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**Cultural Duality: Exploring Identity and Belonging in Jhumpa Lahiri's  
*Interpreter of Maladies***

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Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* offers a powerful exploration of the immigrant experience, delving into themes of identity, displacement, and the complexities of cultural duality. Through her vivid storytelling, Lahiri captures the intricate emotional landscapes of her characters, who often find themselves caught between their inherited cultural roots and the realities of their new surroundings. The collection reflects the profound challenges of navigating life as an immigrant, where belonging and alienation coexist, and identity is constantly negotiated. Each story examines personal struggles to reconcile tradition and modernity, exploring the human condition in the context of migration, generational conflict, and cultural intersectionality. By weaving together these narratives, Lahiri provides a poignant portrayal of the immigrant journey, illustrating how individuals seek to define themselves amidst contrasting worlds.

This article analyses the themes of identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. Through an exploration of nine short stories, the paper examines how Lahiri's characters grapple with the complexities of cultural hybridity, reflecting the emotional struggles of the immigrant experience. The collection illustrates the tension between heritage and assimilation, highlighting the challenges of navigating multiple cultural identities. By focusing on themes of displacement, family dynamics, and personal transformation, this study sheds light on the nuanced ways in which Lahiri portrays the psychological impact of immigration. The article also emphasizes how the author uses the motif of illness, both literal and metaphorical, as a vehicle to discuss the emotional ailments that arise from fractured identities. Ultimately, this study reveals how *Interpreter of Maladies* offers a profound commentary on the human experience of cultural transition and the search for self-definition in a globalized world.

**Keywords:**Immigrant experience, cultural hybridity, identity negotiation, displacement, belonging, Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, assimilation, generational conflict, cultural duality.

## **Introduction**

Lahiri belongs to a contemporary cohort of East Indian authors, including Arundhati Roy, Raj Kamal Jha, and Pankaj Mishra, who, while continuing the diasporic literary tradition, have moved away from the magical realism popularized by Salman Rushdie. Instead of relying on fantastical elements, these writers focus on a more realistic portrayal of life, grounding their stories in truth and personal experiences. Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, first published in 1999 in the USA, UK, and India, marked her debut into the literary world. The collection quickly garnered critical and popular acclaim, culminating in her winning the Pulitzer Prize the following year. This success solidified Lahiri's place as a significant voice in contemporary literature.

Set across various locations, including Bengal, Boston, and other cities, *Interpreter of Maladies* showcases Lahiri's ability to tackle complex themes of prejudice, social distinctions, and the injustices faced by immigrants in their day-to-day lives. Her characters, many of whom are immigrants themselves, navigate the intersections of their identities, contending with the dual pressures of living in a new world while maintaining ties to their cultural heritage. Through these narratives, Lahiri examines the often-overlooked emotional toll of migration, as her characters experience a sense of alienation, nostalgia, and longing, both for the country they have left behind and for the one in which they now reside. This melancholic evaluation of existence permeates much of her work, emphasizing the tension between belonging and isolation. (Iyenger 1985)

Lahiri's narrative voice in her stories is distinctly shaped by her own identity, one that transcends conventional national, political, and historical boundaries. Her works are deeply rooted in the cultural and narrative traditions of India, which are interwoven into her storytelling. (Brah 1997) Despite her American upbringing, Lahiri's writing is profoundly influenced by her Indian heritage, allowing her to explore the complexities of cultural duality. By engaging with both her Indian and American identities, Lahiri reflects the challenges and intricacies of the diasporic experience. Her stories not only engage with personal identity but also serve as metaphors for the broader dilemmas faced by individuals in post-colonial societies, where questions of belonging and cultural heritage remain deeply pertinent.

Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* is also a testament to her desire to carve out a unique space for herself as a diasporic writer in contemporary literature. Her works explore the challenges of living between two worlds, addressing both personal and national identity struggles that are shaped by the influences of multiple cultures. This duality forms the crux of Lahiri's creative consciousness, allowing her to navigate the complexities of post-colonial identity. Her exploration of these themes becomes

especially poignant in light of her personal experiences. Though not born in India, Lahiri made numerous visits to Calcutta (now Kolkata) with her parents during her childhood. These visits, which often included extended stays at her ancestral home and time spent with relatives, provided her with a deep connection to her Indian roots. These experiences form the backdrop of much of her writing, offering a rich, personal foundation for her exploration of identity and migration.

In a 2008 interview with "Fine Art", Lahiri reflected on her relationship with Calcutta, stating:

"I travelled to Calcutta with neither the intention of being a tourist nor as someone who had previously lived there - a significant standpoint, in my opinion, for a writer" (Melwani 1).

This sense of simultaneously belonging to and being apart from Calcutta encapsulates the tension that runs through her work. While many of her early stories are set in Calcutta, much of Lahiri's fiction takes place in the United States, reflecting her own life experience. In the same interview, she further elaborated on the role that India plays in her fiction:

"However, despite having only resided in America, India remains an integral element of my imaginative setting. Given that the majority of my characters have an Indian heritage, India frequently appears as a backdrop in the stories, both in a literal sense and at other times in a more symbolic manner, inside the characters' recollections" (Melwani 1).

In Lahiri's writing, India is more than just a setting; it serves as both a literal and figurative presence in the lives of her characters. This duality reflects the diasporic experience, where the homeland becomes both a distant memory and a central part of identity. Her ability to navigate these spaces of remoteness and proximity allows Lahiri to offer a nuanced perspective on the immigrant experience, one that is both deeply personal and universally resonant. Through *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri examines the complexities of cultural identity, the emotional weight of migration, and the ways in which individuals attempt to reconcile their past with their present.

Jhumpa Lahiri masterfully presents nine stories in her Pulitzer Prize-winning collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, seamlessly bridging the cultural and emotional gaps between her characters' home countries and their new lives abroad. One of the most striking elements in Lahiri's narrative is her ability to deliberately subject her characters to various hardships, both physical and psychological, and then guide them toward redemption. This process of enduring affliction and eventually finding resolution defines Lahiri's talent for portraying the human condition. Her characters' suffering, often the result of human error or weakness, occurs in both conscious and

unconscious moments. These afflictions profoundly alter the characters' lives, dramatically shifting the course of each story. (Ferdous 2015) However, Lahiri ensures that these moments of distress do not derail the overall narrative but instead serve as transformative experiences, teaching valuable lessons to the reader. By confronting and ultimately resolving these issues, Lahiri turns hardships into positive reflections, skillfully exposing the truth about life's difficulties.

The collection's opening story, *A Temporary Matter*, centers on Shoba and Sukumar, a couple whose lives are unexpectedly disrupted by a scheduled one-hour power outage for five consecutive days, starting at eight in the evening. The power outage becomes a pivotal event that brings to light the strain in their relationship. As they sit in the dark each evening, the power failure catalyzes moments of confession between the two, allowing them to confront the emotional distance that has developed between them. Through these confessions, Lahiri navigates the couple's deep-rooted issues, ultimately leading to a form of reconciliation. The setting of the story, defined by the power outage, provides a space for the couple to address their unresolved conflicts, which are emblematic of the immigrant experience – the disconnection between the old and the new, the familiar and the foreign.

Lahiri consistently operates within tightly constrained frameworks of time, place, space, and relationships. The challenges she presents her characters are often bounded by these limitations, reinforcing the idea that the difficulties they face are, in many ways, temporary. The title *A Temporary Matter* itself reflects this theme, suggesting that life's struggles, no matter how serious they may seem, are transitory. Lahiri's message encourages a more light-hearted approach to life, reminding readers that doubt, misunderstanding, and gaps in communication often serve to intensify the gravity of life's challenges, but they are not permanent. Her stories suggest that through open communication and vulnerability, these problems can be resolved.

In *A Temporary Matter*, Lahiri employs the literary technique of flashback to explore the inner lives of her characters, delving into Shoba and Sukumar's memories to provide a deeper understanding of their present situation. Through these flashbacks, the reader learns about the emotional strain that has built up over time. One of the most poignant flashbacks takes Shoba and Sukumar back to the time when Shoba's mother visited from Arizona, shortly after Shoba's return from the hospital. The mother stayed with them for two months, serving as their only guest since the tragedy they had experienced. Shoba's mother, a diligent and helpful presence in the household, took on many responsibilities: preparing dinner every evening, shopping independently at the supermarket, doing their laundry, and organizing their home with meticulous care. A deeply religious woman, she arranged a small shrine in the guest room, placing a framed image of a Goddess on the bedside table, accompanied

by a tray of marigold petals. She prayed twice daily, her devotions centered around the hope of healthy grandchildren in the future.

Despite her overt politeness, Shoba's mother maintained a subtle distance from Sukumar, a reflection of her uncertainty regarding the state of their marriage. Her coolness towards Sukumar was not born of malice but stemmed from her concern over the growing disconnect between Shoba and her husband. Though there was no bitterness in their interactions, there existed a communication gap, one that was exacerbated by the emotional distance between the couple. However, as the power outages force Shoba and Sukumar to confront the silence that has grown between them, they begin to rebuild their relationship. On one of the nights, they share a meal together before the darkness envelops their home, a symbolic moment of reconnection.

Through these intimate scenes, Lahiri illustrates the process of healing and reconciliation between Shoba and Sukumar. The power outages, initially a source of inconvenience, become an opportunity for the couple to reconnect emotionally. Lahiri's narrative is not merely about the rekindling of romantic love but also about the possibility of harmonious coexistence in the face of diversity and hardship. The characters learn to live with each other in a new way, fostering an environment of warmth and friendliness that had been missing from their relationship for some time. In the end, Lahiri crafts a story that is both poignant and hopeful, showing how love and connection can be rediscovered even in the darkest moments of life.

During the initial evening of the power outage, Shoba and Sukumar independently prepare their meals, feed themselves, and meticulously use their forks to remove bay leaves and cloves from their stew by stirring the rice. Jhumpa Lahiri taps into her Indian heritage through the character of Shoba, who observes, "It is like India," while noticing Sukumar's careful handling of his improvised candelabra. Shoba's remark evokes memories of frequent power cuts in India, a situation she vividly recalls:

"Occasionally, the flow of electricity ceases for extended periods. Once, I had to participate in a complete rice ritual in complete darkness. The infant incessantly wailed. The temperature must have been extremely high" (117).

This reflection not only highlights her cultural background but also brings a sense of shared hardship that she has experienced both in her native country and in her current life.

Lahiri's introspective approach is the driving force behind the narrative, gradually guiding the relationship between Shoba and Sukumar from a state of emotional disconnection to one of profound intimacy. The progression of their relationship is marked by subtle yet transformative moments, particularly during the

power outages. As they begin to confide in one another, the walls that had been built between them slowly start to crumble. One of the most poignant moments occurs when Shoba reveals a heartbreaking truth:

“Our kid was a boy. His complexion exhibited a reddish hue rather than a brown tone. He possessed a mane of ebony hair on his cranium. His weight was about five pounds” (22).

This revelation about their lost child marks a turning point in their relationship, as it brings to the surface a grief they had both been avoiding. Through this moment of vulnerability, they begin to reconnect on a deeper level, finding solace in each other’s pain.

Lahiri's narrative does not end in despair but rather with a sense of hope and reconciliation. The couple’s shared tears at the end of the story signify a moment of catharsis, a release of the emotions they had been suppressing. (Moussa 2020) In this way, Lahiri optimistically concludes the story, as Shoba and Sukumar, through their mutual grief and confessions, come to a new understanding of their relationship. Their rediscovered connection is solidified through these moments of honesty and intimacy, and they are able to move forward together, having reestablished a strong emotional bond.

In the second narrative, *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*, Lahiri shifts the focus to a different cultural and historical context, positioning herself at the center of the story by taking on the perspective of Lilia, a ten-year-old girl who serves as the narrator. Through Lilia’s eyes, Lahiri explores complex themes such as the partition of Bengal in 1971, poverty, the civil war in Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim riots, Bangladeshi infiltration into India, and the Indo-Bangladesh war. These issues are brought into the narrative through the conversations between Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s parents, providing a rich historical backdrop to the personal stories of the characters.

At the beginning of the story, Lahiri introduces Mr. Pirzada, a highly educated man who works as a botany professor at a university in Dacca. He had come to America in 1971, having received a grant from the government of Pakistan to research plant life in New England. Despite the geographical and cultural distance between him and his homeland, Mr. Pirzada is deeply affected by the political turmoil in South Asia, particularly the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan and the resulting social upheaval. Through his character, Lahiri explores the impact of these events, painting a vivid picture of the atrocities committed during the civil war.

Lahiri’s portrayal of the war is both harrowing and detailed. She describes the violent actions of the Pakistan army, who invaded Dacca in March, setting fires, bombing the city, and committing numerous atrocities. Teachers were dragged into the streets and executed, while women were forcibly taken to barracks and subjected

to sexual violence. The brutality of the conflict left a deep scar on the people of the region, and Lahiri does not shy away from depicting these horrors.

Through Mr. Pirzada's character, Lahiri personalizes this historical tragedy, making it resonate on a deeply emotional level. His conversations with Lilia's parents about the war, combined with his personal anguish over being separated from his family, highlight the emotional toll of the conflict. Lilia, as a child, does not fully understand the gravity of the situation, but through her observations, the reader gains a clear sense of the pain and loss experienced by those affected by the partition and subsequent war.

Mr. Pirzada is deeply saddened by his inability to determine whether his family is alive or dead, an uncertainty that weighs heavily on him. His family, residing in Dacca, consists of his wife and seven daughters, ranging in age from six to sixteen, all living in a three-storeyed building. The situation presents a stark irony. Lahiri introduces a subtle but noticeable pattern in the story: all of Mr. Pirzada's daughters have names starting with the letter "A," such as Ayesha, Amira, Amina, Aziza, and others. This detail, along with the image of their braided hair tied with ribbons, not only adds authenticity to the story but also underscores the cultural richness Lahiri brings to her narrative, blending elements of different cultures and backgrounds.

Indian parents rationalize their acceptance of Mr. Pirzada, despite his being a Muslim from Pakistan, through the concept of "Atithidevo Bhava", meaning "the guest is equivalent to God." This phrase represents a cornerstone of Indian hospitality, where guests are treated with the utmost respect, regardless of their background. Lahiri skillfully weaves this cultural ethos into her storytelling, emphasizing themes of acceptance, kinship, and the ability to embrace others despite religious or political differences. Mr. Pirzada is welcomed warmly into a Hindu Bengali family's home, highlighting Lahiri's vision of cross-cultural harmony and liberalism.

Lahiri's examination of individuals from diverse cultures drives the narrative toward a climactic moment. As a writer, she knows that the story cannot reach its resolution without deepening the complexities faced by outsiders in a new land. Mr. Pirzada's situation—caught between his family's plight in war-torn Bangladesh and his life as a researcher in America—illustrates the challenges of displacement and the emotional burdens newcomers bear. The tension mounts as the narrative builds around these themes, leading to a greater understanding of what it means to be separated from one's homeland and loved ones.

In her third story, *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri shifts focus to another set of characters dealing with personal and emotional disconnections. The story begins with a quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Das over their young daughter's complaint about

needing to use the bathroom. Neither parent is willing to take her, revealing early on the lack of engagement and care they exhibit towards both their children and each other. This initial conflict sets the tone for a larger exploration of diaspora and the challenges it brings to relationships, both familial and romantic.

Lahiri probes into the themes of disconnection and lovelessness, portraying couples who lack affection and attentiveness towards one another, as well as parents who fail to show adequate care for their children. Her ability to render these complex emotional states with both charm and insight highlights her keen understanding of the difficulties inherent in American family life, particularly for those navigating the cultural tensions of diaspora.

The narrative of *Interpreter of Maladies* is centered on a journey that Mr. and Mrs. Das, along with their children, take from their hotel, Sandy Villa, to various sightseeing destinations, including Konark and Khandagiri, on a hot July Saturday. The sunny weather makes for ideal sightseeing conditions, but it also serves as a backdrop for the deeper emotional journey that unfolds within the family. Lahiri's use of both temporal and spatial elements adds layers of richness to the story, making the setting as much a part of the narrative as the characters themselves.

As the Das family embarks on their tour, Lahiri introduces a pivotal character, Mr. Kapasi, who serves as their guide. Mr. Kapasi, like many of Lahiri's characters, is a figure whose personal struggles reflect broader themes of longing, disconnection, and the search for meaning. Through his interactions with the Das family, particularly Mrs. Das, Lahiri explores the complexity of human psychology, examining how individuals seek out connections and understanding in the face of personal pain.

Lahiri masterfully builds tension as Mr. Kapasi's role in the story grows more significant. His position as a tour guide is symbolic, representing his dual role as an interpreter—not just of languages but of human emotions and the hidden realities of life. As the story unfolds, the reader realizes that Mr. Kapasi is, in many ways, trying to unlock the secrets of life for himself, even as he helps guide the Das family through their journey.

Lahiri's examination of human psychology, especially in moments leading up to significant revelations, often requires a close, personal connection between characters. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, this dynamic plays out as Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das engage in conversations that reveal their inner thoughts and feelings, creating a space where the truth can be unveiled. Lahiri carefully constructs the story so that these moments of revelation occur at the right time and place, enhancing the emotional impact of the narrative.



Lahiri, like many Bengalis, holds a deep appreciation for Odisha's landscapes, history, culture, tradition, folklore, and mythology. When the characters arrive at Konark around two-thirty, Lahiri directs them to explore the famous Sun Temple, a thirteenth-century architectural marvel. She dedicates three full pages to a detailed description of the temple, offering intricate information about its construction, historical significance, symbolic representations, and the teachings embedded within its stone carvings, photographs, and sculptures. This level of detail serves to immerse the reader fully in the cultural and historical richness of the temple, further anchoring the story in its Indian setting.

A 28-year-old woman, Mrs. Das, is portrayed as searching for a solution to her emotional ailment. She confesses that she no longer feels affection for her spouse or children and has lost her passion for life. Mr. Kapasi, upon hearing this, feels a profound sadness for her. Two types of remedies are presented in this scenario: on one hand, Mr. Kapasi has the ability to interpret hidden meanings for Mr. Das, offering his professional insight as a way to ease the psychological burden Mrs. Das has carried for eight years. On the other hand, Jhumpa Lahiri herself serves as an interpreter, aiming to reveal the deeper subject matter to her readers, particularly those who are skilled professionals in the medical or psychological fields. Lahiri positions herself as an exceptional storyteller who seeks to uncover these emotional layers, leaving room for the reader's interpretation and understanding of human suffering.

In *A Real Durwan*, the fourth story by Lahiri, the focus shifts to Boori Ma, a 64-year-old woman who works as a sweeper in a stairwell. After the partition of India and Pakistan, Boori Ma was forced to relocate to Calcutta. Through characters like Boori Ma, Lahiri includes a wide range of societal perspectives, ensuring that her stories reflect the experiences of individuals from various walks of life. Lahiri's characters are never marginalised or isolated; instead, she brings diverse individuals into her narratives to challenge the self-centered attitudes of society and evoke empathy for the marginalised, oppressed, and disadvantaged. This particular story explores the contrasting experiences of individuals during and after the partition, focusing on the struggle to adapt to new identities, locations, and environments in the pursuit of survival. The partition is depicted as a tumultuous period, one that leaves many individuals enduring severe hardships, often losing their homes, families, and connections. Boori Ma embodies this intense conflict and chaos, symbolising the emotional and physical toll of division and displacement.

In *Sexy*, the fifth story in Lahiri's book, the narrative opens with a conversation between Laxmi and Miranda, colleagues who work together in the fund-raising department of a public radio station in the United States. They spend their

days talking on the phone, and during one conversation, Laxmi shares a story about her cousin's husband. The cousin's husband, after boarding a flight from Delhi to Montreal, falls for another woman and disembarks with her at Heathrow, abandoning his wife and son. The plot develops around themes of infidelity and personal transformation, as Laxmi seeks advice from her cousin over the phone. Lahiri uses this story to explore the experiences of Indian individuals in America who, separated from their families, undergo personal changes in search of clarity and understanding. Through this lens, Lahiri seeks to interpret the human experience, particularly the suffering caused by emotional and familial discord.

The narrative probes into the destructive impact of extramarital affairs on family life. While such affairs might be seen as more common in American culture, Lahiri highlights how they erode traditional family values, which in Indian culture are regarded as sacred and enduring bonds. The novel shows how the dissolution of these bonds, through actions like infidelity, leads to personal suffering and the breakdown of family structures. Miranda's relationship with Dev, a Bengali man living in America with his wife, becomes central to the plot. As Miranda listens to Laxmi's conversations with her husband, she becomes more attuned to the theme of family unity, but at the same time, she is involved in her own romantic affair with Dev, who is married to another Indian woman. Lahiri uses Miranda's affair to further explore the theme of infidelity, particularly in the context of cross-cultural relationships.

Lahiri cleverly incorporates Bengal into the narrative not only by transporting Dev from Bengal but also by highlighting Bengal on a map shown in *The Economist* magazine, which Miranda observes. As an American writer with deep ancestral ties to India, Lahiri is fascinated by her heritage and continually revisits India as a source of inspiration for her stories. The recurring theme of Bengal reflects Lahiri's connection to her cultural roots and her ongoing exploration of how identity, place, and tradition shape the lives of her characters.

Jhumpa Lahiri's sixth story, *This Blessed House*, probes into the intricate dynamics of a love-hate relationship between a newly married couple, Sanjeev and Twinkle, who have recently relocated to a new home in Connecticut. Sanjeev, an engineer, has been transferred to a company near Hartford, while Twinkle, his young wife, becomes fascinated with their new home because of the Christian symbols, idols, and religious artifacts she keeps discovering in various rooms. Twinkle believes that the house is blessed by these Christian items, which contrast sharply with her Hindu background, and eagerly searches for more relics, exploring each room with curiosity. Lahiri introduces this theme of discovery in the opening sentence, with Twinkle's excited exclamation:

“Guess what I found” (136).

Through this narrative, Lahiri examines the theme of diasporic displacement, juxtaposing American and Indian identities, while also exploring the blending of religious beliefs from Hindu and Christian traditions. This merging of cultural and spiritual elements highlights the complex experiences of the Indian diaspora and reflects Lahiri’s broader aim of portraying the intricate intersections of identity and heritage in a transnational context.

In *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar*, Lahiri shifts her focus to another facet of the Indian experience. This eighth story presents a deeply emotional exploration of Bibi Haldar, a woman living on the outskirts of Calcutta, whose life has been marked by suffering and isolation due to a chronic illness. Bibi, the protagonist, is afflicted with epilepsy, a condition that has plagued her for twenty-nine years. Orphaned at a young age, Bibi now lives with her older cousin and his wife in a dilapidated four-story building. Lahiri carefully crafts Bibi’s character as a symbol of social marginalization and illness, drawing attention to the lack of support that individuals like her receive in traditional Indian society. Bibi’s story is not just about her physical ailment but also about the societal expectations placed upon women regarding marriage, dowry, and family. Lahiri uses this narrative to explore broader social issues, such as the stigma associated with illness, the role of superstition, and the pressures of arranged marriage. Through Bibi’s plight, Lahiri reflects on her own memories of Calcutta and the cultural, social, and religious beliefs that shape Indian society. Bibi’s story is an example of Lahiri’s ability to probe into unique and underrepresented aspects of life, showcasing her talent for uncovering the profound human struggles that are often overlooked in modern culture.

In *The Third and Final Continent*, the last story of the collection, Lahiri presents a story that epitomizes her diasporic experience and her exploration of national identity. This story is widely recognized as one of her most significant works, earning her the Pulitzer Prize in the United States. The title, *The Third and Final Continent*, clearly refers to America, the land where Lahiri and her characters ultimately settle. The story traces the journey of the narrator, a man from Calcutta, India, who migrates to England and eventually moves to the United States. This narrative offers readers a detailed portrayal of the immigrant experience, highlighting the cultural and geographical dislocation faced by the protagonist as he navigates life in unfamiliar territories.

Lahiri provides a deeply personal account of her family’s migration, beginning with her father’s experiences as a young man who travels from India to England in the 1960s. Her father, initially a librarian, eventually finds himself drawn to America, where he starts a new chapter of his life. The protagonist’s journey is

likened to that of an astronaut landing on the moon, a comparison that connects the narrator's experience of exploring a new land with the monumental event of the moon landing in 1969, which Lahiri notes was celebrated as a national holiday by President Nixon. Mrs. Croft, the protagonist's elderly landlady, serves as a symbolic figure of American pride, representing the admiration and reverence that the narrator feels for his new home. Through the interactions between the narrator and Mrs. Croft, Lahiri emphasizes the blending of identities that occurs when one navigates between different cultures and geographies.

The story is written in first-person narration, offering an intimate glimpse into the narrator's life and his father's journey. Lahiri's choice of narration suggests that this story is deeply autobiographical, even though she deliberately withholds specific details to prevent it from being seen as a direct reflection of her own life. Despite this, *The Third and Final Continent* contains clear parallels to Lahiri's personal experiences as the daughter of Indian immigrants, and the story serves as a tribute to her parents' resilience and adaptability in the face of cultural displacement.

The narrative begins with the protagonist's voyage to England as an unmarried man in search of education and stability. At the age of thirty-six, he marries and secures a job as a librarian at MIT, marking the start of his new life in America. The story highlights the challenges and triumphs of the immigrant experience, emphasizing the sense of achievement and belonging that the protagonist feels as he settles into his new life. Lahiri's portrayal of America as the "third and final continent" reflects her own feelings of connection to the country, which she views as both a new home and a continuation of her family's migratory journey.

Thus, Lahiri skillfully weaves together themes of diasporic dislocation, cultural identity, and personal transformation throughout her collection. As a conventional diaspora writer, she often grapples with feelings of confusion and detachment from her cultural roots. However, despite her attempts to assimilate into her new environment, she maintains a strong connection to her inherited traditions and customs. By creating a "third space" for herself, Lahiri ultimately embraces a hybrid identity that encompasses both her past and present experiences. Through her nuanced storytelling, she captures the complexities of navigating multiple cultural identities and establishes herself as a writer who is deeply attuned to the intricacies of the immigrant experience.

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