

EDITORIAL

This special issue of *Literary Cultures* explores questions of identity by engaging with literary texts from multiple locations and periods. Identity is difficult to define; for some, it might be a point of pride, something that's preserved from generation to generation. For others, rebelling against conventions of identity is necessary and, even in liberal society, this is often a point of conflict. In contexts where communities or individuals face oppression, however, identity has further resonances. In cultures that have been stripped of autonomy, forced into diaspora or otherwise persecuted, identity can be seen as a vital resource, an anchor to a heritage unwillingly left behind. In contexts such as slavery and indentured labour, individuals and communities are separated forcibly from markers of their identity: language, culture, tradition.

Reclaiming that identity, then, is a topic with many aspects to explore. With so many cultures grappling with their identity over periods spanning centuries, it might seem overwhelming to attempt to pinpoint common themes. But those parallels do exist, as motifs that connect the oppressed in a web of shared struggles and rare victories. This special issue attempts to make some of those connections, using Lainy Malkani's collection of historical short fiction *Sugar, Sugar* (2017) as a primary inspiration.

Sugar, Sugar presents a collection of stories describing the experiences of Indian migrant workers from a period spanning between the late 19th Century and the modern day. By providing a distinct juxtaposition between the historic and the contemporary, Malkani proves that the marks oppression leaves on identity are timeless. Themes span decades: shared conflicts can be found lurking within characters connected only by a vague ancestry, and the stain left by the titular crop is pervasive. The ideas that Malkani presents and the truths she unveils are the topics of many of this special issue's articles, which each attempt to use *Sugar, Sugar* as a tool to better understand the struggles of the oppressed in reclaiming a lost identity.

The first section of articles focus on *Sugar, Sugar* in particular, or the themes presented therein. Tom Curren's article, 'Defining Collective and Individual Memory', examines identity in two separate but interlinked halves: the collective, and the individual. By examining *Sugar, Sugar* alongside Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's ground-breaking Ugandan novel *Kintu* (2014), which deals with the contemporary effects of an ancient family curse, the article seeks to find the means to define collective and individual memory, their offshoots, and to offer ideas as to why these two crucial means of preserving identity last as long as they do. Similarly, Jas Ghuman's work is concerned with the marks that oppression leaves on the bodies of migrant slave workers. By outlining the ways in which identity might be preserved physically, and by describing the ways a system of oppression interacted with the bodies of individuals, the article dovetails to join *Sugar, Sugar's* themes with the wider context of slavery across history. Lastly Oliver Pratt's article combines the ideas of *Sugar, Sugar* with those of Nisei author Milton Muruyama. Using Muruyama's celebrated *All I Asking For Is My Body* (1975) as a touchstone, the article presents ideas related to the economic and political impact of diaspora and its existence within colonial infrastructures. The article uses examples from both texts to forge links between colonialism, diaspora and the individual, as well as the work of Marxist scholars: György Lukács is represented, as is radical political thinker Frantz Fanon. Pratt argues that postcolonial diaspora is a cog in the machine of capitalism, and considers the marks it left on individuals on its way there.

The second section of articles all consider the ways in which other literary texts provide further insight into identity in its many forms. Jacques Issartel analyses the works of Alan Sillitoe – including the celebrated, Nottingham-set *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) – to explain self-identity's place inside a larger political structure. By examining the subversive nature Sillitoe imbues into his characters, Issartel argues that their shared identification with the working class unwittingly ties them together; and convincingly explains how this left-wing collective fits into the political spectrum by contrasting it with Marxist and libertarian ideologies. Next, Michael Corlett examines identity through a psychoanalytical reading of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, to examine the effects of an individual's sexual orientation on their self-identity. Corlett considers factors both internal and external as he seeks to provide insight into society's often oppressive relationship with sexuality, providing contrasts between biological and psychological approaches to the subject. In a similar vein, Courtney Long's article 'Sexuality in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*' offers an analysis of the character of Clarissa, examining how her representation within the novel reflects themes of domestic oppression in the 1920's. Arguing that sexuality in *Mrs Dalloway* is continually repressed, the article provides compelling evidence that the novel challenged commonly held ideas of the time that would later be developed throughout the Modernist movement.

American Pulitzer Prize winner Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) is the central text in two articles, the first being Emma Wood's analysis of domestic violence and its representation in literature. This piece argues that violence, particularly within relationships, is often catalysed by a loss of an individual's identity. The argument develops to provide convincing evidence for the complexity of many abusive relationships, explaining how the power dynamic between two individuals can have adverse effects in both directions, rather than just on the abused. Here, the concept of identity is considered, culminating in an examination of how the character of Sethe loses, and then regains, her self-identity. Amanda Walker's article also focuses on *Beloved*. This time, the novel is used to unearth details about the preservation of memory. The article examines how memory might exist spiritually and physically, internally and externally, drawing relationships between corporal evidence of memory, like scars, and the mental baggage they embody. Walker also considers the inanimate representations of memory that appear throughout the novel, and how they relate metaphorically to the struggles that shape the character's identities.

Finally, four analytical reviews consider how identity is conveyed across two different artistic mediums. Jacques Issartel and Georgia Cunningham both review Jim Goldberg's Photography exhibition *Rich and Poor*, displayed at Nottingham Contemporary in Autumn 2017, while Courtney Long writes on Bill Owen's collection *Suburbia*, displayed as part of the same exhibition. Issartel analyses several of the captions that accompany the pictures, providing context to the snapshots that he considers to be useful and intimate representations of historical America. Cunningham's focus is on the visual content of *Rich and Poor*, analysing how the photographs, when viewed in conjunction with Goldberg's accompanying comments, help enlighten viewers about the identities of the individuals they depict. Cunningham finds surprising links between the oppression of the poor and the loneliness of the rich, leading her review to conclude on Goldberg's mastery of empathetic imagery. Long's article reflects upon Owen's interest in individuals, finding value in his ability to present a diverse range of themes via his subjects and the comments they authored to accompany his work. Lastly, Oliver Arnold examines how Alice Walker's

meditative novel *Meridian* presents a link between individual identity and the struggle to enact social change. His review examines the internal conflict Walker conveys within her titular character, and how the outcome of this struggle impacts *Meridian's* external struggle for social change.

Reclaiming Identity seeks to cover a wide spectrum of topics, tying everything together via its central theme. We hope to prove that issues pertaining to identity are timeless, providing useful and enlightening analysis that both builds on existing discussions and serves as catalysts for new ones.