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The Intertextual Dimension of Otherness in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*¹

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Abstract

The work of the Pulitzer prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri has been referred to as a solid representation of diaspora and immigrant literature. One of her most famous books, the novel *The Namesake* (2003), illustrates the experience of dislocation psychologically exploring the identity crisis and the sense of alienation. Nevertheless, the novel offers the opportunity of a trans-textual approach that leads to a philosophical vision of the traditional issues of alterity. The aim of the paper is to explore the extent to which an intertextual reading of the novel can provide a better understanding of the multitude of socio-cultural and identity questions the book raises. The resonance of Nikolai Gogol's name, work and tumultuous existence transgresses the pages in layers of meaningful interpretation of Otherness as a duality of name and cultural affiliation. The never read essential text, Gogol's short story *The Overcoat*, shapes the tragic paternal imagery in a continual struggle of the inner self to clarify the sense of displacement and hybridity.

Keywords: Otherness, Immigrant literature, Intertextuality, Cultural identity, Duality, Cultural shock.

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1. Introduction

The overused description of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* (2003) as diasporic literature or immigrant literature has constructed a pattern of interpretation oriented towards explaining both the complexity of the work and its public success. Reviewers, exegetes, theoreticians and interpreters make use of a range of established terms such as 'hybridity', 'marginalization', 'cultural insularity', 'identity crisis', 'alienation', 'cultural displacement', 'homesickness', 'cultural trauma', all of which and more are perfectly justified by the focusing upon the expanded history of an Indian Bengali family that struggles to preserve their identity in the process of assimilation into the American society.

The story as a whole is concerned with the searching of a way to leave a trace, to make an evidence of one's existence, a quest that is always followed by a feeling of waste and void. The dislocation of characters starts from the very beginning, with Ashoke's accident, and that is also the moment when the name that deconstructs and reconstructs every single pattern (Gogol) starts casting its shadow over the trajectories in the book. The name of the long debated Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, which "sounds as it always does, simple, impossible, absurd" (Lahiri, 2003: 237), recalls what seems to have been "a string of accidents, unforeseen, unintended, one incident begetting another" (Lahiri, 2003: 280). Under the circumstances, Gogol Ganguli had hardly tried to correct by changing his name into a more authentic one, but everything makes a sense only at the very end when the never read story, "The Overcoat", is brought forward and Gogol "starts to read" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 284).

In the article "'What Is in a Name?': Dislocation and Relocation in *The Namesake*", Carine Pereira Marques illustrates the multifaceted character of the novel that permits approaches from different critical perspectives. Postcolonialist criticism reveals the discussion of the cultural effects of colonization and of the rupture between colonies and metropolis. On the other hand, cultural studies underline the idea of dislocated territoriality, the subject being divided between two worlds. Hybridity not only emphasizes the rupture, the dislocation, but also creates the image of a third space that bears new transcultural forms. From this point of view, naming becomes a central point in the novel and is seen as a metaphor of the effects that the process of dislocation and relocation have upon the subject:

As a result, naming occupies a central point in the narrative as the name "Gogol" will bring distress both to him and his family. For his parents it feels as if they had failed to follow an important cultural tradition from their homeland. However, for Gogol, it carries a feeling of dislocation and of not

belonging, as it is a meaningless name for him since it is neither American nor Indian. Therefore, my hypothesis is that naming in *The Namesake* symbolizes the feeling of the hybrid subject who lives between two worlds, an imagined one, and the “concrete” one which forces the characters to deal with their migrant heritage (Pereira Marques, 2012, p. 2).

This sense of hibridity, of not belonging, recalls the idea of otherness and positions it in a different light when it is viewed in connection with the notion of ‘generic intertextuality’. Bauman (2004) shows that the formal relationship generic intertextuality implies, has pragmatic and thematic correlates as well. Discursive production is guided by generic conventions created by prior situational contexts of the generically informal discourse. Correlating these facts with the understanding of genre as “a set of conventional guidelines or schemas for dealing with recurrent communicative exigencies” (Bauman, 2004, p. 5), the present paper will look for those elements of intertextuality that create the opportunity of affirming that *The Namesake* accomplishes and surpasses all the categorizations and labels and creates an original work in which intertextual patterns serve a further purpose, that of expressing Otherness in a specific cultural context.

This approach is nevertheless sustained by the way in which the novel communicates with the short story *The Overcoat* by Nikolai Gogol and by the theoretical consideration of text as a “process of entextualization” that potentiates “decontextualization”:

I conceive of genre, then, as one order of speech style, a constellation of systematically related, co-occurrent formal features and structures that serves as a conventionalized orienting framework for the production and reception of discourse. More specifically, a genre is a speech style oriented to the production and reception of a particular kind of text. When an utterance is assimilated to a given genre, the process by which it is produced and interpreted is mediated through its intertextual relationship with prior texts (Bauman, 2004, pp. 3-4).

2. The Mechanisms of Intertextuality

When Gogol turns 14, the moment is celebrated by two distinct parties, an American one (with his friends, with pizzas, a baseball game on TV, some Ping-Pong in the den) and a Bengali one his parents throw for their Bengali friends, thus stressing the continuous cultural ambivalence. Later at night, Gogol is listening to side 3 of the White Album of his favourite band, The Beatles. In this atmosphere of American life and ignoring the loud music, his father offers him an awkwardly covered book by Nikolai Gogol that he has ordered from the book store just for his son. The gesture causes Gogol and the narrator to plunge into memories, explanations and debates around his name which for him becomes “an entity shapeless and weightless” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 79), a pet name turned into a good name that he hates. This is the moment when his father wants to tell him the story of his name and probably of his life, but the reality is the story seems too related to death and inappropriate for a birthday. Still, before leaving the room, he wants to assert the words that bear the essential meaning of his existence, “We all came out of Gogol’s overcoat” (Lahiri, 2003, p 81), attributed by literary historians and critics to Fyodor Michailovich Dostoyevsky. Gogol fails to understand the significance of these words, the same way he fails to read what his father has written for him inside the book and is revealed only in the final pages of the novel, “For Gogol Ganguli, The man who gave you his name, from the man who gave you your name” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 283). Incessantly looking for meanings about his existence, but aware of the legacy that his dead father has left him, first of all in his name that is to perish, Gogol starts to read “The Overcoat”.

On the first page of “The Overcoat” by Nikolai Gogol, after refusing several names for the reason that they were too strange, Akaky Akakievich’s mother expresses her conclusion: “It’s evidently his fate. If so, better let him be named after his father,” (Gogol, 1999, p. 219). The correlation between the two texts is justified by the visualization of a work not as “the product of an author’s original thoughts”, “not as the container of meaning but as a space in which a potentially vast number of relations coalesce” (Allen, 2006, p. 12). “The Namesake” includes numerous intertextual elements that encourage such a view that promises to offer a complete understanding of the events.

Reading has for long stopped to be an intrinsic action, limited to the system of signs of a singular text. Intertextuality has become a dominant idea in literary studies, creating controversies and defining difficulties for most of the theoretical movements, as the act of reading is seen as plunging “us into a network of textual relations”, and meaning has become

“something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations” (Allen, 2006, p. 12).

Combining Saussurean and Bakhtinian theories of language and theories, Julia Kristeva articulated the intertextual theory in the 1960s, during a period of transition from structuralism to poststructuralism. She defines text as “a translinguistic apparatus”, a “productivity” that creates a “redistributive (destructive-constructive)” relationship to the language, a “permutation of texts, an intertextuality” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 36). The term “ideologeme”, seen as “the intersection of a given textual arrangement (a semiotic practice) with the utterances (sequences) that it either assimilates into its own space or to which it refers in the space of exterior texts (semiotic practices)” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 36), is used in order to explain the utterance specific to the novel and the way, it links the text as a totality to historical and social con-text:

Novelistic utterances, as they pertain to this suprasegmental level, are linked up within the totality of novelistic production. By studying them as such, I shall establish a typology of these utterances and then proceed to investigate, as a second step, their origins outside the novel. Only in this way can the novel be defined in its unity and/or as ideologeme. To put it another way, the functions defined according to the extra-novelistic textual set (Te) take on value within the novelistic textual set (Tn). The ideologeme of the novel is precisely this intertextual function defined according to the Te and having value within Tn (Kristeva, 1980, p. 37).

The first pages of “The Namesake” introduce an event that becomes symbolical for the entire utterance of the novel. The train accident that had almost killed Ashoke Ganguli in 1961, while he was on his journey to his grandparents, is told in retrospection, pointing the details that gather significance with every page. He was reading his favourite Russian short story, “The Overcoat”, immersed in the “wide, snow-white, windy avenues of St. Petersburg”, when the bogies of the train capsized into a depression and the one in which he was sitting was “flung by the speed of the crash farther into the field” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 25). The character remembers the shouts of the rescuers and his inability to speak or to see, thrust partway out the window. It was his dropping the page from the book he was clutching in his bleeding hand that drew the rescuers’ attention. Lying in bed for a whole year with serious injuries, he envisions the future that a passenger from the train, Gosh, had suggested to him, “Pack a pillow and a blanket and see much of the world as you can” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 23).

A few lines later, the story is summarized as a shadow that refuses to disappear, even away from India, the country where he almost lost his life, in an American “small gray city caked with snow”:

He has tried but failed to push these images away, the twisted, battered, capsized bogies, of the train, his body twisted below it, the terrible crunching sound he had heard but not comprehended, his bones crushed as fine as flour [...] He was born twice in India, and then a third time, in America. Three lives by thirty. For this he thanks his parents, and their parents, and the parents of their parents. [...] But there is one more dead soul he has to thank. He cannot thank the book; the book has perished, as he nearly did, in scattered pieces, in the earliest hours of an October day, in a field 209 kilometers from Calcutta. Instead of thanking God he thanks the Russian writer who had saved his life (Lahiri, 2003, p. 28).

The story becomes a narrative and symbolical core. It shows its power throughout the narration, especially when the clash between the two different cultures creates a fertile soil for the intertextual patterns. The next example is when their baby has to be named in order to leave the hospital, and Ashoke remembers again the page “crumpled tightly in his fingers, the sudden shock of the lantern’s glare in his eyes” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 35), giving his son the name of the man who had saved his life, Gogol. His father fails to tell him the story when he turns 14, as we have seen, but he recollects it every time it is triggered by an apparently insignificant event. One of these moments is when Gogol’s train has been stopped in the field for over an hour, causing his father to wait nervously and eventually tell him the story that led to his unusual name. This is the moment when the story is transferred to the son and Gogol is the one who tries to imagine his father’s mangled body among hundreds of dead ones. After his father’s death, the memory of the accident he has never seen, “the disaster that has given him his name” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 181) is vivid until the last page of the book, when he finally starts to read “The Overcoat”.

All this insistence upon a core event and a name seems to have the only goal of taking the novel next to the short story that functions as a hypertext. This intention is evident from the first pages, when a summary of “The Overcoat” is provided, emphasizing the main events. The narrator inserts quotations from the story and adds an interpretation attributed to Ashoke: “shading light on all that was irrational, all that was inevitable about the world” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 21). The word “inevitable” acquires its final meanings in the last pages of the book, when

Gogol recollects the events that shaped his life: “They were things for which it was impossible to prepare but which one spent a lifetime looking back, trying to accept, interpret, comprehend. Things that should never have happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these were what prevailed, what endured, in the end” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 280).

The evident elements of intertextuality do not stop here. Several pages are dedicated to the encounter between Gogol and his “godfather”, when his literature teacher, Mr. Lawson announces the study of short story and distributes books in which Gogol is listed after Faulkner, and before Hemingway. The superficial purpose of the short biography pigmented with exact details of his character and tumultuous life is to emphasize the reaction of a teenage boy constructing a powerful repulsion to his name. The narrator observes the torments and reactions of the character, the feeling that “the name was a particularly unflattering snapshot on himself”, his need to leave the classroom, his hands pressed against his ears when the teacher relates Nikolai Gogol’s death, his eyes tightly shut. Furthermore, these passages acquire new meanings under the light of intertextual studies.

The structuralists see all the interconnections among texts as transtextuality with the inclusion of subclassified concepts such as intertextuality (the actual presence of one text within another), metatextuality (the relation of commentary that a text takes to another text), architextuality (the reader’s expectations and reception of the work), paratextuality and hypertextuality (Genette, 1997). When activated or mobilized, the intertext “leaves little leeway to readers and controls closely their response”, thus becoming the modality by which “the text maintains its identity despite changing times, despite the evolution of the sociolect, and despite the ascent of readerships unforeseen by the author” (Riffaterre, 1990, p. 56).

The concept of paratextuality offers new opportunities for the analysis of the novel. As Genette explains, “the paratext” refers to those elements which “lie on the threshold of the text and which help to direct and control the reception of the text by its readers” (Allen, 2006, p. 103). It consists of peritext and epitext. The elements of the peritexts are important for the present approach, including the title and the epigraph.

The functions of a title are to designate, to indicate the subject matter and to tempt the public (Genette, 1997, p. 82). According to Genette’s description, “The Namesake” is a thematic title, metaphorically related to an unquestionably central element. “A person named after another”, the namesake becomes the leitmotif of the novel. We have indicated the circumstances in which the central character was named, but the problem of names has deeper implications, in the context of dislocated immigrant families. Moreover, it becomes a

meaningful problem of identity. As explained in the novel, Indians have two names: a pet name, “daknam”, used by friends, meaningless, “deliberately silly, ironic, and even onomatopoeic”; and a good name, “bhalanam”, that appears on all official papers, representing dignified and enlightened qualities. Gogol’s mother’s name, Ashima, means “she who is limitless, without borders” and his father’s name, Ashoke, means “he who transcends grief” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 33). Parents cannot give good names, this is the honor of their grandparents, but the letter that contains the names for the baby is lost. Under the circumstances, a pet name is given, Gogol. But this name is not meaningless, it means life for Ashoke and the incident at kindergarten (when the good name, Nikhil (“he who is entire, encompassing all”), is rejected by the little boy and a pet name becomes a good name) does not seem incidental any more.

In “The Overcoat”, the narrator explains why the character was called Akaky Akakievich and develops upon the situation leading to such a name. The mother was offered three names of saints, Mokky, Sossy and the name of the martyr Khozdazat, but she rejected them. Trifly, Dula, Varakhasy, Pavsikhaky and Vakhtisy were also rejected therefore the solution was to name the child after his father. This is obviously a strategy used by the narrator to justify to the readers the name of the character, strategy that also explains the succession of events in “The Namesake”. Nevertheless, the name Akaky Akakievich created numerous interpretations. St. Acacius, a 16th century holy martyr, was famous for his asceticism and forbearance. The name can also be derived from the Greek *akakia*, meaning “innocence, simplicity, guilelessness”. Moreover, the name can also be a reference to *kaka*, a childish word for excrement. The last name, Bashmachkin, means “shoe” and creates a contrast with his family who wore boots but also directs the interpretation towards his condition of being a subordinate, under someone’s shoes.

The epigraph that Jhumpa Lahiri uses for the novel is taken from this part of the short story, underlining the significance of the title, as Genettes observes, “commenting – sometimes authoritatively – and thus elucidating and thereby justifying” it (1997, p. 151): “The reader should realize himself that it could not have happened otherwise, and that to give him any other name was quite out of the question” (Lahiri, 2003). These two correlated elements, the title and the epigraph, justify the intended character of intertextuality in the novel and thus encourage a closer analysis of the two texts. According to Fanger (1979), “The Overcoat” can be interpreted as a parable presented on three levels: the world of Petersburg that goes on without him, a comic-grotesque narration and a direct dialogue to the audience

invited to reflect on the meaning of the other two levels (1979, p. 155). Moreover, “The Overcoat” can serve the function of a “hypotext” or “intertext” that acts as a territory of retelling and reinterpreting in the postcolonial novel.

3. The Intertextual Dimension of Otherness

In “Nikolai Gogol. Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism” (2007), Edyta M. Bojanovska relates the dialogue and ulterior correspondence between Nikolai Gogol and Aleksandra Osipovna Smirnova to the subject of his nationality. The question “In your soul, are you a Russian or a Ukrainian?” receives different answers which reveal the “conflicted attitude toward his Russio-Ukrainian identity, which he alternatively bemoaned and embraced” (Bojanovska, 2007, p. 1). The book offers an answer for the strange death described in “The Namesake”, the writer’s self-conviction to starvation until death, referring to his disappointment after the critics’ accusations that he lacked the requisite knowledge to write about Russia.

The Gangulis, Indian Bangalis from Calcutta who go to the United States in pursuit of a respectful life, face the effects of the spatial, cultural and emotional dislocation and try to reach the “beyond” preserving their national and social identity. But, as Bhabha asserts, the “intimacies of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very act of going beyond – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the present which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced” (1994, p. 4). They face the “revisionary time” which facilitates the accumulation of elements from the new culture that threaten to double or to displace the Indian customs and traditions:

And yet to a casual observer, the Gangulis, apart from the name on their mailbox, apart from the issues of *India Abroad* and *Sangbad Bichitra* that are delivered there, appear no different from their neighbors. Their garage, like every other, contains shovels and pruning shears and a sled. They purchase a barbecue for tandoori on the porch in summer. They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house (Lahiri, 2003, p. 68).

Nevertheless, Gogol Ganguli faces a different kind of otherness that can be partially explained by Bhabha's term "in-between" that designates a state in which "the differences find their agency in a form of the future where the past is not ordinary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 219) The condition of the main character in "The Namesake" is a particular one and can be better viewed as a continuous "negotiation with Otherness" that "seems to be a persistent feature of the negotiation with the self" (Khair, 2009, p. 14).

The narrator observes that, "as a young boy Gogol doesn't mind his name" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 70) which is never an option on key chains or metal pins or refrigerator magnets. He is accepted in the American society as any other child, teachers are accustomed to his name, after "a year or two, the students no longer tease and say Giggle or Gargle", his name looks ordinary in the programs of the school Christmas plays. The coming of age gathers events that deepen the implications of his identity weirdly reflected by his name. His state of alterity does not resemble that of his parents. This is revealed during the discussion he has with his parents on the subject of changing his name. He asks his parents why they gave him a pet name and, out of all possible choices, why they had to name him after somebody so strange. His argument that nobody takes him seriously is defeated by his father's question "Who does not take you seriously?" doubled by the narrator's explanation: "For his father had a point; the only person who didn't take Gogol seriously, the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name, the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 101).

The intertextual dialogue of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel "The Namesake" with Nikolai Gogol's short story "The Overcoat" reveals its self-conscious layers when Gogol takes the decision and acts towards changing his name. The first argument for this approach is the fact that "The Overcoat" also presents a change. As a consequence, a question needs to be asked: Can the Name be the Overcoat? In order to answer this question, a closer analysis of the short story needs to be made.

Akaky Akakievich is a simple St. Petersburg clerk ("bald, pockmarked, short-sighted, and the scapegoat of his colleagues who invent cruel ways of mocking him") who "discovers one day that his pathetically threadbare coat no longer protects him against the fierce winter wind" (Brombert, 1991, p. 569). Gogol Ganguli decides to change his name because he cannot bear its oddity, he cannot envisage it written on a Bachelor of Arts degree, at the top of

a resumé, on a business card. It is the “cold” of the future in a country where he continuously questions his identity, a future from which he feels he can only protect himself by adopting a name with a powerful meaning, Nikhil. The immediate and superficial argument is that the change is possible, as he finds out from a magazine article called *Second Baptisms* in which he discovers that “plenty of people changed their names: actors, writers, revolutionaries, transvestites” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 99). The narrator offers again details about Nikolai Gogol’s life, detailing that he shortened his name from Gogol-Yanovsky to Gogol. Another reason for changing his name is that it was much too simple.

Akaky’s old overcoat receives a detailed description: “it was somehow strangely constituted: its collar diminished more and more each year, for it went to mend other parts. The mending did not testify to any skill in the tailor, and the results were in fact crude and unsightly” (Gogol, 1999, p. 222). The tailor is introduced, Petrovich, who had also his name changed from Grigory to Petrovich, with his blind eye and pockmarks all over his face, with his disfigured nail on his big toe. Petrovich’s verdict is definitive: the overcoat cannot be patched, it must be changed, “there’s nothing to put a patch on, nothing for it to hold to” (Gogol, 199, p. 223). This approach towards the old overcoat, ironically called “housecoat”, resembles Gogol’s attempts to disguise his name, to shorten it somehow, “but Gogol, already short and catchy, resists mutation” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 75).

Akaky Akakievich “is introduced as being inherently static, [...] a creature without a self, existing timelessly in the pleasant little world of his own mechanical copying” (Fanger, 1979, p. 158). For Gogol Ganguli, “the pleasant little world” can be identified as the space of his Bengali-like family existence. They have tried to create their small universe as a replica of the real India. The change of name coincides with the rupture from his parents’ universe and it feels easier to ignore them, to ignore his father’s desire for him to follow a career in engineering and register for a drawing class in the evenings.

According to Riffaterre, the intertexts can be identified through a series of indices that point to the text or texts “which the reader must know in order to understand a work of literature in terms of its overall significance (as opposed to the discrete meanings of its successive words, phrases and sentences)” (1990, p. 56). These indices are called “connectives”. The connectives have two components, the substitute in the text and its “corollary correspondent in the intertext”, thus enabling the representation of pairs of opposites: convention, tradition, sociolect (the already said) – in the intertext; departure from

convention, novelty, idiolect (negation or transformation of the already said) – in the text (Riffaterre, 1990, p. 75).

What is more, Fanger remarks that “the overcoat appears as the symbol of false development and its moral role in the story becomes a warning [...] of the pitfalls of petty passions” (1979, p. 159). Trying to apply this pattern entirely to the novel does not create satisfactory results. As Nikhil, the character has a promising future: a month away from the final moment of the novel, he is to begin a new job at a smaller architectural practice, producing his own designs, with a possibility of becoming a future associate. In this case, “Nikhil will live on, publicly celebrated, unlike Gogol, purposely hidden, legally diminished, now all but lost” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 283). The thing that Gogol discovers in the name to be lost in the pages of the book is his father’s presence.

For Akaky Akakievich, the day when he receives the new overcoat is filled with happiness. He compares it with a “great festive holiday”. A chief clerk offers to give a party to celebrate the overcoat and invites Akaky. On the way to the party, Akaky starts to notice women and stops in front of a lighted shop window to look at a picture that portrayed a woman taking off a shoe and baring her whole leg. On the way back from the party, he “even suddenly ran, for unknown reason, after some lady who passed by like lightening” (Gogol, 199, p. 228).

Gogol used the name Nikhil for the first time when he had to introduce himself to a girl. He does not want to see her reaction and explain his real name. This is when he kisses a girl for the first time, but the experience lacks authenticity because he feels that “it hadn’t been Gogol who’d kissed Kim”. As Nikhil, the character plunges into the American life and follows his feelings, trying to get as far as possible from his father’s alma mater. His relationship with Maxine is the one that establishes this new identity. The way she and her parents live is so totally different from his parents’ existence that he starts to analyze it as he gets further and further. He adopts Maxine’s and her parents’ manner of living, “the mess that surrounds Maxine”, “he learns to love the food she and her parents eat”, “he learns to wake up earlier than he is used to”, “as he comes to know her, he realizes that she has never wished she were anyone other than herself, raised in any other place, in any other way” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 138).

4. Conclusions

As Allen observes, the feminist and postcolonial approaches to intertextuality have hyphenated an ambivalent discourse that reflects the existence of a 'split' subject "whose utterances are always double-voiced, their own and yet replete with an otherness which we can associate with a socially oriented notion of intertextuality" (2006, p. 165). On the other hand, critics of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" have noticed the complex ambivalence of the discourse, as the narrator "becomes a performer, a buffoonish actor mimicking incoherence itself" (Brombert, 1991, p. 574).

The same narrator patiently depicts the crucial moment when Akaky Akakievich's overcoat is stolen. The details of the cold Russian night are overwhelmed by the dynamics of the scene which only emphasizes the afterwards state: "and felt no more" (Gogol, 1999, p. 229). The sense of emptiness, of desolation and humiliation is the same that burden Gogol Ganguli's existence in two crucial moments: his father's death and the failure of his marriage. Both of them have the effect of bringing to light the questionable name that acquires new meanings, as a container of memory, recollecting the image and presence of the father.

All in all, the intertextual approach to Jhumpa Lahiri's novel "The Namesake" draws attention upon the way the work constructs interwoven patterns of Otherness in the cultural context of dislocation. Such an approach emphasizes the idea that the hypertextual presence of the short story "The Overcoat" shapes the tragic paternal imagery and leads to a philosophical vision of the traditional issue of alterity, thus revealing a particular and original understanding of humanity in the context of globality.

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