



# Interrogating Patriarchal Structures and Cultural Dichotomies in Ocean Vuong's Novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

**Mahima Goswami<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Kajal Chaudhary<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Student, School of Media Studies and Humanities, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research & Studies, Faridabad, India  
mahimaagoswami@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Assistant professor, Department of English, SMEH, MRIIRS, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research & Studies, Faridabad, India  
kajalchaudhary.sme@mriu.edu.in

## ABSTRACT—

This paper is looking at how patriarchy and identity and race and gender all mix up in books today, especially in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong. This study looks at how identity, ethnicity, and gender all blend together in books today, especially in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. It tries to show how norms in society and culture clashes make people feel in stories by using some smart articles. The paper mixes together themes from many writers, such as how patriarchy doesn't recognise women as entire individuals (Orban, 2003), how women stay stuck in the house (Burri, 2012), and how men's things is there but not talked about much (Fišerová, 2019). These thoughts help us understand Little Dog better, how he attempts to be himself even when society tries to change him, and how race, gender, and love all play a role in his existence.

The report also talks about how identity isn't something that stays the same. Orban (2003) also argues that. Little Dog in Vuong's story doesn't fall into just one category. It's hard to be LGBT, Vietnamese, American, or a male all at the same time. Gender and sexuality here are more like things that people learn or do than things that they are born with.

Paslawski (2018) also talks about how being queer, having family, and having trauma are all tangled up. He focusses at how feminist and patriarchal ideologies clash and how queer individuals strive to find their place in all of that. Vuong's character is going through the same thing: he wants to be free, but he is also stuck in what his family wants or doesn't comprehend. Finally, the article shows how patriarchy, identity, and cultural differences are a large part of novels nowadays, and Vuong's story mixed them all together. It shows how

Even when the system tells them they don't belong, those who don't fit in still attempting to find room for themselves. It's about staying alive, communicating your narrative, and just being.

**Keywords—** *Patriarchy, Identity, Gender, Race, Sexuality, Ocean Vuong*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong is a highly eerie and poetic book. It talks about memory and history, which can be personal or societal. The letter is written as a letter from a son to his mum who doesn't read. It talks about more than just what the boy says; it also talks about society and people's lives. Patriarchy and feeling out of place in a culture are the key themes in Vuong's work. Little Dog, who is Vietnamese-American and queer, has to cope with a lot of these things. The book talks about how things like patriarchy and cultural differences may cause suffering, oppression, and feeling like you don't belong. But it also talks about how telling stories, remembering things, and being yourself can give you hope.

A lot of scholars think this is a huge topic right now when you look at literature that has patriarchal and cultural divides. A lot of different points of view talk about race, gender, and how culture impacts belonging and identity. These points of view let you see Vuong's work in a larger way, just like other books.

So Orban (2003) talks about how patriarchy takes women supporters away from their bodies and how race and gender come from both inside and outside of bare culture. She thinks that identification isn't like blood; it's more like a story individuals tell. That fits with Vuong's tale, where Little Dog is trying to get by in a world where he has trauma from Mom and all the war and history stuff.

Next, Teresia Burri (2012) talks on how women are stuck between nature and culture and generally do things around the house. She used Ortner, who wrote about how society makes women feel tiny, especially in households and schools where men are in charge. In Vuong's book, that makes sense because Rose (his mom) was violent and handed it down to him, and Little Dog strives not to be like the gender stereotypes that push him.

Then there's Beas Murillo (2018), who talks about homosexual topics and how guys with guys isn't necessarily about love but about power and gender roles. He thinks that gender is more like a show than a real reality, using Butler and Sedgwick as examples. Vuong also displays this when Little Dog is queer in a way that isn't typical and loves Trevor, which is messy but honest and doesn't fit the box.

Paslawski (2018) talks about LGBTQ life-writing and how trauma and family can make it hard to be yourself in a group. He argues that people assume LGBT is a perfect world, but it's not. It's hard to be yourself when the world is continuously saying no. Vuong's novel contains this too, when Little Dog wants to be cheerful but is still sad. She said that culture makes people into men, but they don't see it. In Vuong's novel, things are hard for men. His mom hits him, his grandpa is harsh, and Little Dog doesn't want to be that man. He is strong, but he is also quiet and soft.

World English Journal and others (2020) also discuss about women in strict locations like Afghanistan and how they fight back with words and stories. That also has to do with Vuong, because Little Dog writes the letter like a weapon, like saying, "I am here." It's important, even if Mom can't read it. He says his story is true, just like feminists do.

Vuong displays patriarchy in the family most clearly through the striking and hurt that comes from Mom, as well as from her experience with war, being poor, and being stuck. It's not as simple as good person and bad guy; everyone is stuck in the system. So violence passes from one generation to the next, even if they don't want it to.

The gap in culture is also enormous. Little Dog doesn't belong in either the Vietnam world or the America world. He feels adrift, like his two hearts are fighting. Vuong writes this with both anguish and beauty, saying that you might not need to be perfect.

Writing helps him. When the world is quiet or harsh, writing makes voice happen. He talks even if no one listens. The letter is like living. Vuong teaches that words is power and that you may be free when you speak your mind.

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## 2. BACKGROUND

Ocean Vuong's novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is a very complex story on race, gender, sexuality, and identity, all set against a background of patriarchy and cultural disparities. The movie is about an immigrant family that is having a terrible time. It follows Little Dog, who is Vietnamese-American and LGBT, as he tries to deal with his identity and the pressure from his family and society. Vuong's writing reveals how race and gender work together and how strict laws in society affect people who don't have power. Little Dog's story is a sweet and painful look at finding himself, love, pain, and trying to fit in, all while dealing with pressures from both culture and family.

This study looks at how Vuong's work displays and battles against those notions, as well as how the main character's life shows the large system that affects people who don't follow the rules. It depicts how hard it is to find your place in the world when you are of a different race, gender, and sexual orientation at the same time. We hope that our study will help people learn more about how constraints about power and society still make it hard to find out who you are today.

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## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. How Women Are Shown and Disconnected from Their Bodies

In her 2003 work *"Bells and Whistles: The Mass (Re)Production of Female Bodies for Male Consumption,"* Orban talks on how patriarchy turns the female body into an object instead of a real person. She says that women are only seen for their bodies and not for who they are, like their thoughts or spirit are less important than their bodies. Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* has this theme in it. Little Dog feels like others just see his physique or a label, not him.

Orban adds that race isn't something that stays the same; it changes and flows. This is similar to Vuong's idea that Little Dog has to deal with being Asian, American, and queer all at the same time. Orban talks about strong women who say no to patriarchal things, and Vuong has them too: women who don't just obey the norms but resist them, showing that it's hard but important to be who you are.

### 2. Women and the Systems That Keep Them Quiet

In her 2012 article *"Silenced Women of John Steinbeck's Dustbowl Trilogy,"* Teresia Burri explains more on how patriarchy keeps women stuck. She uses Ortner's theories to claim that women are constantly tied to nature, like infants and kitchen things, not civilisation or thinking things. That means they have to stay home and not go out into the big world for work or study.

Burri also talks about how women are in charge of teaching kids but aren't acknowledged in colleges. This illustrates that men still pick who gets power. In Vuong's book, too, women don't have big parts, and guys have to be tough and quiet. It's everywhere, yet not loud.

### 3. Queer Love and Hiding Behind the Curtain

Beas Murillo wrote *"The Phallus Monologues"* in 2018. In it, he talks on how gayness is hidden in things that boys do with their friends. He uses the ideas of Sedgwick, Butler, Irigaray, and Anzaldúa to explain that being homosexual isn't only about liking males; it's also about how you act, how you dress, and whether or not you express it. Individuals in society tell boys and girls how to act, and gay individuals have to pretend or conceal sometimes.

Vuong's primary character has the same problem: he likes boys but can't state it clearly. He loves Trevor, but it's a secret and it hurts. Murillo employs Anzaldúa's idea of being in between cultures, and that's true in Vuong's book because *Little Dog* isn't from just one country.

#### 4. Gay Stories, Moms, and Hurt That Stays

Paslawski (2018) wrote "The Way We Dream Now," and he talks about LGBTQ stories, like how gay people try to find home in a world that hurts them. He says there's the idea of a "gay homeland," but it's not always real because trauma from family and society is still there. This connects to Vuong's character, who loves his mom but also fears her.

Paslawski mentions how parents control kids' bodies and desires, which matches Vuong's mom hitting *Little Dog* even though she loves him. It's all mixed up. There's pain from the past and trying to be yourself while also wanting to be loved. Vuong's book shows how these feelings don't go away easily.

#### 6. Fighting the System with Words

Lastly, the article "Conflicting and Challenging Patriarchal and Liberal Feminist Ideologies and Norms in Afghanistan" (World English Journal et al., 2020) shows how people in strict places still fight back, especially women using words and stories to survive. That idea is like Vuong's book, where *Little Dog* writes even if his mom can't read.

Table I. Summary of Key Articles and Their Contributions to the Study of Patriarchy and Identity in Contemporary Literature

Author & Year	Article Title	Key Focus	Connection to Vuong's Novel
Orban (2003)	<i>Bells and Whistles: The Mass (Re)Production of Female Bodies for Male Consumption</i>	Disembodiment of women; race as a fluid construct; rebellion against patriarchy	Reflects body commodification, identity struggles, and resistance in Vuong's female characters
Burri (2012)	<i>Silenced Women of John Steinbeck's Dustbowl Trilogy</i>	Women tied to nature; gendered disparities in education	Shows how patriarchal structures restrict opportunities, resonating with gender roles in Vuong's narrative
Beas Murillo (2018)	<i>The Phallus Monologues: A Study of the Closet and Its Influence on the Homosocial/Homosexual Continuum</i>	Homosocial desire, the closet, gender performativity	Parallels the hidden queer identity and societal pressures faced by Vuong's protagonist
Paslawski (2018)	<i>The Way We Dream Now: History, Theory, and LGBTQ Memoir in America</i>	LGBTQ identity, familial bonds, generational trauma	Mirrors the novel's exploration of queer identity, immigrant struggles, and mother-son relationships
World English Journal et al. (2020)	<i>Conflicting and Challenging Patriarchal and Liberal Feminist Ideologies and Norms in Afghanistan</i>	Resistance against patriarchal and liberal feminist norms through language	Aligns with Vuong's use of lyrical language as a form of resistance and identity assertion

## 4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The goals for this research are kind of like:

### 1. To see how patriarchy and culture collide in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Beautiful*.

This part looks at how Vuong writes about things like what society wants people to be when it comes to race and gender and being gay, and how he says "nah" to all of that.

### 2. To see how patriarchal ideals change how people become who they are in novels.

This section talks about how regulations from patriarchy alter how characters see themselves and how those norms shape whole groups of people, especially those who already don't fit in.

### 3. To find out how queer and feminist ideas help us understand how characters fight back and have power.

This goal is to combine ideas from feminist and LGBTQ+ thinkers and use them to show how the people in Vuong's story don't just follow the rules; they struggle to break free and be who they want to be.

#### 4. To add to the broad conversation about gender and who we are in novels today.

This last one just wants to stress that this study is part of the broader conversation going on in book studies right now about how people like Vuong are creating stories that deal with actual issues like gender, identity, and what the world expects.

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### 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is going to employ a qualitative method, largely looking to books and theories, to find out how patriarchy and culture opposites show themselves in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Beautiful*.

First, it will look closely at the book itself, breaking down the tale and seeing how race, gender, and identity all fit into it. We will look at certain parts of the story to see how the main character battles against what society says he needs to be and how hard it is to be yourself when patriarchy is around.

The study also leverages ideas from clever people like Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick who write about queer and feminist philosophy. Their thoughts will help us understand how the characters deal with their gender and who they love. Vuong also pushes back against conventional preconceptions about how boys, girls, and gay people should act. When it comes to LGBTQ+ issues, this is really important.

There will also be some comparisons with other books and articles, such as Burri's, which talks about how women are stuck in domestic roles, and Murillo's, which writes about tight connections between males and latent desire. The research seeks to highlight how different novels talk about patriarchy and how it impacts people in the same way.

Using something called thematic analysis, which essentially means looking for significant ideas that keep coming up, we will find themes like identity, racism, oppression, and resistance. This helps highlight how the characters struggle to figure out who they are when the world continues getting in their way.

In the last phase, other scholars will be employed to offer further ideas to the article, such as looking at real-world problems that Vuong is writing about. Using a variety of approaches lets the research go deeper and reveal how the book talks with important issues like gender, culture, and identity.

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### 6. PROPOSED OUTCOMES

This study will look at how cultural splits and patriarchy are affecting race, gender, and identity in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. We want the results to be like this:

1. **Look at Patriarchy Deeply:** The study is intended to show how Vuong's writing about the main guy's fights with society's laws is really about big cultural systems of patriarchy. It will look at how those systems make him feel strange about who he is and where he fits in, especially when they blend race, gender, and who he likes.
2. **Ideas About Gender and Identity:** By using some feminist and queer theories, we try to understand better how gender and sexual stuff is built and sometimes flipped around in the book. This study will say how culture rules and people's thinking makes a big deal about who you think you are and how you live.
3. **Helping Literature Study:** This work will provide literary critics something fresh to think about by comparing Vuong's novel to conversations about difficulties with patriarchy, LGBTQ+ battles, and life as an immigrant. It might also connect to other books and studies that talk about the same things.
4. **Knowing Culture Opposites:** The study will also examine at opposites in Vuong's work, such as love vs. violence and old vs. new items, and how they make characters feel like themselves or want to break the rules.

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### 7. CONCLUSION

Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* and other novels that talk about patriarchal institutions and cultural differences reveal how race, gender, and identity all get mixed up. The articles talked about offering large ideas about how these themes show up in stories and how they change the people in the novels.

The first one, by Orban (2003), claims that patriarchy takes women out of their own bodies and makes them into something that aren't entire persons, but how they seem. She thinks that stories about culture have a bigger impact on who we are than biology. That goes along with Vuong's work, where the main character, Little Dog, attempts to resist how people see him and find a place to fit in. Identity isn't fixed; it changes. Little Dog has to deal with being Asian, homosexual, and a boy in America all at the same time.

Next is Burri (2012), who writes about how women are primarily stuck at home in literature and in real life. She says that patriarchy hinders women from going out into the world, notably at work and in school. Vuong's book also has that notion, where people are locked in roles ala moms remain home and males go outside. This illustrates that gender still dominates things, even in school, where males receive more powerful professions.

After that, Murillo (2018) talks about queer things that happen in friendships between boys. He utilises intellectual people like Butler and Sedgwick to show that gender is something we do, not just who we are. He believes that the "closet" is where queerness hides, and Vuong portrays this too, like how Little Dog loves Trevor but can't truly say it, which is heartbreaking. This approach helps break down the boxes that suggest love and gender are simple.

Paslawski (2018) looks at LGBT memoirs and how trauma and family life can make it hard to be queer and fit in. He believes that LGBT "dream places" don't always feel pleasant because real agony is still there. Vuong's narrative is the same way: Little Dog wants to be free, but Mom and culture still hurt him. It's hard to find where you belong when you've been hurt and don't fit in.

The last one is from World English Journal et al. (2020) and talks about feminism struggling with patriarchy, especially in Afghanistan. It also has something to do with Vuong. Even though the world doesn't want them to talk, the characters fight back with words and stories. Vuong's writing is the same: it's beautiful but also sad and full of resistance. Little Dog says, "I'm here," by writing, even if no one listens.

In the end, all of these essays show how novels today are full with race, gender, pain, identity, and individuals attempting to be true. Vuong's book combines all of these things—being gay, being Vietnamese, being a boy, and being hurt—to convey how hard and beautiful it is to just be. These ideas don't go away; they keep coming up, and we need to keep talking about them.

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