in communicable experience."[145] The new emphasis upon the exchange of experience, which Benjamin argues that we have lost through communicable language, means a sharp rise in the importance of information (most recognisable by its immediacy). This methodology is expanded upon in Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* in which he writes that is not the content of the information, but the medium by which it is delivered that holds more sway. "Cool" media, such as print, television, and telephone conversations are ameliorated by surrounding contexts. Because of this, cool mediums demand more participation from the audience, not least of which because these mediums are narrativelydriven by nature.

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[145] Walter Benjamin, The Storyteller", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 84.

McLuhan contrasts cool media with “hot” media, which are better understood in technical-sensory terms rather than the narrative value they might otherwise provide to their audience. Hot media such as photography, radio, and more recently cinema, are media that might be abundant in spatial-visual stimulus, but its participatory value to the audience remains limited to a certain sensory singularity. Thus, another way of looking at the unease between knowledge and experience could be attributed to the sudden lack of distance between ourselves and the presence of hot and cold media. Given the invention of the Internet, the relationship between these mediums and the messages they purport to maintain and disseminate has become increasingly convoluted (or in a word, more ambivalent).

The conflict between hot and cold mediums can therefore be seen as a reduction of knowledge and experience as afflicted by continued cultural trauma. This trauma has established itself as a staple of literary dread in contemporary fiction. Don DiLillo’s 1992 novel *Mao II* argues that the individual is paralysed from fear by this very conflict.[146] *Mao II*’s protagonist is the novelist Bill Grey, who agonises over his return to the public eye through his new novel yet to be published. Grey lives as a recluse in deference to his work but secretly harbours the contrarian desire to stop the novel’s publication in order to preserve its “purity.” It would seem then that, without completion and, therefore, retaining “purity” - or perhaps what Franzen would call “status,” - a book can survive audience engagement. Franzen contrasts the coldness of the “status” novel (sprawling postmodern doorstoppers in the mode of William Gaddis, one of Franzen’s former literary heroes) to the warmness of the “contract” model, wherein an author actively seeks out the approval and the participation of his readers.[147] Despite Franzen’s reformed approach to

[146] Don DiLillo, *Mao II* (London: Picador, 2016).
[147] Franzen, *A.*, p. 240.

literature, he still appears to share DeLillo's concern.[148] This concern is not without some founding as DeLillo states that, the future, as "inherited by the crowds" is an unhappy, unfriendly one towards knowledge and its much needed contexts (sometimes known as experience).[149]

More pointedly, perhaps, the question of the crowd is reassessed in Terry Pratchett's Discworld novel, *Jingo*, which extends the analogy proffered in DeLillo's *Mao II.* Pratchett not only consents to the presence of the crowd as inevitable, but he also notes the influence of the crowd as being not particularly conducive to the keeping of peace. According to Pratchett, "The intelligence of that creature known as a crowd is the square root of the number of people in it."[150] The novel's title also attests to this lowest common denominator. Pratchett's title is derived from the word "jingoism," which is a form of extreme patriotism most often found in the form of aggressive foreign policy -- again, another form of knowledge willfully dislocated from contexts which surround and are meant to inform it. This suggests that knowledge has become emaciated due to catering to the lowest common denominator or -- as Pratchett argues by way of DeLillo -- the mob. The mob has little use for knowledge outside what it narrowly understands. This continued self-enforced ignorance then creates a vicious feedback loop wherein hot media will always triumph over cold: as witnessed by the recent slide of TV down the scale from cool media in McLuhan's time towards hot media due to pointed advertising and increased special effects. This is also reflected in an earlier discussion in Chapter One of Franzen's *Purity,* whereby Andreas Wolf as a living man is considered detached from his media image, and the memorialising of his life after his suicide is considered much more meaningful to both his fans and detractors.

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[148] Perhaps an uncharitable, but accurate assessment of Franzen's relationship to DeLillo's struggles with the particulars of American culture might be found in James Wood's review of *The Corrections*, in which Wood states, "Jonathan Franzen is the slightly damaged child of Don DeLillo's peculiar relationship with American culture." See James Wood, "What the Dickens", *The Guardian,* 9 November 2001.
[149] DeLillo, p. 15.
[150] Terry Pratchett, *Jingo* (London: Corgi, 2013), p.436.

As such, the ubiquitous mob enters into the conscious of the new millennium by the way of trauma still unaddressed. Cathy Caruth remarks on this point that trauma is necessarily hard to place, and any hope of placing such experience is impossible in the present: "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located."[151] Carving out a safe space in which trauma can be addressed takes on an added urgency as the world grows smaller. Crowds and trauma inevitably shadow Franzen's and Ghosh's imaginations. One could argue that 9/11 remains the definitive Event of the twenty-first century and continues to occupy a large part of our cultural conscience because we haven't found a way to confront it in earnest. While it could be viewed as a uniquely American problem and seen by many to mark the end of American exceptionalism, even such an opinion, which seeks to diminish the idea of Americanism, is done so with limited association to other acts of terrorism such as the Troubles in the 1970s and 1980s, the 7/7 bombings in London, and also suicide bombings and attacks elsewhere, and not always in the West. In his essay "The Anglophone Empire," published in *The New Yorker* after 9/11, Ghosh offers this contextualisation of the event: that his personal experiences as an individual of Indian descent has informed by "the institutions of this empire as by a long tradition of struggle against them." It is because he as an inheritor of such an ambivalent context that "the September 11th attacks and their aftermath were filled with disquieting historical resonances."[152]

The following examples provided by Franzen's *Freedom* and David Foster Wallace's short story "The View from Mrs. Thompson's House," effectively represent the greatest tragedy of Western education in light of these troubling contexts. These two writers express this tragedy in two parts. The first part is that the academic language used to explain and theorise a situation in

[151] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 8.
[152] Amitav Ghosh, *The Anglophone Empire, The New Yorker*, 7 April 2003.

order to provide meaning is now obfuscatory and complex to the point where it drives the layman away from the possibilities of critical thinking. This then leads into the second part, wherein students and otherwise educated laypersons become alienated by such language and by extension the academic process. The value of the university degree is currently under debate, and the outcome of this will influence both the practical (whether a degree will help its holder gain employment),[153] and theoretical value of the degree (how a future graduate might engage with critical thought outside of the academic sphere). In a *New York Times* Op-Ed piece, the esteemed academic Stanley Fish notes that after serving as a dean of a university, he has learned that academia is at its most effective when adhering to certain limitations.[154] Fish suggests the academic should not be tasked with obligations to "fashio[n]" future "citizens." This contemporary addition to the responsibilities of the academic troubles Fish, as academic research should not be expected to perform the Herculean task of preparing students for the wider world. Even, as Fish admits, that questions such as, "What practices provide students with the knowledge and commitments to be socially responsible citizens?" are important, but providing answers "should not be the content of a university course."[155] As we will see, Franzen and Foster Wallace appear to argue for the university as a corporate entity of social responsibility but, opposing Fish's view, Ghosh, in the *The Hungry Tide* revisits this question with an eye towards a degree of personal responsibility and growth being taught to the students.[156]

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[153] Stanley Fish, "Why We Built the Ivory Tower," *The New York Times,* 21 May 2004.
[154] Fish, *ibid*.
[155] Fish, *ibid*.
[156] Umberto Eco proffers a similar perspective to the conclusion eventually arrived at in *The Hungry Tide*, except Eco's demonstration is meant to revitalise the classroom. The real occupation of teachers, is not to filter and censor information in real time for the students they are meant to teach. Instead, Eco argues that the presence of a teacher is invaluable because he or she provides "an example of a selection made from the great sea of all possible information." Such a selection would then encourage critical thinking or as Eco puts it, carefully "discriminat[e]" thinking. See *Chronicles of a Liquid Society,* translated by Richard Dixon (London: Vintage, 2017), pp. 57-59.

In Franzen's *Freedom*, a similarly disquieting scene unfolds around the tragic event of 9/11. Students' inability to cope with such a seismic event is largely depicted as a failing of the university. Previous to 9/11, Joey Berglund is a sophomore at the University of Virginia. Chiefly, Joey's concerns as an up-and-coming business studies major is how to keep up with his much wealthier friends and whether or not to remain faithful to his girlfriend. Joey, having received "numberless assurances that his life would be a lucky one," approaches the world with a laissez-faire attitude, thinking that things will always work out favourably for him. This can be considered a negative form of ambivalence, as he is unable to cope when things have gone wrong (*F*, p. 232). When the reality of 9/11 hits, Joey's sense ambivalence is sorely misplaced:

> On the morning of September 11 he actually left his roommate Jonathan to monitor the burning World Trade Center and Pentagon while he hurried off to his Econ 201 lecture. Not until he reached the big auditorium and found it all but empty did he understand that a really serious glitch had occurred. (*F*, p. 232)

As a second-year business student, Joey's initial reaction to 9/11 is verging on the absurd, but such absurdity is itself only an emphasis of Joey's incapability to connect to the tragedy as a cultural event. Joey's attitude towards 9/11 is simultaneously ridiculous and also a more sinister sign of the possible waning in value of a university education. The ivory tower that is the university proves a sanctuary in the wake of these traumatic events—a santinised and warded bastion against the weight of liberal progress which denies 9/11 its appropriate contexts. Franzen appears to suggest in the above passage that the university resolutely lacks the ability to connect students to the wider world and to provide them with much needed context. Instead, the university is stunted as an elitist institution which is more suited to keeping students well informed.[157] The opposite becomes true,

[157] Stephen J. Burn, *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism* (London and New York, NY: Continuum, 2008), p. ix.

as Joey's know-how from Econ-101 keeps him from making connections that should otherwise be obvious. Being a keen student of business, Joey should be among the first to worry about how such a global event, tearing at the seams of long-established global trade routes and alliances that would affect his future career prospects.[158]

More significantly, Franzen's flippant usage of "glitch" to summarise Joey's predicament is meant to highlight the fact that Joey might have realized that something is wrong, but he is still unable or unwilling to understand the problem in context. Later, this problem resurfaces with more urgent repercussions than just Joey's ignorance, as Joey's work with the organisation RISEN leads him to doctor reports and sell rusted tank parts to the United States government having salvaged them from South America.

Yet Joey is still ready to be annoyed by the reactions of other people as they struggle to come to terms with the reality of 9/11. Franzen implies in the following passage that Joey remains protected by the distance of campus and the closed-circuit ideas in a classroom:

> In the days after 9/11, everything suddenly seemed extremely stupid to Joey. It was stupid that a "Vigil of Concern" was held for no conceivable practical reason, it was stupid that people kept watching the same disaster footage over and over, it was stupid that the Chi Phi boys hung a banner of "support" from their house, it was stupid that the football game against Penn State was cancelled. . .The four liberal kids on Joey's hall had endless stupid

[158] In his recent study on socio-structural inequality, Richard V. Reeves paints an even more disturbing picture vis-à-vis Joey's ignorance. Reeves argues that attending a selective institution of higher learning reinforces a sense of privilege among the upper middle class. This leaves them unable to engage with the ramifications of 9/11. Reeves writes that "the problem we face is not simply class separation but class perpetuation." Under this vicious cycle, "people from affluent backgrounds," represented in *Freedom* by the Berglunds, "further increas[e] their own chances of ending up as affluent adults." These same affluent adults, would then be similarly protected by their wealth and status, as evidenced by Joey's landing on his feet near the end of the novel. See Richard V. Reeves, Reeves, Richard V., *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That is a Problem, and What to Do About it* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2017), p. 58.

arguments with the twenty conservative kids, as if anybody cared what a bunch of eighteen-year-olds thought about the Middle East. (*F*, p. 233).

The last description in the above paragraph about the students' opinions on the Middle East reads as very dismissive of the critical thinking capabilities that should have been inculcated by the same university. This perceived loss as noted by Franzen stands against the narrowed confines of academia as suggested by Stanley Fish. Later, Franzen appears to double down on this lacuna between knowledge and experience, as Walter's and Lalitha's environmental summer camps for college students from the preferred caliber of colleges devolve into chaos.

Such an attitude, which insists on keeping knowledge and experience as separate from one another, plays no small part in perpetuating the alienation that academia and academics engender in their students. So in this sense, Franzen's opinion more or less lines up with Allan Bloom's argument in *The Closing of the American Mind* that, rather than the classroom fostering a sense of ambivalent curiosity, it has given rise to the opposite. Bloom notes that we have taken "a lode of serious questions, and treated them as though they were answers, in order to keep from confronting them ourselves."[159] The student experience within the university adheres to this view, as students are encouraged to interact with the world through a certain lens that detracts from and abstracts experience. This contrarian view of higher education can be attributed to a clash between hot and cold mediums. According to McLuhan, a university lecture counts as a "hot" medium, as it is meant to engage students with meaningful ideas, but the structure of their education is still ultimately considered cold, as they are systematically examined to a prior standard that can sometimes be seen as closer to resembling cold media.

[159] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (London and New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 113.

A similar obtuseness that is also clearly the product of the assuredness of the American higher education system comes to the fore in David Foster Wallace's short story "The View From Mrs. Thompson's House." Written as a direct response to 9/11, Foster Wallace makes short work of summarising the event, calling it "obvious" and the practice of putting pen to paper contorted by "probably what qualifies as shock," shows too how philosophy, in this particular case a simplification of Sausserian semiotics, is ill-equipped to make sense of a national crisis.[160]. A reporter visits a certain suburban block in Bloomington, IN to collect responses to the event. Most of the reactions are run-of-mill practical patriotism. The sudden mounting of American flags on people's porches, notes one denizen, is to "show that Americans don't bow down to anybody" (DFW, "View", ibid). Other responses fall more or less along these lines, with most Americans understanding the flag as a way in which they could show solidarity with the event. However, one response stands out; whereas all of the quotes remain unmarked, the one labeled "grad student" reads: "The flag is a pseudo-archetype, a reflexive semion designed to pre-empt and negate the critical function" (DFW, "View", *ibid*).

What is important to note here is that Foster Wallace's student, while well-versed in post-structuralist terminology and one version of its practical application, still fails to bridge the gap between the classroom debate and the wider world. Simply put, the critical function of the American flag as a signifier has not been negated by the sudden stubborn presence of the flag. The planes still hit the Towers and Ground Zero is still memorialised so that the critical function will always remain critical and functional. Claims of American exceptionalism since, by the same token, have not grown less but more stubborn. What keeps America exceptional is no longer rooted in fact, but instead transposed into our fragile perception in order to protect ever fragile American

[160] David Foster Wallace, "The View from Mrs. Thompson's House", *Rolling Stone,* (2001), p. 94. Subsequent quotations given in-text as "View".

ego. As stated plainly in Benjamin's "The Storyteller," we have lost sight of our fragile bodies and therefore have to resort to trying to reach our practical selves again through thinking that has been. In the other patriotic comments, none mention the tragedy by name. Foster Wallace shows here that flags are a gut reaction, which actually in turn tells us we lack the propensity for real action.

While Joey's institutionalised ignorance seems to be the fault of his collegiate education, Franzen's earlier novel *The Corrections* illuminates the flaw of the university system itself. At D______ College, We are reminded of Chip Lambert's former job title, "Assistant Professor" of the "Textual Artifacts" course at D___ College, (perhaps a thinly veiled reference to Cultural Studies offered at many institutions). As Chip attempts to engage his students in a critique of a feminist ad campaign called "You Go Girls," he remains blinded by the fact that this critical position is itself subsumed and inextricable from the corporations Chip wants so badly to critique.

Tellingly, Chip's course is evocatively titled "Consuming Narratives," which also recalls the aptly terrifying supermarket "Nightmare of Consumption." This troubling parallel speaks to the impossibility of his task as a professor. Any possible critique that he offers as an academic is constantly conflated with and hindered by the unshakeable presence of corporate consumption. Chip may see himself as one such fashioner of "socially responsible citizens," to borrow a phrase from Fish, but instead Chip himself, as a member of staff in a university, finds himself hampered by the insidious relationship between D____ College and the ubiquitous W______ Corporation. James Annesley argues on this point that Chip's attack on the W_____ Corporation, the intangible propagator of the "You Go, Girls" campaign can be ultimately seen as a futile exercise. Even if he has the wherewithal to recognize his situation as problematic, Chip has no real say in the reality

that Denise's generous paypacket, provided by her boss Brian who has sold a piece of music software to W____, is currently subsidising his unemployment.[161]

While this glaring contradiction is never explicitly acknowledged by Chip himself, Franzen is at pains to point out such a contradiction is unavoidable in Chip's life, and is especially untenable in his teaching. Where Chip endeavours to think of himself as the encouraging proprietor of young minds, the reality is quite the opposite. One student, Melissa Paquette accuses Chip of not being interested in the opinions of others "unless [their opinions] are the same as his" (*C*, p. 42):

> "This whole class. . .is just bullshit every week. It's one critic after another wringing their hands about the state of criticism. Nobody can quite say what's wrong, exactly. But they all know it's evil. They all know 'corporate' is a dirty word. . .And people who think they are free aren't 'really' free. And people who think they're happy aren't 'really' happy" (*C,* 44).

Although Franzen's sense of irony is on full display here, as in an effort to critique the misalignment of hot and cold medium in the classroom, the irony of the scene exposes a more sinister practice of silence and ignorance within everyday society. Melissa's and Chip's disagreement over the efficacy of the "You Go, Girls" campaign point to an inability to communicate, in which monologues (in *The Corrections* and elsewhere represented by various lectures) always triumph over the practice of dialogue (wherein opinions are exchanged and discussed on an equal footing). It is useful here to remember Naomi Klein's remarks regarding the continued obfuscation between a product and its consumers. [162] This then leads to a reassessment

[161] See Annesley, p. 114.
[162] As Naomi Klein argues in *No Logo*, in order for any corporate empire to gain traction with a world oversaturated with various products of the same guise and intention, the best way to develop a plethora of consumers is to develop, not a product, but a brand. Such "brand identities" are, in effect, in direct conflict with a consumer's individual identity and sense of self. Klein argues that, when advertising in predominantly B.A.M.E. neighborhoods, clothing companies claim that consumers will a "better" lifestyle by consumption of their products. That this lifestyle is at

of physical enforcements upon these theoretical challenges. When Chip goes to Vilnius, Lithuania, to help his married girlfriend's Lithuanian husband, Gitanas, to defraud Lithuanians, he comes to the realisation of the uselessness of trying to apply theory to only ideas without any practical applications. Theory, Chip thinks, has now become the propriety of "farce":

> It warmed his Foucaultian heart, in a way, to live in a land where property ownership and the control of public discourse were so obviously a matter of who had the guns (C 441).

Though Chip might prefer it in his heart to witness the direct connection between experience and knowledge, which takes a troubling step towards mending the distance between the two, there is something to be said for the price of realising such a union has to do upsetting the balance between the two, long maintained because of the threat to social stability. As Giorgio Agamben writes in *Destruction of Experience*:

> The idea of experience as separate from knowledge has become so alien to us that we have forgotten that until the birth of modern science, experience and science each had their own place. What is more, they were even connected to different subjects. The subject of experience was common sense, some~ thing existing in every individual. . . while the subject of science is the noūs or the active intellect, which is separate from experience, 'impassive' and 'divine.'[163]

However, Chip's veneration for post-structural theory as played out in real life has little bearing upon the very real consequences brought on by this flagrant marriage, thus making all possible means of critique (at least, in the sheltered way that Chip is used to doling out behind the safety of his desk) rather difficult to undertake.

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odds with B.A.M.E cultures and/or lifestyles (and economically unobtainable for the majority) is ignored. (See Naomi Klein. *No Logo*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 112-113).

[163] Giorgio Agamben. *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, translated by Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), p. 18.

As such, there are compelling comparisons to be made between Franzen's narrative intentions and the distant critiques of the Frankfurt School, a group of German philosophers (including Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno), who are collectively known for their scathing comments on the state of early-twentieth century culture and its abysmal direction. Despite such comments and fervour for change, the members of the Frankfurt School (excluding Herbert Marcuse) still found it much easier to critique society at large when they did not have to face the reality that it provided. As Stuart Jefferies puts it in his group autobiography:

> [Adorno's conception of theory as freedom in the midst of unfreedom] was where the Frankfurt School felt most comfortable. Instead of being caught up in.revolutionary euphoria, they preferred to retreat in a non-repressive intellectual space where they could think freely. That kind of freedom is, to be sure, a melancholy one since it is born of a loss of hope in real change.[164]

Jefferies's astute description of the Frankfurt School encapsulates Franzen's dilemma as he tries to reform the novel into something participatory. While Franzen does not lack for the desire to critique real life through his preferred theme of the family unit, he lacks the drive to put his theories into practice. Franzen's narrative ambivalence, which often sees characters take on a reformed view towards their lives; in which grandiose ambitions (see Walter's environmentalism, Joey's farcical business plans which in fact work to defraud the United States government, Pip's wanting to change the world) are usually misinformed by theory or the promise of a certain individual specialness. Jesus Blanco Hidalga sees this reformation as a natural consequence of privilege:

> The question for a writer such as Franzen is how to substantiate a critical position from the mainstream, with no minority or underprivileged group to rely on, even more when critical

[164] Stuart Jefferies, *The Grand Hotel Abyss* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 6.

subgenres such as the Systems novel have been discorded and political utopias are out of the question. In this sense, environmentalism may afford a much needed critical position for the novelist. However, we should bear in mind that the same non-specific character which makes environmentalism available for any novelist as an instrument of critical leverage, in practice undermines its actual power.[165]

One such privilege becomes more tangible than any of its theoretical counterparts in the form of technology. Unlike other Big Questions that the world faces today which retain their seeming opacity, technology has become more and more transparent and a more recently, treated as a marker of alleged privilege.[166] By extension, Franzen seems not to have realised that the newest technological update or upgrade may not be immediately available to everyone. In an Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times*, this issue is given a sense of universality when Franzen alludes to the dampening of experience by technology. In the essay, "Liking is for Cowards, Go for What Hurts," Franzen writes an ironic ode to his new Blackberry Pearl, with which he is "infatuated":

> To speak more generally, the ultimate goal of technology, the telos of techne, is to replace a natural world that's indifferent to our wishes — a world of hurricanes and hardships and breakable hearts, a world of resistance — with a world so responsive to our wishes as to be, effectively, a mere extension of the self. [167]

For Franzen, it is not only experience that has become limited by technology. The presence of technology and its in-built demand for upgrades (as Franzen notes, upon replacing his Blackberry,

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[165] Hidalga, p. 204.

[166] Perhaps the most egregious display of this idea is made by U.S. House of Representative Jason Chaffetz, who recently suggested that "Americans may need to choose between a "new iPhone... they just love" and investing in health care." See "Congressman suggests poor Americans should give up iPhones for health care" (2017) <https://www.theverge.com/2017/3/7/14841736/chaffetz-says-americans-must-pick-between-iphones-and-healthcare> [Accessed 4 November 2019].

[167] Jonathan Franzen. "Liking is for Cowards, Go for What Hurts," *The New York Times*, 28 May 2011.

that such an act constitutes the equivalent of "outgrowing a [human] relationship")[168] indicates a shift between the individual and their devices. Under the threat of new technology, individuals become consumers, to be effectively influenced by advertisement. Due to technology being the newest extension of self, this suggests that what constitutes personal identity is not only up for debate but also purchasable. The largely accepted practice of switching out technology for better (sometimes billed more attractively as more secure and reliable) models has also seeped into the way we see ourselves.

Academia and technology also make for awkward bedfellows in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. Unlike Franzen, who seeks to disavow technology because it shows society as having something unpleasant at its core, Ghosh instead takes the approach that technology can be useful. Yet he, too, shares Franzen's concern that technology can easily take away from experience if it is properly contextualised. Piya, the marine biologist researcher, who comes to the Sundarbans to do a dolphin survey carefully limits her experiences with nature and her surroundings with scientific equipment -- thereby also excluding any part of her environment which does not agree with her thesis. This is at first portrayed in a positive light because it demonstrates the depth with which she is able to use her academic knowledge. Early in the novel, Piya notices a sunning crocodile while on the Mej-da's boat. When the Mej-da demands a tip for alerting her to this creature, Piya is reassured by her tools and her scientific expertise that this sunning crocodile is not relevant to her thesis. The irrelevance of the crocodile here doubles as a metaphor for the presence of both the Mej-da and the forest guard, who represent postcolonial oppression. Their attempt to censor and curate Piya's knowledge is unsuccessful. Piya's knowledge stands above the Mej-da's attempt to subsume what she knows. This is characteristic of Ghosh's work, as he is interested in knowledge

[168] Franzen, "Cowards," *ibid*.

as a chaotic force which defies the forces of categorization and delineation. Within the context of Ghosh's work, Anshuman A. Mondal circumscribes this ambivalence as a product of irony which renders reason "vulnerable."[169] Mondal writes, "in fact, knowledge does not describe the world 'as is,' but rather expresses our *desire* to to see order. . . in the world, even when it is not warranted."[170]

However, when Piya meets Fokir, she is compelled to rethink her approach to her project. In trying to prove her thesis, Piya has blocked herself from truly experiencing life since she discounts all other experiences that do not align with the scope of her project. This is especially true as critics such as Ismail S. Tahlib and Tuomas Huttunen suggest that this is due to Piya's distrust of language and a problem that arises out of a lack of communication, which has always been her experience with language. I would like to contend that it is in fact less a problem of language than her own over reliance upon language as a mode of communication. With Fokir, language cannot fulfill its usual function for he is illiterate and nearly mute. Fokir has been previously discussed in Chapter 1 as a figure who represents a perfect juxtaposition of experience and knowledge and is not made any the less by what he does not know (in this case, communicable spoken language): he becomes an embodiment of ambiguity and of what ambiguity can achieve especially when it comes to perceiving new ideas.[171] Compared to Fokir, Piya's hard-earned scientific knowledge at her university begins to appear inadequate in the face of the practical experiences the crab fisherman even if he cannot completely express this inwords. Pramod K. Nayar, for example, points to this chasm in Piya's knowledge as reminiscent of Freud's conception

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[169] Mondal, *Ghosh* p. 54.
[170] Mondal, *Ghosh*, *ibid*.
[171] Although an ambivalent reading of Fokir's character can also be drawn from the novel, as even though Ghosh seems to prefer Fokir's mode of existence, as the man lives on the careful precipice of experience and knowledge, but Ghosh is aware too, of the harsher realities of the world today that naturally opposes this sort of living. Fokir's wife Moyna, for example vehemently opposes her husband's occupation because it has no future rather than pointing to his lack of education.

of the uncanny. Nayar argues that technologisation in the novel ultimately aids the "displacement" of knowledge, and that knowledge systems therefore "codified" by a "Westernized, metropolitan and technology-reliant culture" in fact adds to the unfamiliarity of the tide country.[172] Later, since Piya has already discarded the crocodile from view, the creature re-emerges and demands to be seen and imprinted on her affective memory; Piya becomes haunted by "[the crocodile's] ghostly outline. . .almost as large as the boat" (*HT*, 175).

Where Franzen and the extended landscape of the new millennium as he envisions it alludes to the impossibility of returning experience to its roots, Ghosh seems to be in favour of reconstituting experience and knowledge in a way that does not take away from the strength of either. With Ghosh's continued interest in connections and contextualisation, and what is often lost in affecting one perspective over another, experience becomes an invaluable part of how knowledge is seen. Ghosh never loses sight of the importance of surrounding context. Unlike Joey, who is determined to relegate immediate contexts like 9/11 as separate from the classroom, Ghosh understands all systems of knowledge as connected.[173]

This is perhaps most clear in *The Hungry Tide.* In praise of the novel, Rajender Kaur calls the novel an 'uncannily prescient text,' in that the title and the novel itself 'can be seen to portend' the Indian Ocean Tsunami that occurred in December only later in the same year.[174] As a follow up to his supposed omnipotence, Ghosh's own journalistic report of the incident, laid out in an essay titled 'The Town By the Sea,' remains for Kaur one of the more 'sensitive' narratives of the

[172] Pramod K. Nayar, The Postcolonial Uncanny: The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's The *Hungry Tide*", *College Literature*, 37 (2010), p. 110.
[173] C.f. Amitav Ghosh. "The Anglophone Empire", *The New Yorker,* 7 April 2003.
[174] Rajender Kaur, "'Home Is Where the Orcaella Are' Toward a New Paradigm of Transcultural Ecocritical Engagement in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*.' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, (14) 2007, (125-141), p. 125.

tsunami.[175] Notably, Ghosh not only recounts the event at face value, but he also stays true to his training as an anthropologist. He takes great care to carve a definitive space for the tsunami within the wider scope of history. In doing so, the tsunami gains a discursive advantage in being written strategically into the heart of the dispute between 'the hurried history of the emergent nation [which has] collided here with the deep time of geology.'[176] Ghosh uses this dispute to create an inextricable contradiction between the old autonomy of the natural world and the newness of human ambition. He therefore carves out a space for both possibilities.

Though it may appear from the above that Ghosh's humanist take on ambivalence is the preferred perspective of the two, there is something to be said about the fact that Ghosh could effectively adopt such a position at all. Ghosh is an individual who identifies strongly with his Indian roots and has consistently relied on his background as a platform to effectively put across ideas which champion cross-culturality for a more holistic experience, he has arrived at such a position by way of postcolonialism. As a writer who has come from an established tradition of struggling to speak for himself (see his letter to the Manager of the Commonwealth Prize in the Introduction) and feeling as an intrinsic part of his epistemological system that he must necessarily depend upon lesser known venues of achieving knowledge. Franzen's characters, largely middle-class and comfortable with the state of their own opinions, are prone to lecturing and not listening to others, so that information and experiences exchanged in conversation, and by extension, in narrative are often lost.

As such, Ghosh reconstitutes the seemingly forgotten and neglected relationship between an individual's knowledge and his or her experiences. While it is not expressly stated that Kanai is an educated man, he is the epitome of what happens when an individual values knowledge

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[175] Kaur, p. 126.
[176] Amitav Ghosh *Incendiary Circumstances.* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), p. 2.

without experience. In a telling conversation with Fokir's mother, Kusum, Kanai makes fun of her for not being able to understand English. Again, this showcases Kanai's ignorance rather than his knowledge:

"Do you read English?"

"No."

"Then why would you want to see it, it would not make any sense to you." (*HT*, p. 250)

Kanai might think that his city education -- itself at first the initial cause of his inability to communicate with the people of the tide country, though he might readily share a spoken language with them -- puts him squarely above the others. However, as Moyna, Fokir's wife reminds him, Kanai's education is something that continues to put him at odds with the residents of the tide country and it becomes increasingly clear that his education and knowledge actively works against his efforts to be a more rounded individual.

Despite Kanai's growing limitations as a person who refuses to see experience (particularly, experiences that are not the result of academic learning), Fokir's wife Moyna still attempts to use Kanai as a gateway to get through to her husband in the following exchange:

"It would be good for him to hear it from you, Kanai-babu. Who knows what he's begun to expect -- especially when she's giving him so much money?"

"But why me, Moyna?. . .What can I say?"

Kanai-babu, there's no one else who knows how to speak to both of them -- to [Piya] and to [Fokir]. . .But for you neither of them will know what is in the mind of the other. Their words will be in your hands and you can make them being what you will.'

. . .Kanai laughed. "Moyna, it's true he's your husband -- but then why can't you talk to him yourself? Why do you want me to do it for you?"

> “It’s *because* he’s my husband that I can’t talk to him[,]” Moyna said quietly, “Only a stranger can put such things into words.” (*HT*, p. 257-8)

Moyna’s appeal to Kanai shows that she is aware of the limitations of her own experience which would naturally to Kanai. Further, Moyna is aware too, of the parameters of her relationship to Fokir as his wife. Even though Moyna, like Kanai with his Detective novel, has also placed certain restrictions upon her interaction with him, she does so with a view towards what differing knowledge can add to her experience, rather than what it takes away. By emphasising his talent with language, Moyna has seamlessly integrated Kanai’s knowledge where it had no place before.

By being willing to conceive of knowledge as a vital part of experience, Kanai and Piya both move towards what Emily Johansen calls “territorialised cosmopolitan—cosmopolitanism located in specific, though often multiple, places.”[177] Though Johansen’s understanding of this concept is deeply rooted in the way city individuals such as Kanai and Piya perceive rural spaces, territorialised cosmopolitanism represents a unique opportunity in terms of ambivalence as a learning experience and is one possibility of reuniting one with the other without either losing its own integrity. At the end of *The Hungry Tide*, instead of retreating into familiar, familial spheres of influence, both Kanai and Piya are richer in having faced new experiences. For Kanai, who values language above all, finally admits that language is an inadequate tool of communication without experience behind it. His parting letter to Piya bears this caveat which does not take away from the translation, but rather propels the translation to an ambivalent position, becoming an integral part of the tide country:

> That was the song that you heard on Fokir’s lips yesterday: it lives in him, and in some way perhaps, it still plays a part in making him the person he is. . .Such flaws as there are

[177] Emily Johansen, “Imagining the Global and the Rural: Rural Cosmopolitanism in Sharon Butala’s *The Garden of Eden* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*”, *Postcolonial Text*, 4 (2008), 1-18 (p. 13).

> in my rendition of it I do not regret, for perhaps they will prevent me from fading from sight as a good translator should: for once, I shall be glad if my imperfections render me visible (*HT*, p. 354) .

Where Kanai previously clung to knowledge while he disregards the necessity of experience, he finally understands that his flaws in translation in fact adds to the holistic nature of his endeavour. For perhaps the first time, Kanai's view towards language becomes an inclusionary one, upheld by a much-needed sense of uncertainty.

As such, ambivalence points to the state of the postmodern world and the individual's seeming inability to live within it. In its more pessimistic form, championed by Franzen, newly ambivalent individuals seek to retreat from making real judgments and decisions, whereas Ghosh's more humanistic approach to the subject allows for the reunification of experience and knowledge. The early horror writer, H. P. Lovecraft, who bears the distinction of bringing existential dread into our intimate reality rather than just some alternative faraway universe, offers remarks:

> The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We love on an island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it is not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our own frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.[178]

In a world that is all but held hostage by disassociated, deterritorialised knowledge, madness seems to be on the rise: the return to nationalism in global and local politics and the tribalism that is

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[178] H. P. Lovecraft, *The New Annotated H.P. Lovecraft,* edited by L. S. Klinger (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014), p. 124.

emerging in the digital world so forces knowledge to look for other ways of self-preservation that does not rely on exclusivity or reclusivity. Ambivalence becomes then, perhaps the fourth possibility in Nietzsche's famous maxim: "To live alone one has to be a beast or a god—says Aristotle. A third case: one has to be both—a philosopher".[179] In a civilised society, all of these states of living alone have become impossible by the new smallness of the world; one simply cannot be a beast in the world living alongside others; godhood is a notably empty pursuit—again to quote the old saying "God is dead"[180]; and as we have seen, philosophy has largely lost the ability to connect with practical realities at least within the academic context in which it is most often found, and is antithetical to "hot" media. The pursuit of ambivalent knowledge is all that remains.

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[179] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and Anti-Christ*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (New York, NY and London: Penguin Books 1968), p. 33.
[180] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, edited and translated by Graham Parks, (London: The Folio Society, 2012), p. 5.

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