

DEFOE'S MRS VEAL AND THE RHETORIC OF CERTAINTY

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It is no exaggeration, perhaps, to say that Daniel Defoe is the most intriguing figure among the English authors now credited with the invention of the eighteenth-century "novel". The perplexity came with the realisation, only in the latter half of the 20th century, that a Defoe canon had been a matter of historical negotiations and was still an incomplete matter: let alone the various, often contradictory, critical appraisals of the worth of his fiction, it was discovered that the man had been the author of an impressive bulk of texts, many of which had passed for authentic documents of his age even up until the 20th century. The discovery has not ceased, even to this day, to fire debate as to fundamental issues regarding the definition of the "novel", as well as of the modern notion of "literature" itself. (See Brown 1996.) Central to this inquiry, of course, is the, indeed, perplexing extent to which the categories of fact and fiction, or the positions of author and editor, are purposely confused, and the *poietic* matter of rendering the real stretched to the limits of extreme "authenticity" in Defoe's writings.

McKeon (1998) has subsumed these features to a particular variant of epistemology which he has labelled "naive empiricism" and placed in relation with several ideological evolutions of the time (the scientific revolution, the typographical revolution and the Protestant Reformation). A "naive empiricist" is an author of fiction who denies both his own authorship and the fictional quality of his writing: he gives himself only as an unassuming "editor" of real manuscripts relating the "true histories" of real persons; he is the humble recorder of reality who assumes the same means and ends of the early scientists, whom Thomas Sprat described as "laborious observers" of nature in his 1667 *History of the Royal Society of London*.

My concern in this paper is with this very vicinity of the fictional and scientific discourses in the early modern period. I suggest there is more to empiricist assumptions about reality and knowledge than mere "objective" investigation, and that inquiry into these domains (ontological and epistemological) forms a common background to natural philosophy and "realist" fiction in this period. It is useful to notice, in this respect, that this was a time of paradigmatic shifts for both "science" (or: natural philosophy) and fiction-writing, which triggered a marked awareness of, and reflection on, the basic assumptions, premises and values on which these

respective forms of knowledge and expression rested. In particular, I am interested in a specific problem facing both the scientific and literary accounts about the world in their “empiricist” variant: the problem of rendering the real in the manner of offering satisfying evidence about the real. In order to start approaching this issue, we might well ask two basic questions: one is “what constitutes the real?”; and the other, “what constitutes satisfying evidence?” Having asked that, we realise a qualification has to be added: we will ask “what constitutes those things *at a certain point in time and space*”: thus, we start with a historicised problem with two facets (one ontological, the other epistemological and legal).

My proposal is to approach this problem by focusing the analysis on two texts, one literary, the other scientific. The one is an early text of Defoe’s, a pamphlet published in 1706 under the title *A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal, the Next Day After her Death, to One Mrs. Bargrave, at Canterbury, the 8th of September 1705* (the source of this text was a relation of the event published in the Loyal Post no. 14, on December 24, 1705). The other is a treatise of great notoriety in the late 17th and 18th centuries: Joseph Glanvill’s *Saducismus Triumphatus, or: Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions. In two parts. The first treating of their possibility. The second of their real existence* (1681, second edition 1682).

Defoe’s pamphlet is, simply put, one of the most notorious ghost stories in English literature, although, perhaps, an unlikely candidate for a unitary Defoe canon. Yet, Defoe was (even though the undergraduate student hardly ever learns about it) not only the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, or *Captain Singleton*, but also of such texts as *The Political History of the Devil* (1726), *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727), *A System of Magick* (1727) or *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe, containing A Vision of the Angelick World* (1729). This is to say that Defoe was seriously concerned with questions of magic and demonology, with spirits, ghosts and apparitions, not merely as fictional devices, but as actual components of a world(-view). And this is not a recent discovery: Sir Walter Scott classed these concerns under a “third species of composition” he discovered in Defoe’s writings, “upon theurgy, magic, ghost-seeing, witchcraft, and the occult sciences”. Defoe appeared thus as a “believer in something resembling an immediate communication between the inhabitants of this world, and of that which we shall in future inhabit” (cf. Rogers 1972:69). In the first half of the 20th century, Summers (1931) includes references to Defoe in his *Supernatural Omnibus*, and places him in the vicinity of Glanvill, as does a late 20th-century commentator (Titlebaum 1999), who reiterates the now

acknowledged, if still surprising, fact that Defoe read and was inspired by people like Thomas Browne, Joseph Glanvill, Richard Baxter or John Beaumont. *The Apparition of Mrs Veal* is thus an early text announcing Defoe's later preoccupations with such matters. It tells the "true story" of the apparition of the ghost of Mrs Veal to her friend Mrs Bargrave, with an implicit moral about the importance of friendship and of the (Protestant) Christian's preparation for the life to come (it was published together with Charles Drelincourt's *The Christian's Defence against the Fears of Death*, as it also contained an apology of this text); and it is also, importantly for our analysis, a story about the credibility of this story.

Joseph Glanvill, an Anglican Latitudinarian and fellow, as well as apologist, of the Royal Society, proposes in *Saducismus Triumphatus* (hereafter referred to as ST) a philosophical assessment of the possibility, as well as of the actual existence, of spirits, ghosts and apparitions (the title translates as "victory against the Saducees" – where the Saducees of old, i.e. the Jewish rabbis who denied the existence of angels, are assimilated to the modern "atheists" like, most notoriously, Thomas Hobbes). The premises of this inquiry are rooted in a 17th-century natural philosophy worldview in the Cambridge Platonist vein (Henry More was both a supporter of such investigations and an actual contributor to Glanvill's volume; for More and the Cambridge Platonists, see, for instance, Hutton 1996). The arguments of this inquiry are both theoretical and factual: philosophical demonstrations stand side by side with relations of apparitions, and while the former are said to be the more vigorous, it is the latter that are deemed more eloquent.

Even such a short and reductive description of the two texts is apt to suggest common points: Defoe's relation might well have featured among Glanvill's *exempla*, and thus played its role in a demonstration of the existence of spirits. The specific reasons why this is so, and the apparent conundrum of the scientific concern with factuality going hand in hand with an investigation of spirits, takes us back to the two-faceted problem I have already announced.

The ontological question: what constitutes the real?

As we have seen, Defoe was a man who *believed* in spirits and apparitions, which is to say, for this man, the world positively contained a non-material, intellectual realm. Here are some examples:

"As there is a converse of spirits, an intelligence, or call it what you please, between our spirits embodied and cased up in flesh, and the spirits unembodied; ... why should it be thought so strange a thing, that those spirits should be able to take upon them an outside, or case? ... If they can assume a visible form, as I see no

reason to say they cannot, there is no room there to doubt of the reality of their appearing. (Defoe, *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions*, 1727)

I always believed (in) a converse of spirits, and I never saw any reason to doubt the existent state of the spirit before (it is) embodied, any more than I did of its immortality after it shall be uncased." (Defoe, *The Consolidator. Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon. Translated from the Lunar Language by the Author of The True Born Englishman*, 1705) (Cf. Jordan 1991, who also argues for Defoe's sustained interest in both the notions and the language of the new philosophy of the 17th century.)

That "spirits should be able to take upon them an outside, or case" is a conjecture that closely echoes Glanvill's explanation for the philosophically sanctioned possibility of apparitions: these are formed once the soul, separated from the body "without death", is dressed in "its immediate vehicle of air, or some more subtle matter" (ST:13). Such account, Glanvill notes, is in keeping with "the Platonick hypothesis, that spirits are embodied", a hypothesis that seems "very probable, from the nature of sense and the analogy of nature" (ST:36). Thus, it is based on assumptions about the nature of human beings as well as about the nature of things in the universe that ghosts and apparitions are said to be highly probable: on the one hand, for there to be sensation, Glanvill argues, there must be a *vital union* of spirit with matter; and on the other, and as an extension of this first assumption, since nature "proceeds by orderly steps and gradations," it follows that the "orders of spirits" nearer to us will be "vitaly joined to such bodies" (ST:37).

Let us note that this is an ontology which derives its full force from a theological picture of the world, one that usually makes use of the metaphor of the *chain of being*, or of the similar notion of the *analogy of nature*: nature proceeds orderly and gradually, as in a hierarchical "chain", and the levels of this chain are analogous. Thus, since all the "regions" of the observable universe have their inhabitants, it follows that the "upper stories" must be "furnished with inhabitants", too (ST:7), and since humans are defined by a vital union of matter and spirit, the same will be true of the upper beings, just that the qualities of the two ingredients will change (spirits more refined, matter more subtle).

Also, for Defoe, as for Glanvill, belief in spirits, ghosts and apparitions goes hand in hand with, and acts, indeed, as a support for, a belief in the immateriality and immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body and, ultimately, the existence of God:

"...yet considering the Saducism of this present age, and atheism too if you will, it were a great neglect in me, or any one else of my profession not to have a great zeal and indignation against the stupour and besottedness of the men of these times, that are so sunk in the dull sense of their bodies, that they have lost all belief

or conceit that there are any such things as spirits in the world.” (“An Account of this Second Edition of *Saducismus Triumphatus*,” by Henry More)

And this is also “the use” which the narrator of Defoe’s text urges the reader to extract from the relation:

“The use which we ought to make of it, is to consider, that there is a life to come after this, and a just God, who will retribute to every one according to the deeds done in the body; and therefore to reflect upon our past course of life we have led in the world; that our time is short and uncertain; and that if we would escape the punishment of the ungodly, and receive the reward of the righteous, which is the laying hold of eternal life, we ought, for the time to come, to return to God by a speedy repentance, ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well: to seek after God early, if happily he may be found of us, and lead such lives for the future, as may be well pleasing in his sight.” (Defoe, *The Apparition of Mrs Veal*)

Now, the question is: is the empiricist view of the real compatible with such an ontology? Is there any link between the scientific investigation of the factual, palpable materiality of nature and the invisible realm of spirits?

In a recent book, John Yolton has pointed out that the intellectual realm of spirits features prominently, if less vocally, in John Locke’s philosophy – a strange place for such an occurrence, one might have thought. Yolton demonstrates the importance for Locke’s thinking of the notion of a chain of being that includes intelligent non-embodied spheres besides the material ones, and how this notion relates directly with Locke’s more apparent, “materialist” concerns.

Yolton also draws attention to the distinction in Locke’s thought between an *empirical truth* (subject to the experimental science of nature) and a *speculative truth*, which is the proper object of a natural philosophy: natural philosophy includes “the knowledge of Things as they are in their own proper Beings, their Constitutions, Properties and Operations” (*Essay* IV.21.2). (Yolton 2004:46) And that is a knowledge of *both* the essence of *matter* and the nature of *spirits*. (That is to say, a knowledge of the *real essences* of these substances, from which all their qualities flow, as opposed to their *nominal essences*, which are simply collections of ideas we have about those qualities.) Such knowledge is, nevertheless, unattainable by man in his limited, fallen condition, and thus can only be approached in the manner of speculation, conjecture or hypothesis (none of which are procedures of solid, demonstrative science), and in the case of spirits, of revelation. (*Ibidem*: 51-5, 62)

Indeed, it is a remarkable thing that the advent of the new science in the 17th century propelled, at least for a while (i.e. until science established

itself as a thoroughly positivist form of knowledge), an inquiry not only into the realm of the visible, factual and demonstrable, but also into that which lies beneath the surface: the invisible world of causes and real essences. Let me stress several points: 1) on this ontological picture, the world includes both material and spiritual forms of existence, and the various combinations of the two form the various degrees of the chain of being; 2) behind all these forms of existence, material as well as spiritual, lies an impenetrable domain: the domain of “causes”, or of the real nature of things, which should explain their behaviour (e.g. movement, gravity, cohesion, mind-body interaction), but remains mysterious to human eyes. Glanvill writes in this respect:

“...and we can no more (...) form an argument against them [i.e. against spirits], than against the most ordinary effects in nature. We cannot conceive how the foetus is formed in the womb, nor as much as how a plant springs from the earth we tread on; we know not how our souls move the body, nor how these distant and extreme natures are united (...) And if we are ignorant of the most obvious things about us, and the most considerable within ourselves, ‘tis then no wonder that we know not the constitution and powers of the creatures to whom we are such strangers.” (ST:11-12)

And: 3) it was the resistance of this very domain of causes to demonstrable certainty that caused the strong sceptical positions of empiricist philosophy and that introduced into the vocabulary of scientific research the notion of probable (or: “moral”) certainty. Glanvill concludes the fragment quoted above with these words:

“Briefly then, matters of fact well proved ought not to be denied, because we cannot conceive how they can be performed.” (*idem*)

“Matters of fact well proved” are not yet positively certain, but only highly probable: which seems to be ground enough for a philosophical account. Let me note that it was under the sign of *probability* that the “Platonick hypothesis” was introduced as powerful defence of the *possibility* of ghosts and apparitions; and it is under the same sign that Glanvill proceeds with the demonstration of their *real existence*, which will emerge out of a qualification of relations and testimonies of such occurrences. And thus we come to the epistemological side of our problem.

The epistemological question: what constitutes satisfying evidence? And what degree of certainty can we attain?

Glanvill makes repeated assessments of the epistemological situation of his inquiry:

“For in solving natural phenomena, we can only assign the probable causes, showing how things may be, not presuming how they are.” (ST: 12)

Defoe’s text ends with the narrator assuring us that she is as satisfied of the truth of Mrs Bargrave’s relation as she is

“...of the best-grounded matter of fact. And why we should dispute matter of fact, because we cannot solve things of which we can have no certain or demonstrative notions, seems strange to me.” (Defoe, *The Apparition of Mrs Veal*)

This is, importantly, the only indication in Defoe’s text of there being a problem with “solving things”: the main thrust of the narrative is to give reasons why Mrs Bargrave’s relation is believable. It is concerned with the question of credible testimony, rather than with philosophical justifications of the existence of spirits. And yet, the indication is important, since it obviously reiterates the vocabulary and thus the concerns of the 17th-century theory of knowledge. Consider Glanvill’s introducing the matter in his Preface to *Saducismus Triumphatus*: he insists he only offers a *defence* of the *possibility* of the existence of witches and apparitions and warns:

“And if it should be objected, that I have for the most part used only supposals and conjectural things in the vindication of the common belief, and speak with no point-blank assurance in my particular answers, as I do in the general conclusion; I need only say, that the proposition I defend is matter of fact, which the disbelievers impugn by alledging that it cannot be, or it is not likely: In return to which, if I show how those things may be, and probably, notwithstanding their allegations, though I say not what they are in the particular way I offer, yet ‘tis enough for the design of defence, though not for that of proof: for when one says a thing cannot be, and I tell him how possibly it may, though I hit not the just manner of it, I yet defeat the objection against it, and make way for the evidence of the thing de facto; which now I have added from the divine oracles, and two modern relations that are clear and unexceptionable.” (Preface to ST)

Importantly, the notion of *matter of fact* is placed together with probability, and not with certainty: yet, probability is said to amount to sufficient evidence “of the thing de facto”, as sanctioned by both philosophical conjectures and factual testimonies (while the latter are derived from both divine history and modern experience, or, better say, accounts of experience).

Such distinctions come in the wake of 17th-century sceptical notions of “certainty”, which ultimately led to a valorisation of probability (understood as a weak species of certainty) as cognitive operator for both religious and scientific inquiries. William Chillingworth, the Anglican clergyman, distinguishes in his *The Religion of Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation* (1638) three kinds of certainty: 1) absolutely infallible certainty; 2) conditionally infallible certainty; and 3) moral certainty. The first lies beyond human reach; the second is mathematical and metaphysical; the third is “the certainty of everyday life about matters of fact and is based on such evidence as excludes the possibility of error for all practical purposes” (Van Leeuwen 2003:307). As such, it admits testimonies of witnesses, as well as reports of chroniclers and travellers.

The Royal Society of London premised its investigations on precisely such an understanding of the nature of certainty: John Tillotson, Joseph Glanvill and John Wilkins, members and also clergymen, further developed Chillingworth’s notions. Wilkins’ major work was *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (published posthumously in 1675) and it is representative of the translation of religious into scientific vocabulary as far as knowledge procedures were concerned: less than infallible certainty came to be accepted in both religion and the sciences, and such constructive scepticism became part of the “experimental philosophy” of the Royal Society. One of the points Wilkins makes is that belief in matters of fact is sanctioned by testimony. “The testimony of witnesses to a crime, of an explorer to the customs of a distant country, or of an historian to events in the past are all adequate bases for belief, provided that the witnesses are authoritative and credible” (*Ibidem*:309).

The close relationship between moral/probable certainty and evidence by testimony of witnesses is crucial for our inquiry. Defoe constructs his text even as he constructs the testimony, and indeed a major point of concern is to build up a case for the credibility of the witness. But in addition to the celebrated “circumstantial detail” that is apt to lend to narratives what Barthes notoriously called “*l’effet du réel*”, an equally great importance is placed on the *moral character* of the witness – an element worth paying attention to. The text is prefaced with a short introduction that, before giving the “use of the relation”, makes sure that the persons involved are beyond suspicion:

“This relation is matter of fact, and attended with such circumstances, as may induce any reasonable man to believe it. It was sent by a gentleman, a justice of peace, at Maidstone, in Kent, and a very intelligent person, to his friend in London, as it is here worded; which discourse is attested by a very sober and understanding gentlewoman, a kinswoman of the said gentleman's, who lives in

Canterbury, within a few doors of the house in which the within-named Mrs Bargrave lives; who believes his kinswoman to be of so discerning a spirit, as not to be put upon by any fallacy; and who positively assured him that the whole matter, as it is related and laid down, is really true; and what she herself had in the same words, as near as may be, from Mrs Bargrave's own mouth, who, she knows, had no reason to invent and publish such a story, or any design to forge and tell a lie, being a woman of much honesty and virtue, and her whole life a course, as it were, of piety." (Defoe, *The Apparition of Mrs Veal*)

Equally, the relation proper is followed by an enumeration of qualities that make for its credibility: Mrs Bargrave is capable of mentioning things concerning Mrs Veal which had been secrets and known to no one else but her family; she "never varies in her story", she doesn't "jumble circumstances"; she does not seek to derive any profit from this account, therefore she "can have no interest in telling the story"; above all, she is known to be a person of "authority and sincerity", and of "much honesty and virtue". Also, the "gentlewoman" who had this story from Mrs Bargrave's mouth is herself of a "discerning spirit", known as such by her relative, a gentleman who is a justice of peace, a very intelligent person and the more immediate source of the account, as sent to his friend in London. The interesting thing here is that while for a 20th-century sceptic the proliferation of "relators" can only add to the unreliability of the fact related, the chain of relators in Defoe's story actually reinforces and commends the truth of the matter *because* their are all persons of quality and discernment: an element of validation that is also present in Glanvill's text, and which, moreover, has been shown to feature prominently in the discursive construction of scientific papers in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society. (Cf., for instance, Atkinson 1999.)

For Glanvill and More, too, it is a sign of evidence that the witnesses are "civil and obliging persons", "careful and diligent" and their narratives "full and punctual". Such persons must be credited with a mind free from the temptations of warm imagination:

"And to deny evidence of the act, because their imagination may deceive the relators, when we have no reason to think so but a bare presumption that there is no such thing as is related, is quite o destroy the credit of all human testimony, and to make all men liars (...) For not only the melancholic and the fanciful, but the grave and the sober, whose judgement we have no reason to suspect to be tainted by their imaginations, have from their own knowledge and experience made reports of this nature. (ST: 26)

All histories are full of the exploits of those instruments of darkness; and the testimony of all ages, not only of the rude and barbarous, but of the most civilised and polished world, brings tidings of their strange performances. We have the attestation of thousands of eye and ear-witnesses, and those not of the easily-

deceivable vulgar only, but of wise and grave discerners; and that, when no interest could oblige them to agree together in a common lye.” (ST: 5)

Thus, crucial to the validation of probable knowledge about a world whose material factuality is always governed by invisible principles is the “spectator” of this world, the witness and relator of “spectral” matters of fact. Additionally, validation of the witness is required, too, hence the importance of his/her moral and social status: one cannot reasonably doubt the word of “wise and grave discerners”, members of a “civilised and polished world”, in whom “sincerity” and “virtue” are necessary companions. On this early modern worldview, therefore, knowledge is less a matter of “objective” pursuit than a linguistic situation with strong rhetorical and performative features: the focus is on the status of the “actors” and the qualities of their “relations”. (The same holds for the accounts of experimental investigations by Royal Society members in this period: “authors typically present themselves at the centre of events described in their texts, referring to themselves in the first person and freely describing their actions, thought processes and feelings”, Atkinson 1999:xxiii.)

Such sensitivity to the rhetorical co-ordinates of the communication of knowledge includes, needless to say, a preoccupation with the impact of narrative eloquence. Indeed, the power of narrative was important for Glanvill and More: it alone could bring the event and its significance in their full force before the eyes of the reader. Stories are not simply illustrations, they are “arguments”, albeit rhetorical arguments, all the more so as they are “fresh and near”, thus exempt from the improbable air of antiquity:

“And I know by long experience, that nothing rouses them (those who do not believe) so of that dull lethargy of atheism and Sadducism, as narrations of this kind. For they being a thick and gross spirit, the most subtle and solid deductions of reason does little execution upon them; but this sort of sensible experiments cuts them and stings them very sore, and so startles them.” (Dr. H.M.’s Letter to Mr. J.G.)

Ultimately, knowledge derives its validating strength from three sources: the theoretical force of philosophical arguments; the moral force of witnesses to events; and the eloquent force of narratives.

Conclusions

Reading together Defoe’s and Glanvill’s texts has been useful for grasping the interrelation of matters of ontology, epistemology and rhetoric that were behind the presentation of both scientific investigations and

narrative relations to the public of the late 17th and early 18th century. We have also seen how the bedrock of all these traits was a concern with theological questions.

I believe such an investigation is apt to modulate the notion of “naive empiricism” put forward by McKeon and to open new vistas into the cultural and discursive phenomenon of “realist fiction” in its early modern variant: if we are talking of a world of matter of fact, this is one with specific, interrelated traits:

a. It is a world of matter of fact which also includes an invisible domain, behind or above both its material and spiritual parts: here, “apparitions” are sanctioned by the logic of the “vital union” of matter and spirit, in conformity with the “analogy of nature”. And it is because of this invisible domain that all sorts of (yet) unexplainable things, both natural and supernatural, as well as the surprising turns of events in life, are ultimately reducible to the mysterious ways of providence.

b. It is a world that has to be “attested”, of which accounts have to multiply in order that its many facets may be documented. Thus, it is a world that requires human testimony, and such testimony can only be delivered in terms of probability; as such, great emphasis will be placed on the quality of the relation and the credibility of the witness.

c. Since it is a world given in testimony, it is necessarily a world subject to narration: the story is required to add its full rhetorical force to the conjectures of philosophy. It can do that because it is itself a “sensible experiment”, and thus gives us the “materiality” of the phenomenon, the “embodiment” of the spirit. The narrative emerges thus as a spectral world in itself, a world of phantom-like factuality.

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THE IMAGINATION IN HENRY JAMES'S ESSAYS

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There is a virtual epistemological model of the creative process in James that incorporates the faculty of the imagination. In this paper the processes triggered by the imagination are presented in their relation to a Jamesian theory of the novel. I have chosen to discuss the problem in a logical, rather than a chronological, order of James's writings: first we get a glimpse of the Jamesian model of understanding through his essay on Maupassant, then issues raised in this are explicated in James's essays on novelists.

The concept of the imagination occupies an important position in James's essays on novelists, the specific authors are always marked as imaginative or not or both. However, these pieces of information on novelists are not easy to fit into a framework of the seemingly idiosyncratic Jamesian evaluations: one wonders if they are part of a frame of reference at all or arbitrary epithets in James's essays instead. To arrive at a preliminary pattern, I propose that we first look at James's virtual model of the creative and the critical processes as described in his essay on Guy de Maupassant. This creates a possibility of placing the imagination later in a more specific model of the creative process. (Veeder and Griffin, 1986:6)

1. The Jamesian model of understanding in the Maupassant essay

In his essay on Maupassant, James describes a model of the creative process that marks off the area of the imagination's operation. While considering Maupassant's "Preface to *Pierre et Jean*", James recommends the ideas of Maupassant, but at the same time he focuses his own interest on sections of the preface, because instead of wider philosophical considerations he is interested in the consequences of Maupassant's model for the creative process. Eventually, James criticizes the practice of his fellow novelist. This criticism, in turn, highlights his own notion of a "good" novel and his convictions about his own writing. While reading Maupassant's account of the creative process, James also establishes his own model of interpretation.

A long passage from Maupassant's "Preface" occupies the central position of the beginning of the essay, and the quotation enables a comparison of quotation and actual commentary. The quotation contains the

outlines of the relationships among the world, the perceiver, and the novelist. The relationship between the world and a perceiver is primary compared to the relationship between the perceiver and the novelist that follows it and is of a different quality. Firstly, regarding perception Maupassant states that we all carry our own reality in our thought and in our organs. (Edel, 1984b:523) As for the senses, he claims that our senses are diverse, we have our sight, hearing, sense of smell, taste, touch that mediate the world to us. Moreover, the senses are personal and individual, therefore their products, our experiences of the world, are diverse. That is, already on the level of perception our experience of the world is diverse.

As for the second aspect of perception, our mind, Maupassant states that the mind is informed by the organs and it processes the information it receives. The role of the mind is to “understand, analyze, judge” the information the senses provide us with. The various sensual impressions are ‘made sense’ of, a whole circle of first creating an understanding, second reflecting on it, and eventually identifying a relation to it is sketched. In other words, diverse sensual pieces of information are processed by diverse speculative modes in the mind. This scheme of a liminal, first sensual then speculative perception of the world means that for Maupassant the world does not exist as a separate autonomous entity, but rather as the interpretation of various sensual information we get about what we think is reality. What we think is the real is the product of our senses and our mind. In this way diverse truths are created, as a perceiver’s experience is true for him the same way as another perceiver’s is true for that person. That is why Maupassant states that there are as many truths as there are men, and calls these truths illusions.

The relationship between the perceiver and the novelist is secondary to the latter’s creation of illusions. Artists *express* their particular illusions of the world. In this process perception, first sensual, then speculative, comes first, and only after these stages can expression take place. To put it boldly, the *temperament* of the artist is expressed in his writing, where the skill is to present the temperament or illusions produced by that temperament in a convincing *manner*. By convincing he means credible: the great artists are able, as Maupassant contends, to make humanity accept their illusions. (ibid) Also, a novelist is able to use different illusions of the world and present different realities of things. A novel is simply a vision of the world projected from the standpoint of a person constituted after a certain fashion that a novelist is able to use further.

James is interested in the creative process and its comprehension more than in a general philosophical model about the limits of understanding. Therefore, James adopts the idea of the perceiver who is a

novelist at the same time, and calls the illusions of a particular novelist the author's *case* to describe the creative process. The author's case is constituted by the particular sensual and mental organization of the particular author. In other words the author's work is to be studied through his case, while his case is to be considered through his senses, through his mind, and eventually through his ability to put forward the illusions or impressions produced by the former two faculties faithfully.

The mistakes an author can make fall into the three categories: the senses, the mind, and execution, too. Firstly, the sensibilities of an author can be poor either by being too small or not keen enough. Secondly, the author's mind should be cognizant not only of sensual issues but of problems of the moral sense, as well. Thirdly, as for presenting impressions faithfully, in a convincing manner, the problem can be that an author fails to admit the impression either because of ignorance, diffidence, stupidity or false ideals. The most spectacular sign of James's interest is the inclusion of the critic in the model. According to James, the critic is intelligent to the extent that he is able to enter the author's case. An author's case should be embraced instead of the critic's own, because the consideration of the author's premises may be both more valid and entertaining. The premises of the author tell us about the very nature of his mind, and this is the aspect a critic should consider.

James criticizes Maupassant at specific points and his criticism shows his own preferences as an author and a critic. The problem for James is that Maupassant is primarily an author of the senses, unable to perceive the workings of the mind. For instance, Maupassant's sense of smell is exceptional, James states:

"Human life in his pages (would this not be the most general description he would give of it?) appears for the most part as a sort of concert of odours, and his people are perpetually engaged, or he is engaged on their behalf, in sniffing up and distinguishing them, in some pleasant or painful exercise of the nostril." (526)

His visual sense is equally powerful, and the basic human instinct, the sexual impulse pervades his pages as well.(526) James comments on that impulse at length: the basic problem is that in Maupassant the sexual impulse seems to be the deepest motivation of man, whereas according to James man's moral impulse is the main motivation.(529) Maupassant, as James sees him, is blind to the moral nature of man, the deepest motivation of action and character and can only sense superficial kinds of motivation.

The immense lack James finds in Maupassant is characteristic of his own case as an author. For James the mind, the workings of thoughts which he calls the moral aspect, occupies a higher position than sensual

information. The senses serve to indicate the workings of the mind, to project the moral impulse that is the basic motivation of both action and character. James the novelist reproduces the creation of his particular case, where the production of illusions is motivated by a moral sense.

2. The imagination in James's essays on novelists

The imagination is a term used frequently in the essays, but there is no indication if it has its definite place within the general model of the senses, of the mind, and of execution. Let us investigate the scattered remarks as the term appears author by author: a preliminary definition on the basis of *Hawthorne*, an account of the senses and thinking on the basis of the essays on French writers, and a consideration of the importance of the moral sense in English writers and the Russian epitome of novelists, Turgenev.

Although *imagination* is a common word in James's critical dictionary, it is not defined very clearly at any point in the essays. The passage closest to a definition can be found in the *Hawthorne* book where, in chapter III on Early Writings, Hawthorne is characterized from the perspective of Coleridge's familiar 'fancy' and 'imagination': Hawthorne is said to be a man of fancy bearing signs of a playful imagination. Well into the evaluative passages James refers to the difference between fancy and the imagination:

"Hawthorne was a man of fancy, and I suppose that in speaking of him it is inevitable that we should feel ourselves confronted with the familiar problem of the difference between the fancy and the imagination. Of the larger and more potent faculty he certainly possessed a liberal share; no one can read *The House of the Seven Gables* without feeling it to be a deeply imaginative work. But I am often struck, especially in the shorter tales, of which I am now chiefly speaking, with a kind of small ingenuity, a taste for conceits and analogies, which bears more particularly what is called a fanciful stamp. The finer of the shorter tales are redolent of a rich imagination." (Edel, 1984a: 365)

The passage takes Coleridge's distinction between the fancy and the imagination for granted, a "familiar problem," and uses them for the sake of analysis. Both are faculties, the imagination is larger, it is potent, while the other one, fancy, is small and less creative. It seems James is using concepts current at the time when he speaks of two faculties that are relational to each other, not opposites; which are not exclusive, either, one text of the same author can be imaginative while another fanciful: the imaginative quality is encoded in the texts.

If one reads this passage in light of the chapters around it, one can see that the fancy/imagination difference is a critical tool or measure of literary production. Hawthorne provides a good example to show this because being a man of fancy and of the imagination, both aspects appear in connection with him. Hawthorne the man of fancy is often allegorical, and allegory for James is one of the lighter exercises of the imagination (367), it is not a first-rate literary form. At the same time, his fancy is pure, spontaneous, and natural, James states.(362) The imagination is one faculty that lies near fancy in Hawthorne's case and from which fancy borrows: it affects the fancy, endows it with charm. The interference of the imagination explains the way Hawthorne relates to the moral issues of his Puritan background, his ability to transmute the heavy moral burden into the very substance of his imagination, into art, and to select the dark area of Puritan morality for its playground.(363) Also, his imagination has developed during his career, is delicate and penetrating:

“What had a development was his imagination – that delicate and penetrating imagination which was always at play, always entertaining itself, always engaged in a game of hide and seek in the region in which it seemed to him that the game could best be played – among the shadows and substructions, the dark-based pillars and supports, of our moral nature.” (340)

In this account the growth and play of his imagination as an upper-level faculty is contrasted both with his intellect and with his underlying affections. Contrary to the development of his imagination, Hawthorne's intellect has not developed: James claims the volumes of his diaries record very few convictions or theories, as if he possessed an unperplexed intellect: his mind proper “a repository of opinions and articles of faith” did not change. Instead of the intellectual base under the play of the imagination, we have Hawthorne's affections directly. So instead of the consecutive layers of affections, convictions, and the imagination James seems to be after, in Hawthorne he finds an abundance of the imagination. Because Hawthorne's affections are given, his convictions do not abound.

James' account of Hawthorne can be complemented by his essays on Balzac and Flaubert. Interestingly, his general criticism of the French mind as he puts it is that it is concerned primarily with the senses and thus neglects other, for James perhaps more important aspects of understanding.

Like Hawthorne, Balzac is described as both fanciful and imaginative. James is relying on Coleridge's notions still. Balzac, says James, is two writers in one, one spontaneous, the other reflective, where the spontaneous side is the positive, the reflective the negative one. His spontaneity is related to his imagination and is unlimited and vivid.(Edel,

1984b:126-7) His reflective part lacks disinterested observation (33) and shrinks the wealth of civilization into recordable patterns.(41) It seems to me that this duality can be related to the imagination / fancy difference in *Hawthorne*, if we consider James's further comments on Balzac's 'sides':

“after the vividness of his imagination, Balzac's strongest side is his grasp of actual facts. Behind our contemporary civilization is an immense and complicated machinery -- [...] of government, of police, of the arts, the professions, the trades. Among these things Balzac moved easily”. (40)

Balzac's sides are characterized further as a possession of both an intensity of imagination and an insatiable appetite for facts. (93) James goes so far as to name these two directions: the principle of free imagination and the principle of the earnest seeker. (95) The two antagonistic principles that are used to describe Balzac's sides are connected to the two faculties: the imaginative composition and the seeker to the imagination and the fancy, respectively.

The earnest seeker in Balzac is also criticized by James on the basis of his relation to the divine principle of the imagination. (98) James contends that Balzac had a fairly limited practice of the imagination, and despite the fact that his imagination was rich, its scope was far from satisfactory. James develops this point in detail in his 1902 essay on Balzac, where he observes that the prime aspect of the scene of the human comedy for Balzac was money, and always thinking about money he forgot about areas beyond that:

“it makes us wonder again and again what then is the use on Balzac's scale of the divine faculty. The imagination, as we all know, may be employed up to a certain point in inventing uses for money; but its office beyond that point is surely to make us forget that anything so odious exists. This is what Balzac never forgot; his universe goes on expressing itself for him, to its furthest reaches, on its finest sides, in the terms of the market.” (98)

Ideally, then, the imagination can have lower and higher offices, the lower an imagination of everyday solutions, e.g. inventing uses for money, the higher in search of the expressions of a personal universe divine, and James has sympathy with this. (99) The problem with Balzac was that his imagination was limited to lower offices of the faculty.

The problems attributed to Balzac point towards James's criticism of Flaubert, the two Flaubert essays where the imagination is once again a key term. For James, Flaubert is an interesting, ponderous failure (289) whose mistakes represent potential success. (330) He is “formed intellectually of two quite distinct compartments: the sense of the real and the sense of the

romantic.” (321) James describes his sense of the real as the basis of his strange talent, “his peculiar talent [...] in the description [...] of material objects, and it must be admitted that he carried it very far,” (290) and his masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*, is not his most imaginative work. So there is criticism implied in James’s account because Flaubert nearly excludes the free play of the imagination in his best writing, (322) and because it is limited to deplorable subjects. (326)

In this context, James’s reading of Flaubert’s mistakes deserves particular attention as it highlights the potential James saw in Flaubert. Writing about *L’Éducation sentimentale*, James discovers the indicative mistake in the figure of Mme. Arnoux, saying that the character is Flaubert’s least superficial one, it is somehow moral. The figure is an error inasmuch it does not fit in the company of Flaubert’s superficial characters. It is also an unconscious error, as the author had not suspected it was an opportunity that would have counted as his finest (330) -- from James’s perspective, of course. It seems that for James a moral character can be opposed to one that is portrayed through the description of things and he misses the depiction of a moral character in Flaubert and would value the appearance of one. From a Jamesian point of view Flaubert’s case, his conviction that the beauty of art is dependent on form is greatly discredited. Expression, for James, is not the only measure of the life of a work of art; it is as eccentric to say only form matters as it would be to say that only the subject matter does. James misses that part of his own model where the perceiver’s senses and the mind cooperate to construct an illusion, and he is astounded by the eccentric and limiting focus on the stage of execution only. To say that such a preference for execution on Flaubert’s part differs with the nature of the imagination Flaubert applies is to connect Flaubert’s two sides, the romantic one (*Salammbô*, *Saint-Antoine*) and his realist one (*Madame Bovary*) with the question of execution. (335) The Realist project, however, is concerned with execution only, while the Romantic one is aware of the importance of a construction of an illusion to be executed.

James’s metaphors about Flaubert’s lack of moral character and abundance of form both illustrate and elaborate the Jamesian standpoint. For James, a writer of the first order writes in the style of a “crystal box.” (313-4) It resembles “[...] when in the hand and however closely viewed a shapely crystal box, and yet to be seen when placed on the table and opened to contain innumerable compartments, springs and tricks. One is ornamental either way, but one is in the second way precious, too.” In this metaphor the box, obviously, stands for style: the crystal box figures on the style of Flaubert’s romantic side. The two options, romantic and the realist, are identified with the crystal box studied both from the inside and from the

outside, or only from the outside, respectively. The concentration on form, then, the realist project, is ornamental but not precious, and is the result of too close an observation 'in the hand'. As opposed to this, the romantic project is both ornamental and precious, in placing the object of study far enough ('on the table') for the perceiver to notice that it can be opened and that innumerable compartments and particles can be found in it. The opposition of observing the crystal box from the outside only or from inside and outside also is related to that between observing superficial character vs. a moral character: things vs. thoughts.

To go back to our guiding terms, the fancy and the imagination as faculties of the mind, we can think of James's critique of Flaubert's conviction as related to the lack of the free play or principle of the imagination. As we have seen, the opposite principle to the free play of the imagination was the principle of the earnest seeker. Balzac, the seeker, sought things and respected the real above all, and when he wanted to make things the measure of the imagination, he failed for James. James articulates a similar problem with Flaubert when he says Flaubert was paralyzed by observing the ornaments of outer form only, without ever entering into "beyond" the door and the walls: the corridors and the chamber of the soul. Writing about Flaubert James connects the play of the imagination with issues of the soul, while "things" would belong to the area of fancy.

In James's view of the tradition of the novel the counterpart of the French writers' absence of a moral interest the English (Anglo-Saxon) tradition of the moral novel. To reduce the matter to the level of principles again, it is as if for James the French mind was preoccupied primarily with the senses while the English mind was preoccupied primarily with the soul, both neglecting the issues valuable for the other. From James's criticism of French writers we know that the "representation" of the soul was an important area of writing. In the essays his most valued representative of this tradition is George Eliot, and James's opinion of her writing instructs us in the treatment of the moral issue in his own case.

Keeping the French-English principles of thinking in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that George Eliot is praised as a thoughtful writer, but it is indeed a surprise that she is also considered to possess some imagination. James's comment that it "is unusual for an English novelist to have powers of thought at all commensurate with his powers of imagination" (911) indicates that Eliot is exceptional in this respect. James goes on and tries to give a key to Eliot's method in the manner of a critic.(912) However, when he analyses Eliot's novels one by one, his opinion of Eliot's "powers of thought" and "powers of imagination" is modified. *Romola*, for instance, strikes James "less as a work of art than as a

work of morals” (931), but still he assigns equal worth to it as a moral argument and as a work of art because both the spirit and the execution of the book are excellent. As for the imagination, at this point we have to realize that it is present but not at all satisfactory. (932) The modification of the statement about Eliot’s power imagination is that she possesses a little of it: she shows an absence of free aesthetic life. (1002-3) The modification of the statement about her interest in morals is that regarding morals her problems are still the old, passive problems, (993) what not to show a young person. All in all, Eliot’s figures evolved from her moral consciousness, were not the results of observation: “The world was, [...] for George Eliot, the moral, the intellectual world; the personal spectacle came later;” (1003)

Another major European author whose work James considers from the perspective of fancy, imagination, and moral sense is Turgenev (Tourgenieff). He is also interesting for us because he is outside the French - - Anglo-Saxon divide and embodies a unique mixture of the three faculties. For James Turgenev embodies the happy example of the coexistence of art and morality. Unlike French authors, Turgenev did not share the conviction that art and morality are two perfectly different things, and that the only duty of the novel is to be well written. (1014) Instead, he valued the idea depicted, the subject of his writing, too. James appreciates this approach to his innermost world, “our finest consciousness” exemplary. (1034) Another way to describe this dual interest in issues of morality and art is to say that “if his manner is that of a searching realist, his temper is that of a devoutly attentive observer”. (972) He believes in the intrinsic merit of the subject of art, he takes an intelligent look at life, but he is not only an observer. His imagination is also always at work: it surpasses the French school, although it is true that he has a capacity to become insensitive to beauty that would never have been possible for Balzac or Flaubert. (974) Turgenev is driven back into his imagination by the social spectacle that is too grim for him, and this imaginative writing is not exercised innocently, inconclusively, as Hawthorne’s was. He writes in a way that has the air of reality instead.

The importance of Turgenev’s social context for his imagination is apparent in that another value of Turgenev is his special cultural position: the Russian abroad. He is not in harmony with his native land, because he loves the old Russia and is not able to see whither the new one is drifting. Russian society is in the process of formation, and the new Russian character with its old limitations and new pretensions is the subject of Turgenev’s criticism. Perhaps his sole defect is the abuse of irony – James’s ideal novelist would be a personage purged of sarcasm, as James puts it, somewhat sarcastically perhaps. (988) Turgenev’s position is exemplary in that if America had a native novelist of a large pattern, he would be in this

outsider position, too. This position may also remind us of the position of Hawthorne again, whose main problem was the lack of subjects to write about in puritan America. (Edel, 1984a:321) The prospective great American novelist must leave America in order to find a culturally various context in which to apply his imaginative and moral senses. In sum, Turgenev's imagination was exemplary for James even if it was not exercised to its maximum because of its limitations by other concerns like moral issues and social problems.

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The intentionally perhaps unconnected comments on the imaginations of different authors seem to add up to a systematic model of the imagination that constitutes part of James's model of intelligibility described in the essay on Maupassant. The scattered remarks on the imaginations of the individual authors could be fitted into the triadic model of Jamesian understanding: the work of the senses, the work of the mind, and the work of execution as consecutive functions of the creative author.

James's case as the individual preferences of an author concerning the creative process can be traced among the numerous appraisals and criticisms of fellow novelists. His place is somewhere among Hawthorne, Balzac, and Turgenev. Hawthorne is important for him as the American predecessor whose imagination was limited by the poor cultural and social context: simply there was not enough material for his imagination to work with. Had he been transplanted to Europe earlier than he actually was, his mind would have opened to scenes of the social spectacle, and his 'imaginative fancy' could have evolved to the maximum of its potential. Balzac is positive because of his knowledge of the social scene, his ways with women, his enormous imagination. Should Balzac's cultural position only be complemented by the moral interest of a Hawthornian kind, and an almost ideal mixture of the right social and cultural context, the vivid and playful imagination, and the moral interest would follow. Turgenev is exemplary as an author in a socio-cultural context similar to that of James's contemporaries: a citizen of a nation in social transformation, dreading the new, longing for the old, but perhaps criticizing the present all too harshly. James, in the middle of the triangle made by these fellow novelists, as I envision him, is an American with an intrinsic moral instinct transplanted to Europe to be able to observe a socio-cultural spectacle much more developed than the American, who is in this way able to foresee and imagine conflicts of the soul future generations of Americans are likely to encounter, to open them up to experiences they have never encountered but can feel have reality.

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MAGICAL CREATURES IN BRITISH FAIRY TALES

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The story (or history) of this paper starts some time ago, when a colleague of mine looked on the Internet and found some images and probably descriptions of magical creatures present, I think, in Irish fairy tales. I did not take much time to look at them, or to read the texts accompanying the pictures, but I thought it would be a good idea to draw a comparison between the Romanian and those, let us say, “foreign” magical creatures, since one could find some common features, but also more differentiating ones between them.

I had a volume of *English Fairy Tales* (by Joseph Jacobs, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1994), then I bought one of *Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales* (chosen and edited by Gordon Jarvie, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1997). The stories included in the two volumes (*The Seal Catcher and the Merman*, *The Laird of Morphie and the Water Kelpie*, *The Brownie o’Ferne Den*, *Tam Lin*, *Thomas Rymer*, *The Lonely Giant*, respectively *Nix Nought Nothing*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Jack the Giantkiller*, *Childe Rowland*, *Molly Whoppie*, *Tom Thumb*) make up the corpus at the basis of the present paper. The creatures under discussion are mermen, kelpies, brownies, giants and fairies, as they appear in the tales in the respective volumes. I have left out witches, ghosts and other characters that, though endowed with magic powers, have (almost) ordinary human form, and are, most often, actually humans. I gave up the idea of comparing them with the Romanian magical creatures because I realised that before drawing a comparison, one should make an inventory of these characters.

When actually reading the stories, I had two surprises. The first was that the British fairy tales in the volumes were shorter than the Romanian ones I had read, therefore less complicated, and the second that I found only one fairy tale with a kelpie, one with a brownie, one with mermen and, luckily, several with giants and fairies. Still, it was enough to notice that they can be included in several categories, according to various criteria of classification.

In the first place, one can classify them into benefic (brownies) and malefic (giants, kelpies).

Then, they can be divided into aquatic and terrestrial. All peoples have populated their waters with all sorts of creatures. The mermaids are the most famous of them. The classical image of a mermaid is that of a creature

with the head and upper body of a beautiful young maiden and the lower body of a fish, and the belief was that these creatures lure the sailors with their lovely songs and take them prisoners to their castle at the bottom of the sea. That was why they were usually feared by sailors. In the story *The Seal Catcher and the Merman* the image of the latter overlaps with that of another marine creature, the selkie. Selkies take the form of seals, but sometimes, females can shed their skins and come ashore as beautiful women. If a man finds the skin of a selkie, he can force it to be a good wife to him. But if the selkie recovers her skin, she returns to the sea, leaving her husband behind. In our story the mermen and merwomen come to the seashore as seals to breathe the air of the surface. They can be distinguished from the ordinary seals by the fact that they are much larger. They are not aggressive, but, though rather huge, are harmless and gentle. They are endowed with speech and understanding, just like humans, whose form they can also take.

Another water creature is the kelpie. Unlike the mermen, water kelpies “are cruel and malicious spirits, who love nothing better than to lure mortals to destruction.” (Jarvie, 1997: 27). In order to do this they take the form of beautiful chestnut horses, saddled and bridled, and when the humans get on their back plunge with them into the water. If the human manages to take off the bridle of such a horse and then put it on again, he gains mastery over the kelpie, since it cannot return into the water until it finds its bridle again.

The brownies are terrestrial creatures that never appear to anybody in daytime, but are sometimes seen at night, though they try to keep out of sight. They never harm anybody and, more than that, they try also not to frighten anybody. A brownie is “a queer, wee, misshapen little man, all covered with hair, with a long beard, red-rimmed eyes, broad, flat feet like a frog’s, and enormous long arms that touched the ground, even when he stood upright.” (Jarvie, 1997: 39). The one in the story *The Brownie o’Ferne-Den* lives in a glen (or den) near a farmhouse. Despite the fact that he is gentle and kind, everybody is afraid of him and avoids passing through the glen at night.

Considered, in turns, a folk memory of a former race of people who lived underground in mound-like dwellings, fallen angels, nature spirits or gods of another religion, the fairies themselves are also terrestrial creatures, who are led by the Queen of Fairies. They can transform people into all sorts of beasts, but they can also bestow on them various gifts, like that of prophesy. They kidnap people, especially men, that can be freed only after seven years, on Hallowe’en’s night when the fairies ride in procession through the wood. The colour of the fairy folk is green. The Celtic

celebration of the new year, Halloween is the time to prepare for the coming of winter, to celebrate the rise of the winter over the sun, a night when the barriers between the realm of the living and the dead weaken, allowing chaos to enter the world. It is also the night when the dead are likely to visit the living. Seven is a magic number, symbolizing perfection, harmony, luck or happiness. Seven years make up a perfect cycle, therefore we may deduce that maybe the people kidnapped undergo a sort of training or initiation in Elfland, especially because afterwards they are endowed with magic powers. Green, the colour associated with spring, is a symbol of fertility, growth, abundance, harmony, vitality and youth. It is a feminine colour, associated with secret knowledge, and to a *regressus ad uterum*. In Celtic myths, the Green man was the god of fertility.

In *Childe Rowland* we are presented a king of Elfland, who kidnaps the main hero's sister because she went round the church the opposite way to the sun. Merlin is the one that advises Childe Rowland what to do and what not to do to manage to free Burd Ellen from Elfland: "after you have entered the land of Fairy, whoever speaks to you, till you meet the Burd Ellen, you must out with your father's brand and off with their head. And what you've not to do is this: bite no bit, and drink no drop, however hungry or thirsty you be; drink a drop, or bite a bit, while in Elfland you be and never will you see Middle Earth again." (Jacobs, 1994: 77)

Giants are creatures of enormous size: "He was eighteen feet in height, and about three yards round the waist, of a fierce and grim countenance, the terror of all the neighbouring towns and villages." (Jacobs, 1994: 54), because of which they are lonely, since each giant needs a huge space to live off. "They don't think about this loneliness, however, because thinking isn't something they go in for very much. Mostly they just get on with the business of being giants, which takes up all their time and which is very hard work because it is laid down in the Rule Book of Giants that, when they aren't actually eating or sleeping, they have to stamp around the countryside bellowing at the tops of their voices and looking very fierce. Looking fierce is hard work in itself as you'll find out if you try it for half an hour. (...) When a giant does manage to get a few minutes to himself he generally feels so tired that he just drops off to sleep. He sits down first of all with his back against the nearest hill. Then he opens his huge mouth and gives a huge yawn. Then he spits out all the birds that have got sucked into his mouth while the yawn was going on. Then off he goes to dream-land." (Jarvie, 1997: 94-95). This humoristic presentation proves clearly that myths become fairy tales when people cease to believe in them. In ancient mythologies, giants are primordial creatures, personifications of the forces of nature. They existed before the gods and humans came, and play a

significant part in the Creation myths. In the Greek mythology, for example, there is a primordial fight between gods and giants, ended with the defeat of the latter, which represent chaos. Consequently, with the reign of the gods order is established in the universe.

In the Celtic myths the giants have a special place. In primordial times, Ireland is believed to have been inhabited by two peoples: the Leprechauns, some ghost-like, semitransparent dwarfs, considered the archetypes of elves and fairies in the folk tales, and the Fomorians, giants, some of them Cyclops. The Fomorians came to Ireland quite accidentally, probably from a north-western island. They lived on hunting and fishing, and built a fortress from which they watched over Ireland and the ocean. Two invasions followed, and both invading peoples were killed by terrible epidemics when they had conflicts with the Fomorians. The latter asked their enemies to give them each year a third of their children and a third of the production of milk and wheat. The children were taken to the Fomorians' native island to be trained, and the food was given to them on their way there. Other conflicts started, and the Fomorians either killed their enemies, or forced them to hide into forests.

The Celts then came from Britain. They got along well with the Fomorians, and some intermarriages followed. The Fomorians in their native island did not like that. Consequently, they organized a military expedition that ended the Fomorian's reign in Ireland. (see Coarer-Kalondan, Gwezenn-Dana, 1995: 17-40)

In the fairy tales under discussion the giants appear as cruel and strong, but rather stupid creatures that are easily fooled by the cleverer humans. They still ask humans to give them their children in return for various services, and are often in possession of magical objects that the humans manage to steal from them or to get as rewards: a coat which makes the person who wears it invisible, a cap that tells the person who wears it all he wants to know, a sword that will cut whatever it strikes, a pair of shoes of extraordinary swiftness (*Jack the Giantkiller*); or a hen that lays golden eggs and a golden harp (*Jack and the Beanstalk*). If the male giants are malevolent and eager to eat their human "visitors", their wives are usually nice and protective towards them. They usually hide the humans that come to their houses in places where they are unlikely to be found by the husbands, who are then lied about the source of the odd smell in the house.

The only nice giant in the stories under analysis is Angus Macaskill, the protagonist of *The Lonely Giant*, who is also the only one who is endowed with a name and who becomes human in the end, by shrinking after getting into the sea, which stands clear proof for the fact that they are also terrestrial creatures.

We can also classify the magical creatures according to the role they have in the life of the human beings they live next to. Vladimir Propp (1928) considers that there are seven roles which the characters may assume in a story:

1. the Hero, who departs on a search, reacts to the Donor and weds at the end;
2. the False Hero, who claims to be the Hero and often reacts like one;
3. the Dispatcher, who sends the Hero off;
4. the Villain, who fights with the Hero;
5. the Donor, who prepares the Hero or provides him with a magical agent;
6. the Helper, who assists, rescues and/or transfigures the Hero;
7. the Princess, the sought-for person who exists as a goal and often recognizes and marries the Hero and/or punishes the Villain.

In the fairy tales under discussion the magical creatures are not heroes, since, in general, the hero is a human being. However, there is an exception, the main character in *The Lonely Giant*. He leaves in search of a wife, but fails to find a satisfactory one and returns home as a human. Thus, he is able to marry his human girl friend, fulfilling his destiny as a hero.

No magic creatures in our stories are false heroes, dispatchers or princesses, but quite a few are donors or helpers. The mermen in *The Seal Catcher and the Merman* act as donors, giving the human hero a bag of gold which, though has no magic power in itself, saves him from poverty. This bag is received in exchange for the help the seal catcher himself has given them, by healing a merman's wound. The kelpie is a helper, but only as long as it is forced to work for the Laird of Morphee. As opposed to it, the brownies are the helpers par excellence. They help the humans near which they live by finishing during the night what the latter did not have time to finish during the day. They weed the gardens, wash the clothes, thresh the corn, in exchange for only a bowl of milk, which the masters of the houses are expected to leave for them. Moreover, the brownie o'Ferne-Den, hearing that the woman whom he helps is ill, but no one has the courage to pass through his glen at night to bring the nurse, decides to go himself. Thus, he saves the life of the woman who, in her turn, had never forgotten to leave him the richest milk. The Queen of Elfland acts as a donor, rewarding Thomas Rymer for his seven years of singing to her with two gifts: of truth and of prophesy, which he acquires after eating an apple from her orchard. The two gifts make Thomas rich and famous, though he can never forget the years spent in Elfland and will return there after a while. The giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk* is a donor, but without wanting it, since Jack gets from him a bag of gold, the hen that lays golden eggs and the golden harp by stealing them.

As we can notice, the donors offer their gifts and the helpers their help only in exchange for services that the human beings perform for them. As Jack does nothing for his giant, he receives nothing and has to steal the magical objects.

Usually the giants are villains. By killing people, cattle, destroying everything, they produce the misfortunes that the heroes are supposed to remedy. Therefore, they come to fight the human heroes, being defeated and/or killed in the end.

However, whether good or evil, it is these creatures, with their history, special appearance, powers or objects that make the fairy tales what they are. Living next to the humans, in forests or waters, heard and seen only on special occasions, they give the world part of their magic, making it better or worse, but saving it from monotony and dullness.

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FORM AND GOTHIC SUBSTANCE IN MERVYN PEAKE'S GORMENGHAST NOVELS

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1. Introduction

Gothic fiction still survives in contemporary culture. We are entirely immersed in the modernity of the new millennium and yet the applicability of gothic conventions in contemporary art and many cultural products is surprising. This genre has a great capacity for renewal and also the necessary versatility to embody the fears and desires of different generations. Although Gothic fantasy is, as a rule, evasive, some of this genre's novels help us reflect on the human condition. Their protagonists are incoherent, unstable creatures who reject the middle class model of identity that thinks of people as transcendental beings reconciled with their social environment.

In his Gormenghast trilogy, Mervyn Peake (1911-1968) has recreated some of the defining images of Gothic fantasy, as well as the theatricality of its settings. In this essay we will analyse the most relevant formal features and characteristics of the Gormenghast novels and relate them to Gothic fiction. We will also deal with the two most characteristic of Mervyn Peake's novels: *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*. The representation of space in these two works will help us to analyze the similarities and differences between Peake's style and the aesthetic conventions of the Gothic genre. In examining Peake's novels, we will focus on how the villainous Steerpike relates to space and to the ritual systems that govern it. The castle is where Steerpike will set the machinery of terror in motion. Its state of decay anticipates the evil that will take place within its walls. Its architectural structure provides us information about the power relationships among the characters inhabiting it, and its geographical and temporal locations serve a psychological function. This building, remote from time and space, is a place sequestered from external reality.

2. Gothic Features

One of the most salient traits of Gothic fantasy is the overflow of passions, both positive and negative, that frequently leads to the destruction of the protagonists. These excesses are also present in *Titus Groan* and

Gormenghast, where there are neither cultural barriers to violence nor limits on irrationality and obscurity. In *Gormenghast* there are no—like in Gothic fiction—humanistic and enlightened values to defend the excesses of the villains. Spiritual corruption is here more general and we do not find anyone who embodies positive values that escape the grotesque brush-stroke of the narrator.

The *Gormenghast* novels are rich in scenes of horror that are a consequence of the violence present in the atmosphere of the castle. We use the word *horror* following the Devendra Varma's definition of it, which differentiates it from the concept of terror: "The difference between Terror and Horror is the same difference between awful apprehension and sickening realisation: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse" (Varma, 1987: 130). Following this distinction, we observe that what is horrifying predominates over the terrifying in Mervyn Peake's fiction. However, in these novels, the horror created by most male villains in the Gothic novel is rather lessened by its grotesque and ridiculous nature. Only in *Steerpike* are cruelty and sadism present in their pure states. His sadism is made explicit without omitting the most scabrous details. A token of this is the scene in which *Steerpike* indolently pulls a stag beetle's legs while talking to Fuchsia.

During his flight after revealing the Twins' murder, *Steerpike* commits several beastly crimes. His trademark is a stone graft on the skulls of his victims. This liking for horrific death, typical of Gothic fiction, is expressed in the *Gormenghast* novels in situations like *Sepulchra* being eaten alive by owls, the bloody duel between *Rantel* and *Braigon* and the *Thing's* death by lightning. The abundance of death creates an unsafe atmosphere that is very widespread in Gothic works, where normally it is the heroine who is in danger. However, in the *Gormenghast* novels, men are as threatened as women. *Steerpike* seems not to have any criteria for killing someone and this fact creates an atmosphere of general fear.

But *Steerpike* is not the only sadist. Hatred among the secondary characters like *Swelter* and *Flay* offers us instances of sadism; this emphasis on scabrous elements isn't necessary in terms of the plot. The atmosphere in *Gormenghast* is full of emotional tension, but the reader does not know the origin of all the hatred since the narrator employs more expressive means to show the external signs of the rivalry between the characters than reasons. One instance of this hatred is the scene that describes *Swelter* stabbing wood because he is imagining that it is a person.

When Mervyn Peake uses his powerful inventiveness to describe awful and horrible things, he forgets important ingredients of the plot and the creation of characters. One of these ingredients is psychological

coherence in the protagonists. Peake has imagined them more in pictorial terms than in terms of novelistic technique:

“As I went along I made drawings from time to time which helped me to visualise the characters and to imagine what sort of things they would say. The drawings were never exactly as I imagined the people, but were near enough for me to know when their voices lost touch with their heads” (Peake, 1949: 80).

Frequently, the effect that description and the scant narrative economy produce is stagnancy of action. This quality is also present in many Gothic novels, particularly the works of Ann Radcliffe.

Taking this feature of the Gothic novel into account, if we analyse the scene where Fuchsia offers stagnant water to Steerpike and also consider the treatment of the protagonists, we will find that Fuchsia, who is a passive, sensitive, emotive and childish heroine, becomes, in a flash, the most dangerous inhabitant of the castle. Steerpike will conceive, at a subsequent moment in the narration, of killing her. Ultimately he does not succeed, and paradoxically, Fuchsia also indirectly causes the young villain's death. Although in the water scene Fuchsia aims to help a person in need, her charity is not pure because she is not very sympathetic with him. Fuchsia's attitude is characteristic of a dispassionate scientist who observes the outcome of an experiment: "She has tipped something wet over the face of someone who was ill and that to Fuchsia was the whole principle, so she was not surprised when she found that its cogency was immediate" (*TG*, 121). Fuchsia's cold disposition contrasts with the heroine's emotional nature, in such a way that there is no psychological coherence in her presentation. As regards the effects on the plot, this scene does not seem to have any function in it. The episode cannot be considered Fuchsia's advanced revenge on Steerpike; even though unintentional, it turns out to be innocuous to the young villain.

3. The space of the castle

For Titus, Gormenghast is linked with his childhood. When he reaches the mountain at the end of *Titus Alone* and contemplates the castle whose life he has looked into, he feels as if “[T]here burned the ritual; all he had lost; all he had searched for” (*TA*, 1022). The longing for the castle that Titus feels takes the form of the masculine Gothic, which, according to Kate Ferguson, “gives the perspective of an exile from the refuge of home, now the special province of women” (Ferguson, 1989: xiii). However, more than the world of women, the castle represents the world of infancy as opposed to

the adult society of *Titus Alone* in which Titus feels himself to be an outsider, a stranger because, like his sister Fuchsia, he is a *puer aeternus*.

The world of Gormenghast is remote in space as well as time. Like Gothic fantasy, the Gormenghast novels project the past into the present by means of the castle. The utopian Gormenghast is more like an ordinary folktale than the Gothic novels of the first period, in which stories take place in an indeterminate time in the Middle Ages, and in an exotic European or oriental country.

The castle reminds us the world of fairy tales. As Devendra Varma points out, “Castles are traditionally associated with childhood stories of magic, and the Gothic romances are themselves in the nature of adult fairy-tales” (Varma, 1987: 17). Likewise, the absence references to money in the everyday life of Gormenghast suggests us a world of legend, and, from a more psychological point of view, makes up a childish universe where social conventions and compromises are not operational.

Like castles of Gothic fiction, the architectural decadence in Gormenghast is reiterated in images of ruin and decay: “Corroded carvings and broken heads of grey stone” (*TG*, 75), “Except for the library, the eastern wing, from the Tower of Flints onwards, was now but a procession of forgotten and desolate relics [...]” (*TG*, 158), “At the base of the adjacent building, a number of moss-covered lumps of masonry had fallen away from the walls” (*TG*, 208). As Michael Sadleir notes,

“[A] ruin expresses the triumph of chaos over order [...]. Creepers and weeds, as year by year they riot over sill and paving stone, defy a broken despotism; every coping stone that crashes from a castle-battlement into the undergrowth beneath is a small victory for liberty, a snap of the fingers in the face of autocratic power” (Sadleir, 1927; qtd. Varma, 1987: 218).

Another aspect of the castle that is worthy of study is its darkness. Shadowy buildings are characteristic features of Gothic fantasy. For example, Lady Groan’s room is surrounded in darkness: “Mr. Flay [...] inserted it [the key] into the lock of an invisible door, for the blackness was profound” (*TG*, 32). As in Gothic fiction, the castle in the Gormenghast novels stands for the unknown world of the unconscious. This fact is reflected in the labyrinthine form and gloominess of many of its dwellings.

The focus on chiaroscuro in depictions of the castle establishes a distinctly Gothic setting. Enclosed spaces such as caves, basements, and long corridors produce a sinister atmosphere that we associate with feelings that are repressed by the conscious mind but which persist in our unconscious. In these spaces, one can intuit the presence of evil. Villains of Gothic fantasy such as Montoni, Ambrosio, and Schedoni or, in the

Gormenghast novels, Steerpike, behave in a sly, underhanded, and sneaky way.

Personal relationships in Gormenghast are characterized by a high level of violence, which matches with the hellish obscurity that surrounds the castle: “The darkness in the great hall has deepened in defiance of the climbing of the sun. It can afford to be defiant with such a pall of inky cloud lying over the castle, over the cracked toothed mountain, over the entire and drenching regions of Gormenghast from horizon to horizon” (*TG*, 318). Even the natural environment becomes infected with a high degree of intensity: “Near the margin of this inner rain-fed darkness an ant is swimming for its life, its strength failing momentarily or there are a merciless two inches of water beneath it” (*TG*, 318).

The description of one or several people confined in a room is a recurrent image in both novels. Flay locks Steerpike in a room in one of the first scenes of *Titus Groan* Steerpike confines the sisters Cora and Clarice to a remote part of the castle for several years. Fuchsia shuts herself up in her room, where she gives herself over to her reveries. Titus is confined in Lichen Fort as a punishment on four occasions. Gormenghast is, like the castles of Udolpho or Otranto, a place for imprisonment. In his psychoanalytic study of Gothic fiction *In the Circles of Fear and Desire*, Day suggests that the confinement of people is a manifestation of “externalised repression” (Day, 1985: 79). In the Gormenghast novels, a lot of characters voluntarily confine themselves: Barquentine, prior to being appointed Master of Ritual; Sepulchre in his library; Fuchsia in her attic; Rottcodd in the Hall of Bright Carvings, etc.

As frequently happens in Gothic fiction, the insularity of the private dwellings is often interrupted. Steerpike invades Fuchsia’s private room when he seeks refuge after fleeing the room where Flay has held him in confinement (*TG*, 117). Afterwards, he will spy on the breakfast, presided over by Barquentine, where those devoted to their reveries convene (*TG*, 306). Flay spies on the Hall of Bright Carvings (*TG*, 13) through a keyhole, and also into Countess Gertrude’s room through a hole in the wall (*TG*, 33). Swelter overhears what is said in Sepulchre’s room through the door (*TG*, 284). Steerpike devises a system of mirrors to observe what happens inside the rooms of some of the castle’s inhabitants (*GG*, 406-7). The observation of others’ activity is frequent in Gothic fantasy. In their periods of being isolated from the other inhabitants of the castle, the villains of Gormenghast devote themselves to their private vices. These vices become known and are condemned publicly. The most illustrative instance involves Steerpike, who is rejected by the inhabitants of Gormenghast when Flay, the doctor

Prunesquallor and Titus take him by surprise when he is dancing around with the corpses of the Twins.

4. The landscape

As previously mentioned, the plot in Gothic fiction frequently takes place in exotic countries or locales. The setting of *The Monk* is Spain; likewise, most of the action of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, *The Italian*, *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* takes place in Italy; in the case of *Udolpho*, in the remote Apennines. *Vathek* develops his plot in the Orient. Although Gormenghast and its mountains are not placed in a specific geographical location, the influence of Chinese architecture and social organisation bestow an exotic atmosphere on the two novels. Peake's childhood experience of living in China is the source of the oriental imagery and the luxuriant forms that the writer develops in the novels.

According to Mario Praz, the taste for the exotic in the narrative space is full of sexual connotations: "[...] the exotic and the erotic ideals go hand in hand, and this fact also contributes another proof of a more or less obvious truth –that is, that a love of the exotic is usually an imaginative projection of a sexual desire" (Praz, 1951: 197). In the Gormenghast novels, the scenes with sexual content transpire in open natural spaces far from the castle. But the eroticism is not the exclusive domain of nature. The architecture of the castle is full of sexual symbolism and its exoticism can be interpreted as a sublimation of sexual desire.

In the wood of Gormenghast, Fuchsia and Titus meet Flay several years after he leaves the castle when Lady Groan condemns him to exile. In the servant, the two brothers find the affection that they have not received from their father, Lord Sepulchrove. The servant Flay is a substitute for the father, in the same way that the nurse and nanny stand in for the mother.

The freedom that Titus enjoys when he escapes from the castle, and the freedom that Flay and Keda enjoy during their exile, contrast with the discipline that the Ritual imposes in the castle. Maggie Kilgour has pointed out that although the adjective *Gothic* has been used to demonise the past as a dark age of feudal tyranny, it can also be used to idealise it as a golden age of innocent liberty (Kilgour, 1995: 14). It is precisely the excessive strictness in the practice of Ritual that demands a compensatory outlet for the expression of the feelings and behaviour condemned in Gormenghast. From a psychoanalytical standpoint, the external world represents the world of desire and the pleasure principle in the face of the world of duty and reality symbolised by the castle of Gormenghast.

Very frequently, nature reflects the feelings of the protagonists. As in Gothic novels and literature of the Romantic period in general, in the Gormenghast novels there is a high instance of pathetic fallacy. In the same way, Tanya Gardiner-Scott suggests that Peake uses weather in a Radcliffian fashion, showing a predilection for eliciting storms at times of change and stress (such as Fuchsia's fall on the way to the grotto and Flay's luring of Swelter to their final battle) (Gardiner-Scott, 1989: 11). In spite of the fact that the characters in the novels enjoy nature, they confess that they do not understand it. See, for instance, the words of Fuchsia to Steerpike: "I don't know anything about Nature,' [...] 'I only look at it'" (*TG*, 214).

In the Gormenghast novels, we do not find the bucolic landscapes that are present in some Gothic works such as *The Monk* or *Melmoth the Wanderer*. In Gormenghast, the landscape often wields a power that regulates the behaviour of the inhabitants of the castle and which establishes peace and harmony following conflict. This is the function of the deluge that inundates the castle and its surroundings at the end of *Gormenghast*.

Although there are no bucolic landscapes here, in some passages we find an idealised nature that protects the characters who abandon the castle or the Outer Dwellings. The characters that benefit most from such protection are Fuchsia and Titus, who seek recourse in nature when they want to escape the oppressive atmosphere of Gormenghast.

In the natural environment of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, we find a space common to Gothic fiction: the cave. During his exile, Flay dwells in several caves in the wood. Titus has his first sexual experience in a cave. The caves are highly isolated from the rest of the world, in the same way as the lovers of a lot of Gothic novels look for intimacy in the forests or, for want of it, dark and isolated places where they can express their love. In psychoanalytic literature, the cave is interpreted as a symbol of the maternal uterus, an image associated with the protective mother. This psychoanalytic interpretation of the cave fits with the function of this natural element in the novels of Gormenghast. In this way, Titus takes refuge in several occasions in a cave during his excursions in the Gormenghast wood. Steerpike and Fuchsia also take shelter from the rain in a grotto after the adolescent girl cuts her cheek in a fall.

The scenery of Gormenghast is closer to the desolation of the landscapes of the nineteenth-century Gothic novel than they are to the eighteenth century ones, where they are more secure spaces. On the other hand, the castle, as a central space in the novel, is characteristic of the first period of the Gothic fiction. With regard to the characters, the universe of Gormenghast is inhabited by human beings relatively close to our everyday

reality, and not by the ghosts and apparitions, skeletons and demons that inhabit the eighteenth century Gothic fantasy.

5. Conclusions

The Gormenghast novels emphasize the main conventions of gender that are shown in Gothic fiction. Women are very frequently overtaken by their emotions, and men, whose emotions are very scarce, have an immoderate desire to achieve power. Femininity is understood in terms of marriage and maternity. Men seem to delegate the ability to feel to women, but on the other hand, they do not understand this excessive emotional nature.

Gothicism in Gormenghast trilogy is closer to the male Gothic than the female. The uncertain endings of the stories, the treatment of the supernatural aspects as real and following the plot pattern of the *Bildungsroman*, are its similarities with the male conception of Gothic. Feeling, which is one of the fundamental attributes of Gothic fantasy, is in the novels of Gormenghast a secondary element.

The castle is the element which best connects to Gothic novels. It is the location of terror, and its ruinous appearance provides a metaphor for the state of the Gormenghast civilisation. The nature surrounding the castle is sometimes depicted as menacing. The setting plays an active role in the storyline, either determining or mirroring emotions and events. The size and structure of the castle allow for the isolation of the characters and offers an insular universe to its inhabitants, who do not have any contact with the world outside. For all of them, Gormenghast is the known world, and they do not imagine the possibility of social change because throughout the history of castle, the Ritual and the Groan's dynasty have been indissolubly united.

The isolation of the Gormenghast castle inhibits communal life and its residents' lack of communication causes antisocial behaviour. These actions are based on the characters' affective immaturity, low communicative capacities and lack of external referents. The inhabitants of the castle take refuge in their privacy, which they live intensely, and do not commit themselves to society or actively desire to change the aspects they dislike.

Lastly, we observe that the writers of fantasy literature have a faithful reading public that do not makes use of a critical filter to value the aesthetic merits of the works they read. Among the readers of novelists such as Tolkien, George MacDonald or Peake, we find a militant fervour that obstructs critical judgment. Many investigators of Peake's works have made

strains to assign greater quality to the Gormenghast novels than they merit. On the other hand, the authors of fantastic literature such as the those mentioned above have not had the attention from the academic world, in spite of the fact that their works have obvious aesthetic value. Our approach to Peake's work has tried to maintain a critical distance with relation to the object of study, but at the same time has tried to consider the plurality of artistic influences, Gothic fiction in particular.

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**“WYNDHAM LEWIS’S CONCERN FOR WOMEN: MAKING SENSE
OF TENSIONS AND CONFUSIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE”**

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I

Lewis’s views have often been defined as belligerently aggressive, misogynist or homophobic, contributing to a reputation as that of a quizzical, quasi-destructive, and to some extent objectionable observer of his times. In consequence, Lewis’s popularity has suffered in recent decades. Here, I respond to this critical situation by discussing his portrayal of female characters and the sharp social commentary that accompanies them.

The main interest of such research is to go beyond the work of earlier scholars, but in doing so I shall remain with Lewis’s early novel *Tarr* (1928). Previous critics seem to have missed the critical implications deriving from his intense interest in, and sensitiveness to, women and human interrelationships. Here I demonstrate that Lewis is a particularly fascinating depicter of delicate social interactions, a vigorous commentator of the passing scene, and a psychological and stylistic wizardry.

These claims are closely linked to the relational structures that Munton and I consider as being at the heart of Lewis’s work. I propose to take the apparently despicable human behaviour that characterises his fiction as a merit rather than a fault, for Lewis’s fiction is symptomatic. He illustrates doctrines that troubled the society of his time and in *Tarr* he opposes them.

This unusual aspect of Lewis’s aesthetic and critical stance has provoked other types of reactions on the part of his readers and critics. His penchant for depicting unpleasant attitudes and extremely conflicting social encounters constitutes his particular way of making his readers express disapproval of the loathsome social and psychological consequences that arise from such troubled behaviour in order to correct them. This is a classic view of the function of satire.

This view contrasts with those of other critics who describe the markedly conflicting nature of Lewis’s picture of human attitudes and relations as exemplification of his own complicity with aggression. For example, Jameson, Ayers and Freud offer the first insights into Lewis’s aggressiveness by working through a model of the textual ‘psyche’. Critics

such as Corbett, Edwards, Normand, Munton and Wragg (1998: 6) and Gasiorek (2004), whose arguments have similar consequences to mine, object to the former view (satire as corrective) because they consider that Lewis's work must be approached by paying closer attention to history, thereby, displacing Lewis's aggression within historical circumstances.

In my view, the critical views of the last group of critics are right and need to be taken as the standard point of reference in debates about the overall shape and status of the artist's work. Their views contradict the arguments of another group of critics (Julius, Ryan, Gilbert, Foster, Scott, Blair, Mengham, O'Connor, Stevie Smith, and Hewitt, among others) in which Trotter and Foster are prominent, who support Lewis's production bias by using arguments that do not follow a correct logic. In my view, Lewis showed an intensely self-conscious awareness of history, and of the function of art and the artist in society. It was a kind of extremism that turns out to be reflected aesthetically in the patterns of conduct and the outcome of the social interactions of his fictional creatures. The consequent skewed features that characterise his fiction need to be taken not as overt signs of his personal aggressiveness, but as a medium to provoke an ideological transformation in society's traditional understanding of institutions, modes of living, human attitudes, relationships and moral values. Lewis is not a suffering moralist, but a detached satirical writer who takes a style from disgust, contempt and despair. As Lewis's main scholar Edwards (2000: 4) rightly says: "this is the side of Lewis's work that provokes an almost physiological response of fascinated wonder or shuddering distaste."

II

Tarr shows the ways in which modern institutions and constructions produced a radical shift in people's relations to one another. Individuals began to be open to an enormous barrage of social stimulation, and small and enduring communities began to be replaced by a vast and ever-expanding array of relationships. All these modern and progressive doctrines and values set the stage for radical changes in people's daily experiences of self and others.

Tarr is of the utmost interest because it embodies Lewis's early world-view and artistic theory. *Tarr* is an elitist male character who tries to forge a unique identity in constant struggle with the rest of characters, simply by exploiting the creative energy of his mind. This artist hopes to bring to his fictional world an ideal self whose existence outside man's social constructions will allow him to achieve stability. As a result, *Tarr*'s interpersonal attitude and relationships with women are always conditioned

by this rational and aesthetic determinism, which results contemptuously utopian and derisory to me.

The notion of the romantic role of the artist as part of an elite of individuals who is exiled from society converts Tarr into a Stoic indifferent truth-teller. This character needs to contemplate life around him solely, if he wishes to maintain his creative integrity intact and his work objective. Unless he behaves in this distorted manner he will turn into a bourgeois-bohemian artist, that is, someone who produces representative works of art, and deals with art as a business rather than a pure activity of the mind. This aesthetic principle becomes so much of an absolute for Tarr that he even avoids both expanding his love relationship with his German fiancée Bertha Lunken, and initiating associations with her artistic circle of doctrinaire dilettante friends. Tarr considers them as being exponents of a sentimental and mass-oriented type of life, whose unique motivations for acting and associating are materialistic in nature. In other words, he views his own species as personifications of the degenerating religious, moral, social and moral values of Victorian Puritanism and Edwardian England.

This erosion of principles noticed by Tarr represents the cause of the nihilism of the modern man for Lewis. This nihilism has its origin in the announcement of the death of God made by Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1871). Its basis is the disappearance of traditional religious ideals such as faith, love, honour, altruism, or goodness. Accordingly, the Western man and woman view themselves thrown at an uncomprehending world without knowing from where they come, and to where they go. For these reasons, the patterns of conduct of most of Lewis's characters, except for those of Tarr and Anastasya, are absurd in form and their interpersonal relationships tragic in outcome. The principles that motivate them to act, but not to cooperate with their own species spring from their sense of fatalism, apathy, abnegation and hedonism; values that are the result of their being devoid of magical doctrines that give personal significance to their selves and lives.

Tarr and Anastasya differ from the rest of characters for various reasons. On the one hand, Tarr needs to be in a constant process of self-creation and finds in art rather than in love all the real passionate experiences he needs to achieve his goal. On the other hand, Anastasya has in her work as an artist the necessary means to fulfil her private and social interests, that is, personal independence, social prestige, financial security, and freedom to choose her partner/s. The rules of practice that govern the interpersonal behaviour and relationships of Tarr are determined by a pathetic unbridled individualism based on an extremely rational and

aesthetic determinism; those of Anastasya are conditioned by an imperative desire for total independence.

The figure of Anastasya responds to Lewis's awareness of the big efforts made by females in his time to achieve social and professional equality. This social change represents an important sociological alteration in this historical context. Despite the fact that right-wing ideologies and social forces praised her role as a mother, and confined her to the house, while the figure of the man as breadwinner remained prevalent, the female figure gained much importance in society. This occurred, essentially, after revolutionary feminists, and intellectuals complained about the enormous inequalities that existed between men and women in Western society, and above all, when factory owners (taking advantage of this situation because women mean cheap labour force) promoted their validity as workforce after the Great War. Personal independence, professional satisfaction, economic welfare, social power, or acquisition of knowledge became imperatives not only for men, but also for women, who began to have major interests in attaining their individualistic goals.

The traditional roles of the woman as submissive partner, altruistic mother, caring child-minder and diligent housewife started to be questioned by women themselves, and in doing so, the idea of the role of the man as *paterfamilias*, that is, as family provider and protector, went down the tubes. To make matters worse, men were demonised as wife-beaters, deadbeat dads, child abusers and criminals without whom the world would be a better place. In consequence, females started to feel that they needed men less and less, the myth of masculinity turned out to be in crisis, and with it, the figure of the family as structural pillar of society were replaced by that of the State, that is, the institution which is harshly rejected by Lewis in his production.

In my opinion, Lewis is aware that, within this context, very few professional, social or political paths would be opened for women really. Rather, new forms of discrimination, at times, surreptitiously and, under the protection of ideologies proclaiming their equality would appear instead. These facts caused Lewis to view Liberal Capitalism as promoting the idea that men had to give way to women not to improve their quality of life, but to cover the enormous lack of male workforce that existed after the Great War. The active role of women in society began to be enhanced further and further by the Establishment, only for economic interests. Power, money and pleasure became the genius of the new world, and the traditional roles and personal situation of both males and females in both intimate and large contexts suffered many negative modifications. The whole structure of society and their functioning experienced great and numerous transformations that affected the nature of their interpersonal behaviour and

relationships in considerably deteriorating ways. In this regard, the distorted aesthetic picture of social experience depicted by Lewis in *Tarr* and in his subsequent novels largely account for all these historical circumstances and his energetic critical view of them. For example, Bertha and Anastasya answer to the figures of altruistic and independent woman respectively. They are involved in love relationships with Tarr in order to gain their needed requirements, and obtain satisfaction; his love meetings with both females, however, are scarce, misshapen and often motivated by extremely egotistic drives.

Bertha feels unable to find self-rewarding activities that engage her in normal circumstances. Thus she makes use of her sex as a means to attract him privately and adopts his opinions publicly as a catalyst. In this way, she enhances her self-esteem and re-asserts her individuality. However, she also becomes far too dependent on Tarr, which he cannot stand. As a result, Tarr refuses to expand his love relationship with her. This artist needs to maintain his mind pure for art because he considers that art is at war with reality. Consequently, Bertha represents an encumbrance for him. All in all, Tarr rationalises love as sentiment and as eroticism. He decreases his signs of love with his fiancée Bertha as the story evolves, making sure that his interpersonal behaviour and relations always remain superficial. Thus he calculates his exchanges of love with Bertha in his visits in order not to be attached to her. Otherwise, he believes that he would vulgarise his artistic gift and will to create. Tarr views artistic integrity and love as absolutes rather than as resources that can be taken away from him, or given to someone for other resource categories, like money or information.

Nonetheless, his relationship with Anastasya is good in quality and evolves in very positive terms. The outcomes of their relationship are more satisfactory for Tarr because Anastasya is an independent woman figure. In fact, it is only when Anastasya challenges Tarr's intellectual superiority, makes his irrational sexual attraction to her obvious to him and refuses to have sexual relations with him later, that things change. By behaving in this way, she turns all rational and aesthetic principles of Tarr upside down, as she not only questions his self-consistency and artistic integrity, but also ridicules his male superiority. As a consequence, their love relationship terminates in very bad terms.

Lewis recreates the trends of behaviour and relationships of Tarr in these twisted ways in order to show his artistic failure and eventual involvement in Liberal Capitalist doctrines, and the disintegration of traditional religious values and social constructions in the early modern Western world. Lewis recreates the ways in which the peculiar rules of

practice that governed human attitude and relationships in market settings at the onset of the century began to affect human interactions in intimate settings as well, giving origin new visions of interrelationships. By throwing their numerous negative social and psychological connotations into the surface in slanted formal terms, he demonstrates to be highly conscious of all these historical social changes and willing to criticise them in constructive terms.

This deformed image of early Western society is absurdly violent in form and very crude in significance because it avoids all possible identification with reality and desire of dogmatism. From the construction of *Enemy of the Stars* to his last novel Lewis shows that the creation in words of an image constitutes an end in itself. He is aware of the profound impact and meaning of imagery. The descriptions of society in his fiction can thus be taken as representing new visions of life. His liking for images could be said to help him blast traditional forms of understanding human behaviour and relationships and reflect new ones.

Anastasya, the female artist from Dresden is a very significant character because contrary to her *alter ego* Bertha, her behaviour and relationships are not motivated by male principles and constructions. Anastasya is an artist and has a socio-economic function in society. These circumstances provide her autonomy, and freedom to choose her partner/s. Of course, she has needs, but again, these are distinct from Bertha's. Anastasya has "need for achievement", "need for security" and "need for [total] independence." In other words, she wishes to fulfil her emotional, social and financial needs by herself, and for herself; she has no need of a male intermediary between her and the universe.

Tarr's attraction to Anastasya can be explained because she is a female of high self-esteem who avoids depending on any male (or female) for the provision of her needs. Anastasya has very much to offer to Tarr, an individual with very high self-esteem who believes that he has a lot to give, even though he is less than perfect. Tarr underestimates her, and takes a patronising interest. Anastasya is an ideal "travelling companion" because with her "delight, adventure and amusement (are) always achieved." (233) In my opinion, they are satisfied with their relationship because they avoid all possible sentimentality. Thus both of them view love relationships, not as commitment, but as intriguing games.

Anastasya is contented with the rules of practice that govern her interactions with Tarr because she controls sensuality by reason, without this being diminished. In other words, she crudely dissociates erotic love from sentimental love; a union that is, however, deeply profound inside a female since she is a teenager. Together Tarr and Anastasya de-romanticise

sex. As a result, their love relationship is satisfactory for both of them and this is why their meetings are high in quantity, and quality, and last for sometime.

In fact, it is only when Anastasya challenges Tarr's supposedly intellectual superiority by making it obvious to him that he is sexually—Lewis defines this feeling as “irrational”—attracted to her, while she is capable of refusing his sex that all the rational, psychological, moral, social and aesthetic principles of Tarr turn upside down. He fears not to “master the forces arrayed against his ambition of becoming an artist, that is, inertia, self-doubt, sentimentality or sex”. Anastasya disarms Tarr's intellect and flatters his masculinity very skillfully. She is a more admirable and masterful character than he is. However, she is also attracted to him, something that Tarr exploits, when he marries Bertha. In doing so, Tarr reverts to his earlier misogyny: “God was man: the woman was a lower form of life [...] a lack of energy, permanently mesmeric state, almost purely emotional, they all displayed it they were true ‘women.’” (328) Tarr repudiates Anastasya because she is “too big” for him and “he would be eclipsed, a nothing.” In his view, “she is intelligent, active and attractive,” and these facts make him realise how vulgar “an artist” he will be (215). Tarr must admit that Anastasya is a “superior” and “exceptional woman” (327) because her patterns of conduct are unusual for a female of his time. Nonetheless, what really disturbs him is that her behavioural patterns and interactions not only question, but also ridicule his self-consistency, artistic integrity and male superiority: “The line had been crossed by Anastasya, yet he had taken into sex the *procédes* and selfish arrangements of life in general. He had humanized sex too much.” (328)

Lewis challenges the idea of woman as object through Anastasya. This female refuses to be as submissive and abnegated as Bertha, a real Victorian heroine. Anastasya aims at obtaining all types of needs in all manner of settings. She claims her independence and freedom throughout the book, being as autonomous, creative and active as her male counterpart Tarr. In this regard, Lewis makes her reach independence through her work, transcend herself, present new ways of living and dominate external constraints.

In my view, independent Anastasya plays a major role in *Tarr* that many scholars seem to have missed. Lewis's main purposes in this novel are to create an autobiographical novel where he can lecture others of his revolutionary notion of the ideal artist, and present new forms of understanding life and human relations. In paying attention to aesthetic notions exclusively, critics have obviated the dialogic nature of Lewis' mind and art and a post-modern heroine as well.

Lewis does not allow Anastasya to win over Tarr eventually. She only leads, distracts, disarms, and seduces Tarr, who surrenders. He tries to convince himself that he cannot sustain a love relationship with Anastasya on an equal basis because he thinks she is too male (naturally, Tarr expects her to be his vassal). However, what really annoys him is that Anastasya works, this fact not entailing that she has given up her femininity or has lost her attraction. Anastasya merely opts to have an active function in society rather than to be submissive, an exemplification of Lewis' novel propositions. When Tarr realises that Anastasya starts to humanise their love exchanges too much, his love relationship appears to him to be non-profitable. Thus he starts a number of lesser affairs, on the same pattern as those with Bertha and Anastasya, with Rose Fawcett and Prism Dirkes, which seem to us to be a very Lewisian strategy. As a result, the meetings of Tarr and Anastasya diminish in quantity and frequency, and deteriorate in quality, their love relationship becoming extinct considerably quickly from then on.

In the preface to *Tarr*, Lewis describes it as “in a sense the first book of an epoch in England”. As many others have said, this early Lewisian work is highly innovative, due to its abstract Vorticist style, anti-naturalistic form and complex spiritual content. Notwithstanding, many of the aforesaid social and psychological aspects of the interrelationships of these four characters turn out *Tarr* to be very innovative as well; a novelty that derives, above all, from the odd qualities of the social experience portrayed in it, which I have tried to illuminate here.

Consequently, Lewis's work needs to be studied within a historical perspective. By doing so, the reader may understand much better that his powerful stance as a writer and social critic, and his over-all and very responsive vision of man reflect his never ending warning of the necessity to re-structure society's mind and heart in order to preserve the species.

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TRAWLING THE SEA OF MEMORIES

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Introduction

Following his death by suicide in 1973, British author B.S. Johnson slipped into near-oblivion. Paradoxically, he was forgotten by the general public while fetishized by collectors. His books became the provenance of cultists and obsessives: by the late Nineties, copies of *The Unfortunates*, his book in a box published in 1969, sold for well over a hundred times the original cover price. Lately there has been a revival of interest: an omnibus collection of three of his representative novels was published in 2004 and two comprehensive critical works were written about his work - Nicholas Tredell's *Fighting Fictions: The Novels of B.S. Johnson*, 2000 and Philip Tew's *B.S. Johnson: A Critical Reading*, 2001. Also, Jonathan Coe compiled a biography of Johnson in 2004.

The fact that B.S. Johnson has long been doomed to a marginal position in the academic world, his work being considered secondary to the post-structuralist and postmodern project has several reasons. First of all, his literary politics created an opposition with most of his contemporaries. The primary task of the novel, as he saw it, was to interrogate itself, to draw attention to its own artifice. Moreover, Johnson aspired to true literary naturalism, that is, he formulated and professed an almost esoteric theory of the truthfulness of literature. However, beyond formal innovation and the obsessive life-likeness there was also a third aspect that made Johnson neglected, namely, that his writings were unusually raw and confrontational for academic tastes. As Jonathan Coe explains,

„If Johnson's peers never quite gave his novels the recognition they deserved, it was because they presented an emotional challenge, rather than a formal one. Militantly working class, with no access to the Oxbridge network, Johnson was, in many ways, an embarrassment to the literary establishment. The feeling in his books was too raw, too upfront. They lacked the veneer of politeness and diffidence which England has always admired in its writers.” (Coe, 1999)

The aim of this paper is to address the issue of memory in B.S. Johnson's novel *Trawl* (1966). First I will deal with the workings of memory explored by the narrator, and show how the denial of pure logic in recreating the past is offset by the constraint of the mind to create order.

Secondly, I will focus on the Johnsonian truth-claim and argue that the narrative constitutes a denial of that claim.

Exploring Memory

Trawl is considered Johnson's most autobiographical novel. It is an account of a journey on a deep-sea trawler. The narrator leaves behind his life and starts on a sea-voyage whose destination and exact duration is unknown. As Hitchings (2004) states,

„Trawl re-creates in hypnotic detail the narrator's thoughts during three weeks spent aboard a fishing trawler in the Barents Sea; the trawler's probing of the sea becomes a metaphor for Johnson's exploration of the Unconscious and of memory. „

The aim of the sea-voyage is the recreation of personal history:

„...to think would be welcome, for which I am here, to shoot the narrow trawl of my mind into the vasty sea of my past." (Johnson, 1966:9)

The narrator revives his memories in order to be purged of them. He wishes to free himself from his past, to be relieved. However, purification can only be attained through the act of remembering.

Trawling is the central metaphor of the novel: as Davies (1985:75) points out, it refers to fishing but also the conscious effort of the mind intending to reassemble the fragmented areas of the subconscious. The past must be integrated into the present; this is an imperative for living:

„Why do I trawl the delicate mesh of my mind over the snagged and broken floor of my past? ...In order to live, the question does not need to be asked, for me." (Johnson, 1966:21)

The mind compulsively returns to the past and tries to encompass every tiny detail:

„I must think of it all, remember it all, it must be everything, otherwise I shall certainly not understand, shall have no chance of understanding, that I most desire, that I am here for." (Johnson, 1966:14)

Paradoxically, the longing to understand, the urge to reconstruct the whole past dwells near the wish to forget. The former is a condition of the latter. It is only at the end of the voyage that the narrator is healed, that is, he attains a state of being purged of his past:

„No, I need no more of these flashbacks, these autopsies performed on the past (...) I have been purged of my past” (Johnson, 1966:174)

According to Davies, the book is a metaphor of a mind at odds with itself, a mind that cannot rest “until it has laid to rest the ghosts of its earlier self.” Davies (1985:75)

Philip Tew emphasizes the pattern of otherness in the novel, the theme of the isolated voyager. The sailors on the trawler never utter the narrator’s name; he is only called the “pleasuretripper”. Ironically enough he is sick during the voyage and it is only towards the end of their journey that he emerges more frequently on deck, a sign of his metaphorical (and literal) healing process. Tew (2002:56) identifies transition and desire as the underlying motifs of the novel and considers the narrative an inner voyage of self-discovery. The voyage is the enactment of the narrator’s initial isolation in an extreme form whereas the end of the voyage marks the cessation or rather the acceptance and encompassing of isolation. The novel concludes as it opened, with a sense of perpetual solipsism or self-imprisonment:

„I... always with I...one starts from...I, always with I...one always starts with I... And ends with I.” (Johnson, 1966:183)

The painstaking process of recollecting and arranging past events and memories goes against the knowledge that “all tends towards disintegration, towards chaos” (Johnson, 1966:24). The narrator tries to discipline himself, to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant events: “I ramble, I ramble, my constant fault, these are irrelevancies.” (Johnson, 1966:121). He urges himself to be systematic in his thoughts (“Analyse systematically, then”; “Discipline, order, clarity, truth”) and pursue adamantly a line of thought: “Is this the point it begins, where I find the cause? Think harder!” (Johnson, 1966:88)

The Skipper scanning the fishfinder which he recognizes to be of limited use epitomizes the narrator complaining that his memories are unreliable but still making an effort to reconstruct the past since this is his only chance to find his way amidst experiences:

„...the instrument is of only limited use, since it indicates that fish are directly under the ship at that point: while the trawl is perhaps half a mile astern. The Skipper nevertheless scans the fishfinder as it bleeps: it is after all his only guide to what is happening.” (Johnson, 1966:41)

There are two opposing drives in Johnson's narrative: on the one hand, he desperately tries to create order ("But I should try to keep things in order, chronological order"), on the other hand, he claims that pure logic is impossible: "No mind is logical, logic is not a quality of the mind." (Johnson, 1966:72) In other words, memory, or the process of recalling is most often uncontrollable: "Yet it is compulsive: the memory has no stop, is only partly under control, bubbles on, once switched on." (Johnson, 1966:80)

Christopher Sorrentino examines Johnson's novels in the context of contemporary metafiction and considers them innovative on the grounds that Johnson appears in them both as the "disembodied, authoritative, obtrusive narrator familiar to readers of metafiction, and as "the actual character of the artist, living and working at his art." (Sorrentino 2000) He concludes that this is characteristic of the writer's conviction that one could embrace the artifice of the novel and its formal innovations while rejecting "fiction" as "lies".

The workings of memory are not only imitated or enacted but also extensively commented upon in *Trawl*: the metafictional asides reflect on the dynamics of remembering and forgetting, the metamorphosis of past events in the mind as well as the urge to reconstruct and understand the past. Judith Mackrell calls attention to the metafictional nature of the narrative, even though she does not use the term itself. She claims that the narrator describes the process of his thoughts, not so much mental "content" and concludes that the narrative is "not merely a transcript but also a commentary on the mind's working." (Mackrell, 1985:53-54)

The narrative seems to be a continuous, spontaneous flow of memories. However, there are sudden halts in the form of metafictional comments implying a constant awareness of an audience: "This is tedious, has no relevance."(Johnson, 1966: 80) The narrator is self-critical, he does not allow himself to plunge into fantasy: "...ah, that is fanciful, smacks of fictional speculation" (Johnson, 1966:81) He is quite dissatisfied with himself:

„I begin to suspect I shall wish I had never started on this examination: I keep surprising myself with my own nastiness, with my own limitations.... But on. „(Johnson, 1966:82-83)

Johnson's narrative is characterized by the poliphony of voices talking about the past. The total identification with past events is counterpointed with the critical response to it. There is the joy of recalling

distant memories, on the one hand and the sudden halt or interruption of the flow of memories, usually by a self-critical comment, on the other. The seemingly endless circuit of recollections is cut short by self-ironic statements. The narrator becomes impatient with and critical towards his own meandering thoughts. The episode recalling wartime evacuation in High-Wycombe starts on a nostalgic tone: the narrator recalls how children evacuated from London and separated from their parents used to buy a certain delicious cake in a baker's shop in town:

„Mrs Davies had a cousin who worked in a very good baker's shop in the town where we used to go on Saturdays and buy a lardy-cake, which was a wonderful cake, the lardy-cake, with - ...” (Johnson, 1966:93)

The train of thoughts is interrupted by questioning the reason, or rather, the validity of remembering. The narrator tries to impose order on his branching-out memories, to discipline himself. Logical thought and sober analysis are posited as the means of attaining the order desired, however, their effectiveness is immediately questioned. Trying to achieve order despite the awareness of the unreliability of the mind is all that remains to do:

„What bloody relevance has a sodding lardy-cake to me now? I've had enough of High-Wycombe and being evacuated: surely I must have exhausted it by now, the pain must be exorcised, the tedium of interest, of making me regurgitate all this: for what? ... Think, then, analyse, then, this estrangement from home, from London, parents, younger self ... Blank ... What use are analyses, reasons, causes? All I am left with are just things, happenings: things as they are, happenings as they happened and go on happening through the unreliable filter of my memory. But try. What else is there to do?” (Johnson, 1966:93-94)

Even though the sense of remembering and the reliability of memory is constantly challenged, the narrator desperately tries to build up a chronology, relate past incidents and remnants of speech to each other and endow events with meaning.

In a short review written for *The Times* Richard Holmes points to the relativity of experience emphasized in *The Unfortunates*, Johnson's famous book in a box:

„One is made aware of the terrifying relativity of experience: that which comes before depends so much on what comes after.” (Holmes 1969)

This is also valid for *Trawl*: past events undergo a transformation in the process of remembering; changes occur in their relevance and meaning.

Past events are usually transfigured by the conceiving, creative, narrativizing mind.

Holmes considers that the awareness of the relativity of experience is responsible for viewing language as an obstacle rather than a means of grasping 'reality':

'Characteristically, it leads Mr Johnson to shy from the relativity of language, stalling all similes and metaphors like a thoroughbred before doubtful hedges.'
(Holmes 1969)

Philip Tew also deals with the failure of language. He claims that the emphasis on the physical presence of the book reemphasizes the physical presence and effects of language and its failings. (Tew, 2002:39) Indeed, the inability of language to account for our experiences is a central concern underlying Johnson's novels, for "...how, using the poor, inadequate, blunt instrument of language", can we recapture anything of the "simultaneity and multiplicity of modern life?" (Coe 2003)

Interior monologue, more precisely, the stream of consciousness method is used to show the workings of the narrator's mind. Questions, self-denials and reinforcements interrupt the flow of memories, while spaces, the lacunae of whiteness between words mark pauses in the process of thinking. Extremely vivid memories alternate with distant episodes that are hard to recall, but in both cases the past overwhelms and determines the present.

The problem of memory and its accuracy appears to be mainly a question of restoring the vividness and intensity of original experience. It is generally assumed that the memories that are vivid and detailed, the recollections that have a rich texture are the ones worth cultivating. However, it is rather the "work of memory", the struggle for recalling even the tiniest detail and lost connection that redeems the past in *Trawl*. It is the ceaseless effort to tie loose ends and recreate forgotten chronologies, in spite of the torturing thought that "it is all meaningless", that makes the novel memorable.

Johnson's truth-claim

Let us now turn to Johnson's idea of ontological authenticity, that is, truth and its anchoring in perceptual reality or experience.

"Telling stories is telling lies, and I want to tell the truth... I want to tell the truth about me... about my truth", says Johnson in the *Preface* to his 1973 short story collection, *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* According to Jonathan Coe, the writer believed that a true literary naturalism was both possible and desirable:

„Instead of moving further away from his own experience, he is starting to move closer towards it in the belief that he can only tell the truth about something if he has experienced it. Yet he also knows that this is impossible, because even in one small life there is so much incident, so much detail, that even the most compendious novel could not contain it.” (Coe 2003)

We may agree with Johnson’s distinction between life and literature, his claim that writing stories means a process of selection and therefore a degree of falsification:

„Life does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification. Telling stories is really telling lies.” (Johnson, 1973: 14)

However, Johnson’s peculiar desire to reduce the novel to the status of real life, his claim that the novelist should not be a writer of fiction but concentrate on the simple facts of his own life proves to be problematic. In his review of Coe’s recently published biography of Johnson, Frank Kermode shows how the writer’s manic insistence that his novels should contain no lies had been subverted by his very writings: he could not stop telling stories. Kermode considers Johnson’s conception of truth faulty and explains how telling the truth for him means formal innovation, typographical variation, chapters in random order, “as if the book, to contain truth, needs to be a model of the author’s mind, or of the universe.” (Kermode 2005)

As Judith Mackrell (1985:54) remarks, *Trawl* is pervaded by Johnson’s overall pessimism about the possibility of attaining and communicating the truth of experience. Nevertheless, the narrator tries to be scrupulously honest. The novel which is much like a long narrative poem seems to be heeding any trace of fictionality. “Johnson is continually afraid that he will betray himself into ‘fictional representations’”, observes Davies (1985:75). He seems to be obsessed with the details of his own mental processes and only rarely leaves his “psychic cocoon”, to borrow Philip Tew’s term.

Even though the narrative technique is relatively straightforward in *Trawl* – interior monologue is used throughout the novel – the typography is quite complex: separate spacing is used to indicate breaks in consciousness, to show that the narrator is reflecting, remembering or commenting on his own thoughts and descriptions. The internal processes of mind, the workings of memory occupy a central place in the narrative. However, the

preoccupation with details of mental processes cannot be completely separated from the history of people and events remembered.

Johnson's narrative is contradictory as it professes a mistrust of literary imagination while it displays an obvious imaginative effort in describing scenes of wartime evacuation, failed romances as well as the ship and the crew. Unlike most experimental writers who sacrifice intensity of feeling for formal ingenuity, and despite his quixotic attempt to tell no stories but the truth, Johnson cannot completely break with story-telling:

„His books are immensely readable, and usually follow a strong narrative line, almost in defiance of his own doctrinaire attitudes.” (Wiles, 1995: 59)

Conclusion

My aim in this paper was to highlight the coexistence of the opposing drives of figuring randomness on the one hand and desperately trying to create order, on the other hand, within the narrative. My claim is therefore that we should focus on the aporetic nature of Johnson's novelistic discourse.

As to the truth condition professed by Johnson, the violent rejection of the slightest trace of fictionality, I propose an approach which accounts for the dialogic nature of the paradigm of reality: the strong narrative line in *Trawl* counterpoints the cardinal Johnsonian truth-claim. The urge to build up a chronology and endow events with meaning pervades the novel. This is essential in writing stories and constitutes a denial of Johnson's professed paradigm of reality.

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