The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture · Vol 18.2 · June 2025 · 23-58.
DOI: 10.30395/WSR.202506_18(2).0002

Patriarchy, Intimacy, and Confession in Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy*❖

*Kaochen Liao**

ABSTRACT

Hanif Kureishi's novella *Intimacy* (1998) is a first-person confessional writing that presents the protagonist Jay's decision to leave his children and their mother—his partner Susan. Jay loses enthusiasm for Susan since he cannot bear the stagnation of their life. Even though he still loves the children, Jay wants to leave Susan and be with the seemingly docile Nina. Although Kureishi's monologue style makes explicit Jay's dissatisfaction with Susan, so that his decision to leave does not have much suspense, his feelings for children, thinking about intimacy, varied comments on female characters, and reflections on his male friends' intimacies make this novel highly complicated. Some critics have criticized Jay for his masculine selfishness, misogyny, and anti-feminism, or even equated Jay with Kureishi, who also left his ex-girlfriend. Others have focused on Jay's contradictory traits—his courage to confess and leave home, and his selfish, cruel, and immature attitude. This paper explores the interlocking relationship between Jay's intimacy and confessional writing in terms of the lingering structure of patriarchy. The author believes that labeling Jay as a misogynist or a hero does not explain what is wrong with his masculinities and why masculinity, not femininity, is the crux of his intimacy problems. Through the study of entanglements between masculinities and patriarchy, the author believes that male dominance, identification and centeredness may be the reason why some men are impotent in intimacy and must rely on confessional writing to regain their self/power. Through studies of confessional writing and intimacy, gender differences and patriarchy will be revealed from Jay's narratives, thus showing the interlocking relationship between patriarchal masculinity, intimacy, and confessional writing. This paper explores how Jay becomes a victim/perpetrator of patriarchy, and why his confessional writing and home-leaving reaffirms his old self and conducts him into a

❖ This research is subsidized by National Science and Technology Council in Taiwan (Project Number: NSTC 112-2410-H-431-002 -). The author thanks anonymous reviewers for their constructive opinions, as well as research assistants for their hard work.

* Received: July 26, 2023; Accepted: June 26, 2024

Kaochen Liao, Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Fo Guang University, Taiwan (kaochen.liao@gmail.com).

patriarchal society where he finds his path of least resistance through embracing male-centered values.

KEYWORDS: patriarchy, masculinity, intimacy, confession, Hanif Kureishi

庫雷西《親密關係》中的父權、親密關係與自白

廖高成*

摘　要

庫雷西的中篇小說《親密關係》（1998）是一部第一人稱的自白書寫，講述了主角傑伊離開他的孩子和他們的母親——他的伴侶蘇珊的決定。傑伊因無法忍受他們生活的停滯而對蘇珊失去了熱情。儘管他仍然愛著孩子們，但傑伊想要離開蘇珊，與看似溫順的妮娜在一起。雖然庫雷西的獨白風格明確表達了傑伊對蘇珊的不滿，使得他離開的決定沒有太多懸念，但他對孩子的感情、對親密關係的思考、對女性角色的各種評論以及對男性朋友親密關係的反思，使這部小說變得非常複雜。一些評論家批評傑伊的男性自私、厭女和反女性主義，甚至將傑伊與同樣離開前女友的庫雷西等同起來。其他人則關注傑伊的矛盾特徵——他有勇氣坦白和離家，但同時也表現出自私、殘忍和不成熟的態度。本文試圖從父權結構的延續來探討傑伊的親密關係和自白書寫環環相扣的關係。筆者認為，將傑伊標籤為厭女者或英雄並不能解釋他的男性氣質出了什麼問題，也不能解釋為什麼男性氣質，而非女性氣質是傑伊親密關係問題的核心。通過男性氣質和父權制彼此糾葛的研究，作者認為男性支配、認同男性與男性中心可能是一些男性在親密關係中無能為力，必須依靠自白書寫來重獲自我／權力的原因。通過對自白書寫和親密關係的研究，性別差異和父權制將從傑伊的敘述中揭示出來，從而展示父權體制下環環相扣的男性氣質、親密關係和自白書寫。本文探討了傑伊如何成為父權制的受害者/加害者，以及為什麼他的自白書寫和離家出走重新確認了他舊有的自我，

* 本文 112 年 7 月 26 日收件；113 年 6 月 26 日審查通過。
廖高成，佛光大學外國語文學系教授 (kaochen.liao@gmail.com)。

並將他塑造成一個父權社會中的角色。在這個社會中，他通過擁抱男性中心的價值找到了最小阻力的道路。

關鍵詞：父權制、男性氣質、親密關係、自白、庫雷西

Hanif Kureishi's novella *Intimacy* (1998) takes the form of confessional writing, presenting the protagonist Jay's struggle to leave his children and their mother—his partner Susan. Jay, a withdrawn but successful playwright, and Susan, a shrewd worker in a publishing house, were unmarried and living together with two children. Such a relationship may have been their ideal after the sexual revolution of the sixties, freeing each other from the shackles of marriage, but now Jay has lost enthusiasm for Susan and cannot bear the quiet stagnation of their lives. Even though he still loves his children, Jay wants to leave Susan to be with the seemingly docile Nina. The night before he leaves, he thinks about his two friends: Asif, who believes that marriage is supposed to be something to maintain, and Victor, who left his wife to date a younger woman and ended up living alone.

Intimacy caused a lot of controversy when it was published. Kureishi's ex-partner, Tracey Scoffield, accused him of exposing their lives. She said that calling *Intimacy* a novel is "total hypocrisy. You may as well call it a fish" (qtd. in Thomas 140). Like Jay, Kureishi left Schofield and his twins to live with a young woman, Monique Proudlove. Susan and Jay's occupations are almost the same as those of the author and Scoffield. As Bart Moore-Gilbert relates, Kureishi's failed relationship "received a lot of unfavorable media coverage which, it could be argued, unfairly influenced the reception of much of his subsequent work, particularly *Intimacy* and *Sleep with Me*" (153). Jay's unreserved distaste for Susan adds fuel to the fire, making it easier for reviewers to think he was a misogynist or an anti-feminist. This politically incorrect, overly autobiographical novel has therefore aroused great moral controversy.

Hostile reviews of this novella often appeared after its publication, when Kureishi's case of leaving his ex-partner for another woman was still fresh to his critics. David Sexton classifies *Intimacy* as a case of misogyny, just like John Updike's *Towards the End of Time* (1997), Howard Jacobson's *No More Mr. Nice Guy* (1998), and Tim Park's *Europa* (1997). He claims that these authors, who once did not appear to hate women at all, "have stopped bothering to mask their underlying feelings" (qtd. in Thomas 140). Jay's statement that "there are some fucks for which a person would have their partner and children drown in a freezing sea," along with his distaste for his mom and Susan, proves his misogyny in Sexton's understanding (Kureishi 96). With Jay's belief that "the world is a skirt I want to lift up" (Kureishi 21), Sexton regards him as "simply obsessed with sex" (qtd. in Thomas 140). Laura

Cumming saw the book as more pathological than intimate. To her, Susan is the exploited wife who is presented as a "bitch." Even though Jay claims he wants absolute honesty, Cumming sees him as malicious. His words and deeds show that he felt no real sadness about leaving Susan, and his "self-reproach" was always associated with "self-admiration."

Criticisms did more justice to this book when the furor against Kureishi declined, especially in books of Kureishian studies. Susie Thomas thinks Jay's statement that some people would let their partners and children drown in a freezing sea is "non-gender-specific and therefore cannot be regarded as misogyny" as claimed by Sexton (141). She suspects that

> what [Sexton] most dislikes is not misogyny in itself but the possibility that he might be mistaken for a misogynist. Jay is one character, in whom some men may recognize certain aspects of themselves, but he is not representative of all men. (141)

Finding that Jay's life does not fully parallel Kureishi's, Bart Moore-Gilbert classifies this novella into the genre of a testimonial that speaks to the contemporary crisis of masculinity, and "might thus be taken as partial corroboration of certain 'post-feminist' works" (179). While Jay's attitudes to women are often "vengefully misogynistic or transparently adolescent," *Intimacy* "can be read as a reassertion of traditional forms of patriarchal masculinity," or conversely, an "ironic vision of contemporary masculinity" that "in fact corroborates feminist ideas" (174).

Ruvani Ranasinha and Bradley Buchanan also excavate Jay's masculine perspectives or shortcomings. As Ranasinha finds out, Jay is not "interested in Susan's perspective" and his failure to "demonize" Susan is "crucial to his characterization," making Susan "a far more likeable character" (109). *Intimacy* can be read "as pure irony," a "dissection and exposure of Jay's narcissism and self-justification, a satire of selfish, cruel and immature men" (110). Though Kureishi actually

> maps relationships between a confused generation of men [after the 1960s] and their more capable and pragmatic female partners, which may appear to reflect female empowerment, he constrains

> women, "allowing" their male partners to be wayward and immature. (112)

Apart from analyzing Jay's hypocrisy in class and unwillingness to take care of his sons, Buchanan criticizes his "bias against women" and the "bitter anti-feminism" surrounding descriptions of "his wife Susan" (81). These discriminations intensify with Jay's "sense of his vulnerability to Susan's domineering yet demanding nature" (82).

There are still critics who praise Kureishi's contribution without focusing on Jay's masculinity. Amitava Kumar backdrops this novella with Kureishi's view on marriage. Since it "seems to be the central institution of the West," "[m]ost of the great novels of the West are about sexual desire— . . . marriage and adultery" (159). No exception to those great novelists, Kureishi attempts to write "about how painful it is when a marriage falls apart" in *Intimacy* (159). Kumar finds that there is a "disturbing closeness that lies between the intimacy of the act of love and, on the other hand, the intimacy of the act of infidelity" (159). Therefore, "Kureishi's lucid lesson is that our desires . . . are inextricably bound in conflict. . . . [It is not] a case of choosing between promiscuity and commitment. Rather, we learn our choices are threatened by, and even drawn toward, their opposites" (162). Whenever one chooses commitment or freedom, love or infidelity, s/he starts to desire its opposite.

There seems to be no final solution for the ambivalence of desire that brings about marriage and infidelity. Michael Perfect's book chapter on Kureishi positively evaluates the action of abandonment, hence providing a solution to Kumar's paradox of desire. Perfect finds "[a]bandonment and departure are often portrayed as necessary for personal development and maturation in Kureishi's work" (12), and *Intimacy* comes up with "a determination to affirm the possibility of a kind of existential rebirth following abandonment" (13). Placing *Intimacy* with other of Kureishi's works, ethnic or not, Perfect concludes that "central to Kureishi's work is the notion that *all* individuals—and indeed *cultures themselves—must* remain on the move, developing through a process of continual abandonment," and that "the experience of living *within* a contemporary multicultural society should . . . be a kind of migration" (19).

Recent journal papers on *Intimacy* rarely focus on Jay's masculine traits that disturb his intimacy. Considering Jay as a "postmodern happiness-seeker"

who prefers "instant pleasures" to "long-lasting engagement" (70), and also aware of his helplessness "in relationships with independent, self-sufficient women as he no longer knows what his role in them should be" (72), Petr Chalupský argues "the novella offers . . . a hopeful belief in love and humanity" rather than "providing a hateful perspective on femininity" (61). Likewise, Ana-Blanca Ciocoi-Pop affirms a common lesson in Jay's struggle, which reflects "the eternal plight of the human soul, caught between the painfulness of duty and the irresistible call of passion" (83). Karam Nayebpour and Mustafa Zeki Cirakli also attend to universality in *Intimacy* via their Lacanian exploration of Jay's insatiable desire. Since Jay's desire "acts in relation to the other, beyond language, law, and reality," his satisfaction "seems possible only in protracted fantasy" (51). These authors seldom delve into different gender traits among characters, even when the idea of patriarchy and the post-feminist era is mentioned by Chalupský.

The above criticisms mainly focus on Jay's masculinity (in crisis) and the novella's genre as a male testimonial (confession), or explore fundamental issues such as desire and the ethical significance of abandonment. Many of them surprisingly leave intimacy, an idea widely addressed by humanist/sociological scholars, untouched. Also, patriarchy and confession are usually taken for granted rather than anatomized in their complications regarding *Intimacy*. That is why these studies, despite being rich in insights, leave many questions answered. If this book is pathological, as Cumming claims, rather than a general representation of intimate relations, why would Sexton take it as a description of all men, or fear being deemed a misogynist himself as Thomas suggests? After all, pathology is widely regarded as an abnormal or exceptional state. Also, Sexton does not consider whether or why these male novelists change their opinions on women in different life stages, as if misogyny is essentially innate.

Moore-Gilbert comes up with "patriarchal masculinity" as a salient concept yet does not define it at all. After all, it is difficult to imagine a traditional patriarchal man feeling so subordinated and suffocated in his family that he would exchange a cozy house and children for a buddy's tiny room. Recognizing *Intimacy* as post-feminist, he might as well discuss whether patriarchy does vanish in a post-feminist era. Ranasinha's observation of Kureishi's ironic rendition of a narcissistic, selfish, and immature man is sharp, yet why his meditation and struggle only result in "'older' forms of male selfishness" may need more theoretical excavation, especially regarding the

historic and gendered dimension of selfishness (111). As for Buchanan's criticism of Jay's "bias against women" (81), he seems to ignore that Jay does not look down upon every woman, including Susan. It is also difficult to label Jay as antifeminist as Buchanan and some critics do, for the only time Jay mentions anything about feminism is to negate Susan as a feminist. Except for "Susan's domineering yet demanding nature" (82), she is strangely not discussed in terms of gender, personal or social background by the above critics, including her attitude toward Jay. Kumar and Perfect's focus on desire and abandonment, though ontologically and ethically illuminating, does not explain why some people still enjoy the monogamy Jay deems oppressive. Nor do the two critics relate desire and abandonment to the masculinity that shapes Jay's worldview and intimacy.

To answer the questions left by critics of *Intimacy* over two decades, the text and context, as well as the form and content of this novella, need to be re-examined. Neoliberalism, Thatcherism, and global consumerism compose the socio-historical backdrop of this novella written in the 1990s. Those economic changes, with new media technologies, have transmitted cultural and material products and ideologies worldwide, mutually reinforcing new identities and lifestyles, such as cultural hybridity, homosexuality, and prolonged adolescence. Long-lasting marriage has become more and more difficult to achieve with the rise of individual hedonism hailed by consumerism. Taking enjoyment as the main creed of life, some resist growing up and taking on adult responsibilities to settle down, commit to a partner, or have children.

When it comes to gender, the 1990s witnessed the impact of feminism on men and women in an acclaimed post-feminist era. While women may have found more possibilities in their emancipation, some men experienced a crisis of masculinity as they competed with women in public and were required to devote more to caring in private. However, to say that gender traits are no longer binarized or that feminist goals have been achieved is a myth, as "there can never be a 'post-feminist' era" as long as women still face discrimination and inequality (Whitehead and Barrett 5). The masculinity crisis could also be a myth as far as gender inequality is concerned. Social, economic, and technological changes do not fundamentally transform men, or "the notion of masculinity as we know it today would not exist anymore" (Segal 19). In popular culture, there is still "a flourishing of nostalgia for the 'old order' of babes, breasts and uncomplicated relationships" that delimit the feminine ideal

(Whelehan 178). Resultantly, even though "the situation of women has been considerably improved and . . . some men have adopted a pro-feminist attitude, the majority of heterosexual couples still live their lives based on the traditional division of labour" (Ochsner 76).

Regarded as misogynistic by Sexton, *Towards the End of Time*, *No More Mr. Nice Guy*, and *Europa* did not appear in the 1990s by chance. Male protagonists grappling with their identities and societal expectations in these novels also appeared in works studied by Andrea Ochsner's *Lad Trouble: Masculinity and Identity in the British Male Confessional Novel of the 1990s*. She explores structures of obsessions, non-commitments, and prolonged adolescence as exemplary young adult masculinities in the 1990s, with novels such as Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy*, Tony Parsons's *Man and Boy*, and Mike Gayle's *Mr Commitment*. While male characters in her study struggle with their professional and personal life, resulting in their inadequacy and self-pity, women in these novels often appear more stable and self-confident than their sexual counterparts. The confessing male protagonists therefore both accuse and excuse themselves: accuse the social changes and women around themselves and consequently apologize for their misdeeds.[1] These masculine traits are also well illustrated in Jay's confessions, when he feels inadequate in his failures to deal with a shrewd partner and have a lifelong partnership with Susan. The sweeping victory of consumerism and neoliberalism further adds insult to injury for Jay, since he, unlike characters in Kureishi's early works, is unable to find energy in criticizing Thatcher in the world she creates. His masculine unease in intimacy hence magnifies, immersing him more in sexual obsessions and yearnings for his (post-1960s) adolescent hedonism than Kureishi's early young heroes.

This paper pays attention to how the uneven structure/power of gender, usually not fathomed enough or even ignored by the above critics, permeates patriarchy, intimacy, and confessions in this novella. In so doing Jay's confession and intimacy could be seen as greatly infiltrated by patriarchy and masculinity. Labeling Jay as a misogynist or a hero who dares to leave neither explains the root of his masculinity in crisis nor answers why masculinity, not

[1] The confessional novels Ochsner studies are not devoid of positive plots or portrayals of male characters. Some protagonists mature when they find employment, reconcile with former lovers, raise a child on their own, or undergo significant changes in their outlook on life. In comparison to these narratives, Jay's relatively static attitude toward intimacy and selfhood stands out more prominently and warrants both structural and personal examination.

femininity, becomes the crux of the problems bothering characters in this story. Through the study of patriarchy, I argue that sex/gender binary, the construction of masculinity that alienates men from the complicated working of intimacy, and the dependence of men on the symbolic order of language contribute to Jay's reliance on confessional writing to regain his self/power. This paper is divided into three parts hereafter. First, I introduce Allan G. Johnson's study of patriarchy as the structuring power that would further orient Jay's intimacy and confession. Recognizing our patriarchal society as male-centered, dominated, and identified, with control as its core value, illuminates Jay's masculinity and its crisis more clearly than just considering it a response to the rise of women's power and feminism. Second, Anthony Giddens's sociological studies and historical periodization of intimacy will be one of my major theoretical kits in the analysis of Jay's intimate relations, since heterosexual love, deeply embedded in patriarchy and represented in Jay's confession, is the ultimate concern both for the protagonist and Giddens. As Jay and Susan's failed intimacy will be examined mainly via Gidden's contributions, Johnson's findings will still be useful in compensation for Giddens's insufficiency in detailing the patriarchal impact on intimacy.

Finally, Michel Foucault's studies of confession in terms of power, knowledge, and sexuality help deconstruct Jay's desire to liberate himself from an oppressive regime through his first-person narrative. Attempting to find the truth of sex(uality) via confession, Jay is enmeshed in a patriarchy that not only privileges men at the expense of women's subordination, but also delimits his possibilities with heteronormative masculinity. This paper hence argues that Jay's inability to decipher the workings of patriarchy constrains him in masculine imagination that further victimizes others. His confession, as a result, is a self-justified masculine heroism that praises individual desire rather than altruistic love, which reflects a pursuit of impossible satisfaction in postmodern capitalism at the expense of realizing other possibilities of intimacy.

I. Patriarchy and Masculinity (in Crisis)

As Jay, a screenwriter and hence an intellectual who lives through the second wave of feminism, is taken as a misogynist and anti-feminist, with problematic and even toxic masculinities, an excavation of patriarchy becomes indispensable before discussions of Jay's intimacy and confession can begin.

Patriarchy is a social system in which privileges and advantaged positions are largely owned by men. As an anthropological term it refers to families led by the eldest male, and in our current culture largely influenced by feminism, patriarchy is related to the broad social structure in which men dominate women and children, bringing about discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. In response to this term, men are likely to negate themselves as supporters of this social constitution, in the way that Sexton negates himself as being like Jay. Actually "*not* a way of saying 'men'," patriarchy is "a kind of society in which men and women participate," and the society is "more than a collection of people" (Johnson 5). Johnson takes the figure of the patriarchal tree to illustrate how individuals are different from society yet still connected to it. Individuals, mainly characterized as men and women, are leaves on the branches in which they participate in patriarchy, including "[g]roups, organizations, communities, families . . ., etc." (18). The branches are grown from larger institutions as the trunk consists of institutions of economy and state, which are further grown from "core principles of masculine control, male dominance, male identification, and male centeredness" as the roots of patriarchy (17). The very idea of male or female individuals is created when we are socialized, and to keep our deeds "safe from scrutiny" and be accepted by other people, our "conscious and unconscious choices" are guided by the social systems as seemingly the only possible reality through "paths of least resistance" (30). In this way, individuals and social systems strengthen each other and make a patriarchal society difficult to remove.

Characters in *Intimacy*, traditional or not, all participate in a patriarchal society that is "more than a collection of people" and that "promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women" (Johnson 5). Patriarchy is "male dominated in that positions of authority—political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic—are generally reserved for men," and hence "men can claim larger shares of income and wealth," and "shape culture in ways that reflect and serve men's collective interests" (Johnson 6). Working on "adaptations and original scripts for television and the cinema" (Kureishi 41), Jay is the one to control "the content of films and television shows." He probably claims "larger shares of income and wealth" than Susan and Nina, or he would not complain that Susan wastes his money on anti-aging cream and have money to give or

lend to Nina. Men's economic, social, and cultural dominance make them and their social positions superior to women's. Be it an ironical representation or support of patriarchal masculinity, Jay's and Kureishi's voices are more likely to be heard via this confession than their ex-partners, paralleling the fact that Tracey Scoffield would not have been well-known were she not once involved with Kureishi. As literary canons are mostly written by men, a male writer like Jay/Kureishi has the fame that Susan/Scoffield is unable to gain either as a worker in publishing or a hardworking mother. Susan's thoughts on Jay are marginalized in this novella, while the highly controversial *Intimacy* still wins its author economic and cultural capital that undesignedly consolidates male dominance.

Men's dominance is also supported by their immunity from being blamed for inadequacy in works traditionally done by women. "When a woman finds her way into higher positions, people tend to be struck by the exception to the rule and wonder how she'll measure up against a man" (Johnson 6). Yet "men's failure to measure up [in devalued domestic and other caring work] can be interpreted as a sign of superiority, a trained incapacity that actually protects their privileged status" (6). The marginalization and unimportance of domestic works and caring further show the closeness between male dominance and male identification, the latter showing "what is considered good, desirable, preferable, or normal are culturally associated with how we think about men, manhood, and masculinity" (7). For example, the idea of a career is defined as an achievement of a male career in the public space, with a wife at home to ensure "there is a safe, clean, comfortable haven for rest and recuperation from the stress of the competitive male-dominated world" (7). No wonder Jay says, "[t]here is no doubt that I have an aversion to shopping, housework, washing. Somehow I expect all that to be done without my having thought about it" (Kureishi 67). For Jay and even Susan, male-identified value in patriarchy is taken for granted when it comes to Jay's attractiveness. Jay is "Successful and well-off," a "catch" because he "was offered a lot of work" for script writing rather than housekeeping. Therefore Susan "has been proud of [him] . . . to give a woman gravity and light," which makes Jay imagine "she would rather have a busted, broken-backed relationship than nothing at all" (Kureishi 62). Jay's male-identified superiority allows him to assume "a subordinate position" in private relations—one that does not "put women off." However, as he admits,

"when I [Jay] had these women, I never quite knew what to do with them" (Kureishi 45).

Women are not entirely devalued despite men and masculinity being the norm. While women are "often prized for their beauty as objects of male sexual desire," for instance, they are tamed and controlled in ways men favor and are finally devalued (Johnson 7). Feminism and gender studies have long discussed how women are identified either as Mother, the ultimate caregiver, or as beauty, men's sexual objects. This is echoed by Kureishi's two screen scripts entitled *The Mother* and *Venus*. Such sentimentalization and romanticization have "little effect on how women are regarded and treated on a day-to-day basis" (7). Women usually find they are expected to remain "in a few narrow areas of life like 'caring' occupations and personal relationships" in male-identified patriarchy (8). Jay is attracted by Susan's "humdrum dexterity and ability to cope" at first (Kureishi 29), yet "the more powerful a woman is under patriarchy, the more 'unsexed'. In other words, in a patriarchal culture, power looks sexy on men but not on women" (Johnson 8). Although Jay has never "seen her girlish" (Kureishi 27), in day-to-day cohabitation, Susan's capability more and more violates Jay's favoring of female tenderness when he occasionally enjoys "her enthusiasm" for their children as a guarantee of her femininity (12). This further attests that Jay or Kureishi is more male-identified than a misogynist. Jay specifies his distaste against the very character of Susan since she is unable to flame his curiosity, making Sexton's accusation of Kureishi's undisguised misogyny untenable. That Jay claims Susan is just "bad-tempered" rather than a "feminist" also shows he cannot tolerate an unfeminine woman *in intimacy* rather than women in general or women in other relations. "[E]ffective, organized" (27), "straightforward and firm" and capable of anatomizing Thatcherism in-depth, Susan would only be sexy if she were a man in a patriarchal worldview (29). Jay's reactions to Susan result from his male-identified illusion of a female lover that only Nina could satisfy. No wonder he compensates for his envy of Susan's capability with the patriarchal criteria for women: "After I'm gone there will be devastation. A lone middle-aged woman with kids doesn't have much cachet, and Susan is always aware of her status" (62). Women shall naturally stay with the children after a failed heterosexual relationship in the patriarchal ideology, and their value will be further greatly scarred by their motherhood and age, ironically, as the penalty for spending time with and caring for their male partners.

Male identification is entangled with male-centeredness, "which means that the focus of attention is primarily on men and boys and what they do" (Johnson 10). For a man like Jay, domestic labor or raising children is not their major concern. He feels no shame in criticizing how many things Susan buys and the tasks she does for her family, yet dares not to talk with her. He does not sound positive about Susan's feminine desire "to please," which is the reason why "young women," rather than him, "are so suitable for the contemporary working world" (Kureishi 29). Ironically, what Jay needs most is for Susan to please him. To please implies a certain degree of intention to care for others, which sharply contrasts with Jay's self/male-centeredness. Being accused of lack of application by Susan and his teachers, Jay believes his mind is "always concentrated—on something that interests it. Skirts and jokes and cricket and pop" (52).

Men's thoughts are Jay's only possible source of knowledge endorsed by male-centered patriarchy. As a scriptwriter and an intellectual Jay has a busy "internal life," and the thinkers, historians, playwrights, and musicians he mentions are without exception male. Except for a photograph of his two boys, John Lennon's autographed picture is a "definite" for Jay to leave his house (Kureishi 99). This, unsurprisingly, parallels the fact that "every monotheistic patriarchal religion worships a male-identified God gendered as masculine" (Johnson 10). An idol, a god, or a thinker who provides spiritual guidance is a man because our patriarchal society serves men's needs. Lamenting that "general culture isn't getting [him] anywhere tonight," leaving him in "loneliness and longing" on the last night before his leave, the only ethics Jay mentions is Aristotle's, which is not directly related to his troubled intimacy with a woman (43). To solve his problem, Jay would rather consult his male friends rather than any female characters. He would rather make a novella-length confession than read any books on how to deal with intimacy, especially those written by women, as if women's feelings and thoughts are not only unrelated to his heterosexual relations but not existent at all in what he calls "general culture." This does not imply that Jay is hostile to feminism. Living through the second wave of feminism, he shares chores and child-caring with Susan in a changing society, yet his male-centeredness hinders him from seeing through his male privilege and taking "feminine" works as the core task in his life. Feminism, mentioned only once in this novella, has little to do with his worldview, philosophical system, and private life.

Male-centered patriarchy also orients Jay's relationship with his children. He does care about his two boys, especially when they satisfy his nostalgia for lost innocence and his love for amazement. Jay is still a child in need of caring and attention. He believes he belongs to "the children of innocent consumerism and the inheritors of the freedoms won by our seditious elders in the late sixties" (Kureishi 58). His ideal form of love—fondness of the new—resembles his children who "[chuck] aside the once-cherished to drag out what they need to keep themselves interested" (57). Identifying his boys with himself, Jay even "feel[s] sorry for the children, having to stay here with her," when there is no hint to show any dissatisfaction of his children toward Susan (95). Jay is more like Susan's own child, fond of playing with his two boys/brothers, than her partner. He rarely concerns himself about their education, daily schedule, and future. His attempt to leave Susan reminds him of his escape from home in boyhood, and his reluctance to go to therapy with Susan is depicted as "feeling like a child being taken to the doctor by an impatient mother" (75).

It is patriarchal male-centeredness that turns women into men's reflections and caregivers. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf sees that women often serve as "looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (35). This is because men "are affirmed through what they accomplish," and women are affirmed "less for what they accomplish than for their ability to empathize and mirror others as they form and maintain personal relationships" (Johnson 12). Men's requirement of attention ("See me!") evacuates men's sense of their very own selves. "As a result, patriarchal expectations that place men at the center paradoxically perch men just a short drop away from feeling that they are not at the center—and, therefore, on some level, that they don't exist at all" (Johnson 13). Jay needs women and their attention to attest to his existence. He calls Nina "my refuge, my pocket of light" (Kureishi 101). When Nina "came into the room in high heels, a suspender belt, . . . and the pearl earrings [Jay] bought her," he waved at himself in the mirror to enjoy his happiness and epiphanies (74). Nina as a precious object of desire customized by his gifts guarantees Jay's value. Contrarily, when "Nina became distant or sharp, I was convinced she was permanently detaching herself from me" (17). This illustrates that "men are vulnerable to feeling left out and neglected" when their "reflection is obscured by the reality and demands of women's own lives" (Johnson 12). The more the middle-aged Jay deteriorates in organic function or

appearance, the more he needs a beautiful and submissive woman in love to make up for his deficiencies and replace him in the spotlight. Likewise, Jay intentionally stops "approaching Susan [for sex], to see whether . . . she desires [him]" (Kureishi 64). He even says "if she lets me fuck her here, now, on the floor, I won't leave" (108). Susan fails to meet Jay's unsaid anticipations since she has "distracting lives of [her] own in spite of [her] training to keep men at the center of attention." (13). This explains why Nina, with a younger body and more leisure than Susan, is Jay's current preference.

An "obsession with control," Johnson argues, is the "fourth characteristic of patriarchy" and "a core value around which social and personal life are organized" (13). Control endows men with privileged self, worth, well-being, and a sense of safety. It also disconnects men from others, men and women alike, since control "involves a relationship between controller and controlled" (14). Women also need control, like the way Susan manages her house and family, yet men's control is more related to themselves than to the welfare of others. The "idea and practice of control as a core principle of social life is part of what defines patriarchal *man*hood, not womanhood, and so women are discouraged from pursuing it and criticized if they do" (14). Susan "has guided [Jay] out of confusion before" (Kureishi 64), but her "busy mind" that handles every aspect of the family is now discomforting and suffocating to Jay (47). Refusing to be under Susan's control, he ironically "preferred [Nina] not to go out, and soon blamed her for having any life apart from me, which I considered an infidelity" (71). Jay upholds his male freedom of promiscuity yet denies it to his mistress. With a workroom outside, a freelance lifestyle, a mistress, and fewer chores than Susan, Jay is more in control of his life than his partner, despite his claims of feeling weak to "enable [Susan] to feel strong" (29). His flight from Susan to Nina is to regain his identity as a controller of intimacy. Paradoxically, Jay's obedience to his wayward desire, based on male privileges, is for control. It is because of his male privilege—his fortune, cultural status, and immunity from pregnancy—that he believes "love and women's bodies . . . are at the center of everything worth living for" (106). He is thus able to take Nina, his inferior in class and culture, to "restaurants and parties, to openings and exhibitions," and takes "pleasure in her pleasure" because he is in control in this relationship, with his pleasure as the ultimate goal (100).

Such a male-centered or phallic desire to control also vividly shows in an episode of Jay's masturbation. Before masturbation, he sticks his whole penis

into Susan's anti-aging unguent. In doing so he reclaims his control of not only the money he spends on the family, but the symbolic Susan since the cream is used on her face. Also, Jay does this in the hope that his penis will regain its former vitality and have a strong urine stream like his sons, which dimly implies his longing for a strong phallic capability to control more women's climaxes. This can be evidenced by the fact that, during this self-abuse, he recalls his fingers pushing inside Nina to "control" her (Kureishi 90). The way Jay becomes an aesthete in choosing which of Susan's knickers to use for masturbation further illustrates that neither Susan nor Nina as a concrete individual is his love object (though ironically Jay says he believes in individualism). They become meaningful only when they cater to his desire for love or sex. His theory that "one should masturbate before considering any woman seriously" is not just to discover "if one wants her for sex, or whether there is anything more" (84). It ascertains whether the desired woman is a man's masturbatory fantasy, his manageable object rather than herself.

Jay's sufferings for himself and others, as Moore-Gilbert suggests, reflects a contemporary "crisis of masculinity" (171). After the Second World War soldiers returned to civil life only to find that their positions had been filled by women during wartime. With the coming of post-industrial society and the rise of the service industry, old industrial men and war heroes were "phased out by ongoing technological, social and political change since the late 1960s" (Genz and Brabon 135). Women's ability to work in the factory during wartime and their communication and interpersonal skills have made them indispensable in post-industrial society, as they are still the ones to bear children. Men look redundant in the contemporary social structure, and Jay doubts whether men/fathers "serve any useful function these days" except "[impregnating] the women" and "occasionally send[ing] money over" (Kureishi 93). For Jay the changing role of men and the transformation of women are responsible for such a crisis. His father in an early generation could still "guide, exert discipline, and enjoy his children," and these functions have now been taken over by a mother like Susan (93). Moreover, Jay feels his stagnation in life is sharply contrasted by women, who "were fortunate to go . . . into themselves and out into the history world. They examined their lives more than [men] did" (60). Satirically, his reader is constantly bombarded by Jay's examination of his inner life, with lengthy descriptions of his indulgences, obsession, and complaints about Susan's practical and uncomplicated mind that fails to stir his curiosity. Jay also

demonstrates his active participation in the external world, when Nina envies him "having something important to do every morning; something [his writing] that absorbed everything; something to live for" that "made her feel left out" (72). With a successful career, a stable partner to take care of his children and himself, and a mistress to realize the sexual adventures Susan fails to provide, Jay may be less in crisis than Susan and Nina are burdened by their gender. His sense of crisis probably comes from relative deprivation, when some male privileges of his father's generation are now canceled and Susan's shrewdness both at home and workplace overwhelms him. Aversion to washing dishes is only an issue to his mother rather than his father, and now, with a new paradigm of gender equality, he feels inferior or powerless to Susan from child-raising and cooking to house-managing. This is even more intolerable as Susan is also a full-time worker, making his clumsiness at home a sharp contrast to his achievement at work.

Despite a strong sense of crisis felt by certain men like Jay, masculinities that evolve with time yet focus on control help men attain their privileges and ensure a group of men their dominant status. Jay, along with his father, witnessed the postwar evolution of masculinity in Britain, from control over others and one's patriarchal image, to control of one's enjoyment and freedom. The strict image of man as the patriarch tortured an earlier generation of men like Jay's father, making him unable to leave his unhappy marriage. But, as Barbara Ehrenreich argues, men began to rebel against their gender roles earlier than women. The hippies in the 1960s, like the Beats in the 1950s, "held out to men the possibility of perfect freedom from material obligations" (Ehrenreich 107), and they must have deeply influenced Jay who is among "the children of innocent consumerism and the inheritors of the freedoms won by our seditious elders in the late sixties" (Kureishi 58). Unlike his father, who was expected to get married and support his wife, Jay does not marry Susan and is not always happy to meet her economic demands. This is because hedonist individualism has become his core belief that remains in his quasi-marriage.

The New Man in the 1980s, and the Metrosexual and New Lad in the 1990s, are well-illustrative of Jay's self-centered masculinity in the late 1990s. "[O]riginating in the 1970s, the new man is a pro-feminist . . . , attempting to put his 'sharing and caring' beliefs into practice in his daily life." Contrastingly, in the 1980s he becomes "a hedonist, . . . taking a great interest in grooming and appearance" (Benyon 164). The metrosexual in the 1990s deepens new

man's narcissism and hedonism as he takes "himself as his love object and pleasure as his sexual preference" (qtd. in Genz and Brabon 139). Seeming a reaction against the new man and metrosexual, the new lad in the 1990s embraces laddish behaviors, such as enjoying games, football, booze, and, pornographic images of girls. These evolutions and diversifications of masculinity all involve men's pursuit of their pleasure, including the pro-feminist new man and metrosexual. This accounts for Jay's hard time in his domestic life, since pleasure for himself is always placed much higher than altruism or pro-feminism. Even if not hegemonic or mainstream enough, these emergent masculinities could be deemed as complicit masculinities for they are in alliance with and support the hegemonic one, focusing on men's welfare (partly) supported by women's attention or erotic function. Jay's pursuit of freedom like a hippie, his doing domestic work for Susan and Nina like a new man, his narcissistic hedonism also taken by the metrosexual, and his new-laddish pornographic attitude toward women represent a masculinity based upon control (of his male freedom) when some sacrifices are made in exchange for male dominance in the postfeminist age.

II. Intimacy and Love

While Jay's intimacy depicted in this novella often relates to heterosexual relationships in patriarchy, intimacy is a complex and ambiguous phenomenon that involves notions of privacy, sexuality, proximity, secrecy, affect, and desire to shape human selves, subjectivities, and socialities. The term "generally denotes a close interpersonal relationship or feeling of being in a close personal association and belonging together from both physical and mental point of view" (Muniruzzaman). Sertaç Sehlikoglu and Aslı Zengin also emphasize intimacy as a form of "relatedness" that shapes people's "senses of selves, their feelings, their attachments and their identifications" (22), yet go on to define it as a mode of connection and boundary that creates new meanings, distances, proximities, "bonds and attachments" (20), a domain of privacy and secrecy "with dynamics of sensual and affective attachments and forms of desire" (20), as well as performance and pretension guided by cultural codes and evaluated by moral and social norms. To put it briefly, intimacy could be understood as an interpersonal relationship in which one closely relates to certain people/objects while at the same time keeping others at a distance. Hence intimacy occurs not

just among lovers but among relatives, friends, or even human beings and animals. *Intimacy* strongly shows the above characteristics as Jay, knowing he is violating moral norms by leaving Susan and their children, pours out his affect, desire, sexuality, and secrecy to his best friends and readers, and these intimate activities would further shape his subject position in society.

"[C]onsanguineous with a larger Western cultural tendency to loosen . . . a firm separation between the public and the private domains," Jennifer Cooke finds that literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries deals with sexual and "non-sexual intimacies such as familial relationships or particular states, like death, illness or grief" (4). Literary intimacy challenges the social and cultural assumptions and norms that govern intimate behavior and expression, invites the reader to share, witness, or participate in the intimate scenes and situations depicted, and hence solicits affective reactions and interactions from them. As studies on literary intimacy "attend not just to what is said about intimacy and its acts in literature, but also to how it is said," the kind of intimacy focused on by Kureishi, and how it acts and is said, matter in the following discussions (3). We have to ask whether *Intimacy* broadens, deepens, or transforms close relationships, or reiterates and thickens conventional gender traits and relations rooted in patriarchy.[2]

Although intimacy is experienced in different kinds of relationships, "in present-day Western societies, intimacy is particularly sought in romantic relationships" (Barry and Schwebel 31), making an "[i]ntimate relationship generally . . . an interpersonal relationship particularly between male and female" (Muniruzzaman). The conventionality of *Intimacy* heavily lays in its emphasis on heterosexual love deeply ingrained in the operations of patriarchy. Anthony Giddens's *The Transformation of Intimacy* is a pertinent mutual reference for *Intimacy* in that it not only centers on heterosexual love, sex, and eroticism as Jay's narratives, but delineates the transformation of love in three stages/types that bespeaks Jay's gendered dilemmas in the Western patriarchy amidst social change. In pre-modern society, the referent of love was passion, a "disruptive" sexual attraction for another. It "uproot[ed] the individual from the mundane" (Giddens 38), "generating a break with routine and duty" (40). In light of this, passionate love was regarded as "dangerous . . . from the point of view of social order and duty" and for this reason was "nowhere . . . recognized as either a

[2] For structural clarity, what is said and actions about intimacy are explored in this section, while how it is said will be left to the next one on confessional writing.

necessary or sufficient basis for marriage" (38). While passionate love did not disappear as a human drive, the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a rise of love as romance. In this mode of love, individuals strive to find their love object who, "by being who he or she is, answers a lack which the individual does not even necessarily recognise" (45). As a result, "the flawed individual is made whole" (45). As this love happens, individuals envision that their finding of *one* true love would lead to a life-long marriage where they assume parenthood. Giddens claims that romantic love is related to rationalization, one of the most defining attributes of modernity, because intimacy in this love was "a potential avenue for controlling the future, as well as a form of psychological security (in principle) for those whose lives were touched by it" (41). Romantic love has a specific intimacy with women when it takes shape. Romance novels in the nineteenth century portrayed lives, especially of women, as "quest[s] . . . in which self-identity awaits its validation from the discovery of the other" (45). Discursive practices like romantic novels still powerfully shape contemporary subjects, especially some women, and in *Intimacy* we are not surprised that it is Jay who wants to leave the ideal love he once shared with Susan, rather than vice versa. Their quasi-marriage relation still highly resembles marriage in its traditional sense, which represents the "mysticism and dogma" that a rationalized romantic love is not immune from (40). A lifetime heterosexual marriage as the natural outcome of romantic love has been recognized as commonsensical to date, endorsed by the legal system and major religions. Hostile attacks on Jay's escape from a formerly romanticized love, not only from critics but sometimes himself, are just evidence of how much faith and restraint has been put into romantic love.

Though romantic love may still be the ideal in the Westernized world, Giddens claims that the pure relationship or confluent love emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Detraditionalized as it is, a pure relationship

> refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only insofar as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it. (Giddens 58)

The pure relationship is made possible by what Giddens has called the "democratisation of personal life" and the impact of globalization on personal relationships (184). When individuals are endowed with more freedom in making their lifestyle choices in a global context, love cannot linger without constant negotiation and mutual respect between the lovers. The pure relationship is where self-reflexivity works in its highest performance. For Giddens reflexivity, rather than individuality, is the prime characteristic of modernity. It helps reconstruct a contingent, fragmented self into a coherent and authentic life narrative. Reflexivity as a conception of the modern self hence reveals subjectivity as an ever-changing arrangement and an ethical choice.

Giddens's conception of the pure relationship is sometimes criticized for its optimism and ignorance of social inequalities. Read with other criticisms of intimacy, Giddens's limitations could be as illuminating as his contributions regarding how power works in patriarchy. Gidden almost equates intimacy with the pure relationship in his declaration that intimacy "implies a wholesale democratising of the interpersonal domain, in a manner fully compatible with democracy in the public sphere," and "means the disclosure of emotions and actions which the individual is unlikely to hold up to a wider public gaze" (3, 138). Lynn Jamieson discerns that "[m]uch of personal life remains structured by inequalities" when "[p]opular discourse supports the view that heterosexual couples are more equal and intimate." Gendered subjects still struggle "with the gap between cultural ideals and structural inequalities," and may save their relationship despite inequality rather than seek a fundamental transformation of intimacy (477). Giddens's pure relationship therefore risks false individualization in ignorance of social structure, as well as the "practical love and care . . . more important than . . . [an] exploration of each other's selves" (477). Neil Gross is also cautious of Giddens's optimism. He challenges the thesis of detraditionalized intimacy, which claims romantic/sexual intimacy has become less constrained by traditional norms and expectations in the late modern era. This is because while "regulative traditions" of intimacy—the threat of exclusion from moral communities for deviating from certain practices—have been in decline, "meaning-constitutive traditions" remain strong as the cultural and linguistic frameworks that enable meaningful action and selfhood (288). The latter results in the idealization of the nuclear family and parenthood, persistent gender inequalities in the family, and worship of romantic love that are not only exemplified in American society but constitutive

of Jay's reaction to his intimacy. Below I will explain Jay's gendered imagination and practices of love in terms of Giddens's contributions, complemented by the patriarchal structure that thwarts detraditionalization in many ways.

Jay *seems to* represent confluent love or a pure relationship that "is active, contingent . . . and therefore jars with the 'for-ever', 'one-and-only' qualities of the romantic love" embodied by Susan (Giddens 61). Thinking himself knowing well about Susan, Jay meets Giddens's principle of confluent love in which "knowing the traits of the other is central" (63). Like the confluent love not based upon "sexual exclusiveness," Jay overtly opposes monogamy were it not for the children, and encourages Susan and Nina to have relationships with other men, though this is to justify his promiscuity and desire to know well about their hidden affairs (63). While romantic love's ultimate aim is marriage, Jay stands with the pure relationship by asserting that "[t]he family seemed no more than a machine for the suppression and distortion of free individuals" (Kureishi 60). While women in romantic love are usually limited to the domestic sphere in the service of their husbands and children, Jay claims that he and Susan "could make our own original and flexible arrangements" (60). He is willing to reflect upon himself regarding his failure of intimacy, and proposes that he is of "a generation that believes in the necessity of satisfying oneself," echoing Giddens's belief that reflexivity and satisfaction count in confluent love (66). However, he lacks some critical traits of confluent love, in which negotiation with and mutual respect for the other shall be the core value. He is put off by Susan's "liking for weddings" and never marries her (60). His encouragement for partners to have affairs is for his purpose rather than their desire. Though quite familiar with Susan's character in their long-term relationship, Jay has little interest in knowing Susan's purpose and feelings, not to mention in openly negotiating their future.

Far from realizing Giddens's pure relationship, Jay once held a belief in romantic love yet still failed to fulfill it. He finally realizes that "We begin in love and go to some trouble to remain in that condition for the rest of our lives," resonating with the principle of romantic love in which love is sublimated and incarnated in life-long marriage (Kureishi 82). Like a Victorian man with mistresses outside, to keep his family based on romantic love, Jay violates his anti-monogamist stance and lies to Susan, because if he "hadn't enjoyed those women [he] wouldn't have stayed so long" (109). Victor's hope "to marry the

right woman" and "play on the floor with his children" before it is too late might explain why a man like Jay once agreed to have babies with Susan (83). However, Jay's definition of love as curiosity related to "unrest, disquiet, curiosity and the desire for more . . . at the root of life" sharply violates his anticipation of "a tender and complete intimacy," showing a masculine ignorance of the complicatedness of intimacy in practice (79, 64). It seems that he is a child in need of others to fulfill all his wishes, so he can "sleep in someone's willing arms" and has a woman like Nina to fuel his imagination (64). His proposal to Nina rather than Susan just evinces such a fantasy to ensure the continuance of his passionate love.

For Giddens men's and women's anticipations of romantic love are quite different. Men "could find in marriage and the family primarily a refuge from economic individualism," and the colonization of the future that characterizes romantic love means to men "an anticipated economic career," therefore making their love "closer to amour passion" (59). Jay's other friend Asif is kind of like this. He will have "nowhere to go" without a home with his wife, forcing him to stick to a seemingly outdated model of romantic love and find escapes in literature depicting unfaithfulness (Kureishi 105). Jay, as one of the "foppish dreamers, who have succumbed to female power," is what Giddens calls "romantics" (59). Not "someone [like a woman] who has intuitively understood the nature of love as a mode of organising personal life in relation to the colonising of future time and to the construction of self-identity," the romantic does not "treat women as equals." Jay "is not really a participant in the emerging exploration of intimacy, but more of a throwback to previous times" (Giddens 59), as he embraces the passionate love with his "adolescent cry," that "I am all for passion, frivolity, childish pleasures" (Kureishi 80). His amour passion, yearning for a refuge of intimacy, and promiscuous desire are an assertion of patriarchal male privilege. In patriarchy, men's identity is built upon the model of working achievement, which is likely to weaken many men's familiarity with expressing and dealing with their emotions, now the specialty of women since the emergence of romantic love. Men's privilege as discussed before endorses their emotional reliance upon women in the patriarchal system. Jay could enjoy passionate love more easily than a female without the risk of being pregnant. He does not consider his clumsiness in providing emotional labor—mental and physical caring—for Susan and his family a failure.

In the limited depiction of Susan and Nina, Kureishi shows a male-centeredness that delimits Jay's observation on the one hand, and women's inclination to romantic love that makes it "essentially feminised love" (Giddens 43). These gendered binaries illustrate how difficult it is to anticipate a pure relationship between two sexes unbothered by patriarchal traditions. Ranasinha is correct to see Jay's ignorance of Susan's viewpoints as male-centeredness which destroys their intimacy: when Susan looks at him hard in her greeting, Jay takes it as coercion to "notice her" (Kureishi 13); her response to a TV program is taken to start a "domestic drama" (Kureishi 23); her daily busyness is felt with "desperation in her activity" (Kureishi 47), despite that Susan "tried to make things work" and "wanted it to be nice for [Jay]" (Kureishi 82). As for Nina, Jay says he "did know how to please her" and swears he "could love, protect and support her" (Kureishi 112), yet does not take any actions to respond to Nina's insecurity as he keeps leaving her, making her not knowing what she is "waiting for" (Kureishi 113). Jay's willingness to care is under the premise of a submissive feminine other for whom he feels in control, as what the other cares about or how he should contribute to their long-term intimacy is under his radar.

On the other hand, Susan and Nina are bound to women's gender roles in romantic love. It is Susan who has to make major plans for the future of the family, a prerequisite to sustaining their romantic love, including a family trip in which they may better discuss their problems. Susan, growing up in the patriarchal tree like other characters, takes it for granted that women are the specialists in intimacy. The naturalized division of labor, that women are responsible for governing the household in the Victorian age, and her longing for marriage with Jay, blind her from the possible discontent of her male partner till the crisis emerges.[3] As romantic love "depends upon projective identification" that "creates a feeling of wholeness with the other, no doubt strengthened by established differences between masculinity and femininity," Nina is attached to Jay's male advantages and superiorities to compensate for her dependency (Giddens 61). In the mutual projection of one's anticipations and ideals to the other, Jay's naked confession of his intimacy is dominated by a heterosexual romantic love evolved from passion amour. His confession

[3] The term comes from Isabella Beeton's *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861). In middle-class households, a woman as the head of the house was seen as the commander of the army and the director of the enterprise.

marginalizes his friendship and intimacies with children, and hence fortifies his male identity which nullifies his assertive challenges toward the given orthodoxy of gender.

III. Confession, Truth, and Ethics

Kureishi said in a review that he "consciously wrote *Intimacy* in the form of a confession and was also aware that it might be read as 'Hanif Kureishi telling the truth about a relationship break-up'" (Yousaf 25). For the author, it is critical that *Intimacy* "operates as a construct—written in the first person, constructed as a confession" (25). As we have seen how the work stimulates negative and positive responses, confession as a literary form through which Jay manifests the operation of patriarchal masculinity and different types of love must be investigated. As the effect Kureishi anticipates, Jay's confession conveys a sense of truth. Yet how truthful or fake is this "truth," what is contained in this "truth," and how does this impression of truth relate to truths of intimacy and ethics in reality? To answer these questions, the intertwinings among confession, knowledge, power, and truth must be clarified. And to analyze how Jay struggles to find the truth of his intimacy enmeshed in his (sexual) desire and responses to other characters, there may be fewer theoretical tools more suitable than Foucault's. With his anatomy of confession as a discourse entangled and symbiotic with a large structure of power/knowledge, this section discusses whether Jay's confession and escape from Susan is a liberating ethics of the self against an oppressive morality, or a privileged stance enabled by patriarchy.[4]

Foucault defines confession as "a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship," since one confesses with "the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner" (*History* 61). As discourses are coherent bodies of statements that form the objects of which they speak and position subjects as they are spoken, the confessant not only influences his or her listener, but "produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and

[4] While Foucault's theories provide valuable insights into power dynamics, they have limitations in often overlooking the specificities of gendered experiences and the working of patriarchy, which I have discussed earlier and will be added here to complement his insufficiencies.

promises him salvation" (61). Once a practice of the Christian Church, confession became diffused into secular culture, especially psychology, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through the act of confession, people were incited to tell the truth about their desires, emotions, and dispositions. The value of the confessed truth becomes higher when "the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated" (62). Confession, as a discursive practice, is a mechanism of power that produces knowledge which further creates truth. For Jay, confession helps him utter truths of his secret desires oppressed by moralities embodied in other characters. As a playwright, he is exercising his discursive power toward the readers, though he is simultaneously the (gendered) object of knowledge and power created and positioned by patriarchy.

Foucault's well-known idea of the repressive hypothesis (of sexuality) may illustrate well the obstacles that hinder Jay's free expression till the last day in his home with Susan. To Foucault, nowadays we still "supported a Victorian regime" whose "image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality" (*History* 3). The repressive hypothesis emerges accordingly, assuming "the history of sexuality must be seen first of all as the chronicle of an increasing repression" from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century (5). Foucault urges us to "abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression," because "We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities," but "the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities" (49). By saying so he does not negate the existence of sexual repression, as he asserts, "[w]hat is peculiar to modern societies . . . is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret" (35).

The repressive discourses on sex and their counter-discourses, for Foucault, are part of "a never-ending demand for truth: it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness" (*History* 77). Whether they are for repression or liberation, religious and psychological confessions witness this will to tell the truth of sex, or the truth of ourselves through sex. Sex becomes the means through which the truth of oneself and the world is found. The way previously unspecified behaviors are transformed into different forms of sexuality witnesses how sexuality becomes the object and means of power and

knowledge, as well as a field where truth is produced. Power hence is the producer, rather than just the oppressor, of sexuality.

Jay's confession related to sex could thus be seen as a postmodern version of the repressive hypothesis. Like the project of modernity in which the truth of self relies on what one is not, Jay needs an oppressive other to guarantee his unhindered potentiality for pleasure and self-fulfillment. For him, the liberation of sex and an unsuppressed desire are indispensable for his core values of life, which are now impeded by his domestic life with Susan and his children. Taking Freud to be the god of his generation, he deems people influenced by "two thousand years of Christian civilisation" as "mentally defective and probably in need of therapy" (Kureishi 105). Jay regards the "rationalist" therapist Susan asks him to visit as one of the repressive cases, asserting the importance of contentment, maturity, and consolation rather than enthusiasm in intimacy. He even taunts her in his mind, thinking, "who tickles their tongue in your old hole?" when he imagines his head between Nina's legs (80). He claims that "if you didn't have children monogamy was unnecessary," and accordingly forces Asif, a faithful husband interested in works on erotic themes to "confess that he wonders what another body might feel like" (24, 36). Susan's middle-class background makes her the very incarnation of Jay's repressive hypothesis, for she lives in "a separate, sealed world," accepts "an accepted division of labour, and a code of rules" in marriage (28), and "to keep everything going she can be bullying and strict" (30).

In the face of all the hypocrisy, repression, and hidden secrets, Jay takes sex and women's bodies as the ultimate truth of the world. He has a great "interest in girls' skirts," which "was a transitional object; both a thing in itself and a means of getting somewhere else" (Kureishi 21). As the skirt "became [his] paradigm of important knowledge," and "[t]he world is a skirt I want to lift up," he belongs to the "regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality" (Foucault, *History* 11). Since patriarchy delimits the skirt in the common occasion as a woman-only outfit, it becomes an external illegitimate object that men cannot wear, yet are allowed to access through heterosexuality. A woman's skirt, like the world itself, becomes a Kantian thing-in-itself to be desired, occupied, and accessed. Without the skirt/woman, as having been explored in the first section, man does not exist at all. Men's "will to knowledge" is to know what the real woman is within the skirt, both as the route and the answer to man's truth (12). For Jay, his

confession of a desire to lift up the skirt suggests/justifies his hidden argument that sexual repression violates (promiscuous) desire and pleasure as universal truth, which could be regained if the aforementioned hindrances, such as the dominant ideology held or practiced by Asif and Susan, are successfully removed.

Jay's confession "is all those procedures by which the subject is incited to produce a discourse of truth about his sexuality which is capable of having effects on the subject himself" (Foucault, "Confession" 215-16). Taking sexual repression as his truth, Jay "can discreetly bring into coexistence concepts . . . : revolution and happiness; or revolution and a different body, one that is newer and more beautiful; or indeed, revolution and pleasure" (Foucault, *History* 7). With Nina's young body and wild sex, Jay could feel himself belonging "to something, to other young people, and to some sort of oppositional movement" against the current repression (Kureishi 116). Sexual suppression becomes indispensable for Jay's enjoyment of knowing the world, fantasizing about revolutions, and seeking new female bodies. Kureishi's own words seem to endorse Jay's repressive hypothesis and penchant for sex. He deems *Intimacy*'s "contestation of 'a sacred taboo'" as "transgressing the 'Koran of the middle classes'" (Ranasinha 111). No wonder he likes to "write about sex as a focus of social, psychological, emotional, political energy—it's so central to people's lives" (Kumar 160). Kureishi and Jay's interest in focusing on sex as the hidden truth of the world evidences "the existence in our era of a discourse in which sex, the revelation of truth, the overturning of global laws, the proclamation of a new day to come, and the promise of a certain felicity are linked together" (Foucault, *History* 7).

Jay's ethical problems stem from his repressive suggestion, the truth that delimits himself, his half-knowledge of pleasure as an ethical goal, his failure to change, and his fantasy of intimacy, which are all related to the working of patriarchy and his path of least resistance. While confession is a process where truth is built, the "absolute honesty" he wants is "[w]ith a soft pencil and a hard dick—not the other way round" (Kureishi 53). If a complicated reality of intimacy is filtered through his masculine sexuality represented by an erect penis, the truth he constructed could hardly be ethical regarding his knowledge of and relation to others. Jay's main argument, the truth he is most concerned with, is the omnipresent and uncontrolled desire, yet to what degree is it repressed and by what ethics we shall treat this phenomenon are rather at stake.

He has lost his ground in an attack against monogamy for he never marries Susan, which probably implies that he has foreseen the possibility of his unfaithfulness and can leave her anytime. He even violates his claim that monogamy is indispensable for the children while Susan and he are an unmarried couple. His repressive hypothesis and truth of desire never explain why Susan is the one to take care of their children after the separation, why she does not care about his affairs unless he is leaving her, and why he would stay with Susan once she makes love with him. The most ironic part lies in his proposal to the hippie-like Nina rather than Susan, given all his cynicism about marriage. All these puzzles attest that Jay's self-made truth is the smokescreen he takes to mantle his lack of clear doctrines of life, such as his wayward appropriations of the different kinds of love explored by Giddens.

Jay's male-centeredness turns to egoism requiring others to meet his contradictory anticipations, and he has no responsibility for what he has done before, such as misleading Susan to believe he is a follower of monogamic romantic love, and having children with her thereafter. That being said, Jay as a child "of innocent consumerism and the inheritors of the freedoms" does not change his primary self in his seeming heroic flee (Kureishi 58). While he thinks, "[p]erhaps every day should contain at least one essential infidelity or necessary betrayal," he is quite loyal to his welfare throughout the novel at the expense of his lovers and children (11). It is not the point whether adultery is immoral, holy marriage unbreakable, or Jay's emphasis on his pleasure to be condemned. His repressive hypothesis, clinging to sex, and generation of the truth seem to assert a new paradigm of infidelity and nonmonogamy, which even he cannot follow in his proposal to Nina.

For Foucault, ancient Greek ethics cared less about confession and truth than our modern ethics. As Chloë Taylor maintains, "ancient techniques of self-examination pursued the goals of self-transformation and self-mastery rather than self-discovery and interpretation" (13). The open ending of *Intimacy* greatly shows how little his confessional truth contributes to his happiness found in intimacy. After leaving Susan, he learns Nina called him but is not in a hurry to call back; for the first time he intends to speak to Susan and his children about his leaving. Most importantly, the ending paragraph shows no sign of whom he chooses to be with. This could be Nina, Susan, a new target woman, or even his buddy Victor. Perhaps he finally learns that his version of intimacy, a feeling of perfectly losing oneself in the other's tenderness, which

is quite different from Giddens's notion that requires a certain continuity, can only be achieved through action. Jay's reflections and actions throughout the novella attest more to patriarchal masculinity than a revolutionary break from either his old self or the Koran of the nuclear family. His concealment of an affair with Nina from Susan is normal for husbands with mistresses. His escape from home is a *mastery* of his interpersonal relations rather than himself, so his wayward sexual desire can remain intact and there will be no need for his *transformation* into an altruist and considerate lover. Neither does Jay try to take other radical measures to defy the age-old patriarchy, such as becoming gay or a trans-woman, or openly advocating his promiscuity when he sees any woman. He does not choose so because it is his path of least resistance to have Nina's feminine submissiveness in support of his male dominance, identification, and centeredness.

IV. Conclusion

Reading *Intimacy* within the context of the patriarchal structure helps mitigate previous criticisms of this novella. Whether Jay or Kureishi is a misogynist, as shown in Sexton's attack and Thomas's defense, is not as crucial to Jay's problem as it might have seemed from a didactic perspective. He does appreciate certain thoughts expressed by Susan or Nina, yet his male-centeredness made many women into mirrors upon which his imagination was cast. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve a relatively objective judgment on these women, not to mention to hate or love them as concrete individuals. As patriarchy is a taken-for-granted system that privileges men and allows them to pursue their enjoyments or achievements at the expense of women, Jay's behavior is likely to be mistaken as representative of other men's.

While some critics like Moore-Gilbert and Ranasinha mention Jay's problems of masculinity, patriarchy as a dynamic structure dismantles what lies beneath the crisis of masculinity as structurally inevitable. As no one can perpetually dominate in all fields, the requirement of patriarchal dominance, rather than women's empowerment, is the source of men's crisis that occurs throughout all eras. Burdened by her work, children, house management, and a partner unwilling to communicate, Susan should be the most qualified one to claim a crisis. Ignoring the increasing load of post-feminist women who burn their lives at work and home to focus on the crisis of masculinity just evidences

the male-centeredness of patriarchal ideology. The reality of self-evolving patriarchy also shows that this novella is more likely an "ironic vision of contemporary masculinity" than "a reassertion of traditional forms of patriarchal masculinity," as Moore-Gilbert suggests (174). Jay's father and Asif represent traditional masculinity in their faithfulness to their marriages, which is nothing Jay is interested in as he never marries Susan. Jay cares less about his masculinity, be it in old or new forms, than his patriarchal privileges, without which he cannot justify his escape from Susan and his sons to embrace Nina as his fountain of youth. It is also patriarchal ideologies that constrain a woman like Susan, for she shoulders the *main* responsibilities of home without the least thought of leaving them to Jay.

Kureishi's obvious attempts to write "about how painful it is when a marriage falls apart" in *Intimacy*, as Kumar recognizes, is not so successful when Jay chooses not to marry Susan in the beginning (159). Keeping a way open for retreat, Jay seems to take his relationship with Susan as disposable if anything goes wrong. Even when Kureishi takes pains to explore how desires always work in conflict and love is inseparable from infidelity, readers can easily see from Asif's marriage that sexual fantasies or desires do not necessarily come at the cost of long-term relationships. Jay's abandonment of Susan/his sons is not simply a necessary means, as Perfect claims, "of living *within* a contemporary multicultural society" (19). It is a male privilege endowed by patriarchy that his gendered identity and attractiveness are not based upon his fatherhood. Thus he can easily leave his partner and children to pursue (sexual) excitements, as long as a mother is willing to pick up his slack.

A man immersed in patriarchy is not necessarily a wife-beating or children-kicking chauvinist. After all, many men in reality are not like this. Via Jay, Kureishi illustrates how a man who takes on childcare and housework, perceiving his domestic role as inferior to his female partner, and interpreting his lack of love for her as a personal weakness and failure, is deeply shaped by patriarchy. In Jay's claustrophobic confession of his intimacy as a daily reality, the reader astonishingly finds a gendered apartheid, when Jay is unwilling to discuss any barriers and difficulties between him and Susan with any female character. Intimacy as a relationship, in his view, has little to do with child-raising, career planning, problem-solving, or conflict negotiating between partners expected to live together for years. The ultimate need of his intimacy is to immerse himself in the tenderness of a probably

feminine subject, and he thinks he deserves this because of his mundane achievements earned through male privilege in the public sphere. His clumsiness in and unwillingness to tackle intimacies with Susan, his taking for granted of Nina's submission, and his confessional writing that blames Susan for her dominance in the private sphere all attest to the patriarchal structure that encourages men to be male-dominating, male-identifying and male-centered. Patriarchal ideologies infiltrate Jay's vicious circle between intimacy and confession, blinding him from genuine reflexivity as Giddens anticipates in late modernity. Jay does not embark on, as Moore-Gilbert describes, "a journey of conscious self-reinvention as 'someone else' which ends in liberation from a stifling partner" (174). By abandoning a woman threatening his masculine dominance, he tries to find a submissive one to support his ideal masculinity even in his private life, so his original identity remains unchallenged. To paraphrase his own remarks for Susan: he thinks he is an individualist but he is just well fed by patriarchy.

Works Cited

Buchanan, Bradley. *Hanif Kureishi*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Ciocoi-Pop, Ana-Blanca. "Amorality, Immorality and Individualism in Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy*." *SAECULUM*, vol.48, no.2, 2019, pp.83-90.

Cooke, Jennifer. "Making a Scene: Towards an Anatomy of Contemporary Literary Intimacies." *Scenes of Intimacy: Reading, Writing and Theorizing Contemporary Literature*, edited by Cooke, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, pp. 3-32.

Chalupský, Petr. "Prick Lit Or Naked Hope?: Self-Exposure In Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy*." *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2011, pp. 61-77.

Cumming, Laura. "Charity Ends at Home." *The Guardian*, 9 May 1998, www.theguardian.com/books/1998/may/09/fiction.hanifkureishi. Accessed 10 June 2023.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*. Anchor, 1983.

Foucault, Michel. "The Confession of the Flesh." *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980, pp.194-228.

---. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*. Pantheon Books, 1978.

Genz, Stéphanie, and Benjamin A. Brabon. *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh UP, 2009.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford UP, 1992.

Gross, Neil. "The Detraditionalization of Intimacy Reconsidered." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2005, pp. 286-311.

Jamieson, Lynn. "Intimacy Transformed? A Critical Look at the 'Pure Relationship.'" *Sociology*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1999, pp. 477-94.

Johnson, Allan G. *The Gender Knot: Unravelling Our Patriarchal Legacy*. Temple UP, 2014.

Kumar, Amitava. *Bombay—London—New York.* Routledge, 2002.

Kureishi, Hanif. *Intimacy and Midnight All Day: A Novel and Stories*. Scribner, 2001.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Hanif Kureishi*. Manchester UP, 2001.

Moss, Barry F., and Andrew I. Schwebel. "Defining Intimacy in Romantic Relationships." *Family Relations*, vol. 42, no. 1, 1993, pp. 31-37.

Muniruzzaman, M. "Transformation of Intimacy and Its Impact in Developing Countries." *Life Sci Soc Policy*, vol. 13, no. 10, 2017, lsspjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40504-017-0056-8. Accessed 20 Jan. 2024.

Nayebpour, Karam, and Mustafa Zeki. "Unrelieved Desire and Protracted Fantasy in Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy*." *Analele Universităţii Ovidius din Constanţa. Seria Filologie*, no. 2, 2012, pp. 51-59. *Central and Eastern European Online Library*. Accessed 15 Jan. 2024.

Ochsner, Andrea. *Lad Trouble: Masculinity and Identity in the British Male Confessional Novel of the 1990s*. Transcript, 2009.

Perfect, Michael. "The Enigma of Abandonment: Rethinking Hanif Kureishi's Importance for Multiculturalism." *Hanif Kureishi*, edited by Susan Alice Fischer, Bloomsbury, 2015, pp. 7-20.

Ranasinha, Ruvani. *Hanif Kureishi*. Northcote, 2002.

Segal, Lynne. *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. Rutgers UP, 1990.

Sehlikoglu, Sertaç, and Aslı Zengin. "Introduction: Why Revisit Intimacy?" *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2015, pp. 20-25.

Taylor, Chloë. *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault*. Routledge, 2009.

Thomas, Susie. *Hanif Kureishi: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Whelehan, Imelda. *Overloaded. Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*. The Women's Press, 2000.

Whitehead, Stephen, and Frank J. Barrett, editors. *The Masculinities Reader*. Polity, 2003.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Harcourt Brace and World, 1929.

Yousaf, Nahem. *Hanif Kureishi's* The Buddha of Suburbia. Continuum, 2002.

CONTRIBUTOR

Kaochen Liao is Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures at Fo Guang University, Taiwan. Her research focuses on late capitalism, community, the gender binary related to intimacy and family, transgender studies, British writers such as Hanif Kureishi, Angela Carter, and Oscar Wilde, and drama studies. Liao has directed graduate plays for her department for 15 years.