

BOOK REVIEW

CONNECTING THE DOTS THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY LITERARY STUDIES: PSYCHOANALYSIS, COSMOPOLITANS, MENTAL HEALTH, POVERTY, AND URBANISM. [REVIEW OF THE BOOK UNSEEN CITY: THE PSYCHIC LIVES OF THE URBAN POOR, BY ANKHI MUKHERJEE]

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the conceptual and theoretical framework propounded by Ankhi Mukherjee. Her framework is developed through rigorous analyses of literary texts from diverse genres. It is philosophically underpinned in psychoanalysis and postcolonial studies. The interdisciplinary framework is eclectic in nature and it can be used in trauma studies, ageing population, mental health, health communication, and urban studies. This paper delineates the development of the framework and its application.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, interdisciplinary analysis, population studies, urbanism.

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REVIEW

Ankhi Mukherjee is Professor of English at the University of Oxford. She specialises in the areas of postcolonialism and world literatures. She has published numerous ground-breaking ideas in many indexed journals. She has also published several books in different disciplines, such as the idea of hysteria in Victorian novels and contemporary literature (Mukherjee, 2007), the very idea of canonical texts and what is its constituency (Mukherjee, 2013), as well as the postcolonial Bengali novels (Mukherjee, 2016). Her recent book is an intricately researched book which focuses on psychoanalysis in three cosmopolitans: New York, London, and Mumbai (Mukherjee, 2022). It draws theories from various disciplines and constructs its multimodal theoretical and analytical frameworks. An interdisciplinary approach to this critical examination of current issues related to mental health, urbanism, city and urbanism, slum and poverty indeed requires an eclectic framework.

Postcolonialism slanted itself into the analysis of most Asian literature (Chong et al., 2010). This is mostly due to historical background. Some theoretical concepts derived from postcolonialism are powerful theoretical tool which can be used to analyse issues such as environmentalism and education (Ahmad Zufrie et al., 2020). Postcolonialism as a theoretical framework is also an effective analytical tool to analyse issues related to binary opposition (McLeod, 2010) and current affairs. The main theoretical framework used in this book lies within the territory of psychoanalysis and postcolonialism. In fact, psychoanalysis, according to Eng and Han (2019) has its root in postcolonial studies.

The book is demarcated by cities and texts. In part 1, she focuses on London. She examines a novel by Aminatta Forna *Happiness* (2018), and a movie *Haider* (2014). In part 2, she focuses on Mumbai. She included a nonfiction by Katherine Boo (*Beautiful Forevers*), and Sonia Faleiro (*Beautiful Thing*). In part 3, she focuses on New York, she included *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007) and *Open City* (2011) by Teju Cole, as well as Rawi Hage's *Cockroach* (2008). She framed the discussion within a psychoanalytic framework, alongside other critical theories. The texts were chosen based on their themes and relevance to the analysis.

Mukherjee examines the way in which how people living in poor conditions in big cities around the world think and feel. She uses contemporary literary works and examines them from the integrated critical theories of psychoanalysis. Mukherjee shows how being poor can affect mental health and how it's important to understand the thoughts and feelings of the poor people. She concludes that if we better understand their minds, we can help them have better lives.

The novelty of the book lies within her acute and sensitive readings of texts from different angles. The analysis presented is multifaceted because of the use of multiple

theoretical frameworks and analytical frameworks. It goes beyond the traditional literary studies which focuses on author, text, and issue. It goes beyond by scaffolding theoretical frameworks and analytical frameworks from various disciplines.

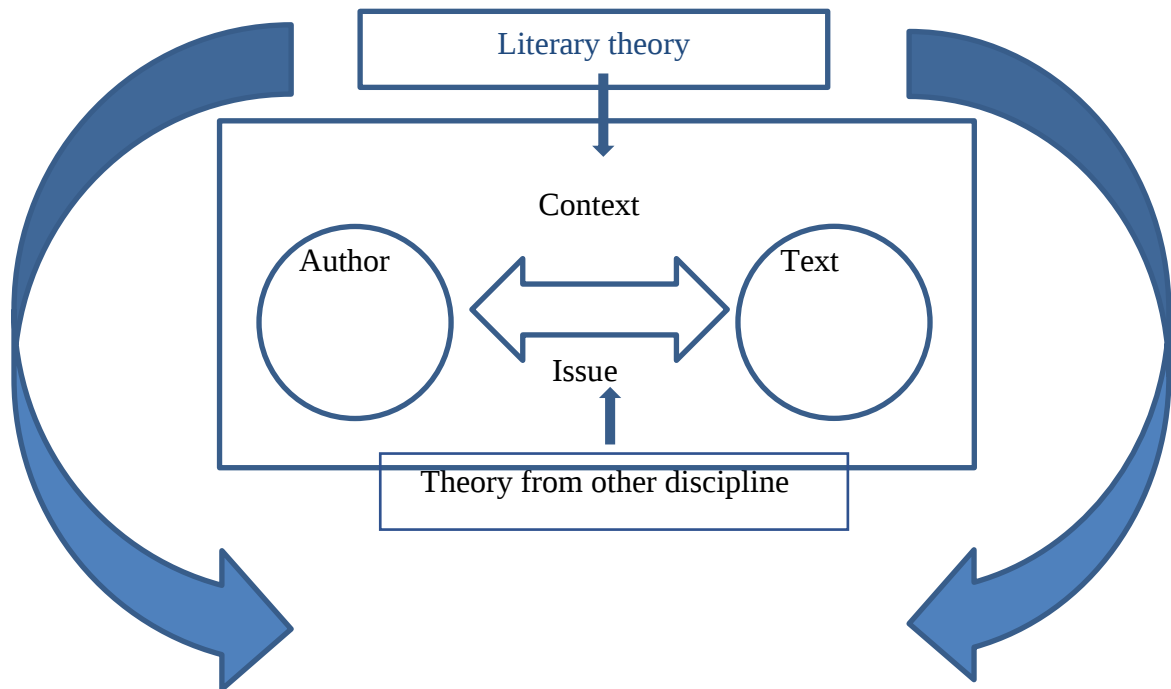


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of an interdisciplinary literary study

This book propounded interdisciplinary literary studies, such as the use of novels written by Charles Dickens and George Eliot to illuminate flood studies (Ahmad Zufrie et al., 2020). The researchers further suggest that flood is non-temporal and it is across time. Dasgupta (2020) studied architecture in Victorian London through the works of Charles Dickens, especially the idea of tenancy and lodging. On the other hand, some researchers studied trauma effects by using Victorian literature (Chong et al., 2020).

However, this book is not without its uneven spots. The writer uses three distinctively cosmopolitans in the study. For instance, two colonial and postcolonial cities – London and Mumbai. But the comparison with New York seems to be a little off on a tangent. Similarly, the writer uses two extremely wealthy cities – New York and London. But Mumbai seems to be rather far off in terms of the level of poverty. Nevertheless, this tacit does not hinder from the major contribution of the book.

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