

Abstract

Title—Burning the Bridges She’s Crossed: The Migrant as Deserter of Roots in *Jasmine*

Program of Study—English

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Every story contains not only the content it displays but also that which it hides, avoids, chooses to cover over and forget. Thus, every story is by nature palimpsestic, since all the might-have-beens of the story—its alternate wordings, plot devices, character arcs, and descriptions—hover at its edges, ever-present but never overtly acknowledged. Despite the apparent absence of these traces, however, they form the basis for much textual criticism, particularly in the case of migrant authors censured for embracing the rootless joys of a privileged cosmopolitan migrancy at the expense of roots and national belonging. These accusations of careless disaffiliation that such critics as Graham Huggan and Aijaz Ahmad level at South Asian migrant authors find justification in Bharati Mukherjee’s depiction of her titular character’s increasing departure from her cultural heritage and roots in *Jasmine*. Jasmine’s continual efforts to escape her Indian roots in favor of adopting new, increasingly American identities implicitly privilege West over East, an impression that her physical travels and adjustment of appearance only reinforce. Mukherjee’s depiction of her central character as overly sexualized also reinforces Orientalist stereotypes, leading Western readers to view India negatively rather than leading them to question the stereotypes with which they have already been indoctrinated.