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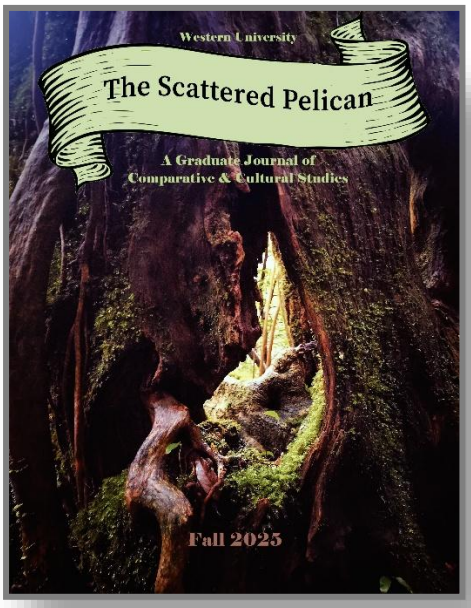

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"I RUN TOWARDS HOME. MY HEART ARRIVES BEFORE ME.": THE UNCANNY PRESENCE OF THE QUESTION OF HOME AND IDENTITY IN MA'ASOUMEH JAFARI'S *WHY SHAN'T I WORSHIP THE DARKNESS?*

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ABSTRACT

Many people around the world have formed a relationship with "Home" and "Identity" which is bizarre, unsettling, and creates moments of hesitation when facing these concepts. Todorov famously defines the genre of Uncanny as a decision towards defying incredulity and familiarity at the same time by the reader and/or the character when facing hesitation about the nature of unbelievable. In this paper, I argue that the Persian short story collection *Cherā Tāriki Rā Khodāy-e Khod Nakonam?,* loosely translated by the author of this paper as *Why Shan't I Worship the Darkness?* (2021), is exactly a depiction of that unsettling state of misplacement between the home and the heart. It is the debut collection published by Afghan-Iranian writer Ma'soumeh Jafari and is considered by Iranian writer and literary critic Pazhand Soleimani as a work in the field of literature of diaspora. As a new work, written in Persian, there is not enough literature around this collection, yet it has so much to offer. I will discuss my thesis through a close reading of two of the stories in which the writer has used Uncanny as a literary device to talk about two main themes of "Home" and "Identity."

KEYWORDS**:** Uncanny; Diaspora; Literary Device; Afghan-Iranian Writers.

INTRODUCTION

It is said that "home is where the heart is". It seems like a simple and encompassing definition. However, for many, neither "home" nor "heart" and not even the relationship between the two is a very clear notion. In some cases, they can be so bizarre and incomprehensible that they even become unsettling. As such, many are on a constant search for finding the "home", the "heart", and their relationship. The Persian short story collection *Cherā Tāriki Rā Khodāy-e Khod Nakonam?*, loosely translated[1] to *Why Shan't I Worship the Darkness?*, is exactly a depiction of that unsettling state of misplacement between the home and heart. It is the debut collection published by Afghan-Iranian writer Ma'soumeh Jafari. Jafari was born in October 1996 in Tehran, Iran, to an Afghan refugee family. She has a bachelor's in English Language and Literature from Kashan University, one of the most prestigious universities in Iran. She has also been involved in many workshops and reading sessions at "Afghanistan Literature House" in Tehran since 2015. Before this collection, her works had been sporadically published both in Iranian literary magazines and a Anthology of short stories by Afghan woman writers published in Kabul, Afghanistan ("Azhang," para.1). The collection addresses home and homeland from the point of view of a second-generation émigré, as well as identity crisis, and how the sense of belonging can get lost across the borders or both "home" and "heart" can lose their comforting meanings.

This uncomfortable state of heart and unsettling feature of home is quite close to what scholars call the "uncanny." The most famous conceptualisation of this phenomenon is Freud's definition of it as "that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). In other words, it is where the heart finds the familiarity of home where it is not supposed to. Freud constructs this concept on the German word "Unheimlich," which is the opposite of "Heimlich" or "homelike;" something concealed from the familiar and turned into an unsettling stranger (225). "Heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich" (226). While Freud tries to explain this phenomenon from the viewpoint of a psychoanalyst, but in the realm of aesthetics, Tzvetan Todorov takes this concept one step further and treats it from a structuralist viewpoint in the realm of narrative. Although in the narrative analysis of this article, Todorov's insight will be very useful, it is Freud's conceptualisation of "Uncanny" that is more widely accepted in the realm of literary studies when dealing with depictions of "unsettling beauty." Furthermore, while

[1] All translations in this essay are done by the author of the essay from the original Persian.

Todorov's flexible approach gives us a better analytical device, it comes short compared to Freud's "ambivalent" conceptualisation to address all the nuances that come with the postcolonial facets of "literature of diaspora", as Ghazoul aptly explains in a study of the idea of "home" in Iraqi diasporic literature (2–3). As such, in this article, Todorov's theory has been the primary "tool" for analysing how the uncanny is used, while Freud's concept is simultaneously used as the primary "definition" for interpreting what represents uncanny.

In his structuralist view of narratives, Todorov's uncanny becomes a part of his classification of genre literature. He provides three main classes: marvelous, fantastic, and uncanny. While pure marvelous and pure uncanny are rarer, the former is where the unfamiliar and unbelievable are accepted as normal parts of the fictional world, while the latter is where every aspect of the fictional world defies incredulity and familiarity at the same time (41–42). Todorov's definition of the fantastic is the space between the two extremes, where a moment of hesitation about the nature of the unbelievable occurs for both the character and the reader. As long as this hesitation lasts, the narrative is pure fantastic. When the reader and the character decide on how they want to react to the hesitation, Todorov specifies two subgenres of the fantastic. If the hesitation leads to an acceptance of the unbelievable, it is a fantastic-marvelous, and if the hesitation leads to a denial of it and an attempt to logically explain the unbelievable, it is fantastic-uncanny (44–52). The first usually creates a dream-like state for the reader, and the second an unsettling feeling. Both, however, entail defamiliarization (46–50). It is this very methodical and flexible theorisation, as well as its connection to aesthetic qualities like defamiliarization, that gives an analytical applicability to this theory. And yet, it needs to be softly amended by Freud, since an exploration of psychological themes like "belonging to home" and "finding identity" needs a less structural and more ambivalent understanding of the limits of "uncanny."

Bayani, in her critique of Jafari's collection, mentions "defamiliarization" as a significant technique used in several ways by the author (*Review Session* 44:30–45:00). She also mentions that the linear time structure of the stories, is in direct contrast with the surrealistic nature of their genre (*Review Session* 40:10–40:32). If we take her word that this collection is surrealistic, then it is closest to "pure fantastic" in Todorov's classification (Todorov 172). This is something we can trace in the text of this collection as well, where most of the stories keep the state of hesitation until the very end or constantly and rapidly oscillate between uncanny and marvelous. Therefore, the uncanny does not seem to be strictly a genre here, and while Todorov's theorisation around the

concept is structurally useful, we need to investigate how the uncanny is working in this text. In a socio-linguistic case study on this collection, while studying a story titled "Marz" or "Border" through structural discourse analysis, the authors maintain that the bizarre descriptions are a result of the childish perspective of the character; however, they immediately attest that there is no standard imagery of objective elements, making every aspect unfamiliar and uniquely subjective to each reader (Rahimi et al. 116–17). Using structuralist narratology of Chatman, end up acknowledging the presence of a representation of the uncanny and being unable to define the genre, to the extent that they consider this short story, using a narrative theory, to be a work of nonfiction about "roaming identity" (121). This example once again calls into question the capability of a structuralist approach to deal with the specific form uncanny that Jafari uses to depict her struggle with identity.

In the mentioned oscillation between uncanny and marvelous based on Todorov's model, the uncanny side dives deeper into the ideas of "home" and "identity" than the marvelous side. Rahimi et al. also mention how the narrators of all the stories are girls who are dealing with a form of indirect misplacement which is overtly or covertly linked to immigration (Rahimi et al. 101). Jafari herself refers to the "identity crisis" of a person born in Iran to an Afghan refugee family as one of her struggles. Such person is still seen as an outsider although they have never migrated in their life ("Bukhara Nights" 12:30–13:30). Ijabi in her critique mentions that the theme of identity is represented in a fictive and figurative way and it is never literal and direct ("Bukhara Nights" 26:15–26:20). Soleimani considers this collection as a part of "literature of diaspora" and mentions the multiplicity of the related ideas traceable in the book, including "otherness," "misplacement," "border," and "Homeland." She mentions that in this collection, "Homeland" is not a place, but the people, and specifically parents ("Bukhara Nights" 48:40–55:50). This simultaneous presence of an idea of "home" and a struggle with "misplacement," in a fictional style which as mentioned, is ripe with "defamiliarization," creates a sensibility quite similar to Freud's definition of unheimlich, which is also structurally always keeps a certain level of Todorov's uncanny.

Therefore, *Why Shan't I Worship the Darkness?* (2021) is a fantastic story collection with multifaceted features, one of which is a unique use of the uncanny. I contend that Jafari, in her collection, uses uncanny and defamiliarization as literary devices for emphasizing two of her central themes, which are "home" and "identity." This is significant in terms of seeing uncanny not only as a psychoanalytical aesthetic feature or genre classification, but also as a literary device

that can raise thematic questions within a narrative. Thus, the purpose of this article is to demonstrate how Jafari draws the reader's attention to the mentioned themes using uncanny feeling and shows the unfamiliar side of two of the most familiar concepts: home and identity. For this purpose, two of the stories from this collection of eleven short stories are chosen, and through a form of close reading, instances of uncanny and defamiliarization are extracted. I discussed evidence from these two stories against theories of uncanny and fantastic, concepts of home and identity, and the Iranian and Afghan cultures, to show how the two mentioned concepts work as a device in the hands of the writer to represent disturbing sides of identity and home.

DISCUSSION

As mentioned, two of the stories from this collection are chosen for an investigation of themes of "Home" and "Identity", although I can argue that these themes are present in the whole book. The first one, "Obūr" meaning "Crossing", like many other stories in the collection, resists the establishment of any clear-cut plot. It is a narrative about a girl who is trying to convince her family to go somewhere, but the destination remains intentionally unidentified. The difference between dream and reality is not clear and thus every event leads to a reappraisal of this question of dream vs. reality. The narrator is planning the journey so insistently, but it seems like the whole personified dream-like universe around her is sarcastically impervious to this idea. The narrator, in that state between dream and reality which will never be clarified for the reader, exchanges herself, literally "buys a new self" from a shop. A new self that suits her journey. The story, however, never tells us whether the journey happens; it ends in a flashback to a few days before, when the narrator symbolically is seeking to buy "a reliable future", and not finding it, ending up trapped in the same family house (Jafari 29–40). This story, comparatively between the two, is slightly more on the "Uncanny" side of Todorov's model.

The second story, which is also the namesake of the collection, is another enigmatic story. However, the plot is easier to follow in this one. The story begins with an italicised paragraph, separated from the rest of the story as a vocative expression. It is like a post-modern homage to epistolary novels. The vocative expression depicts the bizarre picture of the narrator taking out her own brain, finding it rotten, and throwing it out in the garbage along with all the lamps. This is where we have a dinkus, and the reader enters the main story. The narrative starts in the morning, told by a narrator who sees the sun as her god. But this is not the god her family worships. There is a sheep in the backyard which is going to be beheaded in a sacrificial manner. Relatives are

coming to the house as guests while the main character, Rasoul, is trying her best to avoid them. After the sheep is dead, Rasoul, who is obviously upset with the killing of the animal, comes out of her room to express her dissatisfaction in a confrontation with her father. The mother, however, takes her away to take a shower, a scene which ends in the shocking action of the father who comes inside the bathroom and, in front of all the guests, pulls his fully naked daughter towards the body of the dead animal to show her how the sacrifice was a success, while men are watching her through their male gaze. When the rest of the family goes back to the house to continue the party, Rasoul finally wraps herself in her towel and goes back to her room. Along the way of this bizarre scene, the narrator addresses the sun-god from time to time, who is hidden behind the clouds. The narrator has an obvious discontent and grudge towards a god that has let such a humiliation happen to her and threatens to dethrone it. The sun does not answer, night arrives, and the narrator decides to become a dissident of her previous faith, rage against the brightness, and worship the darkness. After another dinkus, we have another omniscient point of view narrating how Rasoul dresses up and goes back to the guests for the lamb stew made from the sacrificed sheep. In the last two sections, the narrator is again a first-person narrator who conveys her final complaints to the sun while telling the vague ending of this weird family gathering. The father is still insisting on glorifying this act of sacrifice he has done. The last scene implies a physical punishment endured by Rasoul by her father, although it is not explicitly said. In the final sentence, Rasoul is back in her room with a bruised body, acknowledges to herself and to the sun that despite the sad experience of the day, she still worships the sun deep in her heart (Jafari 77–95). This story has a clearer surrealistic atmosphere, which oscillates between reality and illusion, akin to Todorov's "pure fantastic."

1. "Where the Heart is": Theme of Identity

Identity refers to parts of a self composed of the meanings that individuals associate with their role in society (Stryker and Burke 284). As society has different institutions and boundaries like class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, etc., the construct of identity, which is the manner self is affected by social structure, should also be seen as multifaceted (285–86). For example, one of the famous facets of identity, which is more central to this study, is "national identity." "The notion of the 'other' is inextricably linked to the concept of national identity" (Triandafyllidou 596). Ijadi mentions the theme of being the "other" as a dominant theme in this collection ("Bukhara Nights" 24:00–24:30). Identity theory suggests that identity is stable over time, and each facet of it

correlates with the time a person spend on that social role, as well as the tendency they have to engage in related social groups (Stryker and Burke 286–87). For example, another identity is language identity, which can even be related to dialects of the same language, and Park found in a study that North Korean refugees in South Korea rework their dialect and accent to avoid being distinguishable, while at the same time trying to stabilise an inner language identity for themselves as North Koreans (271). In her talk in an interview session with Bukhara magazine, Jafari mentions the same kind of being "distinguishable" as an Afghan refugee in Iran, as one source of her attempts to "imaginary world building" since childhood ("Bukhara Nights" 6:00–6:30). An attempt which clearly resembles a stabilising psychological mechanism.

1.1. An 'Identity' Crossing:

In the first story, "Obūr" or "Crossing", the difference between reality and dream is hard to distinguish, and thus, it is much more surrealistic and leaning towards the uncanny. This uncanny is not precisely structural, but more so, it is a Freudian uncanny. The whole atmosphere of the story is unsettling in different ways. There is an affinity between identity and the sense of home, or Freudian "Heimlich," which makes it hard to talk about these two themes separately, and in most cases, both ideas are at work in a reciprocal way, even if to different extents. In one of the scenes in "Crossing," for example, the father of the main character tries to bury her alive, to which the main character reacts by committing patricide. The lack of clarity about whether it is reality or a dream retains the state of hesitation mentioned by Todorov, while the manner the actions unfold creates a symbolically meaningful state of psychologically defamiliarizing what is considered familiar. The father is killed with his own shovel and buried on his own farm, after which the main character starts reading stories for his corpse. This unexpected father-daughter interaction happens so fast, in half a page, and it is reported so nonchalantly that it completely gives us a feeling of unnerving awe. A frightful and unsettling picture of what we think we know as part of our identity: familial love.

Another identity facet that is challenged through defamiliarization and uncanniness is religious identity. In an exchange with her mother over breakfast, we have this scene:

> I lick my lips moist and say: "let's try making your own decision for once over the course of your marriage with father!"
>
> The prayer-beads choke on its morning tea.
>
> …

Mother responds: "These deeds and words like going somewhere without the permission of the man should be avoided by God-loving women and children."

- "I personally met God in the market yesterday. He was selling pears. Took me to the corner and told me you should pack up and go" (34).[i]

In this encounter, not only is the Muslim identity of the whole family challenged by emphasizing some of its flaws, like patriarchy, but it is also foregrounded in a bizarre language. The praying beads, an object, is personified as something that is eating breakfast with the family every day, possibly signifying the constant presence of the unusual religious identity, and when the main character challenges the boundaries of this identity, it is startled to the point that it "chokes on its morning tea."

God is also personified in an uncanny manner, as someone selling pears. In Persian language and literature, pears connote worthless things. It seems that the writer tries to tell us that everything that is being sold to us in the name of God is devoid of real value. For the Iranian or Afghan reader, no matter how religious they are, these are very bold and brave words, to the point that they are frightening and unsettling. Even if the reader doesn't practice Islam, the fierce Islamic upbringing in the region and its lasting effects on one's unconscious mind make thinking about this imagery an uncanny experience. What is noteworthy is the fact that the author, with full awareness of this inevitable effect on the target audience, uses this uncanny personification deliberately. Thus, similar to the patricide scene, the unsettling feeling is not a mere aesthetic experience created by the text, nor is it the classification of the text's structure; this deliberate and purposefully crafted uncanny, is used by the author as a device to convey a message belonging to "that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar," whether it is intergenerational familial relations or old religious teachings.

1.2. Why Shan't the 'Identity' be the Darkness?

The theme of identity can also be traced in the other selected story. It is again closely connected to home and is hard to be separated from it. For example, the starting vocative expression of the story is both a mention of home (through its relation to mind and body) and of identity (by its relation to belief and sanity). Both ideas are presented through one of the most disturbing descriptions in the whole book: a scene in which the narrator takes her brain out to find it rotten, then licks it to remember the taste of a rotten mind, and finally throws it in the garbage bin and thus declares herself to be insane. So, the beginning of one of the relatively more realistic

stories of the book has one of the most uncanny images, and this contrast draws attention to the rotten mind and insanity as the locus of identity crisis. Sanity is usually seen as a social definition, and it can be closely related to national identity (Cooke 964–65). As explained in the identity theory, every facet of identity is our reactionary self-creation in social roles; therefore, insanity can be a symbol for self-destruction and the loss of identity. Beyond the short preface, the story itself is also about people and social roles, with a focus on family (which again is both connected to home and identity). All relationships in the story, however, are in a way devoid of a familiar sense of normally defined sanity. Most characters act like automatons. This adds to the uncanny effect of the story and at the same time questions the place of the main character in this society as an existential question of identity.

Belief, spirituality, and religious identity are also challenged, just like in the previous story. While the god of the main character is different from the god of the family, even the relationship between the narrator and her god is disturbing. Sometimes, it takes an erotic form, as if the god is a former lover, and sometimes, in a very businesslike and trading manner. The sun is the ancient god of Persian-speaking people, who used to be known by the name Mithra, which is still used in modern Persian as Mihr, literally meaning the sun. Contrastingly, darkness has always been associated with evil beings. Therefore, it can be very unsettling for the reader when the character, in an attempt to stabilise her religious identity and as a reaction to the society around her, denounces her god and actively tries to turn to darkness:

> You couldn't remain a god, so your progenies also must not remain. I will break any lamp or lightbulb I can find … Indeed, the night is better; although it does not pay much heed to you, but it does not stab you in the back either. Why shan't I worship the darkness? (89)[ii]

These forms of juxtaposition turn what the Persian-speaking audience knows as different facets of identity into uncanny images. For example, in a culture where breastfeeding or anything related to female body is a taboo, Jafari intentionally juxtaposes it with a religious imagery, creating a bizarre contrast between religious identity and societal norms: "Haniyeh's breast is put into her baby's mouth, … another woman has taken out her black socks to say her prayers[iii]" (91). Along with other examples, these excerpts show how the author, while keeping the balance between Todorov's Uncanny and Marvelous, mostly uses a psycho-social sense of uncanny as a tool to defamiliarize facets of identity for the target audience.

2. "Where Home is": Theme of Home

Sarup finds strong relations between identity, politics of place, and the commonplace ideas of home (89). Interestingly, Hashemi mentions the centrality of the politics of place in Jafari's story collection ("Bukhara Nights" 39:00–40:20). However, the problematic aspect of connecting home to place is also emphasised in Sarup's review of the relationship between "Home" and "Identity", since "place" is ambiguous and socially constructed, and it is about power, it is hierarchical and connected to the movement of capital (92–93). But in a less problematic way, home is usually assumed to be connected to stability (90). From this aspect, it more resembles identity. Rahimi et al. notice how Jafari connects places to the idea of identity, for example, by pondering on the fact that streets have names as they have always been in the same place, and thus they are described conceptually rather than descriptively (116–17). Jafari herself talks about how her family and her home has been a source of inspiration, a basis for her stories and a tie to her identity ("Bukhara Nights" 9:30–10:00). Thus, it is not surprising that Jafari's collection constantly goes back and forth between these two themes, as they seem to be necessitating one another, and being definitionally interconnected. While the Identity side is already explored, and despite this unescapable interconnection, the theme of "Home" should also be separately discussed.

From philosophy, to literary studies, to social science, anthropology, and many other disciplines, the idea of home has been studied in different theoretical and empirical ways, and the dominant and recurrent attributes associated with home are place, space, feelings, practices, or a state of being in the world (Mallett 62). One interesting definition of home is what Mallett mentions as the space "between the real and the ideal", which is the "remembered home" (69). This notion again is not only in line with the picture of home in Jafari's collection, but also, in a way, is reminiscent of Freudian "Heimlich." That is why when Jafari uses defamiliarization in those settings, she creates a sense of "Unheimlich". Mallett also mentions "Family" and its nurturing aspect, as well as "Gender" and the traditional femininity as ideas closely related to home (73–75). Lastly, as we have based our discussion partly on Todorov's theory of genre literature, it is noteworthy that in an investigation of the idea of "Home" in contemporary literature and specifically Fantasy, Chang finds many eccentric characters which previously were excluded from the idea of home and specifically mentions the quality of it being an "imaginary place" of "security" and "belonging" (78).

2.1. Crossing 'Home':

While the theme is present in the whole book, the second story between my two selections is one of the most prominent examples of this. However, it might be easier to focus on the theme of "Home" in our first story, "Obū" or "Crossing" first. Once again, unfamiliar scenes and uncanny descriptions play a big role in bringing the theme of home up from the depths of the context. For example, in one scene, the main character finds a possibility for her "Crossing," which in this story is the deliberate search for a new home. Even the mention of the heart in this scene may have a symbolic connotation to home. However, the described scene is very appalling and unnerving:

> If the sea becomes arid, we can easily cross. … I take a deep breath and then drink up all the water in the sea. … The sea is finished! I run towards home. My heart arrives before me. When I open the door, my heart drops down on the doormat. I pick it up from the ground and put it in its place. My hand is red and greasy from the sticky blood. I rub it clean on my trousers. (37)[iv]

There are many unsettling images regarding "what is known and long familiar," including home, heart, and even the idea of placing the heart where it is supposed to be. It is an uncanny atmosphere created to misplace heart and home in a blood-stained way, in relation to the idea of crossing and leaving one's home.

The pragmatics of language are also misplaced in many conversations written by Jafari. It is, however, a wise and intentional decision to show many binaries, fractions, and imbalances. The two sides of conversations usually represent two sides of these binaries, and the very discursive fraction shows the imbalance between them. These usually incomprehensibly unfamiliar situations create a sense of detachment from the story and characters for the reader, which draws attention to the binary imbalance. This fraction often has its emphasis on the ideas of a broken home. For example, this exchange between the father and daughter in "Crossing" has that sense of unfamiliarity which happens inside a family and reflects the idea of the fractured home:

> … I say:
>
> "Why aren't you ready yet? You always used to say one should be ready early in the morning if one wants to go somewhere. You want us to lose the morning tide? The sea is only good now when it is calm."
>
> Father does not even pay the smallest heed to my pleated skirt. He says:
>
> "Eat your bread and thank your God" (31)[v]

2.2. Why Shan't I Worship 'Home'?

In the second story, home is even more prominent and maybe the main subject of the narration. Bayani mentions the use of words from Afghanistani or Hazaragi dialects of Persian in this story and mentions how this element, along with the traditional family, old house and religious practices can work together to create a picture of a familiar Afghan home (*Review Session* 37:50–38:30). One of the first defamiliarizing and shocking elements for the Persian speaker is the name of the main character. Rasoul, a conventionally male name used very imperturbably for a female protagonist. A challenge for both gender identity and the idea of home, which, as mentioned, is socially connected to gender. This story explores the concept of home in many of its different aspects. In relation to the house, through the descriptions of the building. In its relation to family, it is essentially a narration of a family gathering with many unexpected familial relations. And in its relation to "imaginary sense of security", as in the act of worshiping a personal imaginary god (sun), which at the time of insecurity can easily be redefined to another (darkness). The perplexing, paradoxical scene of the Muslim father dragging her naked daughter to show her the religious sacrifice is an emphasis on how home loses its meaning. "He is dragging me, bare and wet as I am, to show me a cut off head. What are you yapping in the middle of this, Sun? … I shall piss all over the advice coming from you and anyone like you[vi]" (85). For this character, and in this household, the imaginary sense of security and familial support is lost with their sense of belonging at the moment of immigration.

The home is also emphatically depicted in its relation to gender, through names as well as gender roles. Also, in its relation to the nation, through the idea of homeland, and with the use of Afghan dialects and cultural elements. For example, in the following scene, both the naming and the setting indirectly point to the idea of home. A sense of home which does not seem to be a sweet feeling: "Men are occupied with killing the sheep in the backyard while women are sitting on the mattresses around the room with their tea still too hot to drink. Fariba offers sugar cubes. Everyone takes one cube, except Keshvar[vii]" (82). Family and gender relations, old-fashioned seating arrangement on the ground, and social norms of drinking tea are all connoting home. But the most interesting part is the character called "Keshvar" who avoids taking a sugar cube. This is a solely Afghan name, not used in other Persian-speaking countries. But even in Afghanistan, it is a very rare name, and more interestingly, it is used for both male and female. Finally, the literal meaning of the name, ironically enough, is "country". In three simple sentences, Jafari brings out all the

different aspects of home (family, house, homeland, gender relations) while the picture of the sacrificial ceremony and Keshvar (country), avoiding taking sugar cubes, gives a bitter and daunting undertone to this part. There are none of the undesirable aspects of home present for the character, which again defamiliarizes the whole idea of home into an uncanny version of something that is supposed to be the most familiar and soothing idea.

CONCLUSION

Although I just studied two of the stories, "Crossing" and "Why shan't I Worship the Darkness?", and only had space to mention a limited amount of evidence, "home" and "identity" are recurrent themes in the whole collection. These two stories also provide enough evidence that defamiliarization and uncanniness are not merely aesthetic features, but devices deliberately used by the author to highlight those concepts. As Soleimani mentions, the role of family and specifically father in the stories serve as a representation of a closed cultural border ("Bukhara Nights" 53:00–54:00). Ijadi, in reading another story from the collection called "White Certificate," asserts how the main character looks for emigrating to another country, only because they provide people with a certificate which not only has their picture and all personal information, but also creates a sense of belonging and recognition ("Bukhara Nights" 27:50–28:15). This is again a combination of identity (personal information), home (sense of belonging), and defamiliarization (a government-issued document pictured as something novel and distinctive) as an example of the constant emergence of these themes and devices in other stories. The collection is not exactly uncanny in genre, in Todorov's classification, although Todorov's theory is an excellent starting point for understanding how the uncanny works within the narrative structure. The uncanny creates a subconscious unsettling experience, akin to Freud's definition, but it is not merely an aesthetic feature of the text. Instead, Jafari's uncanny is one of the main devices used intentionally by the author in a dreamlike world, which has created a surrealistic collection, to represent what is expected to be comforting, but for the author defies familiarity. The collection, as I tried to argue, provides enough evidence to confirm my thesis that the uncanny is, in fact, an actual device that an author can use intentionally. This not only shows the genius of Jafari in redefining the capabilities of her own narrative prose but also provides a new insight into how we should treat the uncanny in other surrealistic works of fiction. This Uncanny, as a device, has close affinity with defamiliarization, but it is a different way of challenging familiarity. This essay was delimited to two stories and limited in terms of the lack of previous literature on this collection,

and limited space for analysing all the evidence from the text. Ma'asoumeh Jafari's created world, however, even in these eleven short stories, has endless space for further discoveries. It is something recently published, in Persian, which is not the most widely studied literature, and by a lesser-known young author; and yet it has a lot to offer, to the extent that every researcher of literature who is proficient in Persian language, can turn to it and find a new aspect in this unique work which defies being classified in any genre or withing any standard.

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END NOTES

[i] لب هایم را لیس می زنم و می گویم: «بیا و تو این زندگی مشترک با پدر یه تصمیم متفاوت بگیرا!»

چای می پرد توی گلوی تسبیح.

[...]

مادر اضافه می کند: «این کارها و حرف ها از مردم خداترس دوره که بی اجازه مرد زن و بچه سر خود جایی بروند.»

«من خود خدا را دیروز سر بازارچه دیدم. داشت گلابی می فروخت. منو کشید کنار گفت جمع کنید برید...

[ii] خدا که نتوانستی شوی، نسلت هم نباید بماند. هرچی چراغ و لامپ ببینم می ترکانم [...] همان شب بهتر است. کاری به کار آدم ندارد اما پشتش را هم خالی نمی کند. چرا تاریکی را خدای خود نکنم؟

[iii] پستان هانیه فرو رفته در درهان نوزادش، [...] زنی دیگر هم جوراب سیاه نازکش را درآورده و می‌خواهد به نماز بایستد.

[iv] اگر دریا خشک شود می توانیم به راحتی گذر کنیم. [...] آمادگی می گیرم و تمام آب دریا را می نوشم. [...] دریا به پایان می رسد! می دوم سمت خانه. قلبم زودتر از خودم می رسد. در را که باز می کنم قلبم می افتد روی فرش پادری. از پیش پا بر می دارم و می گذارم سر جایش. دستم از خون قلب چرب و سرخ شده. با شلوارم پاکش می کنم.

[v] ... می گویم:

»چرا شما هنوز آماده نشدین؟ خودتون همیشه می گفتین آدم هرجایی بره باید صبح خیلی زود راه بی افته. می خواین به ظهر بخوریم؟ دریا الآن خوبه که آرومه«

پدر اصلاً به دامن پرچینم توجهی ندارد. می گوید:

»نانت را بخور و خدایت را شکر کن«

[vi] برهنه و مرطوب دارد مرا می‌برد که کله‌ی بریده نشانم دهد. تو چی می‌گویی این وسط آفتاب؟ [...] دیگر حرف تو و امثال تو را رویش شاش می‌کنم.

[vii] مردها در حیاط مشغول گوسفند کشتن هستند و زن ها هم روی تشک هایی که دور تا دور اتاق انداخته شده نشسته اند و چای هنوز داغی خودش را دارد. فریبا قند تعارف می کند. همه یک دانه بر می دارند، بجز کشور.

the scattered pelican is committed to a comparative approach that embraces pluralism and inhabits the spaces or aporias of/in/between/ among discourses, ideologies, or methods of criticism; playfulness as a leveling perspective that resists the privileging of certain objects of study based on origins, genres, forms, or media; and an active and conscious pursuit of scholarship that enlarges the space of the discipline of comparative literature through deep engagement with a broad range of objects of study, novel applications of critical theory, and primary texts in their original languages.

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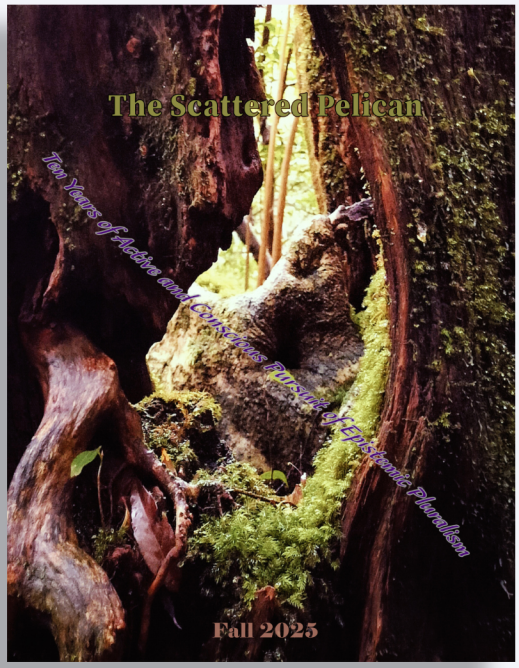

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