



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Kazim Ali's poetry: *Sky Ward* negotiating postmodern identity**Nehal Ali^{1*} & Mohsen Abbas¹¹Arab Open University, KSA*Correspondence: n.ghaffar@arabou.edu.sa**ABSTRACT**

The postmodern belief is more mental structures in response to rapid changes in thinking, creativity, awareness, conduct, and authority. Changes in thoughts and visions caused a huge impairment in creative structures, resulting in artists of this period with a diversity of modifications and distinctions and separated from old logical patterns and modern upkeep. Kazim Ali is a contemporary poet inspired by technology. *Sky Ward*, his poetry book, examines how technology affects relationships and creativity. In this research, postmodernist features in Kazim Ali's poetry are analyzed, along with how he metaphorically reflects his native North America and his ancestors' homelands in his writing. This study takes a multifaceted look at the poetics of diaspora, with a particular focus on the diasporic identities of those who are of the second generation of immigrant families. This study also investigates the ways in which second-generation immigrants construct metaphorical homelands via the use of familial narrative and early recollections of their ancestors. In addition to this, it investigates the ways in which loss expresses itself for authors who live in liminality, as well as the ways in which contradicting experiences or plurality are depicted by gaps in both the formal structure of a poem and its intellectual landscape.

KEYWORDS: postmodernist features, Kazim Ali's poetry, technology, technological advancements

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Introduction

The postmodern poem has been studied throughout the 1960s and is distinguished by certain artistic and subject characteristics. This type of poetry is frequently composed in an informal structure, with the intention of reflecting the process of thinking or organic speech via a flow of awareness manner. These verses may be hard to comprehend and read, which is frequently done on goal to mirror the poetry back to the reader. Postmodern poetry typically expresses a spiritual point of view and addresses topics of futility or absence of reality. Intellectuals are sometimes perplexed by the phrase “postmodern poetry,” despite the fact that the principles underlying such poems are pretty simple.

The term “postmodern” merely refers to a manner that follows the “modern” trend in art and literature, which is commonly defined as work created during and immediately after the two World Wars of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, in the 1960s, the counterculture’s rise that swept much of the United States led to novel forms of creative engagement. Postmodern poetry sometimes involves topics of restlessness and usually is composed in a loose fashion. Breaks in lines and patterns might be disorganized or appear to be useless, yet the unexpected breaks typically have a function. While traditional types of poetry frequently conveyed concepts via the division of lines and punctuation, postmodern poem employs unpredictable line breaks to represent the globe’s chaotic governance. The structure of the poem reinforces the concept that patterns are useless and that intent cannot be forced on the work.

Creating the postmodern belief is more mental structures in response to broad rapid changes in which we went from constrained to unrestrained in the fields of thinking, creativity, awareness, conduct, and authority. Following that, it resulted in shifts in thoughts and visions, resulting in a massive impairment in creative structures, with the artist of this age augmented with a range of modifications and distinctions, and disconnected from the previous logical patterns, and modern upkeep (Hammadi and Khudair, 2021).

Kazim Ali is a modern poet whose work is heavily influenced by technology. His poetry collection, *Sky Ward*, explores the effects of technology on communication and relationships, as well as its potential for creative expression. He also uses digital media and new technologies to create multimedia works. Kazim Ali’s poetry is seen to be influenced by intertextuality, which is the practice of using references to other texts in one’s own work. Ali is often influenced by the works of other authors, such as Rumi, Hafiz, and Walt Whitman, to form his own unique poetic voice. He also makes references from the Holy Qur’an, Islamic mysticism, and Sufi poetry, as well as his own personal experiences and observations. Ali’s intertextuality allows him to create a dialogue between his own work and the works of other authors, creating a rich and layered poetic landscape (Greenberg 2014).

To point out how Kazim Ali’s *Sky Ward* constructs an explicitly **secondgeneration diasporic subjectivity** through postmodern poetic strategies is the ground upon which this study stands. The paper is not dealing with fragmentation, intertextuality, and hybridity as just being formal features, it inquires about how these techniques reflect the experimental conditions of secondgeneration immigrants who inherit memories of the so-called homeland without having directly lived in those homelands. It examines how Ali’s poems locates identity in an “inbetween” position. This positioning represent the opposition and tension created between ancestral homelands and North American space, between religious traditions and secular modernity, and between queer subject positions, and how this inbetweenness is celebrated at the levels of narrative discontinuity and allusion. The research thus seeks to answer the following inquiry: in what ways does *Sky Ward* use postmodern devices to negotiate memory, belonging, and otherness for a secondgeneration diasporic subject, and how does this negotiation challenge dominant models of American and Islamic identities?

Kazim Ali’s 2013 poetry collection *Sky Ward* represents a significant intercession in contemporary American poetry, although the way literary critics interpret it requires an extensive revision. While the collection does indeed explore themes of spirituality, identity, and loss through fragmented and intertextual approaches, the commonly cited interpretation of the title as referring to a mental hospital ward is fundamentally misguided. The title suggests both directional movement (“skyward”) and attentiveness (“ward” as protection or watchfulness), creating a semantic tension that mirrors the collection’s larger concerns with rising above. The collection’s fragmented structure serves multiple functions beyond just the formal experimentation. Ali constructs poetics reflecting the split-inside nature of contemporary experience while simultaneously signaling possibilities of perfection. Such is being performed through carefully composed discontinuities. The poems

resist linear narrative progression not to disorient readers, but to create new pathways of meaning-making that challenge forming a conventional Western literary tradition.

Ali's poetry book, *Sky Ward*, raises the issue of the effects of technology on communication and interaction, and the potential of technology to enable creative expression. He also employs digital media and emergent technologies most frequently to create multimedia works. Kazim Ali's writing is highly dependent on intertextuality, or employing allusions to other texts within one's own writing. Ali makes common reference to other authors, i.e., Rumi, Hafiz, and Walt Whitman, as a means to attain his individual poetic voice. Ali uses the Qur'an, Sufi poetry, Islamic mysticism, and what he observes as well as has done, for drawing inspiration. Intertextuality by Ali is the reason behind the introduction of conversation between his text and writings from other writers for creating a multiple-dimensional world of poetry (Greenberg, 2014).

Literature Review

Poetry is in a very special situation to take into consideration not just for the past, but also for the present and even the future of a topic that has a diasporic history. As an illustration, many facets may be compared to one another using metaphor. For instance, the past and the present can co-exist inside a single case, as can two different physical places. This approach dismantles portrayals of diaspora as a geographically constrained construct that is dependent on a place in the past. As a result, we are able to see diaspora for what it really is: a continually evolving and redefining condition that is unrestricted by the boundaries of physical geography. Poetry, on the other hand, has the ability to modify what is there while at the same time subtly (and at times, blatantly) alluding to what is not there.

Homi Bhabha's theoretical framework provides crucial insights into the spatial dynamics of diasporic literature, particularly through his conceptualization of gaps and intersecting spaces. In "Interrogating Identity," Bhabha identified "the gap between a spectrum of conflicting positions that coexist", suggesting that these interstices create new possibilities for cultural understanding and expression. In this theoretical map, the author explains how a new "space," created within and across marked places, comes into "being". This emergent space therefore is a necessity in the metaphorical homeland realization, it is an effect of paradigmatic hybridization and born from the tensions within the concept and gestures towards an immeasurable time. This theoretical construct may be observed in practice in the poetic texts of the second generation immigrant poets of the contemporary epoch. Fatimah Asghar, Tarfia Faizullah, and Kazim Ali construct imaginary homelands which contain necessarily erratic spaces and phases which can yet be but still remain out of reach. (Bhabha 2020: 68) The paper is thus positing that diasporic experience and poetic expression are inextricably mediated by questions of access and absence, specifically as concerns inherited memory and racialized identity. These limitations manifest in two distinct but interconnected ways: by limiting the poet's access to areas where she/he is "othered" and racialized, and by the methodological problematics of memory, particularly intergenerational memory (Ahmed 2000). This idea of double Otherness emerges in poetry as the literal gaps -- as the things that are absent yet are given voice due to that absence. The notion of figurative homelands poses a challenge in this sense in that it is required to address these absences as it seeks to map the figuration of the hybrid subject. Those representations remain incomplete and cannot adequately make up for the something which second generation diasporic individuals have never known or have had taken from them.

Ahmed's (2000) analysis of Audre Lorde's early encounters with racism, as documented in *Sister Outsider*, provides a compelling framework for understanding how memory transcends temporal boundaries. As Ahmed notes, "We must remind ourselves as readers, that the recalled encounter between herself and another is written, and that it functions as an aspect of an argument within a text that shifts between academic, personal and political modes of address" (p. 40). She further elaborates that "The encounter is lived and written, but it fails to be an event, or even a text, that is simply in the present. The encounter is already recalled and relived in the metonymic slide between different encounters" (Ahmed 40).

Postmodernism emerged as a response to the deterministic and systematic philosophies of modernity, after the trauma of Second World War. The essential feature referring to postmodernism is the contradiction with the modernist belief in unity, order and great and coherent narratives. Literature under this movement tries to reject authority, objectivity, and history and skepticism about the traditional historical novel breaks down structures of storytelling such as time, space, realistic representation of characters and events, and the narrative

voice is consciously self-questioning and metafictional, and close to irony.

In poetry, postmodernism marks a break from rigid poetics, formalism, and traditionally focused elements, including free verse, fragmented stories, and indeterminacy in language and meaning. The writers of this stream of modernist poetry ask us to consider the bric-a-brac and the meanings of the signifier vis-a-vis the signified, and the audience is made to realize that, contrary to what was assumed, meaning is not absolute, but relativistic. These ideas force readers to co-construct messages instead of being mere recipients of a specific message which is exogenous to them.

Many critics have analyzed the postmodern features in the poetry of the contemporary writer, Kazim Ali and his book *Sky Ward*; more intense focus has been given on fragmentation, intertextuality, and anti-narrativization in the writing. Wang (2013) states that there is a rich understanding of Ali's poems in terms of special poetic features making it clear that they are filled with unexpected connections and disconnections together with several juxtapositions that create brand new fields of thinking. Wang's commentary goes further than such structural analysis to explore the political dimensions of Ali's project, asserting that "Ali's poetry is subversive of mainstream cultural discourses and power regime" (p. 47).

On this basis, Waldmeir (2018) offers an extensive analysis of intertextuality in *Sky Ward* while pointing out the linkage of this work to postmodern literary theory. Another interesting point of view closer to the concept complementing the intertextual analysis was seen in Sullivan (2018), who stated that Ali's poems showed that literary works are interrelated and are not separate entities.

Thus, in addition to summarizing the previous literature, Sankar and Changmai (2019) present new analysis of the collection's postmodern features. Their analysis focuses on how Ali "interrupts progression of events by developing a seeming gaps within a poem", (p. 156). Moreover they point out that with intertextuality trick is even more complex and the authors state that "overall composition produced by the employment of intertextual references can be seen as a pattern woven into a vast cultural fabric that questions hegemonic paradigms and enriches the reader's perceiving of reality" (p. 158). These analyses' scholarly consensus is to stress novelty as a property of *Sky Ward* coupled with its importance to present-day poetry. Interim, skeptics make it clear to people how intertextual and fragmented poetics combined with the refusal of great metanarratives establish the contestation of the modernist model of poetry at the hands of Ali while exercising over serious social and political issues. Taken together, these works make it quite clear that what we are seeing here is not just the playful subversion of conventional avant-garde compositional processes but a necessary and conscious subversion of residual elite anthropological worldview as well as the poetic conventionalities in contemporary postmodernist poetic aesthetics as embodied by Ali's work.

Theoretical Framework:

Homi Bhabha's concepts of the "third space" and cultural hybridity are employed in order to discuss how diasporic identity is understood not as a simple mixture of origins and host cultures but as an entity emerging "between a spectrum of conflicting positions that coexist". In Ali's poetry, enjambment, ellipsis, and disrupted narrative sequences are read as formal equivalents of Bhabha's space, where meanings remain unfinished and subject positions are continuously negotiated. (Bhabha 2020: 68)

Sara Ahmed's analysis of memory and "strange encounters" further provides a ground for the reading of secondgeneration experience. Sarah Ahmed's emphasis on how encounters are "lived and written" though never being actually lived, supports an understanding of Ali's recurrent images of exile, home, and racialization as inherited rather than directly remembered. Therefore, the paper highlights the poems' recurring motifs, such as: houses, rivers, tickets, frozen bodies...etc. All are dealt with not just as metaphors, but as sites where different generations' memories and concepts of race are indorsed in the present tense of the lyric.

These postcolonial frameworks are combined with accounts of postmodernism focusing on fragmentation, intertextuality, and hybridity. Based on critics such as Wang, Waldmeir and Al Faqih et al., the paper regards Ali's fragmentation not simply as an experiment in playfulness, but rather a structural equivalent for diasporic subjectivity that is, the experimental discontinuity of it. Intertextual allusions, to Qur'anic discourse, Sufi poetry, Greek myth and American literary traditions, are interpreted as a hybrid archive that situates the speaker within overlapping cultural and religious ancestors rather than a single stable lineage. The final dimension of the concept of hybridity is extended beyond culture to knowledge systems, tracing how spiritual, scientific,

and emotional wording are integrated in poems such as “Prayer Request Cards” and “Ticket” to articulate a multilayered, postmodern self.

Homi Bhabha’s and Sarah Ahmed’s ideas, together with postmodern poetics, offer a framework for reading *Sky Ward* as a book that employs formal disruption and intertextuality to think through diaspora, not only in its themes but also in its form and syntactical structures.

Analysis

The poem *Sky Ward* by Kazim Ali, published in 2013, pays homage to postmodernism principles. His poetry is autobiographical and/or transcendental while at the same time disrupting the very construct of the poetry. This is because like postmodernism the poems are open and do not give clear cut conclusions to issues which are unrestrictedly many-sided. On the same note, Ali’s work is a conversation with cultures and religious traditions and proceeds to synthesize religious scriptures, philosophers, counseling sessions and real life to come up with a multilayered text.

In this analysis, key postmodern traits of *Sky Ward* will be discussed through the close analysis of fragmentation, intertextuality, ambiguity, and the quivering identity while including close reading of several poems from the collection.

Fragmentation

Postmodern literature is characterized by a number of features and fragmentation is one of the prominent features of Postmodern literature. Fragmentation is an important aspect of Postmodernism (Sunayna, 2024). The fragmentation of the text is perhaps one of the most evident thematic trends in *Sky Ward* and is observable at two levels; the poem form and language used by Ali. This technique averts the postmodern notion of reality as fragmented in the text by reflecting it, and at the same time disrupts the reader’s way of perceiving meaning and construction of meaning.

1. *Lake House*

*“Now to praise utterly unceasing now to shadow and learn
Flickering pulse last chapter sent Never to touch be shorn
Full hour spent spelling my house by web to thread air blue
By cover of night tree to tree strung any place through
Seen clear sun cold lake soul found any place home
Now done under woven to spill
Blue night lake foal.”*

According to Homi Bahabab’s point of view, these textual fractures can be looked upon as samples of the “third space”, where identity is being formed in the gaps among fixed points rather than in a stable entity. In *Lake House*, the jumps between “house”, “lake”, “web”, and “blue night” are not just representations of a fragmented consciousness, but they rather point out an inbetween situation that is not stable in which the speaker’s sense of “home” is neither completely attached to a single geography nor completely detached from place. The instability here is represented via the discontinued images, echoing Bhabha’s idea of a developing subjectivity formed “between a spectrum of conflicting positions that coexist”. (Bhaba 2020: 68)

On the other hand, according to Sarah Ahmed, these fragments display how diasporic memory “slides” between encounters that are highly complicated in the heart and mind of the speaker. The wording of “last chapter” and “any place home” enhance the feeling of an instable glimpse of memory that the speaker just inherited not lived. Accordingly, the reader would feel that those images are forming traced of the past that is characterized by pure displacement. Indeed, fragmentation in *Sky Ward* does not only display the uncertainty of postmodernism, but it also highlights the issues related to the second generation memory, Such issues involve hovering between present and past.

In *Lake House*, fragmentation is clear in both its structure and its imagery. The poem offers brief, disconnected glimpses of home, nature, and personal reflection, rather than following a continuous, linear narrative. Images such as “Flickering pulse,” “tree to tree strung any place through,” and “Blue night lake foal” create a fragmented sensual experience. These fragmented snapshots reflect the nature of memory and

identity. The language itself is also fragmented, with each line standing as an independent moment of perception. Such representation reflects the postmodern rejection of traditional, unified meaning, instead presenting an unstable as well as fragmented sense of reality. The reader is left to deduct meaning from the fragmented scenes, emphasizing the postmodern belief that life and understanding are inherently fragmented.

In *Lake House*, the phrase “spelling my house by web to thread air blue” represents home as something that is woven from intangible materials rather than fixed to a stable geography. Such representation reminds the reader of what Bhabha described as the “third space”. The house here is built of “web” and “air” which shows bluntly that the second generation is fragmented as its sense of belonging is derived from second hand experience. Similarly, “Seen clear sun cold lake soul found any place home” embarks the idea that the concept of “home” is not fixed, neither in place, nor in feeling. Everything is fragmented and not fixed at the same time. To discuss such emotions on the level of formal analysis, a conscious reader of the poem would notice that Ali’s long phrases creating enjambement with minor use of commas/full stops enhance the feeling of fragmentation and instability. The form of the poem can be looked upon as marking a diasporic subject whose inner self is scattered among various places and homes.

2. *Fairy Tale*

*“The amnesiac prince woke up in a garden
Where no inscription would bear his name.
He wandered into the cemetery,
The hollow words turned in his mouth like stones
At the shore, he thought he could read again.”*

We can observe the fragmentation in *Fairy Tale* in the story of the “amnesiac prince” existing in the city Fairy Tale through disconnected scenes like: a garden, a cemetery or a shore. These transitions are abrupt and do not have a coherent logical order. Accordingly, the reader would need to grab images and assume that they are related to each other. Moreover, “the inability” of the prince to read inscriptions and his empty, stone-like speech contribute to the alienation as he tries to make sense of the world and himself. The disjointed narrative form of the poem mirrors the postmodern concept of the self as shattered and disoriented. The prince, wandering away with absolutely no purpose, represents the disjunct person typical of postmodern literature, where identity and reality come into conflict and are fluid and unstable. Language, memory and dislocation are recurring themes that strengthen the fragmented perspective of the poem, where bits of narrative are given, rather than a full narrative. In *Fairy Tale*, the reader encounters the progression from “garden”, “cemetery”, and “shore” displays how second-generation subjects relate to their origins. The garden suggests an imagined childhood purity, while the cemetery confronts the prince with family losses he can witness but never fully comprehend. That final shift to the shore, a threshold space between continents, captures the diasporic suspension noticed in this kind of poetry, forever hovering between arrival and departure, “here” and “there.”

The prince’s loss of memory aggravates the feeling that the poem cannot be read as a simple personal experience, but it pushes to the reader’s mind what Ahmed describes as encounters that are “lived and written” but never fully present (2000). Those stories and memories that pass from one generation to the other, they are like inherited in the collective unconscious of generations. His experience of the homeland is actually a secondhand experience. The prince’s wandering enhances the feeling of loss and Bahaba’s notion of being “in between”. The image of the “stones” in his mouth suggests suppressed narratives, words that are too heavy to utter. Fragmentation here displays vividly how the second generation acquire their own identity, it is not just a postmodern concept, but a descriptive tool of a status quo.

3. *High Stakes Game*

*“I come by holding dark felt aloft
Raise me felt and snow Invisible water, the final blue scene of winter.”*

In *High Stakes Game*, fragmentation is conveyed through disjointed language and imagery. Lines like “I come by holding dark felt aloft” and “Raise me felt and snow” create a sense of disconnection between the speaker and the world. The imagery, which includes “invisible water” and “the final blue scene of winter,” presents a

fragmented reality where boundaries between elements like water, snow, and darkness blur.

The poem lacks a straightforward narrative or resolution. It just offers instead a collection of fragmented observations and emotions. This absence of coherence reflects the postmodern rejection of grand narratives, presenting life as a series of disconnected moments and perceptions. The fragmented structure is being an active rival to the reader challenging him/her to construct meaning from disorder, which underscores the postmodern belief that meaning is both subjective as well as elusive.

Analysis of Fragmentation

In these poems, fragmentation serves on both levels, on the level of content as well as on the formal level. It is contradicting traditional storytelling, offering a broken view of reality. The fragmented language and imagery demonstrate the postmodern notion that life is inherently fragmented and that meaning is subjective. Each poem presents incomplete images and thoughts, requiring the reader to be engaged in constructing meaning. Such fragmented display reflects the postmodern perspective that truth and identity are fluid, changeable, and that reality is experienced in terms of fragments rather than in terms of a unified whole. By employing fragmentation, Ali's poetry imitates the complexity of human experience in the postmodern world, where traditional forms of constructing a certain meaning or concept are no longer reliable.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality plays a crucial role in postmodern literature. By making references and combining different elements from previous texts, Ali, as many other writers, creates new meanings and depths in poetry. Intertextuality allows for a dialogue between texts and different cultural traditions, expanding readers' knowledge and understanding of various disciplines and perspectives. This integrative and collaborative approach enhances creativity, analytical skills, and critical thinking, enabling individuals to engage with complex issues and cultural differences (Al Faqih et al., 2023). Intertextuality is another post-modernity factor in *Sky Ward* where Ali quotes a number of literary and cultural texts from western and eastern registers. Besides, this technique also expands his work and reveals how one text is linked to another and how there are no singular ideas.

Intertextuality in Kazim Ali's Poems

High Stakes Game

"I come by holding dark felt aloft
Raise me felt and snow
Invisible water, the final blue scene of winter."

In *High Stakes Game*, intertextuality is present through its referencing to mythology and other literary references. The winter imagery and lines like "invisible water" and "Raise me felt and snow" suggest a connection to Western mythologies, particularly Greek myths where winter symbolizes cycles of death and renewal. The reference to "invisible water" evokes divine intervention or unseen forces, which are common themes in classical literature. This allusion infuses the poem with mythological tone, hinting at life the temporary nature of life and the everlasting search for meaning. Moreover, the poem draws on modern literary traditions, engaging with the works of poets such as Wallace Stevens, whose explorations of nature and perception similarly blur the boundary between the imagined and the real. The intertextual references enhance the poem's thematic complexity, blending classical and modern traditions. According to Bhabha's notion of hybridity, the employed natural forces like "snow", "water" and "winter" create a sense of tension between elements. As with the second-generation subject caught between cultural climates, the speaker's exhortation to "Raise me felt and snow" positions identity as emerging from this unstable elemental mixture.

Freeze Tag

"Frozen at the touch,
Released from stillness by a single hand---
The awful treaty of touch-and-go,
Fingers reach to save all the others."

In *Freeze Tag*, intertextuality emerges through the interplay of childhood games and mythological hints. The idea of being “released from stillness by a single touch” echoes the story of Medusa from Greek mythology, as her gaze could turn people to stone. Furthermore, the lines about fingers reaching “to save all the others” recall Orpheus’s failed attempt to rescue Eurydice from the underworld. This blending of a simple children’s game with profound mythological references links the poem to broader themes of transformation and to the fragile boundary between life and death. The intertextuality here highlights the poem’s postmodern technique of integrating high culture (mythology) with low culture (childhood games). Such technique serves to complicate the reader’s perception of meaning.

Sarah Ahmed’s idea of “strange encounters” helps in explaining how the game’s “touchandgo” rules show the body’s risky dependence on others: being “frozen” by a touch perfectly reflects how racial or social norms can stop you in your tracks, while being “unfrozen” always needs someone else’s help. The childhood game mixes mythlike images of being turned still with ordinary play, suggesting that secondgeneration memories hold these moments as both painful and completely every day.

Baptism

“The winged god flew from my throat---
Chained to these rocks, I ask for fire.
Reborn, but as a beast,
I tremble in the water.”

Baptism is also employing intertextuality through mythological and biblical references. The “winged god” escaping from the speaker’s throat alludes to Prometheus from Greek mythology, who was punished by the gods for giving fire to humanity. The speaker’s imagery of being “chained to these rocks” mirrors Prometheus’s eternal torment, linking the poem to themes of rebellion, punishment, and regeneration. The title itself *Baptism* invokes symbols of Christianity, suggesting rebirth and purification. The poem creates a complex narrative of transformation, suffering, and punishment by combining both religious and mythological references. The employment of intertextuality enriches the poem; it also creates layers of multiple systems of meaning from different traditions.

Frozen

“Tattooed wrists say let-go, not-it
Nightly torn open by brute sky and eagle claw
A frozen man, touched by fire.”

Intertextuality is once more derived from classical mythology in *Frozen*, particularly from the story of Prometheus. The phrase “eagle claw” refers to Prometheus’s punishment, in which an eagle eats his liver every day. The “let-go” and “not-it” markings on the speaker’s wrists represent the conflict between freedom and captivity, which is consistent with Prometheus’s struggle.

The contrast between “frozen” and “touched by fire” evokes the agony of Prometheus as well as the imagery of fire and ice serving as distinct forms of punishment in Dante’s *Inferno*. The poem is made more complex by Ali’s use of intertextuality, which turns the mythological allusions into a reflection on adversity, perseverance, and metamorphosis.

The poems of Kazim Ali are indeed intertextual, incorporating literary, religious, and mythological allusions to deepen their meanings. Through allusions to figures like Prometheus and Medusa, as well as Christian symbols like baptism, Ali’s work engages in a dialogue between past and present, myth and modernity. The postmodern notion that texts are in continuous dialogue with other works and cultural traditions and do not exist in a vacuum is reflected in this intertextuality.

A deeper engagement with the text and the broader cultural frameworks it invokes is prompted by Ali’s poems, which test the reader’s ability to identify these allusions. The postmodern belief in fragmented, multi-layered narratives that reflect the complexity of human existence and identity is reinforced by the intertextual connections, which undermine singular meanings. Ali challenges established literary hierarchies through

intertextuality, fusing everyday experiences with mythic grandeur to produce a complex examination of pain, change, and rebirth.

Ali's intertextual practice becomes a crucial tool for creating a "third space" of cultural belonging when interpreted through Bhabha's concept of hybridity. References to Greek myth, Sufi mysticism, Qur'anic discourse, and American poetic traditions do more than just decorate or refine the poems' discourse, they place the speaker in overlapping incompatible genealogies. The lyric voice in *Baptism* and *Frozen* speaks from within this hybrid archive. This is similar to the situation of the second generation diasporic subject, who negotiates identity through materials that are not just "owned," but are also inherited, translated, and transformed from ancestors.

Hybridity

Multiplicity is another postmodern feature in *Sky Ward* which is a result of Ali's mixed origins and the fact that the poet has an Indian-Egyptian Muslim origin living in the United States. This is done through language or cultural and traditional mixtures to depict the dynamism of identity in the post-modern world milieu. The concept of hybridity is very important into the post-colonial discourse where it talks about an in-between culture. In the same way, cultural hybridity denotes the mixing of two cultures and the birth of a new culture with the admixture of two (Pandey & Limba 2023).

In poems such as *Prayer Request Cards* and *The Good Brother*, hybridity is demonstrated through notions of cultural mixture and diversity, in addition to what Bahaba calls "in-between" status quo of the second generation. The reader encounters a personal/ speaker who is making an appeal to the church while raising minority "queer" desire dramatizes a self that cannot be contained within inherited religious or familial scripts; rather, identity is forged in the tension between them.. Ahmed's focus on how minorities are interpreted in public also highlights the poem's concerns regarding innocence, judgment, and evidence. The "gilt edged tongue" is a metaphor for a voice that must be verified in a variety of competing legal, social, and spiritual systems of recognition without being fully fitting into any of them.

Prayer Request Cards

"I would like the church to pray for
a clear reckoning the core unearthed what's best born skyward searched
who's most easily followed seared
who's most faithful beckoned to queer
I would like the church to pray
my psalm to unsettle the case
my askance umbilical lust to review and refute the evidence
to enter my gilt-edged tongue as final proof of innocence."

In *Prayer Request Cards*, hybridity is demonstrated through a blend of religious imagery and themes of queerness, creating a complex interplay between spiritual authority and modern identity. The speaker requests prayers for a "clear reckoning" and a "psalm to unsettle," suggesting a desire for both spiritual clarity and disruption. The phrase "beckoned to queer" displays a state of opposition a tension between traditional religious values and contemporary queer identity. By merging these apparently different worlds, Ali explores a hybrid identity where religious heritage and personal identity coexist, reflecting the multiplicity inherent in postmodern subjectivity.

The refrain "I would like the church to pray" is employed by the poet to serve as a recurring request for acceptance within a setting that both maintains normative boundaries and provides spiritual relief. The phrase "a clear reckoning" and "my psalm to unsettle the case" are two examples of how each return of the phrase slightly changes what is being asked for. As a result, prayer becomes tied with legal and documented language, stating both religious and legal regimes of judgment. The poem represents desires of minorities and diasporic expressions as issues to be decided rather than merely blessed when the speaker requests that the church "review and refute the evidence" and accept the "gilt edged tongue as final proof of innocence." Accordingly, the refrain represents a struggle to be perceived within competing frameworks: religious, queer, and legal without ever fully fitting into any of them. In other words, the refrain is like a catalyst for a vivid image of a struggle to be seen and observed among conflicting realms. Such representation highlights the "in-between" status of hybrid entities.

The Good Brother

A penniless pot-maker I am always willing to condemn or be sentenced.

Oh yes, as the fan turned in the hot afternoon I bore witness to the sadness of our father, working his way through blade and stone, hungry to guide his son.

I am the good brother, never to know more, never to look at the far shore.

For a decade I made pilgrimage to the river, scoping out the place I heard my brother fell.

Brother of the bird, I watched from a distance wondering if I would have had the courage to listen to our father.

Still unbelieving, I remain in the lair of the beast; only half a man, I declined the coat my brother wore, incandescent aspect of both bird and angel.”

The Good Brother explores the hybridity of familial duty, myth, and personal identity. The speaker starts a pilgrimage to the river, searching for a spiritual journey while he feels tied to family obligations and responsibilities. The imagery of “incandescent aspect of both bird and angel” blends human and divine qualities, which highlights a hybrid identity that is always in-between lively forces and spiritual forces. This blend between spiritual and family responsibilities highlights the speaker’s struggle with his in-between identity. It also reflects the complex nature of the self in a postmodern, multicultural context.

Ticket

“I dug graves in my pockets searching for the ticket out.

Intent on escape I never noticed there was no wall.

I lash myself daily describing fake bondage:

All the prisons and pockets, the graves in which I bury myself.”

In *Ticket*, Ali uses hybridity to focus on a state of juxtaposition, featuring contrasts and tensions between feelings of confinement and those of liberation. Phrases like: “graves in my pockets” and “searching for the ticket out” reflect a desire for an escape on both levels; physical and metaphorical. Ali represents the hybrid experience of confronting internal psychological conflicts or even struggles, and at the same time encountering external challenges and realities. He managed to do so by blending images of self-imposed imprisonment and yearning for liberation. This tension reflects the diasporic condition of being caught between different cultural spaces, emphasizing the complexity of identity in the postmodern world, where there is always a status quo of “in-between”.

There is an ironic effect here in the line about “Intent on escape I never noticed there was no wall” which is employed to demonstrate how borders become part of the diaspora. The image of the lack of a wall is symbolic and is intended to mark a state of freedom. However, the images like: “graves in my pockets” and “prisons and pockets” show that imprisonment has become a part of the speaker. According to Ahmed’s description of how racialized people deal with space, the wall that doesn’t exist shows that what stops movement isn’t just outside rules, but also histories of exclusion and displacement that have become mental barriers. The “ticket out” cannot be redeemed, as the border to be crossed is actually part of the subject. Ali’s syntactic choices and the alliterated /p/ sound in “pockets” and “prisons” indicate that the speaker is in a position of self-imposed confinement.

Ahmed’s description of “strange encounters” gives the reader hints to interpret the “graves in my pockets” as the internalization of boundaries and exclusions rather than just as personal depression. The speaker accuses himself of “fake bondage,” In a setting where, as the poem makes clear, “there was no wall,” implying that the barriers are emotional and historical rather than merely physical. An imagined escape from diaspora that is still structurally unattainable may be referred to as the “ticket out” for a second-generation subject. As a result, the poem portrays hybridity as a painful kind of self-division, and internal tension, as the subject both loves and hates the identities that have been imprinted on him. The postmodern play with freedom and confinement serves as a means of dramatizing such status of uncertainty.

Swoon

“small sound pocket sky torn wound
down my body eight-limbed swoon
lunar starved catastrophe across the midline stranded
stranger street lantern leading to winter
time unwrought sore still who are you
nowhere ecstatic beside yourself now.”

Swoon blends bodily and celestial imagery, embodying hybridity through its juxtaposition of physical and metaphysical elements. The phrase “sky torn wound” merges earthly and cosmic imagery, while “eight-limbed swoon” invokes mythological references, suggesting a fragmented identity caught between multiple dimensions. Ali’s use of hybrid language in this poem mirrors his own postmodern exploration of identity, where the tangible and intangible, the mythological and the personal, coexist and inform each other.

Ahmed’s focus on the ways in which the body bears the marks of past encounters can shed light on the hyper-corporeality of “Swoon”. The phrase “sky torn wound” can be read as a vivid account for the surrounding space as an injury to the body, suggesting that the subject navigates their world in an environment that is already breached and violated by past histories of violence and exclusion. Moreover, the phrase “stranger street lantern leading to winter” can be read as placing the speaker in a public space that is both illuminating and exposing, much in the same way that racialized and queer bodies have been exposed in public spaces. The long, unpunctuated lines of the poem that create enjambment can be read as a kind of continuous falling or fainting, as “eight limbed swoon”, that mirrors the instability of the subject that is created by these encounters.

Lake House

“Now to praise utterly unceasing now to shadow and learn
Flickering pulse last chapter sent Never to touch be shorn
Full hour spent spelling my house by web to thread air blue
By cover of night tree to tree strung any place through
Seen clear sun cold lake soul found any place home
Now done under woven to spill
Blue night lake foal.”

In *Lake House*, Ali merges natural and spiritual imagery to create a hybrid sense of place and self. The poem intertwines descriptions of the natural world, such as “tree to tree strung” and “blue night lake,” with introspective reflections on belonging and identity. The fusion of physical landscapes with metaphysical contemplation highlights the speaker’s fluid identity, where home is both a physical and spiritual concept. Ali’s blending of the external and internal reflects the hybrid nature of diasporic existence, where multiple cultural, temporal, and spiritual influences shape one’s sense of self.

Some phrases such as “spelling my house by web to thread air blue” point out Bhabha’s “third space” of ‘in-between home’ where belonging is created through intangible, mediated materials rather than geographical space. Here, the house is not built from stone, but from digital “web” and ephemeral “air,” such descriptions highlight the second-generation diasporic subject’s experience of making identity from inherited narratives, virtual connections, and partial recollections rather than direct experience. Phrases such as “soul found any place home” deliver a sensitive message that ‘any place’ and ‘soul found’ into an unpunctuated, spatial relationship, where home is defined through relational movement between spaces rather than through space itself. The syntax of long, comma-scarce lines, where phrases such as “Now to praise utterly unceasing now to shadow and learn” are accumulated, generating a floating, unstable lyric ‘I’ that refuses narrative resolution, where the subject is displayed only through the accumulation of sensory fragments, echoing the diasporic self, suspended between origin and destination.

Analysis of Hybridity

Kazim Ali’s work is most of the time celebrating the idea of hybridity, and the idea of intersection of language,

culture, and identity. In poems such as *The Far Mosque* and *Port of Return*, Ali puts Eastern and Western elements side by side on the level of language and culture. Such juxtaposition underscores the fact that it is very difficult or even impossible to have a unified identity. His employment of Urdu words in *The Far Mosque*, is a reflection of linguistic hybridity, demonstrating the disruption of the idea of a unified identity. His poetry also displays levels of hybridity such as employing different poetic forms such as blending forms of 'ghazal' with free verse. By bringing the western and the eastern traditions, Ali creates a hybrid state where the single fixed identity has no place to exist. On the level of knowledge systems, in *Pulse* and *Gravity*, for instance, Ali juxtaposes spiritual and scientific realities. Accordingly, he hints at the fact that all meanings in the postmodern era are results of various different frameworks.

Repercussions for Modern Poetry

The impact of the postmodern features such as fragmentation, intertextuality, and hybridity, which are present in Kazim Ali's *Sky Ward*, can be critical to modern poetry. These techniques posit an unspoken critique of more conventional forms of mimicry, as they extend the possibilities of what poetry might say about a postmodern life. Ali's fragmentation is similar to the postmodern condition; he does not supply the reader with a unified story. Intertextuality relates his work to other works in a way of suggesting that texts are related and not compartmentalized; meaning therefore varies from one text to another. Last but not least, hybridity captures a postmodern subject in her multicultural and multilingual reality of the twenty-first-century subject. Thus, by using these postmodern approaches, Ali presents readers with an opportunity to read poetry in a very different way -- in a way that does not deny plurality and relativity of meaning. His work compels the reader to rise above the assumptions and think and listen to the exigencies of the post modernity.

Conclusion

Exploding Meaning and Form: Postmodern Characteristics of the Poem Kazim Ali's *Sky Ward*. The fragmentation of structures is evidence of the impersonal nature of today's society, something understandably embraced by Ali, while the play with intertext creates a multi-layered text that welcomes the reader to interpret the work in a number of ways. The structure, the freedom, and lack of limits the author provides for the reader to interpret the poem are again characteristic of postmodernism in the sense of the reader's involvement in construction and taboo of formalization of meaning that those theories preach. Therefore, *Sky Ward* occupies a rather pivotal position in postmodern poetry and is well worth a closer scrutiny of presiding motifs and approaches. In this context, Ali's plural and ambiguous text forces the readers to denounce the conventional scripts, and try, as a result, to grasp the postmodern world where stability is replaced by constant change. Thus it will become possible to state that *Sky Ward* is not a simple poetry collection but it is an essay in understanding the postmodern world's manifold and ambiguous nature of life.

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