

## Dualism and Materialism in Gregory David Roberts' *Shantaram*

*Gregory David Roberts'in Shantaram Romanında Düalizm ve Materyalizm*

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## **Dualism and Materialism in Gregory David Roberts' *Shantaram*<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Gregory David Roberts is a contemporary Australian author who had been involved in several criminal activities and was therefore convicted to prison sentence earlier in his life. In 2003, he published the semi-autobiographical novel *Shantaram* largely based on his experiences in the Indian city of Bombay. The novel, which became a best-seller around the globe is an astounding account of a westerner's spiritual voyage in the outskirts of India. *Shantaram* deals with a great many themes and issues such as ethics, violence and good vs. evil, but the theme which lies at the core of the narrative is the binary opposition between dualism and materialism. While dualism defends the autonomy of the mind/soul over the body, materialism affirms that all living beings are bound to material laws. This article aims to analyse Roberts' *Shantaram* through the binary opposition of dualism and materialism, and specifically from a dualistic perspective. As the founder of modern philosophy and dualism, René Descartes' theories will be applied to the text as opposed to the contrasting philosophy of materialism. In this respect, dualism is compared and contrasted with materialism and physicalism with reference to several influential thinkers who contributed to this thought from Greek antiquity to modern philosophy such as Aristotle, Plato, Lucretius, Kant and George Berkeley. Thus, a Cartesian analysis is implemented to *Shantaram* in order to expose the dualism emphasised in the subtext of Roberts' narrative. All in all, the study concludes that *Shantaram* exhibits depictions of Cartesian dualism through the protagonist's experiences in the slums of Bombay and determines that dualism overcomes materialism in Roberts' story as the mind/soul asserts its autonomy over the body and its physical sphere.

**Keywords:** *Shantaram*, Gregory David Roberts, Cartesian Dualism, Materialism, René Descartes

## **Gregory David Roberts'in *Shantaram* Romanında Düalizm ve Materyalizm**

### **Öz**

Gregory David Roberts, hayatının önceki dönemlerinde pek çok suç eylemlerine karışmış ve bunlardan ötürü ülkesinde mahkûmiyet cezası almış çağdaş Avustralyalı bir yazardır. 2003 yılında yazar, çoğunluğunu Hint şehri Bombay'da yaşadığı deneyimlere dayanan yarı otobiyografik *Shantaram* romanını yayımlar. Dünya

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çapında ilgiyle karşılanan ve en iyi satanlar listesine giren roman, batılı bir maceraperestin Hint şehirlerinde deneyimlediği manevi yolculuğun şaşırtıcı hikâyesini anlatır. *Shantaram*, ahlak'tan şiddete ve iyile kötünün mücadelesine kadar pek çok farklı mesele ve temayı ele almaktadır fakat kurgunun odak noktasında yer alan tema ise düalizm ve materyalizm arasındaki ikili karşıtlıktır. Bu anlamda Roberts, bireysel arayışı dualizm ile materyalizm arasındaki karşıtlığı simgeleyen ve açığa çıkaran batılı figürün büyüleyici bir öyküsünü resmediyor. Düalizm, aklın/ruhun beden üzerindeki özerkliğini savunurken, materyalizm ise tüm canlıların maddi yasalara bağlı olduğunu iddia eder. Bu makale, Roberts'ın *Shantaram* romanını düalizm ve materyalizm ikili karşıtlığı üzerinden, özel anlamda ise düalist bir bakış açısıyla analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Modern felsefe ve düalist düşüncenin kurucusu olarak kabul edilen René Descartes'ın kuramı, onun felsefesi karşısında konumlanan materyalist düşünce ile birlikte metne uygulanacaktır. Bu bağlamda, düalizm, Aristoteles, Plato, Lucretius, Kant ve George Berkeley gibi, antik çağdan modern felsefeye kadar, bu düşünceye katkıda bulunan birçok etkili düşünür referans alınarak, materyalizm ve fizikalizm ile karşılaştırılmaktadır. Böylece, *Shantaram* romanına Kartezyen analiz uygulanarak Roberts'ın hikâyesinin alt-metninde vurgulanan düalizm açığa çıkarılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma, *Shantaram* romanının, ana karakteri olan Lin'in Bombay'da bulunan varoşlardaki deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak Kartezyen düalizmin tezahürlerini ortaya koyduğu ve Gregory David Roberts'ın anlattığında, zihnin/ruhun, beden ve fiziksel alan üzerindeki özerkliğini savunurken, düalizmin materyalizme baskın geldiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Shantaram*, Gregory David Roberts, Kartezyen Düalizm, Materyalizm, René Descartes

### Introduction

Gregory David Roberts is an Australian author who was once a convicted criminal and bank robber who fled from prison and escaped to India to spend ten years in the city of Bombay (Gordon, 2020: 22). *Shantaram* is one of his novels which presents a wide variety of themes and issues ranging from philosophical questionings to ethical and social concerns. One significant aspect that the novel deals with in its subtext is the discussion of dualism and materialism. This study aims to analyse the binary opposition of dualism and materialism in Gregory David Roberts' *Shantaram*. To this end, the article reveals the depiction of dualism in Roberts' novel through a Cartesian analysis. *Shantaram* is Gregory David Roberts' most celebrated novel which blends the author's autobiographical memoirs with fictional events and characters. The novel follows the adventures of Lin, a former convict who escapes from a high security prison facility to flee to the Indian city of Bombay and engages in a series of dangerous and fascinating adventures (Gordon, 2020: 22). Lin's adventures in Bombay cause drastic changes in his character and self-perception. Through his experiences in India, the protagonist successfully makes the transition from Lin to a new human being, whom the locals refer as "Shantaram". The novel,

*Shantaram* “is the story of a man with a checkered past on the run who is desperately trying to redeem himself and do good deeds even as he faces odds and obstacles that most people would consider overwhelming” (2020: 22). In addition, *Shantaram* might be viewed as a continuance of the 1960s trend of westerners travelling to Asia in search of enlightenment (Magner, 2014: 137). Mantri, on the other hand, defends that the novel represents “an example of multicultural/global writing” (2019: xxxii).

In a theoretical context, as the founding father of modern philosophy and Cartesian dualism, René Descartes stands at the centre of this study. Cartesian dualism is thus compared and contrasted with the opposing philosophy of materialism which is also elaborated in detail. While discussing the binary opposition of dualism and materialism, the article also consults alternative philosophers such as George Berkeley and interprets *Shantaram* from their unique point of view.

In respect to dualism, various philosophers have put forward their arguments for or against the separation of the human body and mind/soul. To that end, different perspectives have been established on this matter from the Greek antiquity until modern philosophy. However, the philosopher who expressed influential insights on the division of mind and body was the seventeenth century French philosopher René Descartes. Cartesian dualism defended the distinction between mind and body and the autonomy of mind from body. The materialists, on the contrary, contended that every single living entity in the world was in essence material and was bound to material rules. Within this context, Roberts portrays a fascinating account of a western figure whose individual quest symbolises and exposes the opposition between dualism and materialism. Specifically, it is disputed that Cartesian dualism is depicted in *Shantaram*, mainly through the lifestyle demonstrated by the local inhabitants of the slums of Bombay. Due to the dualistic state, the slum’s people are able to carry on with their lives and Lin is able to deliver the spiritual journey that would enable him to make the transition to become a new and better person, hence the transformation of Lin to Shantaram. Thus, Cartesian dualism not only facilitates the survival of the slum’s people through the distinction of the mind and body, but also grants Lin the opportunity to discover his true spiritual potential. In respect to Cartesian theory, the following section will look into Descartes and his philosophy of dualism.

### **René Descartes and Cartesian Dualism**

René Descartes (1596-1650) is a French philosopher who exerted a profound influence on mathematics, science and modern philosophy. As the father of modern philosophy and as a rationalist, Descartes has come to be celebrated with his phrase: “Cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am) which formed a major breakthrough in his philosophy (Cottingham, 1992: I). It is imperative to study Descartes and Cartesian

way of thinking in order to acknowledge the condition of modern philosophy (1992: 2). Cartesian philosophy is concerned with a variety of issues from “inquiries into the nature, the structure of the material universe, his views on human freedom and the existence of God, and his account of the human condition” (1992: I) However, Descartes’ most celebrated, studied and discussed philosophy is his dualism which strongly advocates the distinction between the mind and the body (Cottingham, 1992: 236). Throughout his life, Descartes was convinced that the minds or souls of human beings were not physical and thus maintained that “the power through which we know things in the strict sense is purely spiritual, and is no less distinct from the whole body than blood is distinct from bone, or the hand from the eye” (Descartes, 1985: 42). In another work entitled, *Passions of the Soul (Passions de l’âme)*, he contends that the soul is of such a nature that it has no relationship to extension, dimensions, or other attributes of the substance that makes up the body (1985: 339).

Descartes posits his doctrine of dualism through his formulation of substance dualism. As the thinker advocates the separation of mind and body, he contemplates “a true distinction” between mind and body in his work, *Meditations on First Philosophy (Les Méditations)* (Nadler, et al., 2019: 111). On the other hand, in his *Principles*, he contends that “each substance has a principal attribute (thought or extension) and that each has various determinations of that attribute, such as volitions and perceivings for the mind, or size, shape, and motion for bodily substance (matter)” (2019: 111). Thus, Descartes purports his theory of substance dualism which emphasises the distinctness of the body and the mind. Dean Zimmerman asserts that according to Descartes’ substance dualism:

Cartesian souls are immaterial in a very strong sense: unlike material objects, they are not spatially located; unlike the material world as Descartes conceived it, they have no parts, but are instead ‘simple substances’; and they are in no way dependent upon the physical world for their continued existence or ability to think. (2010: 134)

Thus, it has been asserted that the mind or the soul in the Cartesian sense are two distinct entities which are independent from one another. In other words, Cartesian dualism incorporates “a dualism of mental and physical fundamental properties” (Zimmerman, 2010: 139). In another work, Descartes argues that: “the human soul is of a spiritual nature, and is really distinct from that of body” (Descartes, 1664: n.p.). Hence, Cartesian philosophy stems from the spiritual or intellectual sphere and takes into consideration the motives of those who engage in the act of philosophy (Nadler, et al., 2019: 475). In other words, Cartesian philosophy mainly relies on spirituality and the spiritual domain.

Furthermore, Italian philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas who lived in the thirteenth century, some four hundred years before Descartes, maintained that intellectual issues had to be carried out by immaterial beings: “The intellectual principle, which is called the mind or intellect has an operation through itself in which the body does not participate. [...] Consequently, the human soul is something incorporeal and subsisting” (1964: 1.75.2). Hence, within the body and mind opposition, Aquinas attributes all activities of the intellect to the mind alone and for this to become possible, the mind ought to be deemed as an existent essence (Rozemond, 1998: 373). In asserting the mind’s immateriality, Aquinas concentrates on the human intellect (1998: 373). According to Descartes, the mind or thinking entity is “a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, imagines also and senses” (Morton, 1996: 77). Descartes’ dualism, also called substance dualism, proclaims that the mind and body are separate (Rozemond, 1998: 374). However, Descartes’ substance dualism should not be interpreted in the literal sense because at the focal point of his thought lies his notion of substance and “essence of mind where essence is understood as in a non-modal sense” (1998: 374). In this respect, the core of thinking incorporates distinctness with the essence of the body and this enables to question whether the mind and body are separate (1998: 375). Thus, the non-modal formulation of the separation of mind and soul are central to Cartesian dualism (1998: 376). In *Meditations*, Descartes expresses the following:

Moreover, I find in me faculties for certain special modes of thinking, namely the faculties of imagining and sensing. I can clearly and distinctly understand myself as a whole without them; but not vice versa them without me, that is, without an intelligent substance in which they inhere: for they include some intellection in their formal concept, and hence I perceive that they are distinguished from me as modes from a thing. (1998: 96)

Hence, Descartes describes the difference between the mind and the body using disparate types of modes (Rozemond, 1998: 377). The philosopher includes sensation and imagination as modes of the mind which aims to designate the intellectual sphere and within this particular intellectual sphere, Descartes argues that the mind functions autonomously from the body (1998: 387). Therefore, it could be asserted that Descartes centres his argument concerning the incorporeality of the mind on the intellect rather than the senses (1998: 387-388). As a result, in his *Meditations*, Descartes argues that the mind and the body can function on separate grounds. Moreover, an aspect which distinguishes Cartesian dualism from other views is the philosopher’s asseveration that the notion of the mind expands to non-human beings

as well (Sorell, 2000: 79). As a consequence, Descartes categorises minds in proportion to their competence rather than on their biological taxonomy (Sorell, 2000: 80). This is mainly related to Descartes' personal profile as a Catholic believer and to his strong belief that all beings were created by God, the Supreme Being (2000: 80). Lastly, from a Christian perspective, Harold Fromm disputes that if man was created in the image of God, it was logical to think that only God could completely comprehend man's invincible intellect, while a fair appraisal of reality demanded that the field of the body be handed over to nature (1978: 544). All in all, Cartesian dualism maintained a profound impact on the western, intellectual sphere and brought forward an influential argument concerning the true nature of the human mind/soul.

### **Materialism in Western Philosophy**

The French term "matérialisme" originates from *Réplique aux Réflexions de Bayle*, a text Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz wrote to Pierre Bayle in 1702 (Yuva, 2021: 295). The adjective form, materialist (*matérialiste*) however, was first used in English in 1660, in French in 1698 and "in 1700 in the first French translation of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by Coste" (2021: 295). Later, the term was applied to several notions which emerged with Democritus and Epicurus (2021: 295). Materialism is defined as "theory which declares that matter and its forces adequately account for all phenomena-- It declares that not only the content of mind but that which we call mind itself, is determined by matter" (Dewey, 1882: 209). Thus, materialism proposes that all living and non-living entities in their core consist of nothing but matter. According to materialism, the mind or the intellect is a substance and direct activity of the brain (1882: 209). Thus, materialism in essence is monistic due to the fact that it is based on one, single entity which is material and thus argues that all mental activities could be interpreted in terms of atoms and molecules (1882: 209). As a consequence, all laws pertaining to matter equally pertain to the mind and no exception is provided (209).

Nonetheless, "the very description of material things involves an inescapable reference to generic qualities and structural relations which cannot be reduced to matter in motion although they may be predicated of it" (Hook, 1934: 236). Hence, the theory of materialism bears a contradiction within itself. According to the widely accepted definition of materialism, the assumption that "matter is real where matter is an historical variable with values ranging from Democritus' atoms in the void to Dirac's positron, and where real is an ambiguous term meaning either (a) existence, or (b) importance, or (c) necessary condition" (Hook, 1934: 236).

The claim that only matter exists is not only irrational but also tautological because the consciousness of material entities such as, “the experience of pain, pleasure, memory, and fancy, which have no direct objective reference, cannot be dismissed from the realm of existence or degraded to the status of appearance without being recognized” (Hook, 1934: 237). In this respect, materialism maintains an oversimplified and overgeneralised view concerning the nature of all living beings. Moreover, every postulation has certain insinuations and insinuations are bound to be immaterial (1934: 237). Specifically, concerning the characteristics of the mind, there exist “purpose and foresight, the capacity to initiate intelligent action in behalf of goals and values” (1934: 240). In this regard, the mind’s will power and spiritual determination are not to be disregarded and underestimated. Materialist philosophy reduces complex mental functions and qualities to basic physical features.

On the other hand, Aristotle questioned whether the mind consists of parts and, if there is one soul, separated from the body (Manning, 1985: 13). According to Aristotle, “perception is simply the movement which occurs in the sense organs, not some psychic process in addition to the movement in the organs” (Slakey, 1961: 472). Aristotle was likely to favour dualism, which in his interpretation was considered as “the thesis that the body and the soul are composed of two different substances, the body is material, the soul non-material” (Manning, 1985: 17). Thus, Aristotle’s basic criterion for dualism forms the distinction between the body and soul as material and immaterial. In addition to Aristotle, an Epicurean follower, Titus Carus Lucretius in his poem, “On the Nature of Things” disputed that “the mind, they said, was corporeal and perishable, and avoidance of mental and physical pain, ‘the cry of the flesh,’ especially cold, hunger, and injury, were the principal ethical priorities for them” (Wilson, 2017: 111-112). Hence, Lucretius advocated the avoidance of suffering first and the pursuit of pleasure next (2017: 112). Epicurean materialism emerged as an alternative much later in the mid-seventeenth century and was later supported by names such as Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn and Thomas Hobbes (2017: 112). Later on, Marx and Engels took up classical materialism and advanced it into their doctrine of dialectical materialism (2017: 112).

Furthermore, the majority of the philosophical heritage took a stance against materialism as the canonical philosophers from Plato and the Stoics to Kant embraced antimaterialism and have sought to direct their attention from the smallest pieces of matter to “God, soul, rationality, free will and duty” (Wilson, 2017: 113). To that end, belief in God, spirituality and free will led these thinkers to reject materialism and material perspectives. Spiritual belief and commitment are key elements in the

possession of an antimaterialist attitude. In ontological terms, materialism is generally associated with the theory of physicalism which is the understanding that “every property, event, state or process is either physical or physical neutral” (Hiley, 1978: 69). From the perspective of human conduct, physicalism represents the notion that “human behavior can be completely described and explained without a commitment to irreducible or ineliminable mental properties, events, states or processes” (1978: 69). Thus, as it is the case with materialism, physicalism also excludes all types of mental, spiritual and incorporeal activities. In this context, “the requirement of mental properties, events, states or processes” was mainly a consequence of “the supposed privacy and incorrigibility of items of the inner life” (1978: 69). The inner life was thus considered the main motif behind the necessity of all mental properties.

Irish philosopher George Berkeley, however, conveyed that “the products of our minds are ideas and only ideas can be created ‘by the mere will of a spirit’” (Levine, 1986: 247). The philosopher ascribes special meaning to spiritualism and mental ideas which he claims are the essence of living beings (1986: 247). As the founder and defender of immaterialism, Berkeley professes that:

Mental activity produces ideas, but not by acting upon any already existing ideas. Indeed, since according to Berkeley all ideas exist eternally in the mind of God, and creation consists not in the creation of new ideas but in causing finite spirits to perceive those already existent ideas, Berkeley’s use of creation ex nihilo is relative. The Berkelean world is not created from absolutely “nothing,” but “from” ideas eternally present in God. (Levine, 1986: 248)

This point of view, which completely opposes and contradicts materialism and physicalism insists on the assertion that “ideas cannot exist independently of the mind and ideas must be immaterial because an independent material substance is inconceivable” (Levine, 1986: 248). As a result, Berkelean philosophy of immaterialism rejects the materialist and physicalist viewpoint that everything is bound to material substances and attempts to establish a counter-argument by placing perception, mental ideas and spiritualism at the centre of their philosophy. Having analysed dualism and materialism, the following section will explore Gregory David Roberts’ novel in this context.

### **A Dualistic Tale of Survival: *Shantaram***

*Shantaram* (2003) is a semi-autobiographical novel by Australian author Gregory David Roberts. The novel is a combination of the author’s earlier experiences in India and fictional events. The story follows the protagonist Lindsay Ford, an

escaped prison convict commonly referred to as “Lin” throughout his quest to find refuge in Bombay after his escape from prison. As he recounts his adventures, Lin goes through countless hardships and perilous situations. He finds himself alongside the Indian mafia and obtains the opportunity to meet all types of intriguing people on his quest. From a Cartesian perspective and through the personal quest of Lin, *Shantaram* depicts the binary opposition of dualism and materialism. *Shantaram* reflects a distinction of the mind and body, similar to that expressed by René Descartes. This binary opposition between the mind and the body becomes more apparent when Lin finds refuge in the slums of Bombay and discovers his inner self to finally become Shantaram. In this respect, the author, Gregory David Roberts unveils a dualistic story of survival and fulfilment which exposes Cartesian dualism and discards materialism.

The Cartesian statement, “the human soul is of a spiritual nature, and is really distinct from that of body” (1664: n.p.) becomes truly visible in the slums of Bombay through Lin’s narrative. Albeit the poorest circumstances, the villagers are able to survive and sustain their lives by the help of their will power, solid spirituality and mental determination. The hegemony of the mind over the body is evident in *Shantaram*. Hence, Gregory David Roberts’ narrative forms a representation of Cartesian dualism. Coming from a western, materialist oriented culture, Lin has no previous experience and knowledge concerning Indian culture and spirituality. In Bombay, he coincidentally meets a native, Prabaker who soon becomes his companion and guide. He is the one who ascribes him the name “Lin” (Linbaba). Later, he takes Lin to his native village and introduces him to his family. Prabaker’s mother bestows on him the nickname “Shantaram” which means “man of God’s peace” (Roberts, 2003: 171). Later, Prabaker and Lin decide to return to Bombay. On their journey, they both get robbed and are suddenly deprived of all their possessions. Afterwards, Prabaker suggests to take Lin to his village, to the slums of Bombay. Lin is forced to live in a small hut with no water and electricity. This is likely the most noteworthy and significant experience Lin has when he is obliged to live in the slums of Bombay together with the local people. This is the particular point in the story when the protagonist is reborn. Lin had a life of crime and punishment and his refuge in India is a symbolic quest in order to achieve mental, inner peace. Lin’s short but memorable life in the slums of Bombay forms a turning point for the protagonist as his quest in India, which took off as a simple refuge, is not only a mission of survival and freedom, but also becomes a quest to achieve spiritual inner fulfilment.

Despite all the hardships Lin has to endure, the slums transform into a sphere of learning and maturity for him. He learns the Marathi language, many different aspects about Indian culture and that happiness is not related to material possessions. Lin rediscovers himself in the slums:

It was only there, in the village in India, on that first night, adrift on the raft of murmuring voices, and my eyes filled with stars; only then when another man's father reached out to comfort me, and placed a poor farmer's rough and calloused hand on my shoulder; only there and then did I see and feel the torment of what I'd done and what I'd become— the pain and the fear and the waste; the stupid, unforgivable waste of it all. My heart broke on its shame and sorrow. I suddenly knew how much crying there was in me, and how little love, I knew at last how lonely I was. But I couldn't respond. My culture had taught me all the wrong things well. (Roberts, 2003: 124)

This is the particular moment when Lin comes to realise that he had not been at peace with his inner self and commences to question his earlier life. His materialist upbringing and lifestyle obstructed him to discover himself and reach inner peace. Until that very moment, Lin valued money and material possession to such an extent that these became the ultimate purpose in his life. Along with this realisation, Lin not only comes to terms with his inner self but also with the western culture he was brought up with. In the slums, Lin is welcomed to a process of spiritual enlightenment. This process marks his alteration from Lin to Shantaram:

They knew the place in me where the river stopped, and they marked it with a new name. Shantaram Kishan Kharre. I don't know if they found that name in the heart of the man they believed me to be, or if they planted it there, like a wishing tree, to bloom and grow. Whatever the case, whether they discovered that peace or created it, the truth is that the man I am was born in those moments, as I stood near the flood sticks with my face lifted to the chrismal rain. Shantaram. The better man that, slowly and much too late, I began to be. (Roberts, 2003: 137)

Reborn as Shantaram, Lin now begins to fully accept and acknowledge his reborn self and successfully manages to adapt to his new identity. What causes Lin to make this transition so smoothly and without any burden? The answer lies in Indian culture and Indian lifestyle. This is the true magical force of mystic India, leading one to the most significant mission on the planet: self-realisation (Pal, 2020: 56). It is also known that for many westerners, including Australians, India is considered a proving ground, or a site of initiation, for tough colonials (Magner, 2014: 136). This proves to be the case for Lin as well.

The local people who reside in the slums of Bombay are obliged to live under extremely miserable conditions. These conditions are so primitive that they lack the necessary means to sustain basic human needs such as shelter, water, food, sanitation and security. Basic requirements such as electricity, water and heating are a luxury here. The slums' inhabitants possess no choice but to endure this lifestyle, yet manage to survive thanks to their collective solidarity and strong mental health. These people live in illegal huts, lack the fundamental means to lead a decent life and live under sub-human conditions. Despite these utterly negative factors, their communal lifestyle enables sharing and thus solidarity to the fullest extent. Lin is amazed to observe this type of strong solidarity. He welcomes and cherishes this communal lifestyle and ultimately becomes a member of this family. In this context, mental determination and spirituality overshadow the physical devastation in the slums of Bombay.

The very first time Lin enters the slums, he is shocked by the sight he faces. The poor sanitary system and the intense smell draw his attention. As he moves further inside, the scent of spices, cooking, and incense gradually take the place of the oppressive odour. The allusion to the shifting fragrance is meaningful as it depicts life in slums as it really is and though it appears to be unfriendly and horrible from the outside, it is quite the opposite from the inside (Pal, 2020: 55). As a criminal and convict, Lin had been through many events, seen many unpleasant incidents but nevertheless this sight was completely new for him and clearly appeared to be more touching and heartbreaking than he had ever expected:

I'd robbed banks, and dealt drugs, and I'd been beaten by prison warders until my bones broke. I'd been stabbed, and I'd stabbed men in return. I'd escaped from a hard prison full of hard men, the hard way-over the front wall. Still, that first encounter with the ragged misery of the slum, heartbreak all the way to the horizon, cut into my eyes. (Roberts, 2003: 22)

The protagonist's reaction to the degree of poverty and misery is noteworthy. Lin is so shocked in the face of this wretched lifestyle that he cannot help expressing his astonishment. On the other hand, interpreting *Shantaram* and its slums from a materialist perspective, it could be argued that every single element is bound to material substance and all is dependent on physical needs. From a materialist point of view, life in the slums of Bombay would not only have been irrational but also impossible to sustain. As the mind and body are considered to exist as one single physical entity, the major lack of physical resources and the deprivation of basic human needs would easily have caused the rapid deaths of hundreds of thousands of the slums' inhabitants. However, this is not the case in *Shantaram* as people do

succeed in sustaining their lives despite the harsh circumstances. This success is mainly due to the mental strength and spiritual will asserted through collective sharing.

As expressed earlier by Dean Zimmerman, "Cartesian souls are immaterial and independent from physical world" (2010: 134). This means that thinking precedes sensory perceptions, there is not a total negation of the physical world. In the same manner, the souls of the local folk of Bombay are incorporeal and exhibit no dependency on physical conditions. This takes place to such a degree that some of these people even show signs of peace and happiness due to collective solidarity and unbroken mental willpower. Moreover, the perception of happiness of the slum's people is completely different from that of a westerner's perspective. To the astonishment of any western visitor, these people are able to experience happiness with very little means and belongings. It is the mental willpower and the strong sense of spirituality of the slum's inhabitants that enable these common people to draw limitations, control their physical needs and determine the outcome of their lifestyle. Thus, as conveyed by Descartes, the minds of these people are able to function autonomously from their bodies and physical needs. This shows itself in the conduct of the people, their mood and the positive, optimistic mentality they cherish:

The people are too happy, Prabaker laughed. You are the first person from foreign to visit my village in twenty-one years. The last foreign fellow coming here was from Belgium. That was twenty-one years ago. [...] He was a good man. But you are a very, very good man, Lin. The people will love you too much. You will be so happy here, you will be outside yourself. (Roberts, 2003: 160)

Lin, feels liberated in the relaxed sphere of the slums: "I was free. Every day, when you're on the run, is the whole of your life. Every free minute is a short story with a happy ending" (2003: 34). Prabaker displays the local people's attitude and hospitality towards the foreigner's visit. Although the locals have not seen a foreigner for twenty-one years, they are excited and enthusiastically welcome their new guest. Prabaker's statement: "You will be outside yourself" (2003: 160) is particularly symbolic and acts as a foreshadowing of events to come. This statement is a direct reference to Lin's newfound identity, the discovery of his inner self as Shantaram. Prabaker foreshadows that this vital experience will fulfil Lin's metamorphosis into Shantaram.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Berkelean philosophy, mental ideas and spiritualism form the essence of all living beings (Levine, 1986: 247). In *Shantaram*, mental ideas and spiritualism stand at the core of Lin's narrative. Specifically, Lin's

quest in India is a mission of spiritual fulfilment and rediscovery of his true inner self. The spiritual enlightenment Lin experiences provides him a brand new outlook on life, one that is profoundly disparate from the western values that were indoctrinated to him in his country of origin. From this perspective, his unique experience in the slums plays an essential role in Lin's enlightenment and in the adoption of his new identity as Shantaram. His short lived experience in the slums maintains a focal point in the enlightenment of Lin's personality as he is literally woken up from his long term sleep to rediscover the hidden spiritualism which contributes to his inner peace. Transformed into Shantaram, time has come for Lin to leave the slums as a new human being.

Despite the short lived residence in the slums, the locals express emotional and spiritual attachment to Shantaram who was once a foreigner. After leaving the slum, Shantaram frequently revisits the location and pays tribute to those people who introduced him to a unique experience by engaging in their daily activities and becoming part of their routine and traditions. Probably the best quality of the slum's people is that they openly accept Shantaram for who he is and do not question, judge or in any way attempt to change him. Shantaram leaves the slums heartbroken, knowing that he has finally become a new and better human being with profound spiritual insight and with an overwhelming and unlimited control over his mental capabilities. This is the point in the story when Lin acknowledges that he has changed for the better and will never be the same again. Lin's once-in-a-lifetime experience has succeeded in unleashing the immense potential of spiritualism that had been concealed inside him and this is largely caused by the dualism which is exhibited in the slums.

### **Conclusion**

Gregory David Roberts' *Shantaram* is a novel that touches on a variety of themes and issues from guilt to atonement, violence and crime to fate and liberty. However, it is with no doubt spiritual fulfilment and mental strength that stands at the core of *Shantaram*. Roberts not only conveys a semi-autobiographical account, but also adds a fictional touch so as to create a unique narrative of self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. *Shantaram* presents a remarkable, individual pursuit of self-awareness, philosophical inquiry and human values.

Above all, *Shantaram* portrays a tale of dualism and materialism and conveys a preference for Cartesian dualism through Lin's quest of maturation in India. Lin demonstrates a preference of dualism over materialism. To this end, this study has

demonstrated that via the dualistic state, the people in the slums are able to maintain their lives in spite of the serious lack of basic human needs. In other words, dualism facilitates their lifestyle as they assert a tremendous will power and engage in intense spiritual activities. As Descartes contends with his philosophy, the body and the mind, or the material and the immaterial are distinct and can operate independently from one another. This is the case in *Shantaram* as the local folk appear to be unaffected (or minimally affected) by the miserable physical conditions of the slums of Bombay. The local people manage to carry on with their lives happily despite possessing very little or no means to satisfy their basic human needs. Lin's personal quest seems to intertwine in the lives of the slum's inhabitants and this intersection causes Lin to rediscover his hidden spirituality which in its turn provides his smooth transition to the cherished figure of Shantaram. Thus, it has been determined through Roberts' narrative of *Shantaram* that Cartesian dualism overrules the materialist perspective as the mind/soul justifies its autonomy over the body and its physical requirements. The depiction of Cartesian dualism in the slums of Bombay demonstrates that the mind possesses firm control over the physical body and that mental/spiritual power can prevail over the material subject.

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