

THE GROTESQUE AS CULTURAL STRATEGY: DECONSTRUCTING PASHTUN STEREOTYPES IN “*THE PATHANS: A SKETCH*” BY GHANI KHAN

Sania Shehzadi¹, Dr. Abdul Waheed Qureshi², Aiman Haider³

^{1,3}MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan.

²Associate Professor- Department of English Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan.

¹laleen13196@gmail.com, ²waheedqureshi@awkum.edu.pk, ³aimanhaider33@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18513718>

Keywords

Article History

Received: 08 December 2025

Accepted: 23 January 2026

Published: 07 February 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Abdul Waheed Qureshi

Abstract

Literary narratives are often viewed as cultural spaces within which identities are formed, negotiated, and challenged. *The Pathans: A Sketch* (1947) by Abdul Ghani Khan is a complicated depiction of the Pashtun society with its exaggerated, paradoxical, and emotionally charged portrayals. This paper investigates the working of the grotesque as a cultural and narrative technique within the text to generate stereotypical and yet ambiguous images of the Pashtun identity. The major dilemma being discussed is whether Khan's intimate and sympathetic portrayal unintentionally perpetuates the reductive stereotypes and generates the dilemma of the collective self-representation in the case of Pashtuns. Although earlier studies have paid much attention to Khan as a philosophical humanist or nationalist vision, little has been done to unmask the grotesque aspects of his cultural representation and what they say about his ideas. The proposed research will address that gap by bringing a critical, deconstructive approach to the text. Through a qualitative textual analysis, the study applies the Argumentation Model by Stephen Toulmin to discuss how the cultural assertions about Pashtun traditions, honor, violence, and romance have been created, supported, and qualified in the narrative. The analysis indicates that the representation of Khan is based on binary oppositions that are unstable (noble/savage and tradition/progress) and do not lend to meaning. The grotesque both humanizes and perverts the Pashtun identity to show it as fragmented and contingent, as opposed to essential. The research work adds value to literary and cultural studies by emphasizing the need to engage critically with culturally dominant texts that define ethnicity and group identity.

INTRODUCTION

Literary narratives usually serve as cultural documents in which societies are represented, understood, and occasionally misconstrued. Authors often use indirect techniques in their writing- irony, satire, exaggeration, etc. to present social truths without stating them. One of such strategies is the grotesque, a mode that fuses humor with distortion to disrupt the normative representations. Although

the grotesque may be a tool of the critical approach, it may also run the risk of underpinning the very stereotypes that it seems to challenge (Bakhtin, 1984). This ambivalence is especially important in cases when literature tries to depict culturally marginalized or historically misrepresented people. *The Pathans: A Sketch* by Ghani Khan (1947) is in a distinctive place in the Pashtun literary discourse.

The text is written by an insider and tends to show the Pashtun society in terms of satire and exaggerated characterization. But instead of a steady image of culture, it is a story of admiration, ridicule, criticism, and stereotype. The effect of this fluctuation is a dialectic representation whereby Pashtun identity is shown to be fragmented, contradictory, and grotesquely exaggerated. This kind of representation prompts some serious questions regarding the way in which cultural identity is produced through the construction of language and whether satire serves as a form of resistance or unwitting support of stereotypes.

Theoretically, deconstruction is a powerful way of exploring such tensions. Deconstruction questions the assumption of singularity of meaning by revealing contradictions, unstable and repressed assumptions in texts (Derrida, 1976). Compared to cultural representation, it enables critics to question the ways in which narratives can assert and undermine their own claims at the same time. When reading *The Pathans: A Sketch*, one can discover that the use of exaggerated descriptions in this text destabilizes the essentialist concept of Pashtun identity instead of making it clear.

The grotesque in this work is perceived not only as a stylistic element but also as a cultural strategy of perception formation. Through examining the grotesque exaggeration in its argument and ideological operation, the paper aims to reveal in the text the ways in which the Pashtun stereotype is produced, challenged, and complicated. Using a qualitative, theoretically-based tackle, this study leads to greater discussions concerning self-representation, the cultural ambiguity, and the ethics of literature representation under a postcolonial setting (Spivak, 2010; Barthes, 1972).

Overview of *The Pathans: A Sketch*

The Pathans: A Sketch was issued in 1947, the period of a great political and cultural change in South Asia. Ghani Khan, a leading Pashtun intellectual and poet, puts the text forward as a reflective and satirical description of Pastan society. Khan does not focus on a systematic historical or anthropological work, but instead on a sketchy narrative style, a mixture of anecdote, humor, and cultural commentary. It purports to summarise the

essence of the Pashtuns based on generalised findings on their temperament, customs, and social values.

The text also tends to highlight such characteristics that have long been linked to the Pashtun identity, i.e., honor, courage, pride, hospitality, and rebellion. Nevertheless, the attributes are usually translated using hyperbole and irony, making cultural identifiers into an exaggerated caricature. The tone of Khan varies between the loving and the mocking, creating a close and a distant narrative voice. This dualism makes it difficult to determine whether the text should be seen as a celebration of the indigenous culture of the Pashtun, a critique of its shortcomings, or just a form of entertainment in the form of satire.

Notably, the insider authorship of the text gives it some air of authenticity, thereby blurring the ideological connotations of its depictions. Given that the narrative is addressed within the community, the stereotypes might not seem reductive but self-reflexive. However, as this paper contends, insider status does not necessarily stop the reproduction of essentialist or problematic representations. Rather, *The Pathans: A Sketch* is a rich place to explore how self-representation may reflect the outward discourses and yet assert cultural authority.

Problem Statement

Although the literary importance and tendency to refer to it as a cultural commentary, *The Pathans: A Sketch* demonstrates a problematic form of representation that has not been adequately discussed in a critical theoretical manner. The main issue pursued in this work is the ambiguous and grotesque nature of the depiction of the Pashtun identity, which criticizes and supports cultural stereotypes at the same time. Although the satire and exaggeration used by Ghani Khan seem to criticize the strict cultural norms of the community, they also run the risk of creating reductive portrayals of the Pashtuns as excessively violent, irrational, or a one-dimensional culture.

Common interpretations of the text have tended to dismiss the humor as harmless or its excess as simply stylistic and not giving thought to the ideological implications of such presentation. This does not consider that repeated grotesque imagery can be used

argumentatively to normalize stereotypes in the pretext of satire. According to Barthes, cultural myths work because they take historically contingent ideas and make them seem natural (Barthes 1972). In this regard, the exaggerated representations of Khan can play an unwitting role in mythologizing the Pashtun identity.

Besides, the absence of methodological rigor in earlier analyses has constrained scholarly interest in the nature of the construction of meaning in the text. Unless there is an analytic structure of analysis, interpretations are impressionistic and are in danger of recreating the ambiguities that they attempt to describe. It is then necessary to have a systematic and theory-based analysis that will reveal the assumptions, contradictions, and rhetoric strategies underlying the story.

This research fills this gap by applying deconstruction and Stephen Toulmin's Model of Argumentation to the analysis of the way grotesque representation works both linguistically and ideologically. In this way, it aims to explain how cultural exaggeration turns into a location of dilemma rather than resolution and makes the self-representation of the Pashtun more complex, as opposed to stabilizing.

Rationale of the Study

The motivation behind this research arises due to the convergence of literary depiction, cultural identity, and critical theory. Pashtuns themselves have been victims of stereotypical representation both in colonial and postcolonial literature, where they are usually described in the tropes of violence, tribalism, and hyper-masculinity. These representations should be closely examined when they are present in insider narratives instead of blind acceptance.

The reasons behind choosing this study are to re-evaluate *The Pathans: A Sketch* without seeing through its superficial humor and cultural relatability. The study aims to explain the relationship between exaggeration and connotation by using the grotesque as a storytelling tool. The deconstructive practice provides an opportunity to study the problem of textual instability and see how the story itself discredits its own assertions of cultural truth (Derrida, 1976).

The paper seeks to add to the body of Pashtun literary criticism by providing a balanced and conceptually informed reading of the work that does not exclude the text and shapes it as an idealized work. By so doing, it promotes a better responsible cultural self-representation in literature.

Significance of the Study

The study is both theoretically and culturally important. Theoretically, it adds to the study of literature by showing how deconstruction and analysis of argumentation can be successfully integrated to analyze cultural representation. Through the grotesque as a cultural strategy being foregrounded, the research broadens the already available areas of debates on satire, exaggeration, and identity construction.

The study is culturally valuable in the sense that it provides a critical analysis of Pashtun representation by the community. It questions the idea that the insider narratives are necessarily authentic or non-stereotypical, and puts the emphasis on the nuances of how the self and the other are constructed in the literary discourse (Spivak, 2010). This view is especially important in postcolonial research, where voice and power continue to be a central issue.

Moreover, the work offers a methodological framework of analyzing the culturally sensitive texts without demonizing and glorifying them. The research encourages a more ethical and consideration-based approach to literary criticism by revealing contradictions instead of making conclusions.

Research Objective

To examine the manner in which grotesque exaggeration serves as a cultural strategy, to build and destabilize Pashtun stereotypes in *The Pathans: A Sketch*.

Research Question

What is the functioning of grotesque exaggeration in *The Pathans: A Sketch* in order to support and at the same time to destabilize stereotypes concerning Pashtun identity?

Data Analysis Method: Argumentation Model of Stephen Toulmin.

The Argumentation Model by Stephen Toulmin (2003) is a useful model for analyzing the argumentation structure in natural language. In contrast to formal logic, the model proposed by Toulmin is centered on the reasoning in everyday life, thus being especially appropriate to literary texts in which claims are not explicitly presented, but rather implied.

The model is comprised of six components, which include Claim, Data, Warrant, Backing, Qualifier, and Rebuttal. Every grotesque or exaggerated representation of Pashtun identity is explored in this study to determine the claim that is being made about culture. The textual evidence supporting it acts as data, and the warrant shows the cultural presupposition connecting the evidence with the statement. Ideological or historical justifications are supported by backing, the extent of exaggeration is pointed out by qualifiers, and contradictions or alternative meanings are pointed out by refutation.

This approach is used because it enables the study to go beyond description to analytical clarity. The model can be used to uncover the mechanisms of persuasion that lie behind satire by mapping the way stereotypes are argued into existence (Toulmin, 2003; Freeman, 2011).

Literature Review

The development of literary interest in the ideas of the grotesque, cultural representation, and identity formation has gone through a series of critical phases. Initial academic interest in the grotesque centered on the aesthetic and psychological aspects of it. Among the first and most important works is *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957) by Wolfgang Kayser, in which the author introduces the definition of the grotesque as a form of mode that creates estrangement by twisting familiar reality. According to Kayser, grotesque imagery shocks the reader by adding a world that seems familiar and at the same time appears to be disorderly on a fundamental level, thus leading to anxiety and ambiguity. His work makes the grotesque a legitimate literary strategy and not a decorative or comic means, which forms the basis of the ideological interpretation later.

Mikhail Bakhtin, roughly contemporarily, gave the concept of the grotesque a much different meaning in his treatment of grotesque realism in *Rabelais and His World* (1965/1984). Bakhtin sees the grotesque as a carnivalesque power that defies authority, hierarchy, and fixed identities by exaggerating, articulating body imagery, and using humor. Bakhtin, unlike Kayser, who focused on alienation, brings out the regenerative and dialogic quality of the grotesque in the image. This duality is especially helpful in the analysis of the texts in which exaggeration serves as both a form of criticism and statement, the tension that is primary in the cultural self-representation.

The concept was further developed by Philip Thomson, who described the grotesque as an undecided conflict of incompatibles (1972). Thomson stresses that the grotesque does not close itself but maintains contradiction instead. This concept is very important in interpreting literary works that freely balance between satire and seriousness, leaving the reader with doubts concerning the intentions of the author. This is more applicable when literature is trying to establish collective cultural identity via exaggeration, and there is no resolution to such tension.

This connection of representation and ideology became more popular with *Mythologies* (1972) by Roland Barthes. Barthes shows how the meanings of culture are transformed into naturalized facts that were historically and ideologically created. One does not need to theorize the grotesque directly; nevertheless, Barthes' idea of myth is essential in explaining the process in which an exaggerated cultural feature evolved into stereotypes. Cultural exaggeration is experienced through repetition and narrative authority, which can be presented as funny and at the same time, strengthen dominant identity perceptions.

On the Grotesque (1982) by Geoffrey Galt Harpham also functions as an aestheticist and cultural critical point. Harpham places the grotesque in the context of cultural uncertainty, as he argues that grotesque bodies are created at the place of the collapse of boundaries between categories. He stresses the grotesque that does not obey stable interpretation and shows ideological contradictions. This view helps to develop a subversion of grotesque

representation as a place of cultural anxiety but not a place of narrative clarity.

One of the most significant changes in the critical approach to literature was the development of deconstruction, which was first presented by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (1967/1976). Derrida argues with the belief that language expresses fixed meaning and instead suggests that the sense is always put off by means of difference, or *différance*. By deconstruction, we can see that texts depend on binary oppositions, e.g., civilized/primitive or rational/irrational, which always undermine themselves. This method is especially applicable to cultural products that strive to establish the identity of the collective by generalization.

Paul de Man continued Derrida by paying attention to rhetoric and figuration. *The Resistance to Theory* (1986), de Man claims that the language of literature is in conflict with proclaiming any truth due to irony and tropes. His writing proves that texts speak more than they might mean, particularly when they are figuratively written. The concept plays an essential role in the study of satirical stories in which exaggeration creates and disrupts meaning at the same time. The deconstructive approach to identity and representation was also elaborated by other researchers like Helene Cixous and Barbara Johnson, who combined the deconstructive thinking with feminist and psychoanalytic criticism. According to Cixous (2000), identity in language is unstable, and it is inevitable that texts present the hidden meanings and contradictions. These changes increased the applicability of deconstruction to more general cultural and ideological issues than to the formal textual analysis.

The presence of deconstruction in postcolonial theory is best reflected in the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak, in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988/2010), challenges the way representations, particularly those which purport to represent marginalized groups of people, create structures of silence. Her idea of self-othering is especially applicable to insider narratives when writers tend to unconsciously reproduce dominant or colonial discourses when they are portraying their communities. This observation forms the basis of future realization on how cultural stereotypes can exist even in self-written materials.

Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) also makes a contribution to this debate on the basis of rejecting grand narratives, which focuses on fragmentation and plurality. Lyotard is cynical about these totalizing cultural assertions, and his tendency can be compared to deconstructive approaches to texts that attempt to establish collective identity in immutable terms. In the same manner, the focus of Maurice Blanchot on the ambiguity in the narrative matter reveals the inability to establish the concrete meaning, especially in works that address issues of identity and cultural expression (Blanchot, 2015).

In a slightly more recent academic focus, the focus has changed to the consideration of the grotesque in the context of contemporary cultures and postcolonial cultures. According to Edwards and Graulund (2013), the grotesque is more of a critical mode that reveals the ideological contradictions instead of fixing them. Their work is a good resource when it comes to the analysis of ethnic and cultural representation in modern literature because it illustrates the disruptive power of grotesque imagery to the cultural norms.

The Pathans: A Sketch by Ghani Khan has received relatively little scholarly attention, but it is increasing. Previously encountered readings tend to discuss the text in terms of funny or loving cultural remarks and do not question the ideological consequences of the writing. But the recent research has started to take a more critical attitude. A stylistic analysis of the text carried out by Sardar Ali et al. (2023) reveals that Khan employs figurative language and exaggeration. Although their study is a great contribution to the field of linguistics, it does not cover how such an exaggeration can lead to cultural stereotyping.

On the same note, Bahisht and Iqbal (2024) provide an insight into the topic of translation and cultural adaptation in *The Pathans: A Sketch* showing the variation of the meaning in both linguistic and cultural levels. Their results also make the idea of the stable cultural representation even more complex and emphasize the necessity of theoretically based analysis. The wider research on the topic of cultural ambiguity and stereotype in South Asian literature also highlights how important critical frames are in

the analysis of identity-based stories (Arbab et al., 2025).

Regardless of such input, current scholarship does not offer a systematic analysis of how grotesque exaggeration is a cultural strategy in *The Pathans: A Sketch*. Not many studies merge deconstruction with a theoretical analytic framework so as to uncover the process through which stereotypes are argued into being and destabilized at the same time. This gap justifies the approach used in the present study that involves the combination of deconstructive reading and the use of the Argumentation Model created by Stephen Toulmin in order to provide a refined analysis of the issue of cultural representation and identity dilemma within the text of Ghani Khan.

Theoretical Framework: Deconstruction.

Deconstruction, as put by Jacques Derrida, questions the concept of fixed meaning by showing the internal contradiction of texts (Derrida, 1976). Instead of pursuing an objective interpretation, deconstruction looks at the way that meaning is created in terms of difference, absence, and binary opposition.

This paper employs deconstruction in examining how *The Pathans: A Sketch* is constructed around oppositional structures, rational/irrational, civilized/primitive, heroic/grotesque, to construct Pashtun identity. These binaries are demonstrated to fall apart when they are scrutinized by close reading, demonstrating the instability of cultural representation. This analysis is especially appropriate to deconstruction, since it enables the grotesque to be understood as a place of tension rather than resolution.

Through deconstruction, the analysis reveals the way in which the text compromises its own cultural authority, making satire create a zone of uncertainty. This method allows a critical approach to representation without making predetermined evaluations, which makes it best to analyze culturally sensitive stories.

Analysis and Discussion

The Pathans: A Sketch by Ghani Khan (1947) is not only an ethnographic work, but a complicated rhetorical act. Reorganizing its claims in the model of argumentation offered by Stephen Toulmin, the text creates a picture of the identity of the Pashtun

people, which is a disputed one in its nature. These arguments, when subjected to the deconstruction practiced by Jacques Derrida, turn out to be unstable, self-subverting, and at all times caught in the difference game. In this analysis, the four prevailing modes of the narrative used by Khan are deconstructed: the grotesque, stereotyping, the illustration of custom, and romanticization, to show how the text creates and dissolves the very cultural fabric it claims to narrate.

The Grotesque as a Deconstructive Narrative Engine

Claim

Ghani Khan employs the grotesque not merely as a stylistic device but as the fundamental narrative logic of his text, performing a deconstruction of Pashtun identity by forcing it to inhabit irreconcilable binary poles simultaneously, thereby rendering any fixed essence undecidable.

Grounds (Data)

The text is founded on a series of constitutive paradoxes that establish the grotesque as its structural principle.

The opening presents a composite figure:

“I want to bring him down from the peaks of Khyber... his eyes full of manliness, laughter and the devil, and his head full of a childish and noble pride” (p. 1).

This portrait amalgamates opposing signifiers (honor/devilry, childishness/nobility) within a single, impossible subject.

Emotional states are systematically inverted: *“He laughs and sings when he is frightened”* (p. 7). This severs the expected signifier-signified chain, presenting affect as its own contradiction.

Throughout, the Pathan is defined by such couplings: generous/vengeful, poetically free/rigidly bound, sublimely brave/utterly vulnerable.

Warrant (Derridean Deconstruction)

Derrida posits that meaning in Western metaphysics is organized through hierarchical binary oppositions (e.g., noble/savage, courage/fear), where the first term is privileged. Deconstruction exposes the instability of these hierarchies, showing each term is constitutively dependent on its “inferior” opposite for its meaning—a relationship of supplementarity. The

grotesque of Khan is a machine of deconstruction through literature:

It breaks down the hierarchy by keeping both terms in indefinite, incessant suspension.

It reveals identity as an effect of *différance*—endlessly deferred and only present in the non-totalizable movement between these opposed traces.

The grotesque figure becomes the living embodiment of an aporia, a site where logical understanding fails and, the instability of all categorization is performed.

Backing

This rhetorical strategy is historically grounded. The Pashtun frontier was a site of intense colonial violence and anthropological stereotyping, processes that relied on fixed, binary classifications (“*martial race*,” “*noble savage*,” “*fanatic*”). Khan’s grotesque can be read as an aesthetic transcription of historical trauma, rejecting the clean, logocentric narratives of both colonial administrator and romantic nationalist by mimesis of a lived reality experienced as contradictory and absurd.

Qualifier

However, this deconstructive strategy carries a strategic risk. By privileging affective and aesthetic impact over socio-historical analysis, the text risks re-mystifying the very subjects it seeks to liberate from stereotype. The grotesque’s brilliant ambiguity can translate material, political causality into a timeless, mythological struggle, potentially obscuring the concrete determinants of marginalization.

Rebuttal

One could argue that grotesque is a straightforward tool of anti-colonial resistance, reclaiming complexity as a form of superior humanity. A deconstructive reading, however, insists on the ultimate undecidability of this politic. The text’s logic of overturning binaries cannot be arbitrarily stopped. In destabilizing the colonial “savage,” it also destabilizes any stable, positive “authentic” identity. Thus, the text resides in an aporetic space: it is simultaneously resistant, complicit (in re-inscribing myth), and transcendent of this very binary, performing identity as an endless, grotesque process of becoming.

Stereotypes and the Mythology of Naturalized Constructs

Claim

Khan’s text actively participates in the circulation and reinforcement of cultural stereotypes, but does so in a way that exposes their status as myth (in Roland Barthes’ sense), revealing the artificial chain of signification that transforms ideology into “*common sense*.”

Grounds (Data)

The narrative frequently invokes and re-circulates anthropological and racialized assumptions:

“Most people look at his nose and say he is a Jew... His Islamic faith and its inevitable influence on his life and manners give a certain plausibility to this impression” (p. 2).

Here, physical phenotype, religious practice, and racial origin are linked in a speculative, mythic chain.

Warrant (Barthesian Myth & Derridean Trace)

For Barthes, myth is a second-order semiological system that drains the original sign of its history and complexity, naturalizing a cultural construct. Khan’s repetition of such stereotypes, even with potential irony, reinforces their visibility. A Derridean reading extends this: the connection between “nose,” “Jew,” and “Islamic faith” is not a natural bond but a trace—a signifier whose meaning depends on an absent network of historical, colonial, and pseudo-scientific discourses. By laying these links bare in a single sentence, Khan exposes the constructedness of the stereotype, even as he enunciates it.

Backing

Stereotyping is a classic tool of colonial governance, enabling the categorization and control of populations. When reproduced by an “*insider*” like Khan, these stereotypes gain a dangerous aura of authenticity, making their deconstructive critique both more urgent and more complex, as they are voiced from a position of claimed cultural authority.

Qualifier

Khan’s narrative voice is often playful or ironic, which may function as a discursive shield. However, following deconstruction, irony itself is an unstable signifier; it does not erase the ideological content but

adds another layer of undecidability, potentially allowing a non-critical reader to accept the stereotype at face value.

Rebuttal

Applying Barthes' "Death of the Author," the text's meaning is not governed by Khan's possible ironic intent. The reader is thus structurally positioned to engage with these stereotypes as textual objects. An alert, deconstructive reader is empowered to trace the chain of signification back to its ideological roots, performing a critical resistance the text itself may only imply.

Customs and Traditions: Essentialism as Cultural Burden

Claim

Khan presents Pashtun customs (rivaj) as immutable, biologically-embedded codes, thereby engaging in a form of cultural essentialism that naturalizes history and conceals the political agency behind social norms.

Grounds (Data)

Tradition is framed as an inescapable, almost somatic force:

"I found my blood warmer than my brain, and customs harder to break than hearts" (p. 27).

"When a law is bred into the very fibre of a race it becomes a custom and persists long after the need is gone" (p. 27).

He cites specific practices like compensatory marriage: "The boy is made to pay damages... by giving away two or three girls to the family from which he stole one" (p. 30).

Warrant (Deconstructing Nature/Culture)

Derrida's work relentlessly deconstructs the nature/culture binary. By describing custom as "bred into the very fibre of a race," Khan's text collapses culture into nature, presenting a historical, social construct as a genetic inheritance. This is a logocentric gesture that seeks a transcendental, biological origin ("blood," "fibre") for what is in fact a contingent, discursive formation. The text thus naturalizes burden and obscures the historical "need" that first produced the custom.

Backing

Practices like badal (vengeance) and compensatory marriage are informal juridical systems born from specific historical conditions of statelessness and tribal organization. Presenting them as racial essence ignores their adaptive, political history and disproportionately naturalizes their burden on vulnerable members, particularly women.

Qualifier

Khan tends to deliver a voice of disillusioned resignation to such practices, admitting their burden. However, such a passive construction (harder to break than hearts) gives credibility to their inevitability instead of a critique of how they were constructed.

Rebuttal

A deconstructive reading in this case is liberatory. It claims that customs that are not natural but are linguistically and socially constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed. They are partaking in the act of repetition, of telling stories, which is why they persevere, not because of blood, but because of being told over and over again. It would be to read alongside the grain of the essentialism of Khan in order to leave open the prospect of change.

Romanticization: The Supplement of the Warrior-Lover.

Claim

Regarding the concept of romanticization, the representation of the Pashtun as a poetic, passionate warrior-lover is a strategic narrative employed to make the text more difficult but ultimately strengthen an idealized masculine cultural stereotype.

Grounds (Data)

Khan implicitly appeals to the vast store of Pashto tragic romance and expressive poetry, and identifies Pashtun identity with profound emotionality, artistic sensibility, and power to love sublimely, as well as on the field.

Warrant (The Supplement and Binary Hierarchy)

The concept of the supplement created by Derrida is central. Romanticization is a kind of extravagance of the grotesque and stereotypical images. It seems to

provide a humanizing aspect (*the “lover”*) that the negative stereotype of the warrior needs to be corrected. Nevertheless, the supplement adds and substitutes, showing something lacking in the original. This new dichotomy (warrior/lover) forms another hierarchical myth. The violent archetype is not unravelled but made more complex and rich, and is apt to sustain the genre of male-centred discourse, in which a depth of emotion is the prerogative of the male subject, and the agency of the female subject is pushed to the periphery of the romantic.

Backing

Pashtun folklore (*tapos*) is commonly focused on tragic and passionate love, though the plot of such stories is often about male will and female victimization. Although this romantic trope opposes colonial brutalism, it may be the project of nationalist or cultural revivalism, which forms an idealized aesthetic that overlooks domestic social stratification.

Qualifier

This romanticism gives the story a blend of narrative and emotional richness, which generates empathy in the reader. But it is a selective image, a different, but equally simplified perspective, which runs the risk of substituting the savage with the noble romantic primitive.

Rebuttal

As romanticization humanizes, deconstruction seeks to know what it excludes or suppresses. It questions whether this is indeed an act of subversion or a more advanced act of re-inscription of identity. The romantic Pathan is as much a textual effect as the grotesque, an idealized signifier that postpones the entire heterogeneous reality of Pashtun social life.

Conclusion

This study investigated the grotesque as a narrative mode in *The Pathans: A Sketch* by Ghani Khan to explore the representation of the Pashtun identity by virtue of exaggeration, paradox, and stereotype. The main issue of the analysis was to identify whether the image of Khan, regardless of its emotional richness and cultural closeness, poses a problem by

perpetuating the simplified and inconsistent representations of the Pashtun community. The discussion shows that the text written by Khan swings between admiration and critique, establishing Pashtuns as noble and violent, romantic and rigid, thus exemplifying an inconsistent and contradictory representation.

The application of the model of argumentation created by Stephen Toulmin allowed for a systematic analysis of the arguments presented by Khan and the cultural grounds of the latter and showed how the customs, traditions, and honor-based values are justified in the context of the narrative and can be criticized. The use of deconstruction also highlighted the precariousness of the binary oppositions within the text and served to bring out the fact that Pashtun identity is not fixed but is created through language, history, and power relations.

The research arrives at the conclusion that *The Pathans: A Sketch* can be interpreted not as a cultural objective description but as a literary and philosophical reflection. By perceiving the grotesque as a humanizing and distorting power, it is possible to understand the Pashtun identity in a more subtle manner and emphasize the necessity to critically read the texts that define cultural perception.

REFERENCES

- Arbab, M. M., Idrees, S., Zaman, D. B., & Rakhshanda. (2025). Cultural contours and ambiguous narratives: The analysis of Urdu drama *Khaie*. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*, 3(3), 256–270.
- Bahisht, S., & Iqbal, L. (2024). Eco-translatology: A study of adaptation and selection in the Urdu and Pashto translations of Ghani Khan's *The Pathans: A Sketch*. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 8(2), 554–568.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world* (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Indiana University Press.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). Hill and Wang.
- Blanchot, M. (2015). *The infinite conversation* (S. Hanson, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

- Cixous, H. (2000). *Rootprints: Memory and life writing*. Routledge.
- de Man, P. (1986). *The resistance to theory*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Edwards, J. D., & Graulund, R. (2013). *The grotesque*. Routledge.
- Fiedler, L. (1981). *Freaks: Myths and images of the secret self*. Anchor Press.
- Freeman, J. B. (2011). *Argument structure: Representation and theory*. Springer.
- Hanif, A., Irshad, S., & Farooq, M. (2025). Carnavalesque grotesque as a mode of subversion: A Bakhtinian study of Elif Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice*. *Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, 35(1), 255-275.
- Harpham, G. G. (1982). *On the grotesque: Strategies of contradiction in art and literature*. Princeton University Press.
- Kayser, W. (1957). *The grotesque in art and literature*. Columbia University Press.
- Liotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sardar Ali, S. H., Shah, S. U., Ahmad, Z., & Ali, K. (2023). A stylistic analysis of Ghani Khan's *The Pathan*. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 19(4), 1098-1107.
- Spivak, G. C. (2010). *Can the subaltern speak?* In R. Morris (Ed.), *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea* (pp. 21-78). Columbia University Press.
- Thomson, P. (1972). *The grotesque*. Methuen.
- Toulmin, S. (2003). *The uses of argument* (Updated ed.). Cambridge University Press.

