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ABJURATION OF THE PRECISE IDENTITY IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S 'WHEREABOUTS'

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ABSTRACT

Man has always sought a better way of existence. The exploration process went on from the very beginning of the civilization to the modern, advanced era. In search of comfort and success, man decides to move constantly. They frequently emigrate in order to create better futures. This kind of migration is covered in diaspora writing, which also exposes some characteristics that are similar to the experience. Jhumpa Lahiri is a well-known Indian American author and a celebrated narrator of the experience of Bengali immigrants. The fact that Jhumpa Lahiri is the daughter of an Indian immigrant is highly significant, and she believes that people who are culturally displaced and raised in two different worlds at the same time always struggle with the issue of identity and solitude. The paper would be an attempt to examine identity crisis and solitude experienced by the writer herself in the novel. 'Whereabouts' portrays a subdued picture of urban solitude with a sense of longing. It is also Lahiri's first book, originally written in Italian and then translated into English by her. It was released in Italy in 2018 under the title 'Dove mi trovo', which literally translates as "Where I find myself"- which is a suitable proclamation for a writer whose work has always concentrated on cultural relocations. In the novel an unidentified woman is seen moving between hotels, restaurants, and pubs. She also visits her mother, occasionally runs into a potential lover, goes swimming, and reads. Every little scene has a location—a museum, a swimming pool, a bookstore—but the locations just act as a decanter into which the woman pours her memories and feelings.

Keywords: identity, solitude, relocation, struggle, narrator, memory

Jhumpa Lahiri, a renowned author of diasporic literature who is well-known among contemporary authors, has published her first piece of nonfiction that was initially written in Italian. Lahiri, who was born in London to an Indian Bengali immigrant family, grows up in Rhode Island, where she picks up English like a native speaker. She listens to Bengali before going to school and speaks Bengali with her parents in that language. She first fears speaking English in class because she has only ever heard Bengali. This is the preliminary step of her language shock, and she struggles and suffers psychologically. But as time goes on, English starts to look intriguing and eventually replaces Bengali as her favourite language. Instead of Bengali, her mother tongue, English—her stepmother, as she says—becomes the dominating language in her life and propels her to tremendous success as a writer. But she starts to forget Bengali as she starts to think of English as her own language. English is the language she likes and uses to think when she writes.

Her first book, *Interpreter of Maladies*, a collection of short stories published in 1999, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and her second book, *The Namesake*, a brilliant novel that was made into a multilingual film, became a well-known book on diaspora. *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), her third book and second collection of short stories, is recognised as one of the New York Times 10 Best Books of the Year. Her fourth book, *The Lowland* (2013), is a finalist for several awards, including the Man Booker Prize. Because of her profound concern for the diasporic realities experienced by migrants from all over the world, particularly from India and the Indian subcontinent, Lahiri's presence in world literature is strongly felt. Although her interest in the Italian language had started on her first trip to Florence with her sister in 1994. Lahiri feels a serious desire to learn it when she is pursuing her PhD in Renaissance Studies at Boston University. Her thesis is on "how Italian architecture influenced English playwrights of the seventeenth century". She develops a love for the Italian language and aspires to write and communicate in it. She is fascinated by the sound of Italian and has a great desire to learn it. It is unusual for a well-known author of English books and stories to switch to another language; Lahiri will actually create a new identity by picking up a new tongue. She must continue writing in English, according to many of her friends and well-wishers. They also tell her against writing in Italian because the outcome could be awful, but she ignores their cautions. She is however worried about losing her roots. She has achieved great success and notoriety in the past for her work in English, but she now plans to switch to a different tongue. She continues to explore for opportunities to learn Italian, looks for mentors, and then engages a number of tutors to assist her in doing so. She falls deeply in love with Italian, the language of her first dreams. Later, in 2012, she shifts to Rome with her family with the primary goal of learning the language.

The fifth book of fiction by Lahiri continues this trend of change. Since *The Lowland*(2013), *Whereabouts* is her latest book. It is also Lahiri's debut book, originally written in Italian and then translated into English by her. It was published in Italy in 2018 under the title *Dove mi Trovo*, which is a suitable proclamation for a writer whose work has always concentrated on cultural relocations. *Whereabouts* functions like a photographer's contact sheet. As our eyes move over the photographs, responding to each reframe, a fragmented story of an Italian woman at a turning point in her life begins to take shape. But this novel's goal is not to tell a story. Each entry, the majority of which are only a few pages long, is complete in itself; any one of them may be skipped over without leaving a void.

This book is about places, both physical and emotional, both of which are constantly changing, as its title suggests. Prepositions are used to precisely pin each of the book's 46 brief chapters to a specific location, such as "On the Street," "In the Office," "In the Pool," "At the Hotel," "By the Sea," "In Bed," and "At the Register" "In My Head." Some includes the time of day, such as "At Dawn" or "Upon Waking." The chapter "Nowhere" takes place right before the narrator's life undergoes a significant transformation.

Whereabouts presents a subtle picture of urban solitude with a hint of desire. The narrator of Lahiri's novel, who purposefully crams her peaceful life with rituals and routines, writes: "Solitude: it's become my trade. As it requires a certain discipline, it's a condition I try to perfect"(Lahiri 97). This conflict between the pleasures of solitude and its drawbacks, between her nearly constant displeasure and her fleeting moments of ecstasy, forms the upright spine of Lahiri's small book. Without interruption from a partner, kids, siblings, or friends, she establishes a routine rhythm of activity and a connection to her neighbourhood. She visits her favourite stationery store once a month, dines at a trattoria for lunch at noon, and visits the beautician twice a month. "Solitude requires a precise assessment of time. I've always known this. You need to know how much time you need to kill, how much to spend before dinner, what's leftover before going to bed."

A 46-year-old lady who is the unidentified narrator in an unnamed Italian city is preoccupied with her own life throughout the book's forty-six brief chapters. Lahiri depicts the narrator's many duties in various situations in her hometown while imagining various locations. Migration and its effects are indicated through the protagonist's emotional and geographical moves to various locales at various periods. The book is written as episodes or chapter names like "In the Bookstore" and "At My House" allude to different locations. We are given glimpses into the complicated emotional life of this protagonist through these scenes, as well as her intense loneliness in the city and her vain attempts to form connections. Lahiri mentions the locations as "On the Street," "In the Office," "In the Pool," "At the Hotel," "By the Sea," "In Bed," "At the Register" and the time as "At Dawn,"

and "Upon Waking." She portrays the change in narrator's life in a chapter titled, "Nowhere", which refers to unstable settings and movements from place to place.

Over the course of a year, the narrative follows an anonymous lady throughout an undisclosed city, with each chapter functioning as a stroke of regret and loneliness. The reader could assume that a certain sort of tale has started when, in the second chapter, "On the Street" the narrator walks to the husband of a friend, who she "might have been involved with, maybe shared a life with"; The chapters of the book describe various connections or relationships, such as a visit to her mother, a regular conversation with a barista, and a casual meeting. The question posed by the book is: "How does a city grow to be a relationship in and of itself for the female protagonist?" An unexpected meeting with her former partner in the chapter "In the Bookstore" brings up painful memories of her desire to appease him and attend to the many aspects of his life, which culminates in the stunning admission of his treachery. She finally feels relieved once the relationship ends.

This book is about belonging and not belonging, location and dislocation. Lahiri has explored identity issues in all of her novels, whether it is situated in New England, Calcutta, or now (we assume) Rome. This book, which she calls "a portrayal of a woman in a sort of urban solitude," has taken on an unexpectedly relevant resonance after a year of forced isolation for so many people, not least in Italy. The novel portrays the narrator's alienation in different temporal emotional settings and multiple exchange relations through some dramatic events like a parent's death, a lover's betrayal, and a life-threatening stroke. Locating place in a transnational space and relocation enhance the mobility to different places, which is a process of becoming. The postmodern condition refers to the concept of constant making and remaking, which refer to the concept called transmission of identity. The paper draws on the contemporary critical discourse of fluidity as migration, cultural flow, cross-border mobility and formation of identity in transnational sphere.

Whereabouts is a short novel, but there is enough of leisure time to pass. We are offered vignettes of quiet sorrow or stories of little annoyance in place of a conventional storyline, all of which have been combined into a syrup of toxic self-absorption. The narrator's constant sorrow almost had a hint of humour to it at moments. The narrator resolves never to sit on her friend's sofa again when the two-year-old leaves a stain on it. She says, "In spring I suffer." (Lahiri, 203.)

The narrator continues to be an obsessive people watcher despite her broader feeling of alienation. In reality, a large portion of the novel's substance is inspired by her obsessive fascination with outsiders. For instance, she makes up an entire background when she sees an elderly woman at her favourite museum: "I bet she's in the city by chance, maybe tagging along behind her husband, who's here for work and busy all day." The narrator enjoys listening to "the other women chat among themselves" as she makes her semi-weekly outings to the pool. She occasionally feels impelled to follow a lady who resembles her throughout the city.

All of this focus on individuals is intended to highlight the narrator's isolation from other people rather than her relationship with them. She claims, "I don't share my life with anyone." Although she works as a teacher, she admits, "My heart's not in it. ... Solitude: It's become my trade. ... I eat alone, next to others eating alone." Even the ticket seller at the theatre feels bad for her: Just one ticket? She observes a young woman getting a manicure at the spa, which is her most meaningful human interaction. She says, She proceeds to work on my nails,"

Whereabouts' central theme is closely related to the phrase "lifeless shards of myself". These scenes, which provide an unpleasant foreshadowing of the pandemic's isolation, have a recurring death motif. The narrator is passing a plaque on the road where a man once died as the book's early chapters begin. She works in an office whose former occupant died. "Maybe," she offers, "that's why this room feels a bit sepulchral." she says. She observes the chef's wife is died while eating lunch. Parents of her ex-boyfriend passed away. She was fifteen when her own father died. "The sun was so strong I thought I might die," she says on the beach.

At one point, the protagonist claims that "requires a certain discipline, it's a condition I try to perfect." This discipline includes listening to and witnessing the loneliness of others. The protagonist visits her favourite museum, which is usually vacant, and spends a few while sitting in a large room to study the light

flowing in through the window. She spots a lovely woman who is undoubtedly a foreigner in the room. The main character understands the woman is not there to enjoy the art but rather to relax. She spends her time alone in the room studying her swollen feet, her shoes, and reflecting on all the streets she has walked. She is unmoved by this room's splendour. She uses it as a chance to rest. In the chapter 'In the Pool' She also hears a group of older and younger ladies talking in the locker room " One mother discusses her son's cancer, while the other describes a mother's son who was killed in an automobile accident. The main character wishes to disappear under the water to avoid the constant stream of worries that permeate her life, but the stories the ladies share with one another break the illusion.

To explain that everyone experiences the conflict between feeling "rooted and rootless," she imagined what it may be like for someone who has never had to think about these things yet nonetheless feels restless in *Whereabouts*. The narrator is contradictory in other ways as well. A professor in her late 40s, she is single yet has a large social network; sometimes lonely, sometimes times satisfied; envies others' relationship and is envied for her freedom.

There are several casual friendships and even attractions in the narrator's isolated life, but the book ended as the novel is against these core ties and losses. She meets friends who have young children, glances at a younger woman at a dinner party, and watches a private argument between her male friend and his wife play out on the street. She occasionally appears to be both a spectator in the city, observing intimate moments that transcend her in some way. In the final stage, she sees a group of foreigners enjoying one another's company and basic cuisine in a loud manner on the train. The narrator is given their food, but she refuses to take it. She resembles an older, female Prufrock who is incapable of accepting life's chances and content to live in limbo in the city in certain ways. It seems unlikely that her habits of reflection and isolation will alter, even if she takes the chance to spend a year in a distant country.

Whereabouts presents a remarkable portrayal of a lady who is neither youthful nor enjoying the typical comforts of middle life, yet whose internal struggles and outside journeys continue to be captivating. Lahiri writes in poetic, sparse style. The novel's complexity is enhanced by the language's economy and its origin tongue.

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