

**AQUATIC BORDERS AND UNCERTAIN BELONGING IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S
UNACCUSTOMED EARTH AND IN OTHER WORDS**

Adriana Elena Stoican
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

***Abstract:** The paper links the recurrence of aquatic symbols in “Hema and Kaushik” with the same motif employed by Lahiri’s in her latest (autobiographical) work, In Other Words. The discussion considers the fascination for water manifested by Kaushik’s mother, Parul, that is transferred to Kaushik after her premature death. Deeply affected by the loss of his mother, Kaushik attempts to escape this painful experience by removing himself from the setting of its unfolding. The character’s perpetual relocation starts as a trip along the American East Coast, whose austere, harsh landscape seems to strangely comfort him. His decision to explore this maritime locale appears paradoxical, given that Kaushik is afraid of water. His eventual drowning marks the end of Kaushik’s struggle against the patterns of attachment that he considers inherently painful. At the same time, Lahiri’s deployment of water symbolism in her own struggle for cultural redefinition serves as a tool that might clarify Kaushik’s ambivalent relation with the maritime world. The present argument correlates the protagonists’ transnational mobility and their attempts at transcultural negotiation with the fluid symbolism of aquatic borders. This analogy is meant to foreground their suspension between strategies of displacement and patterns of attachment.*

***Keywords:** borders, crossings, displacement, sea, swimming, transmigrant, transnational*