

## **Sweep Me off My Feet: Cultural Dislocation and Self Disformation, a Postcolonial Reading of Romantic Love**

**Chingling Wo**

California State University, Sonoma.

539 West Sierra Ave, Apt #45

Cotati, CA 94931, USA.

Email Address: wochingling@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

*This article reads Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North (1966) to unveil Romantic love's structural affiliation with colonial capitalism. Suggesting that Romantic love is more than an ideology or a discourse, the article argues that Romantic love is commodity fetishism. As commodity fetishism, love is the part of the system that stands for the whole; within the dynamics of Romantic love, one can observe the operation of capitalism in the material formations that gives rise to the spirituality of the modern desiring subject. The genesis of a desiring subject capable of experiencing Romantic love often coincides with systematic disruption of the subalterns' traditional culture and the loss of collective purposes. The essay adds to the debate on how romantic love participates in colonial conquest by connecting commodity fetishism to the many levels of destruction and dislocation involved when Romantic love creeps into the human heart.*

**Keywords:** postcolonial; space and place; commodity fetishism; love; *dis/location*

### **1. The Opening**

The economy of love can only exist because love has been made a scarcity.

--Feral Faun (1989/2004)

"Sweep me off my feet": we as modern Romantic subject thus long for the moment when we can be overwhelmed, snatched out of our rational calculation of self-interest. The subject of this paper is Romantic love and colonial dislocation. We see it in Bombay, in the teeming high-rises; we see it in Shanghai, in the spiraling business sectors, in the global name-brand boutiques, perfume shops, cafes, and the leisurely aura exuded from store decorations. We see it in the suburbs of Taipei, where Mediterranean-style tea houses encode a lazy afternoon, an afternoon adorned by English lavender, Brazilian lemon verbena, Italian-style cappuccino. An afternoon in which the index finger that gracefully traces the edge of a tea cup does not seem to understand the throbbing pain radiating from the thumb and wrist from heavy laptop usage. Indeed, as global capitalism's big economic circle continues to bring deep and sharp compressions, the consuming self and the laboring self can co-exist in one body without having the ability to recognize each other. That is, they are in utter *dis/location*. Such a state of *dis/location* is marked by an ironic reality: while utterly alienated, the labor and consumption is in a chain of impulsive attraction.

This attraction presents a hidden history of *dis/location*. How do we understand "Romantic love" and capitalism in terms of such *dis/location*? In the history of colonial capitalism and the struggles against it, "wanderlust," the desire for dislocation, brings to mind Robinson Crusoe's defiance, Tom Jones' compulsory wandering, and Marlow's longing for the snake recoiling at the heart of darkness. It is an impulse, a longing, a self-realizing quest that becomes love in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century British domestic fiction and is later hammered into the undercurrents of modern consciousness. The modern self as a Romantic Subject lives in love's out-of-bounds excessiveness, in its "confusion of pleasures," its against-all-odds, its no-one-but-you in anywhere-but-here. However, when we relocate Romantic love to the long history of global capitalism, becoming a Romantic subject can essentially be a result of drastic cultural dislocation and social-realignment, a process in which a self is alienated from its cultural localities and relocated within the tributaries of colonial/global capitalism.

### **2. More Than an Ideological Apparatus**

For a long time, critics of Romantic love have regarded it as part of capitalism's ideological apparatus.<sup>1</sup> In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), "modern individual sex-love" combines the elements of "chivalrous love of the middle ages" with a new monogamous marriage; it emerges at a time when European traditions fell aside and Western European "hastened to take the other seven quadrants into their possession" (Engels 1971: 143). To Engels, the newly enlarged world gave the bourgeois their time of "knight-errantry"; as he puts it rather bitinglly:

“they, too, had their romance and their raptures of love, but on a bourgeois footing and, in the last analysis, with bourgeois aims.” To Engels, Romantic love is not a universal human nature, but an ideology promoted by the ruling middle class. Claiming that true love only exists among those who are marginalized by capitalism, Engels puts the emergence of Romantic love in the socio-economic context of industrial capitalism’s displacement of the public dimension of household economy (137).

In the old communistic household, which comprised many couples and their children, the task entrusted to the women of managing the household was as much a public and socially necessary industry as the procuring of food by the men. With the patriarchal family, and still more with the single monogamous family, a change came. Household management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a private service; the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production. Not until the coming of modern large-scale industry was the road to social production opened to her again – and then only to the proletarian wife. But it was opened in such a manner that, if she carries out her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn; and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties. And the wife’s position in the factory is the position of women in all branches of business, right up to medicine and the law. The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules. (137)

By analyzing the changing nature of women’s work in the transition from a communal social organization to that of monogamous family, Engels reveals the narrowness of freedom as defined by Romantic love and its modern contractual marriage. His analysis paves the way for successive generations of Western liberal and Marxist feminists to question Romantic love and modern marriage and explore alternative ways of community buildings and human connections. Despite a long history of censure and criticism, mainstream western discourse of love claims a monopoly around the world over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to soft ideological sway and hard colonial military policing. And one can argue that as it spreads, it develops a distinct pattern which can be accounted for in two aspects: Even though it is a discursive set of practices that defy definition, the structure of feeling featured in Romantic love displays a strong emphasis on freedom of choice<sup>2</sup> and listening to one’s own heart. It also has the prominent characteristics of being overpowered by one’s desire and feelings to the point of being selfless. Unconditional sacrifice is often valorized, though it is not necessarily common.

The power of Romantic love’s monopoly over human relationships can also be illustrated by the increased need for anthropologists in the last century to prove that love is a universal human trait and exists in non-capitalist societies, a claim that is often contradicted by a persistent Western liberal indictment of many non-western societies’ suppression of love. Responding to this trend, more recent anthropologists are compelled to prove that other forms of conjugal relationships involved love as well. Thus, we can deduce from this discussion that love has become so naturalized that other patterns of human relationships are considered inadequate and they are rather unthinkable unless they are redefined in the terms of Romantic love. As part of the 1960s’ effort of postcolonial rethinking of modernization and colonial legacy, the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih’s novel, *Season of Migration to the North*, provides a complex contextualization of Romantic love’s structural affiliation with colonial capitalism. In this postcolonial fiction-- first published in Arabic in Beirut, Lebanon in 1967 and translated into English in 1969--Tayeb Salih suggests that colonial economy expresses itself through love. Through love, it spreads the seeds of destruction.

Prompting us to confront the colonizing and commodifying process that generates Romantic love, Tayeb Salih’s concretizing of the colonial economy of love provides great theoretical insights connecting the personal and private with the abstract and public forces of colonial capitalism, and calls the very division into question. For those of us who are interested in understanding how Romantic love surges in China and many areas that witnesses intensified integration with global capitalism right now, we have to think the issue through the analytical rigor enabled by Salih’s novel. To properly immerse ourselves in the complexity of Salih’s argument, I will start with some introductory remarks about the style of the novel, an account of major events, and finally a more focused engagement of prominent issues raised in illuminating connections the novel offers. Despite my description of the love relationship between Mustafa Sa’eed and Jean Morris, I do not intend to fit all relationships in the story (particularly those of Hosta/the narrator and Wad Rayyes/Hosta) within the parameters of Romantic love. Instead of arguing whether any of these characters can be seen as proper Romantic subjects, I focus on the clashes and shifts from one mode to the other. My larger point shall rest on how Commodity Fetishism comes to be experienced as Romantic love.

And hopefully, this essay will help describe the “pillage of the most intimate” by accounting the many levels of destruction involved at the moment when it is possible for Romantic love to creep into human heart.

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Written almost in a stream-of-consciousness style, Salih’s fiction features sudden shifts of narrative perspective that call attention to the absence and presence of collective consciousness. A linear timeline is transgressed by constant flashbacks of the main character, Mustafa Sa’eed, and the narrator’s reminiscence of Mustafa Sa’eed’s life in London. The narrative style works to resist a simple plot summary or an authoritarian meta-commentator. Thus, formally, the novel challenges coherent consciousness, linear timeline, master plot, and meta-narrator, key features of colonial capitalist episteme. By doing so, it creates fluid and semiotic utterances and enables the reader to be deeply involved in the narrator’s attraction to, preoccupation with and eventually repulsion against Mustafa Sa’eed and the colonial modernity that Mustafa rebels against yet ironically embodies. The narrator’s identification and dissociation with Mustafa Sa’eed is paralleled with the narrator’s drastic change from cultural rootedness to desperate isolation. It is a process that marks the intimate connection between western capitalist modernity and Romantic love as a way of being, while exposing the deep contradiction between Romantic love’s liberatory promise and its large-scale destruction of social fabrics.

The story opens when the narrator returns to his humble village in Sudan after many years of pursuing the doctoral degree in England. His attention is soon directed to an enigmatic new member of the village, Mustafa Sa’eed. As the narrator pursues the secret history of Mustafa Sa’eed, he finds that he was a prodigy in the colonial education system. He was sent to Cairo and then London for higher education. He came to London a conqueror. He conquered Britain like a caravan overcoming a desert mountain; his mind dissected British system of knowledge like a sharp knife; his body subjugated British women to his oriental appeal and sexual prowess. Women who fell in love with him committed suicide one after another, and eventually Mustafa Sa’eed courted and married Jean Morris, a woman who hated him and loved to destroy his self-confidence and the cultural artifacts that adorned his eroticized, orientalized chamber. He killed her and was sent to prison for seven years. The reader is not told why Mustafa Sa’eed murdered Jean Morris until the end. We only learn from the narrator that he promised to keep Mustafa Sa’eed’s past a secret. However, very soon Mustafa Sa’eed the person disappeared like a mirage. He was rumored to have drowned in the Nile on a stormy day. In his will, he left the narrator a key to a special room and the custody of his two sons. He wanted the narrator to ensure that his sons would grow up like the people in the village, instead of submitting to the germs of wanderlust as he did. Later, the narrator left the village and had a job in Khartoum, the capital.

When he came back again, others told him to persuade Hosna, Mustafa Sa’eed’s widowed wife, into marrying a lewd old villager, Wad Rayyes. It was considered impossible for a woman to have a livelihood in the village without a man. Hosna begged the narrator to marry her instead. Despite his feelings for her, the narrator could not agree to marry more than one wife; being a Sudanese with an English Ph.D., his Western education somehow kept him from doing so. He left the village only to find out in his next visit that a horrifying event had torn the village apart: Hosna and Wad Rayyes both died bathed in blood. “Every inch of Bint Mahoud’s body was covered in bites and scratches – her stomach, thighs and neck. The nipple of one breast has been bitten through and blood poured down from her lower lip . . . Wad Rayyes had been stabbed more than ten times – in his stomach, chest, face, and between his thighs” (126-127). In fighting against Wad Rayyes’s attempt to have her, Hosna had killed both him and herself.

The image of Wad Rayyes on top of Hosna became a disturbing image that lingered in the narrator’s mind, and in a strange way, reminded him of the scene of love relationship between Mustafa Sa’eed and Jean Morris. In paralleling this key scene, the narrative amplifies the place of Mustafa Sa’eed and Jean Morris’ love relationship in this novel. To some critics, the deliberate paralleling of courtship and sex between the two couples forces us to connect the violence of colonial conquest and colonial subalterns’ mimicry of that violence. The connection is not an apology for colonialism; it exposes the fact that Romantic love, a seemingly innocuous behavior pattern, is an essential element at the heart of colonial capitalism and it often works against the interest of the colonial subaltern. The making of a Romantic subject who can disengage from the tyranny of tradition, take pride in pursuing and fulfilling his own desire, and be his own agent cannot simply be read as the triumph of human nature or the unexpected benefit of colonization. In the context of the colonial economy, the liberating promise of Romantic love can only be celebrated if we discount the systematic disruption of the subalterns’ traditional culture and the loss of collective purpose that often come side by side with the new modern desiring subject capable of experiencing the intense sex-love that we called Romantic love.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. *Capitalism as an Economy of Love*

In Salih's novel, the relationship between Mustafa Sa'eed and his British lover Jean Morris symbolically articulates the hidden logic of love, a set of logic that corresponds to the key principles of capitalism. I list them as follows:

*A. Push and Pull: repulsion/attraction creates an intense inner turmoil that we call "love".*

When speaking of Jean Morris and how he falls in love with her, Mustafa Sa'eed thus describes their interaction: "Brazen in word and deed, she abstained from nothing – stealing, lying and cheating; yet, against my will, I fell in love with her and I was no longer able to control the course of events. When I avoided her she would entice me to her, and when I ran after her she fled from me" (155). Here, Jean Morris behaves like a ruthless colonial capitalist who stops at nothing. Facing her ruthlessness, Mustafa is drawn closer. Similar to smart women's "bad boy" syndrome, it is the "bad girl" behavior of Jean that gets Mustafa hooked. Indeed, both Jean and Mustafa play "hard to get" in their own ways; the dynamics of push and pull constitute the rules of *supply and demand*. As the pretended scarcity keeps the price high, the high price makes the desired object dearer and the desire more intense. Instead of recognizing the price manipulation, falling in love is buying into this strange dynamics of push and pull. The repulsion/attraction creates an intense inner turmoil that we called "love."

*B. Competition and challenge: Pain measures the depth of pleasure; and the depth of love is measured by its power to overwhelm one's will.*

In addition to playing hard to get, Jean Morris also makes sure that she asserts her "exchange value" by driving away rivals and establishes her own status as super-commodity, an extremely desirable object whose desirability increases along with the difficulty involved in possessing it. As Sa'eed tells us:

She found her way to my house and surprised me late on Saturday night when Ann Hammond was with me. She heaped filthy curses upon Ann Hammond, and when I tried to drive her away with blows she was not deterred. Ann Hammond left in tears, while she stayed on, standing in front of me like some demon, a challenging defiance in her eyes that stirred remote longing in my heart. Without our exchanging a word, she stripped off her clothes and stood naked before me. All the fires of hell blazed within my breast. Those fires had to be extinguished in that mountain of ice that stood in my path. (156)

Here a market competition is created by Jean Morris' treating Ann Hammond as a rival. In driving Ann away, Jean proves her capability of competing with not only Ann Hammond but also Mustafa Sa'eed. Thus, despite Mustafa's earlier history of womanizing, Jean Morris becomes the only one who gets the most-sought-after price, his true and intense love, a price Mustafa Sa'eed would not pay in courting other women. Facing her power, Mustafa unconditionally surrenders, which is a typical symptom of being love-crazed. His surrender reminds us that despite Romantic love's proclaimed freedom of choice and equality between partners, its central features are competition, incompatible trade, and overwhelming conquest.

Besides, when Jean Morris presents herself in front of Mustafa Sa'eed as a body, she deepens the nature of the game. We see the novel's language moves from the descriptive language regarding her action and her appearance to the metaphoric language of fire and ice, a code switching that testifies to this transcendental moment. Her objectification of herself affectively subjugates him. Through her turning herself into a desired object, an important transaction occurs; both she and Mustafa Sa'eed forego their self for the ultimate greater gain—a romantic experience so intense that it is not unlike the union of heaven and hell, fire and ice. It is a gain so powerful that it overwhelms the flesh and thus becomes romantic; it is a kind of transcendence not unlike the way a commodity transcends its objecthood and becomes an idol, a stand-in for the all-mighty capital.

While modern episteme sees unconditional love as an exulting experience of transcendence, it is only a myopic view that centers closely on the lover's individual experience, without looking at the larger social economic principle that governs love. Unconditional love is not unlike the quest for the scarce and sacred limited edition Gucci bag, something whose cost is so high that buying it defies economic principle. To engage in a transaction that makes no practical sense does not mean the consumer has rebelled against material rationality; it means that our actions are determined by a different register of material rationality: we are in a world whereby image/spectacle is a supreme sign and ultimate power. We do what others think; we appeal to what others want to see; we surrender wholeheartedly to the desired object made desirable by a market that pits one commodity against the other, and consumers against the god-like power of the super-commodity. We surrender wholeheartedly to the image that out-competes all others, even at the risk of losing ourselves or our interest, because, somehow, the desired object is so alive and worthy of love that possessing it gives life to us.

C. A lover is someone who is willing to engage in extremely unfair trade; and the higher worth of the Romantic beloved is often proven by that willingness.

Mustafa Sa'eed's love for Jean Morris is marked by his willingness to give up everything in order to have her, as he describes this highly significant moment:

As I advanced toward her, she points to an expensive Wedgwood vase on the mantelpiece. "Give this to me and you can have me," she said. If she had asked at that moment for my life as a price I would have paid it. I nodded my head in agreement. Taking up the vase, she smashed it on the ground and began trampling the pieces underfoot. She pointed to a rare Arabic manuscript on the table. "Give me this too," she said. My throat grew dry with a thirst that almost killed me. I must quench it with a drink of icy water. I nodded my head in agreement. Taking up the old, rare manuscript she tore it to bits, filling her mouth with pieces of paper which she chewed and spat out. It was as though she had chewed at my very liver. And yet I didn't care. (156-157)

While the nature of love relationship is determined by the logic of commodity transaction, "give this to me and you can have me," it is important to note that the intense passion comes from agreeing to trade even when knowing that it is far from fair trade. The objects destroyed here are mostly items of significant monetary or emotional values. And the intensity of love is measured by the enormity of the unfair trade.

Taken together, these three principles reveal the similarity between the logic of capital and love: the love sanctified as selfless unconditional outpouring of affection is precisely *commodity fetishism*. It is important to note that commodity fetishism is more than the act of worshiping commodity instead of God, as it is commonly understood. The problem of capitalism is not its implied pure materialism and the lack of spirituality, but the god-like nature of commodity and the spiritual appeal of commodification as a process; to truly understand commodity fetishism, we have to come to terms with the spirituality of capitalism. Yes, capitalism is not mere materialism. Capitalism destroys and disrupts existing social spiritual ecology as it engenders and recreates its own spirituality. As capital gains its social power, reification of labor and social life dissolve age-old communal ties, estrange neighbors, and objectify men and women as *labor force*. In the midst of this kind of large-scale rupture, a deep spiritual void and an existential crisis emerge. This void is filled by capitalism's magical material objects; is it not godly when, through the delicate web of commodity production, exchange and consumption, capital can miraculously summon random crowds in shopping malls, bring together goods from the four corners, and tie the fates of complete strangers together? In other words, it is in this seemingly fragile and invisible unity capitalism gives itself and everyone a way of worshipping; it is in the total ensemble of production relationship that capitalism is deified and worshiped in the form of commodity fetishism.

How does commodity fetishism work? And how does it relate to love and courtship? When an isolated commodity is taken as a fetishized object, it marks the moment when it becomes "the sand from which one can discern the whole universe," when the world reified and broken by capitalism comes to its own unity and offers the possibility for individual things to transcend their thing-ness and venture for a togetherness beyond itself. Transcending one's thing-ness makes one an idol/fetish endowed with significance/spirituality beyond one's immediate material being. In other words, one becomes a desired object, the beloved who transports the lover to The Other Shore. And in our lover's idolization of us, we realize this potential in full. In the capital's universe, we all have the potential to be an idol, an idol that facilitates the worship of both the profound isolation and the strange togetherness, of the way things are haphazardly broken and irregularly brought together by the wanton rules of the market. A terrible beauty, with a mutually enhanced dynamics of destruction and unity (on a larger social scale), seems to work its way into the intense gaze between lovers. It is in this sense that Mustafa Sa'eed tells us in his secret chamber that colonialism and the two World Wars are motivated not by hatred but love.

#### 4. Romantic Love as Commodity Fetishism in the Making of Desiring Subject and Object of Desire

The novel's argument on Romantic love as the expression of colonial economy brings the connection between Romantic love and commodity fetishism into a sharp focus. It reminds us that early modern European colonialism started a process of objectifying (and commodification of) other parts of the world and its people.<sup>4</sup> Colonial modernity continues to promote the will to be objectified in the becoming of the desiring subject. The creation of such will and desire coincides with systematic disruption of the subalterns' traditional culture and the loss of collective purpose. It threatens place relations with colonial economy's space-centered regime designed for long distant colonial governance, such as top-down abstract bureaucratic management, cash economy, numerical accounting, a modern transportation system focus on resource extraction. Indeed, recent critic, Mike Velez, has read *Season of Migration* in terms of the narrator's struggle between place-centered and space-centered worldviews.

In Velez's words, the narrator's quest is: "the quest of belonging to a place – of both a place-sense and place-relation—that is art and parcel of the natural topography in itself embedded in collective memory, a memory steeped in history, survival, and above all, a sense of being that is dignified even when it was subjected, disciplined, and at times, punished (201). One can say that in the novel's investment in uncovering place-sense and place relation, the novel struggles to move beyond the space-centered "culture" of colonialism. A crucial symbol for the clashes between the place relations and colonialism's space-centered regime can be found in the sharp difference between the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed. Unlike the narrator, Mustafa Sa'eed represents the will to be objectified in the becoming of the desiring subject. As a character whose brilliance and success in mimicking Western ways has made him the most representative product of western civilizing mission, Mustafa Sa'eed is disconnected from his fatherland. His mind is "sharp like a knife," cutting with cold effectiveness and his attitude toward the world is marked by complete reification; as he says, "I viewed the vast world in the geography lessons as though it were a chess board" (22). It is this kind of complete reification that puts him in the position to see the outside world (and himself) as something to be manipulated and controlled.

While the narrator sees no separation between himself, the land, and the people, Sa'eed conceives Cairo to be a woman "embracing" him, "its perfume and the odour of its body filling [his] nostrils" (25). In the struggle between place relations and space-centered colonial management, the narrator's realization of his falling in love becomes an important testament of how he too was claimed by constellation of material objects. That he too had fallen victim to commodity fetishism, namely, colonial modernity's promotion of the will to be objectified in the becoming of the desiring subject. In the subject formation of commodity fetishism, the Romantic subjects are no more than objects in the colonial capitalist scheme of things, despite they all experience their own objecthood as subjectivity. It is within this colonial lie that if the colonial subaltern were to follow the narrator's determination and turn the originally oppressive tools of colonization into their own tools of self-development, they will face an ironic outcome: When they successfully claim ownership of the railways, ships, hospitals, factories, and schools, they risk being defined by the constellation of these material objects.

Indeed, the constellation of material objects is very powerful in giving one a new sense of subjectivity that objectifies and degrades existing place relations. An important example of this comes from the novel's persistent association of interiority (deep individualized psychic) with bedrooms adorned with commodities that are so elaborate, so self-expressive that they cease to be objects—they become their owner, the aura that constitute their Romantic (sexual) appeal. It is a result of being interpellated into this materialist world order that one starts to exercise a particular kind of objectification that we called Romantic love. In this sense, we can say a person is no longer the constellation of social relationships but a spectacle. A self capable of loving romantically is an alienated self whose subjugation enables him to be in love, to become a desiring subject or a marketable object of desire.

The making of a desiring subject through commodification is so natural in the regime of Romantic love that we hardly notice that Mustafa Sa'eed commodifies everything, particularly his culture, to trade for sexual appeal: "I would read poetry, talk of religion and philosophy, discuss painting, and say things about the spirituality of the East. I would do everything possible to entice a woman to my bed. Then, I would go after some new prey" (30). Here in order to attract one's object of desire, one has to subjugate one's intelligence, one's aesthetic aspiration, and --in the case of a colonial Other-- one's cultural heritage to a new belief system, commodity fetishism. This radically transforms the colonial subalterns' relationship to their own social ecology. It is as if they learn to reduce their social ecology to an aura of culture marketable in Target's Global Bazaar. By orientalizing themselves in response to the consumer's orientalizing gaze, they are thus alienated from themselves. The alienation makes them the marketable desiring subject and an exquisite object of desire.

As part of his coming into being as a desiring subject, Mustafa Sa'eed projects himself unto the material artifacts in his room, and thus makes himself his bedroom.

My bedroom was a graveyard that looked on to a garden; its curtains were pink and had been chosen with care, the carpeting was of a warm greenness, the bed spacious, with swansdown cushions. There were small electric lights, red, blue, and violet, placed in certain corners; on the walls were large mirrors, so that when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously. The room was heavy with the smell of burning sandalwood and incense, and in the bathroom were pungent Eastern perfumes, lotions, unguents, powders, and pills. My bedroom was like an operating theatre in a hospital. There is a still pool in the depths of every woman that I know how to stir. (30-31)

There are many noteworthy places in this quote. The description of the room reminds us of the famous line in the 18<sup>th</sup> century British writer Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*:

“While, scourged by famine, from the smiling land/The mournful peasant leads his humble band;/And while he sinks, without one arm to save./The country blooms-a garden and a grave!” (Goldsmith, 1770/1966). Goldsmith’s contrasted image of garden and graveyard characterizes capitalism as a system that promotes material prosperity but is insensitive to human suffering. Goldsmith also reveals how material prosperity feeds on humanity, acquire human qualities, become “smiling land,” while British local culture gives way to capitalist logic of landscaping and cash-crop farming. If Goldsmith’s English village was subjected to scientific capitalism, Mustafa Sa’eed evokes early modern subjection of nature to science when he compares his room to “operating theater in a hospital,” an important scientific institution of 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>- century Europe. It is within this framework of scientific capitalism that love-making becomes the objective and objectifying knowledge of the secret property of nature; love-making becomes “know[ing] how to stir,” as if women are a pool of chemicals waiting to be mixed with scientific precision.

### **5. *The Mirror of Postcolony’s Social Economic Subjugation***

In a rather subtle way, instead of celebrating anti-colonial retaliation and postcolonial subjectivity, the paralleling of the murderous copulation between Mustafa Sa’eed and Jean Morris and that of Wad Rayys and Hosna also postulates colonial subaltern’s unconscious replication of Romantic longings and aspirations as an essential issue in the postcolonial condition. Why is it that falling in love with Hosna—in the case of the narrator—completes a capitalist process of alienation? What exactly does Hosna represent? One is tempted to make Hosna a positive example proving that: by asserting one’s agency over the legacy of colonialism, new ways of liberation and empowerment could be found. Yet, Hosna’s liberating potential remains unrealized. Hosna’s modern womanhood can be easily eroticized by Wad Rayyes’ patriarchal gaze, which ironically renders the cause of her liberalization (her modernity) the cause of her objectification. Hosna became an object of Wad Rayyes’ fatal attraction precisely because her marriage to Mustafa Sa’eed turned her into a modern “city woman.” As a result of this irony, her agency against Wad Rayyes’ objectification can only be realized in her killing of herself. The case tragically represents a colonial irony when one’s liberation (from the oppressive local hierarchy) is to be attractively modern, a modernity that is easily appropriated either by the local hierarchy again or the transnational colonial hierarchy.

The desiring subject’s paradoxical objectification of oneself and the other mirrors the postcolony’s social economic subjectivity: colonialism left behind its legacy, “modern” infrastructure, its educated elites trained in the colonial value system, and an export-oriented economy that serves the needs of global capital more than that of the local. If we go beyond the emphasis on agency, we would realize the agency exercised by the narrator and Hosna cannot keep colonial economy from making commodification the defining rule for human-nature relationships and human-human relationships. In fact, to be lovable is often to render oneself an object for another’s consumption. To be in Romantic love is to remove oneself from the time of the gods and to live in the language of human instinctual passion, to be part of the project of the colonization of nature. It is in this sense that the narrator asserted that Hosna kills herself for Mustafa Sa’eed. In other words, she kills herself for the same reason other women kill themselves in London; their death stands for colonial modernity’s destruction of humanity.

### **6. *Compression and Further Contraction***

Against the very logic of love and its commodity fetishism that destroys other sense of building one’s relationship with the world, the narrator tells us that in the name of love the whole world is reduced to that of an isolated individual:

Outside, my world was a wide one; now it had contracted, had withdrawn upon itself, until I myself had become the world, no world existing outside of me. Where, then, were the roots that struck down into times past? Where the memories of death and life? What had happened to the caravan and to the tribe? Where had gone the trilling cries of the women at tens of weddings, where the Nile floodings, and the blowing of the wind summer and winter from north and south? Love? Love does not do this. This is hatred. (134-135)

What the colonial legacy offers him is an adversary within; the promise of modernity is a “huge joke.” It does not lead to “a treasure chamber” where one can say “open Sesame, and let’s divide up the jewels among the people” (138). It only leads to memories of and callings for love. This love is a system of commodity fetishism, a meaning-making system that directs meaning into Jean Morris’ genitalia, labeling it, “a repository of secrets,” and making it the only sacred place left in the world, where “good and evil was born.” This fetishism makes female private parts sacred—so as to valorize male potency and engender individualized private world. It does so at the expense of other meaning-making systems. Subject to and defined by commodity fetishism, “the universe, with its past, present, and future, was gathered into a single point before and after which nothing existed” (164).

In Mustafa Sa'eed's secret chamber, we realized the interior space of Mustafa Sa'eed is actually a study (a library) reconstructed in Sudan in impeccable Victorian style. Like his London chamber, a symbol of colonial capitalism's commodification of him and his culture, material objects continue to define his humanity and mediate his desires. Unlike the narrator, who was able to express himself and live beyond the logic of commodification, Mustafa Sa'eed's self and his desires can only be expressed in the colonial economy of love.

It is in Mustafa Sa'eed's secret chamber, through the incoherent collage of Mustafa Sa'eed's life story, that we see early colonialist ventures and the Second World War being read as violent "love unable to express itself":

'We teach people in order to open up their minds and release their captive powers. But we cannot predict the result. Freedom – we free their minds from superstition. We give the people the keys to future to act therein as they wish.' 'I left London with Europe having begun to mobilize her armies once again for even more ferocious violence.' 'It was not hatred. It was a love unable to express itself. I loved her in a twisted manner. She too' (151).

In the early stages of capitalism, the colonial conqueror is symbolized as a powerful womanizer. The other is turned into an object for trade, but the exoticism and eroticism of love veil the commodified nature of this relationship. The other is represented as desirable, as a way out of one's banal world. As the other becomes the fetishized object endowed with loving charm, one can find the banal world of scientific realism and colonial economy bearable. It is therefore not that Mustafa Sa'eed as an orientalized, commodified other left these women spiritually deprived; what is really spiritually draining is the system that makes the orientaling and commodifying of the other a daily reality.

In light of the novel's argument on colonial economy's capacity to reduce all human relationships to that of love, we realize that if we only concern ourselves with agency, we might miss the pressing question of why the colonial subaltern cannot be free simply by being their own colonizer. Colonial capitalism has long been painted a human face at the expense of our humanity. It manifests itself as a wicked hero-womanizer, invincible, ruthless and carefree. We can say that its humanity is so alluring and its love so intense that we arrange material objects to evoke its coming into us.

### Acknowledgement

Chingling Wo is an Assistant Professor of English at Sonoma State University. Her dissertation is entitled, *Re-Orienting the British Enlightenment*. She teaches courses in eighteenth-century British literature, world literature, literary theory and practices. Most of her research work focuses on the intersection between capitalism as an economic system and the colonial structure of feeling. Recently she is also interested in using the invasive Apple Snail in Asian rice paddies to develop new ways of theorizing global space.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ann Laura Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* for a Foucauldian approach that studies intimacy under colonialism. Stoler articulates that colonial power structures are never stabilized and are constantly negotiated on the micro-level by the blurry boundaries between the colonizers and the colonized and their close proximity. While Stoler's book is a masterpiece on the topic, my argument takes a very different turn from that of Stoler's. In *Carnal Knowledge*, the body as system of materiality asserts discursive power over the reified rule of colonialism, while my project seeks to articulate 1) capitalism's spirituality, commodity fetishism, and 2) the way spirit is determined by the material forces under capitalism.

<sup>2</sup> This assertion often implies that other choices concerning more than one's own choices are not free and thus inferior.

<sup>3</sup> See Nancy Armstrong for a classic example on the making of modern Romantic love and its subjects in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.

<sup>4</sup> See E.P. Thompson's *Custom in Commons* for a discussion of British commoner's compulsory subjection to the logic of capitalism. For an analysis of colonial structure of knowledge and its impact on people around the world see *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005.