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***PLURAL SPACES, FICTIONAL MYSTERIES***



# ALLEGORIC IMAGERY IN ENGLISH EARLY TUDOR DRAMA

OLENA LILOVA

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***Abstract:** The paper deals with the role and content of allegorism in the plays of early Tudor dramatists (John Skelton, John Heywood and Nicholas Udall). In the English drama of the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., allegorical characters are mainly correlated with the ethical canons of Christianity, though reference to the cultural heritage of classical antiquity is made evident in them, too. What distinguishes allegoric characters in early Tudor plays from medieval allegory is their reference to topical subjects.*

***Keywords:** allegory, classical heritage, early Tudor drama, legitimacy of power, Renaissance, Tudor dynasty*

## 1. Introduction. The role of allegory in English medieval drama

The theocentric drama of the Middle Ages was based on the allegoric imagery that implied rendering abstract (mainly Biblical) ideas and concepts through concrete, objective, and sensuous images. By means of allegoric imagery, medieval drama was talking to its viewers about timeless notions, such as life in God, eternal truth, sin, salvation, etc. The morality play, as one of the brightest manifestations of this kind of drama in medieval England, used allegoric images to disclose to the audience the main goals of human existence as well as the basic perils that a human being may come across in his/her earthly life. The figures of Vices and Virtues appeared on stage to carry on their constant fight for the main character's soul (usually named Everyone or Mankind, or simply Man, etc.).

With time, these allegorical characters, Vices in particular (e.g. Sloth, Avarice, Pride), got really recognizable to and popular with viewers. If a stout character appeared on the stage, with a slice of cheese and a bottle of wine in his hands, with pockets full of food, eating and drinking when a battle was just about to start, one could easily recognize the Vice figure of Glotony (Medwall 1980: 2276). This is how Henry Medwall represents this character in his morality play *Nature* (written in the late 1490s).

This corporeal, fleshly representation of abstract ideas (quite often qualities and traits of human nature) in allegorical drama contributed a lot to its "iconographic dimension" (Walker 1991: 12), thus determining its ability to render knowledge about Christian ethical norms through very vivid physical images ("tableaux vivants").

## 2. Transformations of the allegoric content in the early Tudor plays

This artistic principle of dramatic representation remains extremely popular in English theatrical practices up to the New Age. At the same time, the nature of allegoric images is undergoing some crucial transformations caused by the cultural

shifts that mark the passage from the Middle Ages to the New Time – this intermediary and amazingly prolific period in the history of the European culture, called Renaissance.

But before outlining the essence of these changes in the representation of allegoric images, let us look at one example from the play *Magnyfycence* by John Skelton, written in the years 1519-1520. Skelton was an outstanding poet and playwright, who belonged to the first generation of English men of letters, serving as courtiers at the royal courts of the Tudor monarchs Henry VII, Henry VIII, Queens Mary I and Elizabeth I.

One of the characters belonging to the group of Vices in this play is named “Counterfeit Countenance” (or “false, pretended look”). His garment has many layers, allowing him to take off some of his clothes in the course of the performance, turn them inside out and put on again, thus illustrating the concept that he embodies – “everyone pretends to be someone else and you can never know what they really are”:

Counterfet prechyng, and byleve the contrary;  
Counterfet conscyence, pevyssse pope holy;  
Counterfet sadness, with delynge full madly;  
Counterfet holynes is called ypocrysy;  
Counterfet reason is not worth a flye;  
Conterfet wysdome and workes of foly;  
Counterfet Countenaunce every man dothe occupy (lines 466-472).

In this way, the allegorical Vice-character conveys the idea of falsehood and pretence. It is remarkable that such figures were usually endowed with astonishing artistic energy and charisma. It not only originated in the characters’ vivid iconography, appearance and outfit, but it also resulted from their acquired features of real prototypes – English statesmen and courtiers of the day.

As scholars of English drama assume, the plot of Skelton’s play is based on some real-life events, with the negative characters of the interlude being counterparts of the members of the Privy Council that was with much scandal dismissed on a charge of embezzlement in May 1519. The Council’s responsibilities were handed over to another state body, while the councillors themselves were expelled. King Henry VIII found himself in the centre of the political scandal caused by the mean advisors usurping his authority in the country. The conflict was settled with “the expulsion of the minions of 1519” (Walker 1991: 66), which demonstrated the sovereign’s readiness to correct his own faults and stay faithful to the interests of his people and his country.

Thus, J. Skelton’s *Magnyfycence*, just like court dramas written and staged by his contemporaries and successors at the Tudor royal court, offers a somewhat different approach to the allegoric imagery. The playwright still goes by the eternal truths of Christianity, but, at the same time, he makes his characters be involved matters of current interest – the contemporary social and political context, thus aiming to represent the topical issues in his play.

Such transformations of the nature of allegoric imagery seem to be quite adequate to the new Renaissance ideology of humanist anthropocentrism that engendered new artistic goals and ideals; these got reflected in the works of art of various kinds and genres, including drama. In the new historical period, it was the

earthly existence of a human being in all its amplitude and contrariety that became of central interest and the main subject matter of artistic representation.

The consequence was that the abstract categories that early Tudor playwrights use in their plays do not fail to refer to the earthly matters of the day, at the same time preserving the eternal and abstract Biblical content that was of primary interest in the theatrical allegories of the previous epoch. It does not mean, however, that the new allegorical content in the early Tudor dramas evoked the same associations with real people or events in the viewers' minds. Those allegorical images were neither straightforward nor indubitable. Theatrical allegories as stylistic figures offered scope for the viewers' imagination, allowing the possibility of various interpretations of the same characters or events represented on the stage.

### 3. Allegorism as a means to avoid directness

Evidently, rendering abstract ideas by means of allegoric images remained extremely popular in Tudor England – the old cultural tradition did not give way to the new methods of artistic representation so easily. Besides that, courtly etiquette as well as courtly theatrical practices themselves represented an especially auspicious basis for exercises in allegoric expression.

One of the central topics and ideologemes of this time that sought for allegoric representation was the concept of supreme power. In times past, the sovereign who came to power after defeating his opponent on the battle field had all the legitimacy of authority – by right of conquest. What mattered more to the newer generations was the right of succession. But if Henry VII, the sovereign who laid the foundations of the Tudor dynasty, had observed this right, he would not have become the king of England in 1485. So, the question of legitimacy of power was not an idle matter for the first monarch of the Tudor family, or for his successors. That is why it is not surprising at all that the concept of power gets so widely discussed and so thoroughly studied in the plays of English court dramatists in the late 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Besides, being a part of courtly culture, early Tudor drama adopted the aesthetic principle *ars est celare artem* ("art is concealing art"), which helped court artists to avoid censorship and keep their official positions (Mucci 2003: 301). What rhetorical figure could better serve the purpose of disguising the subject matter and representing it "without pain", according to the courtly code of behaviour, than allegory? That is why, when talking to their audiences about the topical issues of power and authority, early Tudor playwrights used allegory, in order to avoid directness in the representation of the play's theme.

The epoch's avid interest in the classical heritage and the true cultural boom, intensified by the revival of antique ideals of beauty, as well as the introduction of studies in classical philosophy, rhetoric, languages and literature at English Universities and schools inspired early Tudor playwrights to use classical imagery in their plays.

One of the best examples of such imagery in early Tudor drama is given in J. Heywood's *Play of the Weather* (1533), in which eight petitioners apply to the Olympic God Jupiter, requesting the weather conditions they consider to be highly desirable for themselves. As to the figure of Jupiter, who embodies state power in the play, it definitely bears some resemblance to the personality of King Henry VIII, thus allowing the playwright to touch upon some topical issues of the political

life in the country. One of them is that of the increased power that the English monarch received in 1529, after Cardinal Wolsey's dismissal. His newly acquired prerogatives (in Heywood's play, they are discussed at the very beginning, in lines 35-45) led to his becoming the Supreme Head of the Church and, finally, to the Reformation that proved to be a really dramatic period in the history of the country. In one of the scenes, where we learn that Jupiter is away, as he is busy making a new Moon

Even now is he makyng of a new moone:  
He sayth your old moones be so farre tasted  
that all the goodness of them is wasted (lines 793-799),

there is clear reference to Henry's personal life: in this way, the dramatist talks about the king's decision to divorce Katherine of Aragon and marry Ann Boleyn, who was already pregnant at that time (Heywood 2000: 471). Jupiter's godly image in the play combines authoritative traits with really humane features, thus secularizing the character, making him a rather worldly figure.

The use of allegory as the structuring principle of the play is made evident in another piece of early Tudor drama – Nicholas Udall's *Respublica*, which was staged for the first time in 1553 in the presence of Queen Mary I. As it is stated in the following lines of the prologue,

the Name of our playe ys Respublica certaine  
oure meaninge ys (I saie not, as **by plaine storye,**  
**but as yt were in figure by an allegorye** – *the bold type is mine – O.L.*)  
To shewe that all Commen weales Ruin and decaye  
from tyme to tyme hath been, ys, and shalbe alwaie,  
whan Insolence, Flaterie, Opression  
and Avarice have the Rewle in their possession. (Udall 1952: 2)

The allegory in Udall's play is used to comment upon the state of the English society at the time. The central figure in the play is Respublica, and her despair and abashment reflect the situation of chaos and disorder caused by the carelessness of the country's former ruler Edward VI. (Edward VI was nine years old only when he became the king of England, so his authorized representatives acted on his behalf for six years, which proved to be extremely harmful for the country). In this play the Vice is embodied in the figures of Avarice, Insolence, Oppression and Adulation, confronted by Misericordia (or *Compassion*), Veritee, Pax (the goddess of peace from the Roman mythology) and Nemesis. It is noteworthy that in *Respublica* Nemesis, the old Greek goddess that personifies divine punishment for wrongdoing or presumption, is associated with Queen Mary I. As the playwright indicated in the prologue, God had sent Queen Mary I to the Englishmen to put right all abuses and misdeeds of the former sovereign,

She is our most wise  
and most worthie Nemesis  
Of whome our plaie meneth tamende that is amysses. (Udall 1952: 3)

In *Respublica*, one may observe the combination of Biblical and classical allegoric images, which testify to the author's knowledge of the Christian ethos as

well as his humanistic bias – the two pillars or two main sources of Renaissance aesthetics.

#### 4. Conclusion

Allegory was a very popular theatrical device in early Tudor drama. Moreover, it defined people's way of thinking that got reflected in the "textualization of the world" – as Mucci (2003: 301) points out, "an allegorical mode of thinking was structural in Renaissance and baroque culture". It meant turning rhetoric into a metatext that penetrated all spheres of the social life. As the majority of texts in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. England were created at the royal court, courtly code of behaviour and courtly etiquette greatly influenced the rhetorical practices of the epoch. The allegorical dimension of English Renaissance art got even more expressive due to the artists' concentration on the issue of the Tudor royal family legitimization.

English sixteenth century drama made serious attempts to secularize its subject matter, with religious topics and concepts giving way to mundane events and situations played out on stage. It resulted in endowing allegorical images with content that early Tudor playwrights sought for and found in the cultural heritage of the antiquity. In these artistic experiments carried out by English court dramatists, allegories demonstrate their extraordinary plasticity and flexibility.

In their interpretation of the basic ideologeme of the Tudor England – that of supreme power and its legitimacy – early Tudor men of letters relied upon both Biblical and old Greek and Roman images, revealing the eternal topicality of this issue for any society.

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# “I FOUND PEN, INK AND PAPER [...] I KEPT THINGS VERY EXACT”. GENRENESS IN *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

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**Abstract:** “The Novel as readers now understand it did not really exist as a literary form in English during the late seventeenth century and the early decades of the eighteenth”, John Richetti (2017: 152) has recently pointed out. Prior to this, in 1957, Ian Watt conceptualised the “myth of modern individualism”. This paper focuses on Robinson Crusoe and the rise of the English novel, revisiting some key excerpts in order to propose a new approach to the new genre. Michael McKeon (2017: 67) postulated that “The novel crystallizes genre, we might say, self-consciously incorporating, as part of its form, the problem of its own categorical status”. This paper addresses the above proposal, examining the adventures of the eponymous voyager from York. In particular, it pays attention to the various means by which reality is recorded in his autobiographical account, as well as the numerous narrative forms through which the reader is presented with the events of Crusoe’s life.

**Keywords:** bourgeoisie, Crusoe, Defoe, genre, individualism, novel rise, realism

Then what are You, having no Chaos found. (Cavendish 2016: 7)

And now I began to apply my self to make such necessary things as I found I most wanted, as particularly a chair and a table, for without these I was not able to enjoy the few comforts I had in the world, I could not write, or eat, or do several things with so much pleasure without a table. (Defoe 2001: 55)

## 1. Introduction

*Robinson Crusoe* (1719) marks a significant early juncture in the rise of the English novel. Outside England, however, it was preceded in Spain by the Cervantine work about Alonso Quijano, as well as by early novels, such as *Lazarillo de Tormes* published anonymously and *Guzmán de Alfarache* by Mateo Alemán. It marks a point in the rise of the English novel in the sense that it was preceded by works that laid the foundations for its development. These include, among other texts, *The Description of the New World* (1666) by Margaret Cavendish, *Oroonoko* (1688) by Aphra Behn and *Incognita* (1692) by William Congreve. Prior to these developments, there were the prose works of the Elizabethan period, which did display certain characteristics and devices associated with the novelistic form. These include *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) by Thomas Nashe and *The Miseries of Mavillia* (1599) by Nicholas Breton.

The assertion that the English novel emerged in 1719 belongs to Ian Watt (1974: 74), who wrote that “Robinson Crusoe is certainly the first novel in the sense that it is the first fictional narrative in which an ordinary person’s daily

activities are the centre of continuous literary attention”. Later, in reference to *Moll Flanders*, he stated, “Defoe’s novels are landmarks in the history of fiction largely because they are the first considerable narratives which embody all the elements of formal realism” (Watt 1974: 104). It is not the intention of this essay to challenge this date as marking the birth of the novel.

John Richetti (2017: 171) summarises this postulate about the protagonist of Defoe’s novel: “Crusoe recapitulates various stages of human culture, passing from being hunter-gatherer to domesticating animals (the goats he finds on the island), to agriculture, as he manages to grow grain and indeed to bake bread”. *Mutatis mutandis*, this study will map the various stages of writing in Defoe’s novel; it will examine the initial recording of information and occurrences on a wooden post, followed by the protagonist’s journal and finally, through the direct communication of the protagonist himself within the novel. With regard to these distinct stages in the dynamics of writing, Michael McKeon’s (2017: 67) *dictum* about the ontology of the novelistic genre is extremely pertinent: “The novel crystallizes genre, we might say, self-consciously incorporating, as part of its form, the problem of its own categorical status”.

## **2. The square post: “thus I kept my kalendar, or weekly, monthly, and yearly reckoning of time”**

Robinson Kreutznaer (the birth name of Robinson Crusoe), the son of a German immigrant and the daughter of a prominent York family, recounts his life’s story directly through the narrative voice. He begins with a summary of his early life, detailing events until the point at which he first reached the inhospitable island that was to become his home for twenty-eight years. He lives on the island in almost complete isolation, to the point that he nearly loses all sense of time. Yet Robinson Crusoe is determined not to become completely disorientated; and so he resolves to record the days of the year in a primitive but efficient form: “he used his knife upon a large post in capital letters”:

After I had been there about ten or twelve days, it came into my thoughts, that I should lose my reckoning of time for want of books and pen and ink, and should even forget the Sabbath days from the working days; but to prevent this, I cut it with my knife upon a large post, in capital letters, and making it into a great cross, I set it up on the shore where I first landed, *vz. I came on shore here on the 30th of Sept. 1659*. Upon the sides of this square post, I cut every day a notch with my knife, and every seventh notch was as long again as the rest, and every first day of the month as long again as that long one; and thus I kept my kalendar, or weekly, monthly, and yearly reckoning of time. (52)

This provides the reader with a sense of the narrative chronology, objectively structuring the time that the protagonist spends on the island. Crusoe laments the lack of books, paper and ink in his new surroundings; however, he also longs for a means to distinguish religious holidays from working days. His simple yet ingenious solution is this rudimentary calendar, which he fashions using the materials that he has to hand.

The calendar provides Crusoe with a mechanism for keeping time, and yet - as he later admits - it was not a constant or consistent *modus operandi*. Eventually the stranded sailor becomes disoriented and fails to observe the weekly day of rest,

as he cannot distinguish one day from another. On the seventh of November, the protagonist writes “I soon neglected my keeping Sundays, for omitting my mark for them on my post, I forgot which was which” (59). This failure to maintain an accurate record of the days is referred to later with the following words: “I had all this time observ’d no Sabbath-Day [...] I had some time omitted to distinguish the weeks, by making a longer notch than ordinary for the Sabbath-Day, and so did not really know what any of the days were [...]” (83). There is a notable sense of Crusoe’s concern about the passage of time, as he attempts to transform the “disorderliness of life” (Watt 1974: 106) into literary orderliness.

### 3. Writing: “I drew up the state of my affairs in writing”

Defoe’s protagonist eventually discovers a pen, as well as some paper and ink, which he uses eagerly to record his story. The narrator explains:

As I observ’d before, I found pen, ink and paper, and I husbanded them to the utmost; and I shall shew, that while my ink lasted, I kept things very exact; but after that was gone, I could not, for I could not make my ink by any means I could devise.

I now began to consider seriously my condition, and the circumstance I was reduc’d to, and I drew up the state of my affairs in writing, not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me, for I was like to have but few heirs, as to deliver my thoughts from daily poring upon them, and afflicting my mind; and as my reason began now to master my despondency, I began to comfort my self as well as I could, and to set the good against the devil, that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse, and I stated it very impartially, like debtor and creditor, the comforts I enjoy’d, against the miseries I suffer’d, thus, [...] (53)

The recording of information in the Journal includes a list comprising two columns, notable for its concise and efficient layout. Crusoe writes down six statements in the left-hand column, detailing his misfortunes; in the right-hand column, he contrasts these with six further statements, which describe the more positive aspects of his situation, “to set in the description of good and evil, on the credit side of the account” (54). The six statements all begin anaphorically with the first-person singular subject pronoun: The six contrasting ideas reflect this pattern, all beginning with an adversative conjunction. For example, the first statement on the left-hand column reads: “I am cast upon a terrible desolate island, void of all hope of recovery”, while the statement on the adjoining column is “But I am alive, and not drown’d as all my ship’s company was” (54).

The shipwrecked Englishman lays out a detailed list describing his misadventures, but he does not fail to recognise the various ways in which he should consider himself lucky, contrasting each of the negative comments with a positive alternative. This ultimately presents the reader with a detailed written summary of the protagonist’s experiences.

He also mentions certain items that he considers most necessary, such as food. Alongside the basic requirements for survival, however, he also describes certain secondary items that – interestingly – point to the significant value that Crusoe places on his ability to write: “And now I began to apply my self to make such necessary things as I found I most wanted, as particularly a chair and a table, for without these I was not able to enjoy the few comforts I had in the world,

I could not write, or eat, or do several things with so much pleasure without a table". (55)

#### 4. Journal. *Memorandum*: "I, poor, miserable Robinson Crusoe"

The shipwrecked adventurer frequently reveals his desire to leave a written record of his experiences. In addition to the aforementioned list, Crusoe determines to write "The Journal", in which he gives a daily account of his activities until he exhausts his supplies of ink. The first journal entry records the events of 30 September 1659.

Crusoe describes his development into "a compleat natural mechanic" (58), having successfully constructed a chair, a table and some shelves. Once he has all the necessary materials to hand (a pen, ink, and paper), Crusoe marks the point at which he begins his diary with a reflection on how negative his written account would have been had he been able to start it sooner. The protagonist, who recounts his life story directly to the reader in the first person, imagines how the earlier account would have been: "For example, I must have said thus" (56).

The conclusion to be drawn is that before turning to the format of the Journal, Robinson Crusoe was already capable of envisaging a written account of his experiences, however bleak they may have been. It is his decision to keep a diary that results in the narrative – of which the story is comprised – coming into being; earlier events that precede this decision are recounted in written form, as the narrator states:

But having gotten over these things in some measure, and having settled my household-stuff and habitation, made me a table and a chair, and all as handsome about me as I could, I began to keep my journal, of which I shall here give you the copy (tho' in it will be told all these particulars over again) as long as it lasted, for having no more ink, I was forc'd to leave it off. (56)

The protagonist's Journal echoes the diarist tradition that was so popular in Restoration England, notable diarists including Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn. Deriving from the Latin root 'novus', both the English term 'novel' and the French word 'nouvelle' mean 'new' (as an adjective) or 'news' (as a noun). Since the term 'news' is used to define information recorded in journals and newspapers, it is arguably the case that certain necessary ingredients for the emergence of the novel are present, but not all. As well as the prose itself, some of the defining characteristics of the genre are individualism (Richetti (2001: ix) considers the hero to be "an archetype of modern heroic individualism and self-reliance – the man surviving alone on a deserted island"), realism, the narration of everyday events and a distancing from the fantastical style and content characteristic of earlier literature. McKeon (2002: 118) used the terms "naive empiricism and extreme scepticism" to describe the romance genre, as distinct from the novelistic form. Richetti (2017: 171) confirms that *Robinson Crusoe* is "the most realistic, the most intensely particularized, of all of Defoe's novels". Essentially, the style of the text reflects the authenticity "of the actual experiences of the individuals" (Watt 1974: 27).

The solitary protagonist keeps a diary for an entire year, beginning on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1659. Eventually, he remarks that he has no ink left and for this reason cannot continue to record the daily account of his experiences ("A little after this

my ink began to fail me, and so I contented myself to use it more sparingly, and to write down only the most remarkable events of my life, without continuing a daily *memorandum* of other things”(83)).

Significantly, the last day recorded in his journal, the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1660, provides information regarding the date through reference to “the notches on my post”, whereby he is able to confirm the anniversary of his arrival on the island:

*September* the thirtieth, I was now come to the unhappy anniversary of my landing. I cast up the notches on my post, and found I had been on shore three hundred and sixty five days. I kept this day as a solemn fast, setting it apart to religious exercise, prostrating myself on the ground with the most serious humiliation, confessing my sins to God, acknowledging his righteous judgments upon me, and praying to him to have mercy on me, through Jesus Christ; and having not tasted the least refreshment for twelve hours, even till the going down of the sun, I then eat a basket cake, and a bunch of grapes, and went to bed, finishing the day as I begat it. (83)

It has been argued that “Defoe’s interest in literature was almost exclusively dictated by his voracious appetite for facts” (Watt 1974: 240), or his “genius for facts” (Woolf 1986: 57). This is manifested elsewhere through his “aesthetic tendency in favor of particularity” (Watt 1974: 16). The new literary style emerged in the midst of the scientific revolution of the age, and corresponded to the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (*Answer to Davenant’s Preface to Gondibert*, 1650), Thomas Blount (*The Academy of Eloquence*, 1654), John Locke (*Of the Abuse of Words*, 1690) and Henry Home, Lord Kames (*Elements of Criticism*, 1762). It is important to consider the Royal Society’s keen interest in science; the Society, founded in the year of Defoe’s birth had as its motto *nullius in verba*, advocating the importance of an empirical approach based on investigation and evidence (The motto of the Royal Society comes from the poet Horace, specifically the “Epistle 1” (verse 14): “Nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri”, which is translated as “I am not bound over to swear by the words of any master”).

This is the language and style of natural philosophy, whose origins are to be found in the Oxford Group – John Wilkins (a professor of Locke’s, who published *An Essay Toward a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* in 1668), Robert Boyle, and John Ray. In his *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding in Four Books* (1690), John Locke proposed the use of precise, clear language, prioritising *res* over *verba*. In the tenth chapter of the third book he argues for the use of simple, comprehensible ideas, maintaining that “the ends of language in our discourse [...] being chiefly [...] to make known one man’s thoughts or ideas [...] with much ease and quickness [...] to convey the knowledge of things” (Locke 2009: 106).

Defoe’s text is a “narrative [...] occurring at a particular place and at a particular time” (Watt 1974: 24), achieving a degree of “immediacy” and “closeness” (idem: 29); “The narrative method whereby the novel embodies this circumstantial view of life may be called its formal realism” (idem: 32). Nevertheless, the writing style of the Journal gathers the details of sequential events in the form of a diaristic narrative, ultimately formlessly. There are only facts, recounted in a cold, sterile manner. The details and the events are recorded *ad pedem litterae*, that is to say, objectively, to the last detail, in the style of a historian or chronicler.

## 5. Further narrative techniques

The construction and the content of *Robinson Crusoe* is a challenge to certain literary traditions preceding it, such as travel literature or even spiritual allegorical journeys (e.g., *The Pilgrim's Progress*) and the extensive journals of the diary tradition; and yet *Robinson Crusoe* is, at the same time, something new, experimental and different from any earlier work. The text is arguably as different to its forerunners as *Don Quijote* is to the books of chivalry that it parodies.

### 5.1. "Sept. the 30th": two versions of the same reality

The reader of *Robinson Crusoe* is confronted with two accounts of the day on which the young man reaches the shore of the island, both of which are related in the first person singular:

*Sept. the 30th.* After I got to shore and had escap'd drowning, instead of being thankful to God for my deliverance, having first vomited with the great quantity of salt water which was gotten into my stomach, and recovering my self a little, I ran about the shore, wringing my hands, and beating my head and face, exclaiming at my misery, and crying out, I was undone, undone, till tyr'd and faint I was forc'd to lye down on the ground to repose, but durst not sleep for fear of being devour'd. (56)

*September 30, 1659.* I poor miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwreck'd, during a dreadful storm, in the offing, came on shore on this dismal unfortunate island, which I call'd The Island of Despair, all the rest of the ship's company being drown'd and my self almost dead.

All the rest of the day I spent in afflicting my self at the dismal circumstances I was brought to, [...] (57)

It must be asked – what writing style does each of these accounts display? Moreover, what difference is there between these two versions, given that they are both written in the first person singular? The first (56) appears in the novel directly, vocalised by the protagonist himself, with the direct object of the verb “said” (“I must have said thus: *Sept. the 30th.*”); the second is recorded in “*The JOURNAL*” (57), as part of the diary that the shipwrecked voyager keeps. So, the first version is voiced directly by the protagonist; the second, on the other hand, is a written account within the larger text, articulated, formed and formulated within the construct of a journal.

The first account appears starker: it reflects the essence of the protagonist's suffering and his reaction to the dreadful situation. Its primary focus is on all that he experienced and felt. The second account is reported through a more restrained, descriptive language; it focuses on the wider context, such as, for example, the crew with whom Crusoe was travelling and the island itself. Defoe presents the reader with two contrasting styles that, despite their similarities, are markedly different in certain ways.

## 5.2. “I had frequently given them an account of my two voyages to the coast of Guinea”: the story within the story

Another notable technique employed by Defoe is that of the ‘novel within the novel’, which appears in several instances. For example, when Crusoe gives a written account of his adventures to the Englishwoman who had been safeguarding his money, this allows the reader to view the events from a different perspective. A further example of this technique appears during Crusoe’s time in Brasil. Having learned the local language, he regularly converses with the other merchants in *St. Salvatore*, recounting stories of his travels. In this episode, key concepts relating to the eighteenth century, such as colonisation and expansion, trading, business and sea voyages are particularly evident:

To come then by the just degrees, to the particulars of this part of my story; you may suppose, that having now lived almost four years in the *Brasils*, and beginning to thrive and prosper very well upon my plantation; I had not only learn’d the language, but contracted acquaintance and friendship among my fellow-planters, as well as among the merchants at *St. Salvatore*, which was our port; and that in my discourses among them, I had frequently given them an account of my two voyages to the coast of *Guinea*, the manner of trading with the *Negroes* there [...]. They listened always very attentively to my discourses on these heads, but especially to that part which related to the buying *Negroes* [...] (32)

On numerous occasions, the protagonist employs the nouns “discourse” and “account” (83). For example, in the description of the cultivation of barley and rice, in how the grain is sowed, how a third of the seeds are set aside, how the crops failed to germinate during the dry months only to sprout when the rains came, how he searched for land more suited to the cultivation of crops, how he succeeded in bringing in a good harvest and how he became an expert in agricultural matters through these efforts.

## 6. “The logic of virtual witnessing”: “I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family”

Crusoe, marooned alone on the island for decades, manages to survive using the tools and supplies that he salvages from the wreckage of the ship and his immediate environment. He is forced to survive with the little that he has (Ian Watt (1974: 87) argues, “Defoe’s hero is not really a primitive nor a proletarian but a capitalist”); in this respect, Julia Prewitt Brown (2008: 25-27) applies the concept of the “bourgeois interior” to the work. In terms of the recording and presentation of events, both through writing and through the narrative itself, a similar dynamic becomes evident.

Both the journal and the preceding and subsequent narratives appear in the first person singular; as such, they provide a direct account of events from first-hand observation. Roger Maioli (2016: 12) conceptualises “the logic of virtual witnessing”, arguing, “By recasting the island as an allegory of his own misfortunes, Defoe is gesturing towards a possible defense of literary representation”. He concludes that the narrative is essentially comprised of “certifiable empirical facts”:

By appealing to living witnesses and insisting that every episode in Crusoe's story corresponds to a particular event in his biography – not only in an allegorical, but often in a *literal* sense – Defoe stops short of defending fiction as a source of instruction – or, as Defoe puts it, “the happy Deductions I have employ'd myself to make from all the Circumstances of my Story” – should be trusted not because fiction is reliable, but because they are grounded in certifiable empirical facts. (Maioli 2016: 14)

Another important element of the story is that of the protagonist's own reflection on events. Crusoe repeatedly takes up the subject of his experiences, sifting them through his consciousness, filtering and reshaping them through his belief system and personal perspective. He then addresses them autobiographically through hindsight: “I can express at this distance the thoughts” (11). So, the autobiographical viewpoint appears in the narrative as an immediate verbalisation on the part of the protagonist, without the mediation of a written journal, that brings with it “self-scrutiny” (Watt 1974: 74), “the internalisation of conscience” (idem: 75) and self-analysis.

First-person singular narration inherently contains an element of autobiography, as is clear from the opening page of the novel: “I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family” (5). Daniel Defoe generates a self-conscious and analytical narrative style. This is evident in Crusoe's recounting of the advice given to him by his father not to abandon the “middle state” or “middle station”, but rather to cultivate and preserve his “happiness” (6). Similarly, when he describes the death of his elder brother, who fell while serving in Flanders, he includes terms such as: “tears”, “so mov'd”, “broke off the discourse”, “his heart was so full” (7).

Crusoe is a character who feels “repentance”, who verbalises his “reflexions” (10) and “temper” (11) and adopts “resolutions” (10). So, “the hurry of [his] thoughts” (10) are tangible for the reader, who cannot help but sympathise with him to some extent, for example when his ship suffers a “terrible storm” in Yarmouth (11) around the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1651. Nevertheless, he continues with his travels, eventually passing near the Canary Islands, where he considers the possibility of visiting Gibraltar.

John Richetti (2017: 170) confirms that

*Robinson Crusoe* may be said to stage the tension between an emerging modern secular individualism and what were in Defoe's days older and still powerful religious modes of understanding personal identity and individual fate.

The sparks of this tension are evident in the “confusion and terror” when the protagonist first becomes stranded on the island “as well as in his resourceful management for survival and ultimate mastery of himself and his environment” (ibid.).

The reader can learn of how the protagonist planned, fabricated, cultivated and conserved; through these efforts alone he succeeded in surviving (Thomas Keymer (2007: xx) speaks of “survival skills”). Crusoe also reflected on the value of money on several occasions. Ultimately, it is the protagonist's capacity for reflection and analysis that – more so than the notches on the wooden post or the mere act of keeping a journal – imbues the narrative with the elements generally associated with the novelistic genre. As such, it merits consideration as one of the earliest examples of novel in the English literary tradition.

## 7. Conclusion: 1719

With a text as scrutinised as *Robinson Crusoe*, it would be fair to assume that no new aspects of the novel remain to be discovered and commented upon. Yet, *Robinson Crusoe* is a text worth returning to, a text deemed by Richetti (2017: 169) to be “the most enduringly popular of his [Defoe’s] narrative Works”.

Commemorating Cervantes and Shakespeare, Salman Rushdie (2016: 9) recalls, “Milan Kundera proposed that the novel has two progenitors, Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* and Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*”. However, *Robinson Crusoe* was published three decades before *Clarissa* and four decades before *Tristram Shandy*. Therefore, to put it simply – before Richardson, there was Defoe; before Sterne, Defoe. To go even further, before Defoe there were other writers whose contribution towards the development of the novel should not be ignored.

Critics in the *post-Watt* period have explored the *making* of the novel, emphasising the role of other pioneering literary figures, several of them female writers such as Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood. In *Painting the Novel: Pictorial Discourse in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*, Jakub Lipski (2018: 70) acknowledges that

in contemporary criticism there have been strong objections to the labelling of Defoe as ‘the father of the novel’, put forward, for example, by feminist critics, who argue for a proper appreciation of women writers preceding the author of *Robinson Crusoe*.

On the other hand, Sarah C. E. Ross and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (2018: 1) have pointed out that “Women’s literacy increased exponentially over the seventeenth century as a whole [...] that sees the burgeoning in the volume of literary writing by women”.

Some examples of critics who have studied the advent – the making – of the English novel (prior to the rise of the English novel) are Brean Hammond and Shaun Regan in 2006 (pp. 19-37), Marina MacKay in 2011 (pp. 7 and 53-4), Michael McKeon in 2005 (pp. 506-546), John Richetti in 1999 (pp. 18-51) or in October 2017 (pp. 153-162) and Margaret J. M. Ezell in 2017 (pp. 285-294).

To conclude, there are three key points of reference: the wooden Post, the Journal and the Novel. To begin with, the protagonist makes rudimentary signs with his knife on a wooden post, in order to mark the passing of the days and not to lose track of time. Next, he registers the details of his daily life on sheets of paper – “*The JOURNAL*”, with efficient immediacy, closeness and formlessness. From the crude recording of the passing of days, the marooned voyager moves on to the cold, objective realism of his diary. Lastly, his supplies of ink finally exhausted, the self-conscious narration of events emerges once again, whereby the recounting of his experiences are filtered through his own psyche and perspective (“and this I am going to relate”).

*Robinson Crusoe* was first published in 1719. Its full title, which is exceedingly descriptive in terms of introducing the protagonist, offering details of the location and nature of his experiences, and even the autobiographical format of the narrative, is as follows: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who Lived Eight and Twenty Years, All Alone in an Un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, Near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been Cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein All the*

*Men Perished but Himself. With an Account How He was at Last as Strangely Deliver'd by PYRATES. Written by Himself.*

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**AN “ALLOPATHIC PILL” FOR A DISEASED SOCIETY:  
*THE HEAVENLY TWINS* (1893) BY SARAH GRAND**

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*Abstract:* By focusing on her 1893 *New Woman* novel entitled *The Heavenly Twins*, the paper sets out to explore the strategies employed by Sarah Grand in order to undermine traditional gender roles and prerogatives. In her novel, she fostered gender equality, as well as women’s education and awareness; moreover, she forcefully challenged the sexual double standard and the cultural fabrication of gender identity.

*Keywords:* *New Woman* novel, Sarah Grand, sexual double standard, *The Heavenly Twins*, venereal diseases

### **1. Introduction: the *New Woman* novel and Sarah Grand**

Even though she rarely placed a great emphasis on the sexual liberation of her female characters, Sarah Grand (1854-1943) was hailed as one of the leading figures of what came to be known as the *New Woman* novel, a revolutionary genre that reached the peak of its popularity in the last decade of the nineteenth century. *New Woman* narratives featured strong-willed, cultivated, vigorous, and self-reliant heroines, who strove to release themselves from the shackles of gender-based prejudices and conventions, thus forcefully challenging “the constricting male ideal of femininity” (Cunningham 1973: 179) (based on women’s innocence, domesticity, and unreserved submission to patriarchal authority), perceived as an obstacle to self-fulfillment and to the acquisition of equal rights.

Sarah Grand, born Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke, was the daughter of a British naval coastguard stationed in Ireland. She received rather scant formal education, even though, as a child, she was an avid reader of both novels and scientific treatises. When she was fourteen, she was sent to the Royal Naval School at Twickenham where, as Stephanie Forward (1999: 66) notices, “she was unhappy and bored”. Grand was eventually expelled from that school for organizing groups in support of Josephine Butler, a feminist and a social reformer who crusaded against the misogynistic logic lurking behind the Contagious Diseases Acts, established in 1864, 1866 and 1869 to shield men (especially officers and soldiers) from venereal diseases. According to the legislation, since prostitutes were held solely accountable for the diffusion of sexually transmitted infections, they were forced to undergo humiliating medical examinations and, if declared contagious, they could even be detained in lock hospitals. Grand went to a finishing school in London before tying the knot with David Chambers McFall (a widower twenty-three years her senior) in 1871, when she was only sixteen. McFall was a domineering man and a renowned army surgeon who, a few years after their wedding, became actively involved in the implementation of the very Contagious Diseases Acts his wife found detestable and unfair (Beer and Heilmann 2002: 189). Following the birth of their only child, Sarah began to develop a deep aversion to

her spouse: she was appalled by his coarse behaviour, his crass insensitivity, and his repeated infidelities. He even resented her literary ambitions, which prompted her to adopt a pen name (Sarah Grand), since, as she wrote to the editor of *Literary World*, Mr. McFall “had a great dislike to having his name associated with [her] ideas” (Heilmann and Forward 2000: 64). After enduring almost two decades of misery and disappointment, she finally left him in 1890 to pursue her career as a writer. In the course of her life, the novelist campaigned for women’s suffrage and economic self-sufficiency, she lectured extensively on women’s issues, she served for six years as mayoress of Bath (in the 1920s), besides supporting the Rational Dress Society, established in 1881 with the intention of protesting against the wearing of tightly-laced corsets and other garments that impeded bodily movements and deformed the human shape.

## **2. *The Heavenly Twins*: an effective cure for a diseased society**

*The Heavenly Twins*, the second and most successful novel of a trilogy set in the fictional city of Morningquest, was written between 1890 and 1891, and eventually released in February 1893 by Heinemann, a newly founded, avant-garde publishing house specialised in books “thought to be [...] too shocking for the established houses” (Daniels 2003: 164). Despite the traditional three-decker form, the structure of the novel is highly experimental: letters, dreams, long digressions complicate and constantly disrupt the linearity of the plot; furthermore, the text offers an unusual variety of points of view, since, in its conclusive section, the omniscient narrator is replaced by the voice of one of the characters (Dr. Galbraith). Widely acclaimed by readers in both Europe and America (20,000 copies were sold in the first weeks after its publication; moreover, the novel was immediately translated into several languages), *The Heavenly Twins* was regarded with particular anxiety by most reviewers and contemporary critics, shocked by Grand’s unprecedented exposure of the sexual double standard and the cultural fabrication of gender identity. Nonetheless, the author can hardly be listed among the members of the so-called “Anti-Marriage League”, as Margaret Oliphant dismissively labeled the group of the most liberal, unconventional, and disturbingly rebellious New Woman novelists. Indeed, as Beth Rodgers (2016: 147) has elucidated, Sarah Grand was an oxymoronic type of “conservative femini[st]”: as she herself stated in her 1894 article entitled “The Modern Girl”, she ardently believed that “marriage [was] the holiest and most perfect state for both men and women” (Grand 1894: 706). Yet, in her opinion, young girls had to nurture independent thinking, as well as being properly “educated so as to fit [them] for [the] onerous position” (706) of wife and mother; in fact, in order to choose the most suitable and wholesome partner for the benefit not just of themselves but “of the whole human race” (708), they had to emancipate themselves from the “state of ignorance” – mistakenly called “innocence” (706) – in which most women had been languishing for centuries.

*The Heavenly Twins* actually chronicles the lives of three main female protagonists (Edith, Evadne, and Angelica – one of the eponymous twins), by focusing on their different upbringings, vicissitudes, and marriage experiences. As the rest of this paper sets out to demonstrate, their interlaced stories somehow served the writer’s multi-stranded didactic – or, as one may be tempted to say, therapeutic – purpose: they first of all highlight the importance of women’s

awareness and education. Then, they daringly delve into the taboo subject of venereal diseases (as will be shown, Sarah Grand even adopted current eugenic arguments with a feminist agenda). Finally, Angelica's story demonstrates that, regardless of biological distinction, gender is a mere social construction that ascribes different behaviors, roles, and prerogatives to men and women: hence, one's identity as a male or female can be provocatively turned into a performance.

In her "Foreword" to the 1923 edition of *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand (2000: 402) further clarified the *remedial* quality of her novel by comparing herself to a skilled and experienced physician: in writing her book, she would "compound an allopathic pill" for the general reader (unaware of his/her own illness), "and gild it so that it would be mistaken for a bonbon and swallowed without suspicion of its medicinal properties. Once swallowed, it would act". Accordingly, Grand's entertaining narrative, filled with humorous sketches played by the mischievous twins (who are far from being *heavenly*), conveys valuable and thought-provoking messages to her readers, without their even knowing it.

### 2.1. Edith Beale

The tragic account of Edith's life and death, for example, provides insightful instances of the damages caused by a dangerous lack of education among women. As Lyn Pykett (1992: 140) has underlined, many Victorian doctors thought that infertility stemmed from the unnatural development of a woman's weaker brain, given the natural differences in the mental capacities of the sexes also described by Charles Darwin (1889: 564) in his *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, first published in 1871. Edith Beale, a charming maiden, is therefore kept by her parents in the most "complete ignorance" (Grand 1992: 156), and she herself prays the Lord to protect her "from all knowledge of unholy things" (157). Perpetually dressed in white, surrounded by holy images in the quiet of her bedroom, she resembles an angel, a reassuring *angel in the house*, an icon of flawless purity and willing obedience. Edith acts (or refuses to act) as a precious piece of commodity to be sold on the marriage market to the highest bidder; quoting again from "The Modern Girl", she is exhibited by her proud parents "like [a] fatted fow[l] whose value depends on the color and condition of [its] flesh" (Grand 1894: 712). As the omniscient narrator perceptively remarks, "she might have done great good in the world had she known of the evil" (Grand 1992: 158). Her significant lack of sympathy for her fellow creatures – since "she move[s] in the society of saints and angels only" (159) – prevents her from stopping her carriage to assist a young prostitute and her child, lying on the footpath. Had she helped her, she would have probably lent a compassionate ear to her distressing story of seduction and desertion, thus gathering (as it will happen later on in the narrative) that the vicious and corrupt father of her repulsively sick child, "small and rickety with bones that ben[d] beneath its weight" (290) (the specific physiognomy of hereditary syphilis), is actually her future spouse: Sir Mosley Menteith, a military man and a supposedly good catch. As Meegan Kennedy (2004: 262) points out, Sarah Grand seems to "retai[n] a kind of decorous reserve around the decaying looks of the syphilitic male". In truth, Menteith seems to be in the prime of health: only his smile is revealingly "infectious" (Grand 1992: 167), while his head is ominously "shelved backward like an ape's" (178), signifying a possible regression of the human race, a disquieting relapse into barbarism, due to

the multiplication of his hideous and malformed progeny. What is more, Kennedy (2004: 269) continues, throughout the novel, only the symptoms of the disease are mentioned (horrible sores, premature aging), never its actual name, which remains an almost unthinkable and unmentionable word. Conversely, it could be argued that his surprisingly healthy appearance makes him all the more insidious: through the character of Menteith, the writer is actually cautioning her female readers against the dangers of blind ignorance and naivety which, far from being virtues, turn proper ladies into the hapless victims of vulgar sexual predators, prone to infecting both their partners and children. In *The Heavenly Twins*, therefore, Sarah Grand successfully subverts the widespread perception of the prostitute, commonly portrayed as an abnormal woman whose excesses threatened the social and political order, as a lustful temptress or, as William Acton (1870: 166), a renowned Victorian doctor, depicted her, as “a social pest, carrying contamination and foulness to every quarter to which she [had] access”. This time, the part of the poisonous offender is actually played by a seemingly respectable representative of the British army. In addition, given Menteith’s corrupting influence, Edith is rapidly transformed into a paradoxical *fallen angel*, into the mirror image of the very prostitute she had refused to mingle with, while travelling comfortably in her carriage: as the author emphasises, “her spiritual nature had been starved in close contact with him; only her senses had been nourished, and these were now being rendered morbidly active by disease” (Grand 1992: 280). In less than twelve months, Edith becomes “a wreck” (281); the child she has just given birth to is described as “a little old man baby” (288), “old, old already and exhausted with suffering” (289), a “speckled toad” (301) she has “no smile for” (289). All the traditionally womanly qualities she had been previously praised for are now perverted: in one of her fits of madness, she tries to stab her husband in his sleep; moreover, the annihilation of her hideous child becomes her obsession: “I want to kill - I want to kill *him*. I want to kill that monstrous child!” (304). Before dying, she summons her doctor, her spouse, and her father (who is also a bishop) to question their authority, for the first and last time in her life. What she finally utters is a harsh and compelling condemnation of a criminal system of patriarchal control that prevents women from attaining the knowledge of reality that may save their lives: “you, you who represent the arrangement of society [have] made it possible for me and my child to be sacrificed in this way” (300).

## 2.2. Evadne Frayling

At the beginning of the novel, Evadne is presented as “a child who demands instruction as a right” (3): her mind is “prone to experiment” (4) and her intellectual faculties are fully alert and healthily developed. She eagerly reads novels, recording her sharp observations on the various characters in what she calls her *Commonplace Book* (a rather uncommon occupation for a young lady of rank). She secretly studies the old manuals of anatomy, physiology, prophylactics and therapeutics she finds lying in old boxes, covered in thick layers of dust; she strongly believes that “withholding education from women was the original sin of man” (14).

Unsurprisingly, just after the wedding ceremony, she instantly flees from her newly-wed husband, as soon as she receives a letter containing alarming – albeit reliable – information on his debauched past. What her father had consciously

overlooked, namely the “rather wild” (55) youth of Colonel Colquhoun (strikingly enough, another military man), turns into an unbearable burden for her. Being a widely read person, in fact, she is fully aware of the dreadful responsibility she would assume in generating his possibly diseased offspring. In *The Heavenly Twins*, Sarah Grand seems to foster the introduction of a eugenic marriage system: dissolute partners have to be unhesitatingly rejected, in order not to undermine the health and the future of the nation. As Angelique Richardson (1999-2000: 236) points out, according to the Social Purity Movement (which the author earnestly supported), the idea of motherhood stretched beyond the boundaries of a simple biological mission; indeed, it “was a moral responsibility and a woman’s first act of citizenship”. In Evadne’s opinion, therefore, her spouse is a “moral leper” (Grand 1992:79): “allowing him an assured position in society is countenancing vice, and [...] *helping to spread it*” (79); as she further states, “there is no past in the matter of vice. The consequences become hereditary and continue from generation to generation” (80). For the sake of her parents’ reputation, however, Evadne eventually surrenders to social pressures: she reluctantly rejoins her husband, yet she refuses to consummate their union.

Even though she is not physically contaminated by the Colonel, he deviously succeeds in tainting and destabilizing her mind, thus depriving her of her only defence against degradation. He manages to extort a humiliating promise from her: as long as he is alive, she “will not mix [her]self up publicly—will not join societies, make speeches, or publish books” (342). Stripped of any social usefulness, she is condemned to retreat into the stifling domesticity she abhorred. In the words of Elaine Showalter (1985: 145), hysterical female patients “were likely to be more independent and assertive than *normal* women”; many of them were artists, writers, whose medical condition was frequently connected with the lack of “social and intellectual outlets or expressive options” (147). At the end of the narrative, therefore, even after the Colonel’s death and her second marriage with a gentle and dignified man (Dr. Galbraith), Evadne’s hysteria, her suicidal impulses and recurring delusional fantasies become the only strategies she can devise to articulate her protest.

### 2.3. Angelica Hamilton-Wells

*The Heavenly Twins* also follows the physical growth and the mental development of the eponymous siblings, Angelica and Theodore (better known as *Diavolo*), from their childhood to young adulthood. Starting from the very first pages of the novel, readers gather that Angelica is far removed from embodying the Victorian ideal of dignity and womanly perfection: she “was the dark one, and she was also the elder, taller, stronger, and wickeder of the two, the organizer and commander of every expedition” (Grand 1992: 7). The twins are granted equal opportunities of education by their unprejudiced and open-minded parents; in their mother’s view, ignorance is indeed an unsafe “state in which to begin the battle of life [...] in the matter of marriage especially an ignorant girl may be fatally deceived” (41). As children, the twins enjoy swapping clothes and amuse themselves watching the puzzled faces of their friends and relatives; as a teenager, Angelica takes pleasure in experimenting with longer and shorter gowns, alternatively playing the role of the blooming young lady and the impish little girl. For fear of ending up with a husband she deeply dislikes, she even proposes to a pleasant but much older acquaintance of hers she holds in high esteem, Mr. Kilroy,

who willingly accepts her bold and peculiar request: “‘Marry me!’ said Angelica, stamping her foot at him – ‘Marry me, *and let me do as I like*’” (321). Nevertheless, Angelica’s most transgressive violation of the doctrine of the separate spheres occurs when she disguises herself as her brother in order to befriend a newcomer, a talented tenor who sings in the local church. As Ann Heilmann (2000: 84) has noticed, in *fin-de-siècle* feminist fiction “female cross-dressing became a potent marker of personal and political resistance”, as well as being a clear indicator of discontent. By lingering for over one hundred pages on the slow development of what Angelica regards as a true and profound friendship between kindred spirits, Sarah Grand effectively succeeds in questioning gender distinctions: quoting once more Heilmann (2000: 84), in Angelica’s case, “it [is] costume, not the body, which inscribe[s] gender and assign[s] social power to the wearer”. When the spell is broken and the disappointed tenor finds out that the boy is actually a girl, Angelica utters one of the most significant sentences of the novel, which reflects her frustration at leading a useless life, ruled by gender biases and stereotypes:

I have enjoyed the benefit of free intercourse with your masculine mind undiluted by your masculine prejudices and proclivities with regard to my sex. Had you known that I was a woman-even you-the pleasure of your companionship would have been spoilt for me, so unwholesomely is the imagination of a man affected by ideas of sex. Your manner to me has been quite different from that of any other man I ever knew. [...] Now, with you alone of all men [...] I almost think I have been on an equal footing: and it has been to me like the free use of his limbs to a prisoner after long confinement with chains. (458)

### 3. Conclusion

In *The Heavenly Twins*, Sarah Grand tackled the issue of women’s lack of education, which resulted in their choice (or better, in their passive acceptance) of unsuitable partners. Through the dark stories of Edith and Evadne, Grand daringly exposed the sexual double standard and its tragic consequences; in the sections devoted to Angelica, the author highlighted the contemporary women’s fight for equal opportunities and rights, while uncovering the mechanisms of gender construction and expectations. Thus, acting like a physician, the writer managed to concoct a beneficial potion for her readers, who, thanks to *The Heavenly Twins*, became at least aware of the (physical and metaphorical) gender-based diseases that affected Victorian England.

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**BEHIND THE WALL OF SILENCE: THE JOURNEY  
OF EMPOWERMENT OF THE OTHER VOICE  
FROM THE INTRICATE FRIEZES OF THE VICTORIAN FEMALE  
NARRATIVE TO THE LOFTY PILLARS OF THE LAW**

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***Abstract:** Voiceless, but not storyless, “herstory” (Barbara Godard 2002: 63) sculpts its way through friezes of Victorian female narrative into “history”, with its robust architecture of impregnable temples of law and power. Inspired by the words of Shelley, according to whom “poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged “legislators of the world” (P. B. Shelley 1909-14: 48); it is, in a “literature of their own” (J. S. Mill 2003: 187) that nineteenth-century women came to spin a story of their own, forging a conscience gendered feminineness. Our focus will mostly be laid on the écriture of George Eliot and the dialectal relationship between the aesthetics of writing and the almost impenetrable rationalism of the time. The hermeneutics of Victorian narrative jurisprudence will be read and interpreted in the key offered by James Boyd White (1990) – justice as translation – where translation describes a journey, as its Latin root “translates” so plainly reveals. Thus, the concept of translation acquires an infinitely subtler symbolism, accommodating the narrative of women writers within the highly professionalized framework of legally empowered language that marks the displacement from the realm of fiction to that of law. In this view, women’s narrative takes on a new significance, legitimizing and articulating the socially “inarticulate” female self into new paradigms of a social and juridical nature.*

***Keywords:** female self, law, polyphony, Victorian literature*

## **1. Introduction: George Eliot and the translation of the self**

Organically associated with the *Woman Question*, though never a “devout” feminist, undeniably *feminine anti-feminist*, if we paraphrase Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000: 466), sometimes a “conservative” supporter of the status quo (for that is how George Levine (2001: 12) sees her in his magisterial introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*), while otherwise rebelling against the establishment, George Eliot believed in “the necessity of reform” (Szirotny 2015: 26), even more so the moment she moved to London in 1851, and began writing fiction in 1856. We are interested in the polyphonic nuances of a female utterance, pursuing those inflections and modulations of tone that do not change the *musical construct* of the text, but which, if overlooked, diminish its richness.

The creases of her literary self, which recommends itself through the canon of a dignified masculine *nom de plume*, while also “betraying” the sheerest overarching love argument of all when she took her lover's name, splendidly reveal what she would confess to her publisher, namely that she was writing out her “own varying unfolding self” (Szirotny 2015: 203).

Precisely because of the operation of representation, actual women are rendered an absence within the dominant culture, and in order to speak, must take on a mask (masculinity, falsity, simulation, seduction), or take on the unmasking of the very opposition in which they are opposed, the Other. (Forte 1988: 235)

It was love and determination that account for this woman's audacity not only to travel, unmarried and unchaperoned, with a married man, but also to share her days and nights with him, in spite of her family's rejection and social ostracism; and if love and contempt of patriarchal values brought maudlin overtones to the *adagio* of her story, the pensive gulfs of intellectual refinement of her discourse finally managed to topple down the social barriers in the rounded cadences of a contrapuntal *fugue*. Oscillating between submission and rebellion, if she had been invited on doctor Freud's famous couch, George Eliot could have become a regular patient; for her, writing must have acted as a sort of *mirror stage* that Jacques Lacan, a post-Freudian psychoanalyst, theoreticized in 1936, arguing that the imaginary misrecognition “situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction”, confident as he was that the *mirror stage* is almost a “drama that defines a core aspect of our ongoing experience of ourselves and others in the social world” (Elliott and Lemert 2014: 159). Apparently, the mirror is not what it seems, for it places the self on the very line of fiction, thus playing with its contours, misshaping its reflections, and sometimes distorting its essence.

The self or ego is created as defensive armour to support the psyche against its otherwise terrifying experience of fragmentation and dread. The capture of the self, or what Lacan terms the “*I*”, by the subject's reflection in the mirror is inseparable from a fundamental misrecognition of its own truth. (Elliott and Lemert 2014: 159)

This process is what Lacan calls “the deflection of the spectacular *I* into the social *P*” (qtd. in Oliver 2001: 32), a deforming metamorphosis that would only anticipate what George Eliot herself referred to as the “dark period” (Eliot 2004: 79). A woman of almost insatiable intellectual curiosity, defiant of convention, tradition and public opinion, one of the highest-paid authors and greatest minds of her time, the high-priestess of English letters (Ewen 2007: 497), whose gifted quill and wits bewitched Queen Victoria herself as well as other famous literati of the age, George Eliot surprises with her “only ardent hope” of having “some woman's duty” for her “future”, a confession she makes in a letter addressed to Mrs. Bray, dated December 4, 1849 (*Letters*, II: 333). Spectacular as her *self* was, the social self catches up with it and, playing with mirrors, changes/distils the angle of reflections and, with it, the perspective itself. There is no map that can proudly claim having fully charted the immense territory that bears her name – too vast to be read within the conventional semiotics of a legend, too complex to imagine a pattern to accommodate it. Among other lady novelists who concealed their true identity behind the socially accepted conventions of masculine pen names, Mary Ann Evans nuances further her *self*, by first becoming Marian Evans, when she

frees herself from any family bond and leaves for London, putting an end to her being her father's housekeeper and nurse, and later, in February 1857, when she dazzles the world with her talent and surprises her lover with a highly emotional reverence to his name and personality, and signs *George Eliot*. "No one can be George Eliot; Marian Evans herself could hardly become her" (Davis 2008: 80). Henry James, one of her greatest admirers, adduces insightful details to her portrayal:

She does not strike me as naturally a critic, less still as naturally a sceptic; her spontaneous part is to observe life and to feel it, to feel it with admirable depth. Contemplation, sympathy and faith something like that, I should say, would have been her natural scale. (James 1968: 83)

The contradictions between the life George Eliot led and that described in her works are surprising, and it is more than once that she transfers them to her characters, who, just like her, long to become lamp-holders (*Middlemarch* 2004: 42), seeking a vocation in marriage and not in the fruitful pursuit of some intellectual ideal, just like Dorothea Brooke who would help "someone who did great works, so that his burden might be lighter" (*Middlemarch* 2004: 304). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar muse on this, stating that:

For, as an Agnostic setting out to write about the virtues of clerical life, a "fallen" woman praising the wife's service, a childless writer celebrating motherhood, an intellectual writing what she called "experiments in life" in celebration of womanly feeling, Eliot becomes entangled in contradictions that she can only resolve through acts of vengeance against her own characters, violent retributions that become more prominent when contrasted with her professed purposes as a novelist. (2000: 479)

We shall analyse what these reputed scholars refer to as vengeance in two of Eliot's historical novels, *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) and *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1871-1872), as *translations of the self* in its struggle to attain freedom and personal fulfilment. The central thread that unites the epic yarn of these two novels is the stifling patriarchal marital oppression of women, *deplored* by Queen Victoria herself in a letter addressed to her eldest daughter, Vicky, on May 16, 1860, and *explored* (though not *deplored*) by the novelist with a legal eye:

Dearest Vicky,

All marriage is such a lottery – the happiness is always an exchange – though it may be a very happy one – still the poor woman is bodily and morally the husband's slave. That always sticks in my throat. When I think of a merry, happy, free young girl – and look at the ailing, aching state a young wife generally is doomed to – which you can't deny is the penalty of marriage. (qtd. in Sand 2001: 394)

## 2. The undulating horizons of perception

Following the Lacanian distorting perspective of the mirror, the displacement of the female self from its *sublime I*, with all its dreams and aspirations, towards the *social I*, which inevitably forces it with its centripetal drives into the very heart of the patriarchal system, where the laws of matrimony

describe *the* most respectable civil contract, maps a territory which George Eliot explores with minute interest for the tiniest detail. Still on the edge of *marginalia* itself, (for even if through matrimony women have reached the core of social webbing, it is their genetic inheritance that decides otherwise for them), Eliot's heroines discover and choose the fulfilment of the marriage of equals over the pursuit of personal vocation. Marriage seems to become *that* vocation, once built on mutually shared feelings and values and *translated* to different grounds.

We would like to propose as delineating topographical features of this geography of the self the “parching thirst for [...] perfection” (Eliot 2003: 41) associated with the unwearied pursuit of an ideal and the (final) choice of dwelling among “strictly feminine furniture” (Eliot 2003: 30), for that is what marriage, in Eliot's opinion, is all about. In between lie the sinuous and convoluted trails of female existence, once too often doomed to make nuptials and not wits its compass. Reading the map is not a facile endeavour, and an intarsia of inlaid reverberations of the novelist's life can only account for its intricacy and polyphony. George Eliot must have assumed her *entire feminine role* when she envisaged her heroines, as if able to anticipate what the French feminist, philosopher, linguist, and psychoanalyst Lucy Irigaray would write in 1977, in a book entitled *This Sex Which is not One*:

[...] One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it. [...] To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to submit herself – inasmuch as she is on the side of the ‘perceptible,’ of ‘matter’ – to ‘ideas,’ in particular to ideas about herself that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make ‘visible,’ by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible. (Irigaray 1985: 76)

We pursue the trail with utmost care and embrace the concept of mimesis not in its straight-laced setting that forces upon it the shadow of a simple replica of a pattern, but in a much more psychologically awarding perspective, as it is through the eyes of Mrs Eliot herself that we intend to decipher its meanderings; and though she chose to put on stage traditional female attributes and social projections, she released the tension when she decided to convert canonical forms of subordination into affirmations, thwarting it and allowing horizons to be added to what could now recommend itself as the boundlessness of the map. Introducing inlays from the legal culture of the time referring to the financial dependence of women and the married women property rights, imbuing the text with masculine logos, she managed to turn a muffled sob into a socially *audible* issue.

At this point, we raise the curtain with the help of Jill Dolan's words in order to outline the first stage directions:

The feminist spectator might find that her gender – and/or her race, class, or sexual preference – as well as her ideology and politics make the representation alien and even offensive. It seems that as spectator she is far from ideal. Determined to draw larger conclusions from this experience, she leaves the theatre while the audience applauds at the curtain call and goes off to develop a theory of feminist performance criticism. (Dolan 1988: 2)

The reader/spectator is invited to imagine that the person hiding behind the anonymity of the gender specific third-person personal pronoun is none other than

George Eliot, though most importantly, s/he is invited to heed her offstage cues and, thus, be able to read between the lines, warned as s/he is by F. R. Leavis (1950: 116) that “James’s use of symbols, famous as he is for it, looks weak in comparison with George Eliot’s”. William P. MacNeil (2012: 15) writes of law in nineteenth-century literature: “Law, if present at all [...] in any substantive way, is often figured subtly, even elliptically – in a range of things: a lost deed, a long hidden testimonial, an unusual ‘law-hand’” and to this we may add, in what George Eliot’s *écriture* is concerned, an equally subtle and astute appeal to the legal fiction of the time, upon which, using the etymological perspective opened by the Latin term *translation*, we may muse “a carrying across” process, evermore complex; not only does it involve legal hermeneutics (*history*) translated/embedded into literary fiction, but also *herstory*, caught among anachronistic customs of inheritance. As she was working on *Middlemarch*, she must have read Henry Sumner Maine’s *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (1861), interested as she was in dipping her quill in legal nuances and capture their reflections amongst the yarns of her writing; the plot of her 1866 novel, *Felix Holt*, stands out as one of her most legally technical examples, especially in what inheritance provisions are concerned:

In writing *Felix Holt* [...] George Eliot did look up *The Times* for 1830 or thereabouts. [...] the complications of the thorough-paced Victorian plot depend, with painful correctness (professional advice having been taken of the Positivist friend, Frederic Harrison), on some esoteric subtleties of the law of entail, and they demand of the reader a strenuousness of attention that, if he is an admirer of George Eliot, he is unwilling to devote. (Leavis 1950: 50)

And she also turned for legal help, which she received from a famous practitioner of the time, Frederic Harrison, who generously assisted Eliot with drafting the intricate legal plot, based on the laws of entails and limitations:

George Eliot was occupied on her novel of *Felix Holt* during 1865 and the first half of 1866; and, as every reader knows, the plot and dénouement in the later part of the story turn on an intricate legal imbroglio, whereby an old English family were suddenly dispossessed of their estates which they had held for many generations. She had endeavoured to work out this problem for herself, but found herself involved in hopeless technicalities of law. As is stated by Mr. Cross in the opening of chapter xiii, she had written to me the kind letter of January 5, 1866, to invite me to join a party consisting of Herbert Spencer, T. Huxley, and the others, and she there imparted to me her difficulties as to the law of entail and the statutes of limitations [...] (Thompson 1967: 691)

She was convinced that that was the best road to take and not to “go sounding on my dim and perilous way through law books amidst agonies of doubt” (Thompson 1967: 697). Meticulous, as she had always been, for “one can never be perfectly accurate, even with one’s best effort” (*Letters*, IV: 252), George Eliot bowed to the lofty pillars of the law and introduced onto the friezes of her literary fiction the character of Thomas Transome, the last representative of the Transome family, whose presence amongst the gallery of characters is summoned, for the first time in a literary work, by the “base fee” (in *law*, a freehold estate of inheritance, which is limited or qualified by the existence of certain conditions; an estate descendible to heirs general, but terminable on an uncertain event - *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, 1911, volume 3).

To readers unversed in law, it must have been baffling why Tommy Trousem should stand in the way of [Esther's] title. If she were heiress by propinquity of kinship, her moral and legal rights would have been evident all along, and the functional role of Tommy Trousem could have been discarded. [...] Had George Eliot eliminated the feature of the „base fee” she would have been vulnerable to the cavils of experts in law [...]. (Thompson 1967: 703-704)

She could have simply embroidered her story around the issue of heirship, a fact that would not have altered the final outcome, whilst, on the contrary, it would have enabled her to sieve the legal technicalities that made reading the novel not the easiest of endeavours (Poon 2012: 55-56); instead of all that, she invited Themis into the temple of Calliope and gave her a comfortable seat. “‘*Mulier est finis familiae*’ - a woman is the terminus of the family. A female name closes the branch or twig of the genealogy in which it occurs” (Maine 1897: 148) reads a passage from Maine’s work of jurisprudence, and interestingly enough, although gravitating around what could be referred to as legal marginalia, some of Eliot’s heroines (Esther Lyon, Dorothea Brooke, Gwendolen Harleth) come to reach the core of legal representation once they become heiresses of properties they would finally reject. The idea of *translatio* follows our story most closely, for once again, the storyteller’s shuttle moves its way backwards and forwards through the warps and yarns of the literary texture, displacing geometrical patterns and (de)constructing social constructs.

### 3. When Calliope enters the temple of Themis

In *Justice as Translation*, James Boyd White imagines law as a most spectacular metamorphosis of translation famous for its *in-betweenness* of claims of authority, social status quo, individual determinism:

There is no single appropriate response to the text of another, nor even a finite appropriate set of responses; what is called for is a kind of imaginative self-assertion in relation to another” (White 1990: 256).

Once on the threshold of this “in-between” land, differences (between people) “can be more fully seen and more nearly comprehended – differences that enable us to see in a new way what one is, or perhaps, [...] differences in which the meaning and identity of each resides” and that also involve “an assertion of the self” (White 1990: 230). For the honourable judge,

[...] in literature and in law alike there is often a perceptible want of love for the subject matter. [...] The driving emotion often seems not to be love but a desire to dissect, to dominate, to conquer, both the past and one's contemporary peers. The erotics of this kind of criticism is not reciprocal or mutually recognizing, but competitive and dominating. (White 1990: 99)

Art and literature, on the other hand, as Iris Murdoch suggests in her dialogue with Bryan Magee that opens her book *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*,

[...] break the grip of our own dull fantasy life and stirs us to the effort of true vision. Most of the times we fail to see the big wide real world at all because we are blinded

by obsession, anxiety, envy, resentment, fear. We make a small personal world in which we remain enclosed. Great art is liberating, it enables us to see and take pleasure in what is not ourselves. Literature stirs and satisfies our curiosity, it interests us in other people and other scenes, and helps us to be tolerant and generous. (Murdoch 1999:14)

These passages draw us closer to suggesting that Eliot's turning to the hermeneutics of the legal text, with its encrypted code, may be considered a reflection of her desire to *dissect* the real state of affairs of the time regarding the right to personal property within the legal context of the concept of entail, to *dominate* both with her artistic mastery as well as judicial knowledge the canvas of her writing, only to finally *conquer* the audience with the force of an exquisite style and inspiring story. We consider that the above mentioned idea of *conquest* accommodates a skilfully faceted cleavage, one of the many steps any gem cutter has to consider before shining the stone and bringing it into the light.

In *translation* and in *metaphor*, James Boyd White discovers the common process of "carrying across" (new) thought-provoking perspectives, in one of the most (intellectually) challenging (re)interpretations of the idea of (re)construction. In *Justice as Translation*, judge White mentions the Greek orator Lysias and muses on one of his best-known speeches, "Against Theomnestus, on a Charge of Slander", which the latter wrote "on behalf of an unnamed speaker who is suing Theomnestus for having said that the plaintiff 'killed' his own father" (White 1990: 239), further arguing that, in fact, Lysias sees "*interpretation* as a kind of *translation*" (White 1990: 240).

When George Eliot fictionally *interpreted* the legal technicalities of the coverture law and women's right to property, she had not only *translated* the language of law from its sacred, specialised sanctuary of the courts of law, its leather-bound legal books and male utterance to pages of feminine *écriture* and metaphorical projections of luminous intelligence. Should we follow the road that takes us from translation to metaphor, we would only discover, as White (1990: 233) did, that "the word 'metaphor', in its Greek root, is a direct parallel to 'translate' – *meta* means 'across' and *phor* means carry", and since translation is a form of transportation, "for the word itself comes from Latin *trans* (across) and *latus* (past participle of *fero, ferre, tuli, latus*: carry)" (1990: 233), the two are but "arts of recognition and response" (White 1990: 230).

Through her writing, George Eliot managed to free herself from her small personal world, for, definitely, the great art liberated her. The question is whether she extended the same freedom to her heroines, rescuing them from their small and dream-stifling world, or whether the exercise of "carrying across" remains more of a fictional metaphor rather than a social manifesto. To what extent did the novelist go in order to capture the logos of man and his undeniably supreme ruling over the world in patterns of thought and action that could have (re)positioned the self onto the map of (fe)male existence? How much of the female soul did she succeed *to translate*? Did she manage to carry it across the canonical conventions of patriarchy, or is the freedom attained still confined within its perimeters? These are all questions worth exploring. "Excellent researcher as she was, she would have been aware that the Reform Act of 1832 added the term 'male person' (in lieu of the generic 'man') to English law for the first time" (Blackburn 1970: 12), highlighting the custom of Agnatic descent, which traced genealogy "exclusively through males", as the basis for "a memorable legal maxim" (Maine 1897: 148).

Set in the late 1820s and early 1830s, *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* was serialised between December 1871 and Christmas 1872, at a time when the passage of *The Married Women's Property Act (the Act)* through English Parliament began in 1865, only to be finally completed in 1882, two years after the death of the great lady novelist. Approaching the topic of this paper from within the very vortex of spatial and temporal ellipses so wonderfully mastered by George Eliot, we have resorted to the image of a ribbon, since *Middlemarch* was a silk-ribbon manufacturing town, just as Coventry was, when the novelist was just a child, for this image of the ribbon, set in a figurative key, loosens and unloosens, describing a most complex web of social relations and historic perspectives. Following it, we discover that when George Eliot was writing her works, any married woman's property rights were strictly regulated under the English common law, with its doctrine of unity of spouses, which was a rule of law, associated with the common law doctrine of coverture (Combs 2013: 217). The legal perspective of the 19th century was completed, as far as married women were concerned, by the Act of 1882, the first major statute to amend the rights of married women property rights. While there were voices who pleaded for a radical rethinking of the legal doctrinaire system, like Caroline Norton, Harriet Taylor Mills, John Stuart Mills, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, who fought for "[t]he abolition of the laws which give husbands this unjust power" (Bodichon 1854: 14, qtd. in Andrew Cowie 2009: 6), there were others who pulled the knot of the ribbon fast, afraid as they were that it would only alter the "existing relations between husband and wife, and introduce discomfort, ill-feeling, and distrust where hitherto harmony and concord had prevailed" (Lopez, qtd. in Cowie 2009: 6). *Coverture* referred to "the status of a woman during, and arising out of, marriage. At common law a wife lost her own personality, which became incorporated into that of her husband, and could only act under his protection and 'cover'" (Law 2015: 159). Under the common law of England, marriage created a legal bond according to which a husband and wife were seen as one person; no wonder then that the semantic equivalent of coverture was known as *unity of personality*, which, according to the same *Oxford Dictionary of Law* (Law 2015: 643), referred to "the common-law doctrine that husband and wife were one person in the eyes of the law". The unitary concept flows from the legal fiction that husband and wife are one person. Sir William Blackstone (qtd. in Cowie 2009: 3) famously observed that "the very being or legal existence of the women is suspended during the marriage and [...] consolidated into that of the husband". The legal disabilities that governed a woman's rights during marriage were collectively called "the laws of coverture". It was thought that where two persons were destined to pass their lives together, one should be dominant and the other should be subordinate (Bingham, qtd. in Cowie 2009: 4). So much so that "whatever the circumstances, the husband remained legally the owner or custodian of the family property, and [...] he could use this property, including that brought to him by his wife, in any way he chose [...] he could leave his wife and children penniless" (Holcombe 1983: 36), since by "marriage the very being of legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything, and she is therefore called in our law-French a *feme covert* under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture" (qtd. in Strachey 1928: 15). George Eliot "researched not only the immediate effects [of property law] on women's position, but also the ideological assumptions embedded in the laws of inheritance

and of kin”, and *Middlemarch* and *Felix Holt* most clearly reflect the author’s concern (Beer 1986: 169-170). “George Eliot firmly draws the curtain between the male sphere of activity and the female sphere of passivity” (Zimmerman 1979: 446-447), as she suggests that “powerlessness and subjection, when accompanied by love, can be woman’s proper sphere” (Zimmerman 1979: 448), the place where another translation occurs, the moment the word of law imbues itself with the vibrations of the heart; to Esther Lyon, “Felix has seemed to bring at once a law, and the love that gave strength to obey the law” (Eliot 1997: 226), while the image of Dorothea Brooke and Will Ladislaw, “their hands clasped, like two children, looking out on the storm, while the thunder gave a tremendous crack and roll above them, and the rain began to pour down” (Eliot 2004: 621), marks a *translation* to a symbolic new horizon, where the unleashed forces of nature could wipe out all the fleeting iniquitousness of this world. It is the authorial quill that (re)arranges the constructions of family history in such a manner that the customs of succession will be dramatically challenged, falling, eventually, under the same phenomenon of *translation*, which this time speaks of an heiress, and not of an heir. Just as Ester Lyon becomes the unexpected and lawful claimant of Transome court, overthrowing, thus, the secular conventions of the time (primogeniture ensured not only inequitable division of property, but also that the eldest child, who inherited significantly more than his siblings, was likely to rely solely on his inheritance instead of “*achieving by [his] own exertions a successful life*” (Mill 1965: 221), Dorothea Brooke comes to inherit her late husband’s fortune, only to become trapped in a similar inheritance plot paradigm, further complicated by the almost obsessive question of whether the inheritance was a question of *liking* or *responsibility*: “Was inheritance a question of liking or of responsibility? All the energy of Dorothea’s nature went on the side of responsibility – the fulfilment of claims founded on our own deeds, such as marriage and parentage” (Eliot 2004: 310-11); so burdensome was the feeling, that she confessed unhesitatingly – “Oh, I cannot bear it – my heart will break”, said Dorothea, starting from her seat, the flood of her young passion bearing down all the obstructions which had kept her silent - the great tears rising and falling in an instant: ‘I don’t mind about poverty – I hate my wealth’” (Eliot 2004: 622). Canonically, wealth has long been associated with the male dominance, so much so, that it became one of its exclusivist attributes, almost tempting us to assume that the currently falling category of the gender would have enlisted the noun among the masculine ones in Old English, when the noun recommended itself as *weal*. What George Eliot seems to write between the lines is that her heroines choose the logos of men for his articulated economic power, as much-yearned proof of self-assertion and self-awareness; but it is *life* that was favoured over the dead, suffocating abundance of material wealth. Like Arachne, or Penelope, both Esther and Dorothea chose to spin and weave the yarn on a spindle that embroiders a story that has not only love and affection to offer, but, most importantly, a voice to follow. Not only Ester, but Dorothea as well save themselves from what could have meant a social terminus for them, dictated by their gender and juridical status and imposed by the whimsical and biased constructs of the law. The alternative means to get married to the one they love, Felix Holt and Will Ladislaw, respectively, and to refuse the bulk of their inheritance. With their refusal comes the freedom associated with the escape from the oppressive confinement of exclusively male-architected horizons, too narrow and hostile for a woman to dwell in them – the freedom to choose and the freedom to articulate their mind; for Dorothea this means keeping her own income of seven

hundred pounds a year, whereas Esther decides to claim one hundred four pounds per annum, for she was happy with only two pounds per week plus “a little income” for her father and mother in law, and for both it definitely implies a happy and fulfilling family life.

#### 4. Conclusion

George Eliot was very much aware that writing is a “powerful, mysterious, interior act that defines the self through contact with the thoughts and productions of others” (Charon 2006: 52), at times when the voice of the other was far too feeble to be heard. A skilled translator herself, known as the “translator of Strauss”, Marian (Mary Anne) Evans was able to *translate* the female self onto the larger epic of an age for which she had long been an utterly ethereal presence. Her narrative is a special epic architecture that bridges the realms of both *history* and *herstory*, to which the juridical intarsia bestow not only splendour, but also substance.

At any rate, in aiming to situate herself *between* literature and life, the realist novel finds its greatest go-between in George Eliot herself; [...] always she wants to translate what it means to be able to produce such evolved structures; she wants to translate them out of art, out of specialist language, out of hiding, out of transience, into solid macro-terms, into the emotional human attitude in real life [...]. (Davis 2008: 79)

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# CHARLES DICKENS'S GREAT(EST) EXPECTATION: *THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR*

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**Abstract:** *Academics, critics and readers frequently adopt a rather stereotypical view on Charles Dickens's literary work. Supposedly, the author of David Copperfield stands out as a remarkable story-teller and, implicitly, as a very popular writer, both during his lifetime and post mortem, but he pays a significant price for this popularity, nevertheless. The tribute in question would consist in an inevitable lack of intellectual sophistication, presumably manifest throughout his novels. Commentators generally argue that he was more interested, as a novelist, in addressing large and heterogeneous groups of Victorian consumers of literature than in shaping profoundly parabolic and symbolic textual constructions. Ultimately, this represents a critical prejudice and, therefore, the present paper aims at asserting the opposite. Undoubtedly, Dickens can be a very deep and subtle artist in his prose. The example used henceforth to demonstrate the above mentioned thesis will be the masterpiece Great Expectations, which remains, at least as far as the overall structure of the plot is concerned, a traditional melodrama. In the context of a close reading of this work, the more you immerse yourself into the narrator's subjective universe of perceptions, the more you realize Dickens's artistic endeavour has a formidable design. The need of the reader to uncover it, even after more than a century and a half since the first publication of the novel in the form of magazine serial installments (between 1860 and 1861), becomes a hermeneutic and scholarly urgency.*

**Keywords:** *daydreaming, (death of the) author, Dickens, narrator, perception*

## 1. Introduction

The protagonist (and narrator) of *Great Expectations*, Phillip Pirrip – called Pip due to the fact his “infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit” (Dickens 5) than such a strange word –, is placed in a *Bildungsroman* pattern of evolution, which implies, gradually, major psychological and biographic changes. From a 19<sup>th</sup> century countryside marginal boy he comes to be a distinguished London gentleman, ready, at the end of the story, to start businesses in remote places of the British Empire. Inevitably, one may think here of Dickens's proneness to autobiography. Certain Dickensian self-referent elements are obviously present, but Pip's formation should not be associated, in any way, with, say, David Copperfield's life trajectory (which reminds of Dickens's significantly!). Although an orphan (more or less like Dickens himself) and exposed to traumatic episodes during the growing up process, Pip appears as a rather autonomous character with a life and, perhaps more importantly, *an identity* of his own. He is *a narrator* in the modern sense of the notion, i.e. with a personal representation of reality, visibly uninfluenced by the convictions of *the author*. Dickens seems eager to transmit, from the very beginning, the message that there is a (huge) distinction between *the one who writes the story* (himself) and *the one*

*who tells the story* (Pip). The encounter of the child with an escaped convict, at the outset of the novel, plays a crucial part in the configuration of this distinction. In the symbolic value of this scene may we locate the key metaphor of the whole book, i.e. Dickens's meta-textual core.

Terrorized by his adult sister, Georgiana Maria, a Shakespearean shrew, equally mean to her good-natured husband, Joe Gargery, Pip prefers to play in the churchyard, close to the graves of his parents and other already deceased siblings. The "preference" – only in appearance a bit awkward – constitutes, in reality, his childish form of escapism. One day, in that morbid place, he unexpectedly meets an oddly looking fellow, whom the experienced reader immediately identifies, based on the narrator's description itself, as a runaway prisoner. Pip, however, behaves exactly like an inexperienced child (completely independent from the author, let us notice!) and does not comprehend the danger he could find himself in by engaging in a dialogue with the intruder. His "perceptive" autonomy will be later amplified by the attitude he adopts during what passes for an "emotional" confrontation with the convict. In order to scare and make him act according to his intentions (the intruder evidently wants to obtain a file from the child's house to get rid of his fetters and be able to continue his getaway), the escaped prisoner grabs one of Pip's legs, turning him upside down. Instead of being terrified, the boy takes everything as a game, observing (and communicating this detail to us, the readers) that, consequently, the church in front of him has suddenly turned itself upside down. The subtle meaning encapsulated in the image should not be omitted. Curiously, the tendency of most people would be to decipher here an allegorical summary of the text which is about to unfold itself, i.e. a metaphor alluding to Pip's future life-trajectory.

## **2. Author vs. narrator – a phenomenological perspective**

A critical response of this kind is not, surely, inappropriate. By all means, the convict (Abel Magwitch or "Provis", according to a later alias) will change Pip's existence in the same dramatic manner in which he turns the little infant body upside down at the outset of the narrative. His physical action now may, indeed, open the door for his, so to say, metaphysical actions to transform the protagonist's life in the long run. Nonetheless, the connotations of the episode seem to go deeper. The fact that, during the act of abuse on the part of the intruder, the child sees the church turning upside down along with his own body and tells us this with perfect ingenuousness means, unconditionally, that everything we are on the brink of reading, learning or discovering in the following pages will be seen (and evaluated, one might add) strictly and unilaterally by the protagonist himself. If, as a child, he unavoidably perceives reality in a childish way, we, the readers, are bound to perceive it precisely in the same way, since we essentially depend on him. In other words, the subjectivity of a character, completely different from the subjectivity of the writer, comes to be placed thus at the heart of the epic construction. The governing consciousness will filter "reality" in the novel, establishing the norms by which we shall assess the authenticity of the whole narrative. Obviously, Dickens validates Pip's position as a narrator in *Great Expectations*, using the exotic image already presented and diminishing his own authorship, so to say, to a minimum. The author explicitly hands over, in a (post)modern style, the text to the narrator.

It may be too early to speak about the above mentioned “transfer” in highly theoretical terms, such as the death of the author or the birth of the narrator. Yet, just as a warning, we must assert that the way in which Pip’s story of formation develops will make this discussion absolutely necessary at a certain point. So, in spite of the 19<sup>th</sup> century melodramatic aura of *Great Expectations*, we should probably be prepared, as the plot moves on, for some quite sophisticated concepts. The complicated elements of the coded artistic ideology derive from the stages of the narrator’s initiation. He undergoes a process of what phenomenologists call “knowledge by degrees” or “mise en perspective”/“adjustment of perspective” (Merleau-Ponty 2005: 253). Pip discovers the world gradually, as part of an effort which combines his subjective impressions with the more objective epiphanies provided by experience. Three of these levels of initiation in particular deserve a special analytical attention: firstly, the days spent in Ms. Havisham’s house, secondly, the meeting with Jaggers in Joe’s workshop and, thirdly, his new encounter, in London this time, with the once escaped convict, Magwitch. Let us look closely at each of these episodes. Basically, they represent the complete cycle of Pip’s formation, composing the picture of the protagonist’s trajectory from childhood to maturity. He gets “initiated” into the mysteries of existence while growing up, i.e. moving through these moments, symmetrically depicted in the novel. The turning points of Pip’s life therefore form a solid metaphorical structure underneath which one decodes a complex Dickensian aesthetic perspective.

### 3. The narrator’s first formative stages – a psychoanalytic perspective

As already pointed out, the first “turning point” in Pip’s formation relates to Ms. Havisham, the uncanny, enigmatic, old, rich lady of the community. The character’s bizarre personality, although worth investigating in a strictly psychological study of *Great Expectations*, should not be of much interest in the present critical context. Moreover, for us, what Pip – still a child at this point – learns and, eventually, knows about her matters. Clearly, he “knows” and “understands” a few things: Ms. Havisham is *peculiar* (she lives in isolation with her adopted daughter, Estella; she had an unfortunate affair in her youth, when she decided to marry the man she loved against the will of her father, who immediately realized the person in discussion was, in fact, after her money; predictably, the plighted husband leaves her on the very day of their wedding; she goes through a profound shock and, consequently, her life stops when she gets the appalling news of the break-up; decades after the sad experience, she is still dressed the way she was at the time of the shocking event, i.e. like a “bride”; ever since, she has avoided human contact, with two exceptions, the already mentioned Estella and Jaggers, her trusted lawyer and accountant), Ms. Havisham is prudent, due to her previous tribulations (she keeps most of her relatives at a distance, because they, like the rest of the people, are interested just in inheriting her fortune; this distant attitude may pass for rigidity, but it is only self-defense) and, paradoxically, Ms. Havisham is generous (she privileges Pip by inviting him to the house to play with Estella and by offering money in exchange).

We should agree that, generally speaking, this is an acceptable list of “pieces” of the information. Considering Pip’s early age and inexperienced perspective over life, it looks quite remarkable. One of them, nevertheless, raises a flag to the attentive reader, i.e. the detail according to which the boy was invited to the house to *play* with Estella. As it happened in the case of the escaped convict,

the more experienced reader understands something else here than the naïve narrator. Pip was not invited to play with Estella, but, in an optimistic scenario, he was hired to *entertain* Estella, who, like her adoptive mother, lives in seclusion, with few people around. “Watching” the “film” of the childish relationship between Pip and Estella, even through the immature eyes of the narrator, we become aware of more disturbing elements. The child was brought to the house to be constantly humiliated by the spoiled and arrogant Estella. Ms. Havisham “supervises” these scenes of rudeness and ruthlessness without intervening and, presumably, developing a feeling of personal satisfaction. Beyond Pip’s deviated perception of the reasons for his presence in the house, the proficient reader will decode a dark strategy: Ms. Havisham uses Pip “to educate” Estella to hate men, “to be able” to avoid becoming their victim in life or, in other words, “to be tougher” than her once superficial mother! This twisted “pedagogical” act may be seen as a reversed *paideia*. The irony of the whole thing comes however from a different direction. In spite of the humiliation he is put through, the boy, surprisingly, falls in love with Estella.

This last detail represents “the heart of darkness” – to paraphrase the title of another masterpiece of the period – inside Pip’s unusual process of formation. It actually constitutes the basis of the next “turning point”, the visit Jagers, Ms. Havisham’s lawyer and accountant, pays to Joe Gargery at his workshop, where Pip, an adolescent in the meantime, is an apprentice. Certain aspects of the story must be clarified. Pip finished his weird “activity” in Ms. Havisham’s house a long time before, being paid, generously indeed, for his efforts. He returned to his family, getting, in a sense, “restored” to his previous social condition. Thus, Mr. Jagers’s visit generates intense emotions both in Pip and in his brother-in-law. The news Ms. Havisham’s employee brings is even more troubling. Jagers says he has been hired by an extremely rich person to offer Pip an agreement. The mysterious benefactor is willing to pay (consistently) for the young man’s education (in London) with the precise purpose of turning him into a gentleman. The enigmatic provider has one condition only: the adolescent has to take the deal as it is, without ever trying, in any circumstance and in any form, to find out anything about the identity of his benefactor (the benefactor will come out whenever the benefactor considers this to be appropriate). Joe, a man of common sense and a humble witness to the scene, immediately considers such a scenario ludicrous, believing that the balanced Pip he knows will turn it down. But to his and the reader’s surprise, Pip does not only accept it, but he accepts it with enthusiasm, instantly creating turmoil in the family.

Yet, it is not Joe’s disappointment and shock at Pip’s reaction that really matter here, but Biddy’s. Biddy, a countryside girl herself who, practically, lives with the blacksmith’s family, taking care of Georgiana (now hemiplegic), seems to be secretly in love with Pip. She deems him, obviously, a good match for her in the future. Learning about his intentions to go to London and his sudden change of social status, she appears desperate, abruptly deciding to unveil her hidden love in order to determine him to reject the offer and stay where he belongs. Pip’s response is, by all means, astonishing. He repudiates Biddy, unexpectedly saying something for which no one – including the experienced reader – seems totally prepared. Pip implies that it is his destiny to go to London in order to become a gentleman, adding, solemnly, a confession which the protagonist himself later considers completely “lunatic”: “I want to be a gentleman on her (Estella’s) account” (Dickens 120). What has just happened? The answer, albeit surprising, is rather

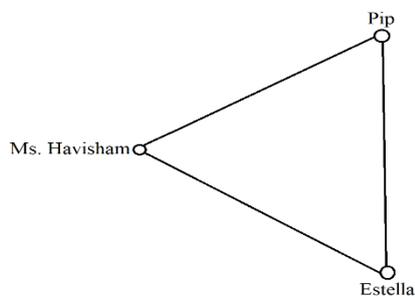
simple: the narrator has remarkably become at least as experienced as the reader. He no longer “understands” less than his listener. On the contrary, he conceals information (which he thinks private) from the reader, thus distorting reality and displaying, implicitly, elements of unreliability. The information in question is his apparently desperate and tormenting love for Estella (desperate, because it has secretly continued years after they “played” under Ms. Havisham’s “supervision”, and tormenting, because Pip has evidently developed an erotic obsession, i.e. an emotional compulsion).

Still, the question must be asked again: what has just happened here? A more theoretical answer would state that the narrator, proving his “unreliability”, has made a dangerous move, allowing the reader to catch a glimpse into what may be called the meta-textual level of the novel. It is beyond any doubt that, in *Great Expectations*, we have two “stories” – one that *we read* and one that *we decipher*, i.e. a textual one and a meta-textual one. In the “textual” one, we “see” the nice and decent Pip living with Bidley and Joe, whereas, in the “meta-textual” one, the dark, absurdly and obsessively infatuated (with Estella) Pip intermittently comes into being. Should we be then puzzled by his acceptance of the enigmatic benefactor’s offer right away? Not at all. *Pip already has an articulate scenario at the back of his mind concerning Jaggers’s proposition.* He has an “explanation” of the “mystery” at the meta-textual level of the narrative (i.e. the level of his secret life, never fully exposed to the reader). The explanation sounds like this: Ms. Havisham is aware of his profound and pure love for Estella and, as a good parent, decides to take action in securing her daughter’s future. She will never find a better husband than Pip. However, in order to make him acceptable for Estella, she has to change his social condition, to transform him into *a gentleman*. So, Ms. Havisham is the “benefactor” behind Jaggers’s offer (and Jaggers works *for her*, in Pip’s eyes, let us not forget!). Consequently, Pip takes the deal. It was about time for him to fulfill his secret and compulsive love! He will be a gentleman by all means. A gentleman on “Estella’s account”.

The hero finds himself here, *avant la lettre*, in the position of the orphan described by Sigmund Freud in an article from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Der Dichter und Phantasieren/Creative Writers and Daydreaming*. Freud’s character should be imagined, according to the Viennese psychiatrist, as coming of age. He has the opportunity to turn the tables of his unfair destiny, by going to a job interview. As he walks there, Freud argues, the orphan will inevitably begin to “daydream” about his future. *He will be hired, appreciated and protected by his new employer* (whom, *nota bene*, he does not know yet!). *In the long run, he and the employer’s daughter* (whose existence, *nota bene* again, is entirely uncertain to him!) *will irreversibly fall in love with each other and get married. Eventually, he will inherit the company.* Laughable as it may seem, in psychoanalytic terms, the act of daydreaming constitutes a shield in front of the harsh reality. Thus, the Freudian orphan emotionally heals the traumas of his childhood (he never had a family and he “gets” one in his “dream”; he never knew true love and he “experiments” it in his fantasy; he never enjoyed social and economic stability and he “obtains” it in his personal fairy-tale). The real world comes to be replaced by an illusory scenario (Freud 1908: 24-37). Pip’s story is not very much different. His secret love for Estella represents the center of his universe, i.e. his *axis mundi* (see Image 1).

**Image 1**

In his fantasy, Ms. Havisham plays the part of the classical *deus ex machina*, appearing as a “parent” to Estella and as a “benefactor” to him (see Image 2).

**Image 2**

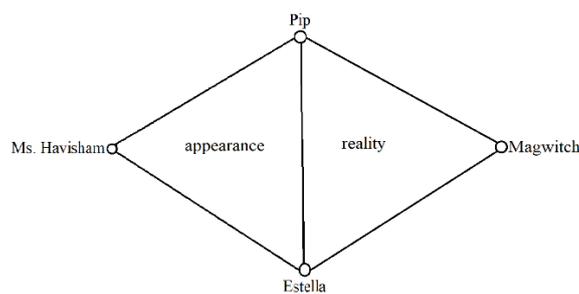
#### 4. The narrator’s last stage of formation – a structuralist perspective

Having clarified the psychological mechanism by which the protagonist *substitutes* reality with a *daydream*, it is about time to address the conclusion of his “formation”, i.e. the last “turning point” of Dickens’s *Bildungsroman*. We are obviously referring to Pip’s second encounter with the once escaped convict, in London this time. Our main character is a *gentleman* now and, if we may add (with respect to his so-called “process of initiation”), already an adult. The episode closes practically a narrative circle which the writer (shall we say the narrator?) skillfully conducted throughout the novel. Abel Magwitch shows up abruptly (again!) in Pip’s life, reminding him, *ab initio*, of the “episode” they shared, a long time before, in the churchyard, and, then, telling him something equally disturbing and embarrassing: *he is his benefactor*. Sentenced to death initially for major crimes (crimes resulting not necessarily from his evil nature, but from the manipulations of a villain, Compeyson, who ironically will also turn out to be Ms. Havisham’s double-crossing fiancée), the prisoner is eventually banished to the Colonies, more precisely to Australia, where he makes a fortune. Since he was compelled to depart without the legal possibility to return (consequently, we may notice, coming to visit Pip in London, under the name of “Provis”, puts him at enormous risk), Magwitch realizes the uselessness, after all, of his wealth. The epiphany generates action: what about placing money in the education of someone with no social privileges?

Pip, the innocent boy who helped him out in a moment of crisis, appears to be the perfect choice.

We should not be diverted, however, from the actual background suggested by Abel's gesture of generosity. There is a lot of social and cultural symbolism in it. He implies to the narrator, with fatherly affection no doubt, that, in the process of making him a gentleman, he also intended to prove his money, i.e. the money made by a convict, can be as good as anyone else's money. The reader might identify here the mentality of a world in full transformation, within which, in strict keeping with the rules of the capitalist society, the margin, the periphery, the outcast aspire to become the center, the axis, the gentleman. Nevertheless, Pip is not impressed by Provis's story, at least at the beginning; he is definitely appalled, horrified, disgusted, but not impressed. Immediately after meeting his real benefactor, he runs to Jaggers for confirmation. Strangely, despite his being Ms. Havisham's employee (an element, for Pip, supporting the validity of his sweet daydream about "becoming a gentleman on Estella's account"), Jaggers has a long history with Magwitch as well. The lawyer defended Abel and his wife, Molly – Jaggers's maid, a criminal herself and, overwhelmingly to hear, *Estella's actual mother* –, in Court. While Molly gets sentenced to death and, finally, executed, Magwitch is exiled. Ms. Havisham's attorney will confirm everything! Moreover, to his despair, the narrator learns (from Herbert, his best friend) the ultimate truth: "Provis" is, certainly, Estella's father. Alas, the convict turns out to be *his* benefactor and *her* parent! A more shocking revelation a narrator could have never experienced, we must honestly admit.

Hence Pip's "reality" (with Ms. Havisham detaining exactly these "positions", that of "a benefactor" and that of "a parent") comes to be dissolved. Abel Magwitch turns the protagonist's world upside down in the same way he did when reversing the image of the church back in his childhood. An uncanny effect is caused by this last stage of "initiation". Pip's phantasy world (with Ms. Havisham and Estella as main characters in it) is reflected, *upside down*, in a mirror-like form, in the real world (with Abel Magwitch taking over all of Ms. Havisham's attributes). Image 2 must therefore be completed with an inevitable Image 3 (see below).

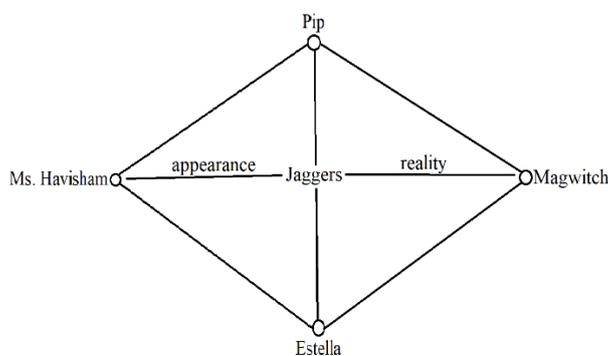


**Image 3**

"Appearance" and "reality" constitute the two facets of the narrator's "knowledge by degrees". He swings between them, due to his unavoidable subjectivity. Evidently, this provisional conclusion of our analysis may be helpful in

understanding the metaphor in the title of Dickens's book – *Great Expectations*. If we see ourselves in Pip or if we see mankind, generally speaking, in him, then we are bound to comprehend that, in life, one's horizon of "expectations" will always be contradicted and even ridiculed by the actual facts of reality. It is in our deep nature to define *outside* only what has been defined *inside*, to project, in other words, our inner beliefs onto the aspects of concrete existence and, eventually, to be disillusioned by their incompatibility. Pip remains an *alter ego* of each and every individual who, at least once in a lifetime, hoped for the best, *without* expecting the worst and, because of that, at last, living it fully.

Yet, this cannot be all. There is something else in the climax of Dickens's masterpiece, in its already defined meta-textual architecture, that the reader has to decode. The starting point of our final "descent" into the subtleties of the novel should be Jaggers's awkward remark, when he is confronted by Pip, regarding the identity of the "benefactor". Instead of showing some compassion for the young man's disappointment, he curiously appears *to enjoy* the protagonist's confusion, telling him quite cynically: "Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence" (Dickens 306). Undoubtedly, in this paradox one finds the narrator's seed of misinterpretation, but – let us face it – now is hardly the time to amplify his anguish! Jaggers seems to be willing to suggest, both to the perplexed narrator and to the still disorientated reader, that *he has been in control all along, in spite of the fact that he never interfered with whatever was going on in Pip's ambiguous mind*. He kept, that is, his complete neutrality, an indispensable factor of a privileged position in a given system. Does Jaggers have, indeed, a privileged position in the narrative mechanism of *Great Expectations*? He certainly does. If we try to place him within Pip's network of apparent and then real perceptions (i.e. within Image 3), we must put him *in the middle* (see Image 4).

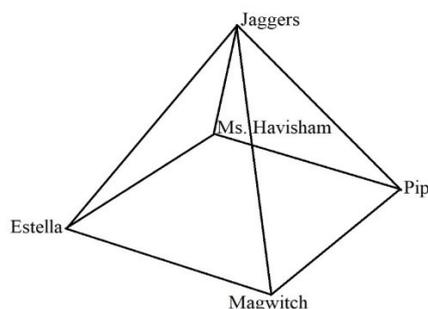


**Image 4**

This central position justifies at least two (if not more) of his main attributes in the story: his omniscience and his omnipotence. To them, however, an attentive reader may add Jaggers's omnipresence. By all means, the lawyer manifests himself as an *omniscient* and *omnipotent* character. Perhaps even as an *omnipresent* one.

A brief explanation might be required here. Jaggers appears to be *omniscient*, because he is the only one who knows all about everything and everyone: Pip, Estella, Ms. Havisham and Magwitch. Similarly, he can be viewed

as *omnipotent*, because he could change the story in any way he would like, did he decide to intervene, concretely, at any point in its development. Moreover, one may even talk about the attorney's *omnipresence*, because of his unique ability of being constantly encountered everywhere in the text and of his continuous (direct or indirect) contribution in the action of putting the pieces of the plot together. In fact, if we take a good look at the new image resulting from Jaggers's inclusion in Pip's narrative network (i.e. Image 4), we become aware of his placement, in reality, at the top of the whole system, since, from a geometrical point of view, Image 4 shows clearly a pyramid (see Image 5 below).



**Image 5**

Who is the mysterious lawyer after all? We have one answer only to such a question. He cannot be anyone else but Pip's very opposite. He is everything Pip is not and seems to be willing to suggest that at the end. If Pip is a narrator, Jaggers must be the author, the "omniscient", the "omnipotent" and, perhaps, even the "omnipresent" author who no longer wants to interfere with the life of his own text, granting it freedom and autonomy. He thus represents a metaphor – the metaphor, *avant la lettre*, of the modern writer who cherishes the independence of his creation more than his God-like position. He is simultaneously *deus otiosus* ("an indifferent God") and *deus absconditus* ("a hidden God").

## 5. Conclusion

Roland Barthes's 20<sup>th</sup> century critical parable *La mort de l'auteur/The Death of the Author* (Barthes 1968: 15-18) is prefigured by Dickens's 19<sup>th</sup> century novel *Great Expectations*. The French theorist sees the modernization of writing as a symbolic "disappearance" of the traditional author from the artistic mechanism. The author becomes *the past* of the literary work, whereas the text will always be *its present* (Barthes 1968: 16). The narrator (a textual component), in the novel at least, takes over the role of the author himself, replacing what may have been considered once "the epic objectivity" with his own "subjectivity". The text cannot be seen anymore from top to bottom (i.e. from the author's perspective), as it happens in the classical narrative, but, symbolically, from bottom to top (i.e. from the viewpoint of the narrator). In a sense, a bizarre one undoubtedly, *the text writes itself* (that being the ultimate Structuralist dream!), proclaiming its *independence*. This is what *Great Expectations* confronts us with at its meta-textual level. Pip's

autonomous voice, although unreliable and even deviant due to the subjectivity that animates it, constitutes a factor of epic self-construction. Dickens disassembles the traditional authorship, giving free access to the core of the narrative to a character with limited knowledge, but with a huge desire to live independently. Thanks to him the text goes through a process of self-articulation. The author of *Great Expectations*, a forerunner of the European aesthetic modernity, succeeds thus in letting his own work live by itself and for itself. We are certainly in front of the first experiment of *sui generis* creation in the English literature.

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# SOME THINGS ARE BETTER LEFT UNSAID: *THE DARK CLUE* OR THE PERILOUS PATH OF A NEO-VICTORIAN NOVEL

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**Abstract:** *Rewriting the Victorians means recovering the most ponderous literary tradition while making use of modern awareness. Under the surface of respectful hypocrisy, novel characters often hide a more uncomfortable truth which narrators wish to unveil. This is also the target of James Wilson's The Dark Clue, where two characters 'stolen' from Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White, Walter Hartright and his sister-in-law, Marian Halcombe, are engaged in a research on the famous British painter Turner. Their ambition is to write Turner's biography; however, their study turns out to be a real investigation of the several mysterious gaps in the painter's life. This study aims at examining the novel through the psychoanalytic paradigm of sublimation.*

**Key words:** *Lacan's sublimation, Neo-Victorian narration, Turner's paintings*

## 1. Introduction

If Neo-Victorian fiction has been proclaimed a successful and well-established literary genre by the reading public, this is due to its appealing peculiarities. On the one hand, it pays a tribute to the great literary tradition of the 19th century, recovering the importance of the novel plot and the return of the narrator against the so-called writing degree zero, which had characterised the aesthetics of Modernism. On the other hand, it is not limited to being merely a revival or a nostalgic homage to the Victorian novel, but it aims at building an imaginary bridge between the 19th and 21st century. Trying to provide a standard definition for texts identified as Neo-Victorian, we can borrow Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's (*cf.* 2010: 4) words when they write that the neo-Victorian "must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged* with the act of *(re)interpretation*, *(re)discovery* and *(re)vision* concerning the Victorians" (italics in the original). It is essentially a re-creation based on historical books and other sources available to authors and open to interpretation, which offers insights into the making of a neo-Victorian story. However, the approach to this tradition is never uncritical; on the contrary, it is characterised by a revisionary critique, whose ability is to renew textual representation by making it a subgenre of Postmodern fiction. According to Llewellyn:

What the neo-Victorian represents is not contemporary literature as a substitute for the nineteenth century but as a mediator into the experience of reading the 'real' thing. (Llewellyn 2008: 168)

But this definition implies the subordinate position of the contemporary novel to the Victorian one, while it is more appropriate to consider them in a dialogic relation, as rightly observed by Robin Gilmour:

the [Victorian past] exists in dynamic relation to the present, which it both interprets and is interpreted by. Evoking the Victorians and their world has not been an antiquarian activity, but a means of getting a fresh perspective on the present. (Gilmour 2000: 200)

That is to say that contemporary artistic productions situated in the Victorian period reflect upon Victorian concerns from a contemporary awareness. This is also the perspective of James Wilson's *The Dark Clue*, published in 2001, which, similarly to other Neo-Victorian novels, shares some interesting metafictional elements and can be defined as an example of "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 1988: 5), or "postmodernist revisionist historical fiction" (McHale 1987: 96).

## 2. Adaptation and appropriation: the text's sources

*The Dark Clue*'s source text is indeed the best-known sensation novel ever written, *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, from which the author also borrows the names for his two main characters: Walter Hartright, a drawing master and painter, and his sister in law, Marian Halcombe. In Wilson's novel, Mr. Hartright is hired by the rich aristocrat and artist patron, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, who is also Marian's friend, to write the biography of the greatest British painter ever, William Turner. The biography is supposed to bear the noble intent of telling the truth about the life of the artist and act as a counterpart to another biography which was being written by George Walter Thornbury. The latter actually published a painter's biography later in 1862; the novel is set around 1850. According to Lady Eastlake, indeed, Thornbury was collecting wrong and slanderous information about the artist with the purpose of drawing the attention of the public to gossip and secrets. As matter of fact, Turner's life itself resembles the plot of a sensation novel. Two opposite personalities coexist in his turbulent soul: the public and the private. The former shows a revolutionary artist both surly and naive, while the latter reveals an ambiguous and elusive person, morbidly attracted by young proletarian girls and haunted by the memory of an uncomfortable childhood. No other artist was as able as Turner to keep himself so secretive and mysterious. Writing his biography is therefore an ambitious project and this is the reason why Hartright hesitates before accepting the challenge. Marian encourages Walter to write it, since she is worried about his artistic vein getting weaker and weaker and resting on the comforts of a well-to-do middle-class life. She also promises him to work as his assistant and help him in organising the materials for the book. This is the beginning of a long and difficult quest, which turns the two protagonists into detectives. Their research makes Walter and Marian travel up and down the country and visit the places dear to Turner. They do interviews, they meet people who had connections with the artist, taking notes in order to reconstruct the most significant stages of his life. All their adventures are reported through the literary device of letter exchange, scattered notes and private diaries, which emphasise the secret and intimate side of the story. However, Walter and Marian are not the only loans from Wilkie Collins' masterpiece: the rich and blonde Laura and the crazy Anne Catherick, a lonely figure who appears completely dressed in white, become the paradigm of Wilson's narration too. Turner's dichotomous personality, like the two sides of the same coin, is described as kind, heartfelt, funny and a bit clumsy by aristocrats, intellectuals and patrons, but as mean, rude,

devilish by the humble people. What is more, the narrative technique of developing the story in a random series of eyewitness testimonies and in fragmented episodes confirms its pastiche characteristics.

### 3. From sublime to sublimation

Walter and Marian's involvement in the research is deep, but the commitment reveals itself much more demanding than they have ever thought. Nonetheless, they understand the importance of investigating Turner's early life in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, where the young artist grew up in a modest family. His father was a barber and a wig-maker and his mother, after suffering from unsteady mental condition, ended her life in a hospital for lunatics. This uneasy past much affected Turner's mind and it influenced his artistic production. Light and shadow coexist in his tormented personality as well as in his aesthetics. As a landscape painter, he was particularly attracted by all weather phenomena; he loved storms and used to say: "the fouler the weather, the better" (Wilson 2001: 115). Rough sea, shipwrecks, high peak mountains, but also ruined abbeys, or old castles were his favourite subjects, as recalled by Mrs Bennett, a clergyman's sixty-five years old daughter, who used to live nearby Turner's house and met him when he was a young boy:

Places where you might imagine a skeleton in a crumbling tower, or a maiden locked in a dungeon beneath the black waters off a moat. Those sorts of subjects were very popular at the time. He did not want for commissions. (159)

Despite his revolutionary representation of light and his obsession for the colour yellow, which he proposed in all its possible hints, Turner's paintings are incontrovertibly stunning and disturbing, and the contemplation of nature fed his hunger for the Sublime.

The Sublime is precisely the stylistic code with which we can analyse and interpret Turner's works. As known, the Sublime was an aesthetic quality in vogue in the 18th century, which claimed to be distinct from the neoclassical notion of beauty as totally detached from the contemplation of regular forms. The pursuit of ecstatic pleasure was mingled with horror, fear, and sometimes even despair. The search for the sublime in nature hides Turner's yearning for Sublimation, as a possible symbolic treatment of the Real. The Real is what always destabilizes the meaning structure of the Symbolic order. Lacan (1992) states in his *Seminar VII* that the psyche is divided in three different orders: the Real, the Imaginary, the Symbolic. The Symbolic consists in the child's recognition and acceptance of the rules and dictates of society: the Name-of-the-Father allowing to control desire and language restrictions in order to enter the adult world. The Imaginary represents the narcissistic side of the self where the subject projects his fantasy images and objects of desire. The Symbolic and the Imaginary are both in constant clash with the Real; however, in order to keep the individual safe from psychosis, the three realms can't function independently, but need to be united, as symbolically epitomised in the Borromean knot. For psychoanalysis, sublimation is a highly problematic concept, initially for Freud and later for Jacques Lacan, who resumed

this theme in his study *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. The mystery of sublimation deals with the question of how there can exist an instinctual satisfaction not directly bound to a sexual satisfaction. Lacan's answer is determinant: the spectrum of "the ideal" may obscure the concept of sublimation and reduce it to a mere sort of idealization. The problem of sublimation does not only imply the transformation of the drive, but also the origin of its value. According to Freud (Recalcati 2007: 10), in fact, sublimation makes its products – cultural art objects – socially recognized and endowed with a value. In this perspective, the problem of sublimation, as a creation of values, is a purely ethical problem. Lacan's operation, instead, consists in preserving sublimation in relation to the Real and not to the Ideal. His approach to the enigma of sublimation is based on the centrality of the Real. Lacan's return to Freud does not take the symbolic path of the "unconscious structured like a language", but the Freudian notion of "beyond the pleasure principle" (Freud 1966-1980b; Lacan 1974: 544), in which the compulsion to repeat leads to the death drive. Artistic sublimation occupies the abysmal void of Freud's "the Thing", *das Ding* (Freud (1966-1980a: 98), through a plurality of imaginary objects. That is to say that in the sublimation process the object of art becomes an imaginary object placed in the emptiness of the Real.

#### 4. Raising an object to the dignity of the Thing

What is the Thing?

The Thing is made to bear a signifier. (...) The signifier delimits the Real and makes it appear as the Thing. How? By presenting the emptiness that it delimits or the emptiness to which it gives shape. (Saint-Cyr 2012: 16)

According to Lacan (1992: 129), sublimation can be expressed in three different areas: religion, science and art, but art has the highest priority. In artistic sublimation, the object of art becomes an imaginary object that is placed by a symbolic elevation in the empty space of the Real of the Thing. Sublimation therefore represents a change of the sexual goal with a higher goal of a greater social value. "Given that sublimation is a treatment of the Thing, it implies a combat: the subject is confronted with his suffering by confronting the Thing, namely, the unbearable aspect of its unrepresentability, horror, destruction, death, in a word, the real of desire" (Saint-Cyr 2012: 16).

Among the several stories and anecdotes collected by Walter Hartright during his research, there is one, above all, which corresponds to this specific process of sublimation. One day an oarsman takes Turner on a trip on a river, when suddenly something indiscernible and mysterious draws the attention of the painter, who asks the man to go closer and see what it is. Unexpectedly, it turns out to be the corpse of a young woman drowned in the river. Turner's reaction to this finding is astonishing: he frantically starts to draw the girl's face on his notebook as if fearing he might lose the memory of her face forever. This striking reaction shows how the irruption of the Real turns into a symbolic "stain", into something jarring that should not be in that place, but it is. It is the uncanny, *Unheimlich*, that unexpectedly looms in an idyllic scene to disturb it, but instead of being looted by the Thing and of succumbing to it, Turner begins to draw as if he wanted to impose a control on that image and bring the defamiliar back to the familiar.

#### 4.1. Seeking for the dark clue

Turner's works contain a secret meaning, "a figure in the carpet", the discovery of which should constitute the task of a good critic; this is what John Ruskin implies at his first meeting with Walter Hartright:

Look at any of his pictures with discernment enough, and at its heart you will find a dark clue. There was something in his manner as he said this – a portentous quiver in his voice, his eyes as mournful as a bloodhound's – that made me want to laugh. I mastered the impulse, however, and said: 'Clue to what?' [...]. 'Indeed, the best advice I can offer you, if you would hope to know Turner, is: immerse yourself in his work.' (59).

In his *Seminar XI*, Lacan develops his reflections on the question: "what is a painting?" (Lacan 2003: 99). This question defines a rigorous aesthetic criterion for discriminating between what is art and what is not; the fundamental condition for a work of art to be defined as such is the presence of the painting function, *la fonction du tableau*. The painting function is based on the radical inversion of the ordinary idea of art fruition, because it is no longer the subject who contemplates the work from the outside, but it is the exteriority of the work that grasps the subject. A painting is not a passive object, but it is what pierces the purely representational frame of its semantic organization. In other words, the art's task is not to reproduce the visible, but to give shape to the invisible. In this respect the visual device of anamorphosis plays a primary role. A perfect example is Turner's *The Bay of Baiae with Apollo and the Sibyl* exhibited in 1823; Marian Halcombe, who unlike Hartright shows more acumen in her research, notes:

The Bay of Baiae is not one picture, but two. On my first visit here, I had been struck by how out of place the figures of Apollo and the Sibyl had seemed – as if they had been transposed from another scene altogether [...]. For Turner portrays them at the start of their story, when the Sibyl, still young and beautiful, has been granted her wish, and is sifting the grains of sand in her hand, and counting the years of life she is to have; but the landscape, with its half-hidden serpent, and broken columns, and skull-like arches, shows the inevitable end: the destruction and decay to which she must eventually come. (330)

The painting doesn't provide for a sort of anamorphosis, however the half-hidden presence of a snake as well as of the Roman ruins functions as the index of the Real that exceeds the imaginary and symbolic dimension of the work. They both act as a *memento mori* since they are there as reminders of the inevitability of death. In this perspective, Lacan's theory places sublimation not only as a possible transformation of the sexual drive, but also as the very principle of any subjective transformation. Turner sublimated his motherly *imago* because it was an obstacle to his art as well as to his own realization.

The family, I think, lived mostly in the cellar or basement. And I do recall one day hearing the most blood-curdling screams and howls coming from downstairs. Mr. Turner was setting my curls, or something like – he was a spry, cheerful little fellow, always bouncing about on his toes, like a sparrow; and at first he just laughed and tried to make light of it. But then the boy came rushing up, white as death, and ran into the street; and Turner made some excuse, and went down to soothe her [...] But

what of his family? His art provided his family – a substitute for the human family which (aside from his father) he never had as a child, and never acquired as an adult. Did not Amelia Bennett say he spoke of his pictures as his ‘children’ [...] (340, 346).

That seems to be the enigma solution of Turner’s life and work, the revelation of the dark clue in the light of his mad artistic genius. Nevertheless, Hartright’s involvement in the story leads him towards a slow, but unrelenting moral and mental breakdown.

## 5. Conclusion

The protagonist is seized by the unusual impulse to achieve mastery of Turner’s paintings, but unexpectedly Turner’s life and art take possession of his mind:

Walter was possessed. A demon had subdued his true nature, and taken control of his faculties and his will. A demon that was not content to destroy innocence and trust and hope, but must enter every cranny, and turn what it found there to evil. (441-442)

Confronted with Turner’s lively and pressing presence, Hartright feels free to abandon his bourgeois lifestyle. His desire to know all about Turner becomes so urgent that he allows himself to be possessed by Turner’s secrets and to reconnect with his paintings as a means to not only revise his art, but also to reveal the dark side of his unconscious. In doing so, Hartright incarnates Turner’s story and desire:

a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text. Narratives both tell of desire – typically present some story of desire – and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification. Desire is in this view like Freud’s notion of Eros, a force including sexual desire but larger and more polymorphous. (Brooks 1984: 37)

The narrator’s impressionistic, biographical approach and his attempt to define that “something” by which Turner’s works should have given him “the sense of all” end in utter failure and bring nothing certain to light. Mystery and ambiguity pervade the tale to its sarcastic epilogue:

a copy of the Quarterly Review, saying there was an article in it by Elizabeth Eastlake – ‘which, if you have not seen it already, I think you might find of interest’. I confess I could not bring myself to read it at once, and left it unopened where it lay. And would, doubtless, have thought no more about it – but that this afternoon, as I was on my way to the garden, I heard a strange sound from the library. So strange that I had to stop, and think for a moment what it was. *It was Walter. Laughing.* I opened the door. He was sitting at the table, looking at the Quarterly. When he saw me, he got up, and handed it to me. At first I could not see what had caught his attention. And then I found it: a review of *The Life and Correspondence of J. M. W. Turner*, by Walter Thornbury. It is even possible that, by requesting some competent friend to draw up a modest memoir of him, and furnishing the necessary information, Turner might have saved himself from the worst of his posthumous misfortunes – that of falling victim to such a biographer as Mr. Thornbury. Perhaps the appearance of this wretched book may be the means of

calling forth some writer qualified, by knowledge of the man and of his art, to investigate the truth and to tell it as it ought to be told (465; italics mine).

An ironic demonstration of the ineffability of art winks at Victorian hypocrisy and at its many moral contradictions. It also shows all the complexity of its epistemological shift from artwork to the text as differently practiced by the critic-protagonists.

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**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN:  
THE OTHERNESS OF BERTHA / ANTOINETTE MASON  
IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE*  
AND JEAN RHYS'S *WIDE SARGASSO SEA***

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***Abstract:** Many readers who are familiar with the Victorian literature are aware of Charlotte Brontë's masterpiece Jane Eyre. In the book, the lunatic lady held locked on the third floor of the house, may have stuck in your mind along with some thought-provoking questions. Who is Bertha Mason in reality? Why is she locked up? Is she really mad or does the narration show her to be a mad woman? And if so, what are the causes of her madness? In Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys manages to find answers to these questions and illuminates the readers by indicating that there is another side to the coin, constructing her own version of it. In the light of above information, the aim of this paper is to shed light on the otherness of Bertha / Antoinette Mason, in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea.*

***Keywords:** Jane Eyre, madness, otherness, Victorian literature, Wide Sargasso Sea*

## **1. Introduction**

During Queen Victoria's reign, the distribution of the roles between men and women was considerably apparent, like in the other spheres of social life. In this rigidly male-dominated Victorian society, women from all classes were kept within their homes and their roles were to create a peaceful place for their husbands and children, while men were dealing with financial issues in the Industrial Britain. In addition to being fully responsible for the household chores, working class women had to support their family incomes with low paid jobs. According to the social norms of Victorian society, being a good wife and mother was the primary duty of middle class women, and marriage was their best career. Social expectations from these Victorian women consisted in performing domestic duties within the private space of their households. Men actively participated in the public, but women were isolated from the outside world. Women were almost imprisoned in their houses. If a woman was silent, obedient, and invisible when needed, she was accepted as an "angel in the house", as Coventry Patmore called her in his narrative poem "The Angel in the House"; otherwise, if she was different from what was "normal" and expected, she would be labelled as a fallen woman.

Another issue that degraded the position of women in that society was having no right to possess or inherit property. The *Married Women's Rights and Properties Act* was a turning point in the equality between men and women. Before this Act, when a woman got married, she no longer had her own rights or wealth, her possessions were now all her husband's. The *Married Women's Rights and Properties Act*, however, allowed women to be the legal owners of the money they had earned as well as the right to inherit property. As is described by William

Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* under the title of “Legal Consequences of Marriage”: “[b]y marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law, that is, the legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated into that of the husband, under whose protection and cover, she performs everything [...]” (Blackstone 1978: 145). This is the situation which paves the way for Mr. Rochester’s marriage to Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and in its prequel published one hundred nineteen years later, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Taking into account the above information, the aim of this paper is to shed light on the otherness of Bertha / Antoinette Mason, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

## 2. The othering process of Antoinette

The social standing of Jane is highly problematic. Since she works as a governess, she neither belongs to the same class with the servants, nor with the owner of the house. In spite of these social class issues, Rochester gains Jane’s love. However, there is an insuperable obstacle to their relationship: Rochester’s mad wife Bertha Mason. She is described as a frightening figure when she first comes out in the novel: “[i]n the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face” (Brontë 2009: 416).

Rochester had married Bertha for financial reasons. His father leaves all his fortune to Rochester’s elder brother, as he does not want to divide his property. Thus, Rochester is obliged to marry Bertha, who is about to inherit significant wealth. Their marriage is the reflection of the British Empire’s cultural and commercial exploitation of colony countries. Just as the British Empire colonizes some countries for its own benefit, Rochester exploits Bertha, a Creole woman, for his own interest. Initially, Bertha can be simply regarded as a figure preventing Rochester and Jane’s possible chance at happiness. However, it is perfectly clear that the real sufferer is Bertha. Before she marries Rochester, she is a rational and beautiful woman, as stated by Rochester himself:

Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty: and this was no lie [...]. She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments. All the men in her circle seemed to admire her and envy me. I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her. (Brontë 2009: 433)

## 3. From otherness to madness: Antoinette’s transformation into Bertha

Bertha’s dramatic change from an attractive lady to a bestial figure raises serious questions in the reader’s mind. Who is Bertha Mason in reality? Why is she locked up? Is she really mad or does the narration show her as a mad woman? And if so, what are the causes of her madness? In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys manages to find answers to these questions and illuminates the readers by indicating that there is another side to the coin, and constructing her own version of it. While Rhys is rewriting the story of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* borrowing its

characters, she also tells the story from the perspective of someone more familiar with the history, culture and geography that shapes it. According to Wolfgang G. Müller,

Generally speaking, it is aesthetically and ontologically impossible to have identical characters in literary works by different authors. If an author takes over a character from a work by another author into his text, putting it to his own uses, this procedure may have a parodistic, satirical, corrective or censorious function and imply literary or social and political criticism. So, in presenting the Jamaican prehistory of Bertha Mason and Edward Rochester, Jean Rhys, though indebted to Charlotte Brontë's characters, does not just borrow them, but rather constructs her own versions of them. (Müller 2007: 65)

*Wide Sargasso Sea* acts as a prequel to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, but it has as its main character Antoinette Cosway Mason, who is Rochester's mentally unstable wife, imprisoned in the attic in Brontë's Victorian novel. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha - or Antoinette - functions as a mad woman, while in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she tells her own story from an early age to death. In her novel, Rhys writes a story which both challenges the British Empire, and the oppressed condition of a Creole woman in the patriarchal society of a colonized country. Under the repressive forces existing in this society, Antoinette is doubly oppressed: on the one hand, she is individually exposed to gender related discrimination, and on the other, she is oppressed both as a woman and as an individual of a colonized country, since Creole people are regarded as second class British citizens. As a Caribbean native writer, Rhys evaluates Brontë's novel as the English side of the story.

As *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published in 1966, one hundred and nineteen years later than Brontë's Victorian novel, the shift in its literary form from the nineteenth century to twentieth century is absolutely clear. In her essay "Boundaries and Betrayal in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", Barbara Ann Schapiro states that:

Rochester's lunatic first wife, Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic in Brontë's tale, assumes center stage in Rhys's version. Rather than the haunting "other" of *Jane Eyre*, the madwoman's searing subjectivity indeed defines Rhys's novel. The collapse of rational order, of stable and conventional structures on all levels, distinguishes Rhys's vision and places it squarely within the modernist tradition. Like many modernist works, Rhys's novel explores a psycho-logical condition of profound isolation and self-division, a state in which the boundaries between the internal subjective world and the external object world have dissolved. (Schapiro 1995: 84)

The title of Rhys's novel is probably not chosen accidentally by the author. The Sargasso Sea is located in the northern part of the Atlantic Ocean, which separates the West Indies and England. The Sargasso Sea represents the separation between two worlds that are both culturally and geographically different. In a similar manner, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the story of a woman who does not succeed in making the West Indies her home and, like the Sargasso Sea, "[...] a mass of seaweed surrounded by swirling currents in the Atlantic Ocean, the novel's troubled heroine is suspended between England and the West Indies and belongs fully to neither" (McKenzie 2009: 56).

Antoinette opens her narration by informing the reader about the ambiguity of her situation in the society she lives in: “[t]hey say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks” (Rhys 2007: 15). Mr. Mason’s wealth places Antoinette and her mother outside the ranks of the black population. Even though Antoinette and her family are safer after the marriage of her mother to Mr. Mason, she thinks that “in some ways it was better before he came, though he’d rescued us from poverty and misery” because “the black people did not hate us quite so much when we were poor” (Rhys 2007: 30-31). The black Jamaican people call her a “white cockroach” and the British women and men call them “white niggers”. In addition to living in a male dominated society, she faces the reality of being a citizen in a colonized country, as she is both rejected by her own people and by the British society. Antoinette “[...] is alienated both from the Caribbean and English landscapes, and from virtually all the people in her life” and expresses her frustration and confusion in the following passage (McKenzie 2009:64):

“Did you hear what that girl was singing?” Antoinette said.  
 “I don’t always understand what they say or sing.” Or anything else.  
 “It was a song about a white cockroach. That’s me. That’s what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I’ve heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all. Will you go now please. I must dress like Christophine said.” (Rhys 2007: 93)

As is understood from her life experience, Antoinette’s unfortunate heritage as a Creole woman might be a contributing factor to her lunacy. Even though, she is sensitive before her marriage, it is inferred from the narration that her husband’s refusal to understand her social position and origin pushes her beyond control. Rochester’s attitude towards Bertha in Brontë’s novel is absolutely indifferent, however it is understandable in the romance plot of *Jane Eyre*, as Bertha is described as mad and unsympathetic. Rhys provides readers with possible and potential answers to the questions such as “Who was Bertha?” and “Why was she mad?” According to Josephs,

[...] the figuration of madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is fraught with questions of colonial identity, place, and order. Via representations of Antoinette’s, her mother’s, and her husband’s madness, the novel determinedly resists the categories and hierarchies that colonialism depends on for power and perpetuation. In insisting on “other sides” and third spaces, *Wide Sargasso Sea* complicates the fixity and dualism – black/white, European/native, mad/sane – that those in power are invested in maintaining, especially during periods of social upheaval, such as during abolition (the setting of the novel) and decolonization (the period of its creation and publication). (Josephs 2013: 51)

In accordance with Victorian law, Rochester takes all of her money after marriage. However, he does not only possess her property, but also wants to own her and change her identity. Although he is not in love with Antoinette, nevertheless, as a representative of a patriarchal world, he wants to both possess and dominate her: “I’ll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She’s mad but *mine, mine*” (Rhys 2007:150). He even wants to deprive Antoinette of her name and insists on her accepting the name “Bertha”. When she objects to this, “My name is not

Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?” he responds, “[b]ecause it is a name I’m particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha” (Rhys 2007:122). Through renaming, he wants to exercise his masculine power over his wife. According to McKenzie, “[f]ew things are more closely linked to a person’s sense of self than his or her name. Rochester’s patriarchal onomastics - Antoinette calls it English obeah – is a strategy aimed at controlling her innermost being” (McKenzie 2009: 60). It is clearly seen that he wants to give her a new identity, and Antoinette is aware of it: “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that obeah too” (Rhys 2007: 133). As Müller pointed out,

What is intertextually such an astonishing feat is that in Rochester’s attempt to force a new name on Antoinette and assign to her a new identity, she is put on the way of becoming the “Bertha Mason” of Jane Eyre. We paradoxically witness the genesis of “Bertha Mason”, the madwoman in Jane Eyre, as a result of the pressure and manipulation to which her husband subjects her in Rhys’s novel. (Müller 2007: 71)

#### 4. Different women, same fate

Antoinette’s fate, madness and death mirror her mother’s, Annette. Even their names are similar, and they also share the same isolated condition. As a result of oppression and emotional torture she goes through, Annette suffers a nervous breakdown. Isolated from the society she lives in and saddened because of her son’s mental and physical handicap and then his death, she feels disappointed. In the novel, Annette’s dependence on men is also reflected. After the death of her husband, she has to marry Mason to avoid economic problems. However, her marriage does not save her. Following the mental state that her second husband, Mr. Mason, leaves her in, she is shut away in a house in the company of a black couple. Moreover, the historical and social incidents that take place during those days, such as the freed blacks’ revolt, will drive her to madness, abuse and death. If the relationship between Antoinette and Annette is taken into consideration, one can notice that Antoinette repeats her mother’s fate. Sylvie Maurel emphasizes the close resemblance between Antoinette and Annette in her book titled *Jean Rhys*:

Antoinette cannot unknot family ties and, as the story unfolds, she looks more and more like her mother. Their physical likeness is underlined on many occasions: Antoinette comes to have the same frown as her mother, which, in both cases, looks as if it had ‘been cut with a knife’. The destiny of the daughter repeats that of the mother: both marry an Englishman and both end up sinking into alcoholism and madness. Daniel Cosway brings out the similarities in his letter and calls ‘Rochester’s’ attention to the fact that Antoinette is ‘going the same way as her mother’. (Maurel 1998: 133)

Antoinette is trapped in the same suppressed role that destroys her mother; but Christophine, Antoinette’s nanny in Jamaica, despite being a servant, is more independent and courageous. Christophine, who is given to Annette as a wedding gift, is portrayed as a strong character, in contrast to Antoinette and her mother. In addition, she is a defiant woman of knowledge, who opposes Rochester. However, “[...] like the alleged witches in Europe, she is both feared and persecuted, and was once reportedly jailed for practicing obeah. Rochester goes to great lengths to try to subjugate and destroy her” (McKenzie 2009: 60). She is a strong-willed character trying to convince Rochester that he was mistreating his wife.

Both Brontë and Rhys put a female character in the centre of their novels and discuss the women issue in the patriarchal society, but they deal with the issue in different ways. The novels, written in different centuries by different authors, have common characters and similar events, but they narrate different stories. The different perspective from which the two stories are written causes the difference between the two novels and is also proof that the time when a work is created affects its characteristics. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, published in 1966, is a twentieth-century psychological novel, focusing on:

[...] how the inability to trust one's perceptions results in a psychological disorder in which boundaries between self and other – both human others and the physical environment – collapse, disabling the cognitive constructive processes required for normal human functioning. Notably, this mental instability, which afflicts both Antoinette and her unnamed husband (the Rochester character of Brontë's novel), finds its first cause in the untrustworthiness of human others. (Easterlin 2012: 138)

Brontë's heroine, Jane, maintains a strong stance against anything that confronts her in her struggle to gain a respected position in society. She is very headstrong and rejects any kind of oppression. In the end, she marries, gains her economic independence and so she attains her goal. Rhys's heroine, Antoinette, experiences the isolation of a modern character. She loses her family like Jane, but she cannot put up with the situation as Jane does. She is otherized in her own society, thus she cannot protect herself and suffers significant harm. Both heroines begin their stories as neglected children and experience lonely childhood. Jane is sent to Lowood boarding school, and Antoinette goes to Mount Calvary Convent School. They both manage to survive in a patriarchal society. While the story of Brontë's heroine brings forward the idea that women can achieve their goals in life, Antoinette's story tells the exact opposite.

Many critics consider Bertha to be Jane's double. According to Gilbert and Gubar, Bertha is symbolically a part of Jane – the embodiment or displacement of her rage. The two critics compare the character of Jane Eyre and mad Bertha, asserting that Bertha is Jane's "other", her alter ego, who realizes Jane's secret impulses. Thus, Jane is "the angel" and Bertha "the monster", which "echoes Jane's own fear of being a monster" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 362). Bertha acts as Jane's dark double and reflects Jane's repressed fear and anger. Although Jane always tells her true feelings, she never expresses her anger explicitly. Bertha manifests her anger instead of and for Jane. Jane keeps her anger under control, while Bertha expresses her womanly rage overtly.

## 5. Conclusion

*Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are among the most renowned works of the literary world, and their two heroines, Jane Eyre and Antoinette Bertha Mason, take their place in the literary canon. The novels emphasize the victimization and emotional confusion of the protagonists and, by narrating their experiences, they reveal the oppression of women in the patriarchal society. Although Rhys builds her novel on Brontë's masterpiece *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a work of art that is completely original. Rhys does not just borrow the characters from Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, but constructs her own versions of them. After reading in *Wide Sargasso Sea* about Antoinette's solitary childhood, unrequited love and the

difficulties she has to face, we can never think of Bertha Mason in the same way as before. From a modern and post-colonial perspective, Rhys creates another story, starting from the text of a Victorian novelist, who expresses the women's struggle for their identity, but ignores the role played by colonialism and imperialism in their lives.

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**ISLAND SOLITUDES -  
SELFHOOD AND OTHERNESS IN THE POETRY  
OF MATTHEW ARNOLD AND THOMAS HARDY**

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***Abstract:** Reinforcing the view that the Victorian poetic stance is intimately and inextricably connected with the sphere of ideas, this paper provides an examination of a selection of representative titles by Matthew Arnold and Thomas Hardy, in an attempt to highlight the similarities and differences regarding the poets' treatment of the seminal dialectic between selfhood and otherness, perception and experience, engagement and ascetic distancing.*

***Keywords:** distancing, experience, Matthew Arnold, the Other, Self, Thomas Hardy*

**1. Introduction: Victorian dualism, Victorian poetry, and the “question of otherness”**

In the vocabulary of the largest segment of readers of Victorian literature, “poetry” and “poetic” are words that rarely spring up as prime denominators of the productions of the age. Indeed, if we take but a cursory glance at the main parameters of this period, such an understanding is unsurprising. Situated at the intersection of the old and the new, reeling from the effects of future-shock occasioned by the consequences of a large-scale industrial revolution, which had forced the individual into a competition with the fearful offspring of his own genius, the machine, the Victorian Age came to be defined, by and large, within boundaries laid out through an action-reaction paradigm: faith in progress overshadowed by doubt regarding its long-term effects, social reform threatened by social unrest, shattering of former belief systems in the wake of new intellectual modes (Darwinism, growing atheism), complemented by desperate efforts to strengthen the ethical, moral and philosophical foundations of society (Utilitarianism, reforms of the Church, passéism). The Victorian Age is a fundamentally dualistic one, and its dichotomic nature is visible even at the level of the discussions regarding its artistic and literary preferences. As John Stuart Mill claims in an essay dedicated to examining the nature and expressive manifestations of poetry, the “grown-up men and women of this most grown-up and unchildlike age – the minds and hearts of the greatest depth and elevation are commonly those which take greatest delight in poetry”; opposed to these, there are “the shallowest and emptiest”, those who, “on the contrary, are, at all events, not those least addicted to novel-reading” (Mill 1860: 94). Yet, if “man is not truly one, but truly two” (Stevenson 2002: 55), the two sensibilities are not mutually exclusive: within the gallery of Victorian writers, there are staple names, such as Thackeray, the Brontës or Hardy, who, at least posthumously, were recognised for their contributions in the fields of both fiction and poetry. Therefore, the value of Mill’s statements lies not so much in their critical weight as in hinting at another fundamental Victorian constant, the preoccupation with the relationship *Self – the*

*Other*. “Who are we?” or “where are we?” are seminal Victorian questions dictated by the bourgeois effort of situating oneself, of defining one’s position clearly in a world of changing values. At the time, it acquired two principal manifestations: on the one hand, the concern for those different from the prevailing norms, the “not us” (other social classes, other races, minorities, intruders, outcasts, the other sex) and, on the other, the interest for the potentialities of the self, the “us-but-differently” (virtues of former ages, memorable figures of the past, the golden days of youth or old age, the “enemy within”, or the “homo duplex”). By and large, the former manifested itself as social critique, while the latter resulted in epistemological or ontological questioning.

In this paper, I will attempt at providing some insights into how this particular type of Victorian inquisitiveness received an expression in the poetic works of Matthew Arnold and Thomas Hardy. My choice of authors is motivated by several factors. For one thing, they are illustrative of a major thread running in the poetry of those days – a mood and vision at odds with the general temper of the age, indicative of the poets’ dissatisfaction with the prevailing utilitarian ethos, science, progress or the modern times, and marked, consequently, by a pervasive sense of alienation, frequently vented through elegy and meditation. In addition, between the two writers there are similarities at the level of poetic destiny too. In their own time, both were acclaimed for achievements outside the realm of poetry (social and cultural criticism, respectively, novel-writing). Similarly, the works of both are informed by an acute sense of loss and absence, melancholy and nostalgia. Lastly, personal history had a significant impact on the poetic development of both poets (Arnold’s *Marguerite* lyrics and marriage to Frances Lucy Wightman, or, with Hardy, the death of his first wife, Emma Gifford). Because, in each case, we are dealing with an impressive body of poetry that spans over almost their entire literary careers, I will not aim at an exhaustive treatment of the subject. Neither will my approach be a comparative one, since we cannot speak of a common allegiance of the two to the precepts of a certain poetic school or doctrine, or even of objectively retracable influences. Rather, my investigation will serve as a reminder of a series of key-characteristics of their poetry that can testify to the intimate connection between artistic vision and philosophical thought in the literature of the age (agnosticism and scepticism, respectively, fatalism and Schopenhauerian pessimism).

## 2. “In the sea of life, enisled” – Matthew Arnold and the quest for the “buried life”

The fact that Arnold’s poetic vision will become, for most of his oeuvre, inseparable from his intellectual outlook is evident already in his earliest attempts at expressing himself in verse. In the sonnet entitled “Written in Butler’s Sermons”, he discloses his general perspective on the Self and its relation to the universe, in such lines as:

Affections, Instincts, Principles, and Powers,  
Impulse and Reason, Freedom and Control, —  
So men, unravelling God’s harmonious whole,  
Rend in a thousand shreds this life of ours. (1897: 3)

We are faced here with an atomistic view that testifies to the conflict of opposites (“God’s harmonious whole” vs the essential attributes of human nature).

However, under the surface, “[d]eep and broad,” lies the seat of unity, “the foundations of the Shadowy throne / Where man’s one Nature, queen-like, sits alone”. In Arnold’s view, this untainted core of each individual nature represents the human potential to which every person should aspire. The harmonious original whole can be reconstructed, since the two “natures” are simultaneously complementary and interdependent, “like sister islands seen / Linking their coral arms under the sea” (1897: 4).

This rather perfunctory attempt to express in verse a philosophical perspective indebted to the classical concepts of “harmony” and “equilibrium” is doubly important. For one thing, it develops upon two images that will become staple ingredients of Arnold’s poetic landscape, the “island” and the “sea”; for another, it discloses to us a first type of split or dichotomy - one residing *within the subject*. Additionally, among the same early poetic set we can find examples of texts illustrative of a second type of dichotomy, *between the subject and the world* (or human nature and the natural order). For example, “In Harmony with Nature” is an admonishment dedicated “to a preacher” who professes the impossible task of keeping the inner and outer realms in tune:

To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool: —

Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,  
And in that *more* lie all his hopes of good.  
Nature is cruel; man is sick of blood:  
Nature is stubborn; man would fain adore:  
Nature is fickle; man hath need of rest:  
Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;  
Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest. (1897: 5)

Human nature, Arnold claims, surpasses the natural order: the former is compassionate, composed, discerning and reasonable, while the latter (its antithetical counterpart) is recalcitrant, unstable, unempathetic and insensitive. Consequently, the poet continues, “[m]an must begin [...] where Nature ends” (1897: 5).

The dualistic blueprint laid out in Arnold’s early poems is therefore that of a world situated between the antinomical poles of equilibrium and permanence, respectively, hazard and transience. As Johnson (1952: 156) observes, “[p]oem after poem in the volumes of 1849 and 1852 invokes, through such phrases as ‘man’s one nature,’ the ‘soul well-knit,’ and ‘my nature’s law,’ the classical concept of equanimity as the highest achievement of individual self-integration.” However, even in this early phase of poetic development, Arnold departs from a pure classical perspective. On repeated occasions, having acknowledged that the correspondence between the individual self and the universal order is “a deliberate fiction of the poetic imagination” (Johnson 1952: 153), he advises his subject to follow the inner voice, rather than an ideal situated outside the Self. Poems such as “Religious Isolation” or the later piece “Self-Dependence” contain such categorical statements as “To its own impulse every creature stirs: / Live by thy light, and Earth will live by hers” (1897: 8), or “Resolve to be thyself: and know, that he / Who finds himself, loses his misery!” (1897: 279)

Despite the resolved stance, Arnold’s proposal soon reveals its shortcomings. If, as he himself admits in a letter to his close friend and fellow poet, Arthur Hugh Clough, the Victorian poet “must begin with the Idea of the world in

order not to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness" or, "if they cannot get that, at least with isolated ideas" (1993: 50), attaining and keeping oneself to the inner, unvalourised self, "the buried life", as he calls it in an eponymous poem (Arnold, 1897: 283), implies one of two alternatives. The first is a contemplative retreat from worldly affairs, for fear of corruption by the "disease" of modern life, as in "Stanzas on a Gipsy Child by the Sea Shore" or "The Scholar Gipsy". Indeed, a close reading of much of Arnold's early poetry reveals a markedly ascetic position, or fascination with "solitary and isolated thinkers" (Ellis 2008: 100) or "lonely and isolated figures, alien to their environment", mere "projections of their creator's own essential homelessness in the Victorian world" (Johnson 1952: 147-148). By contrast, the second choice requires the adoption of a pure, unvitiated understanding of the world, exemplary of an escape or distancing from the ordinary self, as suggested by these lines from "Resignation":

The Poet, to whose mighty heart  
Heaven doth a quicker pulse impart,  
Subdues that energy to scan  
Not his own course, but that of Man. (Arnold 1897: 54)

Yet, as he is forced to accept in the same poem, for the common subject neither of these alternatives can suffice in the long term, since one will imply being subhuman, whereas the other, more than what someone could ordinarily attain: "*Those gypsies – so your thoughts I scan – / Are less, the Poet more, than man.*" (1897: 56). As Ellis (2008: 109) argues, Arnold was aware of the dangers of contemplation and scholarship "unrelieved by actions", capable of making a man "a slave to his feelings. Thus, both ascetic distancing from the world and intellectual scrutiny of it are fraught with the same danger: too much Self, conducive to selfishness.

It is precisely when Arnold's poetic subject gives in to personal feelings that a third source of fragmentation of the Self emerges, leading to forced isolation. As illustrated by many of the *Marguerite* lyrics in his 1852 volume, *Empedocles on Etna*, humans cannot escape the grips of chance or accident, and twin souls are thus often doomed to never meet or meet too late:

EACH on his own strict line we move,  
And some find death ere they find love;  
So far apart their lives are thrown  
From the twin soul that halves their own.

And sometimes, by still harder fate,  
The lovers meet, but meet too late.  
- Thy heart is mine! - *True, true! ah true!*  
- Then, love, thy hand! - *Ah no! adieu* (1897: 210)

In the lyrics of this cycle, Arnold frequently assigns the responsibility for alienation and separation of kindred spirits to a supreme "Other", a "God" who forces individuals into island solitudes, decreeing "that their longing's fire / Should be, as soon as kindled, cooled" and placing between them "[t]he unplumbed, salt, estranging sea." (1897: 186) However, the blame cannot lie entirely with external forces, for "otherness" is integral to the Self too, as illustrated in "Absence":

This is the curse of life! that not  
 A nobler, calmer train  
 Of wiser thoughts and feelings blot  
 Our passions from our brain; (1897: 186)

It is a condition that Arnold has intuited in an earlier text, the suggestively-titled "Human Life": "Ah! let us make no claim/On Life's incognizable sea/To too exact a steering of our way!" (1897: 39) What these lines testify to, ahead of their time, is the slippery nature of the Self, a characteristic that will be revealed and studied much later by twentieth century scholarship. The *Marguerite* cycle reveals to us a Self estranged from its own essence, an example of what we may call "self-otherness". According to Cooper and Hermans (2007: 306), "otherness – understood as that which is alien, strange, and radically different from the 'self' – can be experienced within one's own being as well as without". This state of affairs also precludes the understanding of what is external to the Self as a discrete Other, since, as Levinas (1969: 36) has explained, "[t]he alterity, the radical heterogeneity of the other, is possible only if the other is other with respect to *a term whose essence is to remain at the point of departure* [...] to be the same not relatively but absolutely" (emphasis mine). Consequent on this, much of Arnold's early verse will be marked by a rather fatalistic mood, an overarching state of despondency:

We but dream we have our wished-for powers;  
 Ends we seek, we never shall attain.  
 Ah! *some* power exists there, which is ours?  
*Some* end is there, we indeed may gain? (1897: 213)

However, after the 1850's, we witness the gradual onset of a different perspective in his poetry. Rather than exploring the causes of severance, the poet will now labour towards accomplishing unity with the Other and integration in the whole. As a result, "man's one Nature" will also acquire a different meaning - that of the inmost soul which connects all individual selves. In his later poems, Arnold becomes increasingly more concerned with what is "not ourselves", and a common denominator of many pieces of this period is the dialogue with the others (replacing the earlier preference for dramatic monologue). Similarly, his former preoccupation with the Self is replaced by a growing interest in different "selves". Exemplary in this sense is Arnold's masterpiece, "Dover Beach", whose "mantra", Mary Midgley (2006: 228) explains, is "never 'Cogito, ergo sum', always 'Cogitamus, ergo sumus.'" Despite its elegiac tone and the sombre conclusion that the present "[h]ath really neither joy, nor love, nor light/Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain", the perspective never really verges on despair; rather, at the heart of the poetic vision lies faith in the solace brought by shared experience: "*Come to the window [...]/Listen! [...]/let us be true/To one another [...]*" (Arnold 1897: 214, emphasis mine).

According to Johnson, this new Arnoldian mode is circumscribed by different coordinates. Poetry becomes a "cloistral rite" and self-sufficiency, despite remaining an ideal, is seen now as the prerequisite of creativity and peace of mind. Moreover, Arnold's later verse is indicative of the poet's recognition of the necessity to connect the subjective self with the whole body of human experience (1952: 163 ff.). In fact, what the poet achieves at this point is a culmination of certain occasional earlier efforts. As Frances E. Frame (2007: 22) argues (in

reference to the tactic anticipated in “Sohrab and Rustum”), awareness of one’s true identity can be attained only by a departure from the Self and exposure to others, coupled with a thorough understanding of them. Rather than being experienced as alienation, this is a form of homecoming, leading to the reintegration of the subject in the communal space.

Through the wilful immersion in the flux of experience, Arnold’s later poetry becomes an ontic experience. As Hartford (1999: 61) states, Arnold remains a “moralist determined to live life as fittingly as he could”. Mere knowledge of things was not enough in itself; their “sense” had to be “absorbed” in such a way as to permeate one’s being “with a conviction of what was right”. Hence, in these “new poems” his interest shifts to the morally and ethically appropriate way of coping with our human condition, regardless of its natural or man-made limitations. Exemplary in this sense is the aptly-titled “A Wish”. Through a proleptic exercise, the poet envisages himself on the death-bed, indifferent to the actions of his fellow beings (mourning friends, the doctor, the priest), yearning to be absorbed, through sheer force of sensorial experience, into the wholeness of a nature accepted now not as a foreign realm or obstacle to be surpassed, but as a universal, impartial force:

Bring none of these; but let me be,  
While all around in silence lies,  
Moved to the window near, and see  
Once more before my dying eyes, —

Bathed in the sacred dews of morn  
The wide aerial landscape spread, —  
The world which was ere I was born,  
The world which lasts when I am dead;

Which never was the friend of *one*,  
Nor promised love it could not give,  
But lit for all its generous sun,  
And lived itself, and made us live (1897: 289)

With these last remarks in mind, I will turn my attention in the remainder of this paper to another mode of approaching the dichotomy *Self – the Other*, as reflected in Thomas Hardy’s poetic creation.

### **3. “A meeting with despair” – experience, perception and split-consciousness in Thomas Hardy’s poetry**

As in the case of his novels, the vision and mood of Hardy’s poetry stem from his belief in the existence of a triad of forces governing human existence: individual flaws and ill-informed decisions, nature and the elements, and circumstance. The last of these, Hardy tells us in “The Dynasts”, is of the greatest importance, as it is an expression of the inescapable influence upon our lives of some universal force beyond our control:

*What of the Immanent Will and Its designs?  
It works unconsciously, as heretofore,  
Eternal artistries in Circumstance* (1904: 1)

Yet, Hardy's approach to "selfhood" and "otherness" is not only an effect of his own intellectual affinities or personal experiences, but also an expression of the growing sense of scepticism that came to characterise the latter part of the nineteenth century. For this reason, scholarship has generally treated Hardy as a bridge between the Victorian and the Modernist modes of writing. This transitional character of his work and vision makes it difficult to situate Hardy's poetry with precision. As Wells (2014: 185) explains, his poetry has resisted the critical attempts to categorise it, and there has been a long debate whether he should be placed within the Modernist or the Victorian framework, many considering his poetic works as "outside the mainstream of literary history altogether". The task is further complicated by the fact that Hardy's poetic oeuvre extends from the mid nineteenth century to the years after WW I (2014: 195). We may say therefore, somewhat metaphorically, that Hardy's poetry, taken as a single body of works, is itself indicative of "alienation" and "otherness". As Volsik (2004: 115) explains, "[p]aradoxically, just as Hardy was in subtle ways beyond the pale of the aesthetic space constructed by the late nineteenth century, so he is mysteriously outside the space constructed by the twentieth".

Despite being a transitional poet, Hardy remains Victorian in many respects. In fact, as has been the case with Arnold, Hardy's poetic work is another manifestation of the dualistic dimension of the Victorian Age. In this sense, Hardy's verse is distinguished through a "characteristic oppositional stance", the "rugged avoidance of the sentimental" and "apparent radical refusal of consolation", as well as the "maintaining of anger in the midst of sorrow" (Volsik 2004: 112). Moreover, Hardy shares with the Victorian Arnold a somewhat similar understanding of "permanence" and "loss", indicative of an agnostic understanding of the human condition, arising from the experience of "loss of certainty rather than of faith" and expressing a "fundamentally nostalgic drive", frequently taking the shape of an "exploration of shattered and unstable beliefs" (Estanove 2014: 2).

With all this in mind, there is a fundamental difference between the two. If, for most of its duration, Arnold's quest has been directed toward equanimity and stasis ("man's one Nature" sitting "queen-like" on the "foundations of the shadowy throne"), Hardy admits that his own search, regardless of the source of suffering, is a "*pilgrimage* as pain" (1965: 7, emphasis mine). In fact, his entire poetry can be seen as a "call for motion" (Estanove 2014: 4-5), whose ultimate aim is to uncover "layers of individual experience, of human emotion" (Estanove 2014: 8). This leaning towards experience also lends Hardy's poetry a "hybrid" character. Thus, according to Miller (2007: 96-97), Hardy's poetry is "neither feeling nor philosophy, but the impersonal emotional weight of an idea that has been abstracted from the current of lived experience".

This last point is indicative of another difference between Arnold and Hardy, regarding the status of the poetic self. If the former's efforts, as we have seen earlier, are directed towards the "buried life" of the individual, turning him into a poet-philosopher, Hardy emerges instead as a poet-historian (or documentarist), preoccupied with the "buried selves" of others. This endeavour is nevertheless conducive to the subject's realisation of his foreignness to the world, as illustrated in the poem "Old Furniture":

I see the hands of the generations  
That owned each shiny familiar thing  
In play on its knobs and indentations,

And with its ancient fashioning  
Still dallying: [...]

Well, well. It is best to be up and doing,  
*The world has no use for one to-day*  
*Who eyes things thus—no aim pursuing!*  
*He should not continue in this stay,*  
*But sink away.* (1965: 456, emphasis mine)

In contrast with Arnold, in Hardy's poetry solitude does not result from alienation caused by an external force, be it a nature incompatible with the subject or an inscrutable, unholy force. There is no "vengeful god" that finds "ecstasy" in the individual's suffering (Hardy 1965: 7). On the contrary, it arises from the voluntary distancing of perspective or, in a complementary fashion, from the inevitable temporal gap that separates the Self and the Other, which enables the individual to gain true insight into the significance of a fleeting moment (bygone chances, deceiving appearances, etc.).

In fact, Hardy's principal preoccupation is for the knowledge that can be derived from experience. We find an example of this in "The Last Performance", where the recuperatory work of memory is paralleled, in a contrapuntal movement, by the growing sense of unease occasioned by the realisation of missed opportunities, in the wake of the Other's intimations of mortality:

"I am playing my oldest tunes," declared she,  
"All the old tunes I know, -  
Those I learnt ever so long ago."  
- Why she should think just then she'd play them  
Silence cloaks like snow.

When I returned from the town at nightfall  
Notes continued to pour  
As when I had left two hours before:  
"It's the very last time", she said in closing;  
"From now I play no more."

A few morns onward found her fading,  
And, as her life outflew,  
I thought of her playing her tunes right through;  
And I felt she had known of what was coming,  
And wondered how she knew. (1965: 457)

Hardy's perspective is a processual one, his attention being concentrated both on the inconspicuous but long-term effects of momentary experiences and the conglomerate of perspectives required to reveal them - the "thought in two moods", as the title of another poem suggests (Hardy 1965: 457). Miller aptly notes in this sense that Hardy's concern is, above all, for

larger structures of experience than those comprised in the single moment or the limited individual perspective: the reversals and accretions of meaning over time capture his imagination more powerfully than the immediacy of a sudden insight or the felt intensity of a person's experience as it surges or slackens. (2007: 101)

Moreover, as the critic explains further on, “Hardy is aware that experience is perpetually subject to change”. However, this realisation can only come to the subject if he occupies a position “outside himself” (Miller 2007: 111).

The voluntary adoption by the subjective self of the standpoint and status of a discrete “other” has two major implications. On the one hand, it makes it possible for the poet to concentrate on the other occupants of a scene, present or departed - family members, close acquaintances or lovers. Indeed, as Tim Dolin (2012: 11) has noted in reference to the question of “identity” in *Moments of Vision* (the cycle considered by many scholars as the culmination of Hardy’s vision), “the pronoun that puts identity most at risk” is not the “I” of the first person, since the poet’s attention is devoted, almost exclusively, to “those proximate others [...] whose lives ‘always were, are and will be’ and who are ‘living still in the past’”. The second consequence of this peculiar positioning of the subject is the split between the perceptive and the analytical selves, or, to paraphrase Levinson, the disembodiment of vision from consciousness, manifest in the creation of a camera-eye capable of recording a scene without interference from the subject’s personality, the “unself-seeing” (2006: 573).

Based on this remark, we can conclude this brief excursion into Hardy’s verse by referring to another difference between our two poets. As opposed to Arnold, Hardy’s focus is not on the dichotomy *Self – the Other*, but rather on examining the *Self in relation to the Other*. He does this without any subjective moralising or didactic intent, which has the added benefit of inviting the reader to meditate upon the unfolding scene.

Here is the ancient floor,  
Footworn and hollowed and thin,  
Here was the former door  
Where the dead feet walked in. (Hardy 1965: 152)

As these lines from “The Self-Unseeing” indicate, the quality of Hardy’s poetic approach does not reside in declarative statements of a meditative kind, but in the objective, almost painterly presentation of tableaux to be contemplated. Hardy’s “poems ask the reader to consider the question *what do I feel about a situation of this sort?* rather than *how does it feel to find oneself in this sort of situation?*” (Miller 2007: 113) In other words, we are invited to become the distant Others who cannot simply “unsee” the things offered up to our gaze.

#### 4. Concluding remarks: Arnold, Hardy and the dawn of Modernism

As my discussion of the two poets has tried to demonstrate, in its treatment of the relationship *Self – the Other*, Victorian poetry is situated at the crossroads between the old and the new. Thematically, it addresses traditional subjects such as loss, separation, inadaptation, but it also foreshadows the principal concerns and insights of the generation of poets to come: brooding scepticism, a sense of fragmentation, perspectivism, impersonality, even experience of “self-otherness”.

While Arnold and Hardy are not commonly remembered as major poetic voices of the past two centuries (at least, not as principal contributors to a certain emerging poetic canon), their masterful fusion of thought and lyrical expression is proof that the legacy of the Victorian poetry is, indeed, not negligible. Or, as Volsik (2004: 115) has put it, “the Victorian age is not what the Modernists

thought or how they caricatured it”, confirming thus that “Victorian poetry was not poetry to be exorcised so easily and that it still haunts us at many levels.”

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# THE VICTORIAN MACHINE AS THE THREATENING OTHER IN SAMUEL BUTLER'S *EREWHON* (1872)

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*Abstract:* The emergence of machines in the Victorian society aroused mixed feelings of pride and anxiety. Samuel Butler shared this ambiguity. In his dystopian narrative, *Erewhon*, machines became full-fledged characters in a non-metaphorical way. Machines embodied absolute Otherness. This upsetting or even nightmarish irruption of Otherness results in the deconstruction of the Self and the dissolution of identity. 'Who can draw any line?', the narrator asks as the borders separating Nature's three kingdoms seem to be definitely blurred. No wonder that this amazingly revolutionary text was hailed by modern critiques as a piece of visionary fiction.

*Keywords:* Butler, dystopia, evolution, machines, otherness

## 1. Introduction

The themes of 'Otherness' and 'Identity' are at the centre of Samuel Butler's narrative entitled *Erewhon*, published in 1872. Before analysing this work, I would like to come back to the former concept, Otherness, and I will try and shed some light on it by linking it to its etymology. 'Other' comes from Sanskrit *itara*. The word means other *of two*. The Latin word *alter*, which has the same origin, and produced the synonym of Otherness – 'alterity' – was also applied to only two people or things, and so was the Old English word *ōþer*. In Latin, to refer to more than two, you would use the word *alius*, as in our bibliographies: 'Smith *et alii*'. In all those cases, otherness refers to only two identities: to be other is to be different from *one* other person or group. So originally, otherness has always been linked to a *binary* situation. It therefore expresses a radical opposition between two things that are the contrary of each other, like day and night, light and darkness, life and death.

Otherness, with the cogent overtone of the term which results from its origins, is at the centre of Samuel Butler's dystopia. My intention is to suggest that in Victorian Britain, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and in the political turmoil in which the country had been struggling since the Luddite uprising, the Machine is the archetypal Other. The binary opposition is between *us*, the living – whether humans, animals or plants –, and *them*, the mechanical artefacts – that is, inorganic entities.

## 2. Samuel Butler's legacy

Samuel Butler was born two years before Victoria became Queen and he died one year after her death. So his life corresponds almost perfectly with the Victorian era. Butler expressed the fears and fantasies of his time, as a true

Victorian. To escape from a bullying father, Samuel emigrated in 1859 to New Zealand, where he bred sheep for five years. The Antipodes were a major source of inspiration for the setting of his dystopia.

Today Butler is remembered as an innovative writer for his posthumous novel *The Way of all Flesh* (1903), which he refused to publish in his lifetime because it said too much about his own family, but he was certain that he would go down in history as a specialist of evolution, like Erasmus or Charles Darwin. Yet in 1872, the year when Darwin's last edition of his *Origin of Species* came out, Butler published anonymously a book which was to make him famous until today, *Erewhon*. To name the fictitious country that gives its name to the book, he did not use the Greek word *Utopia*, coined by Thomas More in 1516, but, unlike Morris, who was to publish his *News from Nowhere* in 1890, he chose to hide the reference to 'nowhere' behind the anagram *Erewhon*. Incidentally, he loved to put ideas and words upside down and anagrams were bound to please him.

### 3. The *Book of the Machines* and other writings on machines

Butler had always been fascinated by machines and the so called "Book of the Machines" (namely chapters 23-24 and 25 of *Erewhon*) was the core from which Butler built up the whole narrative. He actually developed two opposite views on machines. Let me call them the "serious view" and the "original view". The serious view was what he called the "extra-corporaneous limb theory". According to it, machines are not the threatening Other; they are just extensions of the human body, meant to help it. The spade is thus the extension of the worker's arm. Human beings can rise above the rest of the animal kingdom thanks to the superiority acquired through mechanization.

Officially, this is the theory Butler supported. In the Preface to *Erewhon*, he mentioned it as "this theory (which I believe to be quite sound)" (Butler 1970: 33). In his book *Unconscious Memory* (1880), he took the same view: "I believed more in the views it put forward [= the extra-corporaneous limb theory] than in those [of the threatening Machines]" (Butler 1924: 17). But this rational preference may be doubted. Butler wrote only one article to defend the extra-corporaneous limb theory, "Lucubratio Ebria", written in 1865 when he was back in England. It was sent to and published by the newspaper *The Press*, in New Zealand. But Butler wrote two articles to develop the opposite view of the Machines as threatening Others: "Darwin among the Machines", published in 1863 by the same newspaper, *The Press*, under the signature Cellarius (which is Latin for Butler), and "Mechanical Creation", published in England by *The Reasoner* (1865). And finally, of course, "The Book of the Machines" in *Erewhon* (1872). Of this second view, he said in *Unconscious Memory*: "Besides, there was more amusement in the other view" (Butler 1924: 17).

Every writer would have felt uncomfortable with the idea of defending two contradicting theories. Butler did not. Actually he loved contradicting everyone, including himself. He loved paradoxes, unexpected ideas. He wrote a book to say that the author of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was actually an authoress, a Sicilian lady. G.D.H. Cole (1952: 15) suggested that Butler wanted to take the opposite attitude to his much hated father, "a clergyman of highly conventional mind, with a terror of unorthodox or subversive opinions".

What might be termed eccentricity probably produced the best part of his literary production, including the “Book of the Machines”. I would like now to concentrate on that original view on machines. How can otherness, and threatening otherness, be found in ordinary artefacts just meant to help humankind in their daily tasks?

#### 4. Machines and Otherness

Machines, in the eponymous book, are not yet threatening Others. But they have the potential to become such monsters one day. “Do not let me be misunderstood as living in fear of any actually existing machines; there is probably no known machine which is more than a prototype of future mechanical life” (Butler 1970: 202). The snake is still in the egg. But the nightmarish future is already potentially present in today’s machines. Butler adopts a Darwinian perspective. Remember that his first article was entitled “Darwin among the Machines”. “The present machines are to the future as the early Saurians to man” (Butler 1970: 202). The machines we use are just at an early stage of evolution. Like many animals, they will become smaller in size but much more adapted and efficient.

Machines are the new kingdom, after the vegetable and animal kingdoms (for Darwinians, there is no human kingdom distinct from the animal kingdom – humans are animals). And this new mechanical kingdom is superior to the other two. What is its superiority? A machine is fitter than a human as it never gets tired, never sleeps, never runs out of patience, never makes mistakes. “Our sum-engines never drop a figure, nor our looms a stitch” (Butler 1970: 205). Human capacities, whether physical or intellectual, would not improve considerably in the near future. On the contrary, there is no limit to the potential of machines, which again are just at the beginning of their evolution. We should keep in mind that Butler wrote a century before the development of computer science and Artificial Intelligence (AI), which makes his novel all the more prophetic.

So far, this superiority has been compensated by the machines’ dependence on humans. To be sure, a locomotive never makes mistakes, but it cannot hear the whistling of another locomotive. “One travelling machine calls to another in a shrill accent of alarm and the other instantly retires; but it is through the ears of the driver that the voice of the one has acted upon the other. Had there been no driver, the callee would have been deaf to the caller” (Butler 1970: 203). Locomotives cannot engage in a conversation, even in case of emergency. They need humans as intermediaries. But for the author of the *Book of the Machines*, the day will come when this mediation will be superfluous and machines will be able to communicate with each other directly.

#### 5. Machines making machines

The biggest dependency of machines on humans, today, comes from their being unable to reproduce. But this obstacle to their independence will not last for ever. To be sure, “we are never likely to see a fertile union between two vapour-engines with the young ones playing about the door of the shed” (Butler 1970: 210). Yet, beyond the humour of that description, one can say that Butler was haunted by this fantasy of a creature becoming a creator. It reminds us of the same feeling of awe expressed some thirty years before by Benjamin Disraeli, who, in

his novel *Coningsby* (1844), already wrote: “The mystery of mysteries is to view machines making machines, a spectacle that fills the mind with curious and even awful speculation” (Disraeli 1983: 180).

“Awe” is of course a very strong word. The power of the machine rouses such exceptional fears because it reminds us of the power of God. The machine becomes a modern god that never fails and is far above human weaknesses.

This alarming self-reproducing capacity is not so far away. Butler remarks that right then most parts of machines were already made by other machines. One day, Man could become just an auxiliary in that reproduction, like the humble bee which is an auxiliary in the reproduction of the red clover (Butler 1970: 211). Man could become the humble bee of machines.

If machines become all powerful and can even reproduce, what will happen to humans? What will be left to them? They will become the slaves of machines. Their slavery will be quite comfortable; the cage will be a golden one. Humans will become the dogs of machines. They will be attended and fed and kept in good health, just as we do with our favourite pets. “Although man should become to the machines what the horse and dog are to us, yet [...] [he] will probably be better off in a state of domestication under the beneficent rule of the machines than in the present condition. [...] there is reason to believe that the machines will use us kindly” (Butler 1970: 211). They will do so because they need humans for their survival and well-being.

In a kind of Hegelian process, the slaves will become the masters, and the masters the slaves.

The question I would like now to address is the question of Otherness. Why can we say that the machine is the ultimate Other? My answer is that, in the fiction written by Butler, machines have acquired both consciousness and a total lack of empathy. If the machines were just things, they could not be viewed as Others, any more than quicksand or a glacier crevice could. They would just be dangerous things among things. But the issue of what Butler calls “mechanical consciousness” is addressed right from the beginning. No one would have suspected that the original molten lava of the earth crust had the potential of producing some kind of consciousness. Yet consciousness came. “Is it not possible then that there may be even yet new channels dug out for consciousness?” (Butler 1970: 198). He goes on to state: “When we reflect upon the manifold phases of life and consciousness which have been evolved already, it would be rash to say that no others can be developed, and that animal life is the end of all things” (Butler 1970: 198).

Machines will some day acquire both consciousness and autonomy. They will have their own will, they will make their own decisions. They will exist in a world of autonomous individuals, next to humans, animals and plants. But unlike humans, animals, and perhaps even plants, they will not feel anything. They will be Others in the etymological meaning of the word, that is to say in a binary opposition between organic and inorganic. They will be completely different from any living organisation. Hence the fascination, the ‘awe’ cursorily referred to by Disraeli and extensively used by Butler for his dystopian fiction.

## 6. Conclusion

Such Otherness is unbearable and the only solution is destruction – to destroy the Other, or, to be more precise, to destroy the present potential that may produce it in the future. In other words, to nip it in the bud. In “Darwin among the

Machines”, the author advocated total destruction. “Our opinion is that war to the death should be instantly proclaimed against them. [...] Let there be no exception made, no quarter shown; let us at once go back to the primeval condition of the race” (Butler 1863). Eight years later, in *Erewhon*, he reached what Lewis Mumford called “a historical compromise” (Mumford 1970: 263): all the machines invented after 1600 were destroyed. Ordinary tools could be kept, but no sophisticated artefact that could evolve into the ‘mechanical Other’. Killing the Other before being enslaved by them, that was the solution put forward by the Erewhonians.

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# **AN OLD CAPTIVITY: NEVIL SHUTE'S REQUIEM FOR THE GOLDEN AGE OF AVIATION**

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**Abstract:** *In 1940, the British engineer Nevil Shute Norway, writing as "Nevil Shute", published An Old Captivity. Although the Second World War had begun, Shute chose to look backward, invoking for one last time the romance and excitement of the Golden Age of Aviation (1925-1940). Writing of a small-scale Arctic expedition and a mysterious dream linking two young people, he uses an important civil airplane, two moments of British national eminence in aviation, and an episode of trans-Atlantic flight to characterize the Golden Age. He poignantly invokes an era quickly vanishing, its excitement and innocence destroyed by war.*

**Keywords:** *British aviation history, "Golden Age of aviation", MacRobertson Race, Nevil Shute, World War II*

## **1. Introduction**

When the British engineer-turned-author Nevil Shute (1899-1960) settled down to write his sixth novel, *An Old Captivity* (1940), Europe was going to pieces around him. Shute began his actual writing in 1939; by that time he had seen the German annexation of Czechoslovakia, the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and the world's first experience of *Blitzkrieg*. As the German invasion of Poland began in September of 1939, waves of Ju-87 and He-111 bombers destroyed air defenses and Bf-109 fighters assured air superiority, while the air attacks were coordinated with mechanized *Panzer* units that swept across the country's borders and crushed all ground resistance. The coming of a new kind of war was obvious to all, and only the question of where and when remained (Roberts 2011: *passim*).

Earlier in 1939, Shute had published his fifth novel, *What Happened to the Corbetts*, a cautionary tale attempting to give an accurate portrayal of the effects of aerial bombing upon the British populace. Now, "sick of war, and war talk," he began thinking of a happier time – the first two-thirds of the 1930s, the last months of "the heroic period of aviation" and a time commonly spoken of as the last, glorious days of the Golden Age of Aviation (Smith 2002: 38-39). It was a time when Shute himself, a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and former managing director of the Airspeed aeronautical manufacturing firm, was deeply involved with aviation progress, helping to shape the technological evolution of the airplane (Shute 2000: 171-183). This is the time that he endeavoured to reconstruct, drawing upon one of the period's most charismatic and aeronautically significant airplanes and three historical allusions of varying specificity. Two of the latter recall the newness of aviation in the 1930s and the tentative, but steady exploration of the airplane's potential. A third at book's end explicitly acknowledges some of the notable and most-publicised aerial achievements of the era. Through them he creates one last, nostalgic evocation of the age of aviation's innocence, as the world hurtled into modern war.

## **2. *An Old Captivity***

The story Shute tells is outwardly simple. The time is 1933. Out-of-work pilot Donald Ross is hired by Oxford don Cyril Lockwood to fly him and his daughter, Alix, to Greenland, where Lockwood wants to carry out a photo survey and archeological dig. As the little enterprise's sole pilot and mechanic for their float-equipped airplane, Ross exhausts himself carrying out the expedition preparations, the flight to Greenland, and the actual flying of the survey itself, resorting at last to sleeping pills to deaden his compelling sense of responsibility. At their campsite, unsettled by an increasing attraction to Alix and drugged by fatigue and the pills, he lapses into a near-coma. In that state, he dreams of a former existence as Haki, a Scottish slave of Leif Ericson's Viking explorers.

In the dream, Ericson and his band cross the Atlantic Ocean in search of a timber-rich region, somewhere west of Greenland. As the trip proceeds, Haki falls in love with another of the group's slaves, a young Scottish woman named Hekja. The two win Ericson's respect with their devotion to scouting virgin territories, and he allows them to remain in the New World. When Ross awakens, the Lockwoods decide to end the expedition. Ross himself, recovered from his stupor but shaken by the dream and Hekja's resemblance to Alix, agrees. They set out, flying along the eastern coast of Canada and the United States, at last reaching Cape Cod. There, stunned by the region's similarity to the landscapes of his dream, Ross lands the seaplane in a tranquil bay. Going ashore, he discovers a rock carved with the names of Haki and Hekja. He has indeed lived a former life; Alix at the site also feels echoes of that existence, and the two look ahead to a life together.

### **2.1. The role of aviation in *An Old Captivity***

For all his emphasis on Ross's dream (which occupies only twenty-eight of the novel's 333 pages), Shute's greater concern is aviation's Golden Age. He draws upon the latest in aircraft technology, equipping the expedition with one of the period's most advanced aircraft. He then reflects at length on the many hopeful efforts, educational, scientific, and commercial, to build public awareness of aviation and aircraft technology and to explore and develop the prospects they offered. His novel as a whole points up how that progress leads to aviation's saddening loss of innocence in the present of 1939-1940, as a machine once held to be an elevating and exalting device becomes known instead as a killing machine. Shute takes his readers back to a time before the world changed forever, and the resulting novel constitutes a memorable requiem for the innocence, excitement, and even heroism of the Golden Age of Flight (approximately 1925-1940).

### **2.2. Aeronautical technology and Shute's choice of aircraft**

The Golden Age is characterized by the rapid evolution of aircraft and aircraft technology. The wood-framed, open-cockpit, wire-and-linen biplanes of the World War I era were giving way to sleek, metal-framed designs with single wings and enclosed cabins – craft more comfortable for the occupants and more efficient aeronautically. As an aeronautical engineer and executive of an aircraft firm, Shute of necessity was aware of these advances, and his knowledge is reflected in *An Old Captivity*. Despite his familiarity with British designs, he chooses to equip the Lockwood Expedition with an American-made “Cosmos.”

The craft, he says, is a single-engined, high-winged, cabin monoplane, seating six to seven occupants. Manufactured in Detroit, Michigan, and priced at \$25,000, it is “a fine, robust, workmanlike seaplane, most suitable for the job it had to do.” (Shute 1940: 45, 81) As the story proceeds, readers learn further details about the ship. It is a metal-framed craft with fuel tanks in the wings and a larger reserve tank in the cabin, having a nominal range of fifteen hundred miles under optimum conditions. It is equipped with Edo pontoons (“the colonial type [...] for beaching”) and a Pratt & Whitney “Wasp” engine that will stand up to the rigors of Arctic conditions, and is painted “chrome” orange overall for heightened visibility for rescuers in the event of a forced landing. In Ross’s opinion, it is “a very good machine [...] the best I could get” (Shute 1940: 70, 90-91).

While the *Cosmos* is fictional, Shute bases it upon an actual machine: the Lockheed “Vega”. The first Vegas, designed by Jack Northrop for the fledgling Lockheed Aircraft Company, appeared in 1927 and quickly captured the attention of the aeronautical world. The majority of the Vegas (and their descendants) were wooden – a molded-wood, bullet-like fuselage topped by a wooden wing rigidly braced by a series of internal trusses and covered with smooth plywood veneer. A high-winged, single-engined cabin monoplane, it was a singularly clean design; at a time when biplanes and external rigging were still commonplace, no external struts or wires marred its appearance or created unnecessary drag. In 1929 the Lockheed firm briefly became a division of the Detroit Aircraft Corporation (DAC), which manufactured ten metal-bodied Vegas, all powered by Pratt & Whitney Wasp engines. One of these metal Vegas was bought by Lieutenant-Commander Glen Kidston, a member of the Royal Navy’s Fleet Air Arm, who believed that “British civil aviation [was] much in want of speed and modernization.” Using his Vega, he made record-setting flights from London to Paris and from London to Capetown, South Africa, in 1931, then futilely attempted to persuade the British aircraft industry to manufacture the craft under license (Allen 1993: 13-16, 99-100, 198, 226-227, 242).

Meanwhile, the Vega was rapidly gaining world-wide recognition as a speedy, durable airplane. By 1930, Vegas had captured so many speed records that the company adopted the slogan, “It takes a Lockheed to beat a Lockheed” (Allen 1993: 34). Sir Hubert Wilkins flew Vegas on his Arctic and Antarctic forays of 1928. Wilfred R. May and Victor Horner in 1928 acquired a Vega (painted vividly orange, like Ross’s) and began commercial service in the Canadian outback; their experiences with rigorous winter conditions anticipate those Ross experiences (Gwynn-Jones 1991: 246-247). The respected trade journal *Flight* devoted a detailed article to Kidston’s ship, and later talked at length of potential Lockheed entries in the MacRobertson Race of 1934 (“The Lockheed ‘Vega’” 1931: 288-89; “The England-Australia Race” 1934: 830-831). A final clue that Shute had the Lockheed ship in mind lies in the name he gave the fictional one: “*Cosmos*”. By 1932, the Lockheed firm was producing six designs, four of them named “Vega”, “Sirius,” “Altair,” and “Orion.” All were names implying “a feeling of astronomical speed and distance [...] in the name of [...] the brightest stars in the firmament.” (Allen 1993: 14, 242). The company logo accentuated the astronomical motif, beginning as a star boldly emblazoned on each ship’s vertical stabilizer, and by 1931 evolving into the shooting-star logo that the company still employs. The celestial aura cultivated by the Lockheed firm is obvious, and the Vega’s association with speed, distance, and exploration make it a highly plausible model for the “*Cosmos*” and a noteworthy representative of Golden Age aircraft.

### 3. Sir Alan Cobham and British “air-mindedness”

Having evoked the Golden Age with his re-creation of the Vega, Shute goes on to write of the times themselves. Ross, out of work and newly back in England after four years in Canada, takes a job flying in an air circus – “a thin imitation of the highly successful National Aviation Day run by Sir Alan Cobham” (Shute 1940: 13). The National Aviation Day was an air show touring Great Britain from 1932 to 1935 to stir public awareness of aviation and its possibilities. Cobham had won his knighthood with a series of long-distance survey flights, surveying potential commercial air routes throughout the British Empire (Gwynn-Jones 1991: 204-207). Finding himself a national celebrity, he determined to put his prominence to good use. In 1932 he assembled a fleet of fourteen aircraft, ranging from a ten-passenger, three-engined Airspeed Ferry to a Cierva C.19 Autogiro, a precursor of the helicopter (“National Aviation Day” 1932: 391). With these aircraft, he barnstormed the country to “make Britain air-minded”. The public, he perceived, “was not air-minded at all [...]; few had ever seen [an airplane] at close quarters, and the proportion who had flown was minute. [...] I should have to take aviation to the people.” For the next four years he toured England for six months at a time, selling rides to all who were willing and putting on displays of stunt flying and parachute jumping. He recognized the importance to the public of the airplane and determined to familiarize the populace with the machine’s possibilities (Cobham 1978: 150, 154).

Cobham estimates that over the four years of its existence, the National Aviation Day gave rides to 990,000 persons and exposed countless others to the airplane and its potential (Cobham 1978: 159). In his efforts, he had the support of the leading trade journals of the day. An editorial in *Flight*, soon after the inauguration of the Air Day, remarked that “If a practical realisation of what flying means is to be brought home to the British man in the street and in the village, no one is better qualified to act as demonstrator than Sir Alan” (“Sir Alan Cobham’s Effort” 1932: 296). A later comment, introducing a description of a typical day’s performance, asserted that the “display will do a tremendous amount of good in getting people all over the country to talk aviation, think aviation and practice aviation” (“National Aviation Day” 1932: 391). Cobham’s efforts did much to set the tone of early 1930s aviation in England, and Shute wanted his readers to remember it.

#### 3.1. Aviation and national pride

Less explicit but no less resonant is Shute’s third allusion to events of the Golden Age in Great Britain. In the early stages of planning the expedition, Ross confers with Sir David Lockwood, Cyril Lockwood’s industrialist brother and backer of the enterprise. Before meeting Sir David, Ross sits with the manufacturer’s secretary, Hanson, to prepare a budget for the effort. The first matter to settle is the airplane to be used, and Ross stipulates the \$25,000, American-made “Cosmos”. Hanson, taken aback, observes: “Sir David would very much prefer to use a British aeroplane. [...] Isn’t that possible?” Ross holds his ground: “If you want the best machine for flying in the North, you must go to the States for it. [...] the British manufacturer hasn’t gone for that market.” Hanson reluctantly agrees, and Ross cements the choice by pointing out, “I’ve got to tell him [Sir David] what machine is best for the job” (Shute 1940: 45). It is a brief

exchange, but it recalls one of the major British aeronautical triumphs (and minor *causes célèbres*) of the era.

This was the London-to-Melbourne “MacRobertson Race”, run in October 1934. It occurred, to be sure, a year later than the events narrated in *An Old Captivity*, but its aftereffects were still fresh in 1939. The race was proposed by an Australian candy manufacturer, Sir Macpherson Robertson, who offered a prize of £10,000 “to focus interest on the real commercial possibilities of long-distance flying – isolated flights, fine as some of them were, had failed to stir public imagination for long” (“MacRobertson’ the Man” 1935: 384). Racers would make six required stops, in Baghdad, Calcutta, Singapore, Darwin, and Charleville, Australia, and the craft achieving the shortest overall flying time would be the winner (“The England-Australia Race” 1933: 770). The race drew sixty-four entrants, twenty of which actually took part. Of those twenty aircraft, fifteen were British designs and five American. A British machine, a specially-designed de Havilland D.H. 88 “Comet” flown by Tom Campbell Black and C.W.A. Scott, came in first, but second and third places, respectively, were taken by two American commercial designs – a Douglas DC-2 operated by the Dutch airline, KLM, and a Boeing 247 leased from United Air Lines and flown by the flamboyant air-racer Roscoe Turner. Turner’s 247 was a stock model, save for added fuel tanks, while the DC-2 was flown in its ordinary airline configuration. Scott and Campbell Black’s victory was seen as placing British aircraft design “upon the summit in the eyes of the world” (“Victory!” 1934: 1107), but the success of the American aircraft gave the British aviation establishment pause. Reflecting on the performance of the Douglas and Boeing aircraft, the *Saturday Review* remarked in an editorial that “Britain has won the greatest air race in history; but she has yet to start on an even greater air race; a race in commercial and military supremacy. [...] no British liner, no British service machine in regular use [...] is fast enough to have finished the race within a thousand miles of the American machine” (qtd. in Gwynn-Jones 1991: 259). It was an eye-opening moment for the British aircraft industry.

Tempering British pride at the victory was the furor surrounding the entry of the odds-on favorite son, the Australian airman Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith. Kingsford-Smith’s knighthood had come after an epic flight from the United States to Australia in 1928, using a three-engined Fokker F.VII, and he was immediately considered a front-runner in the MacRobertson Race. When he announced his intention to enter the race, pundits assumed that, like other British contestants, “he should have no difficulty in getting a suitable British machine” (“Machines for the England-Australia Race” 1934: 59). Kingsford-Smith, however, had other plans, and selected an American-made Lockheed “Altair” – a decision that *Flight* announced as “much [...] to be regretted” (“Airisms from the Four Winds” 1934: 436). Nation-wide criticism erupted almost immediately. There were “howls of criticism from advocates of ‘buy Empire,’” and Kingsford-Smith himself was charged with being “un-British” (Allen 1993: 69-70). His prominence as an aeronautical celebrity, the critics said, made him “now one of the most famous aviators in history, [and] he should respect ‘the Mother country’ by employing a British plane” (McNally 1966: 122-123). Sir Macpherson Robertson himself entered the fray, urging Kingsford-Smith “to fly a British machine”, but to no avail (“MacRobertson’ the Man” 1935: 384). Kingsford-Smith’s own response, like Ross’s to Sir David, was blunt: “I tried to obtain a British plane for this race – tried damned hard and couldn’t. The only aircraft the British factories could offer me

was one that was slower [...] than the others in the race. [...] by using such a plane I would be condemning myself to a loser's position. Why should I have to do that?" (McNally 1966: 123). He was, like Donald Ross, committed to picking the best aircraft for the job, regardless of national concerns. Ironically, he had to drop out before the race began, stymied by mechanical problems that could not be corrected in time.

### 3.2. The lingering romance of Atlantic flight

Shute's final homage to the Golden Age occurs late in the book, as the Lockwood party reaches Halifax, Nova Scotia – the penultimate stop on their way to New York and a Cunard liner back to England. A Canadian customs official examines their passports, then muses: "You've made quite a flight. [...] we don't get many Atlantic fliers in these parts." Lockwood is taken aback, saying, "I never realised that we were putting ourselves into that distinguished category," whereupon Ross, amused, replies: "I remember showing you the map before we started, so you can't blame me" (Shute 1940: 317). To fly the Atlantic singlehandedly in 1933 was still a significant achievement, and Shute wants to remind his readers of the novelty of the deed. A spate of trans-Atlantic attempts had followed in the wake of Charles Lindbergh's 1927 flight. Between 1927 and the start of 1933, over sixty aircraft challenged the Atlantic. Some twenty succeeded – but twenty-three crashed or vanished. Thus, as late as 1933, successful flying efforts drew widespread public acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic, and those efforts continued (Gwynn-Jones 1991: 211).

In July 1933 alone, the month the fictional Lockwood flight sets out, Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh embarked in a Lockheed Sirius to explore air routes around the rim of the Atlantic Ocean. Italy's Minister for Air, General Italo Balbo, heading a squadron of twenty-four twin-engined Savoia-Marchetti S-55X seaplanes in a fifteen-day flight across the Atlantic, reached New York and a celebrity's ticker-tape parade. An American, Wiley Post, having already set one round-the-world record in his Lockheed Vega, "Winnie Mae," made a solo around-the-world flight in just over seven days. As July neared month's end, the British fliers, James Mollison and his wife, Amy Johnson, set out on an east-to-west flight from London to New York in a twin-engined de Havilland "Dragon Moth". On their arrival, they were entertained by Amelia Earhart, received by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and treated to a lavish banquet sponsored by the newly formed Transoceanic Fliers of America – the latter a social club comprising "all airmen who have actually flown oceans" (Wohl 2005: 96-97; Roseberry 1966: 333; "Mollison Hailed by Ocean Fliers" 1933: 13). Thus, by having the Lockwood Expedition's flight take place over July and August of 1933, Shute taps an enormous reserve of subliminal resonance to strengthen his evocation of the Golden Age. The Lockwoods are indeed "Atlantic fliers", and to close his novel with the reference allows Shute one last, nostalgic homage to the Golden Age.

### 4. Conclusion

Throughout *An Old Captivity*, Nevil Shute reconstructs a time and a culture rapidly disappearing in 1939. He reminds readers of a world in which much was still new. It was a time, as the American flier Louise Thaden remarked, when "all 'firsts' were *really* firsts" (Oakes 1991: 11). Vast areas of the Earth remained

unexplored, oceans were still to be reliably spanned, and the airplane had yet to live up to its potential. Sir Alan Cobham describes the era as having “a big future, within which a man might do great things and so prove himself”; Shute concurs, recognizing that new discoveries and new achievements remained to be made, and forthright individuals, empowered by the airplane, could do both (Cobham 1978: 4). The last years of the Golden Age were years when the populace at large was only beginning to learn the potential of the air, and each new individual achievement revealed more of that potential.

All of the aircraft Shute invokes in the novel, fictional or real, are civilian. Some are commercial, the foundation of the fledgling transoceanic air services. Others are part of general aviation, machines manufactured for a person of ordinary means and making flight’s exalting, exhilarating qualities accessible to all. None is military. Yet Shute is writing in a time when military aviation was coming to the fore, when armed aircraft were regularly seen overhead and found on the front pages of each day’s newspaper, and when reports from the Continent attested to the airplane’s efficacy as a weapon. Shute, like Cobham after him, recognizes that

The face of aviation changed radically during the 1930s. When that decade began, it was a matter of open cockpits and [...] the concern of a dedicated few; things were remarkably like what they had been in 1914. But by 1940 things had become much more as they are now [in 1978]: technical development had made aviation into a very complex and expensive affair, and the war was already making it into a vast national concern. (Cobham 1978: 171)

It is no wonder that *An Old Captivity* is permeated by an elegiac mood; the world had changed and there was no going back.

Shute, as engineer and novelist, accepted the changes. The aeronautical world that he faced in 1939 was changing from the one that he had known and worked for; indeed, it was a violation of all that he – and aviation supporters generally – had envisioned for the future. But it was real and had to be dealt with, and therein lies the poignancy of *An Old Captivity*. Shute the engineer looked at reality and understood what must be done; by mid-1939 he was deeply engaged in working with Sir Dennis Burney in secret-weapons development, and within a year he was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, assigned to the navy’s Inspectorate of Anti-Aircraft Weapons and Devices (I.A.A.W.D.) (Anderson 2011: 121-131). The man who had once developed and manufactured aircraft was now engaged in a mass effort to develop means of destroying them.

Shute the novelist reflects a similar shift in focus. His next five novels after *An Old Captivity* deal solely with issues growing out of the war. They report the routine of Coastal Patrol flying (*Landfall*, 1940), the peril of bombing raids over Germany (*Pastoral*, 1944), and the drama of hush-hush raids on German seacoast emplacements in France (*Most Secret*, 1945). He does not return to the topic of peacetime aviation until 1948, when he sets *No Highway* squarely in the present and writes of technical problems affecting an advanced airliner in regular trans-Atlantic service. Of the nine subsequent novels that round out his career, only three substantially involve aviation and aeronautical technology. One of these, *Round the Bend* (1951), stays in the historical present, tracing the growth of a British air-freight business operating in the Middle East. Another looks to the future; *In the Wet* (1953) offers an alternative view of British life in 1984 as seen through the eyes of an Australian officer attached to the Queen’s Flight. Only one looks back:

combat flying in World War I is central to *The Rainbow and the Rose* (1958). Shute never again wrote of the Golden Age. As a novelist he went on to take a longer view, accepting the changes wrought by wartime technology and reflecting upon their possible peacetime applications. He acknowledged the “war, and war talk” swirling around him in 1939, wrote of the war for its duration, then in his later works took up the aeronautical issues emerging from a post-war, more technically advanced world (Smith 2002: 38-39). *An Old Captivity* is his farewell to aviation’s mythic past, as the novel’s last words make clear. These go to Ross. Standing hand-in-hand with Alix before the carved stone, he murmurs, “We shall remember them” (Shute 1940: 333). He refers to Haki and Hekja, but can as easily be seen as Shute referring to the heroic days of flight. The author takes one last, nostalgic view backwards: to a time when two young Scots could find excitement and substance in exploring a new world, and to a time when the prospects and future of the new world of aviation seemed rich in excitement and substance. He called it a “heroic” time, for it allowed, even encouraged, individuals to step forward and make a difference in the world. Shute the engineer understood and accepted reality – but Shute the novelist understood and regretted what that reality had cost the nation and the culture. He tried, one last time, to remind his readers of the optimism and energy of the Golden Age even as he buckled down to the study of mass destruction and the new technologies to come.

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# “THE LURE OF THE ISLAND”: THE WORKINGS OF POWER IN GOLDING’S *LORD OF THE FLIES*

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*Abstract:* Featuring a group of stranded school boys, Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* is concerned with how social relations are established and ordered in the absence of civilization. In this paper, I will refer to the so-called “island lure”, to argue, in Foucauldian lines, how it constructs power relations and incites power struggles. I will try to prove that “power is everywhere”, that is, despite the authority of Ralph and Jack, power is owned by the individuals, the schoolboys, and is that which causes them to erupt in new behaviours, anarchic and savage.

*Keywords:* civilization, Foucault, Golding, “island lure”, power, power relations

## 1. Introduction: islands, heterotopias and power

A rather pessimistic novel, with war at the backdrop, Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* experiments with the idea of a political order that would keep human impulses at bay. Featuring a group of stranded British school boys, the novel is concerned with how social relations are established and ordered in the absence of civilization. It is exactly the setting, an uninhabited Crusoean island, that is the key element for the construction of these relations. In discussing the role of the island in the story, I will rely on two concepts, space and power, for whose argumentation I will draw particularly on Foucault.

Cast in the form of a heterotopic island narrative, to use the Foucauldian perspective, the novel features a newly formed social organization made up of schoolboys and emerging out of the need for rescue and survival, characterized by the desire for power, and projecting certain power relations. Before I take this discussion to the point, I would like to elaborate on the idea of an island for the novel setting that allows for such a social structural organization.

In literature, islands, as remote sites, have often been selected as the setting for stories of shipwrecks, sea storms or other forms of disaster that open up to the lost character(s). Quite customarily, in these narratives, a mainland in miniature is reprojected by reenacting the social organizations of the world left behind, so that the social order of things is reversed, conflicts are resolved, fates are redirected, political order is restored, human character is tested, and so on, as can be demonstrated by a reading of the many famous works of literature from the *Odyssey*, *Utopia*, to later ones, like *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Tempest*, *Nostromo* and many others. In this way, islands, as detached pieces of land with “finite geography” (Baldacchino 2007: 165), have always exerted strong appeal on literary imagination for the creation of stories with real or imagined islands that idealize, romanticize, mythologize, criticize, or demonize the setting and its inhabitants.

In accounting for the attractiveness islands have had as a setting in fiction, Mansfield (2016: 11) links their appeal to their self-containedness, remote

geographical distance, and disconnection from the “familiarity of the continental mainland,” which allow for “critical, subversive or fantastical alternatives to the dominant norms of the mainland [to] be played out, tested or lived.” She calls the island “a space of invitation” in that it invites the “imagining of the potential actions that could occur upon its shore” and “a projection of narrative and imaginary” (ibid.).

Appearing in various kinds of stories, from children’s to adults’, from the fantastic, romantic to the realistic or futuristic ones, projecting utopian and dystopian visions, island narratives continue to appeal to their readers exactly because they introduce a world, real or imagined, geographically removed and socially detached from their mainland. I will return to the idea of the appeal of the island to discuss it in additional terms.

For the purposes of this reading, I would prefer to take the viewpoint of the island as space, far removed from the mainland, that opens up to the stranded, to the lost and to all forgotten and abandoned souls. Here Foucault’s concept of heterotopia is relevant and can apply to the island in *Lord of the Flies*. I will not engage here in the discussion about the controversy of the term as used by Foucault on several occasions, but will rather draw on its definition in Foucault’s translated version of his 1967 lecture “Des espaces autres” by Jay Miskowiec in 1986 as “Of other spaces.” Foucault used the term “heterotopia” on three different occasions. He first made mention of the term in the Preface to *The Order of Things*, first published in 1966. For my reading, I have resorted to its 2002 edition published by Routledge. Foucault used the term the same year in a radio talk, part of a series of lectures in literature and utopian studies. In 1967, Foucault used the term again, this time in a lecture intended for a group of architects. The lecture would later become known as “Des espaces autres”, published only in 1984 in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no. 5 (October 1984) and translated by Jay Miskowiec as “Of Other Spaces” in *Diacritics* no. 16 (1), (Spring 1986). The use of the term by Foucault in these three different texts has often presented inconsistency and caused some controversy, but I will not be concerned with it, as in this paper I will refer to the definition of heterotopia in “Of Other Spaces.”

In discussing what he calls “external space,” “[t]he space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws [sic] at us” (Foucault 1986: 23), Foucault views it as divided into two types, the utopias, that is no real places, and the real places, those that exist “in every culture, in every civilization,” or “the counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted,” which he (idem: 24) resorts to calling heterotopias, sites that assume a variety of spatial forms and that ‘obey’ a set of six principles (Foucault 1986) in order to be described as such. In my view, the island seems to comply with the fifth and sixth principles, that is, described as a “system of opening and closing that both isolates and makes them penetrable” (idem: 26) and as having “a function in relation to all the space that remains” (idem: 27).

To elaborate it further, in Foucault’s view, the fifth principle presupposes that entry to the heterotopic site is not easy, like to any other public site, but is either enforced, as is the case of entry to prison, or “the individual has to submit to rites or purifications” (idem: 26). Whether the former or the latter, entry to the island in Golding’s novel is compulsory, owing to a plane crash. Later, the island

does somehow shape itself as a rite or purification setting. The other principle presupposes the creation of heterotopia as the other real space, of illusion or compensation, which exists in relation to our real space. The island appears as a space of compensation, in that the children try to create a space “as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled” (idem: 27).

In this view, my idea is to suggest that in this novel the island is not projected as a utopia, a ‘nowhere’ where justice is restored and rules are established, but is instead represented as a heterotopia, a relational construct, that is, an extension to the real world, as another space, a localizable and recognizable space that opens up to the lost kids, to be temporarily inhabited by them and modelled after their world, but in which all that it represents is recreated, tested and challenged in the absence of things from the adult world.

At this point, I would like to return to the question of the appeal that the isolation and self-containedness of these geographical settings have on the fictional characters and how it is manifested in fiction and what aspects of human character it activates. In this regard, I want to connect the discussion to the concept of power. In the absence of many power-holding social structures, the stranded and the lost try to restore power either by assuming themselves a power position or by granting it to those who can best master it. In “The Lure of the island: A spatial analysis of power relations”, Godfrey Baldacchino (2012) argues about the so-called “island lure,” a concept I have borrowed for the title of this paper, and how it incites power, power relations and struggles. To argue about it, he resorts to several thinkers, but, for the purposes of this analysis, I will sum up a couple of relevant ideas resulting from his analysis: 1. Doreen Massey’s postulate that the social is constituted in the process of the production of the spatial. Space and social structures are thus mutually constitutive; and the outcome of this dialectic turbulence is always varied, fragmented, contested (Baldacchino 2012: 56); 2. “To island is to control.” (idem: 57); 3. The power of the island image, that is, “the opportunity to ‘play God’ on an island is too tantalizing to resist. We would make islands in our own image (Denning, 1980; Denning, 2004)” (ibid.).

The inhabitation of the island by the community of the stranded boys will enact a certain social organization, chaotic, although tending towards the systematic, that will feature power relations and power shifts between the boys. My intention is to discuss power from a Foucauldian perspective, drawing on Foucault’s concept of power, more precisely, on his relational concept of power, that is, that power is everywhere, his propositions that “it is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (Foucault 1978: 94), that “[w]here there is power, there is resistance” (idem: 95) to power, that “[p]ower comes below” (idem: 94), that is, he does not see power as a binary construct between the ruler and the ruled but rather sees it as a product of the manifold relationships enacted in a social body as a whole, and most important, his idea that power works through discourse (Foucault 1978). In this framework, space, in this case, the island as a heterotopia, aids in the process of subject formation and in establishing social relations, or power relations, or power shifts, as I will argue later.

## **2. The reconstruction of power relations in *Lord of the Flies***

At the beginning of the novel, the island opens as a heterotopic space, introducing the entry to it of a boy with fair hair, Ralph, whose dissociation from his mainland world is announced by the removal of markers from this world, like

his school sweater. The island begins to shape itself as the other real space, through the construction of the island image by evoking images of a rock, a scar, a lagoon, creepers and trunks. The dissociation from the mainland world is further reinforced by Piggy's question to Ralph: "Where's the man with the megaphone?" (Golding 2001: 2), a question which contains two other markers from the mainland world, the man and the megaphone, the man, a representation of adulthood, and the megaphone, a symbol of authoritative or commanding discourse. This implies that Piggy, realizing that they are stranded, looks for some authority, for some adult presence to depend on, to account for responsibility for him (It is no coincidence that he mentions his auntie all the time in the beginning.), to guide and take care of him. Ralph's reply: "This is an island. At least I think it's an island. That's a reef out in the sea. Perhaps there aren't any grownups anywhere." (2), highlights two things, the opening of a space, but not of any space, of a space to be owned and commanded, since there are no grownups. Such a space soon cherishes his imagination with inner ambition for authority: "The fair boy said this solemnly; but then the delight of a realized ambition overcame him" (2).

The meeting between Ralph and Piggy soon establishes a power relation between the two boys. Ralph is the boy who immediately masters the geography of the island, whereas Piggy has to depend on other things or people for his living. He depends on his glasses for his sight, he has got asthma and needs his auntie to take care of him, he keeps asking about the man with the megaphone and the pilot, which probably explains why he sees in Ralph the boy to depend on for their survival on the island. Their relationship is a good illustration of the idea that power comes from below, in this case, from Piggy, who, recognizing in Ralph a boy stronger than himself, grants him power. Thus, in the new space, power imposes its authority through the individual who can better make sense of it and control its confines. Moreover, the discovery of the conch would illuminate Piggy with an idea that will further strengthen Ralph's power and Piggy's position as the person who grants it to him:

"We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting. They'll come when they hear us -" (Golding 2001: 10).

The conch can be seen here as a symbolic replacement of the megaphone. By connecting the announcing function of the megaphone with the sonorous property of the conch, Piggy has the idea that they can use it to summon people. What is more, in this line of argumentation, the question of discourse is involved. The conch is the physical tool that will empower a commanding discourse. Recognizing his physical inability to blow it because of his asthma, Piggy again grants this power to Ralph, thus reinforcing his authoritative position. Piggy's intention in doing so is to establish some social organization on the island, in order to be rescued. The trick works and everybody obeys the call of the conch:

"The children gave him the same simple obedience that they had given to the men with megaphones." (11)

The parallelism suggests that they gave Ralph the same response as to adult authority. Soon a discursive social structure is established upon voting Ralph as the chief, a structure in which power, discursive power, is regulated through the possession of the conch:

“And another thing. We can’t have everybody talking at once. We’ll have to have ‘Hands up’ like at school.”  
 He held the conch before his face and glanced round the mouth.  
 “Then I’ll give him the conch.”  
 “Conch?”  
 “That’s what this shell’s called. I’ll give the conch to the next person to speak. He can hold it when he’s speaking.”  
 [...]
   
 “And he won’t be interrupted. Except by me.” (25)

Two kinds of power are determined here in this extract, that of discourse, symbolized by the conch, that is, he who possesses the conch will have the right to speak and thus be heard, and that of the chief (“won’t be interrupted. Except by me”), that is, authority. Ralph’s insistence on having rules suggests a tendency to rebuild the new space, modelling it after the adult examples so far known to these kids, to which everybody consents in the beginning, even Jack:

“We’ve got to have special people for looking after the fire. Any day there may be a ship out there” - he waved his arm at the taut wire of the horizon - “and if we have a signal going, they’ll come and take us off. And another thing. We ought to have more rules. Where the conch is, that’s a meeting. The same up here as down there.”  
 [...]
   
 “I agree with Ralph. We’ve got to have rules and obey them. After all, we’re not savages. We’re English, and the English are best at everything. So we’ve got to do the right things.” (34)

At this point, I would like to distinguish between authority and power, although both are closely connected. As far as authority is concerned, only two of the boys stand out for possessing it, Ralph, the fair-haired boy who has the conch and who is eventually, with Piggy’s support, elected chief, and Jack, who also stands out from his group when he first appears:

The boy who controlled them was dressed in the same way though his cap badge was golden. When his party was about ten yards from the platform he shouted an order and they halted, gasping, sweating, swaying in the fierce light. (12-13).

Jack’s golden badge seems to have the same symbolic function as Ralph’s conch. He who possesses it stands out from the rest as the authority. Ralph has the conch, Jack has the golden badge. Semiotically, this reads as Ralph wants to command by way of obedient order, whereas Jack by way of distinction.

The following description of the boys, Piggy, Ralph and Jack, is worth noting, since it demonstrates that, although each of them is endowed with something remarkable from the rest that can be translated into power, this does not necessarily mean that they are equally successful at exerting it. In the author’s description:

[...] what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack. But there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance; and most obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch. (15)

Although Jack wishes to be chief from the very beginning, the voting, another token of the kids' attempts to socially and democratically reconstruct the new space, makes Ralph the chief. Despite the fact that both boys possess authority, it is the latter who manages to exert power more successfully, so that he finally becomes the chief.

### 3. The workings of power through discourse

In this part of the paper, I will try to argue that *Lord of the Flies* is a good illustration of Foucault's idea that power works through discourse. Power, which in the novel can be literally identified with authority, namely political authority in miniature, is symbolically represented by the quest for the possession of the conch. Despite the fact that the struggle for power (authority) centres on Ralph and Jack, who represent two different types of leadership, each of the other boys is a source of power *per se*. In order to analyse how power works, I will focus on Ralph, Jack, Piggy and Simon, more precisely on their discourse, all four very different from each other and each characterized by a specific discourse.

The relational discursive structure, as outlined at the beginning of the novel, features Ralph as the leader of the group. His discourse relies on rationality, that is, Ralph insists all the time that they need to be rescued and as such he proposes that they lit a fire to keep the smoke going up, so that passing ships might note it and come to rescue them. But the new spatial distribution does not sustain his discourse for long. The only one who abides by his discourse is Piggy, whom he urges to shut up all the time in the beginning, but whose power of reasoning he comes to appreciate later on. And the only token that stands for power is the conch. The kids obey because he has the conch. They also obey him at the beginning for the fun of it. They think that this could be a game to play, like in books:

At once there was a clamor.  
 "Treasure Island -"  
 "Swallows and Amazons -"  
 "Coral Island -" (27)

This intertextual gesture of shouting out titles from famous island narratives for children could also be seen as an indication of the expectations they have about their own experience on the island. They have not understood yet that living in the new space involves responsibility and assuming a social role as in the mainland world, and is no joke or adventure to be lived, like in the island narratives.

Although Ralph tries to adopt an adult attitude towards the new social structure, he fails to recognize that his rules are reminiscent of the old space. While the discourse of rules grants him power and eventually authority at the beginning of the novel, it also produces the first signs of resistance to it. As Foucault (1978: 95) maintains, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance," and thus here comes the first real power shift. Although the act of handing down the conch is meant to represent a power shift, Jack disregards it, undermining Ralph's authority:

Jack was the first to make himself heard. He had not got the conch and thus spoke against the rules; but nobody minded. (Golding 2001: 75)

Ralph mentions rules all the time, but he fails to realize that this kind of discourse is void in the new space, because, in these circumstances, rationality

alone does not count much. To his discourse, the author opposes Jack's discourse. By assigning him the role of leader of the hunting group, Ralph has granted him power. Ralph overlooks the fact that, finding themselves on an uninhabited island, the kids need not only be concerned with being rescued, but also with coping with the new space, utterly unknown to them, which means coping with fear and hunger. The little kid's discourse of the beast enacts the presence of fear in the other kids, a fear which Piggy and Ralph dismiss, but which Jack, having felt it himself in his first attempt to kill the pig, knows and uses in his anarchic discourse, managing to shift the order of authority.

“What are we? Humans? Or animals? Or savages? What's grownups going to think? Going off - hunting pigs - letting fires out - and now!”  
 A shadow fronted him tempestuously.  
 “You shut up, you fat slug!”  
 There was a moment's struggle and the glimmering conch jiggled up and down. Ralph leapt to his feet.  
 “Jack! Jack! You haven't got the conch! Let him speak.”  
 Jack's face swam near him.  
 “And you shut up! Who are you, anyway? Sitting there telling people what to do. You can't hunt, you can't sing -”  
 “I'm chief. I was chosen.”  
 “Why should choosing make any difference? Just giving orders that don't make any sense -”  
 “Piggy's got the conch.”  
 “That's right - favor Piggy as you always do -”  
 “Jack!”  
 Jack's voice sounded in bitter mimicry.  
 “Jack! Jack!”  
 “The rules!” shouted Ralph. “You're breaking the rules!”  
 “Who cares?”  
 Ralph summoned his wits.  
 “Because the rules are the only thing we've got!”  
 But Jack was shouting against him.  
 “Bollocks to the rules! We're strong - we hunt! If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down! We'll close in and beat and beat and beat -!” (79)

As can be seen from the above, in order for Jack's discourse to gain power, it is not enough to appeal to fear and hunger; the discourse also has to be directed against those who do not think the same, thus showing resistance to Ralph's rationality. It is in this way that Ralph is made the third outcast, besides Piggy and Simon.

Piggy is the typical representation of Foucault's idea that power is not a possession, but a strategy. Realizing that his mind (knowledge), body (physical appearance) and social status (lower-middle class) do not help him establish authority but, on the contrary, pay him back with ridicule, Piggy takes a grip on the only object invested with power, the conch, in order to have his shift of power, or aligns himself with Ralph, who comes to appreciate his opinion and rationality. Recognizing his weaknesses, Piggy uses his reasoning and argumentative logic to achieve power through the discourse of others, Ralph's, in this case. Piggy's discursive failure, however, results in his “inability to recognize the truth of Simon's belief that the beast is within all people. [...] Since he sees himself as a rational good person, he refuses to recognize that he also has evil characteristics”

(Reiff 2010: 82). So, when Ralph, after Simon's death, is shocked by their participation in it and calls it murder, Piggy corrects him and calls it an accident, refusing to accept Ralph's recognition of their inner capacity for evil:

"I'm frightened. Of us. I want to go home. Oh God, I want to go home."  
 "It was an accident," said Piggy stubbornly, "and that's that." (Golding 2001: 140)

Simon, the second outcast, another physically weak boy, characterized by his romantic reticence, gains power when his inner discourse is placed in the mouth of the lord of the flies, a literal translation from Hebrew of "Beelzebub" (*New World Encyclopedia* 2016). His inner discourse acquires prophetic power because, unlike the other boys, who fail to either see or admit the evil in themselves, he is the only one who, despite his isolation and hesitation, courageously meets and releases the presumable beast, the corpse of the dead parachutist hanging in the trees, and recognizes the evil in himself and in mankind:

"Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!" said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. "You knew, didn't you? *I'm part of you?* Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?" (128; emphasis mine)

Although Simon masters the truth of the beast through his internal discourse, his clumsiness and failure to master the external discourse do not give him the power to convey this truth. His earlier failure to articulate "mankind's essential illness" (Golding 2001: 77) reappears when his crying out of the true knowledge of the beast is shut down by the frenzied tribal dance of the boys shouting: "*Kill the beast! Cut the throat! Spill the blood! Do him in!*" (136; emphasis in original), which they literally do by killing Simon, whose crawling down the hill ironically makes him be mistaken for the beast. Quoting Boyd, Reiff (2010: 83) sees Simon "as a prophet and Christ figure":

As a prophet, it is his role "to awaken men to the truth of their own sinfulness" (Boyd, 17) [...] As Simon tries to bring them knowledge of the truth, [...] the boys stab him to death, thus "re-enacting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ" (Boyd, 17). (Reiff 2010: 83)

#### 4. Conclusion

The reconstruction of the island as a heterotopia allows for an examination of the possible social organizations that this brings about. In the attempt to recreate established social structures modelled after the mainland world, the boys lose control, and the structures, i.e. the rules, the voting, the meetings, the order and so on, are destroyed, changed, or challenged. The entry to the island is compulsory, but they fail to come out of it purified, some rite of passage does take place in their weeping recognition of the end of innocence. In trying to reconfigure the new space by making use of social applications known to them, they fail to see or admit the unpredictability of the island and its resistance to submit to any kind of organization.

In trying to establish social order and cope with the setting, the characters try to abide by some persuasive discourse. Although the novel features four types of

persuasive discourse, Piggy's smart and logical discourse, Ralph's rational and organized discourse, Simon's prophetic internal discourse and Jack's anarchic discourse, it seems to suggest that the island promotes the discourse of the survival of the fittest. The new spatial environment eliminates Piggy's and Simon's discourse, because it conveys truths that kids refuse to hear or admit. Not coincidentally, this type of discourse is attached to physically feeble characters that are less fit to survive or exert their power.

What can be finally said is that although power, particularly the resistance to power might induce individuals to erupt into new behaviours, the kids' behaviour in the novel does not contribute to the establishment of a better order. Resistance to power incites in them savage and anarchic behaviour to the point of directing all instincts not only to pigs, but worse, to their friends, Simon, Piggy and Ralph. While Simon's death, which should have brought them knowledge is overlooked, Piggy's death echoes that of the pig (with the descriptions applying to both being rather similar), whereas Ralph is saved only by adult intervention. In the end, this game of power leaves them with nothing but tears and the epiphany of the loss of innocence and a war at doorstep:

Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy.

The officer, surrounded by these noises, was moved and a little embarrassed. He turned away to give them time to pull themselves together; and waited, allowing his eyes to rest on the trim cruiser in the distance. (Golding 2001: 182)

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# DARK HUMOUR AND SOCIAL SATIRE IN JONATHAN COE'S *WHAT A CARVE UP!*

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***Abstract:** Literary critics have tried to establish a clear boundary between humour and satire, since the two concepts are used interchangeably. What mostly differentiates satire from everyday laughter is its instructive feature, because unwise derision cannot serve as the basis for satire. This paper aims to analyse the effects of dark humour and satire in depicting contemporary Britain, focusing on Jonathan Coe's political novel *What a Carve Up!* In the novel, the instances of humour can be subsumed under more than one label. Comedy can be seen as a remedy for pain, but in essence it has a greater purpose: to reform the society by exposing human limitations.*

***Keywords:** humour, politics, satire, Thatcherism, vulnerability*

## 1. Introduction

“If you could not cleanse the world of its deformities, you could at least laugh at them”, argued Jonathan Coe in his essay “The Paradox of Satire” (Coe 2013: 3435). Laughter and the use of comic forms as weapons in the battle against social and political injustices are recurrently employed in Coe's novels. In “What a Carve Up!” (1994), his choice of comic becomes a political statement, a direct criticism of the economic and social cuts during Margaret Thatcher's premiership that severely impacted the lower and middle classes. In the novel, Coe addresses issues related to the effects of Thatcher's policies in a satirical register, with a tone not so much of wrath as of disgust, indirectly reflecting on the aims and efficiency of using humour as a means to expose the faults of the society. This paper aims to analyse the effects of dark humour and satire in depicting contemporary Britain, focusing on “What a Carve Up!”, the novel which brought Jonathan Coe the reputation of being “probably the best English novelist of his generation”, according to writer Nick Hornby (see cover of “The Accidental Woman”, 2011).

One of the characteristics of Postmodernism is its playfulness, the preference for comic forms and structural irony. Some critics consider that this has led to a form of excessive detachment from the collective traumas, while others argue that the comic forms provide a periphrastic way to explore the ethical dimension of writing. Nonetheless, there is a delicate balance between irony and ideology, humour and melancholy and comedy and ethics. Through radical incongruity of form and vision, both Postmodernism and the comic vision seek to short-circuit the dominant culture's repressive impulses (Olsen 1990).

## 2. Humour and satire

Literary critics have tried to set a clear boundary between humour and satire, since the two concepts are used interchangeably. The problem of laughter is a

complex one, considering there are several intraspecific nuances of laughter, like mockery, cynicism or rakish laughter. Nonetheless, what mostly differentiates satire from everyday laughter is its instructive feature, because unwise derision cannot serve as the basis for satire. In “What a Carve Up!”, the instances of humour can be subsumed under more than one label. Comedy can be seen as a remedy for pain, but, in essence, it has a greater purpose: to reform the society by exposing human limitations. The forms of humour in the novel range from satire to the absurd and, as Prado Perez (2016) pointed out, they “[draw] on elements of defamiliarization and distancing to highlight reflexivity”. If humour and laughter were meant to establish connections between people, to create intimacy, in the case of Coe’s novels, they isolate the characters and emphasize their vulnerable intimate difficulties.

### **2.1. Dark humour – humour based on human vulnerability**

One of the most interesting aspects of comedy in the novel is its tendency to deliberately expose the characters’ sensitivity, to reveal a permanent layer of human vulnerability. This way of exposing frailty can be regarded as dark humour, a form of comedy that involves discomfort and amusement at the same time, a humorous way of approaching something very serious or sad. In “What a Carve Up!” comedy lies in the benevolent exposure of frailty in social or personal contexts, which is exemplified by the abundance of jokes made at the expenses of the characters, exposing their limitations and casting a new light on them.

The protagonist of the novel is Michael Owen, an ordinary writer who is offered the deal to pen the official biography of the Winshaw family. His life is presented parallelly to the story of the Winshaws, but at the same time he serves as the link between the two apparently separate storylines. Owen is a rather passive figure, a quite depressed man, whose destiny seems to be mocking him. He epitomises the outcome of the realities of Thatcherism. His life is affected by the society and his career is affected by his life. Throughout the novel, Michael becomes part of an endless vicious circle, without an exit door. His misfortunes and his weaknesses become the engines that trigger the social criticism in the novel. Being the only character whose life is depicted from an early age and whose development is the most evident, Michael is an object of empathy for the readers, who at some point may identify themselves with him and join him in his quite passive struggle against the social and political system. As Northrop Frye (1971: 224) argues in “Anatomy of Criticism”, “two things are essential to satire; one is wit of humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque, the other is an object of attack”.

Michael is presented from the beginning as a quite unaccomplished writer. The main weakness of his novels is that they miss a certain element of passion. This aspect is revealed during a conversation with his editor, Patrick, who explains to Michael that his characters seem incomplete due to a lack of sexual dimension: “there’s a crucial aspect of your characters’ experience which is simply not finding expression here” (Coe 2008: 104-105). Nonetheless, whether the issue is only about stylistics or if it is in fact, as Michael claims, about authors “[putting] sex in their books just to help the sales along” (104), is arguable. It should be borne in mind that Michael Owen is the narrator, and that he is also a novelist, therefore he manifests the tendency to make the events follow a certain plot. A previous scene, when Hilary Winshaw decides to write her first novel, can be regarded as a good

support for his views related to contemporary literature and what the audience seeks to find in a book. In an interview for *Hello!*, a meta-fictional magazine, Hilary declares that she is “currently working on [her] first novel”, but she “actually [hasn’t] started working on it yet, but [she knows] it’s going to be very exciting, with plenty of glamour and romance” (80). During further private discussions related to the topic, Simon asks Hilary to “think of a title, a single word, preferably, Lust or Revenge or Desire or something”, an issue to which Hilary replies that she would “leave that to their marketing people”, because she is going to “have enough trouble writing the bloody thing” (81). The situation alludes to the annihilation of culture under Thatcherism, to the degradation of artistic values and the neoliberal idea of art.

Following the conversation with Patrick, the editor, Michael gives up on his principle that fiction is a higher truth than everyday truth, than ephemeral truth or than truths that seem significant one day and irrelevant the next (102). Although, in the beginning, he strongly disagrees with Patrick, Michael tries to “improve” his writings by creating a sex scene, which becomes one of the most representative instances of humour based on vulnerability in the novel. The trials and errors of composing such a scene reveal Michael Owen’s fear of women, and the actual process of writing brings about laughter. He starts by organising a list of words related to the topic, and then proceeds to compose the puzzle which results in an artificial and shallow piece of writing:

*He pulled her roughly towards the bed*  
That wouldn’t do. I didn’t want to make it sound like rape.  
*He pulled her gently towards the bed*  
Too wimpish.  
*He drew her towards the bed*  
*He looked in the rough direction of the bed, and raised a provocative eyebrow*  
*A suggestive eyebrow*  
*He raised one of his eyebrows*  
*He raised both of his eyebrows*  
*He raised his right eyebrow provocatively*  
*He raised his left eyebrow suggestively*  
*Raising both of his eyebrows, one provocatively, the other suggestively, he pulled her gently in the rough direction of the bed. (295-296)*

Michael tries to adapt his writings, as well as his own life, to the society around him, and he fails miserably. His misfortune is what causes laughter, but it is not a joyful laugh, but what Laurent Mellet (2016) calls a “mislaugh”, laughing when one should not laugh, because “the emphasis is first on the individual’s vulnerable intimate hurdles”. Also, in Coe’s novel “A Touch of Love” (1989), Aparna, one of the main characters, provides a definition of irony, compatible to the idea of mislaughing: “What people call irony in literature is usually called pain and misunderstanding and misfortune in real life, and that doesn’t make me smile” (Coe 2014: 174).

As it has been argued, Coe manifests artistic concerns over the form of fiction and comedy and, through the character of Michael Owen, he tackles the issues of comedy and laughter inclusion in a literary work, as well as of the readers’ reception of it. A representative scene is that with Fiona reading Owen’s biography of the Winshaws, while he was expecting her to burst out laughing at what he considered to be “the most riotously funny scene in the whole novel”:

I could see that she was on about page fifty, roughly a quarter of the way through: only a few pages from what was (or so I had thought when writing it) the most riotously funny scene in the whole novel. I sat back and kept a discreet watch on her from the corner of my eye; taking care, at the same time, to ensure that she had a good view – should she care to glance up – of my profile (...). Ten or twelve pages went by, in as many minutes, without producing anything in the way of visible amusement: not even the distant echo of a smile, let alone those helpless spasms of laughter I had fondly imagined the passage provoking in its readers. What on earth was the matter with her? (Coe 2008: 236)

Here, once again, Michael is incompatible with his society, he fails to share the same taste in art with the people around him. He is trapped in a nostalgic state of paralysis, unable to face the reality of adulthood.

In terms of form and structure, the humorous aspect of the novel and its playfulness lie in the unusual sequence of the chapters in the novel, which begins with the Prologue and ends with the Preface. Therefore humour has a destabilising power over the narrative. Also, “What a Carve Up!” is a genuine metafictional work, which starts as biography and ends as a novel, and where the metafictional writer becomes part of his own narration. Although Michael Owen dies as a character in his work “The Winshaw Legacy: A Family Chronicle”, he still remains the author of the story, and somehow is allowed the chance to write the ending.

## 2.2. Satire as a political weapon

Looking from a different perspective, as the English essayist William Hazlitt (1845, Lecture I: 2) pointed out in his essay “On Wit and Humour”, the “man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be.” One of the main differences between comic and satire consists in the fact that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end to itself, while satire derides, it is a powerful artistic form used mostly as a weapon. Through satire, historical reality is exposed to ridicule. Among the features of satire in “What a Carve Up!” there is the critique of specific human behaviour, persuading the reader to view it disdainfully, aiming to encourage a certain degree of social change. Moreover, the author himself admitted in an interview at the FILIT festival in Iaş i, Romania (4<sup>th</sup> of October 2017) that, when he wrote the novel, he mildly tried to manipulate the readers into believing in what he believed, because he thought satire can stimulate a change.

Around Michael Owen, the figure of the frustrated writer, gravitate the members of the Winshaw family – a many-tentacled monster that has strangled England –, whose history Owen was commissioned to write. Thomas – the banker, Henry – the politician, Mark – the arms salesman, Hilary – the idolized columnist, Roddy – the art dealer, and Dorothy – the brutal chicken and pork farmer, embody the evils of Thatcherism and, as one of their own asserts, they are “the meanest, greediest, cruellest bunch of back-stabbing penny-pinching bastards who ever crawled across the face of earth” (188).

In “What a Carve Up!”, with the Winshaws, Coe transfers ideology from its abstract status to a physical status. Here irony is predominantly specific in intention, and the contrast between appearance and essence, between what it is and what it should be, is striking. As Coe suggests in the novel, through Michael Owen in the stance of the writer,

We stand badly in need of novels, after all, which show an understanding of the ideological hijack which has taken place so recently in this country, which can see its consequences in human terms and show that the appropriate response lies not merely in sorrow and anger but in mad, incredulous laughter (247).

Satire has the ability to highlight the deficiencies in those human behaviours and the social problems that result from them in this way become absurd, even hilarious. Hilary Winshaw despises not only the people she writes for, but also the very words she writes or speaks on television. Thomas is the banker who finances the enterprises of his own family and is, at the same time, the investor in the film industry that epitomises the sexualisation of the commercial film industry. Henry poses as the respected politician, but he is in fact the opportunist mastermind behind the politics of privatisation and deregulations. Roddy is the art dealer who has nothing to do with the real values of art. Dorothy is the “queen” of the Brunwin empire, who profits from the brutal rules of intensive farming and from the production of unhealthy food targeted at the lower strata of society; and Mark is the cynical weapons trader who benefits from the geo-political instability and the conflicts in the Middle East. In the novel, distorted reality becomes the standard for normalcy, and the comic grotesque becomes the norm rather than the exception.

The last part of the novel is written in the form of a gothic horror tale, a whodunnit detective story, mirroring the comedy horror film “What a Carve Up!”, which functions as a stylistic template for the novel. The climax of the novel, when a will is read to the Winshaws at the creepy Winshaw Towers, recreates the world of the film, and at the end, the reader gets the impression that in Coe’s Britain, the impotent and the greedy are linked in their indissoluble Englishness only by a helpless nostalgia for the past. The death of the Winshaws at the end of the novel represents a symbolic death of the political regime.

### 2.3. The (in)efficiency of satire

Jonathan Coe regards “What a Carve Up!” as his most purely satirical novel. In an interview with Vanessa Guignery in 2016, Coe confessed that “What a Carve Up!” is “an unashamedly and unambiguously anti-Thatcherite novel”, which, to his surprise, didn’t put an end to Thatcherism at all. He also explained that the implication of the statement made in the novel that “There comes a time when greed and madness become practically indistinguishable” is that “Britain, and the West generally, has crossed the line between the two at some point, and if we learn to live alongside greed and even tolerate it, then we’ve crossed a line into madness” (Guignery 2016). Therefore, anger dissolves into laughter instead of bringing about political changes.

In the article *Will satire save us from the age of Trump* (2017), Coe argues that the present moment calls for absurdism, caricature and tomfoolery, “because these are the only ways to capture our current reality”. Also, he underlines the fact that it is “one of the perennial paradoxes of satire that it only gives pleasure to those who already share its points of view”. For those who do not, satire could even turn offensive and may have a negative effect.

On the other hand, even though the general purpose is to point out the flaws of the political, social, and economic establishments during Thatcher’s time, the comic sphere also distances the narration from the cruelty of everyday life. On October 4<sup>th</sup> 2017, at the FILIT festival in Iași, Romania, Jonathan Coe claimed that

by laughing at problems, people find a way to take their mind off the actual difficulties those problems may cause. According to the relief theory (Freud, 2003) – a psychoanalytical approach on comedy –, humour may serve to overcome sociocultural inhibitions, reveal suppressed desires, and therefore facilitate relief of the tension caused by one's fears. As Bergson (2013: 64) stated, "laughter addresses reason and intellectual powers and brings a momentary anaesthesia of the heart".

### 3. Conclusion

In his novel "What a Carve Up!", Jonathan Coe tries to mildly manipulate the reader in order to make him/her share his beliefs, and in order to stimulate change through satire. Humour is therefore used with a corrective purpose, it involves a moral reform of the society. While some critics argue that comic forms lead to an excessive detachment from the collective traumas, others consider that they provide a periphrastic way to explore the ethical dimension of writing.

Even though humour and laughter were meant to establish connections between people, to create intimacy, in the case of Coe's novels, they isolate the characters and emphasize. In the novel, laughter is rather a response to confusion and disorientation, to a lack of control over the events or their interpretation. The critiqued behaviour deconstructs itself in the satirical work by being obviously absurd and exaggerated. Therefore satire can be used as a tactical weapon, for political subversion, but it can be effective only in the particular society it refers to.

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# IMAGES OF POVERTY IN BRITISH SUFFRAGIST THEATRE

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**Abstract:** *British suffragist associations, such as the Women Writer's Suffrage League, Actresses' Franchise League and The Pioneer Players, produced and performed plays in support of the women's suffrage; they were an ideal medium for disseminating suffragist propaganda and other topics related to women's issues, like the shameful labour conditions women had to put up with and, as a consequence, their poverty. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which enabled women over the age of 30 to vote for the first time in the general elections of December 1918, and the 100th anniversary of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918, allowing women to stand for election to the House of Commons, this paper aims to analyse the representation of working women's poverty in several suffragist plays.*

**Keywords:** *British suffragism, poverty, theatre, women's rights*

## 1. Introduction

The publication in 1792 of Mary Wollstonecraft's essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, was the first time that ideas about the rights of women in general and the concept of citizenship were brought together, influenced by French and North American movements of the time, which extended in this latter case to freedom and the abolition of slavery. In 1851, Harriett Taylor Mill argued for women's right to vote and full citizenship for all women in her essay *Enfranchisement of Women*, which demanded the right to vote for women; she also collaborated with her husband, John Stuart Mill, on the essay *The Subjection of Women*, in which they denounced the domestic slavery endured by women. In 1867 the *National Society for Women's Suffrage* was set up, followed by the creation of suffragist groups in Bristol and Birmingham in 1868, when the first meeting in favour of suffrage was held in Manchester. Not only were there movements in favour of votes for women, but also proposals to change existing legislation that regulated divorce and women's property at that time. The suffragist organisations that were created to defend the rights of women operated differently from one another, and their messages were varied. The most famous organisation was the WSPU (*Women's Social and Political Union*), founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), famous for its slogan: *deeds not words*. During this period, many suffragists were arrested and others went on hunger strike. We should also not forget another prominent organisation: the *National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*, founded in 1897. However, the *Women's Freedom League*, founded by Charlotte Despard, as a consequence of a disagreement with the WSPU, played an essential role in the transmission of the ideas, since the League had its own propaganda department and published a newspaper called *The Vote* (see Cockroft and Croft 2010: 17-22).

The studies carried out about different organisations do not agree on which was more important, and it appears that the working system was based on collaboration among them all, known as a *sisterhood based on diversity*. Hence, there were organisations that collaborated with political parties, others with a marked religious sense, and others still that largely defended the rights of women workers and not only voting rights.

## 2. Suffragist theatre

In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women began to become involved in public life, and to be aware of the tremendous importance of being visible in public spaces and decision-making processes. In this study, I am particularly interested in organisations related to the theatre: the *Women Writers' Suffrage League*, *Actresses' Franchise League* and *The Pioneer Players*.

In 1908, two members of the *Women's Social and Political Union*, Bessie Hatton and Cicely Hamilton, formed the *Women Writers Suffrage League*. In that same year, an organisation was founded with ties to the aforementioned *Actresses' Franchise League*. Among its members, who often belonged to both associations, were Elizabeth Robins and Kitty Marion. Other actresses who joined were Winifred Mayo, Sime Seruya, Edith Craig, Inez Bensusan, Ellen Terry, Lillah McCarthy, Sybil Thorndike, Vera Holme, Lena Ashwell, Christabel Marshall, Lily Langtry and Nina Boucicault. The first meeting was held in the Criterion restaurant, in Piccadilly Circus. The *Actresses' Franchise League* was open to anyone involved in the world of theatre, and it produced and performed plays in favour of women's voting rights, such as *How the Vote was Won*, co-written by Christabel Marshall and Cicely Hamilton. Other popular plays performed included *Votes for Women* written by Elizabeth Robins, and Hamilton's *A Pageant of Great Women*. In the year 1911, the *Actresses' Franchise League* reached 550 members. This association had three key functions: convincing members of the theatrical world of the need to extend voting rights to women; working to achieve this by means of education; and helping other organisations (Cockroft and Croft 2010: 46). To perform these three functions, the *Actresses' Franchise League* acted as a liaison between actresses who supported the campaign in favour of women's suffrage and suffragists, so that actresses helped women suffragists, teaching them to speak in public and disguise themselves, so as to avoid being arrested at the end of their political speech. Hence, writing for public performance gave women a powerful voice with immediate impact. Furthermore, female playwrights could organise on stage that which was not permitted off stage. Their voice was multiple: agent and subject of action, subversive and feisty.

As indicated by Sheila Stowell (1992: 42), the *Actresses' Franchise League* saw plays as a new medium for propaganda, and opened up a department dedicated to this task, under the direction of Inez Bensusan, which reviewed the plays and published them. As proof of this conviction regarding the influential power of political theatre, in issue 12 of the suffragist newspaper *The Vote*, published in December of 1913, Cicely Hamilton spoke about the difficulty ordinary people had understanding the new ideas presented to them, and expressed her hope that those who did not have much sympathy for the demands made by women could enter the theatre, even under false pretences, and ultimately be won over by the plays they saw.

These plays did not deal exclusively with the issue of the vote, but also examined other issues of vital importance for women, such as work and their role in society, among others. In general, these plays were short, often monologues, performed in the afternoons to small audiences. The plays were not in themselves subversive, nor did they constitute aggressive propaganda; hence at first glance they did not frighten off audiences who were not sympathetic to the suffragist cause, although their message was clear and direct, and together with the use of irony and humour, they constituted a very powerful subversive discourse. In this regard, Sheila Stowell (1992: 439) states that the suffragist theatre was undoubtedly written as part of an organised system, to consciously propagate political ideas. Croft (2009: 12) explains that, although some of these plays were dramas, many of them were comedies, written to entertain and to inspire undecided people and convert them to the cause. As noted by Aston and Reinelt (2000: 4), the style and content of these plays were largely determined by the political reality of the time. The message had to be clear, accessible, educational and entertaining, with a style that Aston and Reinelt (2000: 5) call *agritpop comic-realism*.

Stowell (1992: 66, 67) explains that these plays offered female playwrights an opportunity to develop their own ideas and plays, shielded from the highly limited structures imposed on commercial theatre by the patriarchal hegemony of the time. In this regard, Cockin, Norquay, Park (2007: iv, volume I) explain that theatre gave female activists the opportunity to appear in public in a safe environment, whilst capitalising on this opportunity to gain experience for their public discourses and speeches in other types of activities. However, in spite of this freedom to write, suffragist literature in general was not characterised by innovation in the experimentation of new forms, but instead was based on the description of events that had taken place in the women's activities, such as their meetings, arrests, demonstrations and strikes. This is a consequence, evidently, of the ultimate aim of these plays: propaganda. In fact, many of the plays portray conversions of men and women to the suffragist cause, always maintaining the same social structure, so that the women were not a threat and neither were their demands. As Cockin, Norquay, Park add (2007: ix, volume III), the setting in many of the plays is the interior of a house, which highlights the challenge of transferring the domestic sphere, with its realism and naturalism, to the public and political landscape. Furthermore, as indicated by Katharine Cockin (1998: 132), writing or acting was an attempt to challenge "the common anti-suffrage arguments, such as the proposition that men should occupy a separate sphere".

One of the initiatives of the *Actresses' Franchise League* and *Women Writer's Suffrage League* was the theatre society known as *The Pioneer Players*, founded in 1911 by Ellen Terry, as president, and her daughter Edith Craig as stage director, actress, producer, designer and director, together with her partner Chris St. John. The plays produced and performed by this company were largely comedies that dealt with many issues apart from suffrage, such as inequality in work and women's salaries compared to men, maternity, and divorce, among others (Croft 2009: 18). Together with this initiative, in May of 1913, in the newspaper *Votes for Women*, Inez Bensussan announced the birth of a "new feminist theatre", based on a cooperative system. This project, known as *The Woman's Theatre*, did not last long, however, since the outbreak of World War I forced it to be turned into the *Women's Theatre Camps Entertainments*. Kelly (1994: 129) also notes that the members of the *Actresses' Franchise League* thus found a way of committing to peace through war; although they put on more than 634 performances and hired

hundreds of artists, the original idea for *The Woman's Theatre* gradually disappeared, dissolved among the various suffragist factions and the progressive acquisition of rights for women.

### 3. Images of poverty in suffragist theatre

One of the direct consequences of not having the right to vote is not having other rights as citizens or rights that, even if they have been conceded, are trampled on. One of the plays that highlight the defencelessness of women in everyday life, with the consequences this implies, is *A Change of Tenant* (1908), written by Helen Nightingale. In this play, a landlord who owns various homes decides to stand in the local elections, and he needs to secure as many votes as he can, starting with those of the people to whom he rents out these homes. One of these houses is rented out to the widowed Mrs Basset, who receives notice that she is to be evicted from the house she lived in throughout her whole married life. When asking for the reasons behind this eviction, which will force her to live on the street, she receives the following answer:

SQUIRE – The reason why we cannot, er, renew your lease is a little difficult to explain, especially to a lady. [...] We must feel on the polling day that we have done everything we possibly can, and we should not be able to feel that if we had allowed voteless tenants on the state. [...] you are unfortunately quite valueless. (112-113)

The fact that this woman does not have the right to vote and cannot, therefore, vote for her landlord, makes her completely valueless and useless. Throughout the play, we witness the conversations that take place between the landlord and the replacement tenant found for the widow, after which, owing to the idiocy of this replacement, the widow is not evicted from the property after all. The play shows us the reality of what was happening at that time, but, at the same time, 'teaches' us that being a man is not necessarily synonymous with intelligence and, therefore, as a moral, the fact that men have the right to vote does not guarantee that they know how to use that right.

The working problems of women, and often their consequences, such as poverty, are important subjects in suffragist theatre, including the tragicomedy *Diana of Dobson's* by Cicely Hamilton (1908). In this play, the lead character, Diana, works as a sales assistant in a large department store, under great pressure and constant punishments from the managers for any behaviour considered 'inappropriate' by the rigorous social standards of the firm. In the opening scenes of the play, the sales assistant is talking to her co-workers in the shared dormitory, about how poorly paid they are and the insalubrious conditions they are forced to live in:

DIANA – [...] Usual thing – unbusinesslike conduct. According to her, every single thing I do comes under the heading of unbusinesslike conduct. Oh, how I loathe the words – and how I loathe the Pringle. [...]

DIANA – I wish I could see anything at all humorous about Dobson's high-class drapery emporium. Grind and squalor and tyranny and overwork! [...]

DIANA – Save, good Lord, me save! On thirteen pounds a year, five bob a week, with all my clothes to find and my fines to pay.

SMITHERS – I suppose, you know, Miss Massingberd, that the firm prefers that the assistants should not discuss the amount of their salaries.

DIANA – I don't wonder, I'm glad the firm have the grace to be ashamed of themselves sometimes. Well, I'm not bound to consider their feelings and I shall discuss the amount of my totally inadequate salary as often as I like. I get five bob a week, with deductions, and I don't care who knows it. I only wish I could proclaim the fact from the housetops. Five bob a week for fourteen hours' work a day, five bob a week for the use of my health and strength, five bob a week for my life. (11-12)

At the end of the first act, a letter arrives for Diana, telling her that she has inherited 300 pounds from a distant cousin who has passed away. Diana decides to spend the money on something she will remember, like travelling, and being free for a month. So she invents a new identity, becoming the widow Massingberd and travelling to Switzerland. There, she meets Sir Jabez, the owner of a large department store, similar to that owned by the Dobsons, where Diana worked before receiving her inheritance. In one of the conversations that take place between them, she reveals how the owners make their money:

SIR JABEZ – [...] That's business, Mrs. Massingberd. Give the people what they want, good or bad, silk or shoddy, and give it 'em half penny cheaper than they can get it anywhere else.

DIANA – The question is, how do you manage to give it them a halfpenny cheaper than anyone else? [...]

SIR JABEZ – Wages is one item

DIANA – That's the way to make money, to get other people to work for you for as little as they can be got to take and put the proceeds of their work into your pockets. (29)

This game of false identity is eventually discovered when Diana reveals the truth to her suitor, Bretherton, whom she met in Switzerland under her false widow identity, and to whom she tells all:

DIANA – Earning five shillings a week and having a hell of a time. I shan't apologise for the unparliamentary expression, it is justified. I'd had six years of that sort of slavery, been at it since my father died. Then one night, I got a solicitor's letter, telling me that a distant cousin of mine was dead, and that I had come in for three hundred pounds.

BRETHERTON – Three hundred pounds?

DIANA – Of course, if I'd be a sensible woman I should have hoarded up my windfall, invested it in something safe and got three per cent for it. But I didn't. I was sick of the starve and the stint and the grind of it all, sick to death of the whole grey life, and so I settled to have a royal time while the money lasted. All the things that I'd wanted, wanted horribly and couldn't have, just because I was poor, pretty dresses, travel, amusement, politeness, consideration, and yes I don't mind confessing it, admiration, they should be mine while the cash held out. I knew that I could buy them, every one, and I wasn't wrong, I have bought them. I've had my royal time. I've been petted and admired and made much of, and only for the sake of an imaginary fortune, I know, but still I have enjoyed the experience, enjoyed it down to the very ground [...] and now, it's over and the money's spent, and [...] I'm going back. (46).

The final act takes place months later on the docks of the River Thames, as her suitor is trying to survive on barely any money, and accidentally comes across Diana, also surviving as best she can in absolute dire poverty:

DIANA – If you want to know, I’m here because I have nowhere else to go. I’m resting on this seat until a policeman moves me on. [...]

DIANA – Captain Bretherton, I’m homeless, penniless, I haven’t tasted food for nearly twelve hours, I’ve been half starved for days. (p. 57)

In the play *Votes for Women* (1907) by Elizabeth Robins, the issue of poor homeless women is taken up again. The main protagonist, Vida Levering, is spending the weekend at Lady John’s country house. With her are members of London’s wealthiest class, including a member of parliament, a young heiress, and a politician. The ladies are in the parlour, planning on how to help and collaborate with the church. Vida Levering proposes building houses for homeless women, since although there were shelters for men during the Victorian era, women had nowhere to go, if they were alone and abandoned on the streets. In her attempt to convince these wealthy women of the idea, Vida Levering talks about a real case that she knew of: “She had been in service. She lost the train back one Sunday night and was too terrified of her employer to dare ring him after hours. (...) she was plainly dying”, (39). She even confesses that she found herself in the same situation when she was young: “I do know something about the possible fate of homeless girls. I found there were pleasant parks, museums, free libraries in our great rich London” (42). The second scene in the play takes place by Nelson’s column, at a suffragist political meeting. One of the members of the public, a working woman, talks about the need to have the right to vote so that women can lead a decent life: “Don’t you know there’s a third of the women o’ this country can’t afford the luxury of stayin’ in their ‘omes? They got to go out and ‘elp make money to pay the rent and keep the ‘ome from bein’ sold up. Then there’s all the women that ‘aven’t got even miserable ‘omes. They ‘aven’t got any ‘omes at all” (61).

In a much more dramatic tone than in the plays selected previously, Edith Lyttelton, in *Warp and Woof* (1904), sets out to present the harsh conditions faced by seamstresses. The owner of the business, Madame Stéfanie, needs to make a considerable number of gowns for a party. The seamstresses complain because they cannot work any faster, and one of them, Phoebe, is even ill. But Madame Stéfanie does not care: “No buts for me, the gowns are to be finished. Do you suppose I can disappoint these ladies? It’s your own fault, for not organising better” (175). At the end of the first act, the employees talk about the need to denounce the terrible working conditions and poverty they are enduring, even though some of them express an absolute lack of trust in the protection system. In the second act, Madame Stéfanie instructs her employees about what they are to do if a work inspector appears: “If by chance we are caught, you’re all of you to refuse to answer any questions, do you understand?” (184); and she forces them to work into the night to finish the gowns on time, in spite of the doctor’s warnings about Phoebe’s risk of haemorrhage. In scene V of act 2, the inspector, Miss Donaldson, enters the shop and speaks to the girls and to Madame Stéfanie: “You have already tried to mislead me, Madame Stefanie. And if you will not terrorise them, I believe they will tell me the truth. [...] The law is for your protection, but it can do nothing if you yourselves try to defeat it” (186). Eventually, one of the employees, Theo, talks to the inspector:

THEO – I’ll answer your questions Miss, and I’ll tell you the truth.

MISS DONALDSON – Good, why are you here tonight?

THEO- To finish up the gowns for the Duchess of Berkshire's ball, miss.  
 MISS DONALDSON – Today is Friday. When did you begin working on Monday?  
 THEO – At seven o'clock.  
 MISS DONALDSON – And Tuesday?  
 THEO – Six thirty [...] no six, Tuesday and Wednesday.  
 MISS DONALDSON – And Thursday?  
 THEO – Oh, we didn't home Wednesday night at all.  
 MISS DONALDSON – Did you get any sleep?  
 THEO – We had one hour or two when we could be spared.  
 MISS DONALDSON – And last night?  
 THEO – Some of them lay down on the floor with a pillow for a short time.  
 MISS DONALDSON – How early do you generally start work?  
 THEO – Never later than seven.  
 MISS DONALDSON – How long did you have for dinner today?  
 THEO – Ten minutes.  
 MISS DONALDSON – And tea?  
 THEO – Five minutes. (189)

In spite of this confession about the working slavery to which the seamstresses are subjected, and as a consequence of her poverty, seamstress Phoebe dies from a haemorrhage. Madame Stéfanie shows no remorse, however, only relief that the girl died in hospital: “Dead! Well, I never! Good Lord, what a mercy it didn't happen in the workroom, there'd have been an inquest [...]. I always said she wouldn't last” (204).

#### 4. Conclusion

I have left Margaret Nevinson's *In the Workhouse* (1911) until last, as an example not only of the propagandistic features of these plays, but also of their power to change the women's situation. This play mirrors the appalling living conditions in the workhouses and points out that, according to the Coverture Act, a married woman had no separate legal existence from her husband and was forced to enter the workhouse. Two years after the play was first performed by *The Pioneer Players*, the law changed, largely owing to it and to many other plays that denounced the situation of women. In the highly revealing prologue, the author clearly explains the situation:

[...] In this play I have attempted to illustrate from life some of the hardships of the law to an unrepresented sex, the cruel punishment meted out to women, and to women only, for any breach of traditional morality, the ruin of the girl, the absolute immunity of the male, the brutality that attacks an idiot, the slavery of the married women, the singular advantage a clever woman can take of laws apparently made for the maintenance of a wickedness and vice and punishment of virtue. [...] In writing this little play, I make no apology for its realism that is true, I have tried to show the parlous conditions of 20th century womanhood under the unjust Gilbertian muddle of unisexual legislation [...]. (195)

The traits of naturalism and realism (Hollidge 1981) exposed in these suffragist plays emphasise the poverty level of working women, who had no working rights, because they were not considered citizens on the same level as men. These images of poverty that we have seen in this selection of plays simply reflect the poverty of an industrialised world in which female workers were paid

less than men, endured worse working conditions, and their demands and requests were not heard or taken into account, purely because they were voiced by women. In February 1918, British women won the right to vote and had the first female Members of Parliament, and as a consequence were given a voice to express their social, civil, working and family demands. This was possible thanks to the work of these playwrights, as Edith Craig, a crucial figure in British suffragism and a playwright, affirmed: “one play is worth one hundred speeches” (qtd. in Cockin 1998: 132).

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# REFLECTIONS OF ENGLISHNESS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN JULIAN BARNES' *ENGLAND, ENGLAND*: A CASE OF BROKEN MIRRORS

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***Abstract:** Postmodernist aesthetics has imposed itself as demanding a deconstructive approach of the concept of identity in which the paradigm of continuous fragmentation operates as a powerful tool. In 'England, England', Julian Barnes addresses the concept through irony, constant questioning of previously established values and use of clichés as a form of mockery. The purpose of the paper is to determine the way in which the nation as a concept is being imagined and created in the dynamics of the book in order to determine the pattern according to which it imprints the perception of what Englishness means and entails. By following the path in which the construction of Englishness is related to the mechanism of identity formation, through an analytical approach, the paper aims to unravel the elements of the aforementioned relationship, in order to offer an instrument for accurately understanding a part of the present concerns regarding the issue.*

***Keywords:** belonging, Englishness, England, Julian Barnes, national identity*

## 1. Introduction

Broadly speaking, in the wide range of perceptions of the relationship between nationalism and identity, one of the main angles in the dynamics of this contingency is based on the relationship with the 'Other' (in terms of either difference or sameness). In a social context, exhibiting a certain behavior based on the norms and values of a given society provides certain lenses which offer a comprehensive perspective on the way in which nationalism, with its particular traits regarding cultural and historical aspects, imprints the manner of identity development (both individually and collectively).

The purpose of this paper is to determine the way in which the nation as a concept is being imagined in the dynamics of Julian Barnes' book *England, England*, in order to establish the pattern according to which it casts a shadow over the perception of what the present attitudes towards Englishness might mean and entail. By following the path in which the construction of Englishness is related to the mechanism of identity formation, through an analytical approach, the paper aims to unravel the elements of the aforementioned relationship in order to underline the importance of this literary exploration of England, as it echoes notions relevant to the present concerns over the topic. Furthermore, considering the scope of the paper, a relevant issue regarding the constellation of the identity concept is the question of belonging and its ramifications prompted by the need for adaptation to several changes and acceptance of certain moral and social customs.

## 2. Nationalism

Nationalism operates under a number of paradigms, several of which perceive it as a symptom of the modern world. Here, as Benedict Anderson (1991:15) argues in *Imagined communities*, “everyone, can, should, will, have a nationality” or as Ernest Geller (1964: 169) points out, “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness, it invents nations where they do not exist.” While also highly regarded as a powerful tool of the political realm, nationalism has imprinted a way in which identities are constructed and form their reflection with their cultural background. In this respect, Frantz Fanon (1995: 155) perfectly grasps the essence of nationalism when he states that:

A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.

Designating the steps of its formation up to the conceptualization of its present form, Anderson (1991) marks the appearance of the concept of nationalism at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as a consequence of several events. He mentions the following: the exploration of the non-European world, the gradual decline in the use of Latin – perceived as sacred language; “the fall of Latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized and territorialized” (Anderson 1991: 46) –, the rise of print capitalism and the growth of publications and book writing in vernacular languages. They all converged to the cognition that “these forms provided the technical means for the “re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation.” (Anderson 1991: 24)

Within this conglomerate of events, a powerful shift of conception underlined by Anderson was marked, inevitably, by the Second World War. For Anderson, every successful revolution since that moment has defined itself in national terms and has “grounded itself firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the pre-revolutionary past” (Anderson 1991: 9). Regarded in essence as a “cultural artifact” (Anderson 1991: 8), nationalism is characterized by complexity, which defines all its aspects, especially in recent years, mainly due to the fact that the “old nations”, as named by Anderson, even though highly consolidated, have been confronted by several challenges on the part of “sub-nationalisms” within their border.

One of the larger issues in canvassing what nationalism entails, is, as resulting from Anderson’s book, that it has been wrongly classified as an ideology. What Anderson proposes is an analysis of the concept in terms of “kinship”, an “imagined political community” (“imagined” as a result of the lack of connection between the individuals of the same community throughout time, and “community” due to the fact that it is paramount to be viewed under the lenses of comradeship) rather than ideology. What must be taken into consideration is the impact and repercussions of the change in the character of Latin and the impact of Reformation, with the emergence of print capitalism (as a convergence of technology, linguistic diversity and capitalism) and print languages (gathering related vernaculars and creative fields of communication, thus constructing languages of power). Consequently, it is of preponderant standing to align these

circumstances with the scope of creating an accurate idea concerning the manner in which the modern conception of nation has been paved.

Nations have no clearly identifiable births and their deaths, if they ever happen are never natural. Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography can not be written evangelically 'down time', through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time' [...] This fashioning, however, is marked by deaths, which in a curious inversion of conventional genealogy, start from an ordinary present. (Anderson 1991: 205)

### 3. Nationalism and Englishness

In the more recent years, considering the period of the 1980 onwards, Dominic Head (2002: 119) writes in *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction 1500-2000* about the emergence of new nationalistic energies, which present themselves as being both volatile and resistant to interpretation, and rising as a form of reaction to economic globalization. According to him, the views upon the new nationalistic tendencies unfold under two categories: either as a false 'resuscitation' of traditional self-interest, or as a way towards an equitable future. Through these lenses, it turns out that the particular case of British national identities can be portrayed as follows:

The treatment of British national identities in post-war fiction has tended to fall somewhere between these two positions, wary of an uncompromising tradition on the one hand, whilst tentatively contemplating the reinvention of nationality on the other. A 3<sup>rd</sup> position emerges as a consequence of this dialectic: a kind of post-nationalism built on reappraised symbols and traditions that implicitly acknowledges the mongrelised nature of most British identities. The hesitancy about national identity is inevitably, most pronounced in refigurations of Englishness, where the legacy of imperialism remains a dominant presence. (Head 2002: 119)

Obviously, it is widely known that the notion of national identity generally englobes the common features and traits of a nation with the purpose of offering viable concepts for the process of both the individual and the collective endeavour of self-definition.

The massive set of changes to which the British society has had to adapt since the Second World War had placed a strain upon the way in which the English have been regarded (both by themselves and the others), thus maintaining a broad concern for the concept of Englishness. Of the massive cultural implications of the term, a particular trait stands out, according to several critics, namely, an evasion of the responsibility to assert the essence of their national character, resulting in a general impression of uncertainty regarding the notion of Englishness.

Without doubt, this particular point of view rises out of the fact that, according to several schools of thought, the English national character has shown reticence towards a clear set of traits making up the essence of the notion of Englishness. As Dominic Head (2002: 120) mentions, the reasons for such posture surface as a response both to the fact that Englishness was still considered "tainted" with imperialism, and to the cultural hybridity resulting from the postcolonial migration.

Consequently, it appears that the inner structure of the English identity remained at the level of presumption, due to the legacy of imperialism that placed

the English people in a state in which the need for self-definition did not appear to be imperative.

A critical perspective on the fact that the English people got stuck at the level of assumptions about the assertion of their national character refers to their approach to the issue based on things rather than attitudes or beliefs. Such a construct of attributes lacking in meaning may lead to national identities which rest on self-sufficiency, frequently facing difficulties in tracking and understanding the manner of their construction. Consequently, this type of direction trails towards the situation in which the said national identities eventually become unable to define themselves and the substance of their cultural identity.

A proper construction of national identity should provide a solid foundation that, in turn, should function as a mirror reflecting the essence and values necessary for an accurate development of identity structures. Thus, it is striking that the lack thereof gives rise to sizable questions regarding a proper construction of the self as an individual.

#### **4. National identity and Englishness in Julian Barnes' *England, England***

Nationalism should offer a powerful sense of belonging and hence, the deficiency in accurately addressing the matter leads to a rupture in the dynamics of nationalism and identity formation. On this particular matter, a novel which lays particular emphasis on this issue is Julian Barnes' *England, England* (2012). The way in which the concept of *nation* is imagined in the dynamics of the book and the way in which the portrayal of the concept asserts a certain import to the perception of what Englishness means and entails can be analyzed by following the way in which the construction of Englishness is related to the construction of identity. This draws particular attention to understanding the implications that lead to some of the current perceptions regarding the matter.

Considering that the problematic of the Self represents a recurrent theme in postmodernist fiction, Julian Barnes tackles it by employing a wide array of postmodernist literary techniques. Through the juxtaposition of perspectives, dichotomies and the use of skepticism, the author approaches this particular concept with the help of irony, thus laying bare the indoctrinated perspectives regarding Englishness and highlighting the existence of a certain lack of coherence about it.

In order to investigate the issue of national identity, Dominic Head (2006) mentions that the postmodernist stylistics at the base of Barnes' fiction presents itself in the form of emphasis on literature as text and use of academic criticism through the employment of a cascade of paradoxes, ambivalence and contrast, as means of emphasizing the relationship between fiction and criticism, in order to introspect the issue of national identity. In the particular case of *England, England*, he states that: "the novel is also a pastiche of Edwardian fiction, by virtue of its appearance and its internal structure, a simulacrum of English literary heritage" (Head 2006: 25).

As a consequence of the reliance of the English people upon their iconic approach of greatness, the general perception of Englishness in Julian Barnes' book is one of a self-assumed superiority over the Other, over everyone and everything that is not English. Thus, according to several critics, the outcome was a loss of insight about the essence from which the true greatness of being English springs.

Conceived as a poignant satire on the state of Englishness, the plot has at its centre a cynical and ambitious character, Martha Cochrane, her childhood and maturation, Sir Jack Pitman, a visionary tycoon of questionable moral values, and several other characters. Collectively, the characters help to build up the core of the story through the way in which they deal with issues such as collective memory and individual memory, authentic versus replica and the unreliability of history and memory. "Englishness" represents whatever people associate with English history and culture: the Royal Family, pubs, cricket, marmalade, hypocrisy, Marks & Spencer, etc., all being attributed the value of a commodity. The legitimisation of national identity through debates on the concept of Englishness with perceptions resting on such symbols void of any meaning signal, according to Dominic Head (2006: 18), the existence of individuals that have not reached the degree of self-consciousness required for understanding their own creation. In this respect, as David Wiegand (1999) mentions, Martha becomes a metaphor of England due to her "drive to obliterate memories of her past", mostly as a survival tactic, "England's willingness to abandon its heritage in a misguided belief it will help it succeed in the modern world."

By merging the staggering endeavour of creating a new England within the confinement of the Isle of Wight, and the striking flaws of the characters, the author implies a direct critique of England's contemporary society. Furthermore, the postmodernist condition regarding the prevalence of a lack of a sense of belonging unfolds in the book through an abrasive process of degradation, resulting from the behavioural processes of the characters, their mentality and their relation to the problematic of truth and authenticity.

Pertaining to the realm of postmodernist aesthetics, the presence of dichotomies further strengthens a certain process of dehumanization of the characters in the book. They seem to exhibit a continuous disillusionment resulting out of estrangement and alienation, symptoms which present themselves as driving forces, by showing evidence of moral decay and lack of sympathy towards the Other. Consequently, the author lays bare a clear cut idea concerning what could be lying underneath the surface of a reassured image of England, namely the biased perspectives attached to it and the far-fetched created sense of identity.

Even though the book presents its characters as struggling to pinpoint the backbone of what being English entails, by relying solely on concepts deficient in substance, their failure to demystify the true notion of Englishness is inevitable. Blinded by prejudice and bias, the characters seem to coil in a whirlpool of disillusion, both regarding themselves and their relation with the world. This prevents them from being able to construct an accurate sense of identity, capable of answering vital questions regarding the context in which they are being placed.

The idea of an impeccable England occupies a central place in the dynamics of the book and unfolds within the mechanics of a game between history and memory. According to several critics, this particular game succumbed in a mixture of reality and fabulation, which created difficulties in addressing the core of Englishness and the form in which it is mirrored socially and culturally. Due to a staggering inability to detach from subjectivity in order to attain a clear set of perspectives on the notion of Englishness, Barnes places his characters in a context of broken mirrors, in which there is no reflection of a clear set of cultural pillars on which the characters could rely, unravelling a waterfall of doubts and a sense of alienation by leaving the issue of national identity only partially addressed.

Due to the chosen lenses through which they see Englishness (strictly in terms of financial gain), the characters fail to become followers of the English heritage or persons who come to terms with their life choices. National identity has failed them due to the way they chose to address its essence: they overlooked exactly what could have helped them to succeed as complex identities. By employing satire, irony, constant questioning of previously established values and using clichés as a form of mockery, Julian Barnes vividly highlights the issues concerning English cultural identity and its echoes among the English people. In order to accurately perceive the congruence of elements leading to the portrayals canvassed in the book, it is of paramount importance to take into account the late influences on the general perceptions of Englishness.

In *England, England*, an important part dealing with the valuable notion of identity formation is occupied by the way in which one perceives his/her national identity and how much of it is reflected in one's construction of the Self. In this respect, relevant for the interpretation of the dynamics of the book is Robert Colls' (2002) emphasis on the relationship between national identity and the sense of belonging. Considering Britain's status within the European framework, Colls identifies the English people's need to decide their real place in the world. Apart from the changes brought forth by the fall of the imperial forces and the repercussions of globalization and cultural hybridity, they also had to find their place within the European Community. Colls argues that "if Old England remained set in a silver sea, the UK increasingly found itself perched at the top left-hand corner of a new European Map" (Colls 2002: 338).

## 5. Conclusion

Robert Colls points out that, in the new dynamics of England, national relationships began to offer little that was permanent; thus, imposed by the new changes, a powerful stain was placed on the English people and the way in which they had to recognize themselves. He concludes that:

in spite of the changes, many of the old ideas about England carry on. Over the past twenty years, indeed 'national heritage' has become something of a national obsession, even though no one is sure what it means. People sense that it is more than Chatsworth, or any number of beautiful places. They know, too, it is more than the nineteenth-century labourer's cottage, or the coal-mining museum, or remembrance Sunday, or The National Trust, or all the conservative projects funded by the Lottery to improve our sense of place. They sense that it is really to do with the qualities of the people, but because those qualities have so very recently been stripped of their moral and potential significance, it is difficult to recognise them as anything other than shadows of their former selves. (Colls 2002: 366)

A constellation of changes results from the emergence of the postmodernist aesthetics of truth, of the critical theory of reality – the fall of the British Empire, the cultural hybridity which was brought with it and the implications of the European community, to name only a few. Thus, it is obvious that an abrasive stress has been placed upon the English people in finding stable cultural notions and values to further rely on. The specific aspect highlighted by this paper is that, in spite of the grandeur of the English cultural heritage, there is a loss in the collective sense of Self, gone in a sea of confusion. The point is reached where the national identity becomes a broken mirror, unable to reflect the sense of belonging

and the set of values, attitudes and beliefs as pillars necessary to attain an accurate development of identity formation.

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***EXPLORING WORLDS,  
IDENTITIES, AND GENRES***



# UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA: 'A BRAVE NEW WORLD' AND THE CASE OF JM COETZEE

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**Abstract:** *In this paper, I make a case for the need to re-evaluate JM Coetzee's novel, The Master of Petersburg, in the global context of today, a context of ever increasing authoritarian populisms and erratic acts of violence. Published in 1994, the novel by the Nobel Laureate is set in Russia of the 1860s, against a backdrop of anarchist opposition to the Tsarist state. Critics have been puzzled by the writer's apparently 'escapist' choice of fictional setting at a time when his own country was in a turbulent transition from one dispensation to another. Central to my analysis is the danger of living in radicalised political times, while treading a precarious path between the utopia of revolutionary fervour and unpredictable dystopian unfoldings.*  
**Keywords:** *dystopian unfoldings, political radicalization, utopia of salvation*

## 1. Introduction

Let me start by asking: Why return to *The Master of Petersburg* today, a novel written a quarter of a century ago? Published in 1994, the year of the first democratic elections in South Africa, critics were somewhat puzzled that JM Coetzee had this landmark novel set in another century, another country, at precisely the time when the international community was focused on the birthing of the 'new' South Africa. The novel does not engage with such a question directly, and JM Coetzee's tacit refusal to offer a recognisable representation of the South African/ international context of the early 1990s – a period of turbulent political transitions, post-Apartheid and post-Soviet – has left critics guessing.

I argue that – although set against an alien background (anarchist movements threatening the survival of Tsarist Russia in the 1860s) – *The Master of Petersburg* offers a reading congruent with the temper of today. The contemporary international scene, too, is turbulent and unstable. With increasing global unrest and deep dissatisfaction around economic inequalities, several countries have entered full economic collapse, while others may be called failed states, especially in the Middle East, parts of Africa and Asia. Such states have produced terrorist groups of random and spectacular violence, such as ISIS, Al-Qaida, Boko Haram. As Roger Griffin has poignantly suggested (2012), what appear to be acts of criminal barbarism are seen by fanatical fringes as necessary steps of systematically destroying a materialist, fallen western modernity, together with its entire value system. Most acts of terrorism are executed by angry young men who believe themselves to be on a mission of “destroying the world to save it” (title of a book by Robert Jay Lifton, 2000). According to such utopian, Millenarian beliefs, violently nihilistic destruction is believed to be indispensable in reconstructing a higher-order life purpose. As illustrated by SN Eisenstadt (2000), apocalyptic fanaticism, which is aimed at so-called salvation or paradise, is steeped in the terrorists' belief that they are impersonations of the 'New

Man' of the 'End Times', emissaries of the divine, awaiting the rewards of martyrdom.

Central to my analysis are Coetzee's intimations around the potential dangers of living in radicalised political times, whether past or present; these are times marked by the utopia of salvation, often followed by uncontrollable dystopian outcomes and unfoldings. Without my wishing to transport any particular manifestation from one country to another, I suggest that in recent times we have been witnessing a dangerous mix of perverted religious and political radicalisation, whether in ISIS beheadings, mass shootings, or, less bizarre, in cult figures and followings. It is thanks to Coetzee's uncanny prescience regarding the toxic mix of utopian 'salvation' and social 'anarchy' that *The Master of Petersburg* derives its stamp beyond its initial publication date. Had Coetzee already seen beyond the greater optimism of the early 1990s?

The novel offers a story of idealism deformed by a vision of anarchy and "moral chaos" (Pechey 1998: 62). The setting is Russia in 1869, the protagonist is a fictionalised Fyodor Dostoevsky, who returns from exile to Petersburg to mourn the unexpected death of his stepson, Pavel Isaev. The story follows Dostoyevksy's painfully insistent investigations into his stepson's mysterious fall from a tower. There is speculation that the young man might have been murdered by a group of radical anarchists with whom he had become involved, with Sergei Nechaev (a notorious anarchist hell-bent on destabilising the Tsarist state) being the main suspect. Such ominous thoughts provoke Dostoevsky's soul-searches into his own guilt, fears, failures and desires; into reflections on the position of the individual/writer in totalising times. What forms of social emancipation/salvation are available?

My own focus is on the echoes, both religious and political, that the novel invokes in the reader today, at a time of toxic religious-cum-political demagoguery and populism, both locally and globally. A useful starting point is to remind ourselves that, at bottom, we are responding to a father-and-son story (or, in this case, a stepfather/ stepson story), not in itself anything new in Coetzee's oeuvre. The specific instance, of course, may have archetypal resonances, as father/son rivalry invokes the "psychomachia" of old and new, good and evil; indeed, we enter a quasi-religious quest tale that distorts (perverts) the trajectory of the Christic quest for a "new Kingdom" and a "New Man"; the religious reference abounding in the insistence on salvation and betrayal, Jesus and Judas, redemption, atonement and resurrection. This is not to deny the connection of the spiritual and the secular. Dostoevsky is equally concerned to connect with the ghost of his dead stepson as he is to understand the perils and, as he interprets it, the delusions of the "new man": that is, the new man forged in radicalised political times and treading a precarious path between revolutionary fervour and criminality. Not an unfamiliar figure to our news-screens of the last few years.

## 2. Father and son: the utopia of salvation

Coetzee has always been preoccupied with the difficulties of bridging divides between generations, often allowing private drama to illuminate the historical context; whether it is Mrs Curren (*Age of Iron*, 1990) writing to her daughter in Canada about her uneasy relationship with the social movements in South Africa of the late 1980s, or David Lurie (*Disgrace*, 1999), who, finding himself in a now democratic South Africa, is unable to understand his daughter's

muted response to her rape. In two novels written nearly twenty years apart – *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) and *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013) – the inter-generational tension has a masculine orientation, in which the pairing of ‘father and son’ propels the action. Interestingly, both novels involve quests for the “new man” (New Man) in times of social fracture and turbulence. In both cases, the yearnings for social utopias are tested against the values of more foundational societal norms. Again, in both novels, an element of postmodernist qualification of master narratives (the Jesus story) does not dislodge an urgent attention to religious allusions and parallels.

In *The Master*, the father figure (the fictionalised Dostoevsky) represents an older, moderately liberal bourgeois order, the humanist values of which he desperately defends in the face of an insurrection that is perceived as a threat to the social fabric and the concept of self. While trying to understand, even embrace, an unsettling new order, the ‘father’ desperately attempts a synthesis between old and new values, which he wishes to share with his ‘son’ as member of the new generation. However, the new order, more specifically the “new man”, remains out of his reach. Despite the suffusion of its religious symbolism (Jesus, the Saviour), salvation remains elusive and spiritual intimations are not permitted to expand into outright expressions of belief. Balancing aspiration against parody, deconstruction against reconstruction of purpose, this is a postmodernist quest, in which the real of the mundane is held in tension with an impulse to transcendence: with good and evil, old and new, father and son continuously clashing with each other. From beyond the grave, Pavel refuses to respond to his stepfather’s persistent pleadings for reconciliation. Dostoevsky muses: “Is it always like this between fathers and sons: jokes masking the intensest of rivalries? And is that the true reason why he is bereft: because the ground of his life, the contest with his son, is gone, and his days are left empty?” (108). Later on in the novel, his son will re-appear in the disturbing incarnation of the political anarchist, Sergei Nechaev, to whom I shall return.

In the meantime, the quest assumes the mythical dimension of a battle of the souls. In dreams and during recurrent epileptic fits, Dostoevsky attempts to ‘parent’ an ideal, imagined version of Pavel, thus hoping to alleviate the fathomless remorse he feels for having neglected the boy during his formative years. His hope of obtaining forgiveness is likened to a vision of the Resurrection: “a playing with death, a play of resurrection” (63); an attempt to believe in the impossible: “I believe in the Resurrection. [...] I believe in the resurrection of the body and in life eternal” (122). Yet he is beset by doubts, oscillating between hope, despair and cynicism, even as authorial sympathy does not undermine the value of the quest. Indeed, the novel suggests, almost paradoxically, the value of what we might term a reconstructed postmodernism, in which deconstructive suspicion is permitted reconstructive intent. While parallels with Christ’s Incarnation and Resurrection are constantly undermined by scepticism, the textual undercurrent emanates from a non-conventional religious sensibility. It is a sensibility not so much sourced from belief in divine entities or articles of faith, as an expression of what Coetzee (1992: 261-62) has referred to as “attentiveness and responsiveness to an inner impulse that Tolstoy calls an impulse toward God; [a form of] truth-directedness [born out of] a crisis that brings about an illumination [...] a sense of urgency that the crisis brings about [...] the single-mindedness of the quest for truth.” Do such expressions of urgency and anguish suggest that Coetzee’s work represents, actually, not the profile of a postmodernist, but rather of a “late modernist”

(Coetzee 1992: 198), for whom hopes of lost stabilities balance precariously against fragments of the myth? To turn a modernist discourse towards the religious dimension, we have what André Comte-Sponville (2007) calls “atheist spirituality”: the capacity to transcend the material condition; to embrace affective experience without the support of institutional dogma, as a heightened state of attention to the extra-ordinary in the habitual; a call, a provocation, a partially glimpsed fragment of knowingness. In his response to *The Master*, Graham Pechey (1998: 58) has summed up the paradox: “[I]t is at the heart of the ordinary that the extraordinary is to be found”. By drawing on an analogy with Bakhtin’s dialogism, the critic also suggests that Bakhtin/Coetzee revels in “the pluralizing and carnivalizing spirit of modern writing, and finds there not faith cancelled in a vertiginous relativism, but faith eternally problematized” (Pechey 1998: 61).

Critics find it intriguing that Coetzee can hold in equilibrium a resistance to, and an engagement with, the possibility of religious thought. If this is an expression of faith, then faith in what? Dostoevsky is haunted by visions in which Pavel appears to him as the ghost of “a boy weaving through the reeds” of memory (53), a spectre in search of a home; the spectre, however, resists Dostoevsky’s attempts to save him. This is a novel of waiting that is rooted in a sense of empty expectation of the invisible, the unknown. Derek Attridge (2005: 124-5) points out that Dostoevsky does not know “what he is waiting for under the name of Pavel [...] He allows himself to be determined by impulses, attractions, obscure desires, though without fully trusting in any of them”. In his desperation, he reaches out to Anna Sergeyevna, Pavel’s landlady, in whom he invests irrational hopes: that through her and her daughter, Pavel’s orphaned spirit might find an incarnated, imaginary home. During his sexual intercourse with Sergeyevna, Dostoevsky has an other-worldly, sublime encounter with the spectre of his dead son, but immediately seeks to counter this uncanny feeling with a vision a happy (“holy”) family comprising Anna and her daughter, himself and Pavel – “a family, only a fourth required and we will be complete” (62).

The religious allusion here is based, again, on the symbolism of the ‘incarnation’, of rootedness in the body as index of reality and “ontological certainty” in a world of simulacra (Petrolle 2008: 29). Dostoevsky imagines Pavel as being re-incarnated, and thus resurrected: the broken life becomes whole again, by being homed in a new matrix, the family. Dostoevsky’s carnal relationship with Sergeyevna invokes in him a dream vision which makes him feel “like a child at Easter [...] ‘Christ is risen!’ he wants to call out, and he wants her to respond ‘Christ is risen!’”; the vision of a happy family that also includes “the ghost of [Pavel] weaving between them, clumsy, newborn, released from the tomb” (67-68). None of this, however, is dogmatic or doctrinaire. Rather, as John Caputo (1997: 63; italics in the original) puts it, such faith is, paradoxically, “a faith without faith [...] a certain *faith* in *the impossible*”. The matter of belief in *The Master*, therefore, persistently links the physical to the metaphysical. Accordingly, we may choose, as I have chosen, to ‘read religiously’. To read religiously is not necessarily to subscribe to an article of faith. Rather, as Petrolle (2008: 165) says, it is to submit “to wonder, a possibility of transcending ordinary operations, a reverence for partially glimpsed fragments of knowing”. This is another way of pointing to a life in which religion grants credence to practices and processes of experience. Paradoxically, it is a “transcendence [that] is always rooted deep in ordinary life” (Foley 2012: 83). Writers like Joyce, Proust, Rilke, Kafka, Dostoevsky – and, as I argue, Coetzee – while “reject[ing] the idea of a transcendent divinity, retained a transcendent sense” of the real (Foley 2012: 75).

Such a “religious” understanding echoes Walter Benjamin’s (1973: 246) earlier formulation of “weak messianic power”, a concept through which he suggested that the sacred is glimpsed as an affective experience: an experience perceived in the proximity of material things and in moments of involved, epiphanic attention. It is this understanding of religion as a “weak power” – an aspiration for transcendence in the most unlikely of places – that provides my basis of introspection. Questions, nonetheless, arise: how does one endorse such a reading without either naivety, or resignation? Are allegorical representations of the sacred acceptable to postmodern, or indeed modern, sensibilities? Frederick Ferré (1998) suggests the need to allow for shades of trust in people’s textual hunger for the affective, for meaning and relevance, and also for the co-existence of scepticism and quests of wholeness. Such fusions, in their own way, are manifestations of the religious: of post-secular attempts at creating meaning while, paradoxically, problematising the very nature of meaning. As Petrolle (2008: 4) has said, “postmodernist scepticism about the true and the real can, and does, coexist with religious thinking”: that is, with religion defined earlier, as a “weak force”, a cognitive and experiential process anchored in reality. Instead, we may choose to embody such apparent paradox more comprehensively – at least, in the realm of literary response – by substituting modernist, for postmodernist, frames of interpretation. Nonetheless, as in many works of modernist inclination (TS Eliot’s *The Waste Land* comes to mind), folk motifs are re-arranged in secular modernity, as the quest must face its testing.

### 3. “The epidemic” of Nechaevism: the dystopia of collective salvation

The protagonist has to overcome “temptation”: Dostoevsky’s vision of himself as Pavel’s “savior” is challenged by Sergei Nechaev, the leader of a band of anarchists-cum-insurrectionists. From the police, Dostoevsky learns that his son had clandestine political involvements with Nechaev’s band, a revelation suggesting that Pavel may have been assassinated by the anarchists. Through various manoeuvres and acts of impersonation, Nechaev insinuates himself into Dostoevsky’s life, a life that the anarchist typifies as bourgeois, decadent and, as such, representing the life of a class enemy. The leader of the so-called People’s Vengeance Party, Sergei Nechaev, as cynically pointed out by Dostoevsky, demonises free will, rationality and creative imagination “in the name of a principle of equality [even if] equal misery for all” (Coetzee 1994: 36). Caught in a total war with the old social order of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, Nechaev is an angry, resentful young man who, in the words of Pascal Bruckner (2010: 54), aims to transform the “language of victimhood” into a “language of executioners”. It gradually dawns on Dostoevsky that the “epidemic” of Nechaevism (42) must have been a pernicious influence on his son. Allegorically speaking, therefore, the clash between Dostoevsky and Nechaev, vis-à-vis their authority over Pavel’s evolution, is a classic example of “psychomachia”: an allegorical enactment of conflict between competing ideals. The tug-of-war between the two men constitutes itself as a religious wager for the supremacy of mastery or authority over opposing forms of cognition; a battle-ground of good and evil (good mentor/ bad mentor for Pavel). Dostoevsky’s own utopia of salvation is shown to clash with Nechaev’s collective utopia. What frames this competition for influence, self-defeatingly, is a perverse version of the New Testament story of salvation and resurrection.

It is not easy for Dostoevsky to fathom the ideology of his nemesis, Nechaev, in his over-zealous seeking of revenge. He concludes that “Nechaevism is not an idea. It despises ideas; it is [...] a dull, resentful and murderous spirit [that] gives a voice to something dumb and brutal that is sweeping through young Russia” (44; 111-112). This anarchist/Nihilist movement, known as Nechaevism, existed at the time, and was based on a Millenarian vision of the world as irredeemably corrupt and, therefore, in need of a radical intervention that would culminate in the social redemption of apocalypse. In order to achieve collective redemption, society would have to undergo a process of purging, the end of which – the demolition of the establishment – would justify the means. There would be no middle way; innocent or naïve people would inevitably become collateral victims. (One may choose one’s 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalents: the Talibans, ISIS, Boko Haram.)

The distraught father intuits that many impressionable young people, including Pavel, might have been seduced by Nechaev’s “demon” of vengefulness (112); “absorbed in a single and total passion: revolution, [this man], in the depths of his being, has cut all links with the civil order, with law and morality. He continues to exist in society only in order to destroy it” (61). The more Dostoevsky learns about Nechaev’s evil utopia, the more nauseated he becomes with the latter’s understanding of ‘equality’ as a ruthlessly pursued end-vision: “Christ in his wrath: that is who he models himself on. The Christ of the Old Testament, the Christ who scourged the users out of the temple” (103). In short, Nechaev is a fanatic who, in his mania of grandeur, models himself on his own construed story of Jesus (the New Man). He even prods Dostoevsky to report him to the police – or, in New Testament parlance, to ‘betray’ him – so as fully to live out the parallel: “They say you are treacherous by nature – Dostoevsky is told by one of Nechaev’s acolytes – like the man who betrayed Jesus” (106). As the tension between Dostoevsky and Nechaev rises, Dostoevsky’s determination to cling to his belief in Pavel’s innocence (and in his own ability to ‘save’ his stepson) is gradually eroded. Nechaev mercilessly intensifies the psychological pressure on his nemesis, thus weakening Dostoevsky’s resolve to avoid participating in a self-destructive cycle of violence (“I don’t want to be poisoned by vengefulness”, 111). Led by Nechaev to the top of a tower where Pavel was presumably thrown to his death, Dostoevsky feels “the approach to the edge, the glance downward, the lurch of the soul” (118), even as he grasps at his own cognitive capacity to make sense of the tragic event: “To gather the broken body and embrace it: That is what it means to believe. To believe and to love [...] ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body and in life eternal’” (122). It is a kind of “grasping” that one finds in Franz Kafka’s stories, where ‘hope’ amidst absurdity inspired an intriguing commentary by Albert Camus: “The more tragic the condition described by Kafka [or Coetzee, I might add], the firmer and more aggressive that hope becomes. Like other existentialist novelists, Kafka [Coetzee] embraces the God that consumes him” (Camus 1962: 152-153).

In the chapter “The Cellar”, we find the most eloquent illustration of this persistent pursuit of the “impossible” amidst the shards of the “real”. Here, Nechaev takes Dostoevsky to a place of refuge for the outcasts of Petersburg, where prostitute-mothers are surrounded by “starving, hollow-eyed children” (191). These are the ‘cellar people’, that is, humanity reduced to human animality, or “creatureliness” (Santner 2006: 12). Here, Nechaev, the self-styled protector-cum-saviour of the cellar people, accuses Dostoevsky of belonging to a class of people who indulge in the comforts of “a contemptible bourgeois existence” [while

ignoring the social] “forces” that determine the lives to which these people are condemned” (180). Nechaev dreams of the cellar people “emerging from their cellars, [with] food and clothes and housing, proper housing for everyone” (182). Ostensibly well-meaning, the vision floats free of economic realities; indeed, floats free of human complexity. A social utopia based on a simplistic understanding of equality as levelling in misery would mean “the end of everything, including fathers and sons, [a condition] when everything is reinvented, everything erased and reborn: law, morality, the family” (189-190). Dostoevsky is provoked to consider what will happen after “the tempest of the people’s vengeance has done its work and everyone has been levelled” (184). Will there be a place for individual free will in this utopia?

By contrast, Dostoevsky’s vision is based on a nuanced interpretation of life’s complexities: “I see only the stars that watched over us when we were born [...] no matter how we disguise ourselves, no matter how deep the cellars in which we hide” (185). But, to Nechaev, such musings are but the evasions of a discredited bourgeois class. So, stalemate. The self-styled prophet of the new order (or “Kingdom”) accuses Dostoevsky of being an irredeemable defender of the dying bourgeois world, a voyeuristic writer and “bloodsucker” of the people’s suffering (183). In turn, Dostoevsky thinks of Nechaev as another “creature of Doctor Frankenstein’s” (177), what Slavoy Žižek (2011: 314; 296) has referred to as an “autistic’ monster [...] a new form of subjectivity: autistic, indifferent, deprived of affective engagement”. Yet, it is Dostoevsky who undergoes an autistic collapse.

Nechaev, “the devil” figure, tempts Dostoevsky to descend to his own (Nechaev’s) level of hatred and vengefulness: Dostoevsky ends up denouncing the anarchist to the police as the assassin of Pavel. Being so “betrayed”, Nechaev emerges as a martyr, a messiah of Russia’s poor, as Dostoevsky cynically deploys Christian reference against his own, naked soul: “You behave like a Jesus outside Jerusalem [...] *You fancy yourself the martyr waiting to be called. You want to steal Easter from Jesus*” (187; my emphasis). Feeling threatened in his yearning of becoming his son’s ‘saviour’, Dostoevsky now realises the impact that Nechaev’s rhetorical power might have had on the impressionable Pavel, a power at least equal to his own as a ‘master’ rhetorician (writer): “What a charlatan! Yet he no longer knows where the mastery lies – whether he is playing with Nechaev, or Nechaev with him. All barriers seem to be crumbling at once” (190). In a moment of sublime insight, the older man lunges at the younger one, embracing the boy. This is an epiphanic moment, a turning point in Dostoevsky’s quest, a moment of openness to the radical Other in himself (he, too, as a younger man had had revolutionary ideals): “[Nechaev] is like me, I was like him – only I did not have the courage. And then: Is that why Pavel followed him: because he was trying to learn courage?” (193; emphasis in the original). Once he has accepted that Nechaev may have been an authority figure in Pavel’s life, he feels like a father figure to both angry and rudderless young men. However, these are but fleeting moments of forgiveness amidst brokenness: good and evil, father and son, old world and new world, reconciled in fragile gestures of finding alternatives in a world of polarities. The full truth painfully sinks in: “[e]verything is collapsing: logic, reason” (202), as Dostoevsky realises that Nechaev has gradually manoeuvred him into writing a letter denouncing the anarchist as his son’s assassin. By turning his own best beliefs (in salvation and reconciliation) to anger, Dostoevsky realises that he has stooped to a lower moral order, having failed the ‘test’ of his nemesis’ provocation. Having thus “sunk to the pettiest vengefulness”

(206), Dostoevsky feels that he has become “a Judas [leading] a life without honour; treachery without limit” (222).

His attempts at recapturing his old belief, his ‘utopia of salvation’ – this time, as a form of salvation from “the death of innocence” (213) – sees him, once again, seeking (through extravagant gestures) groundedness in the body as anchor of reality. This ‘master of Petersburg’ proposes to Anna Sergeyevna, for example, that they conceive a child together, with the aim of bringing about “the birth of the *saviour*” (225; my emphasis). A scene of sublime eroticism culminates, perversely, in the realisation that the child to be born might turn out to be a “devil” (230). Is this Dostoevsky’s assessment of his own fallen self? Or, yet again, a glimpse into states beyond good and evil, states in which saviour-and-devil is one entity? This is Dostoevsky’s attempt of going beyond the disgrace of betrayal; from being a body “within whose core a plunge into darkness is taking place, [to becoming] a body which contains its own falling [so that he can] turn the falling into a flying [and] live where Pavel died” (234-235). Such insights, once again, offer the potential of liberation from hatred, the reconciliation of opposites.

However, these insights remain momentary glimpses of hope within Dostoevsky’s entangled states of dark despair, over-determined as they are by self-hatred and the “voluptuous immersion in one’s own depravity [as well as the arrogant] paternalism of a guilty conscience” (Bruckner 2010: 33-4). In spite of his efforts to overcome his self-loathing, Dostoevsky is unable to forgive himself for capitulating to vengefulness. “In self-blame, there is no place for the Other” (Bruckner 2010: 101), and so, Dostoevsky’s mourning for Pavel rapidly turns to mourning for himself: “once, Pavel was lost, now he himself is lost” (237). He cannot mourn Pavel any longer, because a new vision of Pavel reveals itself: as “Nechaev’s comrade and follower [a man of ‘the new world’ who inhabits] a field of indifference tremendous in its force, like a cloak of darkness” (238). It is a vision of Pavel “beyond childhood and beyond love [a stranger who] has retreated into stone, [b]ut the figure before him is not that of Christ. In it he detects no love, only the cold and massive indifference of stone” (240). Dostoevsky can no longer envision himself as ‘parenting’ Pavel’s memory. His only path is to deliver himself, in full vulnerability, to the future as envisaged by the New Man, to become Pavel-cum-Nechaev’s follower, to regress to being “a babe again” (241). Following this symbolically suicidal impulse, “following this shade, he will go naked as a babe into the jaws of hell” (241), into the uncontrollable ‘brave new world’. The ending of the novel is suggestive of multiple possible interpretations.

#### 4. Conclusion

One interpretation of the novel’s end suggests that Dostoevsky has fallen into a state of disgrace: “I have lost my place in my soul” (249). Having become a spiritually fallen being, he can no longer hope for a reconciliation between ‘fathers and sons’, or between generations: “Fathers and sons: foes to the death” (239). This status, perversely, gives him the license to engage in depraved acts of betraying his son’s memory through his writing (242-245). What started out as a utopian quest of ‘saving’ a young man’s innocence in his own memory, therefore, may be interpreted as the death of innocence. Attridge (2005: 132), for example, has suggested that the ending of the novel points to betrayal at many levels – of political vision, of a child’s innocence, of paternal obligations. Žižek, for his part, might interpret the protagonist’s moral disintegration as that of a “post-traumatic,

disengaged subject which survives its own death, the death (erasure) of its symbolic identity” (2011: 294).

One can offer yet another approach to interpreting the end of the novel. This approach, rather than bemoan loss of meaning, would seek to emphasize the urgency, the anguish, of the protagonist’s insistent search for meaning in a chaotic, anarchic world. Such an interpretation would see the ending not as an anti-climax of the quest, but as yet another stage in Dostoevsky’s persistent search for meaning-making in a fragmented world. Such a search demands of the protagonist the humility of total exposure to the other, including the ‘radical other’. Having given up the naïve task of saving others, Dostoevsky has settled for the radical exposure of his self and precarious vulnerability in relation to others. This is an exposure that demands all the attention that he can give it, thus cracking him open to the enigmatic address of the other, and the slight new possibility of transforming disgrace into a state of grace. We may recognise here an acknowledgment of human vulnerabilities and resilience in iron times. As Coetzee (2007: 172) said about Samuel Becket’s philosophy of life: “this is a vision of life without consolation or dignity or promise of grace, in the face of which our only duty, inexplicable and futile of attainment, but a duty nonetheless, is not to lie to ourselves.”

Intriguingly, Dostoevsky faces moments of grace and disgrace, as he both engages with, and resists, religious language and practice, in a tension between his persistent hope for salvation and the urge for total exposure of self-doubt. This is a journey from naïve grace and consolation, to authenticity, which includes the potential of transforming disgrace into meaning. I do not claim that this novel is religious, and neither would I claim that it is secular, for such extreme positions would assume that an either/or response to Coetzee’s work is possible. Rather, I have pointed to Coetzee’s propensity to transcend binary thinking, whether secular or religious. Paradoxically, it is precisely in the protagonist’s undecidability between rationality/ doubt and imagination/ faith, and through postmodernist adumbrations of ‘unfaith’, that the novel embodies its religious impulse. It is to this tension of extremes that Dostoevsky abandons himself: to the elusive and incomprehensible future of the new world, the “new man”. *The Master of Petersburg* is a novel which we should re-read in this troubled new millennium.

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**EXPLORING OTHERNESS  
IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ALIAS GRACE*.  
ETHICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON  
HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION**

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***Abstract:** The paper investigates the capacity of historiographic metafiction to deal with the internal contradictions that characterize writing and story-telling, and to transform those very contradictions into analytical tools. An analysis of Margaret Atwood's novel *Alias Grace* will cast light on how postmodern texts may address otherness not only as a theme, but also as the starting point for reflecting on the politics of representation. This paper will focus on how the novel works through the interlacing of several Victorian discourses in order to cast a new light on the story of a notorious nineteenth-century murderess. As the latter progressively finds her voice, the novel also challenges contemporary readers' perception of identity and alterity, as well as their assumptions about Victorian values and sensibility.*

***Keywords:** epistemology, ethics, historiographic metafiction, otherness, postmodern*

### **1. Introduction: *Alias Grace* as historiographic metafiction**

When you are in the middle of a story, it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else. (Atwood 2009: 345-346)

The concept of *historiographic metafiction*, which Linda Hutcheon coined in the late eighties to refer to a type of postmodern historical fiction characterized by high self-reflexivity and parodic intertextuality, signals a significant change in the way we perceive the mimetic connection between art and life. Hutcheon's reflections on the epistemological and cognitive value of post-modern literature engaging with history have shown that literary texts should not just be approached as *products*, i.e., as more or less faithful representations of an allegedly unmediated reality. They should rather be viewed as part of a *process* which involves the creation of meaning and discourses as well as their reception. Metafictional texts which engage with history cast light on the constructiveness of our relationship to the past. Their investigation on the nature, limits, and possibilities of representation becomes part of their fictional architecture, so that they are free to expose the suppressed discursive practices through which historical discourse come into being. Given that we can access our past only through documents which necessitate interpretation, Hutcheon (1989: 4) reminds us that "the postmodern relationship between fiction and history is an even more complex one than mutual implication and interaction". In her view, history is deeply mediated by fiction, and literature is

more truthful when it reinstates the writing of history in the dimension of what she calls *énonciation*, i.e. “the entire process of production and reception of the text” (Hutcheon 1984: 228). By doing so, historiographic metafiction openly deals with the internal contradictions that characterize writing and story-telling, and it transforms those very contradictions into analytical tools.

The passage quoted at the beginning of the paper, taken from Margaret Atwood’s 1996 post-modern, Neo-Victorian novel *Alias Grace*, deals precisely with the issue of story-telling from a constructivist, meta-fictional perspective. Grace Marks, the novel’s protagonist and the first-person narrator in the chapter from which the extract is taken, articulates some concerns which, as a matter of fact, parallel those of the author, who is re-writing the story of an enigmatic, nineteenth-century homicide case for a highly-sophisticated, contemporary reading public. From the intradiegetic point of view of the character, as well as from the extra-diegetic perspective of the late twentieth-century novelist, engaging with a never completely solved mystery, it is the unbridgeable rift between reality and representation that triggers narration off. Grace, a character based on an Irish-Canadian maid implicated in a high-profile murder trial, which polarized public opinion in what was then known as the British Province of Canada, is a convict serving a life sentence at the Kinston penitentiary and trying to come to terms with traumatic amnesia. She seems to have forgotten what happened when Mr. Thomas Kinnear, her employer, and Nancy Montgomery, Kinnear’s housekeeper, lover, and mother of his unborn child, were brutally assassinated by the stable-hand James McDermott. Was she an innocent accessory to a crime planned and executed by McDermott, who confessed and paid his debt to society with his life, or was she the *femme fatale* who inspired the young man to act against his conscience, as their failed attempt to escape together to the United States seems to suggest? Her words show that she is painfully aware that language, discourse and writing are practices that are never fully at home, never rooted in an unequivocal unity of thought and being. She knows that the story she can tell is a highly-mediated, retrospective account in which causes and effects are established only a posteriori. The clemency that the jury showed towards her when they commuted her death sentence to life imprisonment, and the little hope she has of regaining her freedom are both strictly dependent on the fact that she may produce a narrative related to a world of significance external to itself, to a meaning-system that can make it socially acceptable and plausible. Similarly, Margaret Atwood is aware that retelling Grace’s story requires a double process of mediation. First, retelling a story to a contemporary reading public requires a profound awareness of historical difference. The events narrated are deeply ingrained in Victorian mentalities, stereotypes and codes. How do we, contemporary readers, relate to or take a distance from our Victorian past, more specifically from the way Victorians negotiated issues of identity and otherness? Secondly, Grace’s story cannot be accessed first-hand. Contradictory versions of the facts emerged during the trial, and the story was written, rewritten, and manipulated by different media. Even if the truth on Grace’s personality and motivations is forever lost, fiction casts light on the dynamics of the woman’s discursive marginalization and shows that those dynamics also harbour the potential for renegotiation and subversion.

A wide array of postmodern techniques – self-reflexivity, intertextuality, pastiche – are used in *Alias Grace* to cast light on otherness, an issue whose centrality is also highlighted in the novel’s title. The word *alias* is commonly used

in English to refer to a false or assumed identity: it derives from a Latin adverb meaning “at another time, under other circumstances, otherwise”. It is also the *feminine accusative plural* of the word “alius”, which means *other*. The triple exponence of the Latin suffix *-as* (*plural, feminine and accusative*) certainly hints at the multiple inscriptions of otherness through which Grace’s identity comes into being. First, Grace incarnates otherness in *plural* ways: she is a single woman, an Irish immigrant, a servant, a murderess, a psychiatric patient, and also an amnesiac, whose memory both a well-intentioned doctor and a charlatan posing as a neuropsychic try to restore by submitting her to several therapy sessions. Secondly, it is the sharp contrast with Victorian connotations of *femininity* that made her case so widely debated. For the reading public of 1843, used to idealizing youth, beauty and innocence, it was astounding to read about a sixteen-year-old girl of remarkable good looks, accused of complicity in a double murder. Thirdly, as her story was told by different people, in different media and at different times (the main events in the novel actually take place in 1859), she stopped being a subject of her own narration, in order to become the *object* of an investigation which was aimed at establishing the extent of her guilt. The passage below, which is taken from the same chapter as the epigraph and deals with Grace’s reflections on the multiple retelling of her own story, refers precisely to her progressive giving in to the narratives that others produced for her:

I can remember what I said when arrested, and what Mr. Mackenzie the lawyer said I should say, and what I did not say even to him; and what I said at the trial, and what I said afterwards, which was different as well. And what McDermott said I said, and what the others said I must have said, for there are always those that will supply you with speeches of their own, and put them right into your mouth for you too; and that sort are like the magicians who can throw their voice, at fairs and shows, and you are just their wooden doll. And that’s what it was like at the trial, I was there in the box of the dock but I might as well have been made of cloth, and stuffed, with a china head; and I was shut up inside that doll of myself, and my true voice could not get out. (Atwood 2009: 342)

Grace’s recollection of her trial does not focus on the truth of her story, but rather on the constructiveness of the many narratives that were produced and imposed on her. This recalling of the trial scene, which in the novel happens some fifteen years after the events, puts a clear emphasis on how representation is more important than truth. As Grace was progressively deprived of her right to tell her story, and she was metaphorically transformed into a doll, she also became *the Other* of representation, what, in his essay on *The Writing of History* (1988: 2), the French philosopher Michel de Certeau, drawing on Lacanian terminology, called *le corps su*, “the body of knowledge, the body to be known”. By becoming something to be analysed, discussed, interpreted, she lost the role of *subject-supposé-savoir*, (“subject in the position of knowing”), and she could not control what was said about her. She was produced as an object of knowledge with the same gesture that marginalizes her and transforms her in ways that may be functional to the expansion of a system of power.

The novel reimagines Grace’s story in terms of her *re-becoming subject*. The multiple mediations of her *otherness* are the starting point of her progressive regaining of her voice and freedom. The novel suggests that the release from prison that Grace Marks finally obtained in 1872, after twenty-nine years of detention, is somehow linked to the possibility to subvert, deconstruct, and reconstruct narratives produced for her and about her.

The first section of this essay deals with the complex intertextuality and multi-perspectivity of *Alias Grace*. It will show that readers are required to be sensitive to the way different narrative modes interact in the text, and to how different perspectives, rooted in different interpretative communities and ethical values, clash and integrate one another.

Then, the second section deals with how *subjectivity* emerges from the text as *inter-subjectivity*, i.e. as a capacity to negotiate identity and alterity within communities. Grace's *subjectivation* intersects both the straight-laced, puritanical society of nineteenth century colonial Canada and a contemporary reading community, which receives her narrative from the vantage point of postmodern, postcolonial sensibilities.

In the last section, the concept of *intersubjectivity* will be instrumental in casting light on how, in the novel, issues of representation are deeply intertwined with ethics and politics. This analysis of *Alias Grace* joins in an ongoing debate on postmodernity and ethics (Locatelli 2014) by showing that, even though the novel takes a sceptical and constructivist stance, it is marked by an attempt to find ways to approach *the Other* in a respectful, dialogic way, without subsuming it under the language of the self or transforming it into an object. This essay will show that otherness does not only figure in the novel as a theme, but also as a lens through which Atwood's metafictional retelling of history is unsettled and renegotiated.

## **2. *Alias Grace*, the Victorian intertext and the ethics of representation. The language of sympathy**

*Alias Grace* inscribes Grace Marks' otherness in the words of multiple speakers. As a consequence, Atwood's novel is a complex architecture which assembles a variety of narratives concerning her story. Each of the fifteen sections (which are divided into a total of fifty-three chapters) alternates several narrators and focalizers, each of which offers different points of view on the woman's status. Grace's first-person narration is juxtaposed with Dr Simon Jordan's, a psychiatrist who is trying to help her recover her lost memory; also, their perspectives are placed side by side to the epistolary exchange that Dr Jordan entertains with family, friends and colleagues. Each section is introduced by a series of intertextual references. Some quotes from the work of Robert Browning, Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson tackle some central issues addressed in the novel (women's desire for freedom, violence, imprisonment, etc.), thus showing how Grace's story is deeply involved in more general questions that shaped Victorian and Post-Victorian sensibilities. Other references deal with Grace's story in a more direct way. Quotes from local newspapers reporting the details of Grace's trial, extracts from the Kingston penitentiary's punishment book, personal letters and journals of professionals dealing with madness and crime, extracts from Grace's and James McDermott's confessions and, above all, passages from Susanna Moodie's settlement narrative *Life in the Clearings vs the Bush* (1853) allow the reader to get some insight into how Grace's story was mediated and transmitted across different media.

It is especially this second type of quotes that provides a significant overview on how Grace was created as an object of different fictional constructions of otherness, presenting her alternatively as the target of accusation, correction and, in some cases, pity. The citation of James McDermott's confession at the beginning of section VIII, for example, depicts her as a devilish temptress who convinced him

to act against his conscience: “the good looks of Grace had interested me in her cause”; “in order to win her liking, if possible, I gave a ready ear to all her” (Moodie 1853: 217, qtd. in Atwood 2009: 273-274). At the beginning of the first chapter, a quote from the punishment book of Kinston penitentiary shows a list of the disciplinary measures that the inmates had to suffer in case of misbehaviour, signalling the deeply dehumanizing logic in which Grace’s detention was rooted. It is, nonetheless, in the quotes taken from Susanna Moodie’s *Life in the Clearings versus the Bush* with which Atwood’s novel engages in a dialogue on the ethical dimension of Victorian receptions of Grace’s story.

A great admirer of Charles Dickens, the British-born Susanna Moodie (1803-1885) deeply believed in the idea that literature should serve a social purpose. In her work, Moodie strove to articulate a newly-found sense of home, belonging, and identity in Canada, a country which, at the time was perceived, as distant, marginal, uncivilized, not a nation but a province. Atwood engaged with Moodie throughout her career as a novelist, poet and literary critic (see Atwood 1970, 1972, 1996), showing how Moodie’s life across two continents created a split identity, moving between the sentimentalism and idealized femininity and the rough conditions of her existence. Moodie’s work about her experience as a settler, first in the backwoods of Ontario (which she called “the Bush”) and then in the more urban reality of Belleville (“the Clearings”), is not only meant to offer advice and pragmatic instruction to perspective British immigrants. It also openly exposes her views on the ethical importance of literary texts, which should address human misery in order to promote awareness and to enhance social reforms. *Life in the Clearings vs the Bush* tackles the story of Grace Marks in two different chapters, one devoted to Moodie’s visit of the Kinston Penitentiary, in which her hopes to meet the “celebrated murderess” were disappointed, and the other reporting Moodie’s visit of the Lunatic Asylum in Toronto, where Grace was temporarily institutionalised for a couple of years (1851-52). Moodie’s ambiguous depiction of Grace is quoted in Atwood’s novel:

Among these raving maniacs I recognized the singular face of Grace Marks – no longer sad and despairing, but lighted up with the fire of insanity, and glowing with a hideous and fiend-like merriment. On perceiving that strangers were observing her, she fled shrieking away like a phantom into one of the side rooms. It appears that even in the wildest burst of her terrible malady, she is continuously haunted by a memory of the past. Unhappy girl! When will the long horror of her punishment and remorse be over? When will she sit at the feet of Jesus, clothed with the unsullied garments of his righteousness, the stain of blood washed from her hand, and her soul redeemed, and pardoned, and in her right mind?

Let us hope that all her previous guilt may be attributed to the incipient working of this frightful malady. (Moodie 1853: 308, qtd. in Atwood 2009: 51)

The text makes it quite clear that Grace does not want to submit to the strange visitor’s gaze, as she is compared to a ghost who does not want to be seen or spoken about. Nonetheless, Moodie manages to frame her in a narrative that achieves both her exclusion from and her inclusion in the values of Victorian society. In the lines quoted above, her assumed guilt, and her consequent fiendish behaviour is, in fact, attributed to disease rather than her free will. By shifting agency and responsibility, Moodie imposes a Christian tale on Grace to the benefit and the moral improvement and education of her readers. She imagines that Grace

is repentant, and that she is atoning for her sins. Moodie adopts a Mid-Victorian, moralistic and conservative attitude towards what she sees as a madwoman in order to reinforce the moral values shared by her community.

As the novel juxtaposes Moodie's well-meaning attempt to find a teleology to Grace's suffering with other narratives, among which also the self-reflexive narrative produced by Grace herself, it also shows its limits with regards to the way Moodie relates to otherness. Moodie's attitude is consistent with Victorian *sympathy*, an ethical stance shared by a variety of Mid-Victorian writers; philosopher Rachel Hollander, author of a volume on *Narrative Hospitality in Late Victorian Fiction. Novel Ethics* (2012), explains that sympathy may be seen as a double-edged weapon. Sympathy is based on the value of understanding others, which is as sincere as Moodie's belief to be able to interpret Grace Marks' feelings correctly. However, as Hollander (2012: 3) puts it,

[e]ven if complete comprehension of another person's mind is seen as unattainable, it still functions as an ideal, and moral behaviour depends upon the attempts to minimize difference and emphasize commonality.

Sympathy, Hollander claims,

is not [...] necessarily outright selfishness in disguise, but [...] it requires translating the experience of *the Other* in terms of the self. While this orientation has the potential for tangible moral good [...] it also carries the risks of failing to recognize the full human complexity of others. (ibid.)

By imagining that Grace is a remorse-ridden maniac without even having the chance to speak to her, Moodie does not make any step forward in the comprehension of the woman's personality. As a matter of fact, Grace spent only a limited time in the asylum, and when she returned to Kingston's penitentiary, thanks to her good conduct, she was allowed to serve as a maid in the prison governor's house.

In this sense, even if the novel never reveals the extent to which Grace Marks was really involved in the murder she was accused of, it demonstrates the historiographic metafiction's potential to explore the limited (and limiting) scope of representation. The redemption-plot that Moodie imagines for Grace is confuted by the events that follow and by the different ways in which her story is questioned. The text goes beyond sympathy by exposing the boundaries of knowledge and by respecting Grace as a complex, not completely understandable *Other*.

## 2. Intersubjective dynamics in the search for Grace's voice.

### The language of empathy

In *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood imagines that the process of retelling Grace Marks' story is triggered by her encounter with an interlocutor who speaks a different, non-Victorian language. Grace renegotiates her identity not just for herself, but to create a new human relationship with the young American doctor Simon Jordan, one of the few characters who have not been inspired by real-life figures. Dr Jordan brings about a new epistemological horizon that is not connected with moral judgement, as he is familiar with the newest development in psychiatry

and neurology, and he is interested in Grace's unconscious mind. He is not concerned with sympathy, but he speaks the early twentieth-century language of psychoanalysis, and his work method reminds of Freud's *talking cure*. Doctor Jordan is not interested in establishing Grace's guilt, let alone in helping her redeem herself, but, as a medical practitioner and a proto-psychiatrist, he wants to find out how her mind works and what caused her amnesia. As his colleague Dr DuPont puts it, "it's not the tune played by the musical box, but the little cogs and wheels within it, that concerns [him]" (Atwood 2009: 98). Dr Dupont's metaphor suggests that initially Simon also thinks of Grace as an object, a machine. Nonetheless, as he starts meeting her and speaking to her, his attitude changes significantly, and, as it will be shown later, he is overwhelmed by her human presence.

While the relationship between the two characters is initially defined by the asymmetry of their positions (doctor – patient, free man – convicted woman), the situation changes dramatically as the story progresses. At the beginning of the novel, Dr Jordan appears as a *a sujet-supposé-savoir*, or at least as someone who possesses all the instruments to unveil the truth. In a sense, he is a detective whom readers expect to solve the mystery. However, despite of the fact that his highly advanced medical skills and competence make him look better equipped to deal with Grace's amnesia than anyone else, he remains a child of his time. It is not only Grace's renegotiation of her own self that happens on an intersubjective level; Dr Jordan also has to respond to a society which does not allow its members to be in touch with their own unconscious mind. As a matter of fact, the more his relationship with Grace progresses, the more the doctor becomes aware of his own repressed desires and fantasies and he loses control of the power-dynamics that overdetermine his relationship to Grace. The doctor slowly understands that it is not only Grace that lives the life of a prisoner, but that he too is entangled in a set of overwhelming social conventions.

The novel thus shows that the separation between the *self* and *the Other*, the *sujet-supposé-savoir* and the *corps su*, is a most provisional construct. Simon is able to occupy a position of power only as long as he does not betray the expectation that society has built up about him. He actually does that twice, betraying both the social circle of Kingston and the scientific community. When he gives in to the desire he feels for Grace, as the object of his desire is foreclosed, he starts an illicit relationship with a married woman who acts a surrogate of Grace, thus losing his respectability and even running the risk of being implicated in the woman's attempt to murder her husband. Secondly, he loses his reputation as a scientist when, perhaps driven by his desire to know Grace's truth, or perhaps just because he was willing to win the approval of the circle he had just betrayed, he participates in a séance in which a psychic pretends to invoke the spirits of the dead in order for them to reveal the truth about Grace's murder. As he does so, he is disowned by the scientific community, which speaks through the voice of its representative, the esteemed professional Dr Samuel Bannerling, who defines him "either credulous to an infantile degree, or himself a great scoundrel" (504).

Dr Jordan's quest for a new narrative to retell Grace's story may be interpreted as complementary to Susanna Moodie's sympathy. He develops a form of empathy towards her, which allows him to explore the connections that go beyond the distance between the two characters and their social positions. While Moodie tried to interpret Grace under the light of the self, Simon starts to translate

the self in terms of *the Other*. Rather than investigating Grace's amnesia, he starts following his own drives. Before the truth of his double betrayal is publicly revealed, he runs away from Kingston without being able to complete the therapy sessions with Grace. Paradoxically, as he is trying to run away from his newly-discovered *Other within the self*, his identity is shattered, and he loses the capacity to speak and articulate his own story. Readers are later informed from a letter written by his mother to his former lover that, after spending some time in Europe, he came back to the USA and joined the Union Army in the American Civil War as an Army Surgeon. Wounded in the head, he lost part his memory. His mother, who has to nurse him and care for him, is thus able to impose her own narrative onto him. As a devoted child, she claims, he will marry the girl she has chosen for him and take care of his family's business. Metaphorically speaking, she rewrites him in the language of respectability, morality, and duty. As he is transformed from doctor into patient, he becomes, just like Grace, the object of a story told by someone else.

#### 4. Otherness as a site of resignification

While the previous sections of this essay focused on how otherness was presented in the intertext of original sources, and on how otherness is inscribed in a system of intersubjective relations, this last section focuses on otherness as a site of subversion and resistance. Grace's narrative will be taken into consideration, as well as its reception by the readers in the light of its superimposition with different narrative modes, perspectives and ethical positions.

Dr Jordan's descending parable is opposite and complementary to Grace's liberation from her condition as a prisoner. In *Survival. A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), Atwood claims that the central preoccupations of Canadian poetry and literature are *survival* and *victimhood*. She elaborates four basic variations on the theme of Victimhood, which encompass: the active denial of being a victim, the acknowledgement of being a victim as a necessity decreed by fate, the refusal to accept the fact of being a victim as inescapable, and finally the position of the creative non-victim. Grace's progress crosses positions two, three and four. The novel initially recollects the utter poverty of her Irish childhood, the violence of her alcoholic father and her journey to Canada, with the subsequent death of her mother. It deals with her powerlessness and confusion in relation to her material conditions, and to the degenerate moral situation in which the murder of Kinnear and Montgomery took place. Then, at a certain point, Grace starts to deliberately use language in order to lie and to manipulate the sympathy that she has gained from her community. Grace, in cahoots with the psychic who conducted a séance aimed at discovering what happened on the night of the assassination, adopts a different *othering narrative* and reveals that the person who inspired the heinous crime was not she, but her dead friend Mary Whitney, who possessed her and forced her to act against her will. When she attempted to run away with James McDermott, she asserts, she was not in possession of her body, since the spirit of her evil counterpart had taken over – as the fact that she used Mary Whitney's name seems to prove. Grace Marks gains credibility with her uncritical community by creating *another Grace*, a sacrificial *alias* who will take the blame for her newly-assumed guilt. Although this narrative is not accepted by the authorities, it somehow rehabilitates her, and she gains a large number of new allies, who are

willing to help with the cause of her liberation. This is granted only some thirteen years later, thanks to the effort of the community, who blames Mary Whitney, or *the other Grace*, and is willing to accept the new Grace as a full subject.

Readers, who are not fooled by Grace's ruse, are prevented from fully adopting either a sympathetic or an empathic attitude to the last developments of the woman's story. In the end of the novel, Grace becomes a creative non-victim, because she has overcome the misery of her Irish childhood, of her oppression as a woman and as a servant, as well as of her years as a prisoner. She is ready to start a new life with her long-lost sweetheart, and she gets a final chance at motherhood. The truth of her involvement in the crime is impossible to know, as she never really confesses to it, but a new version of it has been created. The multiple perspectives from which the story is told shows that the separation from which representation issues does not put representation on a solid foundation, and certainly does not root it in a stable ontology. On the contrary, representation is a continuous gesture of appropriation, which has to repeat itself and affirm a territoriality which is never fixed or stable. The séance fabricates the illusion that *the Other* may be contained and comprehended through a new narrative which is widely accepted by the people of Kingston, who, as good Victorians, trusted spiritualism and are ready to exonerate the well-behaved, disciplined Grace. Yet, Grace, as *the Other* of representation, and the mystery that history could not reveal, is increasingly revealed as phantasmatic, and it recedes as we get closer to it.

### **5. Conclusion. Ethical and epistemological consideration on *Alias Grace* as historiographic metafiction**

This study of the emergence of otherness in Atwood's *Alias Grace* has contributed to highlight the historiographic metafiction's potential for narrating history in a way that does not fetishize *the Other* or cancel its presence by ejecting it from discourse. In *The Writing of History* (1988: 5), Michel de Certeau called historiography "a labor of death and a labor against death". With this formula, the French scholar recapitulates the paradoxicality of a discourse that repeats and affirms its separation from the object that it wants to know, while, at the same time, claims for itself the privilege of restating and recovering it in the form of knowledge on the basis of which a course of action may subsequently be taken. In traditional historiographic texts, writing about the past is made possible through a gesture which cuts off the past from the present, which silences the past and then tries to interpret its opacity by displacing it to the site in which the historiographical discourse is produced and legitimized. Historiographic metafiction is able to go beyond this fetishization by problematizing representation, i.e., by showing it as a *process* rather than as a *product*. *Alias Grace* contributes in renegotiating our shifting relationship to our Victorian past by allowing us to establish a living, unceasing dialogue with it.

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# ***THE GLASS MENAGERIE (1950): A GENRE ADAPTATION***

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**Abstract:** *The paper examines the transformation of Tennessee Williams’s expressionist tragedy The Glass Menagerie into a film melodrama of the ‘50s in light of the recent theory on adaptation as intertextual dialogism and the concept of genre as an intertextual aspect of adaptation. New readings of Williams’s play, rewritten in a film medium according to the conventions of a “woman’s picture”, are suggested.*

**Keywords:** *adaptation, film, genre, intertext, play*

## **1. Introduction**

*The Glass Menagerie* (1944) was the play that brought Williams literary fame and his first play that was adapted for film. Since then, it has been adapted for the big screen in different eras and in various cultures and languages and has communicated with a variety of audiences. The earliest film adaptation, directed by Irving Rapper, was made in 1950. Three decades later (1987), a new film version directed by Paul Newman appeared. In recent times, two new film adaptations have emerged: *Akale* (2004), a faithful and critically acclaimed Indian film adaptation directed by Shyamaprasad in the Malayalam language, and the Iranian drama film *Here without Me (Inja Bedoone Man)*, (2011), directed by Bahram Tavakoli.

The late 20th century scholars who studied Williams’s work adapted for the screen agreed that the *Glass Menagerie* (1950) was an unsuccessful film adaptation, regardless of the fact that it was an adaptation of the play that developed from the *film* script (*The Gentleman Caller*) and the theatre work with a *filmic* structure (the plot unfolds through a series of scenes resembling flashbacks, narrated through the narrator’s memories) and a number of *filmic* techniques, such as *screen*, on which the most important moments in the scenes are projected (Phillips 1980: 50; Yacowar 1977: 9, 14). Contrary to Williams’s instructions in the *Production Notes*, in which he writes about the importance of expressionism and other “unconventional techniques” (Williams 1984: 7) such as *music*, which highlights the dominant tone of the play, and *unrealistic lighting*, which gives “a mobile, plastic quality” (ibid.) to the play, the film was reduced to “literal realism” (Yacowar 1977: 9) in which the poetic spirit was sacrificed for the sake of conventional romanticism (ibid.). Recent scholars (Palmer, Bray 2009: 57), however, state that the film, though transformed to a *woman’s picture* of the fifties, was the successful adaptation which managed to avoid sentimentality and to preserve Williams’s modernism in the portrayal of the “drab situation“ infused with “a poetry that reveals the depth of love and discontent that unites the characters”.

## 2. The film production of *The Glass Menagerie* (1950)

The enormous success of the stage performance and the popularity of the play among the critics made Hollywood film studios compete over the rights to film the play. Eventually, Warner Brothers Studio bought the rights and selected the following cast: Jane Wyman as Laura, Arthur Kennedy as Tom, Gertrude Lawrence as Amanda and Kirk Douglas as Jim (Palmer, Bray 2009: 46). Williams wanted the film to be a faithful adaptation of his play and was absolutely sure that with such a film, Hollywood would turn to a more mature, realistic course (ibid.). The producer, Charles K. Feldman, who was fascinated with the play, seemed to have similar intentions, but it turned out that the studio executives had a different view of the things that the film audience might like.

### 2.1. Williams's compromises with Hollywood

In the film adaptation of the play, director Irving Rapper, who in the film circles was not considered a strong, authorial filmmaker (Kozloff 2000: 247), had to make a lot of compromises. The first one concerned the choice of an actress for the role of Amanda: studio executives insisted on a megastar in order to sell the film throughout America, and even though Rapper preferred Tallulah Bankhead, their final choice was Gertrude Lawrence (Phillips 1980: 51).

Although it was agreed that Tennessee Williams and Peter Berneis should work together on the script, there was no creative collaborative work between the two scriptwriters, because Williams thought that Berneis could not keep the play's "true and fresh observations, its dignity, its poetry and pathos" (Palmer, Bray 2009: 48). At first, Williams intended to use Laura's character to send an encouraging message to all the girls who *failed* to find the young man of their dreams, but since a pessimistic ending could not make a box-office success, he created another version, in which he suggested that there was still hope and that someone else would be coming for them, but that "someone" remained *insubstantial*, in line with "the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for" (Williams 1984: 16). This film ending was supposed to mean that the fulfillment of Laura's romantic dreams remained only an open *possibility* and not its achievement. However, the producers, dissatisfied with such a compromise, went one step further, and, without Williams's knowledge, kept Berneis's happy ending in which a real gentleman caller appears. By materializing the gentleman caller, who even gets his full name (Richard Henderson), the film got the ending that, in Williams's words, ruined the "quality of poetic mystery and beauty which the picture badly needs in its final moments" (Palmer, Bray 2009: 54). The ending of the film makes the image of Laura as an adapted, courageous and mature person complete. In one of the earlier scenes in the film, in which she comforts her brother, she shows she believes in the beauty of the world of art: "The world isn't ugly. While I was waiting for you that night, I listened to the music from the Paradise. It was beautiful. The whole world was beautiful." Her true transformation (and the turning point) in the film happens in the scene in which Laura, aware that the broken unicorn will be "more at home with the other horses" (Williams 1984: 113), accepts Jim's invitation to dance not *in* the house, but *out*, in a *dance hall*, where, among all those people, she starts to believe she is unique. After the dance, Laura's delighted face filmed in close-up shows that she was transformed into an open and cheerful person. The twist (and another disappointment) in the film occurs when

Jim tells Laura about his fiancée. Instead of retreating into solitude, as in the play, Laura summons up all her strength and invites Jim to come with his fiancée to visit them. Furthermore, Rapper's Laura encourages her brother Tom to leave his home and do what he has always wished for: write and travel. In the final scene, Laura is standing at the window waiting for her new suitor. A couple of seconds later, we can see Richard walking towards her and, through Tom's voice-over, hear that Richard *is* "the long delayed but always expected something that we live for" (Williams 1984: 16). In the artistic sense, of course, a happy ending to the film was not the happiest solution. For Williams, "the long delayed, but always expected something that we live for" (*ibid.*) has a much more complex meaning: that we all expect and want something we know will not come true, and that, despite this, the only thing that remains is our hope. Scholars agreed that the ending was the biggest drawback of the film (Yacowar 1977: 13), and that it was inconsistent with the logic of the film (Phillips 1980: 60). For Williams, the ending was a complete disappointment: it made the film the "most dishonest of all film adaptations of [his] work" (*idem*: 61) and "the worst parody made of the play" (Palmer, Bray 2009: 42).

Another controversial point in the film was the scene in which Amanda's reminiscence of her idyllic past is shown as a *flashback*, which was "inserted in the film primarily to counteract Ms. Lawrence's misgivings about playing the role of a woman several years her senior" (Phillips 1980: 56), but also to take maximum advantage of the film medium (*ibid.*). The inserted flashback in the film provides a stark contrast between Amanda's popularity and Laura's alienation, but also shows the gap between Amanda's illusion and her reality. The flashback is triggered by the photo of Amanda as a girl, after which goes the scene in which Amanda's suitors fight for her attention. For Williams, the flashback was absolutely unsuitable in the film, because it looked like a scene from an MGM's musical, which, inserted in the middle of a film that had a serious tone, only trivialized its meaning (Palmer, Bray 2009: 54). Once it was shot, Williams bitterly commented that the scene bore more resemblance to an epic about the Old South, such as *Gone with the Wind* (Phillips 1980: 56). Besides, the visualisation of Amanda and her suitors, as stated by M. Yacowar (1977: 12), disrupts the consistency of Tom's perspective, because it shows what Tom could *not* see and what he could *not* remember, but also makes Amanda's fiction authentic and thus inconsistent with the way she was portrayed both in the film and in the play – as a character who recreates the truth about her own past and the past of the South, in order to emphasize its superiority over the present, as well as her own vitality and flexibility over Laura's passivity and inability to adapt.

Williams's other objections referred to the way Berneis overwrote the scene in which Tom appears drunk, which turned out to be completely "incongruous to the spirit of the film as a whole" (Palmer, Bray 2009: 54) and to Laura's final scene with Tom in which a viewer could hear "exchange of some more lines from the cornball department" (*ibid.*).

In the end, Williams's objections regarding the most important points in the film (the happy ending and the *flashback*) were not accepted, while his less important complaints about Tom's "drunk scene" and Laura's speech were accepted.

Another objection to the script coming from a head of The Production Code Administration was the demand that Tom's closing expression of love for Laura "be eliminated or toned down" (Palmer, Bray 2009: 54), because, as it was claimed, it suggested "incest". Luckily, the studio managed to dissuade Joseph Breen, the head of PCA, from such intentions (*ibid.*).

### 3. New reading of *The Glass Menagerie* in line with the conventions of a “Woman’s Picture”

Critical evaluations of the film *The Glass Menagerie* show that the main criterion for evaluating it was the principle of faithfulness, which looks at the film version primarily as a replica of the original. The critical evaluations so far have not taken into account the fact that a film adaptation is primarily a *film* art work, whose main intertext *is not* Williams’s *literary* work, but that shaped by the *filmmaker* in the *film* medium and in some *other* cultural-historical context. For this reason, the analysis of the conventions of the genre, the influence of the film studios, the expectations of the viewers, the film techniques and the film director’s opus could provide a better insight into the meaning of the adaptation and should contribute to the evaluation of the adaptation as an autonomous *film* work.

In order to overcome the “the aporias of ‘fidelity’”, Robert Stam, a film theorist, proposed a new term for adaptation – *intertextual dialogism*, a concept that implies an active stance of an adaptation towards the literary source and “suggests that every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces” (Stam 2000: 64). Stam argues that a good part of the discussion on the intertextual aspects of adaptation “goes under the label genre” or the question of the correlation between literary and filmic genres (Stam 2005: 25).

Bearing in mind that film is a discourse that does not respond to reality but to other discourses, and that it implies “the active production of meaning”, not the “transfer of meaning” (Stam et al. 1999: 207), Stam concludes that *intertextuality* cannot be reduced to the influence of one filmmaker on another or “with sources of a text in the old philological sense” (idem: 208). The intertext of a film, as he explains, includes

all the genres to which film refers [...], but also to that class of films called literary adaptations, with the attendant literary affiliate [...] and extending to the entire canon of the director’s films, actor’s films etc. [...] not just other artworks in the same or comparable forms, but also all the “series” within which the singular text is situated. (Stam et al. 1999: 209)

In this way, the analysis of the relationship between Williams’s play *The Glass Menagerie*, which belongs to the genre of *family tragedy*, and Rapper’s film, which belongs to the genre of *melodrama*, i.e. its subgenre *woman’s picture*, will give us a better insight into the meaning of this adaptation. In accordance with this view, the analysis of conventions, narratives, treatment of gender and class which are dictated by a *genre*, as suggested by film theorist Sarah Cardwell (2007: 55), must be the starting point for the analysis of the film adaptation and for establishing the criterion for its evaluation.

Although it belongs to the genre of *family tragedy*, based on Williams’s personal experience, the play *The Glass Menagerie* is a blend of various other intertexts, such as autobiographical play, confessional writing and pastoral romance. For the purpose of the film, director Rapper took over the intertextual elements from Williams’s play, which overlap with the film genre called *melodrama* (female protagonists, memories, family quarrels), and adapted Williams’s text according to the conventions of this film genre. On the other hand, the film *The Glass Menagerie* also belongs to *melodrama*, a film genre that “centers on tensions within an intimate group [...] involves extremes of emotion”

[and] privileges a feminine point of view” (Lev 2003: 58). In line with the films of the early 50s, this film kept away from political issues, reflecting the peace and prosperity from the beginning of the decade and emphasizing family values; its protagonists manage to overcome their conflicts and find their place in the society, confirming the existing social patterns (ibid.). In terms of style, the genre is characterized by the accentuation of speech (especially about emotions), the rhetorical style full of ornaments and metaphors, Southern accent, special, melodramatic acting style, evident in gestures of special expressiveness (Kozloff 2000: 238-240), and, paradoxical though it may seem, “the repression of speech, the impossibility of using words to gain one’s desire or to win recognition” (idem: 244), so that it becomes extremely explicit for everything, except for what seemed to be important (idem: 251).

In accordance with the studio requirements, the film was advertised as a conventional *woman’s picture* – films with female protagonists at the center, addressing a feminine audience (Moine 2008: 113): next to the picture of Kirk Douglas, who gently touches the face of Jane Wyman, there was the following slogan: “This is a story of a Gentleman Caller and a young girl who suddenly found what she thought was love... the trouble was... she believed him” (Palmer, Bray 2009: 39).

Williams’s tragedy on the destruction of the illusion to “evade the dangerous world of human needs and the entropic nature of existence” (Biggsby 1985: 41) by means of imagination, memory and art, was transformed, in Rapper’s film, into a melodrama of the bitter experience that should “prepare a soul for a new life” (Palmer, Bray 2009: 52). By materializing the visitor, the film takes on a completely different meaning from the play, in line with the standard happy ending of the melodrama: despite misery and failure, after personal transformations, Laura finds herself an adequate spouse, fulfilling her mother’s desire to be safe and secure, and, despite her initial opposition, accepts a conventional place in the social order and the gender role it imposes. According to Jackie Byars (1991: 55), the only acceptable roles of women in the melodramas of the fifties were the roles of *woman*, *mother* and *daughter*, as these confirm the role of the family as a pillar of society. These films reject the possibility of existence of a *lonely woman*, because she, as an antithesis to *the family*, is unhappy (Byars 1991: 55). Despite Tom’s departure, the narrative solution of *The Glass Menagerie* (by which the family is re-established after the appearance of a new gentleman caller), confirms the importance of the family in society and Amanda’s and Laura’s acceptance of their roles as mother, daughter and wife.

Since the play was reduced to the story about the failure of romantic pairing and the suffering of a heroine, who eventually finds her place in a conventional society, two main protagonists, Laura and Jim, had to go through the greatest number of transformations. Unlike Williams’s Laura, who will never again allow herself a visitor, Rapper’s Laura is, though fragile and sensitive, portrayed as an optimistic, mature person, who finds beauty in art and the world she feels at home with. “An emissary from a world of reality” (Williams 1984: 18) and the fulfillment of a romantic dream, Williams’s Jim brings warmth and self-confidence, the very things the tormented Wingfields most long for. Nevertheless, with his naive faith in democracy, Jim turns out to be another victim of the American dream of success and is much closer to the Wingfields than it seems. In the film, however, Jim is portrayed as a superficial hero, superior to his surroundings, a “bumtuous know-it-all” (Phillips 1980: 58), ready to get out of

every situation. His appeal is even more accentuated by Kirk Douglas's powerful, appealing acting persona.

Reflecting upon the differences between a theatre and a film actor, film theorist Leo Braudy (1992: 392) says that "film acting deposits a residual self that snowballs from film to film, creating an image with which the actor, the scriptwriter and the director can play as they wish". Bearing in mind the notion that a film actor "brings along with himself a kind of baggage, a thespian intertext formed by the totality of antecedent roles" (Stam 2000: 60), it may be concluded that Kirk Douglas, known for the roles of strong, self-conscious, powerful and lovable characters (a gunman, a lawyer, a painter, a reporter, a sefarer), projects a powerful, brave and determined acting persona, completely in line with Rapper's Jim. On the other hand, the tragedy of Amanda's character, who is a blend of contradictory aspirations to regain the past and to constantly confront the cruel reality, is trivialized in the film, due to Gertrude Lawrence, who, known as a comedian, does not manage to achieve a balance between comedy and compassion and, in the opinion of some critics, was absolutely miscast as Amanda (Seff 2010). Similarly, Jane Wayman, who won the Oscar for the role of a raped, deaf girl in the film *Johnny Belinda* in 1948, brings about an intertextual recollection of Belinda, "The Indomitable Sufferer" (Yacowar 1977: 13), not the fragile creature of Williams's tragedy.

As in other melodramas of the fifties, verbal expressiveness pervades *The Glass Menagerie* (obvious in the constant quarrels between Tom and Amanda). Melodramatic verbalization is often accompanied by melodramatic gestures (as in the scene when Tom slams the door, and is followed by Amanda, after which he tears his coat apart and throws it on the floor, causing Laura to scream). Since most of Williams' dialogue was retained in the script, the poetic nature of the speech is an essential attribute of Rapper's film, especially in his portrayal of Amanda, who uses rhetorical, ornamental, higher-class speech. In spite of the talkativeness that pervades the entire film, Laura is not able to talk about her big secrets and innermost feelings (about her love for Jim, her complexes, her inability to fit in or her loneliness). However, Laura's struggle between self-expression and the suppression of her feelings is apparent in her behaviour: crying, painful screaming, the sweat on her forehead and panic. Similarly, Tom's voice-over narration is another form of the obstructed need for self-expression, which, "blocked on the level of inter-character conversation", finds a way out (Kozloff 2000: 247).

The sequence of events in the film is different from the play, due to different conventions of the melodrama: the introduction of the idea of 'Laura's search for a spouse' demanded the shift of the fourth scene (in which Amanda insists that Tom find a partner for Laura) to the beginning of the film; the need for suspense led to the shift of the second scene (in which Amanda reveals Laura's lie about the typing course) to the middle of the film. The unfulfilled romance between Laura and Jim confirms the idea that melodrama is a story about events that do *not* happen and that its pathos arises precisely from the lack of action (Kozloff 2000: 245). Besides, in accordance with the conventions of the classic Hollywood melodrama, the happy ending of *The Glass Menagerie* confirms that, after suffering and conflict, the heroine's dream comes true: she has found herself a spouse and a place in society.

Unlike the cramped, claustrophobic environment of the play, which only intensifies the pressure and despair of its characters, the world of the Wingfields in the film is expanding. Here, we are watching the characters go out into the real world (we find them on the street, in the factory, in the park, in the night bar, in the

dance hall, in the business school, in the department store). The shift of the focus on the *outside* world makes the viewer get an impression of the ruthlessness of the pragmatic world that is pressuring all, especially the fragile, hypersensitive beings. In this way, Rapper's characters are, much more than in the play, portrayed as victims of the *outside* world, and less as victims of their *own* illusions.

In Rapper's film, the expressionist style of Williams's "memory play" was transformed into naturalism. The "lightest, most delicate music in the world and perhaps the saddest" (Williams 1984: 11) was intended to express the superficial cheerfulness of life that hides "immutable and inexpressible sorrow" (*ibid.*). The film, however, is dominated by gentle, but cheerful tones. The light in Williams's play is dim, as in memory, with beams of light directed at certain characters or elements, at a moment when the focus of the action lies somewhere else. In the film, however, Laura is illuminated with naturalistic light; she is not in focus in the scenes in which she does not actively participate in the action, nor does she reflect the poetry and depth of religious portraits.

Melodramas are an integral part of Rapper's opus. *Now, Voyager*, also directed by him, bears striking similarities with *The Glass Menagerie*: it is a film adaptation based on the novel by Olive Higgins Prouty, from which most of the dialogue is taken; the plot revolves around an older neurotic girl who gets an inferiority complex, lives under the protection of conservative, tyrannical mother, and is transformed after the relationship with a married young man, with whom she cannot stay; the music for the film was composed by the same composer, Max Steiner; its characters belong to the upper class and use unnatural, accentuated speech; a theatrical, rhetorical dialogue, accompanied by melodramatic gestures, is used for talking about emotions; the film hides a secret about the passionate affair of the two protagonists; and "unauthorized" thoughts are expressed by non-verbal cues, such as music, suffused tones or voice-over narration (Kozloff 2000: 247-255).

#### 4. Conclusion

This analysis has helped us to determine the way in which the themes, characters, events, space and style of Williams's play *The Glass Menagerie* were transformed when transposed to the film directed by Irving Rapper. Bearing in mind that the film was adapted to suit the conventions of "the woman's picture" of the time, the comparative analysis was complemented with the analysis of the genre conventions according to which the text was transformed, and with the analysis of some film techniques, the director's opus and the acting intertext. All these elements provided insights into some of the new layers of the meaning of the film adaptation as a separate film artifact, which cannot be grasped just by the analysis of the literary source from which it originated. In that sense, it seems reasonable to suggest that the evaluation of the film should be based on the comparison with other film achievements of the same genre, with films belonging to the genre of adaptation or with other films in the director's opus.

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# THE MADMEN OF ALLEN GINSBERG'S "HOWL" AND THEIR BLAKEAN ROOTS

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**Abstract:** *This paper considers the cultural reflection of William Blake's literary madness in the shaping of the identity image of "Howl"'s Beats, with the word beat interpreted as meaning beatifically mad. I underline the effect of this type of madness upon the hipsters who inspired and became inspirational through Allen Ginsberg's groundbreaking American poem and the latter's portrayal of madness as both a consequence of social stigma and a source of prophetic self-confidence.*

**Keywords:** *Allen Ginsberg, beatitude, madness, the Beat Generation, William Blake*

## 1. Introduction

In Allen Ginsberg's "Howl", there seems to be a sense of self-confidence driven by the affirmation of madness and the association with people who are mad. This paper tackles the Blakean madness that Beat Generation, as reflected in Allen Ginsberg's "Howl", assumes as one of its main identity markers. I am going to analyze the manner in which this type of madness is reflected in Ginsberg's manifesto-poem, as it affects what he calls the members of his generation on multiple levels, putting them down and making them *beat*, but also giving them the strength to persevere by fuelling their visionary *beatitude*.

Carrying on William Blake's legacy and extending it into the context of Cold War America, Allen Ginsberg set himself as one of the leaders of a youthful, rebellious generation that was *mad* in a struggle to assert its individuality and make a change in the "asphyxiating apathy of the fifties" (Tytell 1976: 10). It all started with Allen Ginsberg meeting Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs at Columbia University and together coming up with "a manifesto called the 'New Vision' (based on W.B. Yeats' *The Vision*), a radical statement of artistic intent which praised experiment, discounted conventional morality and, at heart, responded to the psychic crisis of a world torn by conflict" (Warner 2013: 24). The three core members of the Beat Generation gradually included more kindred spirits among whom Lucien Carr, Neal Cassady, Herbert Hunke, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder and John Clellon Holmes, and became a public phenomenon after Ginsberg's electrifying 1955 Six Gallery reading of "Howl" in San Francisco and the poem's subsequent publication by *City Lights Books* the following year, with an introduction by William Carlos Williams, who famously advised the readers that they would be going through hell while reading the poem. The rise to fame of the Beats was set in motion by the publicity generated by the obscenity trial involving "Howl" – which was won by the publishing house, after Judge Clayton Horn ruled in favor of public speech and determined that the work was "not without socially redeeming importance" (Peters 2011: 207). Upon overcoming censorship, the volume *Howl and Other Poems* became an international sensation, was eventually translated into more than twenty four languages, became part of school and college

curricula worldwide and established itself as a true American literary classic. Public awareness of the Beats was further propelled by Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and secured by William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959), both of which became referential, canonical works.

## 2. A Beat Generation of identity

The writers that called themselves *The Beat Generation* and were what critic Leerom Medovoi (2005: 217) called the "generation of identity", as their mission was to seek an identity that defined them and distinguished them from their predecessors and many of their contemporaries.

Yet there is a specifically modern discourse of generations, closely allied to romanticism, in which a generation is valued, less for preserving a received tradition than for articulating a historically new outlook. Such a modern generation takes a name (lost, beat, silent, X) that is meant to distinguish its cohort's situation or predicament from those of its predecessors. (Medovoi 2005: 215)

Thus, they called themselves "beat" and articulated their identity around this term. Jack Kerouac came up with the name and traced it back to a conversation he had had with John Clellon Homes – "I said 'You know, this is really a beat generation' and he leapt up and said 'That's it, that's right!'" (Kerouac 1959: 41) – and also to a statement made by Herbert Huncke: "When I first saw the hipsters creeping around Times Square in 1944 I didn't like them either. One of them, Huncke of Chicago, came up to me and said 'Man, I'm beat.' I knew right away what he meant somehow" (idem: 41-42). Their 'beatness' was identified with "a combination of both exhaustion and empowerment" (Russell 2002: 11), as they acknowledged their oppression, yet defied it through mad, spiritual protest. The term was also inextricably connected to Blakean madness, since both entailed being broke and marginalized, exhausted with a disenchanting world, but also rejoicing in the freedom, protection and inspiration of beatific madness, as a spiritual, uplifting state. Consequently, "Howl" is analyzed as a poem that describes and simultaneously creates the beat identity through literary representation and acknowledgement that "the canon [...] is the principle underlying the establishment and stabilization of a collective identity" (Assmann 2011: 108). In this case, the identity seems to be formed on the premise of madness: "The anonymous hero of Howl – the 'who' that appears throughout the first section [...] is an archetypal madman" (Raskin 2004: 92). But what generated their madness and why were the members of the generation eager to embrace it?

## 3. A mad generation of struggling Blakean spiritualists

Like Blake, Ginsberg was intimately familiar with madness and the socially alienating effect it produces. As a child and young adult, he witnessed his mother's paranoia, suicide attempts and extreme mood swings which led her to her being in and out of hospitals and eventually to her admission into Greystone mental institution, where she underwent a multitude of harsh treatments including the lobotomy that caused her death two days later, when her son was only twenty nine years old. Consequently, Ginsberg was very much affected and traumatized by witnessing his mother's insanity and even fostered a "fear that the hallucination [of

Blake] was symptomatic of an inheritance of her mental illness” (K. M. Stephenson 50), Naomi Ginsberg would become “the prototype of the persecuted and martyred visionary” (G. Stephenson 2009: 53) and she would be mentioned twice in “Howl” and later, five years after her death, in “Kaddish” (1961) – a poem in which Ginsberg vividly described her physical and mental pain, but also included a series of blessings addressed to the Lord, who guided over madness, death and Naomi Ginsberg among others.

Naomi, Naomi – sweating, bulge-eyed, fat, the dress unbuttoned at one side – hair over brow, her stocking hanging evilly on her legs – screaming for a blood transfusion – one righteous hand upraised – a shoe in it – barefoot in the Pharmacy – [...] In the madhouse Blessed is He! In the house of Death Blessed is He! [...] Blessed be Thee Naomi in Death! (Ginsberg 2006: 223, 233)

In 1949, the American poet also experienced life as the patient of an insane asylum, where he met Carl Solomon, the man “Howl” is dedicated to. However, in the case of Ginsberg, his time spent in Rockland was a legal option, taken in order to avoid a prison sentence, as he had helped his friend Herbert Hunkie flee the police in a stolen car. He was deemed mentally unstable, although the doctors would eventually renounce this diagnostic. Moreover, on a personal level, Ginsberg struggled with charges of madness on account of his sexuality and was hesitant to publically reveal and accept his homosexuality, since in the 1950s, this sexual orientation was still illegal and considered to be a form of mental illness that needed to be treated and healed. Realizing he did not fit the rigid heterosexual grid, Ginsberg started “thinking and writing about madhouses, madmen, and madness” (Raskin 2004: 151): “Madness! Madness! [...] Oh how often I hear that word in my brain [...] My mind is crazed by homosexuality” (Ginsberg qtd. in Raskin 2004: 152). Initially, he repressed his sexual instincts and underwent psychoanalytical treatment, but “Howl” gave him the impetus to free his mind from self-imposed shackles and follow Blake’s path in terms of letting go of shame and guilt: “the Beats enacted their desires, seeking a restoration of innocence by purging guilt and shame. The model was Blakean” (Tytell 1976: 10).

All these accounts of a socially constructed mental illness allowed Ginsberg to see that being ‘different’ and not subscribing to the presumed homogeneity of American values in an era of conformity oftentimes triggered charges of deviance and insanity. If “Trapped in Urizen’s world, Los appears mad” (Barr 2006: 748), trapped in a “reasonable” world, in which World War II and the atomic bomb were marks of sanity, the Beats preferred to deprive themselves of that reason and embrace madness instead, which made them seem “illogical, emotional, and irrational” (Peters 2011: 209). In a similar manner to “Blake [who] often lamented that madness was a label invoked by the uninspired to marginalize true inspiration” (Barr 2006: 747), Ginsberg stressed the injustice behind the attribute ‘mad’, assigned pejoratively to a group who merely sought to reveal their inherent spiritual capacity for transcendence: “I am saying that what seems ‘mad’ in America is our expression of natural ecstasy” (Ginsberg 2001: 209). This is reflected in “Howl” in lines such as “who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural ecstasy” (Ginsberg 1956: 12), with the last word being indicative of both spiritual experience and the drug of the same name that induces it and modifies consciousness inwards. In other words, the Beats often induce their madness by means of drugs. If the alternative of pacifist madness was

violent sanity, then the former state was to be preferred. As Ginsberg himself stated: “I really will go mad and that’s what I half hope for” (qtd. in Raskin 2004: 83). Admittedly, the American poet-prophet considers ‘madness’ to be an ambivalent concept.

Madness [...] has always had that connotation, among bohemians, of inspiration or enthusiasm. It also has the connotation of irrationality and ugly physiological symptoms. I'm steering a middle path here (laughter), but at the same time I am being sympathetic to the people who are disoriented. The whole point of the poem is sympathy to the disoriented rather than rejection of them as being outside of the social pale. (Ginsberg 1989: 97)

Ginsberg’s half measure sprang from a personal understanding of the fact that assuming madness implied fighting against Moloch’s apparently “invincible mad houses” (1956: 22) and suffering “the consequences of the reformatory, the insane asylum, public ridicule, censorship and even prison” (Tytell 1976: 10). It also meant that his transcendence, like in the case of Blake, brought legitimacy to the vision, but alienation to the visionary (Youngquist 1994: 120). Therefore, it is no wonder that the first line of “Howl” – “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, naked” (9) – initially defines the Beat Generation in terms of insanity and its negative, ostracizing facet that leads its subjects to poverty and delirium. However, this enforced madness is immediately countered by the sacred quality that turns only the best members into “angelheaded hipsters” (9), which alludes to their inherent spirituality. What follows is a series of long, prose-style free-rhymed verses that define the members through the lens of the various enactments of their insanity, with twelve overt references to the notion of madness, which prompts critics to declare that “madness is at the heart of his work, and especially at the heart of *Howl*” (Raskin 2004: xxiii). As the author himself maintains, all three parts of “Howl” revolve around establishing how and why he is part of a “Mad generation” (23).

*Howl* is an ‘affirmation’ of individual experience of God, sex, drugs, absurdity etc. Part I deals sympathetically with individual cases. Part II describes and rejects the Moloch of society, which confounds and suppresses individual experience and forces the individual to consider himself mad if he does not reject his own deepest senses. Part III is an expression of sympathy and identification with C.S. [Carl Solomon] who is in the madhouse – saying that his madness basically is rebellion against Moloch and I am with him, and extending my hand in union. (Ginsberg 2001: 217)

Choosing an alternative lifestyle that did not involve getting married, securing a stable, well-paying job, wishing to advance in one’s career and leading average, comfortable, yet “unauthentic, prepackaged lives” (Huddleston 2012: 1), the Beats refused ‘domestication’ and remained wild, untamed, howling wolves that willingly took a stand against what they perceived to be a deadening stagnation, normality and lack of individuality on the part of their contemporaries. Thus, they delighted in ‘exploding’ all of society’s taboos (Russell 2002: 7), from taking drugs, drinking and displaying schizophrenic behaviour to getting involved in petty crimes and publically asserting their casual homosexual, or at least homosocial encounters as preferable to committed, traditional heterosexuality: “who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their torsos

night after night/ with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls” (Ginsberg, 1956: 10). It should be noted that all of the activities of this “generation of extremes” (Clellon Holmes 2001: 226) subscribe to Blake’s (1988: 10) indication that “the road of excess leads to a place of wisdom” and are also permanently accompanied by a vision of eternity – in this case the act of taking drugs represents “the mind’s way of healing the wounds of alienation” (Wasserman 1982: 147) and the body’s way of metaphorically going through purgatory in order to reach salvation. In an American society that was “split between the normal majority and the deviant minority” (Russell 2002: 9), the activities of the Beats were deemed insane, a role that they assumed, actively sought and turned into an integral part of who they were.

One of the most valuable advantages of being considered mad was that they freed themselves of the weight of a system they believed to be corrupt and unjust as it perpetually punished them with “eyeball kicks/ and shocks of hospitals and jails and wars” (Ginsberg 1956: 11). There are three mental hospitals mentioned in Ginsberg’s poem and in Part I, they all appear in the same line and refer not to the mind, but to the soul: “Pilgrim State’s Rockland’s and Greystone’s foetid/ halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul” (idem: 19). It is the soul of the generation that these institutions wish to crash, although the spiritual connection of the soul with its Creator should raise above such profane ambitions: “the soul is innocent and immortal, it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse” (idem: 25). Viewed from this perspective, imprisonment by the government cannot be proof of defeat, but rather of freedom from an already confining society: “they thought inmates embodied the essence of freedom from the system” (Huddleston 2012: 7). It is this realization that makes the “the hospital illuminate[x] itself” (Ginsberg 1956: 26) and that drives the ‘mad’ Beats to “shriek[x] with delight in police cars” (idem: 13). Following Blake, who was “always calling for freedom, both at the political and spiritual level” (Viscomi qtd. in Galvin 2004), Ginsberg insisted on shaping the image of mad individuals oppressed by capitalism, militarism, industrialism, materialism and consumerism who were unjustly rejected, incarcerated, inflicted unnecessary, harmful treatments and driven to suicide by the ‘squares’ who considered them mad. The term ‘square’ is used by Ginsberg to refer to the conformist, spiritually blind members of his society and is roughly equivalent to Blake’s ‘Blockhead’, signifying the *faux* ‘sane’. “Howl” strengthens the association of the Beats with the alienated youth dismissed as crazy: “In it [‘Howl’] I am leaping out of a preconceived notion of social ‘values’ [...] and exposing my true feelings – of sympathy and identification with the rejected, mystical, individual even ‘mad’” (Ginsberg 2001: 209).

It is evident that the figure of the “madman” was not only forcibly attached to the Beats, but was also an image they used in their favor so as to assert their countercultural rebellion. Therefore, the following lines of “Howl” depict their ironic demand to be hospitalized and given a lobotomy.

who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hypnotism & were left with their  
insanity & their hands & a hung jury,  
who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently presented  
themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with shaven heads and  
harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy,  
and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity  
hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia.

(Ginsberg 1956: 18)

Through the above-mentioned protest, the hipsters wished to follow Blake's example in "deliberately challenge[ing] the standards of rationality prevalent in [their] culture, which entailed redefining the criteria of 'sanity' and the nature of reason" (Jesse 2013: 17), yet they were not understood, and, instead, they were taken to be literally mad, which unleashed an endless list of 'normalizing' treatments. Still, they persevered and, in a manner similar to Blake's, who "approached everything with a mind unclouded by current opinions" (T.S. Eliot qtd. in Galvin 2004), they made their own sanctity (Ginsberg 2001: 209).

The fact that the lyrical self of the poem profoundly identifies with the mad generation becomes clear in Part III of "Howl". Just as madness is the first word that describes the hipsters in Part I, the concept surfaces again as part of the first line of Part III, establishing its priority in the identity formation of the generation. In addition, a few lines below, the first pronoun "we" is used in reference to Carl Solomon, at the Rockland mental institution, uniting the "they" of the previously described beats, with the "you" of Solomon, "implicitly completing the interpellative production of an 'us': the beat generation" (Medovoi 2005: 248, 253). In this manner, cultural identity takes precedence over individual identity, as a social phenomenon (Assmann 2011: 112) and proves that a group can be held together by the shared consciousness of it (Assmann 2006: 67).

I'm with you in Rockland  
 where you're madder than I am . . .  
 I'm with you in Rockland  
 where you imitate the shade of my mother . .  
 I'm with you in Rockland  
 where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter . . .  
 I'm with you in Rockland  
 where we hug and kiss the United States under our bedsheets. . .  
 I'm with you in Rockland  
 where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes.  
 (Ginsberg 1956: 24-26)

All of the three instances are connected with "madness" via the repeated name of the institution, as well as the early reference to Naomi Ginsberg and are linked to the identity of the generation via the pronouns "I", "you" and "we". While the last two references carry a message of love, sexual defiance and gnostic, spiritual illumination, the first one is overtly related to madness as a literary trope that helps express a prophetic dissatisfaction and anger directed at the world and foreshadows a subsequent spiritual rebellion.

The Beat-generated countercultural protest was a response to the post-war economic surge caused by what President Dwight D. Eisenhower called the "military-industrial complex" (qtd. in Gair 2008: 12), which asserted the industrial and commercial force of the United States of America as a military superpower ("Beat Generation Attitudes") in the context of the Cold War. Critical of their country's aggressive policies, large-scale use of violence, as well as "mass production and standardization" (Gair 2008: 19), and tired of the censorship and (sexual) repression that they witnessed and underwent as a consequence of what they perceived to be an almost totalitarian, one-sided system, the Beats used "poetry as a weapon of protest" ("The Beat Generation: the Causes") and created a poetics of resistance. However, their "howlings of mad prophecy" (Barr 2006: 748) were not aimed at destruction, and they took "no particular pleasure in tearing

down a social fabric that they see as already ruined” (Parkinson 2001: 450). Instead of turning their rebellion into a Marxist revolution, the Beats reached out to the mysticism of William Blake: “the issue is never as simple as social justice; rather, the key words and images are those of time and eternity, madness and vision, heaven and the spirit” (Roszak 1969: 126).

#### 4. The Beats’ countercultural Blakean mysticism

The Beats shaped their countercultural protest in a manner that laid emphasis on the interconnection of literature, madness, justice, freedom and spirituality, reviving the cultural memory of William Blake. As Jan Assmann states, *memory* has a crucial role in creating a group’s image of the self:

The constitutive role of memory in this process of self-image making identity formation was identified by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s and is constantly confirmed and expanded by modern psychology, psychotherapy, and brain research. (2006: 67)

It is in memory of William Blake that the Ginsberg-led Beat counterculture acquired a mystical character, teaching people to claim, like their mentor, that the world can be seen through a different lens than that of scientific exploration.

The primary project of counter culture [...] [is] to open ourselves to the visionary imagination [...] to claim like Blake [...] that there are eyes which see the world not as commonplace sight or scientific scrutiny sees it, but see it transformed, made lustrous beyond measure, and in seeing the world so, see it as it really is. (Roszak 1969: 240)

Thus, the English poet-prophet triggered Ginsberg’s intense awareness of the inherent holiness of everything. He therefore expressed in his work that “Heaven . . . exists and is everywhere about us” (Ginsberg 1956: 22), as well as “I am living in Eternity./ The ways of this world/ are the ways of Heaven” (Ginsberg 2006: 41), echoing both William Blake’s “Everything that lives is holy” (Blake 1988: 20) and Walt Whitman’s “I hear and behold God in every object” (2009: 101). In “Kaddish”, Ginsberg saw God in everything, whether it was something that was socially acceptable or not, reasonable or not: “Blessed be He in homosexuality! Blessed be He in Paranoia! Blessed be He in the city! Blessed be He in the Book” (2006: 233). He strongly underlined this stance in “Footnote to Howl” by reiterating the word ‘holy’ fifteen times, always followed by an exclamation mark, in reference to sexual body parts, friends, cities, virtues, emotions, music, and even Moloch’s society. Of course, the act of (prophetic) writing and the state of being mad are not omitted and are, as always, linked with transcendence and visions of eternity: “The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is holy the hearers are holy the ecstasy is holy!” (27) and “The bum’s as holy as the seraphim! the madman is holy as you my soul are holy!” (27), “Holy my mother in the insane asylum!” (27). The literature that results from typewriting is indeed a social weapon, but it is holy because its message is a mystical one and the economically poor bum and the confined mother and spiritually rich and free through their madness.

In his famous 1952 article “This is the Beat Generation”, that brought the denomination into the public sphere, John Clellon Holmes (2001: 224) insists that, as opposed to the ‘lost’ generation of the First World War, “the wild boys of today are not lost”. Instead, they are a group linked by the need to revive faith: “it is [...] the first generation in several centuries for which the act of faith has been an obsessive problem” (idem: 226). They are always on the move and on the road, but their journey is inward, hoping to find belief on the other side (idem: 229). Therefore, at the very core of the Beat Generation lies a spiritually-based identity that “appear[s] as a counter-cultural value to Fordist materialism” (Medovoi 2005: 222). And if they are mad, they are mad to be saved, as Kerouac (1976: 5) put it and mad to be saviors (Verbrugghe 2015: 36), providing an example for the young Americans who did not see themselves reflected in the post-war culture.

Both Blake and Ginsberg refute the material empires they live in, embrace and advocate the arrival of an empire of the spirit instead (Stroe 2006: 8) and seem to be equally committed to becoming spiritual revolutionaries (Portugés 2002: 134). The predicament that the Beats see in society is essentially a spiritual one and it is very difficult to deny that Allen Ginsberg’s protest is the result of a spiritual quest, a “an exercise in pop-cult mysticism” (Niemi 2011: 7) that reveals the “beatific” in the beat. As the American poet asserts, “the primary thing was a move towards spiritual liberation [...] [from] the mechanical assault on human nature and all nature culminating in the bomb” (“Online Interviews with Allen Ginsberg”). Therefore, even early critics realized that “to the average Beat their work is gospel” (Lawson 2001: 301). In this sense, “Howl” can be read as the religious sermon of the soul (Kozlovsky 2005: 42) announced at the end of “Sunflower Sutra”.

Moreover, Ginsberg’s mad hipsters are “crazy shepherds of rebellion” (1956: 28) because they “ate the lamb stew of the imagination” (idem: 15) and are deemed “Holy the vast lamb of the middle class!” (idem: 28). The prophetic image created is one that is derived from William Blake, who in turn drew inspiration from Biblical tradition (Diggory 2000: 105). This symbol, allows Ginsberg to carry Blake’s work in the America of his time, as well as stress his (and the hipsters’) belonging to the same line of prophecy and the same cultural identity reflected in the mirror of “Howl”, which elicits awareness of a collective “we”.

The notion of symbol forces us to transcend the frames of body and consciousness and to take into account the whole range of cultural expression, of texts, images, and actions, as carriers or representations of memory and identity expressive of time, selfhood, and belonging. (Assmann 2006: 68)

Just as we are unable to see our face except in a mirror, we are unable to see our inner self other than by reflection, and it is the latter that creates awareness. (Assmann 2011: 116)

Thus, the Christ-like innocence of the Lamb of *The Songs of Innocence* is projected on “Howl” and Ginsberg highlights the integral part of this figure in his poem, by connecting it to all of the three parts that help establish what defines his generation, what struggles it encounters and what measures it can take to overcome them: the first part is a description of the lamb, the second part represents the lamb’s devourer and the third part depicts the lamb in its glory (Ginsberg 1994: 636).

Although “Howl” can be said to borrow mainly from Christian imagery, it is by no means a merely Christian poem. Instead, it affirms the spiritual nature of all

the Beats, irrespective of their religious conviction, doubling Jack Kerouac's claim that he wrote for all religions "No, I want to speak for things, for the crucifix I speak out, for the Star of Israel I speak out [...] for sweet Mohamed I speak out, for Buddha I speak out, for Loa-tse and Chuang-tse I speak out, for D.T. Suzuki I speak out [...]. This is Beat" (1959: 41). In order to stress, as Blake had, that all religions are one, Ginsberg makes reference to three different religions in the same line: "who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated". While the word "Heaven" is more closely connected to the New Testament, "El" can refer either to the Hebrew God of the Old Testament, or to the Phoenician God "El" (Verbrugghe 2015: 28) and the Mohammedan angels make clear reference to Islam. In addition, throughout the poem, Buddhism and Hinduism are also connected to the generation: "who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey" (Ginsberg 1956: 11), "who retired to Mexico to cultivate a habit, or Rocky Mount to tender Buddha" (idem: 18), "who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary indian angels who were visionary indian angels" (ibid.). In fact, the Beats were all angels – "Everyman's an angel" (ibid.) – because they were inherently divine, although to them the word often acquired sexual connotations, referring to youthful, spiritually enlightened male lovers who "came to pierce them with a sword" (ibid.).

For the hipsters of "Howl", having spiritual visions was not a rare occurrence and they "drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity" (17). Once again, the pronouns, "I", "you" and "he" mark the "we" of the generation. But if to the uninspired "squares", these visions were a sign of madness, to the beats, they were proof of sane illumination and were mingled with everyday activities, just as they were for William Blake. To emphasize this aspect, Allen Ginsberg chose to employ "a language of the everyday and of Judgment Day – a language of the mundane and the apocalyptic" (Raskin 2004: xxi), juxtaposing ordinary experiences with mystical ones: a regular walk in Kansas would bring about "the cosmos instinctively vibrat[ing] at their feet" (Ginsberg 1956: 12), a game of pingpong would be perceived as "the actual pingpong of the abyss" (idem: 25), they would be "run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality" (16) and immersed "in the total animal soup of time" (19). In "Howl" language itself refutes the hegemony of reason and finds freedom beyond the confines of logic.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has revealed the various manners in which to be "beat" meant to be "mad" in a Blakean sense – that is, not clinically ill, but metaphorically, literary, rebelliously, spiritually mad. In a society that labeled all nonconformists insane, in a technological era of science, technology, industrialization and war violence, experiencing visions brought about social alienation, attempts at institutionalization, normalization and domestication. Despite the difficulties they encountered, Allen Ginsberg presented an image of relentless Beat hipsters who were adamant in defying their contemporaries by taking on the role of the 'madman' and building their identity around it, yet redefining it and endowing it with positive, mystical significance. For them, as for Blake, whom they saw as a cult figure (Gair 2008: 33), to be mad entailed to have visions that illuminated the

soul, yet were as immediate as everyday reality, to be confident in one's artistic power and individuality and to assume a divine prophetic mission of bringing about divine regeneration.

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### Online Resources

- [http://quoia.huboages.com/hub/The-Military-Industrial-Complex-The-Beat-Generation, "Beat Generation Attitudes Towards War and Corporations"](http://quoia.huboages.com/hub/The-Military-Industrial-Complex-The-Beat-Generation,-Beat-Generation-Attitudes-Towards-War-and-Corporations). [Accessed 2017, July 23].
- [http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g\\_l/ginsberg/interviews.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/ginsberg/interviews.htm), "Online Interviews with Allen Ginsberg" in *Modern American Poetry*. [Accessed 2018, September 4].
- [https://bu.digication.com/wr150L7\\_aschmitz/Paper\\_2](https://bu.digication.com/wr150L7_aschmitz/Paper_2), "The Beat Generation: the Causes and Effects of Postwar Culture", in *Boston University* [Accessed 2018, September 4].



# SELF-ERASURE AND SELF-CONSTRUAL IN PHILIP ROTH'S *THE HUMAN STAIN*

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*Abstract:* Under the guise of the campus novel, Philip Roth's multilayered interrogation of contemporaneity in *The Human Stain* notoriously blends the author's preoccupations with history, politics, social convention, and America's 'moral mood' at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although not as clearly placed in the proximity of mental and physical exhaustion and, eventually, extinction as Roth's later novels, it is, nevertheless, cleverly built upon a series of literal and symbolic deaths/ murders/ suicides and rebirths of the self. The present paper aims to reveal and decode their oftentimes perplexing nature, their objective and subjective causes, their intended and accomplished effects.

*Keywords:* death, race, re-/de-construction, self, trauma

## 1. Introduction

The majority of critical studies revolving around *The Human Stain* (2000) have been, completely understandably, mesmerized by the Classics Professor Coleman Silk's fate, and have focused far less on the other identity crises that the novel portrays. However, apart from the protagonist, an academic who has decided quite early in life to annihilate his racial roots and practically kill his African-American legacy in order to free himself of its inherent constraints, there are other, secondary characters, whose existences turn out to be determined by apparently incomprehensible, enigmatic, yet real, intense, dramatic struggles and circumstances.

It is upon the reshuffling, re-/de-construction and re-/dis-membrance of the self in the context of turn-of-the-millennium America that this analysis will primarily focus upon. Faunia Farley, Les Farley, Delphine Roux are, in turn, individuals who have undergone traumatic events, and who have been forced or lured into making choices that have buried their former, younger, selves. Even when not literal, death haunts the entire book: from Nathan Zuckerman's determination to retrace and decipher Silk's story after both the retired intellectual and his lover have passed away in a car crash, to the ubiquitous ghosts of the Farleys' two children, asphyxiated in a fire which has unleashed the family demons, to the expiration of Silk's wife, Iris (which he blames on the shock of his own appalling treatment at the hands of the Athena College management), to the narrator's confrontation with his own ominous perishability after having undergone cancer surgery, a. s. o.

The ending of each stage in the characters' lives (be it irreversible or just a threshold to yet another, up- or down-graded version of themselves), seems to be accompanied by ambiguity and an intriguing desire for self-alteration, self-transformation, self-annihilation, self-denial: an entire series of erasures and recreations of public personas. The issue of racial passing, which lies at the heart of

the novel's critical, yet accommodating, approach to Silk's secret life, is but one of the instances of such reconfigurations of private life into the public realm.

'To become a new being. To bifurcate. The drama that underlines America's story', Nathan Zuckerman writes late in *The Human Stain* (342). It is a declaration of an American goal that drives Coleman Silk, the 71-year-old protagonist of the novel, to 'pass' his entire life [...] The desire to transform one's self is the motive for Coleman Silk's lifetime drive to be white [...] Secrets motivate the novel, not only Coleman's overpowering and lifelong secret but also the secret fishing place of Les Farley, Faunia's Vietnam vet and violent ex-husband, as well as the secrets of Delphine Roux, the young French professor and chair of department at Athena. (Nadel 2011: 117, 118)

## 2. Self-annihilation and the price to pay

Apparently anachronistically – if one were to think of the massive phenomenon of racial passing and its literary representations in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – but, in fact, not at all inexplicably, the protagonist chooses to symbolically kill both himself and his family, in a sacrificial act meant to ensure the kind of social and professional freedom he craves, as an extraordinarily gifted young man at the beginning of his career. From the moment he realizes that his college scholarship may depend on his appurtenance to a certain community, to his unease while going to the all-colored Howard University his father had predestined him for, to his declaring himself white upon joining the U.S. Navy, and onto the moment he loses what, at the time, seemed to be the woman of his life, because of the imprudence of taking her home to meet his family, Roth builds a ladder of small, but irreversible steps towards Silk's renunciation of his black heritage.

Although placed during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – before, during and after the Civil Rights Movements which, at least theoretically and legally, changed social perspectives and actions in terms of various minorities' emancipation, free speech, and legal rights –, the allegedly Jewish professor's identity construction is still shaped by what W.E.B du Bois had drawn public attention to in his 1903 emblematic *Souls of Black Folk*: 'the color line' (passim). Nevertheless, Silk's reasons for passing himself off as a Jew, despite his African-American roots, as a drastic way of breaking with the past and creating himself anew, are as much of a financial, socio-economical nature, as they are psychological. Academic recognition, professional prestige and renown in one of the mainstream 'white' research fields are, evidently, convenient perks of his attempted racial suicide.

Yet, what Coleman seems to favor in his decision is rather the unrestrained ability of being whoever he desires (ethnically, intellectually, and even sexually). It is freedom that he proclaims as his ultimate goal and, not accidentally, he must pay a costly tribute. By basing his liberty on a counterfeit identity, which eventually entraps him, his chosen pursuit of happiness seems inevitably headed towards a failure that equals the very loss of his life. Although an Oedipal reading is not my main focus, one can hardly overlook the symbolism of Silk's fate, determined by his own (destructively free) will:

Suggestively, Coleman's attempts to slough off the 'othering' and to create himself as 'self' by passing for a Jew do not guarantee him freedom from the coils of ideology. Elaine B. Safer tellingly highlights this determinism: 'He passes as white

so as to escape the hostility of a prejudiced society, only to be punished by a fascistic academic community bent on purifying its white members of racism' (124). The status of the 'other', which haunts Coleman throughout his life and even ironically brings about his death, is forcefully exemplified in Les Farley's murder of Coleman, which is inspired as much by Coleman's Jewish ethnicity as by the affair he conducts with Les's estranged wife, Faunia. (Louis, Neelakantan 2010: 171)

Black humor is, inevitably, one of Roth's trademarks, and *The Human Stain* is no exception. Coleman's determination to terminate his inherited, racially-marked self, and take refuge in a most radical version of mental (and physical) segregation is strengthened by his father's disappearance as a powerful foil/factor/obstacle in his chosen path. The announcement itself is associated with the latter's funeral, as an ill-boding premonition of the ensuing, multiple side-effects. As finitude looms over the characters' destinies, it takes various shapes, from the concrete to the ineffable, from grotesque war crimes to cynical repudiations of affection and bloodlines, which translate into an actual matricide.

Silk's stubbornness to control his trajectory and forge an alternative destiny to suit his professional goals and expectations leads to his posthumous portrayal as a manic, almost monstrous individual, with few scruples in what his own ambitions and projected future are concerned:

Ernestine relates how Coleman told his mother that in order for him to live white he had to cut her off and repudiate his family, the family with roots deep in the inter-racial mix that was colonial southern New Jersey (European, Indian, and Black). Zuckerman conceives this in terms of Coleman making his secret on a grand scale: He will marry Iris (Iris with that wonderful kinky Jewish hair), have children (despite the risk), pretend to be Jewish (because he looks like a Jewish intellectual), and he will be a classicist (perhaps the 'whitest' discipline in academe). To accomplish this grand design, he will have to dig a trench between this conception of himself and his black family. As Zuckerman sees it, 'He was murdering her. You don't have to murder your father. The world will do that for you [...]. Murdering her on behalf of his exhilarating notion of freedom!' (Schwartz 2011: 72)

Like a reconfigured Thomas Sutpen, with a flawed design predicated on the cardinal values of family, education, love, while annihilating the exact same inherent values for the sake of convenient (self)-fabrication, Coleman Silk takes the distancing from his roots to the extreme. Warned by his astonished mother that he may well become a victim of his own scheming and fall prey to a dishonesty that goes against the grain of the freedom and verticality that he claims to aim for, the protagonist exposes himself to the poetic justice of the universe.

Ironically, it does not have him condemned for the moral crimes that never become public (betrayal of blood, family, race), but would rather mock him by punishing him absurdly, for his clashes with political correctness turned end-of-the-millennium tyranny, and his presumed racism (of all possible things). Roth does not miss the opportunity to castigate the servitude of contemporary academic circles and critical thinkers to what appears to be a new terrorism of words and ideas, which has resulted in a shallowness of theoretical vogues, rather than in a reconfiguration of the American canon.

### 3. Symbolic deaths and rebirths: between public shallowness and private failure

Slightly shifting the objective, one can hardly ignore another symbolic death in the novel: that of the humanities in a traditional sense. At Athena (imaginary, yet representative locus of ‘forward thinking’ education), the classics are doomed to eventual extinction, as their study seems to be increasingly dictated (and marginalized) by the hermeneutical trends of the day. Caught in the culture wars of the 1990s and beyond, Coleman Silk witnesses aberrant discourses of humourless identity politics, the imposition of strict speech codes, and the fundamentalism of equalitarian beliefs that reach as far as his being accused of teaching Euripides’ plays, which, one student complains, are ‘degrading to women’.

Clearly, the death of classical education is near, and Roth uses his writing to warn against the shallowness and sterile nature of the new and dangerous impositions of the academic environment, which seems inclined towards a confusing misbalance between ethics and aesthetics, the dictates of quality and the dictatorship of representation. The major pillar of this simultaneously deplorable and risible conundrum in the novel is the young head of department, French professor Delphine Roux, whom Silk himself has hired and who is just as fierce a self-structor as her colleague and, by now, subaltern.

More than being obsessively careful with her public image (which Roth will, of course, help her, tragic-comically, stain), she becomes a true executioner in the life-and-death campus battle (which literally makes a collateral victim in Coleman’s wife, Iris). Author of the famous anonymous ‘Everyone Knows’ letter, that lends its title to the opening chapter, Roux assigns herself the role of fighter for justice and equality in the name of the students, and consequently places herself in quasi-ridiculous positions. She stubbornly applies preconceived theoretical grids to real-life practices and situations, proving her disconnectedness from the immediate world (as attested by both the accusations, and her simultaneously biased and clichéd jargon). As pointed out by Gustavo Sanchez Canales,

Delphine – a Marxist-feminist who interprets human relations in terms of dominance and submission – regards the Coleman-Faunia affair as sexual exploitation of the latter by the former: ‘Everyone knows you’re sexually exploiting an abused, illiterate woman half your age’ (38-39). Delphine’s letter, in which the repeated phrase ‘Everyone Knows’ seems to be a farcical version of the oracle of Delphi’s inscription ‘Know thyself,’ depicts her actual ignorance, wickedness and manipulation of her colleagues. Like Delphi, Delphine is obscure and dangerously ambiguous; unlike the oracle, she becomes a grotesque figure: she overtly embodies many of the flaws of the institution she works for. (Sanchez-Canales 2009: 117-118)

Incapable of surmounting stereotypes, bitter and resentful of Coleman’s status and overall success, Delphine is yet another character who tries to pass herself off as somebody different from her real self, which she obscures in order to fit into the world of her choice. The episode in which Delphine pens a want-ad for a male companion is telling for the true nature of her own successive deaths and births of the self, on her way from the Old World to the New, from France to America. Dropping the mask, she unveils her immigrant background, the ambition and the desire for ‘superiority’ that made her leave (“for the pleasure of one day coming home, having done it, of returning home triumphant” – Roth 2001: 274).

Like Silk, she has been searching for independence and success, for a practical means of breaking away from the influence of a domineering and demanding mother, for a method by which she might prove herself via professional accomplishment. However, the contemplation of her private failures reveals a complete opposite to the overbearing, overconfident, cunning public persona that she has created. Behind the aggressive overachiever, there is an insecure woman who fully realizes the extent of her trauma, the disconnectedness from the life she has manufactured for herself, the devastating outcome of her symbolic killing of her European background for the sake of an illusory American glamour, alongside the impossibility and futility of the rebellion against her mother's lingering shadow.

The struggle, similar to Silk's – whom she feels, in fact, rather attracted to, than appalled by –, is that of reconciling the chosen self with the murdered one, of keeping the past at bay and burying the evidence forever. Once more, Roth would have been a lesser writer had he allowed that to happen. Playing a practical joke on his fierce female academic leader, who exposes her vulnerability by accidentally e-mailing her most intimate secret to the entire department, he does not neglect the exploration of her hidden, stifled, muted feelings, those of a person she is certain to present as a former, invalid version of herself:

Here she operates at fifty percent of her intelligence, and in Paris she understood every nuance. What's the point of being smart here when, because I am not from here, I am de facto dumb ... Thinking that the only English she really understands – no, the only *American* she understands – is academic American, which is hardly American, which is why she can't make it in, will never make it in, which is why there'll never be a man, this is why this will never be her home, why her intuitions are wrong and always will be [...] Thinking that all her intellectual advantages have been muted by her being *depaysée* ... Thinking that she has lost her peripheral vision, that she sees things that are in front of her but nothing out of the corner of her eye, that what she has here is not the vision of a woman of her intelligence but a flat, a totally frontal vision, the vision of an immigrant or a displaced person, a *misplaced* person. (Roth 2001: 276)

#### 4. Self-erasure as means of coping with/escaping trauma

While Coleman Silk's fate embodies the drama of leaving one's racial roots behind, the apparently self-possessed Delphine is torn by the hyphenation, the mental, physical, intellectual dislocation, the maladaptation, the marginality that she desperately tries to turn into centrality, the essential, inevitable, encumbering *neither/nor*: a different kind of double burden that she struggles just as hard to disguise. Her implausible rival, Faunia Farley, who seems the most straightforward, understated, simple and simplistic character of all, will eventually produce one of the big surprises (once again, posthumously).

Working as a janitor who cannot read and write, she is pitied for her involvement with Coleman, seen by Delphine (and not only by her) as a victim of sexual exploitation. What remains unknown until after her death, apart from her obviously free choice of partner, is the fact that she is, in her turn, somebody who has deliberately opted for a new self, obliterating the pain-and-death ridden previous one(s). Abused in more ways than one, traumatized by her father and, afterwards, by her veteran husband, having lost to fire both her children, whose

ashes she keeps under her bed, having tried to literally take her own life several times, she was, in fact, the child of a quite well-off family.

As such, she rapidly and painfully descended the social ladder, becoming an emotional wreck, desensitized to both public opinion and private judgment. Her decision to pass is, this time, not connected to race or immigration, but rather to class and education, as she chooses to sever all ties to her born and bred self, thus attempting to free herself from the unbearable burdens of the past. Just like the other characters who wear social masks in the novel, she creates the illusion of control over her destiny by building herself anew. Interestingly, she would rather play herself down than up, as she has grown indifferent to the apparent social advantages that have neither sheltered her from humiliation and oppression, nor spared her the loss of her offspring.

Since the norm establishes the primacy of the educated and wealthy in the hierarchy of class, Faunia deconstructs the class element of her identity by renouncing her upbringing and passing for an illiterate janitress. As the protagonists move within certain ideological spaces, mostly oppressive ones, their adherence or resistance to a particular ideology justifies the grounds of their identity choices and their *modus vivendi*. (Drăgulescu 2014: 100)

Opting out of her “category”, defying conventional goals and expectations, refusing to be part of a ‘community’ that has very little to do with the traumatizing reality of her own life, she prefers the anonymity of a presumably effaced self. Moreover, she is constant in her decision, not permitting her highly academic lover to mentor her (as other Rothian male protagonists attempt to do in their relationships with much younger women). She stays in control of her apparently insignificant and empty existence by exerting a type of agency that baffles Zuckerman and plays notable counterpart to Silk’s previously undeterred will. While the narrator, upon finding out about the existence of her diary, cannot help but wonder whether feigned illiteracy was a source of power and rebellion against grim circumstances, critics have found that,

while Farley and Silk’s relationship may have appeared disproportionate to many, Farley, in fact, retained a great deal of control, which seems to have equalized any socioeconomic and educational differences [...] Much like Coleman, Faunia passes as a means of escape and to achieve a sense of freedom – freedom from her thoughts, her pains, and her sins. (Kirby 2006: 157-158)

Last but not least, one of the reasons for Faunia’s early retirement from the ‘natural’ course of her life and her rebirth as an impersonator, in a supposedly inferior guise, is Les Farley, a Vietnam War veteran who is plagued by nightmares and whose present self seems to have, once more, very little to do with the person he used to be before his traumatic encounter with brutal, repeated, mass murder. Death surrounds and defines Les who, like many former soldiers, has lost control of his (f)actual being and reactions. Unlike the other characters, he does not choose to kill his former self; he rather wishes for death as an escape from the haunting memories that have transformed him (“EVERYTHING SO INTENSE AND EVERYBODY FAR FROM HOME AND ANGRY ANGRY ANGRY ANGRY RAGE” – Roth 2001: 72).

As Derek Parker Royal puts it, “Les Farley is the character in the novel most closely associated with death. After two tours of duty in Vietnam – during the second, a return to action he volunteered for, he went ‘ape-shit’ and spewed “death and destruction]” via “door gunning” (Roth 2001: 65) – Les is ‘deadened’ to existence” (idem: 131). The obvious perpetrator of family abuse and the alleged carrier of moral responsibility for Coleman and Faunia’s fatal car crash, he is part of the numerous squad of living dead, left behind by forces of history that surpass by far individual will and determination.

A victim of the war, suffering from “goddam PTSD”, he can barely tell past from present, immediate reality from former combat. He is doomed to relive the horror and battle numbness, depression, impotence. “Payback! I kept thinking about Vietnam. About all the times I think I died. That’s how I began to know that I can’t die. Because I died already. Because I died already in Vietnam. Because I am a man who  *fucking*  died” (Roth 2001: 73). Les’ portrait, his sociopathic drives, his blurred self-search in the wake of witnessing and participating in disaster complete the circle of literal and symbolic deaths in *The Human Stain*. His sins are, evidently, neither excused nor pardoned, but his tragedy and those he inflicts upon others are echoes of socio-cultural evils that Roth never ceases to call attention to.

Fairly early on in the story, Roth enters the Vietnam vet’s tortured mind, and what ensues is by now a classic Roth full-range riff that runs on for six, seven riveting pages. Here, and in the subsequent chilling set pieces, Roth recreates the burnt-out psychopathology of a permanently damaged man, presented with no more squeamishness than Homer’s portrait of battlefield carnage at Troy. By the time we get to the final scene, which finds Les ice-fishing at a remote pond and brandishing a large auger before Zuckerman’s eyes, we are persuaded that that such spectral casualties of war are afoot in the land. (Persky 2011: 18)

## 5. Conclusion

As grim reminders of cruel realities, Les and his perpetually menacing presence in the novel connect the multiple (vicious) circles of birth, death and rebirth of the self, placing them in an enlarged context and reminding the reader of the strong cultural, political, ideological tensions that actually form the background against which *The Human Stain*’s “fantasies of purity” are projected. It is out of this all-encompassing and, ultimately, inevitably flawed American obsession with perfection (of race? class? ethnicity? status? nationality? education?) that the book draws its strength and verisimilitude. As Claudia Roth-Pierpont summarizes in her insightful monograph, *Roth Unbound*,

What, finally, does the American trilogy say about America? [...] ‘The fantasy of purity,’ renewed over and over again – from the extreme anti-war Left, from the extreme anti-Communist Right, from the hypocritically puritanical everybody, to take the three books in order – is appalling. ‘But that’s the great American blessing,’ Roth tells me when I ask how the phrase applies to the country. ‘It’s a radically impure society’. Coleman Silk’s genealogical history elaborated in two long pages of near Old Testament begats, includes runaway slaves, Lenape Indians who married Swedish settlers, and mulatto brothers from the West Indies who brought Dutch sisters from Holland to be their wives. And still, like most of the others, he made himself up. And still he was hounded and murdered for what he was and for what he wasn’t. (2013: 258)

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# THE WRATH OF MERRY LEVOV: MOTHER/DAUGHTER CHAOS IN PHILIP ROTH'S *AMERICAN PASTORAL*

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**Abstract:** *The paper explores the mother/daughter crisis in Philip Roth's American Pastoral in order to critically question the cardinal role of the pivotal role paternal and patriarchal elements play in the novel. My aim is to reveal the narrative strategies that expose the pitfalls of Dawn Dwyer's archetypal role and her contribution to the articulation of Merry's inexplicable trajectory as a domestic terrorist.*

**Keywords:** *crisis, domestic terrorism, mother/daughter relationship, terrorism in literature, the American Dream, violence*

## 1. Introduction

In his 1997 novel *American Pastoral*, Roth projects the multi-layered crisis of the American Dream – and its anticipated demise – against the backdrop of a family crisis, that of the house of Levov. Seymour Irving Levov (the Swede), the assimilated liberal Jew who owned a prosperous glove factory and seemed to embody the American fetishized ideal of social success, witnesses the brutal end of his familial bliss, once his daughter Merry joins a radical activist group, blows up the local post office and becomes a fugitive. His wife, Irish-Catholic, former Miss New Jersey, Dawn Dwyer, a strong-willed woman who stood her ground against the family patriarch, her future father-in-law Lou Levov, before marrying into a Jewish family, is no less dynamic in her tragic role as mother of Merry, the Rimrock Bomber.

The paper focuses on the tragic tension defining the mother/daughter relationship in Roth's novel, exploring an angle that has been critically tackled less often than the father/daughter perspective, of paramount relevance in the investigation of Merry's destructive actions. The familial component of the social, political and emotional background of Merry's tragic biography appears fundamentally connected to Roth's critique of the pitfalls of the American Dream. Her daughter's absolute opposite, Dawn Dwyer had had some challenges of her own – adapting to the rigours of a Jewish patriarchal family, overcoming her objectification as a beauty queen, and exhaustingly trying to respond to the needs of her difficult child. Merry, "the anarchic center of the novel" (Parrish 2000: 91), a "postmodern horror" (idem: 93) and "the major disruption of the hero's American Dream" (Safer 2006: 87), proves to be just as catastrophic and disruptive to her mother.

Roth's narrator and fictional voice, Nathan Zuckermann, seems fascinated solely with the Swede: he is the focus of his novel, and the story he tells is a homage to his childhood hero. Dawn may seem purposely constructed for balancing reasons only. Although Seymour Levov is the protagonist of the complex drama unfolding in Roth's *American Pastoral* and the father/daughter relationship

facilitates an up-close investigation of the novel's central theme, the demise of the American Dream at the end of the 1960s, the mother/daughter tensions are equally relevant in the development of Roth's most problematic character, Merry Levov.

Roth's allegories of pastoral bliss focus primarily on familial unity and harmony. Family lies at the core of the Swede's version of the American Dream, with his social and financial success based on a well-managed business. However archetypal his protagonist may appear, he is not as obviously cliché-ized as Dawn. She may be a secondary source of the frustration and anger in her daughter's difficult childhood and adolescence, but her impact should not be overlooked. Rita Cohen, Merry's messenger to her father while she was hiding from the authorities after multiple bombings, would clearly utter this uncomfortable verdict: the massively flawed daughter of the apparently perfect Miss New Jersey of 1949 blamed her mother for her own downfall.

## 2. The archives of loneliness

In one of the Swede's most emphatic imaginary monologues – addressing Merry, nevertheless – the narrator reveals the Levovs' potentially ultimate source of inner tension and unrest, nourishing their angst and sense of dislocation. “The great god Loneliness” (Roth 1997: 226), as their allegorical subversive protector, would oversee Dawn's failed assimilation into a Jewish family, Merry's convulsive political awakening and both parents' effort to survive their social effacement in the wake of Merry's bombing the only local federal building, the post office. “I'm lonesome, she [Merry] used to say to him when she was a tiny girl” (ibid.); “It's just strange [...] it's just strange [...] it's just strange not being alone” (319), Dawn would confess to her husband after making love. In the mismatched, tragedy-struck Levov family, the ties that bind do so in the name of loneliness. The ideal they seemed to embody was, in fact, an amalgam of “concealment, pretense, artificiality, inauthenticity” (Rubin-Dorsky, 2003: 224).

The mother/daughter relationship in Roth's novel is shaped by two distinct episodes – Dawn's response to Merry's uncontrollable stutter and to her daughter's radicalization and crimes. Less obvious, but of similar importance to the archeology of Merry's life as angry-daughter-turned-terrorist is the maternal dynamics in the Levov family – Dawn's assimilation into a Jewish family, her ability to relate to her daughter's increasingly complex needs and her failure to adapt to the stages of Merry's inner metamorphosis, signaled by the fast pace of her changing interests as a teenager.

Dawn entered the Levov family with some major disadvantages – she was a *shiksa*, a Catholic young woman about to marry a Jewish man; her intellectual abilities had long been overshadowed by her striking beauty; she was opinionated and stood her ground, as the episode when she confronted her father-in-law, Lou Levov, clearly proves. However, Dawn was no less baffled by her daughter's increasing anger and frustration than her husband, as she saw no pertinent reason that could explain them. She blamed herself – “Am I a bad mother? Is that it?” (Roth 1997: 102), then she blamed Merry's stutter – “She's angry because she stutters. She doesn't make friends, [...] because she stutters” (103). Although, as the narrative unfolds and Merry becomes the Rimrock Bomber, it may appear as if the Swede was carrying the parental burden of Merry's atrocities on his own, Dawn was no less affected or involved. Merry's quirks and deviations puzzled her, while her husband tried to explain and justify them. “I can't. I can't talk to her”, Dawn

concluded at one point, as she was helplessly witnessing her teenage daughter's increasingly erratic behavior. Her verdict would echo over the years, when her father alone would come to meet her at the deplorable hiding place she was inhabiting. "I don't want to talk about my mother" (263), Merry replied to her father when he asked why she showed no interest in how her mother was.

Dawn seemed able to follow her daughter's development through her puberal stages of celebrity worship (her fascination with Audrey Hepburn), she helped cultivate her interest in cattle breeding and in the Catholic confession, but once her daughter turned political, she seemed to withdraw. The endless conversations about Merry's going to New York to visit her radical friends strictly involved father and daughter. Roth's alter-ego narrator is subtle in his effort to question both parents' approach to Merry's stuttering. Her father's virtually endless patience is poignantly reinforced:

[...] he did not wring his hands like her mother, when she was in trouble he did not watch her lips or mouth her words with her like her mother, he did not turn her, every time she spoke, into the most important person not merely in the room but in the entire world—he did everything he could not to make her stigma into Merry's way of being Einstein." (91)

The Swede's manner of handling his daughter's ongoing crisis as a pathology in need of a cure is prolonged long after her affiliation with the leftist radicals Weathermen Underground and her subsequent hiding. As Sandra Kumamoto Stanley (2005: 12) argues, "the Swede attempts to interpret her political actions as a sickness that may be cured". Dawn would be less tempted to seek answers and, although suicidally grief-stricken (therefore, more than the Swede, pathologically affected, as well), would also focus on herself and their shared past.

The mother/daughter angle is refocused by two marginal characters – Merry's psychiatrist and, much later, the messenger she apparently sent to her father, Rita Cohen. The psychiatrist warned the Levovs that Merry's stuttering could be a manipulative strategy to draw attention upon herself and briefly assume a position of power in relation to her socially flawless parents. In Swede's interpretation, Merry's psychiatrist seemed to believe "that the etiology of Merry's problem had largely to do with her having such good-looking and successful parents" (Roth 1997: 95-96). Yet the Swede would blame the doctor's jealousy on their appearance and prosperous good looks:

It's all because of the way I look. Hates me because of the way Dawn looks. He's obsessed with our looks. That's why he hates us – we're not short and ugly like him! (ibid.)

the Swede thinks to himself. The psychiatrist seemed certain that their daughter's stuttering "can be an extremely manipulative, an extremely useful, if not even a vindictive type of behavior" (ibid.). The Swede refuses to accept this supposition, as he would later refuse to believe his daughter was a murderer or a fugitive who needed to be forcefully brought back home. In his "version of paradise" (86) there was no place for blockage or incomprehensible repetition. Unwilling to accept that his daughter had become involved in a power struggle with her parents, the Swede supported his solidarity with a firm set of illusions. "We frequently see fathers who can't accept, who refuse to believe" (97), the psychiatrist concludes. After the

bombing and Merry's disappearance, Dawn received psychiatric care, too. Suicidally depressed, she became aware that the damage inflicted by her daughter's savage bombing attacks would be permanent and insurmountable. It was then that she would also find her voice to utter bitter words denouncing the Swede's irrepressible power of persuasion and seduction:

[...] so how did this happen? How have I wound up here? You, that's how! You wouldn't leave me alone! Had to have me! Had to marry me! I just wanted to become a teacher! That's what I wanted....[...] I never wanted to marry anyone! But you wouldn't let me breathe – you wouldn't let me out of your sight. All I ever wanted was my college education and that job. I should never have left Elizabeth! Never! Do you know what Miss New Jersey did for my life? It ruined it. (178)

During her long conversations with her husband at the psychiatric facility, Dawn would clearly express her duplicitous stance on her most obvious asset – physical beauty – and would denounce it as a primary source of frustration: “I couldn't stand when people said I should do things because of the way that I looked” (179). Although her revolt against discriminatory societal norms seems justified, despite her protests, she went on to become Miss New Jersey 1949, then she participated in the Miss America pageant. Motivated by money and a substantial scholarship, although aware of the overt objectification she was subjected to, Dawn preferred to protest instead of acting upon her feelings:

[...] I won again. And then they were coaching me on how to sit and how to stand, even how to listen – they sent me to a model agency to learn how to walk. They didn't like the way I walked. I didn't care how I walked – I walked! (180)

The Swede found it difficult to acknowledge the accuracy of his wife's version of the past. He remembered it differently. Once again, as he did when the psychiatrist had warned him that his daughter's stutter could be sheer manipulative behaviour, he was in a position where he had to defend his perception of others, particularly members of his immediate family:

It was a great help to him, driving home after one of those visits, to remember her as the girl she had really been back then, who, as he recalled it, was nothing like the girl she portrayed as herself in those tirades. During the week in September of 1949 leading up to the Miss America Pageant, [...] what radiated from her voice was sheer delight in being herself. He'd never heard her like that before – it was almost frightening, this undisguised exulting in being where she was and who she was and what she was. (181)

Dawn's short resume in the Miss America Yearbook of 1949 was a brief description of a shallow image, a woman reduced to a sketch, with a hint at her marital value: “Mary Dawn Dwyer, 22 year old Elizabeth, N. J. brunette [...] has the ambition of becoming a high school music teacher. She is 5-2V2 and blue-eyed, and her hobbies are swimming, square dancing, and cooking” (186). Twenty years later, when Dawn was invited to the reunion of the 1949 Miss America contestants, the Swede spares his wife a painful encounter with her problematic past. The chasm that separated them from the celebratory mood of those wonderful summer days of May 1969 was frightful enough: “Things were bad enough – the things she was saying to him were bizarre enough; the relentless crying about her

shame, her mortification, the futility of her life was all quite sad enough” (187). Shortly after, Dawn went on to reconfirm her former socially admirable self – she would seek to restore her beauty, the façade she had earlier denounced as punitive and alienating. She had a facelift in an exclusive Swiss clinic, and her husband was convinced that it would be an awful mutilation, the final act of her emotional downfall. Again, he was wrong – it triggered an unexpected awakening: Dawn would soon decide that she hated their solid stone house – again, to her husband’s disbelief – and she would start planning to build a new one, with the help of her future lover, architect Bill Orcutt. The long revelatory episode detailing the life of the Levovs after Merry’s disappearance explores and questions the Swede’s understanding of his family’s perception of past events, revealing Dawn’s metamorphosis. Historically displaced, as an American assimilated Jew crushed by the irrational consequences of social crisis and war, Seymour Levov fails to connect to both his daughter’s and his wife’s representations of the past, which he saw as coherent and comprehensible. In her turn, Dawn would reveal her strategies of dissimulation, by paradoxically denouncing and reinforcing her main agent of social validation and control – in Rita Cohen’s sarcastic terms, that would be “[...] skin. Ectoderm. Surface” (137).

### 3. The pitfalls of idyllic motherhood

Merry “entered the world screaming and the screaming did not stop” (Roth 1997: 390); language could not mediate between her mysterious inner life and the outer world, as she began stuttering as a child, and this would only stop later, after she had revealed her antisocial, homicidal side, when she was handling bombs – “She never stuttered when she was with the dynamite” (259). Indeed, as Timothy L. Parrish (2000: 92) observes, the bombs “express the rage that the stutter concealed”. Social contact proved troublesome from very early on – Merry would react badly to harmless encounters with strangers – “everything might be going fine, until somebody came along and leaned over the cart and said, “Oh, what a cute baby”, and that would be it: inconsolable for the next twenty-four hours” (Roth 1997: 390). When the narrative perspective is shifted from the father/daughter crisis, Dawn’s insertion into her new Jewish family is scrutinized for answers.

As Zuckermann speculates, “What had gone wrong for Merry was what her Jewish grandfather had known would go wrong from the morning of the meeting on Central Avenue” (391). In her future father-in-law’s office, Dawn firmly negotiated her place in the family, the Catholic holidays they would celebrate, her future children’s baptism. Lou Levov stood his ground and gave in cautiously. There were limits he was unwilling to cross, and he would prematurely want to end their common attempt at a compromise. But Dawn wouldn’t give in, she would defend her choice and her identity: “I’m not a picture, Mr. Levov. I’m myself. I’m Mary Dawn Dwyer of Elizabeth, New Jersey. I’m twenty-two years old. I love your son” (400). Dawn’s resilience would prove useless in the long run, as her idyllic family project couldn’t withstand the sheer force of Merry’s appetite for extremes and destruction.

Rita Cohen’s brief encounter with the Swede, supposedly as messenger of his fugitive daughter, uncovers another revealing episode in the prehistory of Merry’s becoming a terrorist. Swede was informed of what Merry might have

perceived as a humiliating ritual – the menstruation party, a coming of age celebration that was increasingly popular at the time. Rita’s ventriloquistic narrative projects with great hateful force what could be Merry’s interpretation of the moment:

We’re talking about the humiliation of a daughter by her beauty-queen mother.

We’re talking about a mother who completely colonized her daughter’s self-image. We’re talking about a mother who didn’t have an inch of feeling for her daughter – who has about as much depth as those gloves you make. (136-137)

One could successfully argue, as Sarah Bylund (2010: 19) already has, that Merry “defies the gendered ideals for the female body” and the roots of her angered refusal could transparently be the social expectation to follow in her beauty queen mother’s steps. But Merry’s body followed her ideological radicalization – this new vision is “reified in the spectacle of her body” (Stanley 2005: 12) – the former

grasshopper child [...] once shot up, broke out, grew stout – she thickened across the back and the neck, stopped brushing her teeth and combing her hair; she ate almost nothing she was served at home but at school and out alone ate virtually all the time, so that almost overnight she became large, a large, loping, slovenly sixteen-year-old, nearly six feet tall, nicknamed by her schoolmates Ho Chi Levov. (Roth 1997: 100)

Mother and daughter would fight incessantly once Merry angrily entered adolescence. Dawn would gradually retreat into her solitary pastoral utopia, managing her cow breeding business, dividing her attention between her increasingly troubled daughter and the farm. The Swede would often witness their fights, as, unlike her husband, Dawn would actively contradict and oppose her daughter:

But there was now no conversation she had with her daughter that did not drive Dawn, if not out of her mind, out of the house and into the barn. The Swede would overhear Merry fighting with her every time the two of them were alone together for two minutes. “Some people”, Dawn says, “would be perfectly happy to have parents who are contented middle-class people.” “I’m sorry I’m not brainwashed enough to be one of them”, Merry replies. “You’re a sixteen-year-old girl”, Dawn says, “and I can tell you what to do and I will tell you what to do.” “Just because I’m sixteen doesn’t make me a g-g-girl! I do what I w-wwant!” “You’re not antiwar”, Dawn says, “you’re anti everything.” (Roth 1997: 102)

By negating her biological heritage and embracing a twisted, radicalized version of political identity, Merry intended to break free from “the old intergenerational give-and-take of the country-that-used-to-be” (86). This natural succession would be brutally replaced by the irrational negation of all traditions and family ties. Todd Gitlin argues that the family drama of the Levovs involves less historical vicissitudes and rather a curse of fate. “Long before the Vietnam War and the counterwar, she was an infant out of control” (Gitlin 2003: 202), and after that she was a teenage girl who would negate and defy her mother’s authority by disposing of the lunch bag and breaking the soup thermos just to detach herself, in protest, from the maternal symbolic breast. Instead, she would gradually indulge into “the ritual sacrament of the vanilla milk shake and the BLT” (Roth 1997: 261), devouring melted cheese sandwiches, “cheeseburgers with French fries, pizza,

BLTs, fried onion rings, vanilla milk shakes, root beer floats, ice cream with fudge sauce, and cake of any kind” (100). Merry’s excessive, impure manner of handling food could signal the beginning of her search for spiritual gratification. She would seek fulfillment in the protection of all life after having killed four people, but, as in many other fictional circumstances in Roth’s novels, “purity is a doomed project, for it is blind to our fallen epistemological condition” (Posnock 2006: 85). Sarah Bylund (2010: 14) pertinently argues that “food and the act of consumption become Merry’s (and Roth’s) potent means of destabilizing America’s post-war era of seeming plenitude, wholesomeness and benevolence”. Merry’s subversive strategies to manipulate the all-American iconic allegory of the American dream – the rich, fulfilling, serene family dinner – include her pretending to enjoy being involved in the cooking process. In fact, she would avoid the chore of washing the dishes and, as a bonus, she would get to eat her favorite dish, baked zitti. Bylund’s argument connects both parts of Merry’s fractured biography – her pre/post bombing gluttonous protest and her ascetic renunciation of almost all food, once she became a Jain: “Early on in life, Merry wields her relationship with food as a means of rebellious empowerment: first to secure autonomy from the expectations and values of her family, and later from those of society” (Bylund 2010: 15). What may have begun as an infantile revolt against the unrealistic body image of her mother evolved into a vaster narrative that would surpass the limits of subjective selfhood and would turn dramatically political. When she became a Jain, Merry would gradually learn to deny herself the primal satisfaction of food, and her renunciation was as extreme as her former excess. By refusing to talk about her mother (and, implicitly, legitimating such notions as family, home, food and communion), Merry severed all ties with the former social body she used to be part of.

#### 4. Conclusion

“What in God’s name had her mother done? What crime had her mother committed? The crime of being gentle master to these compliant cows?” (Roth 1997: 286), the Swede asked himself, obsessively analyzing his encounter with his daughter in his mind. A positive influence, although misfit, lonely and superficially fixated on appearance, Dawn’s impact on her daughter’s tragic biography is significant from multiple perspectives. Although the entire legion of Merry’s motives to become a domestic terrorist remains unclear, the maternal element, harmless and coherent as it may seem, could have proved, as all other benign archetypes in her normative middle-class family, dangerous triggers of future mayhem.

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# SENSOUS JOCKEYS AND SUICIDAL DRIVERS: THE EQUINE MOTIF IN THREE NOVELS BY JOHN HAWKES

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*Abstract:* Still not widely read in the United States, John Hawkes confronts his readers with the difficult task of assessing nightmares and forbidden desires conjured up through stylistic finesse. His visions of high speed cars as agents of destruction and his passion for racehorses make for his most enduring literary fetish: the skillful horsewoman, an image of erotic loss and portent of incoming death. The study tackles the literary means employed by John Hawkes in order to refashion classical equestrian representations and thus to aestheticize the erotic conflict.

*Keywords:* John Hawkes, horsewomen, fetishism, postmodern aesthetics, visual arts

## 1. Introduction: the artificial scenery

Although John Hawkes' first novel, *Charivari*, came out in 1949, he is still one of the least read writers among those we should now call the „postmodern classics”. The academia and literary criticism have paid (a rather clinic) attention to his work, yet, in spite of that, John Hawkes' fiction seems a curious anomaly of the American literature after World War II. It is quite obvious that his novels have not been imitated too much. However his influence on authors such as Donald Barthelme and Thomas Pynchon has still to be fully assessed. As early as 1960, literary critic Leslie Fiedler decried in his preface to *The Lime Twig* the lack of interest in Hawkes' books and considered him an author for the happy few, “a lonely eccentric” and “the least read novelist of substantial merit in the United States” (Fiedler 1960: viii). Since back then, John Hawkes' oeuvre has gained status, but one cannot see it otherwise than isolated and I doubt that this state of things will change in the near future. Perhaps his belief in formalism, his foregrounded aestheticism and the almost total absence of political stance in his novels should be taken into consideration when discussing what makes Hawkes so different among his more successful coevals.

John Hawkes confessed in various interviews that he had never been able to write about the typical American cultural obsessions, about American history and politics, and, most of all, that he had never liked the American landscape (Morrow 1988). The latter idiosyncrasy is one of particular interest here, considering that the large scale environment has always been an important topos in American literature. The uncanniness of Hawkes' fiction derives from the indefinite settings mostly. With a few exceptions, the majority of his plots develop in places which evoke England, France, Germany, the Mediterranean coast, and even some exotic islands. Nevertheless the exact location has always become the object of baffled conjectures. Hawkes prefers to invent landscapes rather than to draw on topographical accuracy. Critics often quote his unequivocal assertion: “I want to try to create a world, not represent it” (Tanner 1971: 203). At the same time,

Hawkes cannot escape the local heritage as long as his writing is indebted to William Faulkner, Djuna Barnes, Nathanael West, and his lifelong friend Flannery O'Connor (Tanner 1971: 202, 204). Thus the paradox concerning John Hawkes consists of the fact that he truly is an American writer who addresses us by specific European means of expression. The result is highly artificial yet graceful and puts him in the same league with Vladimir Nabokov, the Russian writer who managed to boost his acquired American voice by crafting his own idiom. One might object to the implied truism: does not any good writer invent her or his own figurative language? Yes, indeed, but, according to Tony Tanner (1971: 37, 39), the legacy Nabokov bestowed on his American successors (John Hawkes included) was an art of making fiction by mocking realist pretensions and by sustaining an "awareness of space", not so much a geographical one as a "lexical playfield" able to convey the feeling of perpetual exile. As in Nabokov's case, Hawkes' mannerisms only seem to play with moral issues in order to better elude them. Neither Nabokov nor Hawkes considers that the fiction writer should be a solipsistic aesthete, a dogmatic moralist or an empiricist in possession of scientifically-tested proofs. Michael Wood's remark on Nabokov enlightens Hawkes' writing as well: "Moral questions, like epistemological ones, are put to work in his fiction. Nabokov doesn't write about them; he writes them" (Wood 1998: 7).

John Hawkes appropriates myths not so much in order to parody them – it would have been relatively easy for a skillful writer to make fun of a vast preexisting material – as to signify anew representations of old. One of his favourite motifs is the horse. If we ponder the equine trope, the horse turns out as the most resilient animal character throughout Western literature. Between Achilles' horses in Book XVII of *The Iliad*, who mourn the death of Patroclus and make Zeus ask himself why, among all the beasts of the earth, he gave the beautiful and immortal horses to be mastered by such a pitiful creature as man (Homer 2008: 311), and Emma Bovary, whose reveries, erotic longings, and misadventures are almost each time in relation to the presence of horses and carriages (Nabokov 1982: 175-176) unfolds a rich equestrian tradition. Many a medieval knight and fairy tale rescuer, warriors of all persuasions, male and female alike, Shakespearian kings and Quixotic adventurers (not to mention Gulliver's discovery of horsehood utopia), and hunters from the Wild West meshed their destinies with those of the horses they rode. In the sixteenth century, Michel de Montaigne apprehended the human-horse symbiosis in moral terms:

You link [...] your own valour and fortune to that of your horse: its wounds and its death involve your own; its fear or its impetuosity make you too either cowardly or foolhardy; if it does not respond to bit or spur it is your honour which has to answer for it. That is why I do not find it strange that battles fought on foot should have been more bitter and more ferocious than those fought on horses. (Montaigne 2003: 323)

After the Great War, in the wake of the fast technological progress, the horse retreats gradually not only from literature, but from our everyday lives as well. Horse breeding has become a highly specialized business, one associated with competitions and pastime of a particular gusto. John Hawkes brings the horse back in fiction. He does this not in Cormac McCarthy's fashion, who conjures up nostalgically the American ethos of the Southern border and the cult of sacred violence, but by finding the beast's proper place among expensive automobiles,

fashion photography, glossy magazines, high-brow cinematic experiments, and the whole cultural paraphernalia that social change has made available to us since the latter half of the last century. Whereas in the past it was mainly the horseman who had to prove his riding proficiency, now man has become a grudging observer of the expert horsewoman. He sees much and writes well, but it is her actions that capture both the eye and the main topic of discourse.

## 2. Learning from horses

The horse had been a conspicuous presence in some of Hawkes's earlier novels, for instance in *The Cannibal* (1949) and most notably in *The Lime Twig* (1961), where the nightmarish plot, set in post-war London, concerns the scheme of a criminal gang to run a stolen horse in a race by manipulating a young couple, with dire consequences. It was here that Hawkes linked firmly what would become some of his recurrent tropes: innocence, taboo sexual fantasies, dreams, and deadly hooves (Tanner 1971: 213-215). However only in his later novels does the horse come fully to the foreground.

### 2.1. A perfect car crash

In *Travesty* (1976), one can actually glimpse the equine motif a few times, although the animal as such is absent. The narrator – it is his voice only that we hear throughout the book – drives his sports car at high speed along a road somewhere in Southern France with the declared purpose of delivering the perfect crash at the end of the journey, the crash as *objet d'art*, killing himself and his two passengers in the process: the poet Henri, lover of the narrator's wife, Honorine, and also his daughter Chantal's boyfriend, and Chantal herself. The principle the suicidal driver as artist asserts, namely that "ours is the power to invent the very world we are quitting" (Hawkes 2016: 57), sustains his nihilistic philosophy. The three protagonists' confined road flight in what turns out to be a deluxe coffin depends on some sly authorial devices from the very beginning:

Now we are traveling as if inside a clock the shape of a bullet, seated as if stationary among tight springs and brilliant gems. And we have a full tank of fuel, and tires hardly a month old.

Do not ask me to slow down. It is impossible. (Hawkes 2016: 16)

The emphasis is on the repetition of "as if" and on the suggestion that, at that deadly speed, the characters seem stationary. Of course it is possible to slow down a car in perfect condition. The narrator's sententious warning brings to mind Zeno of Elea's arrow paradox: "Objects at rest occupy a space equal to their own dimensions. An arrow in flight at any moment occupies a space equal to its dimensions. Therefore an arrow in flight is at rest" (Flew 1985: 380). Hawkes' *Travesty* is a mental fugue rather than a genuine road novel. Technically speaking, the speeding of the car is purely a reading experience, an "as if" to which we comply while sitting. All we know about this specific dangerous driving we learn exclusively through the narrator's confession, but the narrator proves unreliable. One of the book's main themes – an astute critic has pointed this out while defining *Travesty* as a "claustrophobic fiction" – is passivity, namely the kind of passivity

some writers exploit in order to spellbind and then punish their audience (Baxter 1980: 871):

*Travesty* joins this tradition by enclosing the reader in the novelistic vehicle from which the victim cannot escape before the vehicle itself (a sports car) is demolished. The story challenges him to discover motivation, cause, or meaning – the critical landmarks that might free him from chaos and death – where none exist. (Baxter 1980: 873)

The opening of the novel – “No, no, Henri. Hands off the wheel. Please. It is too late” (Hawkes 2016: 11) – involves us ironically. We are in control of the finished text as much as Henri is in control of the car (Baxter 1980: 874). The readers, like the horrified passengers whose lines we never hear directly, are the narrator’s passive audience.

Inspired by Albert Camus’ *The Fall* (1956) and to some extent by Hawkes’ own frightening experiences as a clumsy driver (Emmett, Vine 1976: 165-166), the novel is the travesty of a chivalric romance. The French landscape has been chosen for its sensuous connotations, pregnant with reminiscences of medieval hunters and forbidden trysts, the beautiful wife Honorine sleeps unknowingly in her picturesque chateau, hapless Henri plays the role of the adulterous troubadour caught by the king, the expensive car came out from “the stables long ago converted to a garage” (Hawkes 2016: 122), and when the driver (he calls himself “Papa”) refers to it, he evokes images that link his mastery behind the wheel to the symbolism concerning jewelry offering as a key to the male’s sexual possessions: “And now beneath the hood of the car our engine is glowing as red as an immense ruby. How unfortunate that to us it is invisible” (idem: 97).

Usually, in stories with castles and damsels in distress, it is the woman who sits expectantly at the window in the tower, whereas in this monologue it is the man who, despite his incessant bragging, assumes the role of a passive, defeated voyeur. For instance, the narrator describes in great detail his daughter Chantal, an olive-tanned Mediterranean beauty, “fresh from the riding lessons”, descending from the same sports car, holding the leash of a big Afghan dog, and going across the cobbled courtyard with the self-assurance of a fashion model on the catwalk. The father rejoices now perversely seeing her horror-struck on the car’s floor, “like the corpse of an abducted socialite” (idem: 55). One should not hurry to infer that, by killing the daughter and the poet lover at once, the revenge against the sleeping wife would be twice as sweet. The driving narrator is not at all in a vengeful mood. He is obsessed with the aesthetic outcome of his painstakingly premeditated destruction. Thus, the pedantic description in which he makes the transition from the patrician figure of spoiled Chantal – associating the expensive car, the riding habit, the clicking heels of her black boots, the Afghan dog, and the features of a Roman goddess – to the frightened girl completely powerless in the backseat, is more significant than the incoming crash. As Charles Baxter put it, “What is important to *Travesty* [...] is not the accident, which makes no sense anyway, but the overload of stimuli it provokes” (Baxter 1980: 881).

For a very long time in history, riding has been considered an almost exclusively masculine calling. With rare exceptions, horsewomen belonged rather with mythology or folktales. The French expression *monter en amazone* (“to mount the horse like an amazon”), which was used for the first time at the beginning of the seventeenth century, despite its warlike resonance, designates a woman who

rides in a rather shy, virginal posture, with both legs on the same side of the saddle (the aristocratic ladies were provided a special saddle, a sort of ornate small armchair yet very restrictive to body movements). Riding astride was considered indecent, graceless, and even lewd and domineering (Babeř i 2013: 454-458). During the Victorian era, men were especially against ladies taking part in hunting and wearing spurs, and even those among them who advocated the women's right to ride in a manly fashion proved picky when it came to the proper safety measures: "A whip was unladylike, clumsy and inefficient; a spur was both more feminine, because easy to apply and hidden from view, and more efficient" (Kunzle 2006: 204-205). As late as 1930, the horseracing rules in Europe allowed women to wear the full jokey attire (Babeř i 2013: 458-459). Hence the woman's posture on horse has always been oversexualized.

## 2.2. Artists in the stables

In *Whistlejacket* (1989), John Hawkes employs the long visual tradition of representing the female body and the horses in the history of art and mirrors it in the contemporary fashion photography. In pretty much the same way as in *Travesty*, he adapts a classical genre (the whodunit) to his own designs, turning it upside down. The environment is ostensibly English this time, with a few subtle American brushstrokes. Harold O. Van Fleet (Hal), the rich heir of Steepleton, expert rider and horse lover, fox hunting aficionado, and womanizer, dies in strange circumstances. Alex, his ravishing widow, asks Michael, the narrator, a brilliant and obsessive fashion photographer, to recreate Hal's life in images for the next year's memorial fox hunt. Hal had been not only Michael's mentor, but his adoptive father as well. However the family's domain looks more like a subversive matriarchy than like an old fashioned patriarchy. Proud and seductive Alex, her unpredictable girls and Michael's sisters through adoption, Toots and Virgie, all three roguish contrivers of incestuous games, which brings to mind Ada Veen's and Van Veen's transgressions in the green shades of the Ardis Park in Nabokov's *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969), and even Buse, Hal's mistress (who would become the humiliated wife's best friend in the sumptuous mansion at Steepleton) manipulate the men through a net of intrigue. As Michael investigates his family's past, while sorting through old pictures and shooting his models at the same time, it becomes clear that Harold Van Fleet was murdered. "Too bad women can't be more like horses!" (Hawkes 1997: 139), he seemed to have said shortly before Alex set Hal, her misogynistic husband, a trap in the stables, where his favorite stallion trampled him under its hooves in the attempt to reach at Alex's mare.

Michael resembles Michelangelo Antonioni's fashion photographer from the 1966 movie *Blow-Up* a little bit too closely. Hawkes also confessed that Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982) was his real source of inspiration (Morrow 1988). While Michael deconstructs visually, with fetishistic zest, the body parts of his models, lips, feet, shoulders, eyes, hair, breasts, fingers, but also their clothes, stilettos, and various accessories – there is even a two page excursus on the vulgarity of the word "buttocks", ending with the dismissal of much worse poetical euphemisms, since, when it comes to eroticize that body part, the explicit is more efficient than the metaphor (Hawkes 1997: 158-159) – and, by using the same method, recomposes, like a detective, Hal's years of debauchery leading to his violent death, the novel comes to its real end: the mayhem caused by the fox hunting party.

The main story is split in the middle by a digression in the third person narrative on the context in which the eighteenth century artist George Stubbs painted the superb although feral palomino stallion named Whistlejacket, whose famous life-sized portrait hangs in the large salon at Steepleton. The highly realistic painting and the commercial photography do not exclude each other. Both Stubbs and Michael are monomaniac artists, delving into anatomical details in order to reveal secrets that nobody has uncovered before (Cowart 1995: 100-104, 106). In order to achieve the goal, their aesthetics distorts reality with cold detachment and so does Hawkes' fiction. The fact that the main characters seldom look at each other directly, preferring instead to look at images of each other (Ferrari 1990: 112) has a striking significance in *Whistlejacket*. Michael's self-indulgences surface the best when he lectures on his own art:

The photograph for which the artist strives has no story. Story is the anathema of the true photographer. Narrative, dull narrative, of interest only to those who sit or stand at the frame's center or lurk at its edges trying to squeeze themselves into the picture, is what the chronicler of the family hopes to preserve. (Hawkes 1997: 106)

Everything in *Whistlejacket* is made up of photographs, "love letters included", as Rita Ferrari noticed – when it comes to characters' feelings, speaking about "desire" would probably be more accurate than "love" –, and in the tension between images and the words meant to convey them on paper resides the novel's denouement (Ferrari 1990: 107), the implied irony being that if the narrative is an anathema for the visual artist, it will always be indispensable for the writer. Hawkes brings forth a pervasive difficulty in the history of art, namely that of translating images into words. Hal's and Michael's explicit passion for thoroughbreds and sophisticated women brings to light the erotic undertones implicit in the seduction of George Stubbs by Lady Sophia Nelthorpe, his patron's wife (Cowart 1995: 104, 110). Conversely, the story concerning the portrait of dangerous and beautiful Whistlejacket has quite the same function as the shadows in a painting, underlining figures and objects at Steepleton that otherwise would be shapeless.

### 2.3. Remembering Petrarch

However, John Hawkes will give full expression to his tenderness toward the horse during his last years of life in *Sweet William: a Memoir of Old Horse* (1993), the heartbreaking story about ageing and death, about beasts as humans and humans as beasts, in the voice of the most stylish and the most unlucky stallion American literature has ever produced. *Sweet William* is what its subtitle announces indeed, a memoir of an equine hero, the life story of an exceptional racehorse, told in the first person narrative. Hawkes' novel is neither a beast fable nor a fairy tale, but it draws heavily on pastoral tropes, adventure literature, picaresque fiction, farm saga, and even the *Bildungsroman*. The trick is that as long as you acknowledge the initial convention affirmed without further ado at the very beginning – "I am Old Horse" (Hawkes 1994: 13) – you will not be at all confused by reading such a literate although beastly mind. In his review, Patrick McGrath seems surprised "that not only does the reader accept the voice from the start, but by the end feels a complex empathy with that horse's experience, and by extension all horses' experiences, such that the world, or at least its equine element, is forever transformed" (McGrath 1993).

William was brought into this world on the Millbank farm, the modest yet idyllic property of the Gordons, a family having a long history in horse breeding. After only twenty one days of Edenic bliss, the colt sees that “time out of time, pastoral time” (Hawkes 1994: 20) coming to an end when his dam, Molly-Long-Legs, dies suddenly. Hawkes develops the classical orphan story in an equestrian context, also bringing a horror component to it. As a consequence of a veterinarian’s malpractice, Molly is buried alive under a mulberry without the people around being aware of it. At dawn, the dam rises from the grave like an apocalyptic specter with blind eyes and clotted nostrils, hooves protruding through the red mud, her presence ghostly and resolute on the Gordons’ veranda in the morning light (Hawkes 1994: 30-31). From this original trauma on, the reader realizes (or should realize) that the access to William’s consciousness in written form reveals his rich inner life, while it remains completely opaque to the human characters (Ferrari 1996: 185-186). By humanizing the horse through literary means, the author turns the humans – “the cause of our troubles”, as William sees them (Hawkes 1994: 49) – into beasts.

The memorialist’s credibility resides in Hawkes’ artistry which makes one feel that all the cruelties inflicted upon the horse might as well be inflicted upon our fellows. Young William is the best at races, but the world of competition implies physical abuses and masters with sadistic proclivities. His love life – Hawkes is very good at imagining Freudian episodes of equestrian erotica without making concessions to mere obscenity – is marred by imposed isolation, fences and frustrations, his impulsive nature is adjusted through gelding, old age and ailments mark him for “destruction” (the cold technical term for euthanizing an ill horse). The whole process of genetic control, breeding, feeding, training, and biological conditioning throughout William’s life becomes in Hawkes’ novel a sad story about violence, sex, and psychological pain. As the equine narrator phrases it (Hawkes 1994: 62), “The world of the horse, and especially of the racing horse, is sinister!”

The novels’ two parts – “Sweet William: the Days of My Youth” and “Petrarch: My Days of Age” – make for a composite genre. The former plays upon picaresque topoi, whereas the latter parodies the idealistic romance in pretty much the same way as Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* did (Ferrari 1996: 208). Old Sweet William is rescued from the filthy Metacomet Ranch and from the claws of the cruel hag Josephine by a pair of eccentric Irishmen, the good-hearted old Master and his verbose groom Ralph, a Sancho Panza-like sidekick. The two figures are easily recognizable: a tall and lean gentleman interested in dove hunting, ridiculous in his old fashioned dandy attire, an out of place avid reader – “It’s the reading that’s turned his head” (Hawkes 1994: 124), Ralph explains to Josephine his clumsy Master’s dream of becoming an expert rider –, and the stout and sly partner, ready to show his misogyny and boorish sense of humor. No wonder then that William will bear from now on the name of Petrarch, “this poet of obsessive yearning and lovesickness, frustration, and a belief in the lady of his life as miraculous and destined for an early death” (Hawkes 1994: 152).

William’s muse is little, freckled Millicent Gordon, the girl who loves him the most and wounds him the worst. He departs from Millie when he is taken from the Millbank farm to the racetrack and meets her again in the same place at the end, now a resolute and muscular woman, ready to give him the lethal injection. William shares with Papa from *Travesty* and Michael and Hal from *Whistlejacket* the same artistic and self-destructive propensity toward female partners:

It was not mere coincidence that one of the only horses I ever loved was a pony or that throughout my life I never loved any but the smallest of girls and no woman larger than a small girl. The smaller the girl or woman, filly or mare, the more startling her capacity for thought as well as passion. [...] Such delights as I knew in youth were aesthetic. And I am essentially an aesthete still. (Hawkes 1994: 57-58)

At the first (and actually the last) dressage show Master and William take part in, they compete against a beautiful Young Lady on a small Arab mare, both disdainful and proud. The stylistic finesse that captures the elegance of the female jockey and her horse is in stark contrast with the insulting aggression with which they treat the fatigued thoroughbred and his aged Master. It is the public show that precedes Sweet William's confined destruction in a squalid trailer.

### 3. Conclusion: John Hawkes' equestrian feminism

In the interview he gave to Bradford Morrow, John Hawkes broods over the two events from his childhood spent in Connecticut and Alaska respectively: seeing a young elegant girl on a big chestnut at the stables behind his grandmother's garden – the image of the young agile woman handling the horse in what seemed to him, back then, a mythical fashion lingers in his memory – and leafing through a film magazine in search of pictures with women in bathing suits. These early reminiscences are responsible, in Hawkes' view, for the peculiar erotic idealism and aestheticism of his fiction which is, at its core, akin to that of Dante's and Petrarch's (Morrow 1988).

However, Hawkes' idealism is not redemptive and the love sickness which affects his male and female protagonists has a conspicuous sado-masochistic element, even in the episode when little Millie slashes William savagely, in a fit of anger, with the leather halter. In Thomas Pynchon's fiction, the sado-masochistic relationships foreshadow the oncoming of fascistic ruling, but in these three novels by John Hawkes, they are mainly a conflictual *mise en scène* sustained by equestrian equipment, a fetishistic pageant, meant to impart through a surprising feminist twist some changes of mentality in the fostering of which the horse played an important part at the very instant it was about to retreat from modern life:

Woman on horseback has availed herself of a unique forum for the public display of private sexual emotion, and her performance has been perceived as both physically and metaphysically analogous to her sexuality. The horse appeals to human sexual polyvalence, allowing man or woman to act out a whole range of roles and modes. Riding is high sexual theatre. To the rider, the mount is both sexual partner and sexual self, and the spectator can project himself or herself into either role alternately or simultaneously. (Kunzle 2006: 21)

In John Hawkes' novels it is the horsewoman who forces the reader to reconsider what to be a man means.

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**RETHINKING RACE:  
TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*  
AND *GOD HELP THE CHILD***

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***Abstract:** The paper examines the first and the last published book by Toni Morrison and the way race makes its presence in her writing. Morrison draws upon the social, political and economic forces that shape contemporary racism in the American society, thus investigating the meaning of self in a culture determined by skin colour. The development in race consciousness will be discussed as well as the question of what has changed during the span of 45 years.*

***Keywords:** America, culture, identity, race, Toni Morrison*

**1. Introduction: Where are we going, where have we been?**

The politics of race, class, gender and sexuality are rearticulated and reconstructed by each generation. Throughout American history, race, gender and sexuality have been linked in specific ways to class and together they formed the legacy of historically established oppression. This signals the socio-political context in which African Americans were fixed: a repressive conceptual framework that forced them to exist in "two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other black, exploited, and oppressed" (Collins 2000: 29). The legacy of slavery, continued to haunt African Americans, and authors such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker took upon themselves to try to free the black community of its destructive fears of the past and, through their writing, consolidate the sense of belonging to the Afro-American entity through their writing. The destructive power of racism and the acceptance of one's black identity in a society that denies it are the themes present in all the works by Toni Morrison. To accept one's identity means to fight against marginalization and the stigma of *otherness*. Jeff Chang (2014: 14) argues that cultural blindness led to a creation of images of otherness and blackness that promoted the notion of their inferiority: "Racism, in other words, was supported by a specific kind of refusal, a denial of empathy, a mass-willed blindness. In this context, the Other's true self might always remain unseen. The Other might always bear the burden of representation."

In her study "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination", Morrison (1993) exposes the racist conception of black Americans in literature, providing readers with an insight into the power relations that have been shaping social dynamics. She observes that "race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was" (Morrison 1993: 63). The representation of African Americans by white authors has been detrimental to their self-image and has caused further oppression and judgment based on the skin color. For Morrison (1993: 63), to

eradicate racism means to speak openly about race relations, because “metaphorical and metaphysical uses of race occupy definitive places in American literature, in the ‘national’ character, and ought to be a major concern of the literary scholarship that tries to know it.”

Toni Morrison’s novels must be seen in the historical context, as they serve as a mirror of culture. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in the 1970, in the era of the emerging black feminist movement. The novel hints at the new analytical path of black theoretical thought and identity awareness. When Morrison started writing the book in the ‘60s, she could not but see that race and class, factors that were connected in the past and influenced the quality of life of the Afro Americans, also had a great impact in the (post)modern era; racial/class hierarchy was the basis of life in big cities. She goes back in the past, in the years preceding World War II, to explore the period when white ideology had the power to define and transfigure black identities. In the segregated American landscape of the 1940s social discrimination, economic exclusion, and racial segregation marginalized people of African descent and prevented them from ever reaching the American dream. The projection of the *otherness* of black Americans, presumed their inferiority and imposed on them standards that were unattainable.

Morrison amplifies the issue of self-image related to skin colour in her latest novel *God help the child*. Taking place more than 50 years after the events in *The Bluest Eye*, the novel tries to provide an answer to the question concerning the change of the national culture with regard to race over the past half-century. Written in 2015, when Barack Obama was still the president of the United States, the novel explores the recurring problems of *double consciousness*, a socio-political concept that explains the difficulty of African Americans to consolidate their black identity and their American identity in what should be the post-racial era.

## **2. *The Bluest Eye*: black is (not) beautiful**

The source of the novel *The Bluest Eye* was Morrison’s conversation with a little black girl, her childhood friend. Both children then, they discussed about the existence of God, and Morrison's friend showed disbelief when her prayers for blue eyes were not answered. Hence the title of the novel, which as Agnes Suranyi (2007: 11) notices,

calls attention to itself immediately: the superlative degree of color as well as the singular form of the noun in the title is rather unusual, resulting in a pun. The singular noun may refer to the damaging white gaze; the omitted plural to the object of desire, an epitome of beauty according to mainstream society; or alternatively, to the saddest story of the demise of a child’s identity (the ‘eye’ as ‘I’).

The child in question is Pecola Breedlove, a member of the dysfunctional African American family living in Lorrain, Ohio, a colour-conscious community that was built on strict racial segregation. The racially disparate town of Lorrain is an example of exclusion and cultural blindness. Whereas the black families live in poverty that was common and inherited, the white families live in luxurious houses with access to Lake Shore Park, a public space reserved for the white people. The only connection with the American Dream home for black people is through their line of work. Pecola’s mother, Pauline, is a servant in the home of the Fisher

family, where she relishes the prospect of inhabiting the same space with the white members of the household even though her detachment from her marginalized existence and economic vulnerability is temporary and illusory. The scene in which she scolds and hits Pecola for ruining the cake she has baked for the Fishers and when she attends to Fisher's daughter instead of her own, speaks of her wish to participate in the social privileges of the mainstream culture. Harold Bloom (2010: 50) makes a further point:

Pauline's self-worth is so completely defined by her role as the 'ideal servant' to this prosperous white family that she chooses to preserve that false identity rather than come to the rescue of her own daughter.

In such a socio-political context, eleven year old Pecola, and her friends Frieda and Claudia are old enough to be aware of the white man's gaze and double consciousness. When Pecola enters the store to buy candy, she is reminded of racial hierarchy and treated as less worthy by the store's owner, Mr Jacobowski:

She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition- the glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. Perhaps because he is grown, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eye. (Morrison 1999: 46-47)

The constant reminder of her status in the society, originating in the white man's gaze, leads to young Pecola's lack of self-worth. Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber (2010: 82) argues that "the text's creation of double consciousness exemplifies the struggle for subject status by black Americans, confirming the detrimental effects from the internalization of a negative self-concept." The standards of living and beauty are imposed on African American by the dominant white culture, and "as a result, white constructions confine black consciousness" (idem: 83). Self-contempt and self-loathing emerge when black individuals realize that these standards are unattainable. For Pecola and her friends, the representation of beauty is epitomized by America's sweetheart and Hollywood icon Shirley Temple – a rich, white girl. Nonetheless, the identification with Hollywood's projection of beauty standards denies Pecola her uniqueness and identity. Her blackness is inherited and thus the entire family negate their selfhood and belief in their "ugliness" is passed on from one generation to the next:

The Breedloves did not live in storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. (Morrison 1999: 36)

As Jeff Chang (2014: 13) points out, “race happens in the gap between appearance and the perception of difference.” The Breedloves’ collective ugliness is met with the collective denunciation of their visibility. Poor and black, their *invisibility* is the result of the fundamental relations of the dominant discourse. They are passive objects rather than radical subjects who can define themselves and gain autonomy in the community. It seems that poverty, the rugged conditions of life and objectification reinforce their sense of worthlessness, which ultimately leads the family to demise. Pecola cannot fully grasp her identity and connect with her mother on an emotional level, for her mother despises her for the same reason white society despises her. In her daughter, Pauline sees her own limited possibilities and a life of struggle and exclusion. The complete erosion of the family structure comes when Pecola’s father, Cholly, rapes her. Moments before that Cholly asks himself “What could he do for her -ever? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter?” (Morrison 1999: 159). The incest, in Lynn Orilla Scott’s (2010: 97) opinion, is a consequence “of the disempowerment of the black male, who because of racism is not able to fulfill the role of father.” She makes a further point by stating that Morrison uses incest “not to indict patriarchy, but to expose a system of racial othering in which the father is as much a victim as the daughter.” (ibid.)

Following the rape, Pecola is irreparably damaged, pregnant, and gradually falling into madness. To escape the grim reality of her life, she ventures on a journey to get *the bluest eyes* to “rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes” (Morrison 1999: 172). With the help of a quasi spiritualist and psychic reader, she is convinced that her wish was granted and that she finally possesses the symbol of ideal physical beauty.

### **3. *God Help the Child*: self-creation and racial visibility in the new millennium**

Intimidation of colour and *being ethnic* in The United States is a recurring theme in Toni Morrison’s work and *God Help the Child* is not an exception. A modern day story revolves around Bride, a young and successful black woman who comes to terms with her childhood trauma caused by her mother’s rejection of her because of her dark skin. In this novel, racial prejudices come not from the white society, but from the inner African American community. Skin colour is an important factor by which African American measure themselves. On the very first page of the novel, Sweetness, Bride’s mother, recalls giving birth to Bride and being appalled when she sees her daughter for the first time:

It’s not my fault. So you can’t blame me. I didn’t do it and have no idea how it happened. It didn’t take more than an hour after they pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong. Really wrong. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black. I’m light skinned, with good hair, what we call high yellow, and so is Lula Ann’s father. Ain’t nobody in my family anywhere near that color. (Morrison 2015: 3)

This rejection of her daughter because of her skin colour can be justified by Sweetness’ own childhood and the stories her mother told her about growing up in America. Sweetness’ grandmother had light skin and decided to *pass for white*, rejecting other family members. She opted for alienation from her roots and assimilation into the white, privileged world. Considering her family history, it

seems that Sweetness suffers from long-term psychic consequences of prejudices rooted in racialism. She cannot come to terms with them and move on from the collective past. For her, the best option for black Americans is to group “according to skin color – the lighter, the better” in order to “hold on to a little dignity” (Morrison 2015: 4). Even though Bride is born in the 1990s, Sweetness still believes that racism is the primary obstacle for the African American development. Living in desegregated America, she has yet to become comfortable with the socio-political change and cultural difference. Her husband left her because their daughter's skin was too dark; her narrow conception of black identity and physical beauty preclude her maternal instincts. Growing up without mother's support or love, Bride has trouble authenticating her identity as a black woman. She decides to reinvent herself and changes her name from Lula Ann Bridewell to Bride. Working in the cosmetics industry, with the help of a stylist friend, she changes her image. Interestingly, her friend suggests that she should only wear white that would contrast and capitalize on her dark skin. Bride's skin is no longer a flaw, but her most distinguishing feature, something that makes her exotic and beguiling. Using the color of her skin as her asset, Bride is empowered. Another step forward in racial perception comes from Bride's boyfriend Booker, who teaches her to let go of her past and other people's prejudicial opinion: “scientifically there's no such thing as race, so racism without race is a choice” (Morrison 2015: 143).

Following the example of the construction of the history of African American women by Alice Walker, Mary Helen Washington (1982) divides African American female characters in three groups: women stopped from growing and development (the suspended women), the assimilated women and the new women (the emergent women). In this way, one can clearly see the change in the development of characters in black women's writing: from a woman who is a victim of (the patriarchal) society and men to a woman who is the sole ruler of her destiny. Pecola Breedlove falls into the first category. She is subjected to and destroyed by racial oppression and violence. Washington concludes that women in this category are “suspended *in* time and place, they are women whose life choices are so severely limited that they either kill themselves, retreat into insanity, or are simply defeated one way or another by the external circumstances of their lives” (Washington 1982: 213). The emergent women are more “fully conscious of their political and psychological oppression and more capable of creating new options for themselves” (idem: 214). Bride, though not politically oppressed, suffered emotional and psychological torture by her mother. When Bride overcomes the ghosts of her past and her own beliefs in racial schism, and expresses selfhood freely, she indeed is a new, emergent woman.

#### 4. Conclusion: Are we there yet?

In her novels, Toni Morrison repeatedly revisits the scenes of racially discriminated American society. The different historical epochs she has depicted in her work provide evidence that she regards racism as one of the primary handicaps of American society. The fact that her latest novel explores this topic again tells us that we still need to talk about race in the post-racial era. Morrison's well-intended literary alertness on this subject corresponds closely to Jeff Chang's account of the recent American history:

In the United States of America, we still tend to begin each conversation about race as if it were new, from a willed presumption of what might be called racial innocence, as if we have lived nothing and learned nothing. Writing about race in America must always be a labor of recovery and faith and – yes – hope against the spectacle of fear and the twilight of forgetting. (Chang 2014: 28)

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# RE-ENACTING “LES PARADIES ARTIFICIELS” BY RE-MYTHOLOGIZING INSPIRATION

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***Abstract:** Be it in prose or be it in poetry, Charles Bukowski proposes anarchic protagonists, critical of the Establishment and absorbed in writing. Muses are plenty, but the real fuel for inspiration is alcohol, especially beer. Epic in poetry, abrupt in prose, Bukowski is unflinchingly honest and self-demythologizing. His hedonism and drunkenness are masks put on his revolt against the world and his own flaws. Undoubtedly, Bukowski is obsessed with writing his version about the macro- and micro-universe, but it is booze that flares his sincerity and resistance to compromise. Apart from his characters’ anti-hypocritical attitude, alcohol also sentimentalizes them or boosts their frustrations. On a mythical level, drinking in Bukowski’s works functions both as a medieval magic filter and as a cartoon-like exhilarating potion. At the surprising intersection of a more geometrico world with the postmodern realm, the subconscious blends with the superego’s projections into a drink-irrigated and peripheral cityscape inferno.*

***Key words:** drinking, Charles Bukowski, Establishment, medievalism, sources of inspiration*

“In a good bar, it is always 10 p.m.” (Adam Rogers 2014: 7)

## 1. Introduction

This research quantifies the effect that alcohol has on the writerly inspiration in the case of the American poet and novelist Charles Bukowski. By making use of behavioural, cognitive psychology and cultural studies approaches, I have tried to decant the implications of fermented stimuli in the process of creating a matter-of-fact, ironic, if not openly sardonic, and sceptical, writerly universe. A universe completely at odds with the American dream of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

If we relate alcohol to inspiration, we concede to an irrational approach to creativity, pretty much as in *les paradis artificiels*.

A salient case for analysing such matters is, I think, the idiosyncratic and irascible life of Charles Bukowski. The American writer was a heavy drinker, but mostly of beer – so not a sophisticated example. If binge drinking was a vice for him, he mixed it with other stimulants: sex and smoking. The question is: was alcohol for Bukowski godly nectar or only a superfood meant to stir his vital force better than others? Before answering, I should reproduce some eulogies to the substance under discussion:

The manufacture of alcohol was, arguably, the social and economic revolution that allowed Homo sapiens to become civilized human beings. It’s the apotheosis of human life on earth. It’s a miracle. Two miracles, actually. It took 200 million years of evolution to make the first one happen. Fermentation, the process by which a

fungus we call yeast turns simple sugars into carbon dioxide and ethanol, is a breathtakingly complex bit of nanotechnology. Fermentation and ethanol happened on earth long before we humans got here, and ethanol's pleasant effects on our brain are a mere side effect of its use as a chemical weapon in the invisible, eternal war among the microbes with whom we share our planet. (Rogers 2014: 7)

So alcohol is perceived both as a miracle and as a drug submitted to all sorts of prohibitions. Fact is, producing this hallucinogen substance requires effort and... algorithmic lucidity:

It wasn't until about 10,000 years ago that we humans took control of fermentation for ourselves, entering into a partnership with that fungus long before we knew what it was. We domesticated that microbe, the same way we domesticated dogs and cattle, to do a job: make drinks.

Two thousand years ago, give or take, we humans built the second miracle for ourselves: distillation" (idem, *ibid.*).

## 2. Is poetry a better brew?

As long as postmodernism was alive, theorists and writers together tried to silence the differences between prose and poetry. In this vision, alcohol would activate the same muses in the minds of novelists or poets. If "making alcohol is a process as familiar to our species as flight is to a bird or prize lettuce eating to a slug" (Hamilton 2013: 3), making prose, poetry and correspondence was as familiar to Bukowski. His showy muse was the diary-muse, as whatever he wrote was self-referential and autobiographical.

There are some records about Bukowski writing without the magic fuel, especially after he was diagnosed with leukaemia. Earlier in his life, he had to suffer blood transfusion in order to be purged of the alcohol in his veins and was forbidden to drink. Medical prohibition was observed until he set foot in a bar, where the merry-go-round of spirits began to turn him round and round again.

But it is more important to grasp the meaning and the role of alcohol in Bukowski's versatile creation. First, there is a medieval streak involving magic and miracle in it. This is the closest instance of inspirational sources in his writing, which is livelier than a museumified cultural touchstone:

There's a reason the word spirits came to be used for alcoholic beverages: the ancient idea that liquor was magical and transcendent, and that when one uncorked and imbibed such liquids, a supernatural force would be unleashed. Spirits are cultural touchstones. They mark geography. (Wilson 2010: 7)

The same author discloses that eight decades after the repeal of Prohibition, fifteen states in the USA still ban liquor sales on Saturday. If vodka was one of the most searched for drinks after the World War II (idem: 9), Bukowski heavily relies on beer and wine and, occasionally, on champagne and pills: "we stayed in bed and/ drank wine, champagne, smoked, popped pills/ by the dozens" (Bukowski 2009a: 25). Second, alcohol is a sign of unhappiness moved into day-dreaming or sheer indifference: "I've seen too many glazed-eyed bums sitting under a bridge/ drinking cheap wine" (idem: 3). Third, binge drinking is a postmodern *modus vivendi*, with chaos, freedom and democratic anarchism in the limelight. On his

first visit paid to the writer, one of his biographers remembers the poor condition of the neighbourhood, the shabby house, the “overflowing garbage cans [...] filled with bottles and beer cans”, the books-and-magazines-flooded living-room and the huge Remington writing machine. (Miles 2009: 8).

The image of disaster and disorder reflects the autobiographical vein of his writings, but also his scorn of the lying pretensions of a spick-and-span selfish humanity.

He gave a voice to the disenfranchised, the marginalised, the mad and dysfunctional, the factory hand, the working people, the drunk and disorderly. He made a point of always trying to write clearly so that people knew exactly what he was saying. He did not use a dictionary. He avoided long words and tried to use the easiest, simplest words possible. (Miles 2009: 9)

In order to access inspiration, Bukowski needed, besides booze, to configure a writerly context. As his works are limpid, if not crystalline, we can infer that the surrounding chaos engendered inner order.

So I kept writing poems. We drank with the roaches, the place was small, and pages 5, 6, 7 and 8 were stacked in the bathtub, nobody could bathe, and pages 1, 2, 3 and 4 were in a large trunk, and soon there wasn't any place to put anything. There were 7-and-one-half foot stacks of pages everywhere. Very carefully we moved between them. The bathtub had been useful but the bed was in the way. So Jon built a little loft out of discarded lumber. Plus a stairway. And Jon and Louise slept up there on a mattress and the bed was given away. There was more floor space to stack the pages.

“Bukowski, Bukowski everywhere! I am going crazy!” said Louise. The roaches circled and we drank and the press gulped my poems. A very strange time”. (Bukowski 2009b: 14)

### 3. Context, mania, and anti-Establishment ploy

Chaos stimulates a flood of words. Actually, Bukowski wrote like a maniac and his publishers had heavy quarrels with him about the selection of the final material. He would often offer some refused texts to another editor. In fact, despite his anti-Establishment attitude and his acrid manners, he was avid to-see his texts printed and visible to the public. But there were also situations when some editors had him accommodated somewhere and supplied with sufficient booze so that he could be over-productive.

When he got drunk, Bukowski became violent, possessive and despicable. When sober, he was able to pin down his inner demons and proffered a coherent *ars poetica*. This was straightforward, anti-Flaubertian and continuously praised “honesty” in creation. With him, it was not words that mattered but contexts. More than a poststructuralist, his mind worked in the manner of a discourse analyst: “A man's either an artist or a flat tire and what he does need not answer to anything, I'd say, except the energy of his creation” (Bukowski 2009c: 10).

From such a perspective, he was not a writer – that is an artist – but a witness and a protestor. All he wanted, he pretended, was to loosen a phony and oppressive world built on the principles of a twisted Darwinian selection. It is not the best one who wins the game, but the most unscrupulous trickster. In spite of

this rabid philosophy, he kept on betting on horses for the most part of his life. He lived amidst common people, if not humble ones, he described the drudgery of work; Henry Chinaski, his alter-ego character, seems to surf humanity like an invisible ghost – an ugly and scornful, but life-thirsty observer

Writing poems is not difficult; living them is. Let's be realistic: every time you say "good morning" to somebody and you do not mean 'good morning,' you are that much less alive. And when you write a poem within the accepted poem-form, making it sound like a poem because a poem is a poem is a poem, you are saying 'good morning' in that poem, and well, your morals are straight and you have not said SHIT, but wouldn't it be wonderful if you could... instead of sweating out the correct image, the precise phrase, the turn of a thought... simply sit down and write the god damned thing, throwing on the color and sound, shaking us alive with the force, the blackbirds, the wheat fields, the ear in the hand of the whore, sun, sun, sun, SUN!; let's make poetry the way we make love; let's make poetry and leave the laws and the rules and the morals to the churches and the politicians; let's make poetry the way we tilt the head back for the good liquor; let a drunken bum make his flame. (Bukowski 2009c: 12)

Living up to one's work was a beatnik's strife. It was not only about living an honest, diligent life, but also about living an anarchic and emotionally-informed life. This is the reason why he despised his tough-mannered, insensitive, but highly prejudiced father. In his autobiographical novel *Ham on Rye*, he deflated the paternal image more than once. One of his biographers emitted the idea that the Bukowskis were either descendants of minor Polish nobility, or descendants of the Hasidic Jews established there (Miles 2009: 11). So, on the one hand, we can spot in Bukowski's works his parents' hypocrisy and desire to be accepted into the upper-middle-class, on the other hand, their son's hatred of respectability and admiration for the vicious, but manly figures of his clan. Such an inspiring relative was Uncle Ben, who was to expiate in an infectious disease hospital. The little boy kept dear memories of the final visit paid to his young, but dying uncle:

'Ben, my mother said, you shouldn't smoke, it will kill you'. 'I've had a good life', said my uncle. 'You never had a good life,' said my father. 'Lying, boozing, borrowing, whoring, drinking. You never worked a day in your life! And now you're dying at the age of 24!' 'It's been all right,' said my uncle. He took another heavy drag on the Camel, then exhaled.

'Let's get out of here,' said my father. 'This man is insane!'" (Bukowski 2001: 7)

Bukowski pulls down many an idol, but he needs his own type of idols too. His character is firm, in spite of being stormed by a fierce temperament (rocketed by booze). This writer fakes his Schillerian naiveté and consciously inaugurates imagological constructs. Contrary to his damaged reputation of an old dirty, debauched and dissipated man, he was an industrious guy.

His well-known alter-ego, Henry Chinaski, is shown making a difficult living. The autobiographical impersonation is haunted by obsessional love, is violently jealous and survives "Bacchanalian misadventures" (Bukowski 2002: 6). Drinking was in his case a protest and a shield. In order to preserve his independence, which is crucial to his (auto)ironic honesty, he disciplined himself to do all sorts of hack work. Every line he wrote came from a double perspective: that

of the working-class miser and that of the melancholy or burly drunkard. As late as his 49<sup>th</sup> birthday, in 1969, Bukowski supported himself by carrying out manual activities: “coconut man” in a cookie factory, delivery man and sorter of mail for the US Postal Service and many others. As he believed in his writerly gift, he highly valued time, which means he typed his texts during night time. Many of those stints proved back-breaking, but he stuck to his late writing hours against all odds.

Bukowski did not want to succumb to self-pity or to self-fulfilling prophecies. However fond of fame and artistic reputation, he remained – even more than Hemingway – an opponent to the American dream in its consumeristic and manipulative guise. That is why some theorists saw in him a political writer, even if indifferent to party politics or ideology (Bukowski 2002: 7).

#### 4. Lawless utopia and doomed muses

Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, which he found captivating, confirmed – some would say – his misanthropy. Another favourite of his was Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger*. Both these novels are about sensitive social misfits. But was Bukowski a misanthrope? Part of his addictions, but also his three times in prison (in 1948, 1949, and 1951) for drunkenness were provoked by his despair of the human race (Baughan 2004: 35). We could hardly call his isolation and burliness misanthropy, for he kept dreaming about a utopian world. But his utopia did not share many common traits with those imagined in detail by the Enlightenment-prone authors. His was a law-free one, in the sense of the Platonic lawlessness, honest and free of workaholicism and profit. As he put it in *Screams from the Balcony*: “Success is wonderful if we can achieve it without whoring our concepts” (Bukowski 2009d: 14). Knowing exactly that most of the people would not long for such a utopia, he leaned against a boozy, chaotic, but hard-working dystopia.

The muses in his slum-dystopia are black, cursed Venuses, much in the same vein as those in Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal*. Chinaski’s drunken jealousy is a proof of his inner rejection of limitless liberty:

he drank wine all night/ he drank wine all night the night of the 28th. and he kept thinking of her:// she’d come back with the special stink again,/ and she did/ she came in at 3 a.m. in the morning/ filthy like a dung-eating swine/ and/ he took out the butcher knife/ and she screamed/ backing into the roominghouse wall/ still pretty somehow in spite of love’s reek/ and he finished the glass of wine./ that yellow dress/ his favorite/ and she screamed again./ and he took up the knife/ and unhooked his belt/ and tore away the cloth before her/ and cut off his balls./ and carried them in his hands/ like apricots/ and flushed them down the/ toilet bowl/ and she kept screaming/ as the room became red/ GOD O GOD!/ WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?/ and he sat there holding 3 towels/ between his legs/ not caring now whether she left or/ stayed/ wore yellow or green or/ anything at all./ and one hand holding and one hand/ lifting he poured/ another wine – Freedom. (Bukowski 2007: 15-16)

All this disparaging life actually helped Bukowski to write in a clear, cinematographic manner. He unconsciously stuck to Gilles Deleuze’s request for the philosophy to stay precise. This approach had been inherited from Henri Bergson who strove to elaborate singular concepts that fitted singular objects (Marrati 2008: X).

## 5. Savagery and ascetic aesthetics

Bukowski's writing receipt is puritanical and it stresses the medieval ascetic values. His lifestyle, on the other hand, largely embraces postmodern phantasms like kitsch, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and peripheral centres. In a nutshell, his prosody and imagery are ascetic, whereas the content of his poems and novels is savage, boastful, sentimental, and violent. His anti-rationalist, if not anti-enlightenment ideals, marked a non-coherent splendour, in contrast to what Albert Gelpi described in *A Coherent Splendor*:

Where Modernism represented a reaction to Romanticism, Romanticism itself had represented a reaction to the rationalist, Neoclassical ideology of the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment sought in some instances to stem, in other instances to supplant, the ebbing of faith with the advance of reason, the decline of theology with the perfection of the empirical method, waning convictions about the sinner's membership in the community of saints with the fallible individual's normative socialization into secular institutions. (Gelpi 1987: 3)

Whereas Bukowski wrote with pathos, and alcohol surely contributed to this – at the same time he managed to keep his lucidity alive. Romantic and realist concomitantly, the main function of his writing was to criticize mores. More than once, somebody could infer that intoxication softened his rebellion by pouring sympathy and empathy into his texts. Unlike Hemingway, whose characters are haunted by a fatalist vision even when they score successes in manly activities, Bukowski is less tragic and more vital.

## 6. Conclusion

Bukowski's oscillation between mediocrity and postmodernism could be studied in Diego Velasquez's *The Triumph of Bacchus* (1628), placed today in Museo del Prado. Here the god has a paler skin than his companions, which can be perceived as a sign of nobility. The people surrounding him are mostly working-class fellows. One of them, who is a bit more smartly dressed and wears a long dagger hanging at the back of his belt, kneels in front of Bacchus to receive a wreath of leaves. The atmosphere is merry, although Bacchus, who was considered the liberator of people from their daily hardships, looks concerned, with his eyes fixed upon a presence out of the reality frame.

But this triumph – or *Los Borrachos* (“The Drunkards”), as it is surnamed – indicates a state of beatitude, Apollonian and Dionysian at the same time. It is a state of exception and ecstasy which Bukowski, in his turn, reached during his best moments of inspiration. Otherwise, he, as a person and less inspired writer, floated between the ascetic, preaching mediocrity and the chaotic, scurrilous postmodernity. His best pieces of writing were triumphs often sparked by alcohol and cigarettes. The fact that for most of his life he stuck close to soft drugs tells a lot about his Apollonian – lucid and critical – temperament. In this interpretation, alcohol contorted the too straight lines of his thinking and deepened his feelings and imagination, which quite often were those of a histrionic guy or more socially than aesthetically involved character.

Bukowski's *Weltanschauung* is concentrated in his poem *the smoking car*:  
 they stop out front here/ it looks as if the car is on fire/ the smoke blazes blue from  
 the hood and exhaust/  
 the motor sounds like cannon shots/ the car humps wildly/ one guy gets out./  
 Jesus, he says, he takes a long drink from a/ canvas water bag/ and gives the car an  
 eerie look./ the other guy gets out and looks at the car,  
 Jesus, he says,/ and he takes a drink from a pint of whiskey, then passes the bottle  
 to his friend./ they both stand and look at the car,/ one holding the whiskey, the other  
 the water bag./ they are not dressed in conventional hippie garb/ but in natural old  
 clothes/ faded, dirty and torn./ a butterfly goes past my window/ and they get back in  
 the/ car and it bucks off in low/ like a rodeo bronc/ they are both laughing/ and one  
 has the bottle tilted.../ the butterfly is gone/ and outside there is a globe of smoke/  
 40 feet in circumference./ first human beings I've seen in Los Angeles/ in 15 years.  
 (Bukowski 1972: 13)

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***ISOLATED WORDS, TEXTS, AND PARATEXTS***



**ASPECTS OF OLD ENGLISH WORD-FORMATION:  
COMPOUNDS IN THE OE ELEGIES  
AND THE *CAPITULA OF THEODULF***

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***Abstract:** The paper analyses compounds and related formations in some of the Old English elegies as well as in the ThCapA (*Theodulfi Capitula*, A version). Both texts (or groups of texts) show the productivity of compounding, and both show that noun + noun compounds were the most productive type of compounds. But they also show significant differences: Whereas many compounds in the elegies are due to the poetic principle of variation, some compounds in the ThCapA are or may be loan-translations based on Latin models.*

***Keywords:** compounds, morphology, Old English, semantics, variation, word-formation*

## **1. Introduction**

This paper is intended as a contribution to a survey of Old English word-formation. I shall point out some principles as well as some problems of analysis and classification – of course in the scope of a paper it is not possible to be comprehensive. There have been many studies of specific aspects of OE word formation, but there has been no book-length study dealing with Old English word-formation as such; to my knowledge the most recent compact survey is still Kastovsky (1992); for a discussion of compounds (henceforth *cpds*<sup>1</sup>), see now also Davis-Secord (2016).

The texts analysed here illustrate on a small scale how wide the scope of OE literature is: The three OE Elegies (W = *Wanderer*, S = *Seafarer*, D = *Deor*) represent alliterative poetry; they show a heroic and oral society, with Christian elements appearing at the end. Moreover, the language of OE poetry was a special language and not identical with prose language or everyday language: for example, some words (including compounds) are attested only in poetry and not in prose; the principle of variation is also characteristic of OE poetry (see, e.g., Godden 1992 and § 3.4.2 below). We do not know what the intended audience was – but since the manuscript was probably copied in a monastery, monks were apparently also interested in this kind of poetry.

The *Capitula of Theodulf* (ThCap) represent OE prose, more specifically didactic Christian prose, and they are addressed to a specific audience (at least originally), namely parish priests. From the beginning, they show a Christian and literate society, literate at least as far as the priests are concerned: reading is

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used in the text: adj. = adjective; cpd. = compound; lit. = literally; sv = sub verbo / under the word; ThCapA = *Theodulfi Capitula*, Old English A version; wf = word formation

important, but the oral component is also there, because the priests, who can read (or at least are supposed to be able to read) have to preach the basic tenets of Christianity to the laity, the majority of whom was probably still illiterate.

Moreover, the elegies are original OE compositions (as far as we know), whereas the OE *Capitula* are translations from Latin; with respect to word-formation, this raises also the question which compounds are loan-formations based on Latin models (see § 3.5. below). Actually, there are two independent translations, which I have called ThCapA und ThCapB. Whereas ThCapA gives a translation of the complete text, ThCapB is only preserved as a fragment, which now begins in the middle of chapter 25. Here I concentrate on the beginning of ThCapA, Prologue to chapter 11. ThCapA is also a somewhat freer translation than ThCapB.

The dating of the OE elegies is very uncertain – the fact that they depict an archaic and heroic society does not necessarily mean that they are early compositions (cf. also Davis-Secord 2016: 101); they could also be late manifestations of the tradition of secular and heroic poetry. The terminus ante quem is the manuscript, in this case the Exeter Book, which was written around 1000 A.D.

The dating of the OE ThCapA is also uncertain. The text is transmitted in a manuscript written at Exeter in the third quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (now Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201), i.e. shortly before or perhaps even shortly after the Norman Conquest. The original translation may have been made earlier, however, perhaps in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century or in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. The Latin original was written around 800; thus the OE translations must in any case have been made later.

For the OE elegies (W, S, D) I have used the edition in ASPR III, but I have also consulted the separate editions of W by Leslie 1966 and by Dunning & Bliss 1969, of S by Gordon 1960 and by Cucina 2008, of D by Malone 1933 [1977]; for the ThCapA I have used the edition by Sauer 1978. On the manuscripts, see especially Ker 1957, nos. 50, 116, 318; Gneuss and Lapidge 2014, nos. 66, 257, 608; furthermore Sauer 1978: 88 ff.; Hofstetter 1987, nos. 132 and 133.

## **2. The main types of Old English word-formation and some problems of their classification**

The texts dealt with here show the main types of OE word-formation (hereafter *wf*), namely compounding, prefixation, suffixation, and derivation without a suffix (sometimes also called conversion or zero-derivation). Here I concentrate on compounds and related phenomena. Other types which are often mentioned in discussions of Modern English word-formation are absent in these texts and are generally rare or even non-existent or in any case difficult to recognize in OE, namely back-formation, sound-symbolic *wf*, *wf* with reduplication (including rhyme and ablaut), clipping, blending and acronyms.

### **2.1. Some problems of analysis**

(1) *Main types or subtypes*. All types have subtypes, but with some patterns it is difficult to decide whether they should be regarded as types in their own right or as subtypes of other types. Compounds, for example, can be roughly defined as combinations of two words. Combinations with particles (e.g. ModE *in-*, *out-*,

*over-*, *under-*) should therefore be regarded as compounds, because particles are also used as independent words. Some handbooks on wf label them as prefixes, however (e.g. Koziol 1972), probably because semantically they are closer to prefixes than to words; in any case particles belong to the category of grammatical words, not to the lexical words. Similar to Marchand 1969, I propose to put them into a separate category, but, for reasons of space, I do not deal with them here; examples from the texts dealt with here are *æfter-cwepende* (S) ‘posterity’, lit. ‘those speaking after’; *geond-hweorfan* ‘visit every part (of)’, lit. ‘move throughout’.

Conversely, some elements (such as *cyne-*) do not occur independently, but are semantically closer to words, or they are some way in between words and affixes; I have put them into the category of affixoids (prefixoids and suffixoids; see §6 below). Accordingly, in the following, I deal with compounding (compounds) and with affixoids.

(2) *Recursivity*. This term refers to the phenomenon that complex words, including compounds, can contain elements that are complex in themselves, i.e. that are derived, or to put it the other way round: complex words can become part of new word-formations. Here the question is whether the word-formation processes worked in sequence, or simultaneously. Even for ModE this is not always easy to answer. Both *street-fight* and *taxpayer* contain a deverbal second elements (*fight* noun is derived from *fight* verb), but *street-fight* is probably easier to analyse as a *noun + noun* cpd, ‘a fight in the streets’ (rather than ‘fighting in the streets’), whereas *taxpayer* is probably easier to analyse as a simultaneous application of compounding and suffixation, i.e. ‘someone who pays taxes’ (rather than as ‘a payer of taxes’). An additional problem is that some of the deverbal elements are also attested independently, but others are only attested as second elements of cpds. One possible solution of the problem is to provide a double classification, e.g. of *taxpayer* under compounds and under derivations with the suffix *-er*.

## 2.2. Compounds and compounding

(1) *Subtypes*. Compounds can primarily be subdivided into compound nouns (or noun compounds, or substantival compounds) and compound adjectives (adjective compounds or compound adjectives), each with further subgroups. Compound verbs are a problematic group, because they are usually derived from compound nouns etc., in OE as well as in ModE: OE *cynehelmian* ‘to crown’, for example, is not a compound consisting of \**cyne-* + *helmian*, but derived from the compound *cynehelm* ‘crown’, lit. ‘royal helmet, royal diadem’ (for *cyne-* see § 6.1 (1) below), and ModE *spotlight* (verb) is a conversion (or zero-derivation) from *spotlight* (noun). Verbal cpds are thus cpds if they are analysed from a purely synchronic point of view, but derivations, if their origin is taken into consideration, i.e. applying synchronic and diachronic criteria in this case leads to different results (cf. also Hubner 2017, chapter 4.5.2.). But the material analysed here does not contain any cpd verbs (apart from verbs the first element of which is a particle; see above), so we need not enter into a detailed discussion here. There are also a few cpd pronouns (*nan-þing*), adverbs (*heonon-forð*) and conjunctions (*for-þon*), but again I shall not discuss those any further.

(2) *Productivity*. The productivity of compounding is also shown by the fact that the same word could be used in various cpds. I list the following (without claiming completeness):

(a) Repeated first elements, especially nouns, from W and S (& ThCapA) are, e.g.: *breost* ‘breast’ (W: *breost-cofa*; S: *breost-hord*; *breost-cearu*); *brim* ‘sea, water’ (W: *brim-fugol*; S: *brim-lad*); *eard* ‘earth, land, dwelling-place’ (W: *eard-geard*, *eard-stapa*); *gold* ‘gold’ (W: *gold-wine*; S: *gold-giefa*); *medu*, *meodu* ‘mead’ (W: *meodu-healle*; S: *medo-drinc*); *niht* ‘night’ (W: *niht-helm*, *niht-scua*), *sele* ‘hall’ (W: *sele-dream*, *sele-secg*); *stan* ‘stone’ (W: *stan-hlið*; S: *stan-clif*).

(b) Repeated second elements, are, e.g., *cofa* ‘chamber, cave’ (W: *breost-cofa*; *hord-cofa*); *dryhten* ‘lord’ (W: *mon-dryhten*; *wine-dryhten*); *geard* ‘dwelling, land’ (W: *eard-geard*; cf. also *middan-geard*); *giefa*, *gyfa* ‘giver’ (S: *gold-giefa*; W: *maþþum-gyfa*); *hama*, *homa* ‘covering’ (S: *flæsc-homa*; ThCapA: *lic-homa*); *lad* ‘way, course’ (W: *lagu-lad*; S: *brim-lad*); *loca* ‘enclosure’ (W: *ferð-loca*; S: *hreðer-loca*); *weg* ‘way’ (S: *flod-weg*; *hwæl-weg*).

(c) Words that are used as first and as second elements are, e.g., *cearu*, *caru* ‘care, sorrow’ (S: *breost-cearu*; *cear-seld*); *cwide* ‘speech, word’ (W: *cwide-giedd*; *lar-cwide*); *lāst* ‘footprint, trace’ (S: *last-word*; *wræc-last*); *mæg* ‘kinsman’ (*magu-þegn*; *wine-mæg*) *wine* ‘friend’ (NOT ModE ‘wine’; W: *wine-mæg*, *wine-dryhten*; *gold-wine*).

(d) Examples from the first few chapters of ThCapA are: Repeated first element: *lic* ‘body, corpse’ (*lic-homa*; *lic-tun*) and *mæsse* ‘mass’ (*mæsse-preost*; *mæsse-reaf*; *mæsse-sang*); repeated second element: *man*, *mon* ‘man, human being’ (*ambiht-man*; *wif-mon*) and *weorc* ‘work, action’ (*hand-weorc*; *weorold-weorc*). As these examples show, the use of the same element in various cpds was also common in prose, i.e. it is typical of compounding in general.

(e) Elements of cpd adjectives that occur repeatedly are *-ceald*, *-cearig* and *-gifre*: *ceald* and *gifre* occur twice as second elements, *cearig* even three times: *ceald* ‘cold’ (W: *hrim-ceald*; S: *is-ceald*); *cearig* ‘sorrowful’ (W: *mod-cearig*; D: *sorg-cearig*; W: *earm-cearig*); *gifre* ‘greedy’ (W: *feoh-gifre*; *wæl-gifru*).

### 3. Compound nouns: *noun + noun*

#### 3.1. Number and frequency

The most frequent type of compounding and one of the most productive patterns of wf generally were the *noun + noun* cpds; apparently they have been the most productive pattern of compounding throughout the history of English. Therefore discussing them will take up most of the space; the other types of compounds are much rarer and can be dealt with quicker. There are 36 different *noun + noun* cpds in W, and 27 different *noun+noun* cpds. in S; together W & S have 59 different cpds – the sum is a little less than 63, because four cpds. occur both in W & in S (*mod-sefa*, *niht-scua*, *geswinc-dagas*, *wine-mæg*). *Deor* as a very short text has only 4 *noun + noun* cpds from the general vocabulary, plus five names, and *ThCapA* has 11 different cpds in its first chapters; thus the texts analysed here have 74 different *noun + noun* cpds altogether, and five names.

### 3.2. Some problems of analysis and classification

For a number of reasons it is, however, difficult to give precise numbers. The problem of how to classify deverbal elements has been alluded to above (see § 2.2 (1)); other problems are posed by obscured compounds and by prefixoids and suffixoids (on the latter see also § 6 below).

(1) *Obscured cpds* are original cpds where one or both elements were weakened and shortened, so that their character as cpds was lost, and the words making up the compound developed differently in independent use (cf., e.g. Götz 1971; Faiss 1978). A standard example is ModE *lord*. It consists of one morpheme from a purely synchronic point of view, but it goes back to an OE cpd *hlāf-weard* lit. ‘bread-guardian’; however, even in OE it was mostly used in the obscured form *hlaford* (as such also attested in D), where the second element was weakened to *-ord* and probably no longer associated with *weard*. Another example (from ThCapA) is *weofod* ‘altar’, an obscured form of *wigbed* lit. ‘idol-table’ (‘table where a idol was put’; see, e.g., Gneuss 1955: 85; Käsmann 1961: 210-214). Formations attested in our texts which were still transparent cpds in OE, but were obscured later, are, e.g., *wifmon* (> ModE *woman*) and, from the *adj + noun* cpds, *godspel* (> ModE *gospel*; see below). I have not counted *hlaford* and *weofod* among the cpds here.

(2) *Word into suffix*. Another reason why it is difficult to give precise numbers is the phenomenon by which some words lost their status as independent words and changed into suffixes; see further §6 below. As a consequence, some combinations (especially those with *-dom* and *-had*) were probably still compounds in OE, but have to be regarded as suffix-formations for Middle English and Modern English.

(3) *Hapax legomena and poetic compounds*. Fairly many of the cpds in W and S, namely 19 altogether (out of 59, i.e. roughly a third), are hapax legomena, i.e. they are attested only once (see, e.g., Dunning and Bliss 1969: 36; Cucina 2008). The hapax legomena were apparently ad-hoc formations and not really part of the common OE vocabulary, but they show the productivity of the pattern of *noun + noun* cpds, which was apparently almost unlimited in OE. It must have also been relatively easy to understand these formations. The nine hapax legomena among the *noun + noun* cpds in W are: *brim-fugol*, *cwide-giedd*, *eard-stapa*, *gliw-stæf*, *hægl-faru*, *mappum-gyfa*, *sele-secg*, *weal-steal*, *win-sæl*; the ten hapax legomena among the *noun + noun* cpds. in S are: *bealo-siþ*, *cear-seld*, *earfoð-hwil*, *hrim-gicel*, *hwæl-weg*, *hring-þegu*, *last-word*, *medo-drinc*, *niht-waco*, *tid-deg*.

Moreover, many of the cpds in W and S occur only in poetry, 19 in W and 14 in S, i.e. 33 altogether. Poetic cpds from W are (CIHall marks poetic cpds with a dagger): *breost-cofa*, *byrn-wiga*, *eard-geward*, *ferð-locas*, *gold-wine*, *hord-cofa*, *lagu-lad*, *lar-cwide*, *magu-þegn*, *meodu-healle*, *mod-sefa*, *mon-dryhten*, *niht-helm*, *niht-scua*, *sele-dream*, *sinc-þege*, *stan-hleoþ*, *wine-mæg*, *wræc-last*. Poetic cpds from S are: *breost-hord*, *brim-lad*, *ecg-hete*, *flæsc-homa*, *flod-weg*, *gold-giefa*, *hleomæg*, *hreþer-locas*, *mere-flod*, *mod-sefa*, *niht-scua*, *geswinc-dæg*, *wine-mæg*, *wræc-last*.

The hapax legomena can, of course, also be counted among those formations that are only attested in poetry. If we combine the number of hapax legomena and of poetic compounds, they add up to 28 poetic cpds in W (out of 36 *noun + noun* cpds altogether), and 24 poetic cpds in S (out of 27 *noun + noun* cpds altogether), i.e. in W and S, 52 out of 59 cpds are poetic cpds – or to put it the other way round,

apparently only a small minority of the cpds in W and S were part of the common OE vocabulary (seven out of 59). Among the cpds also attested in OE prose texts are, e.g., *eorð-scræf* (W), *woruld-ric* (W), *eorð-wela* (S), *stan-clif* (S), and *middan-geard* ‘earth’ lit. ‘middle-earth’; the morphology of the latter is difficult to analyse, however (see § 3.3(3) below); The first chapters in ThCapA have only one hapax legomenon, namely *ungemethleahator*. This shows perhaps that hapax legomena are on the whole more frequent in OE poetry than in OE prose.

### 3.3. Morphology: typical and less typical patterns

(1) Typically *noun + noun* compounds consist of two primary nouns, e.g. *breost-cofa* ‘heart’, lit. ‘breast-cave’, *meodu-healle* ‘mead-hall’, or *wine-mæg* ‘dear kinsman’, lit. ‘friend- kinsman’. But some formations pose problems, to mention just two:

(2) Compounds with a deverbal element are not quite so typical. As mentioned above (cf. § 2.1(2)), it is not always easy to decide whether cpds with such elements should be synchronically classified as *noun + noun* cpds or as cpds with a deverbal element. In such cases, I propose to use a cross-classification and to list them among the *noun + noun* cpds as well as among the deverbal derivations without a suffix. A number of *noun + noun* cpds contain a deverbal element, e.g., from W: *hægl-faru* (in CIHall listed s.v. *hagolfaru*) ‘hailstorm’ (*faru* is derived from *faran*, strong verb VI); *mappum-gyfa* ‘generous chieftain’, lit. ‘treasure-giver’ and *gold-giefa* ‘gold-giver’ (*gyfa*, *giefa* is derived from *giefan*, strong verb V), *sinc-pegu* ‘receiving of treasure’ (*pegu* is derived from *picgan* ‘to receive’, strong verb V); the examples also show that with strong verbs, the basis for the derivation of nouns was sometimes the present stem (*faran* > *faru*; *giefan* > *giefa*, *gyfa*), but sometimes also one of the stems of the past or the past participle (*pegu*). *Geswinc* in *geswinc-dagum* could be the present stem of the strong vb (*ge*)*swincan* ‘to labour, struggle’, or the deverbal noun (*ge*)*swinc* ‘work, toil, effort’ derived from (*ge*)*swincan*. *Stapa* ‘someone who goes, steps’ (W: *eard-stapa*) is derived from the strong vb VI *stæppan* ‘to step, go’.

(3) *Formal equivalence of noun and adjective*. Often a noun and an adjective had the same basic form in OE; in such cases it is difficult to decide whether a given formation should be assigned to *noun + noun* cpds or to *adj + noun* cpds. Instances where an element could be a noun or an adj are: *earfoð(e)* ‘hardship, suffering’ or ‘hard, troublesome’ in *earfoð-hwil*; *midd(e)* (in *middan-geard* ‘earth’ lit. ‘middle-earth’ – apparently the model for Tolkien’s middle earth), where *midd(e)* could be the adjective *midd*, *midde* ‘mid, middle’, or the noun *midde*. I have classified both *earfoð-hwil* and *middan-geard* as *adj + noun* cpds (cf. § 4.2. below). An additional morphological complication with *middan-geard* is that *middan* is inflected according to the weak declension. Inflexion of the first element is unusual in cpds; this is perhaps also the reason why genitival cpds (see § 4.1. below) are much rarer than *noun + noun* cpds. This does not help, however, to determine the word-class of *middan*, because the weak consonantal declension would be the same for the noun and the adjective.

But even if those formations are counted as *adj + noun* cpds and not as *noun + noun* cpds, the group of *noun + noun* cpds still remains very large, whereas the the group of *adj + noun* cpds remains very small; see further § 4.2. below.

### 3.4. Semantics

*Noun + noun* cpds are not only the most frequent group among the cpds, they also show the most varied semantic patterns. Moreover, semantic analysis works on (at least) two levels: The literal relation between the elements can be described and classified (see § 3.4.1.), but in some cases the meaning of the entire cpd is not just the sum of the meanings of its parts, but has additional (or lost) meaning components; the latter phenomenon is captured by terms such as idiomatization and lexicalization and will be dealt with a little later (§ 3.4.2.).

It has been claimed that cpds have a unified meaning, but it is difficult to decide what a unified meaning is, and perhaps not all cpds have a unified meaning. The ModE translations of OE cpds are not very helpful in this respect: for example, both *breost-cofa* and *brim-fugol* are generally regarded as cpds, but *breost-cofa*, lit. ‘breast-chamber’, is often translated as ‘heart’, which would point to a unified meaning, whereas *brim-fugol* is usually translated as ‘sea-bird’, where the two elements and their meaning are still transparent. Modern dictionaries and glossaries are not very helpful for this kind of analysis. Often they translate an OE cpd (in our case a cpd from W, S, D) with one ModE word, sometimes with a noun preceded by an adjective, and sometimes with a compound (definitions taken from Dunning and Bliss 1969), e.g. (1) simple word: *breost-cofa* ‘heart’, *eard-geard* ‘city’, *eard-stapa* ‘wanderer’, etc.; (2) noun with a preceding adjective: e.g. *anhoga* ‘solitary man’, *byrn-wiga* ‘mailed warrior’, *cwide-giedd* ‘spoken utterance’; (3) cpd, e.g. *brim-fugol* ‘sea-bird’, but dictionaries and glossaries do not always agree: Leslie (1966) and Dunning and Bliss (1969) sometimes have the same definitions, but sometimes different ones. Leslie, for example, renders *eard-geard* with a cpd, ‘dwelling place’, but *byrn-wiga*, ‘warrior’, and *cwide-giedd*, ‘utterance’, with a simple ModE word. Dunning and Bliss do it exactly the other way round; they explain *eard-geard*, ‘city’, with a simple word, but *byrn-wiga*, ‘mailed warrior’, and *cwide-giedd*, ‘spoken utterance’ with a phrase – this shows that ModE explanations are not reliable guides as to whether OE (poetic) cpds have (or had) a unified meaning (see further § 3.4.2. below). Therefore an analysis according to the concepts of idiomatization or lexicalization seems more promising. One could say that non-lexicalized cpds are self-explanatory, whereas lexicalized or idiomatized cpds are not. But, as I shall argue in § 3.4.2., a distinction between meaning and reference should also be made (at least in principle).

#### 3.4.1. The semantic relation of the elements

There have been many attempts at a semantic subclassification of *noun + noun* cpds, often taking the reference of one element or the relation between the elements as a starting point, but none is entirely satisfactory (cf., e.g., Sauer 1992; Hubner 2017, chapter 7.3).

One problem is the following: it is one function of cpds to condense information, but for the analysis, this means that one compound can simultaneously contain several semantic structures which have to be disentangled. *Win-sæl* (*win-salo*) ‘wine-hall’ and *meodu-heall* ‘mead-hall’, for example, refer to ‘the place where wine or mead is drunk’ (‘A is drunk in B’, or ‘the warriors drink A in B’), but also to the purpose of the hall, namely that its function (or one of its functions) is to drink wine or mead there (‘B is intended for drinking A’), and it is difficult to say whether one of those meanings (place; purpose) is more dominant than the

other. Another problem is that many words are polysemous (at least according to their dictionary definitions), and if they are a part of a compound it is often difficult to say which of their meanings is the relevant one. For example, *wæl* is defined as ‘slaughter, field of battle’ and *sleaht* (*slieht*) as ‘slaughter, murder, death, battle’; *wæl-sleaht* could accordingly mean ‘slaughter-slaughter’ (in which case it would be a tautologic copula cpd; see also below), or ‘battle-slaughter, slaughter during the battle, slaughter on the battle-field’ (in which case it would be a rectional cpd). A further problem is that for a (syntactic) paraphrase of *noun + noun* compounds a verb has to be inserted, and even for ModE this is not always easy, e.g., should *police-dog* be paraphrased as ‘the dog works for the police’ (with dog as subject), or ‘the police uses the dog’ (with dog as object)?

A widely accepted distinction is between copula compounds and rectional cpds. In copula cpds, both elements have a (more or less) equal status, and in the paraphrase, ‘and’ or a form of ‘to be’ has to be inserted. In rectional cpds, the second element dominates semantically and another verb (different from ‘to be’) has to be inserted. The latter have many subgroups; here they are subdivided into compounds referring to: people, place, time, material, instrument, part-whole and whole-part, result, action. This classification can accommodate most cpds attested in our texts.

### I) Copula compounds

Copula cpds, i.e. A and B are semantically on the same level (‘A is also B’, or ‘A and B taken together’). Here belong probably: *wine-mæg* (W and S; also in the plural *wine-magas*) ‘friend-relative’, i.e. ‘a relative, kinsman who is also a friend’, and *wine-dryhten* (W) ‘friendly lord’ lit. ‘friend-lord’, i.e. ‘a lord who is also a friend’, and *cwide-giedd* (W) ‘utterance, speech’ lit. ‘speech-speech’ or ‘saying-saying’ - i.e. *cwide-giedd* may even be tautologic. *Woruld-ric* ‘world’, lit. ‘world-kingdom’, is probably to be analysed as copulative ‘The world is a rice [kingdom]’ (perhaps as opposed to heaven); *eard-geard* ‘city, earth’ (*eard* ‘country’ etc.) lit. ‘dwelling-place, country – dwelling, land’ can be analysed as a copula cpd ‘the land is a dwelling-place’. From S could be added *mod-sefa* ‘heart, mind’ lit. ‘mind-mind’.

Other formations are more complicated: they could be analysed as copula cpds, but also as rectional cpds, e.g.: *sorg-lufu* (D) lit ‘sorrow-love’ could be a copula cpd. (and simultaneously an oxymoron, expressing semantic opposites), but also a rectional cpd, if it is analysed as ‘a love that causes sorrow’ – from the context, the latter interpretation seems more probable (Malone glosses it as ‘distressing love’, CIH as ‘sad love’). *Wæl-sleaht* ‘battle’ can be analysed as a copula cpd or as a rectional cpd, see above; *weall-steal* lit. ‘wall-place’ can be analysed as copulative ‘the wall is a place’, or perhaps also as rectional ‘a place near the wall’. On *brim-lad* and *lagu-lad* see 2) below. An example of a copula cpd is probably also *wif-mon* > ‘woman’ (ThCapA); the original meaning must have been something like ‘human being [man] who is a female [wif]’.

### II) Rectional compounds

As mentioned above, rectional cpds have many subgroups, and there are several ways of classifying the subgroups. From the elegies and the ThCapA, the following subgroups emerge:

(1) *People, including agents* (i.e. B refers to a person). Examples from W are: *byrn-wiga* ('mailed warrior, corsleted warrior', i.e. 'warrior wearing a mailcoat'; in more abstract terms, 'B wears A', i.e. A referring to an instrument); *eard-stapa* 'wanderer', lit. 'country-stepper, someone who walks across the land' (i.e. A referring to a place; see further 3.4.2. below); *gold-wine* 'gold-friend' ('friend who gives gold', i.e. A refers to an object); *sele-secg* 'retainer' lit. 'hall-man, hall-warrior' (A again referring to a place); from S: *hleō-mæg* 'protecting kinsman, kinsman who provides protection' ('B provides A'), and from W and S cpds. with *gifa*, *gyfa* 'giver' as second element: *mappum-gyfa* 'treasure-giver', *gold-giefa* 'gold-giver' (B gives A'), i.e. their semantic structure is similar to *gold-wine*, but whereas in *gold-wine* the element 'giver' is not expressed on the surface of the cpd and has to be supplied in the paraphrase, it is expressed on the surface of *mappum-gyfa* and *gold-giefa*. Examples from ThCapA are *ambiht-men* 'servants', lit. something like 'people providing a service' and *mæsse-preost* 'priest', lit. 'mass-priest', i.e. 'priest who celebrates mass'.

(2) *Place (location)*, i.e. A indicates the place where B lives or is situated or takes place, or B indicates the place where A lives or takes place. Examples from W are: *breost-cofa* 'heart', lit. 'breast-cave' ('the cave is in the breast', or 'the breast contains a cave', etc.); *brim-fugol* 'sea-bird', *eard-geard* 'dwelling-place', *eorð-scræf* 'grave', lit. 'earth-cave' ('a cave in the earth'); *ferð-loca* 'breast', lit. 'mind-enclosure', *meodu-heall* 'mead-hall' (see above); *sele-dream* 'hall-joy, hall-revelry' ('B takes place in A'). The *adj + noun* cpd *middan-geard* 'earth', lit. 'middle-land' (i.e. land between heaven above and hell below), also belongs here (see above). From S can be added: *breost-hord*, *breost-cearu*, *cear-seld*, *eorð-wela*, *flod-weg*, *hwæl-weg*, *hreðer-loca*, *wræc-last*. See also § 3.4.2 below. Cpds. with the same second element are *brim-lad* (S) and *lagu-lad* (W), both meaning 'water-way, sea-way' (i.e. 'the sea provides a way', or 'the sea is a way', which would make it a copula cpd.). Examples from ThCapA are: *gebed-hus* 'chapel' lit. 'prayer-house' ('people pray in that house'); *lic-tun* 'cemetery' lit. 'corpse-enclosure'.

(3) *Time*. Examples from W are: *gear-dagas* 'old days, days of yore' lit. 'year-days' (both elements referring to time); *niht-helm* 'cover of night', lit. 'night-covering, night-protection' ('A provides B'; A referring to time); *niht-scau* 'shadow of night', lit. 'night-shadow' ('A provides B'; in W and S); *geswinc-dagas* 'days of tribulation' lit. 'tribulation-days'; from S can be added: *niht-waco* 'night-watch' ('B takes place during A').

(4) *Material*, i.e. 'A consists of B', or 'B consists of A' (or 'B characteristically contains A'): An example from W is: *stan-hleoþ* 'rocky slope, stone-cliff' ('B consists of A'); examples from S are: *hrim-gicel* 'icicle'; *medo-drinc* 'mead-drink' ('B consists of A'); *mere-flod* 'sea', lit. 'sea-flood'; *sealt-yp* 'sea-wave', lit. 'salt-wave' (i.e. 'B contains A')

(5) *Instrument*, i.e. 'B is for A, B provides A'; instruments usually also have the semantic element 'purpose'. Examples from W are: *gief-stol* 'gift-seat', i.e. 'seat where the lord distributes gifts to his warriors' ('seat the function of which it is to distribute gifts from it'); *gliw-stæf* 'melody, joy', lit. 'pleasure-staff' (perhaps 'B produces A'; but here used adverbially *gliw-stafum* 'joyfully'); *lar-cwide* 'counsel', lit. 'advice-speech' ('B provides A'); furthermore the cpds. with *homa*, *hama* 'covering' probably belong here: *lic-homa* (ThCapA) 'body', lit. 'body-covering', 'B covers A', 'B is for covering A' (but *homa* is strictly speaking pleonastic, because *lic* already has the meaning 'body'), and similarly *flæsc-homa* (S) 'body' lit. 'flesh-covering'; semantically in both *lichoma* and *flæsc-homa* a part

(‘body-covering’, ‘flesh-covering’) stands for the whole (‘body’). Examples from ThCapA are *husel-fæt* ‘sacramental vessel’ and *mæsse-reaf* ‘mass-vestments’ i.e. ‘vestments used for mass’.

(6) *Part-Whole; Whole-Part* (belonging to). This is a frequent relation in ModE, but there do not seem to be any clear examples in the material analysed here. Possible examples are *flæsc-homa* ‘body’, lit. ‘flesh-covering’, and *lic-hama*, *lic-homa* ‘body’, lit. ‘body-covering’, if *flæsc* and *lic* are taken to refer to the whole, and *homa* to the part.

(7) *Result, effect* (‘B brings about, causes A’), e.g. *last-word* (S) ‘fame after death’, lit. ‘footprint-word’ (i.e. ‘word that leaves a footprint, a trace’); *geswinc-dagas* (W and S) ‘days of tribulation’; *wræc-last* (S) ‘path of exile, exile-footprint’.

(8) *Action*. It is often said that actions are typically expressed by verbs, but actions can also be expressed by nouns (often, but not always, deverbal nouns): Examples from W are: *hægl-fare* ‘hail-storm’, lit. ‘hail-going’; *sinc-pege* ‘receiving of treasure’; an example from S is *sæ-for* ‘sea-voyage’. Here belong also the cpds with *sið* ‘journey’ as a second element: *bealo-sið* ‘destruction, death’, lit. ‘destruction-journey’ (‘a journey that leads to destruction’). Examples from ThCapA are *mæsse-sang* ‘mass’, lit. ‘mass-song, mass-singing’ and *ungemethleahator* ‘excessive laughter’.

### 3.4.2. Lexicalization, idiomatization, and reference

As mentioned above, a second layer of meaning and a second step in the semantic analysis is when the meaning of a cpd is not the sum of the meaning of its elements, but when the meaning of the whole is more than the meaning of its parts, i.e. when there are additional (or lost) semantic elements. If the meaning cannot be inferred (or can only be partly inferred) from the meaning of the elements, then a cpd. is labelled as idiomatized or lexicalized. But especially poetic compounds often have both a literal and a transferred meaning, and one apparently does not exclude the other: *gold-giefa* literally is the ‘gold-giver’, but it refers specifically to the lord, who gives gold to his men. Perhaps a third aspect should be added, and a distinction between meaning and reference should be made; but probably this will be easier to make in theory than in practice. The idea that cpds have a unified meaning is not very helpful here (see § 3.4 above).

A curious case is *eard-stapa*, translated by dictionaries and glossaries as ‘wanderer’, lit. ‘earth-stepper’. *Stapa* is a deverbal noun and its literal meaning is ‘stepper, someone who steps’, but when *stapa* is used (apparently very rarely) as an independent word, the dictionaries give its meaning as ‘grasshopper, locust’ - i.e. as a (rare) independent word, *stapa* has a lexicalized meaning; but as second element of the compound *eard-stapa*, lit. ‘earth-stepper, land-stepper’, it has its literal meaning ‘someone who steps, wanders’.

But self-explanatoriness and lexicalization do not always exclude each other, at least not in OE poetry; this has also to do with the principle of variation. Variation is one of the techniques of OE poetry, which is also used in the OE Elegies: the same person or thing or concept is referred to with various words, including compounds - those may or may not be synonymous, but they have identical reference. Three concepts in the OE Elegies, where variation is particularly noticeable, are ‘lord, ruler’, ‘man, warrior’, and ‘breast, heart, mind’.

(1) In W, there are four compounds that refer to the lord or ruler, namely *gold-wine*, lit. ‘gold-friend’ (i.e. a friend who gives gold [to his warriors]),

*mappum-gyfa* (W) lit. ‘treasure-giver’, *mon-dryhten*, lit. ‘man-lord’ (‘B rules, commands A’), and *wine-dryhten*, lit. ‘friend-lord’ (‘a lord who is also a friend [of his warriors]’); from S, there can be added *gold-giefa*, lit. ‘gold-giver’. There are even more expressions referring to the lord, if phrases are included, e.g. *sinces brytta* ‘treasure’s giver’ (semantically equivalent to the cpd *mappum-gyfa*). All of those refer to the ‘lord, ruler, chieftain’, but he is actually called *dryhten* ‘lord’ in only one of them (*wine-dryhten*). These compounds and phrases stress various aspects of the lord, i.e. that he is a friend of his men and that he gives them treasures, including gold – this is at least the image presented in the OE elegies (cf. also *Beowulf*); how far this reflected social reality in Anglo-Saxon England is yet another question (see also the following section).

(2) The men and warriors are also referred to with four *noun + noun* cpds. in W: *byrn-wiga* ‘mail-coat warrior, corslet warrior’; *magu-begn* ‘young retainer’, lit. ‘young man – retainer’ (copulative); *sele-secgas* ‘hall-retainers, hall-warriors’ (probably referring to the image of warriors who celebrate and also sleep in the hall); *wine-magas* ‘friends and kinsmen’ (also copulative); from S, one can add *hleomæg*, lit. ‘protection-kinsman’, i.e. ‘kinsman who offers protection’. If other types of cpds are taken into consideration, then *freo-magas* ‘free kinsmen’ (W) also belongs here. They stress various aspects of the warriors, namely that they wear armour (*byrn-wiga*), that they are young (*magu-begn*), that they celebrate and also sleep in the hall (*sele-secg*), that they are friends and even relatives (*wine-magas*). As these formations show, often there is hardly a distinction between the concepts ‘man’, ‘warrior’, ‘kinsman’, relative’. How far these compounds are poetic images and how far they reflect social reality is, of course, very difficult to tell; one of the problems is that society between the beginning of Anglo-Saxon England (ca. 450) and the time of the Exeter Book (ca. 1000) had certainly changed.

(3) The concepts of ‘breast’, ‘heart’, ‘mind’, ‘thought’ are difficult to distinguish in W; these are also expressed by four cpds, namely *breost-cofa*, lit. ‘breast-cave, breast-chamber’, *ferð-loca* ‘mind-enclosure’, *hord-cofa* ‘treasure-chamber, treasure-cave’, usually taken to refer to the ‘heart’; *mod-sefa* (W, S), lit. ‘mind-mind’ (copulative) or ‘mind-heart’. Most of those refer to the heart or mind as a cave or enclosure, or as something that is enclosed (for a more detailed discussion with further references see, e.g., Davis-Secord 2016: 97-101).

I have mentioned above that it is often said that one of the functions of cpds is the condensation of information, but this is apparently only partly true of the poetic cpds, which often expand information and thus contribute to the poetic style. As has just been shown, this is at least partly due to the principle of variation; it can also be seen from the fact that there are relatively many copula cpds, where both elements are of equal weight - as opposed to rectional cpds, where normally the second element expresses the more general concept, which is specified by the first element (*meodu-healle*, e.g., is a specific kind of hall, namely a hall where mead is drunk).

Some cpds in OE poetry are kennings (kenningar; or can be analysed as kennings), i.e. they stress a relatively minor aspect of the referent which does not come first to mind when thinking about the referent (the classic study of OE kenningar is Marquardt 1938). Thus the sea is called *lagu-lad* in W and *brim-lad* and *flod-weg* in S, all three meaning ‘water-way’ – the sea is a way for its inhabitants (fish, whales) and for ships and boats, but this is perhaps not its most prominent aspect. Cucina (2008: 397-414) regards eight of the *noun + noun* cpds

from S as kennings, namely *breost-hord*, *brim-lad*, *ecg-hete*, *flæsc-homa*, *flod-weg*, *gold-giefa*, *hreþer-loca*, *last-word*.

### 3.5. Loan-formations

Whereas the cpds in the elegies seem to be original formations, with some of the cpds in ThCapA the question is whether they are loan-formations. Loan-formations are imitations of foreign words with native material, often resulting in cpds; in the case of OE, the model was usually a Latin word. The assumption is that the OE word in question did not exist before. This is relatively easy to show with many words expressing Christian concepts, because it can usually be assumed that the Christian concepts were not known to the Anglo-Saxons before their conversion to Christianity; it is often more difficult to show with words belonging to other semantic fields, e.g. names for people or for certain professions; see also the examples given under (4) below. The likelihood of a cpd being a loan-formation is increased if there is close morphological correspondence between the OE word and its presumed Latin model. Once they have been coined, loan-formations are often used independently; they do not have to be used together with their model.

In ThCapA (Prologue to chapter 11) there are three *noun*+ *noun* cpds that are likely to be loan-formations; moreover, there are two other cpds and a syntactic group that could be loan-formations, so that there are six formations that are or might be loan-formations. The most recent monograph dealing with OE loan-formations is still Gneuss 1955, who concentrates on the OE psalter glosses; but more research, taking other texts into account, is still needed - one semantic field where many OE loan-formations based on Latin models occur are the OE plant names (see, e.g., Sauer and Kubaschewski 2018).

A subdivision of loan-formations is into loan-translations, loan-renditions and loan-creations. Loan-translations show the closest correspondence and are accordingly easiest to detect; in loan-renditions usually only one element corresponds precisely to the Latin model; loan-creations were triggered off by the Latin model, but they show no formal correspondence.

Certain or possible loan-formations from ThCapA are: *noun* + *noun*: *gebed-hus* (for *domus orationis*), *lic-tun* (for *cimiterium*, *coemeterium*), *hand-weorc*; *adj* + *noun*: *god-spell*; particle-combinations: *ymbstandenda[s]*; syntactic group: *bisceopa gemot*, lt. 'bishops' meeting'.

(1) A standard example of a loan-translation is *god-spell* (in ModE obscured to *gospel*); it is usually explained as a loan-translation of Lat. *euangelium* (which in its turn is a loan-word from Greek *euangelion* 'good news'); cf., e.g., Gneuss 1955: 94, § 87.

(2) *Gebed-hus* 'prayer-house' is also a likely loan-translation, because it corresponds morphologically to Lat. *domus orationis* 'house of prayer' (if one ignores the different sequence of the elements and the fact that *domus orationis* is a genitival phrase, whereas *gebed-hus* is a cpd).

(3) *Bisceopa gemot* (for Lat. *synodum*) could be a loan-creation: it has no morphological correspondence to *synodus*, but it is a Christian term which the Anglo-Saxons probably did not have before their conversion to Christianity.

(4) With the other formations a decision is more difficult, one of the reasons being that they are not specifically Christian terms: *lic-tun* 'cemetery': cemeteries

existed before the conversion, but since we have no written documents from before the conversion, we do not know whether the Anglo-Saxons used the word *lic-tun* before Christianization. *His ymbstandendan* ‘those standing around him’ (ThCapA 7) is, of course, not a Christian concept, but its close morphologic correspondence to the Latin *qui ei circumstent* makes it a possible candidate for a loan-translation. *Hand-weorc* for *manuum operatio* corresponds morphologically to the Latin phrase. Of course work with one’s hands existed before the conversion, but in the context of the ThCap it might nevertheless be a Christian concept, because (especially for priests and monks) it is opposed to more spiritual activities such as prayer, attending mass, reading Christian books.

### 3.6. Names

Names are a special group within the vocabulary (see, e.g., Cecily Clark 1992; Khallieva Boiche 2015). Germanic and OE names were often cpds, and, at least originally, they had a meaning, usually a positive one; how far the original meaning was preserved in later formations is another question. Five examples occur in *Deor*, namely: *Beado-hild*, *Eorman-ric*, *Deod-ric*, *Mæð-hild*, *Nið-had*; how far these refer to historic or to fictitious persons (or to historic persons who were later fictionalized) is also a question which I cannot enter into here (cf. the Glossary in Malone’s edition of *Deor*). There has been an extensive discussion about most of these names, and in some cases the original form and meaning might have been changed later through sound-changes or through popular etymology. Two are names of women (*Beado-hild*, *Mæð-hild*), and they have the same second element, *hild* ‘war, battle’. For us it is probably strange that women were called ‘war’, but the Germanic people obviously thought that ‘war’ or cpds with ‘war’ were good names for women.

(1) *Beado-hild* lit. ‘battle-battle’, or ‘battle-war’ is probably also tautologic; it can be traced back to the Germanic \**Baudi-hildi* (cf. Khallieva Boiché 2015: 205). *Mæð-hild* is a bit more difficult: Malone identifies the first element with ‘might’ (G. *Macht*; OE *meaht*, *miht*). Another possible explanation of the first element is OE *mæð* ‘measure, honour, virtue, ability’, which would fit in with its latter meanings (‘virtue-battle’, ‘ability-battle’, i.e. perhaps ‘someone [a woman] who is able to fight in a battle’; but *mægð* ‘maiden, girl’ and *mægð* ‘family, tribe’ also come to mind - perhaps several words had coalesced in *Mæðhhild*).

(2) *Eorman-ric* and *Deod-ric* also have the same second element, which is apparently identical with *rīca* ‘ruler’ (from *rīce* ‘strong, powerful’); the literal meaning of *Deod-ric* is thus ‘people-ruler’ (where strictly speaking the first element is pleonastic, because a ruler usually rules over his people); *Eormanric* again is a bit more difficult. Its first element could be identical with OE *eormen* (*yrmen*, *iermen*) ‘mighty, vast’; the meaning of *Eormanric* would then be ‘mighty ruler’.

(3) *Nið-had* apparently consists of *nip* ‘enmity, hatred, war’ and *hād* ‘rank, person’, i.e. the literal meaning apparently was ‘hate-person, hateful-person, person who is full of hate’. *Nið-had* thus is one of the relatively few names with a negative meaning, but it would fit the negative characterization of *Nið-had* in *Deor*.

## 4. Other types of compound nouns

### 4.1. Noun in the genitive + noun

This is not an old or original type of compounding: the combination of *noun in the genitive* + *noun* existed (and still exists) as a syntactic group and as such is attested several times in the texts discussed here; to give just a few examples of syntactic genitival groups: *sinces brytta* ‘treasure’s giver’ (W 25); *dryhtnes dreamas* ‘the lord’s [i.e. God’s] joys’ (S 65); *hwæles epel* ‘whale’s land’ i.e. ‘the sea’ (S 60); *earfoða dæl* ‘amount of hardships’, lit. ‘hardships’ amount’ (D 30); *bisceopa gemot* (ThCapA 4.1.) ‘bishops’ meeting’ for Lat. *synod* (see above); *heofona rice* ‘heavens’ kingdom, kingdom of heaven’ (ThCapA 1.26; frequent). In the latter case a compound (OE *heofonrice*) and a syntactic group (OE *heofona rice*) apparently co-existed in OE, but the form *heofona rice* as attested in ThCap clearly represents the syntactic genitival group.

The only genitival combination that coalesced into a syntactic group is *domes-dæg* ‘judgement’s day’ (> ModE *doomsday*); but whether the translator of the ThCapA regarded it as a cpd is difficult to say. Grein and CIHall, for example, list the cpd. *dōm-dæg*, but not a cpd. \**domes-dæg*. Semantically, both the cpd and the syntactic group belong to the category which expresses time (‘judgement [doom] takes place on that day’; see § 3.4.1, II (3) above).

### 4.2. Adjective + noun

Similar to genitival groups, combinations of *adj + noun* occurred (and still occur) as syntactic groups, and occasionally as cpds. When used as the first part of a cpd, the adjective is not inflected. But in the texts analysed here, there are very few *adj + noun* combinations which can be regarded with any confidence as cpds: W has just one clear example, namely *freo-mæg* ‘free kinsman’ (see also § 3.3. (3) above).

The two examples from S are ambiguous, namely *earfoð-hwil*, *soð-gied*: *earfoð(e)* could be used as a noun ‘hardship, trouble, etc.’ or as an adjective ‘hard, difficult’, and even as an adverb ‘with difficulty’; *soð* was also used as a noun ‘truth, justice, etc.’ and as an adjective ‘true, just, etc.’. *Earfoð-hwil* could therefore be interpreted as a *noun + noun* cpd ‘hardship-time’, i.e. ‘time of hardship’, or as an *adj + noun* cpd, ‘hard time’; *soð-gied* could be interpreted as a *noun + noun* cpd. ‘truth-song’ (‘song that tells the truth’) or as ‘true song’. Here I have classified them as *adj + noun* cpds; if they were interpreted as *noun + noun* cpds, that group would, of course, still be larger.

Even so, the group of *adj + noun* cpds is small, comprising five formations, if all the ambiguous formations are included; see also the following examples. *Middan-geard* ‘earth’, lit. ‘middle earth’ (i.e. between heaven and hell) is also unusual, because the first element (probably from the adjective *midd* ‘mid, middle’) is inflected; the *-an* probably represents the accusative singular (could also be genitive or dative singular) of the weak adjectival inflexion (which is the same for nouns and adjectives; cf. also § 3.3.(3) above). The example from ThCapA, *ungemethleahor*, is also ambiguous; *ungemet* was mostly used as a noun ‘excess, immensity’, and only rarely (in the form *ungemete*) as an adjective ‘huge’ (more often as an adverb ‘excessively, extremely’).

Semantically, *adj + noun* cpds normally have a copulative structure (cf. § 3.4.1, I above) and can be schematically explained as ‘B is A’, e.g. *earfoð-hwil* ‘the time is hard’; *soð-gied* ‘the song is true’; *middan-geard* ‘the earth is middle’; *ungemethleahator* ‘the laughter is excessive’.

#### 4.3. Numeral + noun

Compounds with a numeral are also rare; there are three examples in our texts, namely *an-haga* and *an-hoga* from W, and *an-floga* from S. All three have *an* ‘one’ as their first element, and they are probably slightly lexicalized, because they express not only the numeral ‘one’, but also ‘solitariness’ or ‘loneliness’. The meaning of these formations is relatively clear, namely ‘solitary man, one who is alone’ for both *anhaga* and *anhoga*, referring to the protagonist of W, and *an-floga* ‘lonely flier’ for a seabird. There has been a debate, however, whether *anhaga* and *anhoga* are variants of the same word or different words (see, e.g., Dunning and Bliss 1969: 37-40) – they are certainly synonyms, i.e. they have a similar or perhaps even the same meaning, but etymologically they are probably different words. The second element of *an-haga* is perhaps derived from *haga* ‘hedge, enclosure’, and the second element of *an-hoga* is perhaps derived from *hogian* ‘to think’ (i.e. lit. ‘one who thinks alone’); the second element of *an-floga* is derived from the strong vb (II) *flēogan – fleah – flugon – flogen*, i.e. *-haga* is denominal, whereas *-hoga* and *-floga* are deverbal. The structure of *an-haga* is even more complex, because (originally) it does not refer to a hedge, but to someone who lives alone in a hedge. Similar formations are OE *hægtesse* ‘witch’ (related to G *Hexe* ‘witch’), originally ‘someone (a female) who lives in a hedge, or rides on a fence’, and German *Hagestolz* ‘bachelor’ (originally also ‘someone who lives alone in a hedge’ (but some details of the formation of *Hagestolz* and *Hexe* are also still unclear; cf. EWDS).

#### 4.4. Adverb + noun

This is also a rare combination, with just one example in the texts analysed here. The type is probably unusual, because adverbs normally modify verbs or adjectives or other adverbs, but not nouns. S nevertheless once has the hapax legomenon *iu-wine*, lit. ‘formerly friend, earlier friend’, which is generally regarded as a cpd, and often taken to have the literal meaning ‘departed friend, dead friend’, probably specifically referring to the dead lord.

### 5. Compound adjectives

#### 5.1. Noun + adjective

Among the cpd adjectives, the most frequent group is formed on the pattern *noun + adj*. W, S, D together have 16 examples, and ThCapA (first chs.) has two more.

##### (1) Examples

(a) W has seven instances, namely 1) *feoh-gifre* ‘avaricious’, lit. ‘money-greedy’; 2) *dom-georn* ‘eager for glory, ambitious’, lit. ‘glory-eager’; 3) *hrim-ceald* ‘ice-cold’; 4) *mod-cearig* ‘troubled in heart’, ‘troubled in thought’, lit. ‘mind-sorrowful’; 5) *sele-dreorig* ‘sad at the loss of the hall’, lit. ‘hall-sad’; 6) *wæl-gifru*

‘greedy for slaughter’, lit. ‘slaughter-greedy’; 7) *winter-cearig*, lit. ‘winter-sorrowful’.

(b) S has six examples: 1) *est-eadig* ‘prosperous’, lit. ‘pleasure-prosperous’, etc.; 2) *is-ceald*, *is-cald* ‘icy cold’, lit. ‘ice-cold’; 3) *mere-werig* ‘sea-weary’; 4) *mod-wlonc* ‘haughty’, lit. ‘mind-proud’; 5) *win-gal* ‘intoxicated with wine’, lit. ‘wine-proud’, etc.; I have also put 6) *el-beodig* ‘foreign, strange’ into this group (see further below).

(c) D has three relevant formations, namely 1) *leoð-cræftig* ‘skilled in song’, lit. ‘song-skilled’; 2) *sorg-cearig* ‘sorrowful’; 3) *winter-ceald* ‘severe’, lit. ‘winter-cold, as cold as winter’.

(d) The first few chapters of ThCapA have two examples, 1) *lic-wyrðe* ‘pleasing, acceptable’, lit. ‘like-worthy’, i.e. ‘worthy to be liked’; 2) *riht-wis* ‘righteous’ (see below).

### (2) Morphology

The typical morphologic shape is *noun + adj*, which is exhibited by, e.g., *dom-georn*, *hrim-ceald*, *win-gal*. But relatively many *noun + adj* cpds have derived second elements; four are derived adjectives with the suffix *-ig* (mostly derived from nouns): *cearig* ‘sorrowful’ (from *cearu*; CIH s.v. *carig*), *dreorig* ‘sad, sorrowful’ (from *dreor* ‘blood’), *eadig* ‘happy, prosperous’ (from *ead* ‘riches, prosperity’), *werig* ‘weary’ (CIHall refers to *wōr* as the basis). The first element of *lic-wyrðe* is probably the stem of the verb *lician* ‘to like, to please’, and not the noun *lic* ‘body’ (see above), nor the adjective *gelic* ‘like, similar’.

*Riht-wis* (> ‘righteous’) is problematic (cf. Sauer 1992): from its original meaning it could be interpreted as a *noun + adj* cpd ‘wise with respect to what is right’, or more probably, as a bahuvrihi adjective (formally *adj + noun*) ‘having the right manner [wis]’.

A special case is also *el-beodig* ‘foreign, strange’ in S: it is probably not a cpd, but is derived from *el-beod* ‘strange, foreign people’; moreover *el-* does not occur independently and, strictly speaking, has to be regarded as a prefix.

### (3) Semantic structure

Some *noun + adj* cpds imply a comparison; both *is-ceald* and *hrim-ceald* can be paraphrased with ‘as cold as ice’ (or perhaps ‘cold from ice?’), probably also with an intensifying function ‘very cold’. The majority of the cpd adjectives from W and S can, however, be explained using a preposition: FOR: *feoh-gifre* ‘greedy for money’; *dom-georn* ‘eager for glory’; *wæl-gifru* ‘greedy for slaughter’; IN: *mod-cearig* ‘troubled, sorrowful in the mind, heart’; *mod-wlonc* ‘proud in the mind’; FROM: *mere-werig* ‘weary from the sea’ (i.e. from sailing on the sea); *win-gal* ‘proud from wine’ (i.e. ‘proud from drinking wine’). Probably the last two should be regarded as (slightly) lexicalized. *Sele-dreorig* ‘hall-sad’ can also be regarded as lexicalized; it does not just mean ‘sad at the hall or because of the hall’; it is usually taken to have a more specific meaning ‘sad at [the loss of] the hall’. *Lic-wyrðe* has a passive meaning, ‘worthy to be liked’; the problematic interpretation of *riht-wis* has been discussed above.

## 5.2. Adjective + adjective

There is just one example, which, however, occurs in W and S, namely *earm-cearig* ‘care-worn, wretched and troubled’, lit. ‘poor-sorrowful’ (CIH s.v. *carig*).

Morphologically, *cearig* is a derived adjective (from *caru*, *cearu* ‘CARE, sorrow’); semantically *earm-cearig* is probably an additive formation (a copula cpd) ‘poor and sorrowful’ (‘A + B’; see § 3.4.1., I above). *Cearig* as a second element occurs also in two *noun + adj* cpds., see § 5.1 above.

### 5.3. Bahuvrihi adjectives

(1) *Description of the type*: Bahuvrihi adjectives form a special category, because formally they consist of *adj + noun*, i.e. the second element is a noun, but they function as adjectives. Semantically, they express a ‘have’ relation, i.e. ‘X has AB’; they mostly refer to parts of the body or the mind. Later they died out and were replaced by extended bahuvrihi adjectives (see § 5.4. below); the reason was perhaps that extended bahuvrihis adjectives are formally marked as adjectives, whereas bahuvrihi adjectives are not formally marked as adjectives.

(2) *Examples*: W has three, and S has four (ThCapA has none in chs. 1-11), i.e. there are seven in our material.

(a) W: *collen-ferð* ‘ready for action, resolute, proud’, lit. ‘with a proud (?) mind’; *dreorig-hleor* ‘with tear-stained cheeks, sad-faced’, lit. ‘[having a] sorrowful face’; *hat-heort* ‘angry, impulsive’, lit. ‘[having a] hot heart’ (heart as the seat of emotions).

(b) S: *eap-mod* ‘humble-minded, friendly’, lit. ‘[having an] easy mind’; *gomel-feax* ‘grey-haired’ (first element: *gamol* ‘old, hoary’); *isig-feðera* ‘with icy, frosted wings’ hap.leg.; *urig-feðera* ‘dewy-winged’ – the latter two are used as nouns.

(3) *Morphology*: Typically, bahuvrihi adjectives consist of *adj + noun*, with the noun functioning as an adjective, e.g. *eap-mod*, *hat-heort*. But *collen-* and *urig-* are apparently not attested independently in OE and are therefore difficult to explain. *Urig* is usually taken to mean ‘damp’. *Collen-* in W perhaps means something like ‘proud’; the literal meaning of *collen-ferð* would then be ‘having a proud mind’. On *collen-* and *urig* see AEW. A form similar to *collen-* is *collon-* in the plant-name *collon-croh* ‘water-lily (?)’, but this is also not attested independently and therefore does not help to explain *collen-ferð* (cf. Sauer and Kubaschewski 2018).

Three first elements are apparently derived with the suffix *-ig*: *dreorig* (from *dreor* ‘blood’), *isig* (from *īs* ‘ice’), and *urig*. *Isig-feðera* and *urig-feðera* are substantivized according to the weak declension, i.e. *isig-feðera* ‘the one having icy wings’; *urig-feðera* ‘the one having dewy wings’, both referring to sea-birds.

(4) *Semantics*: As stated above, the meaning usually is ‘having AB’, e.g. *dreorig-hleor* ‘having a sad face’, and in substantivized bahuvrihis, ‘X has AB’.

### 5.4. Extended bahuvrihi adjectives

Probably in order to show their adjectival character more clearly, bahuvrihi adjectives were even in OE sometimes extended with a suffix, in OE often *-ig* or *-ed*, later usually *-ed*. Not every extended bahuvrihi adjective is, however, actually an extension of an existing bahuvrihi adjective; many are new formations without a preceding bahuvrihi adjective.

In our material, there is just one example of an extended bahuvrihi adjective, namely the hapax legomenon *fea-sceaftig* ‘miserable, poor’, which is an extension of the also attested *fea-sceaft*.

### 5.5. Numeral + adjective

This is also a rare pattern with just two examples in our material. As with the pattern *num* + *noun*, in both cases of *num* + *adj* the first element is a form of *ān* ‘one’: *an-hydig* ‘resolute, strong-minded’, lit. ‘having one mind’ (D); *æn-lipie* ‘single, solitary’ (ThCapA; CIHall s.v. *an-liepig*); i.e. in *æn-lipie* the numeral (first element) expresses once more ‘solitariness’, but in *an-hydig* it expresses strength.

## 6. Prefixoids and suffixoids

Prefixoids and suffixoids are elements that stand somewhere between words and prefixes or suffixes. A few, such as *cyne-* do not occur independently, but they can be regarded as morphologically conditioned allomorphs of words, in this case of *cyning* ‘king’. Others, such as *-dom* or *-had*, were originally words, but either they split up into a word and a suffix (in the case of *dom*) or died out as independent words and became suffixes (in the case of *had* > ModE *-hood*), but both processes probably took a long time to complete, and when they began is difficult to say.

### 6.1. Prefixoids

(1) *cyne-* can be regarded as a morphologically conditioned allomorph of *cyning* (cf. Sauer 1992): whereas *cyning* is used as an independent word, *cyne-* is used as the first element of cpds. There is one attestation in D, namely *cynerice* ‘kingdom’. Later *cyne-* died out and was generally replaced by *king* (e.g. ModE *kingdom*).

### 6.2. Suffixoids

#### 6.2.1. Noun suffixoids

(1) *-dom*: The OE word *dōm* had a wide range of meanings, e.g. ‘judgement, law, advice, choice, etc.’. Gradually it split up into the ModE noun *doom* /du:m/ and the ModE suffix *-dom* /də m/. But when this split occurred is difficult to tell. CIHall assumes that even in OE there existed a noun *dōm* and a suffix *-dōm*, but the spelling was the same, and the meaning ‘condition, etc.’, which CIHall gives for the suffix, was also a meaning of the independent word. In our material, there are two formations with *-dom*, both in the ThCapA, namely *recenddom* ‘governance’, and *þeowdom* ‘servitude, slavery’. Paraphrasing them is not easy; perhaps ‘state of being a ruler, governor’ for *recenddom* and ‘state of being a slave’ for *þeowdom*.

(2) *-had*: ‘person, condition, state’ was originally also an independent word. It died out in independent use in Early Middle English, but has survived as a suffix, ModE *-hood*. As with *-dom*, the question is when *-had* started to become a suffix. CIHall assumes that even in OE there were a noun *hād* and a suffix *-hād*, but the meaning ‘condition, state’, which CIHall gives for the suffix, was also a meaning of the noun. Therefore it is difficult to distinguish between *hād* noun and *-hād* suffix in Old English; accordingly I have put combinations with *-had* among the formations with suffixoids.

(3) *-wara* ‘inhabitants’ did not occur as an independent word in OE, but only as a second element of combinations. There is one attestation of *burgwara* ‘inhabitants of a ‘burg’ (W), citizens, burghers’. It seems to have been synonymous with compounds where the second element is also attested as an independent word, namely *burg-leod*, *burh-mann*, both also meaning ‘citizen’; therefore I have classified it here as a suffixoid.

### 6.2.2. Adjective suffixoids

(1) *-bære* ‘bringing’ is derived from the strong verb IV *beran – bær – bæron*, but does not occur independently as an adjectival element (see also Sauer and Waxenberger 2017: 176, §10). It occurs in *wæstmbære* ‘fruitful’, lit. ‘bringing fruit’ in ThCapA.

(2) *-leas* ‘without, free from’ was still used as an independent word in Old English, e.g. W 86 *burgwara breahtma lease* ‘without the noise of the citizens’, but later it became a suffix (*-less*) e.g. ModE *friendless*, *bottomless* etc. CIHall lists it just as a word and not as a suffix, but in view of its development, I have classified it as a suffixoid here. There are four examples in our texts, from W *freond-leas* and *wine-leas*, both meaning ‘friendless, without a friend’, and from D *ende-leas* ‘endless’ and *grund-leas* ‘numberless’, lit. ‘groundless’. Some formations with *-less* have an antonymous formation in *-ful* (e.g. ModE *helpful – helpless*), but not, e.g., the formations just quoted from W and D.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis of compounds in some of the OE Elegies (Wanderer, Seafarer, Deor) and in chapters 1-11 of the OE *Theodulfi Capitula A* has yielded a number of interesting results; here I can sketch just a few of them. Some principles and problems of word-formation in general and of compounding in particular are common to poetic texts and prose texts, but the two groups also have their specific features. In poetic compounds, the principle of variation plays a role, whereas with some of the compounds attested in prose texts the question arises whether they were coined as loan-formations, based on a Latin model. In the poetic texts, moreover, many compounds are hapax legomena or confined to poetic language; nevertheless they show the productivity of compounding in Old English.

As far as morphology is concerned, compound nouns of the type *noun + noun* are by far the most frequent pattern (with cca. 75 different formations), followed by compound adjectives of the type *noun + adjective* (with 16 different formations). All other types of compound nouns (*noun in the genitive + noun*; *adj + noun*; *numeral + noun*; *adverb + noun*) and compound adjectives attested in our material (*adj + adj*; *bahuvrihi adjs*; *extended bahuvrihi adjs*; *numeral + adj*) are much rarer. For a number of reasons, it is, however, impossible to give accurate numbers for many types. For example, in several formations, the word-class of one element (often the first element) is uncertain (e.g. noun or adjective; primary noun or derived noun – cases of the latter type can often be explained etymologically, but whether this had synchronic relevance is another question). I have classified some elements as prefixoids or suffixoids, i.e. they stand somewhere in-between prefixes or suffixes and. In the case of elements that are not primary, but the result of derivation, a cross-classification might be useful.

Especially with *noun + noun* compounds, there are also many semantic subgroups, e.g. copula compounds and rectional compounds, and among the latter, compounds referring to people, place, time, material, instrument, action, etc. Once more, some formations are fairly straightforward, whereas others are ambiguous and difficult to classify. Moreover, when dealing with semantics, a distinction should be made between compounds that can be understood and explained with the help of their elements, and compounds that have additional semantic features, i.e. that are lexicalized or idiomatized. Especially in poetry, one phenomenon does not exclude the other, however, and in addition to the meaning of the elements and features of lexicalization, the reference of compounds should also be taken into account. *Gold-wine* (a *noun + noun* compound), for example, has the literal meaning ‘gold-friend’, but it refers to the lord who gives gold to his warriors and is not only their lord, but also their friend (at least this is the image presented in the OE elegies – how far this also mirrored social reality is a different and difficult question). It can, of course, be debated whether this is a semantic phenomenon (a feature of meaning) or a matter of reference. Compounds of the type *gold-wine* were probably formed due to the poetic principle of variation.

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# METAPHORS AND METONYMIES OF THE ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN CONCEPTS OF FEAR IN CONTEXT

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*Abstract:* The paper studies the language of fear in English and Russian and investigates the metaphors and metonymies that contribute to the English and Russian concepts of this universal basic emotion. The paper aims at discussing the role of context in English and Russian linguistic expressions of 'fear' and 'strakh'.

*Keywords:* context, emotion, fear, meaning making, metaphor, metonymy

## 1. Introduction: theoretical background and aim of my research

The present paper has been inspired by Kövecses's (2015) volume entitled *Where Metaphors Come from*, in which he studies the role of context in metaphorical meaning construction. After giving a brief theoretical background, I discuss English and Russian metaphors and metonymies of fear and attempt to find out the role of context in metaphorical and metonymical meaning making.

The study of the language of emotion has had a long tradition in cognitive linguistics. Researchers have shown that emotion language is pervaded by figurative expressions (Lakoff 1987, Kövecses 1990, 2000), however, it is a matter of course that there are also literal expressions describing different emotional states. Our emotion vocabulary containing both literal and nonliteral expressions shows the way people belonging to a language community understand the emotional experience in question. Metonymies usually capture physiological and behavioural reactions accompanying an emotional state, while metaphors refer to less easily observable inner bodily experiences (Wierzbicka 1999).

Emotions are complex physiological, behavioural and mental reactions of people to situations and events in which they are involved and to other people with whom they interact. Psychological investigation has shown that emotions can be distinguished with the help of componential analysis (bodily reactions, facial expressions, emotional reactions and a cognitive appraisal of the situation in question – cf. Bányai 2013: 51, Atkinson et al. 1997: 309).

Fear is an "emotion caused by the nearness or possibility of danger, pain, evil, etc." (Hornby 1989). According to the kind of danger that threatens our physical, social, mental, etc. well-being we may show a wide range of complex responses, from taking action to cope with the dangerous situation through escaping from it up to trembling or even being paralyzed and unable to do anything that might help (Lazarus 1991).

Kövecses's *Emotion Concepts* (1990) and *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling* (2000) present metonymies and metaphors that depict a number of details of fear, but Kövecses does not investigate the mechanisms by which metonymical and metaphorical meanings come about.

In his 2015 volume entitled *Where Metaphors Come from*, Kövecses studies the process of meaning making in metaphors. In the preface Kövecses states that

meaning construction is always context-based and context is created in a communicative process. He claims that metaphorical meaning construction depends on context, too, by which he means a combination of linguistic and non-linguistic factors (Kövecses 2015: 1-2).

As a starting point, Kövecses accepts Van Dijk's (2009: 5) definition, stating that "[...] a context is what is defined to be relevant in the social situation by the participants themselves" (Kövecses 2015:1). Kövecses then points out that conceptual metaphor theory cannot account for all metaphorical meaning because "metaphorical meaning does not arise from conceptual metaphors, mappings, or metaphorical entailments, or inferences" (idem:7). He illustrates it by quoting Ritchie's example "*My wife is an anchor*" (Ritchie 2004: 278-279), which is an ambiguous metaphor, if seen out of context. According to Kövecses, who reflects on Ritchie's analysis of the ANCHOR metaphor, it can have the metaphorical meaning 'stability', on the one hand, but it can also mean 'lack of freedom'. In the first case, the speaker intends to say "in times of danger in the course of my life, my wife provides me with the stability I need" (idem: 278, qtd. in Kövecses 2015: 9). In the second case, the speaker talks about the difficulties he has in his life and "blames his wife for his not being able to achieve certain life goals" (idem: 279, qtd. in Kövecses 2015: 9). Kövecses shows that the metaphors LIFE IS A JOURNEY and HUMAN RELATIONS ARE PHYSICAL CONNECTIONS are used in both situations, while the metaphor EMOTIONAL STABILITY/ STRENGTH IS PHYSICAL STABILITY/ STRENGTH is used in the former, while LACK OF FREEDOM TO ACT IS LACK OF FREEDOM TO MOVE is used in the latter, which explains/creates the difference in meaning (Kövecses 2015: 9).

Cognitive linguistic literature has already proved that metaphors have their corresponding bodily basis, or in other words, are rooted in people's bodily experiences (e.g. MORE IS UP; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Because a lot of our bodily experiences are very similar for all human beings around the world, metaphors that are based on bodily experiences are often viewed as universal or near universal. On the other hand, there are metaphors that capture different aspects of how we perceive the world; therefore they are rather viewed as non-universal, culture-specific variations. Kövecses (2015) finds that metaphor variation is mainly motivated by contextual factors such as "key concepts in a culture, in history, and environment" (Kövecses 2015: 14).

Based on my preliminary studies of English and Russian expressions of fear, I find that there are similarities and differences in the English and Russian vocabulary of fear, both in the use of single words denoting some kind of fear and in complex expressions or sentences that may have either literal or figurative meanings. As a starting point, I accept that context has a crucial role in what words and expressions mean and this is also true of figurative expressions.

First, I shall look at what kinds of fear can be distinguished by fear terms in the two languages and what contexts they are used in. Then, I discuss more complex expressions of fear in my English and Russian corpora and see what metonymies and metaphors they instantiate. Finally, I attempt to find out what role context may have in the meaning construction of the metonymies and metaphors in my corpora.

I have built two corpora containing linguistic expressions of fear and related emotions in English and Russian. For the English corpus, I used The Free Dictionary (<https://www.thefreedictionary.com>) as a source and selected terms

denoting various kinds of fear, and collected example sentences under the headings *fear*, *anxiety*, *nervousness* and *tension*. (Each dictionary entry contains a ‘cite’ section, which gives quotations from Sommer’s (1988) *Similes Dictionary*). For the Russian corpus, I used the Russian National Corpus (<http://www.ruscorpora.ru>), selected terms denoting various kinds of fear, and collected example sentences using *strakh*, *ispug*, *panika* and *trevoga* as search words. Example sentences in both my English and my Russian corpus are figurative expressions, instantiating either metaphors or metonymies or their interactions. (Below I give the English translation of the Russian examples in brackets.)

## 2. Kinds of fear denoted by English and Russian terms and the contexts in which they are used

Probably the most frequently used terms in relation to the emotion ‘fear’ in English are *fear*, *fright*, *terror*, *horror* and *panic*, while in Russian *strakh*, *ispug*, *uzhas* and *panika*.

The most general and neutral terms are *fear* and *strakh*, which refer to our response when we are faced with some danger that we wish to avoid or when we feel bad and have certain unpleasant physiological reactions. We say things like *I am afraid of heights*, *I am trembling with fear*; *ja bojus’ prostranstva* [‘I am afraid of space’], *ja drozhu ot strakha* [‘I am trembling with fear’].

If the feeling of fear comes suddenly and unexpectedly, we use the words *fright* and *ispug* and by them we usually mean that the emotion only lasts for a relatively short time. The bodily and behavioural reactions of fright can be very similar both for speakers of English and Russian: *he took fright and ran away*; *on s ispugu ubezhal* [‘he ran away in his fright’]. Besides the concept of fright identified as a “notion of short-lived biological fear” (Apresjan 2008: 20), there is another concept “for a very strong short-lasting fear” (ibid.), which exists in both English and Russian. For this concept we use the words *terror* and *uzhas*, respectively. Apresjan (ibid.) claims that the two terms are not totally identical as far as their use is concerned. She claims that, although both *terror* and *uzhas* are accompanied by very similar physiological reactions, like going pale and freezing (*go pale with terror*, *freeze with terror*, *pobelet’ ot uzhasa* [‘turn white with terror’], *uzhas skoval ego* [‘terror shackled him’]), on the one hand, and by similar behavioural reactions like fleeing (*flee in terror*; *ubezhat’ ot uzhasa* [‘run away with terror’]) on the other, the contexts they may occur in are not the same. Apresjan’s examples with their English translations show that English uses two different terms, where Russian uses just one term, *uzhas*:

(1) On s uzhasom smotrel na priblizhavshikhsja banditov  
[‘He was looking at the approaching gangsters in terror’] and

(2) On s uzhasom smotrel na obezobrazhennoje telo  
[‘He was looking at the mutilated body in horror’] (Apresjan 2008: 20)

In Apresjan’s analysis, the difference lies in the fact that the Russian term *uzhas* has a wider meaning than its English counterpart *terror*: *uzhas* “can refer not only to the feeling of anticipating something very bad, but also to the feeling of being exposed to something very bad that has already happened” (Apresjan 2008: 20). The two kinds of feelings are referred to in examples (1) and (2), respectively.

Finally, *panic* and *panika* seem to refer to practically the same kind of fear, which is a very intense negative emotion implying “complete loss of rational control” (idem: 21), which may result in extreme reactions, like involuntary release of bowels or bladder (Kövecses 1990: 71). Expressions like *be scared shitless* and *nalozhit' v shtany* [‘shit in one’s pants’] may be used to refer to a real physiological reaction or just an imaginary one to describe cowardly behaviour in a derogatory way. In both English and Russian, the context is giving a negative evaluation to a behavioural reaction, no matter whether the expression is used literally or figuratively.

### 3. Metonymies and metaphors instantiated by the sentences denoting fear in my English and Russian corpora

#### 3.1. The English corpus

Kövecses (1990: 70-74) discusses metonymies of fear in detail and claims that they capture physiological and behavioural reactions that accompany the emotion. Metonymies like INCREASE IN HEART RATE (*His heart pounded with fear.*) exemplify metonymies based on physiological reactions, while FLIGHT STANDS FOR FEAR (*When he heard the police coming, the thief took to his heels.*) exemplifies metonymies based on behavioural reactions. Kövecses (1990: 74-78 and 2000: 23) presents a number of fear metaphors and claims that the metaphor FEAR IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER (*Fear was rising in him.*) is very elaborate in English and describes the events in a prototypical scenario of fear. Of course, there are several other metaphors depicting other aspects of our fear experience, which Wierzbicka (1999: 276) refers to as unobservable inner bodily symptoms of individuals.

Analysing my English corpus I find that there are no examples of behavioural reaction metonymies in it, but it contains 14 examples of metonymies instantiating four different physiological effect metonymies, three of which are included in Kövecses’s (1990) analysis. I shall present one example for each:

(3) My heart begins to pound like a thief’s with the police after him – INCREASE IN HEART RATE STANDS FOR FEAR

(4) Felt chilled as by the breath of death’s head – DROP IN BODY TEMPERATURE STANDS FOR FEAR

(5) His stomach felt like a volcano about to erupt – NERVOUSNESS IN THE STOMACH STANDS FOR FEAR.

The fourth metonymy instantiated by 8 examples in my English corpus is TENSION IN THE BODY STANDS FOR FEAR, for example:

(6) My back became like a stick

(7) Spines ... stiffened like pulled twine.

The examples show the back and spine area as typical parts of the body where tension accumulates. The number of the instantiations suggests that it is a rather frequent conceptualization of fear, nonetheless it is not mentioned in Kövecses (1990). In the context of examples (3) to (7), the simile part of each sentence describes a specific detail of the physiological effect depicted in the expressions.

My English corpus has 54 metaphorical expressions conceptualizing several different aspects of fear. Seventeen of the metaphorical expressions instantiate the container metaphor. Kövecses (1990, 2000) presents the metaphor FEAR IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER and claims that the container is the human body. My corpus provides 10 examples of specific parts of the body conceptualized as containers for fear, for example the brain, foot, toes and ankle, as in:

(8) Brute terrors [...] filled the more remote chambers of his brain

(9) I pretend my right foot is like a bottle. I pour my fears down into the toes and cork the whole thing at the ankle, so none of my fears can escape into the rest of me.

Examples (8) and (9) prove that it is not only the human body as a whole, but also certain of its parts that may serve as containers for fear. Moreover it must be noted that fear may not only be conceptualized as a fluid in a container (9 examples in my corpus), as suggested in Kövecses's studies (1990, 2000), but also as a substance (8 examples in my corpus), for example:

(10) Fear ... sat heavy in the center of his body like a ball of badly digested food – FEAR IS A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER.

The term 'heavy' in example (10) helps us to construe the substance reading of fear, the expression 'in the center of his body' specifies the container body part, and the simile in the second half of the sentence reinforces the substance reading of fear by comparing it to 'badly digested food'. Therefore, I claim that sentence 10 instantiates the specific metaphor FEAR IS A FOOD SUBSTANCE IN THE BODY CONTAINER, which is not mentioned in Kövecses (1990 and 2000), and which means that the simile specifies the generic level SUBSTANCE metaphor.

Besides the examples instantiating the container metaphor, there are 37 further metaphorical expressions in which the body and its certain parts serve as locations for fear and some related emotions. The body parts providing locations are the head, face, tooth, chest, heart, stomach/belly, limbs, legs, knees, bones and nerves, and the emotions are fear, terror, panic, worry, anxiety and fright, which are conceptualized as animate/animate-like and inanimate entities. The animate/animate-like entities are personified objects, animals or supernatural beings, while the inanimate entities are technical appliances, natural forces or substances in metaphorical expressions. For example:

(11) Fear ... lay on me like a slab of stone,

where fear is a personified object on the body as a surface location, and

(12) Fear ... clutching at his heart ... as if tigers were tearing him,

where fear is understood as an animal and the heart is an 'operation area' for fear. Furthermore, the contexts provided by the simile parts in both examples reinforce the metaphorical reading of fear by highlighting the images of stone and tiger, respectively. In (13),

(13) Felt (the beginning of) panic, like a giant hand squeezing my heart,

the simile part of the sentence has a special role, which can be tested by comparing (13) to (14):

(14) Felt (the beginning of) panic.

In (13), the metaphorical meaning FEAR/PANIC IS A SUPERNATURAL BEING (whose location/operation area is the heart) is construed easily, because the simile activates the metaphorical image, while the meaning of (14) is more neutral (less specific and consequently less personal), because there is no metaphorical reading that could be construed without the simile.

### 3.2. The Russian corpus

My Russian corpus contains 14 instantiations of six metonymies, four of which are included in Kövecses (1990) and two are not.

(15) Smotrela na nego s ispugom...  
[‘She looked at him with fright...’]

instantiates WAYS OF LOOKING STANDS FOR FEAR;

(16) V eto vremja v komnatu vskol’znul odin iz molodykh. Belyj ot ispuga  
[‘At that time one of the young slipped/crept into the room. He was white with fright’]

instantiates CHANGE OF SKIN COLOUR (WHITE FACE) STANDS FOR FEAR;

(17) On s ispugu i ot neozhidannosti lishilsja rechi, skoro perezvonil mne, ne verja v slushevsheesja  
[‘He became speechless because of fright and unexpectedness, soon called me up not believing what he heard’]

instantiates INABILITY TO SPEAK STANDS FOR FEAR, while

(18) Inogda rebënok prosto ne reshaetsja sdelat’ chto-libo iz strakha poterpet’ neudachu  
[‘Sometimes a child simply is not willing to do anything out of fear of failing’]

instantiates INABILITY TO ACT STANDS FOR FEAR.

Kövecses (1990) does not list TENSION/TIGHTNESS STANDS FOR FEAR and PHYSICAL AGITATION STANDS FOR FEAR, apparently because his corpus does not contain any such examples; however,

(20) U menja chto-to szhalos’ v grudi, kak ot ispuga  
[‘I had something tightened in my breast just like due to fright’]

(21) Vsë, ja napugan, ja drozhu ot strakha, i ja nemedlenno nachinaju učit’ zarubezhku  
[‘That’s all, I am frightened, I am quivering with fear, and I soon start to study abroad’]

instantiate the TENSION and PHYSICAL AGITATION FOR FEAR metonymies, respectively.

My Russian corpus contains 51 examples of metaphors, most of which are included in Kövecses’s list of metaphors. The metaphors FEAR IS A FLUID and FEAR IS A CONTAINER have three and four instantiations, respectively, for example,

(22) On ponjal tajno i prostuju mysl’ Leny, ot etogo ponimanija ispug pronik v ego serdce...

[‘He understood Lena’s secret and simple thought, because of this understanding fright penetrated into his heart...’]

(23) A ja tut prebyvaju v strakhe i uzchase, osobenno v svjazi s poslednimi sobytijami

[‘And here I am in fear and horror, especially in connection with the latest events’].

The metaphor STRAKH [‘FEAR’] IS AN ENEMY is instantiated by ten examples in my Russian corpus, which highlight different features of the fear experience. The use of the verb *preodolevat* [‘overcome’] highlights the image of an enemy in general, the verb *okhvatyv* [‘seize’] highlights the image of a vicious enemy (human or animal), while the verb *muchit* [‘torment’] the image of tormentor (cf. Kövecses, 1990: 75), as in (24) (25) and (26), respectively:

(24) Tol’ko togda Kal’vero nachinaet bor’bu, preodolevaja svoj i chuzhoj strakh pered provalom...

[‘Only then does Kal’vero start the fight, overcoming his own and the others’ fear before the failure...’]

(25) No komandir skazal, chto po doroge nel’zja, i Kostju okhvatyval ispug – a vdrug zavedët ne tuda?

[‘But the commander said not to go on the road and Kostja was caught by fright what if it (the road) takes you not there?’]

(26) V etom sluchae ikh ne budet muchit’ strakh, chto oni znachitel’no slabee sverstnikov

[‘In this case, they will not be tormented by the fear that they are much weaker than their peers’].

It is interesting to note that the relatively large number of examples with the image of ‘fear as an enemy’ (15 per cent of my metaphor corpus) indicates that the enemy aspect of the fear experience seems rather salient for the speakers of Russian. It must be admitted, however, that my corpus is rather small, therefore questions about salient features of the fear experience should be further investigated.

Kövecses’s (1990: 75) example *She was sick with fright* instantiates the metaphor FEAR IS AN ILLNESS by depicting a physical symptom of fear, while example (27) from my corpus,

(27) Stojish na ostonovke [...], a sama skhodish s uma ot strakha – plachet Serëzhka odin v zakrytoj kvartire ili eshchë net?

(You are standing at the bus stop [...], and you are going crazy with fear – is Seryozhka crying alone in the locked apartment or not yet?),

refers to a mental problem. However, both examples describe a very intense level of fear.

Example (28),

(28) Ne ostavljajte rebënka naedine s ego strakhami, i popytajtes’ sovместnymi usilijami sdelat’ ego uchëbu v shkole prijatnoj i plodotvornoj

[‘Do not leave the child alone with his fears and try to work together to make his schooling (= studies at school) pleasant and fruitful’],

instantiates the metaphor FEAR IS A (BAD) COMPANION, which is not identified in Kövecses’s (1990, 2000) studies, probably because it is not part of the English concept of fear.

#### 4. The role of context in the meaning construction of the metonymies and metaphors in my corpora

The discussion above has shown that context (single words, phrases or whole sentences) plays a part in meaning construction. There is no real practical or pragmatic sense to look at the meanings of words out of context, since in communication (either written or oral) we practically never use words alone. A single word or short phrase may provide a context for another word or phrase. For example, the sentence *Mary has turned pale* may refer to Mary's physical condition. But if we add *with fear* to the sentence, we know that the emotion *fear* is the cause of Mary's change of skin colour. The addition of the prepositional phrase *with fear* puts Mary's change of skin colour in the context of fear and, by doing so, enables us to understand the example as an instantiation of the metonymy CHANGE OF SKIN COLOUR STANDS FOR FEAR.

Combinations of words like *shrink in horror*, *shake with fear*, *drozhat' ot strakha* ['shake with fear'] may be viewed as various instantiations of the metonymy PHYSICAL AGITATION STANDS FOR FEAR.

Kövecses's (2015) analysis of Richie's (2004) example of the ANCHOR metaphor (*My wife is an anchor*) shows that context may serve as a means of disambiguating an otherwise ambiguous metaphor. In other words, disambiguation leads to two different meanings of the same metaphorical expression. In my corpus, however, examples like (29) *serdce oborvalos'* ['the heart sank'], (30) *serdce v pjatki ushlo* ['the heart is gone to the heel'] and (31) *dusha v pajtki ushla* ['the soul is gone to the heel'] show that the three expressions combining different words instantiate the metaphor FEAR IS THE HEART DOWN, thus establishing the same situation (or a very similar situation), in which the heart is conceptualized as losing its normal position. Examples (30) and (31) also show that the terms *serdce* and *dusha* (heart and soul) are interchangeable in the context, although they are not identical in meaning, since *serdce* denotes the body organ, while *dusha* refers to a "person's spiritual, moral, and emotional core and as an internal theatre where a person's moral and emotional life goes on" (Wierzbicka 1997: 3), in other words, the latter denotes a central and specific concept in the Russian culture and language. Both *serdce* and *dusha* are understood as the seat of emotion by speakers of Russian, that is, they both may be used to describe fear.

#### 5. Conclusion

Based on the literature I have studied and the analysis of my corpora, I have found that context is a very important factor in all meaning making. The role of the linguistic context is to allow precise interpretation of what has been communicated by both literal and figurative expressions (metaphors and metonymies); it gives information about the conceptual content signalled by individual words, it helps to disambiguate ambiguous metaphorical expressions, by making a difference between literal, metonymical and metaphorical meanings of expressions and also by highlighting culture-specific peculiarities in the use of certain words and concepts within and across languages.

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**THEY DO IT WITH NURSERY RHYMES.  
THE MYSTERY OF INTERTEXTUALITY  
IN AGATHA CHRISTIE'S DETECTIVE FICTION FROM  
A LITERARY CRITIC'S AND A TRANSLATOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

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***Abstract:** The paper looks at Agatha Christie's thought-provoking selection of titles for her detective stories both from a literary critic's and from a translator's perspective. The fact that many titles include or allude to well-known English nursery rhymes is not a mere coincidence, but the deliberate choice of an author who created a subtle interplay in her reader's horizon of expectation, between the tension and thrilling atmosphere of a classical crime narrative and the tranquility and playful mood of a children's poem or fairy tale. Observing the Romanian translations of Agatha Christie's original titles, we comment on situations when this interplay is replicated; when it is not, we pay attention to the compensatory strategies – if any – used by the Romanian translators.*

***Keywords:** crime fiction title, detective story, intertextuality, literary translation, nursery rhyme*

## **1. Introduction**

Almost 130 years after her birth, Agatha Christie continues to be one of the best known and best-selling authors of detective fiction worldwide. Even if she wrote books pertaining to a genre that was – and still is – regarded as popular, lowbrow, her influence and authority over later generations of writers and the elements of the narrative which became, due to her contribution, invariables of this genre, undoubtedly turn her into an *auteur*. Moreover, as the most notable female writer of detective fiction and the creator of the best known lady sleuth as well as of the equally famous Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie gives readers and literary critics solid grounds for regarding her work as a convincing instance of *écriture féminine*.

Last but not least, this writer offers as many puzzles to her translators as to her general public, among other things, in the subtle tension she creates between the titles of her novels and their plot. Sometimes, she gives her books titles with a strong intertextual resonance, this highly literary connection extending its aura of authority and prestige to the thriller, which, in this way, remains not only a good example of craftsmanship, but also a piece that claims canonicity.

On many occasions, Agatha Christie intrigues her readers by giving her stories titles which contradict the very expectations of a detective story. She employs many easily recognizable lines extracted from nursery rhymes and fairy tales, a strategy which may be given a complex justification. The contrast between the serenity and innocence promised by a genre for children and the technicality of the most atrocious murder has an almost cathartic effect on the readers. Beyond the

individual drama which is singled out in the story, with a victim whose violent death is avenged by a clever detective, these “world-of-innocence” additions are reassuring in the sense that a universal tendency towards order will always prevail. In this paper, we analyze several examples of Christie’s titles containing nursery rhymes and elements of other texts for children, discussing whether the choices made by the translators when rendering these titles into Romanian are true to the author’s original intentions or not and, implicitly, whether they are as functional in the translated versions as they are in the original.

## **2. All’s well that ends well? The literary critic’s perspective on intertextuality in Agatha Christie’s titles**

Many recent analysts of the detective genre insist on the contribution of women writers to the stability and credibility of this fictional mode in a century which has been very whimsical in its support and appreciation of literary movements and their representatives. After the genre was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a witness of the middle-class respect for order, the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century consolidated it as a male domain, in the shape of hard boiled narratives. But quite a few women writers tackled this genre and succeeded, with less stereotypical heroes, more colourful and detailed settings, or more socially sensitive subjects, in keeping the whodunit afloat and alive in the attention of readers and critics. Sally R. Munt (1994: 5) observes that, in contrast with early versions of whodunits, dominated by the “sizzling irrelevance” of female characters, in the recent years, the feminine version of the crime narrative has consistently rewritten the archetypal masculine framework.

One of the most prominent contributors to the genre was Agatha Christie, who gave a particular twist to the image of the average private investigator. Not only is Poirot a sophisticated, exotic gentleman with a slightly effeminate inclination towards fashionable elegance, refined cuisine and comfortable domesticity, but Miss Marple, in her very ordinariness, is one of the most extraordinary sleuths. An elderly, middle-class, provincial lady, with a passion for knitting, she is a singular focalizer of post-war British lifestyle, mentalities and social order. Christie was also original in exploiting an element of the plot like no other writer of whodunits had the inspiration to do. She gave up the classical murder weapons that the public was most accustomed to and replaced them with poisons – the more elaborate, the better. Seeking inspiration in her own youth, when she served as a nurse and an apothecary’s assistant during the First World War, in many of her plots, Agatha Christie puts dangerous chemical substances in her characters’ hands with an authentic touch. Apart from the best known poisons, like arsenic, cyanide or strychnine, murderers in her novels use plants, taken, for example, from a medieval witch’s cauldron, or modern medicines, which sparked off, in her lifetime, various pharmaceutical disputes.

Just as the portrayal of her heroes and heroines and the use of poisons as murder weapons may be considered original traits of Christie’s work, her creative use of titles may be said to substantially contribute to the lasting popularity of her novels among readers and to their appreciation by literary critics. It is intriguing to account for the recurrence of nursery rhymes and other keywords recognizable from children’s texts in the titles of her novels and short stories. It is plausible to assume that the writer’s flair made her aware of the effect created by the juxtaposition of two universes that are totally set apart – songs, poems and games,

harmlessly performed by little boys and girls vs. the aggressiveness of death, charged with negative emotions and affording a glimpse into the darkest contortions of the human psyche. Stylistically, these novels and short stories could be said to display a veritable oxymoron: the promise of tranquility and happiness in the title, broken by the drama of abuse, hatred, despair and murder in the text.

If we read Agatha Christie's diary, autobiography and personal letters, we find that the universe of childhood was always on her mind. She begins her autobiography by stating that one of the most fortunate periods in her life was her happy childhood, the freedom she benefitted from allowing her to explore and exploit her potential from a very early age. She learnt how to read and write on her own, when she was only five, and was soon scribbling poems and stories for her personal entertainment. Symmetrically, in her old age, when she was already one of the most celebrated authors of her generation, she enjoyed spending time with her grandson, whose intelligence and imagination she trained by making him solve puzzles and find clues, disguised in games for children (Curran 2010, 2014).

In some of the cases when Agatha Christie's novels have titles which are taken from easily recognizable nursery rhymes or games for children, the connection between the title and the plot is that a keyword can be identified as being part of the clue that solves the murder mystery. In other cases, the title works more like an overall metaphor, a commentary on the moral of the story. Among the most famous examples in the former category, we can mention *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* (1940), *Crooked House* (1949), *A Pocketful of Rye* (1953), *Hickory Dickory Dock* (1955), or the short story *How does Your Garden Grow?*, included in the 1974 collection *Poirot's Early Cases*.

*One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* is a well-known counting exercise for small children in the form of a nursery rhyme, which pairs the numbers from one to twenty, making them more easily memorable by finding rhyming associations with familiar objects, persons, animals and events in a child's daily routine: "knock at the door", "pick up sticks", "a good fat hen", etc. In her novel, Agatha Christie quotes the song in the motto and uses a line at the frontispiece of each chapter, in a story in which several murders succeed one another, giving thus the impression that a simplistic counting of these tragedies takes place. More subtly, though, the buckle in the first line of the poem is also the clue to solving the mystery, as Poirot soon realizes. The first victim is a dentist who is visited one morning by the Belgian detective and a lady with new shoes, whose buckle falls and Poirot retrieves. When he notices the discrepancy between the modern, shiny buckle and the overall shabbiness of the lady who becomes the second victim, the detective concludes the case successfully.

*Crooked House* comes from a poem for children, in which the repetition of the epithet "crooked" creates an amusing effect:

There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile,  
He found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile.  
He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse,  
And they all lived together in a little crooked house. (<https://allnurseryrhymes.com>)

The "crookedness" of the characters, setting, and objects is on a par with the suggestion of exceptionality frequently found in fairy tales. However, Christie employs the adjective "crooked" both with its first meaning – "bent", and with its secondary meaning – "dishonest", demonstrating that the household and three

generations in the family of the man who is murdered have been twisted psychologically by the negative influence of a domineering and cruel *pater familias*. The title, reminding of the redundant adjective in the nursery rhyme, works as a premonition of the quick succession of several dubious and violent deaths in the crime story.

*A Pocketful of Rye* is a line from the nursery rhyme *Sing a Song of Sixpence*, which Agatha Christie uses twice more, in a short story entitled *Sing a Song of Sixpence* and in one called *Four and Twenty Blackbirds*. This children's song tells a simple story of a king's family and household preparing to eat a pie. It projects a calm picture of domesticity which, despite the characters' royal status, evolves within the confines of predictability: while waiting to eat the pie, the king is counting his money, the queen is eating bread, and the maid is hanging out clothes. Like other poems and fairy tales inspired by folklore, this nursery rhyme contains some elements of cultural history, such as the early modern boys' pastime of hiding birds in a pie as a mock funeral, or the lavish recipes for banquets, where the *pièce de résistance* had not only to taste delicious, but to stun the guests: a pie from which birds would fly out when served at the table certainly is such an amazing dish (Opie 1997: 468). Christie's novel focuses on a serial killer, who wreaks havoc in the household of a rich businessman where, one by one, husband, wife, and maid are killed, the murderer choosing to double his cruelty with cynicism, by leaving signs that he is literally following the song: rye is found in the man's pocket, a clothes' peg is put on the maid's nose, etc. The police, however, are blissfully unaware of the reference and it takes Miss Marple's recognition of the nursery rhyme to establish the pattern of the murders and find the culprit.

*Hickory Dickory Dock* is a counting exercise for children who learn to tell the time by enjoying the adventure of the little mouse running up and down the clock. The song might have been inspired by the urban legend surrounding the astronomical clock at Exeter Cathedral: as it was made of wood, its designers provided it with a trap door, for the cat to be able to hunt the mice which would have otherwise threatened to ruin the machinery (Opie 1997). In the novel, the explicit reference to the rhyme is found in the address – Hickory Street – of the boarding house where strange incidents followed by murder take place. Indirectly, the story of the mouse can metaphorically shed light on how Poirot's investigation begins, when his attention is drawn to the fact that only petty, insignificant little things are reported stolen from the boarding house.

In *How Does Your Garden Grow?*, Poirot has to solve the mystery of a woman's death and is unable to do so until he remembers the woman's exaggeratedly adorned garden. The question in the title is the second line of a nursery rhyme, in which a beautiful garden is described as being full of "silver bells and cockleshells" (<https://kidsongs.com>), just as the detective remembers the victim's garden to be. In fact, the murderer has served the victim poisoned oysters for dinner and then disposed of the shells by hiding them in the garden. The puzzling subject of the original nursery rhyme can be explained as a cryptic reference to the Tudor dispute between Catholicism and Protestantism; Mary, a key Catholic character, as related to the Virgin's cult, possibly is an allusion to the victimization of Mary Queen of Scots, a figure used by the Church of Rome as an instrument to contain the growing Protestantism in England. Other keywords related to Catholicism are the silver bells – the church bells, the shells – a symbol of Catholic pilgrimage, and even the maids – a possible reference to nuns in the

monasteries which had been dissolved upon the creation of the Church of England (Opie 1997). While such overtones are absent from the modern whodunit, we may assume that the inclusion of Katrina, the Russian companion of the victim and prime suspect, is a commentary about the intolerance – be it ethnic or religious – of the provincial, average Britons in the inter-war period when the story takes place.

The latter category, that of titles that may be considered overall metaphors or commentaries on the moral of the story, includes titles like *And Then There Were None*, a novel initially published in 1939 with the title *Ten Little Niggers*, or *Five Little Pigs* (1942). By far the most complex case is that of *Ten Little Niggers*, a title which, after securing the connection with a nursery rhyme, poses some serious issues in terms of political correctness. Launched with the word “niggers” as one of its elements, the title was later transformed so that its offensive potential disappeared in the neutral *And Then There Were None* (1940) (“niggers” was replaced by “Indians” in the United States editions published by Pocket Books between 1964 and 1986). No matter whether the racial prejudice is expressed or not, the title capitalizes on the idea of a countdown. The nursery rhyme generally evokes actions which are only slightly disquieting and implying death in a cartoonish, fairy-tale-like style (“one choked his little self”, “a big bear hugged one”) or simply makes a harmless reference to a character’s exit from the story (“one said he’d stay [in Devon]”) (<https://allnurseryrhymes.com>). The only unsettling image in the nursery rhyme is the very last, in one of its variants – one of the ten little Indians hangs himself. Conversely, the novel grows, from its very beginning, into one of Christie’s most terrifying psychological thrillers because of the suspense this countdown implies when ten guests are invited on an island and left there to die, one by one. An equally chilling epilogue reveals not only the identity of the murderer, but also his approach to the deed and the reason behind the countdown-game: all ten “niggers” were guilty, but, while the least guilty was killed first, without even realizing what was happening, the others were removed in an order directly related to their culpability, the punishment being thus doubled by the burden of fear, insecurity and expectation. The last guest, the guiltiest party and the one who can no longer resist the tension, commits suicide, so, in the end, “there were none”, just like in the nursery rhyme, which concludes, quite bleakly: “One little Indian boy left all alone. He went and hanged himself and then there were none” (<https://www.poemhunter.com>).

*Five Little Pigs/ This Little Piggy* is another counting game for infants, where each finger or toe, shaken by the adult reciter, is a “piggy” and is personified, engaging in various activities that an infant would easily recognize: “went to the market”, “had roast beef”, “went wee wee wee all the way home” (<https://allnurseryrhymes.com>). In the novel, Poirot is challenged with solving a many years old mystery, all the evidence as well as some of the witnesses having long disappeared. There are five equally plausible suspects in the murder of a famous painter, the last – and youngest –, like the little finger who “cried wee wee wee”, being not the murderer, but the reason why an innocent woman admitted to committing the crime she wasn’t guilty of. The painter’s wife, thinking her baby sister committed the crime out of jealousy and wishing to protect her, goes to jail and is hanged. Just like the nursery rhyme that suggests a performance-like arrangement, Poirot organizes his ideas about each suspect, one by one, and then prepares a re-enactment at the crime scene.

### 3. An equivalence dilemma. The translator's perspective on intertextuality in Agatha Christie's titles

The complexity and intricacy of Agatha Christie's choice of titles for her detective stories is an element to be taken into account by a literary translator, as the expectations about the content of a book should be formed from the very beginning. As long as the title of a literary work, like any other title for that matter, fulfils both a hermeneutical function, i.e. it offers (more or less obvious) keys to how the text it "labels" should be interpreted, and a "focusing" function, i.e. it helps the reader to "select from among the main elements of core content one theme to stand as the leading one of the work" (Levinson 1985: 35), the preservation of the effectiveness of these functions when the title is translated into another language is of utmost importance.

#### 3.1. Intralinguistic translations

Before moving on to the discussion of the Romanian equivalents of Christie's titles referred to in the previous section, we have to mention that some of the English titles also have an alternative variant, which may, at least partially, count as intralinguistic translations (as long as, we shall see, these alternative variants refer to the content of the novel in a more transparent way). Examples that illustrate this type of translation are the alternative titles for *Ten Little Niggers*, *Hickory Dickory Dock*, and, *One Two Buckle My Shoe*.

If *Ten Little Niggers* carries the allusion to the counting nursery rhymes and connects to the content of the story rather allusively, in a way already explained in the previous section, its other title, *And Then There Were None*, devoid of the initial politically incorrect race foregrounding, seems to more clearly create the readers' expectation that somebody was going to disappear (i.e. die). The partial reproduction of Christie's *Hickory Dickory Dock* as *Hickory Dickory Death*, the title under which the crime story was later published, in 1955, in the United States, is also more efficient as far as its hermeneutical and focusing functions are concerned: the keyword "death" in this variant of the title draws attention to the fact that the story is about someone's passing away.

As compared to their corresponding initial titles, both *And Then There Were None* and *Hickory Dickory Death* suggest more directly what the readers should expect. *Death* in the latter title is also an indirect hint at the genre that the story belongs to. The intensity and the kind of connection to the content that the originals set is certainly diminished in the later titles, though more in the former than in the latter, where the allusion to Hickory street is preserved and the intertextual reading of the title is still possible (in fact, one may speak here of double intertextuality, as the American title is simultaneously linked to both the original, British title and to the nursery rhyme line). The alliterative pattern in *Hickory Dickory Death* is similar to that in *Hickory Dickory Dock* and thus, stylistic equivalence compensates for the diminished expectation and tension-creating potential of the title.

*One Two Buckle My Shoe*, also in the category of intralinguistically translated titles, was published in the United States with titles totally disconnected from the author's original intentions. *The Patriotic Murders*, its first American variant, chosen by the publisher in 1941, alludes to an espionage plot hidden by mysterious deaths, as well as to the fact that the novel promises not one, but several crimes. Like in the case of *Hickory Dickory Death*, the keyword "murders"

successfully confirms the readers' expectation that the story belongs to the crime fiction genre and synthesizes the essence of the story content. The second American variant title of *One Two Buckle My Shoe*, the 1953 *An Overdose of Death*, resorts to the medical term "overdose" to allude to the murder weapon, which is poison, administered through the dentist's syringe. Obviously, the two US versions of the initial title are much less creative choices than the original counting game line. At the same time, though they are capable of conveying clearer messages as to the kind of story they name, they fail to intertwine the counting game words with the part of the story where the murder mystery is solved, due to Poirot's seeing the shiny shoe buckle. As such, this time again, much of what can be expected from the book is clearly indicated to the prospective readers by its titles, but interest in finding out about its actual content may fade, unlike in the case of the initial title which, at least theoretically, should have a stronger potential of fuelling the readers' curiosity.

Similarly, *Five Little Pigs* was released overseas as *Murder in Retrospect*, in the same year as in the UK (1942). Reconsideration of the title by the editor thus cancels the reference to the number of suspects suggested by the initial version of the title – the nursery rhyme-title. The focus shifts to the fact that Poirot is expected to solve a past mystery and the type of story becomes clear once "murder", a word in the semantic field of "death", is used.

### 3.2. Translations into Romanian

Agatha Christie's novels were translated into Romanian soon after their original publication – something remarkable, given the limited book market for foreign authors in Romania before 1989. Some of the most prestigious Romanian publishers in the 1960s and 1970s, like Editura pentru Literatură Universală, Editura Tineretului and Univers, translated a number of the best known whodunits (*Crima din Orient Express*, *Zece negri mititei*, *Cine l-a ucis pe Roger Ackroyd*, *Anunţ ul mortuar*, *Misterioasa afacere de la Styles*, etc.). After 1990, when the book market diversified, Christie's (almost) complete works were translated by publishers like Excelsior Multi Press, Rao, and Litera. While Rao also published the writer's diary and notebooks, edited by her biographer John Curran, Litera, inspired by the 2017 film based on *Murder on the Orient Express*, released a second, luxury edition of her works, with cover illustrations taken from the big screen or TV adaptations.

The analysis of the translation into Romanian of the titles we have discussed so far has revealed aspects that will be summarized in the following paragraphs.

The first thing to mention is that there is variation in the Romanian titles of the same novel or short story, just as there is in English, though there is no one-to-one match between the two languages. In seeking the best Romanian equivalents, translators may sometimes have taken inspiration from the American versions of Christie's titles, simplifying them, or they proposed an interpretation of the more cryptic original: *O supradoză de moarte*, for example, effaces the nursery rhyme reference in *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe*, corresponding, in a word-for-word manner, to the American edition of the book – *An Overdose of Death*.

Conversely, for *Five Little Pigs*, *Cei cinci purceluşi*, a word-for-word equivalent, too, was considered a better option than what would have been the faithful translation of the American version, *Murder in Retrospect – Retrospectiva crimei*, perhaps because the translator was aware that Romanian readers are able to

recognize in the animals a children's literature reference, even though, in the story of the piglets and the wolf that blows down their house, the number of animals is different (three). This option thus preserves a quite similar, though not identical, intertextual intent as the original.

Some editors directly transferred *Hickory Dickory Dock* as the title of the book in Romanian, a possible explanation for this choice being rather stylistic than functional: its alliterative, rhythmic quality, reminiscent of a song or a game, which, if not acknowledged as such, may be unconsciously appreciated by a reader with a subtle musical ear. Even if it takes readers knowledge of the English speaking children's world to be able to correctly decipher the intertextual dimension of the original title, the fact that the name of the street playing an important role in the book is present in the Romanian edition renders it at least partly as suggestive as it is meant to be for its source culture audience. A more direct, explicit reference to the street where the crime is committed is present in the other Romanian variant of *Hickory Dickory Dock – Ceasul rău pe strada Hickory* [approx. *'Rotten Luck in Hickory Street'*] (2014), a transparent title that creates undoubtful expectations that the book is about some unfortunate event that happens in the street mentioned.

*Casa strâmbă* is a literal, word-for-word translation of *Crooked House*, but the allusion to the nursery rhyme is lost for the Romanian readers. In the absence of a similar children's poem in the target culture, in the other Romanian version of the title, *Crima din căsuța a strâmbă* [*'The Crime in the Crooked House'*], the translator attempts at compensating for the lack of similar intertextuality by employing a diminutive form of the Romanian noun "casă" (the actual equivalent of the very last words of the nursery rhyme – "little [crooked] house"). Thus, she implies the smallness of the universe alluded to, in contrast both with the actual grandness of the manor where the story takes place and with the seriousness of the subject. As for the polysemantic character of the English adjective "crooked" which we mentioned earlier as being suggestive of the psychological "crookedness" of the characters in the book, it may be considered partly embodied in the Romanian adjective "strâmb(ă)". Though the primary reference of this word is to physical aspect, it may be metaphorically extended to signify distortion of the mind, too. Intertextuality apart, the equivalent suggested by the Romanian translator may be considered as functional as the English original. On the other hand, the addition of the word "crimă" ['crime'] serves the purpose of explicitation, just as "murder" or "death" did in the American versions of some original titles we have discussed. If, once more, nothing is gained on the intertextuality side, the presence of the added word in this Romanian title renders it much more explicit than the other translated title.

*Un buzunar plin cu secară*, the word-for-word translation of *A Pocketful of Rye*, creates no intertextual connection in the Romanian readers' minds, but the phrase can be interpreted literally rather than metaphorically, as rye is actually discovered by the police in the first victim's pocket. Similarly, *Cum îți i creș te grădina?*, the equivalent of *How does Your Garden Grow?* obtained by direct, word-for-word translation, establishes no intertextual connections. However, as long as the garden plays a key role in solving the crime mystery, it loses its stylistic value, but remains an appropriate choice. Thus, the hermeneutical, focusing, as well as anticipatory functions of both these titles are fulfilled.

We have deliberately left *Ten Little Niggers* to be discussed last. In its case, the Romanian equivalent – *Zece negri mittitei* – is the most faithful of all target

language versions mentioned in this section, both in terms of wording and in terms of intertextuality. The nursery rhyme in English has been so well-known that it has given birth to analogous rhymes in other languages, Romanian included. Thus, in Romanian, like in English, *Zece negri mititei* is the very beginning of the counting rhyme that tells the story of how, of the ten initial boys, only one was left. However, unlike in the “gloomy” English version that seems to best connect with the content of the novel, the Romanian ending is much brighter – this very last boy does not die; he marries a girl and makes her the mother of ten little niggers all at once: “Un negru mititel s-a-nsurat c-o fată/Fata i-o făcut pe loc zece negri-odată” [‘One little nigger got married to a girl/The girl gave birth to ten little niggers at once’]. This, perhaps, explains why the Romanian translators have never thought of providing an equivalent for *And Then There Were None*.

#### 4. Conclusion

As can be seen from our analysis, the translation of Christie’s titles representing quotes from nursery rhymes and children’s games is not always an easy task. In the instances that we have talked about, intertextuality is, most often, absent from the Romanian translations. When the intertextual option was not considered, no adaptation to mirror the original was attempted, most probably because, if the title had been changed (i.e. adapted rather than translated in the strict meaning of the word), the content could not have been that easily altered to connect with it. Discrepancy between “the label” and “the product” would have arisen in case of no match between an adapted title and an unadapted content. The absence of intertextuality does not mean, however, that the Romanian titles were inappropriately chosen; in most cases, they were good choices, as we have shown (in some instances, this was the result of the compensatory translation strategies resorted to). In other words, by their choices, the translators demonstrated that they did not lose sight of the fact that, as Nord (1995) suggested, any piece of information a title intends to convey has to be comprehensible to its addressees and compatible with their culture-specific world knowledge.

Given the popularity of Christie’s novels worldwide, special attention should be paid to translating their titles (not to mention their content). Considering that “a work differently titled will invariably be aesthetically different” (Levinson 1985: 29), it becomes crucial to be careful when choosing the equivalents of the original titles so as not to guide interpretation of the text on the wrong path and negatively influence its aesthetic value in the target language(s) and culture(s).

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# THE PARATEXTS OF THE SECOND TRANSLATION INTO SPANISH OF E. M. FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *A Passage to India*, the last novel British author E. M. Forster published during his lifetime, appeared in 1924. Almost fifty years later, in 1981, it was translated and published in Spain by Alianza Editorial. This translation has been reissued several times over the years by its original publisher, and in this paper I analyse the different paratexts that have been used to frame it.

**Keywords:** British literature, E. M. Forster, paratexts, translation

## 1. Introduction

According to Genette (1989: 9-10), transtextuality is roughly defined as “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts”. Among the different types of possible transtextual relationships, Genette (1989) recognizes what he calls *paratextuality*, that is, the relationship that binds the text to its paratexts or “the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers” (Genette 1991: 262). These productions can be themselves verbal or not, and include elements such as the author’s name, the title, the preface or the illustrations that surround and prolong the text. The importance of paratexts has been widely acknowledged, and Genette (1989) himself already pointed out that paratextual elements can play an important role on the reception of a literary text. In this paper, I will discuss the paratexts of the different editions<sup>2</sup> of José Luis López Muñoz’s translation into Spanish of E. M. Forster’s novel *A Passage to India*, published by Alianza Editorial. More specifically, I shall focus on a number of peritexts (that is, those paratexts either situated around the text, in the space of the same volume, or inserted into the interstices of the text (Genette 1991)), such as the title, the bindings, the footnotes and the glossary.

## 2. Bindings

López Muñoz’s translation of E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* was first printed as a paperback with a dust jacket in 1981. The front cover of the dust jacket shows the photograph of an elephant figurine covered in tesserae, sequins and beads, against an ochre background, as well as the author’s name, the book’s title

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<sup>2</sup> The information on the copyright pages of different editions and reprints is contradictory. Here we have considered different editions - those with different ISBN numbers and paratexts and different reprints of the same edition, those with different ISBN numbers but otherwise identical. This approach has the added advantage of matching the information on the copyright page of the last edition, which proclaims to be the sixth one.

and the name of the collection it belonged to (Alianza Tres); under the jacket, the cover of the book is plain black and it only features the author's name, the title and the collection's name. The following text is printed both on the back cover of the book and on the back cover and the first flap of the dust jacket:

In 1912, after a short trip to India, E. M. Forster (1879-1970) started to write a novel that would play a decisive role in establishing his literary fame. Twelve years later, after spending six months in the same country as secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas, he finished the novel, which he titled *Un viaje a la India*, an allusion to Walt Whitman's poem. The importance of the novel, which has a political core and is a critical representation of a particular historical period, is absolutely not limited to that of a mere denunciation of the havoc caused by British imperialism in the subcontinent. *Un viaje a la India* is the poetic embodiment of the confrontation between two opposing worlds, East and West; between two mindsets, the intuitive and the logical; between two principles reduced to norms of conduct, aesthetics and pragmatism. Beyond those confrontations, there is the impossibility of communication - not necessarily because of their different nationalities, races or beliefs - between two people connected to each other by love or friendship. The plot of the story revolves around three main points, and its tripartite structure is in correspondence with three different levels of interpretation. According to Forster, the main motifs of the book, mosque, caves and temple, were in correspondence with the tropical climate seasons, however, they have an ulterior meaning, being places of mystical initiation that foster moments of especial penetration, full consciousness and revelations. Poetry and humour bind together all this complex and symbolic world, which, as all masterpieces, allows multiple interpretations. Alianza Tres has published two other books by Forster: "El más largo viaje", one of his most important novels, and "La vida futura", a collection of short stories sharing a common thread, that of homosexuality and forbidden love (*my transl.*).

The 1982 reprint of López Muñoz's translation was identical to the first edition, but from 1985 on, they changed. The 1985 edition was a paperback with French flaps. The front cover, as well as the first flap and part of the second, features a still image from David Lean's movie adaptation, which was released in Spain that same year. The image shows a panoramic view of Aziz, Adela and Mrs Moore's elephant ride during their expedition to the Marabar caves. On top of the cover, there is the book's title and the author's name; at the foot there is the name of the collection, Alianza Tres. The same text is printed on the back cover and the second flap, although the last sentence is rephrased, and information about the change of title, David Lean's movie and a new translation of a novel by Forster published by Alianza is included:

In 1912, after a short trip to India, E. M. Forster (1879-1970) started to write a novel that would make him famous. Twelve years later, after spending six months in the same country as secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas, he finished the novel, which he titled *Pasaje a la India*, an allusion to Walt Whitman's poem. David Lean's adaptation, filmed in 1984, has helped to popularise the atmosphere, the plot and the characters of this extraordinary story (which was previously published by Alianza under the title *Un viaje a la India*). The importance of the novel, which has a political core and is a critical representation of a particular historical period, is absolutely not limited to that of a mere denunciation of the havoc caused by British imperialism in the subcontinent. *Pasaje a la India* is the poetic embodiment of the confrontation between two opposing worlds, East and West; between two mindsets, the intuitive and the logical; between two principles reduced to norms of conduct, aesthetics and

pragmatism. Beyond those confrontations, there is the impossibility of communication - not necessarily because of their different nationalities, races or beliefs - between two people connected to each other by love or friendship. The plot of the story revolves around three main points, and its tripartite structure is in correspondence with three different levels of interpretation. According to Forster, the main motifs of the book, mosque, caves and temple, were in correspondence with the tropical climate seasons, however, they have an ulterior meaning, being places of mystical initiation that foster moments of especial penetration, full consciousness and revelations. Poetry and humour bind together all this complex and symbolic world, which, as all masterpieces, allows multiple interpretations. Other books by the author published by Alianza Editorial: “La vida futura” (AT 21), “El más largo viaje” (AT 34) and “La mansión” (AT 77) (*my transl.*).

The 1997 edition was a paperback without either dust jacket or French flaps. The front cover features a slightly different framing of the same movie still, with the author’s name and the title at the top and the name of the collection (Literatura) and the publisher’s name and logo at the foot. A shorter version of the same text is printed on the back cover against a white background. A reprint was issued in 1998.

The importance and meaning of *Pasaje a la India* is absolutely not limited to that of a mere denunciation of the havoc caused by British imperialism in the subcontinent, but E.M. Forster achieves with it the poetic embodiment of the confrontation between two opposing worlds, East and West; between two mindsets, the intuitive and the logical; between two principles reduced to norms of conduct, aesthetics and pragmatism. Beyond those confrontations, there is the impossibility of communication - not necessarily because of their different nationalities, races or beliefs - between two people connected to each other by love or friendship (*my translation*).

The 2005 edition is another paperback with no jacket and no flaps. The still on the front cover is almost identical to the one used on the previous edition, with the author’s name and the title at the top and the collection’s name (Biblioteca Forster) and the publisher’s name and logo at the foot. The back cover is blue and features the same text as the previous edition, although a sentence has been added at the beginning of the paragraph and the text is accompanied by a portrait of Forster. A reprint was issued in 2009.

The importance and meaning of *Pasaje a la India*, which is considered almost unanimously Forster’s masterpiece, is absolutely not limited to that of a mere denunciation of the havoc caused by British imperialism in the subcontinent (...) (*my transl.*).

The 2007 edition is a paperback with French flaps. The front cover features the same movie still, although the zoom and framing are again slightly different. At the top of the cover there is the title against a bright green background, whereas the author’s name is superimposed over the still (so are the publisher’s name and the logo of the collection (13/20), situated at the foot of the image). The back cover gives two new texts, as well as the publisher’s name and the collection’s logo. A reprint was issued in 2010.

Around 1920 the British Raj is unwittingly coming to an end. Aziz, a young Indian Muslim doctor, is in good terms with the English, although he is aware that a great distance separates his world from theirs. However, as the result of a confusing incident in the strange Marabar caves he is subjected to an unlikely accusation, and

the trial that follows brings to light the confrontation between two opposing worlds and two different mindsets. *Pasaje a la India*, adapted by David Lean in 1984, is also the unforgettable portrait of a country full of contrasts and suggestions, as well as of the character of its people (*my transl.*).

E. M. Forster (1879-1970) is one of the most important English writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a very successful author when he was alive and his fame grew even larger with the adaptations of *Regreso a Howards End*, *Una habitación con vistas* or *Maurice*, all of them published by Alianza Editorial (*my transl.*).

The last edition, published in 2018, is a paperback without jacket or flaps. The front cover shows a photograph of Sabrina Michaud, her son Romain and two native people riding an elephant in the Indian Kaziranga National Park; at the foot of the cover, there are the title and the author's and the publisher's names, superimposed over two white stripes. The back cover features the same text as the 2005 edition, as well as a small portion of the front cover photograph, the names of the publisher and the collection the book belongs to (El libro de bolsillo) and the name of the translator.

### 3. Title

In the note he wrote for the programme of Santha Rama Rau's dramatized version of *A Passage to India*, which premiered in Oxford in 1960, Forster (1989: 335) stated that, in taking his title from a poem by Walt Whitman, he had tried to indicate "the human predicament in a universe which is not, so far, comprehensible to our minds". The intended meaning of the word 'passage' as used in the novel's title has been widely discussed among critics ever since the book was published. According to Shusterman (1965: 174-175), the title is a play on words, an elaborate pun, since, in one respect, 'passage' means "the way to an ultimate solution of India's problems" and, in another, it is "the passage back, as Whitman expressed it, 'to primal thought'" (the tenth section of Whitman's poem begins: "Passage indeed, O soul, to primal thought!"). According to Oliver (1976: 57), the word 'passage' alluded to a 'voyage of the soul': "Whitman (...) writes of the need to combine with these material successes of Western civilization a new passage or voyage of the soul into those unexplained areas which are to the soul what India was to the early explorers like Vasco da Gama". According to Decap (1968: 104-105) Whitman's passage to India could be described as "un pèlerinage aux Sources, un effort de retrouver les intuitions religieuses premières" and the poem was a necessary clue to decipher the title of the novel, since this one did not deal with "un voyage jusqu'en Inde" but with "un séjour". According to Zabel (1955), what Whitman called 'passage to India' and Forster had used to title his novel was what Westerner souls must undertake in order to reach that goal of the human spirit which is situated beyond Western rationality and aggressiveness, logics and morals, in a place of spiritual development and renunciation, that is, in the East or in the South.

Of the twenty-five translations into Spanish of Whitman's works that could be checked, "Passage to India" was included in eight. Armando Vasseur (1910) translated it as "Camino de las Indias Orientales"; Concha Zardoya (1946) as "Paso hacia la India"; Francisco Alexander Alexander (1956) as "Navegar a las Indias" (the poem is retitled "Pasaje a la India" in the 2004 edition, published by Colihue and revised by Rolando Costa Picazo); Leandro Wolfson (1976) as "Tránsito hacia

la India”; Pablo Mañé (1994) as “La ruta de las Indias”; Luis Chamosa and Rosa Rabadán (1999) as “Viaje a la India”; Pablo Ingberg (2007) as “Pasaje a la India”; and Eduardo Moga as “Viaje a la India” (2014). At least four of these translations (Vasseur’s, Zardoya’s, Alexander’s and Wolfson’s) were published prior to 1981, when López Muñoz’s translation of Forster’s novel was first released. The first edition of López Muñoz’s translation was titled *Un viaje a la India*, but from 1985 on it was retitled *Pasaje a la India*. At least two different journalists criticized this change, which they connected to David Lean’s adaptation (his movie was released in Spain in 1985 under that title, *Pasaje a la India*):

[...] his most famous (although in my opinion not his best) novel, *A Passage to India* (which the Catalan publisher, resisting the cinematic mermaid songs, has tastefully decided to translate as ‘viatge’, which is what it should be, whereas the Spanish publisher has fallen into the Hollywood trap and titled their second edition ‘pasaje’, which is not what it should be). (Pessarrodona 1987) (*my translation*)

Forster’s novel *A Passage to India* was published under the title *Viaje a la India*, which was correct, however, the movie’s title, *Pasaje a la India*, was nonsense. It is really a shame that Alianza Editorial, a publishing house that usually takes good care of their well-deserved reputation, decided to reissue the novel (included in the exquisite collection Alianza Tres) and use the movie’s title for purely commercial reasons. (Permanyer 1988) (*my translation*)

Later on, both Osvaldo Gallone (2006) and Paola Mancosu (2013) would agree in considering that the title *Pasaje a la India* is less appropriate than the title used in the first translation into Spanish of Forster’s novel (published in Argentina in 1955 as *El paso a la India*).

#### 4. Footnotes and glossary

The first edition of López Muñoz’s translation includes forty-two translator notes, most of them providing information about India’s culture, religions, fauna, geography and history, although some deal with Western concepts or items, such as Christian texts or Greek and Nordic mythology, and one is used to explain the decision not to translate the expression ‘Bridge Party’. This fact is relevant, since, according to Willson (2011), the presence of translator’s notes means the publisher is willing to show that trace of the translation process. Except for the ‘Bridge Party’ footnote, they all seem to be based on the footnotes included in the edition of *A Passage to India* edited by Oliver Stallybrass (1989a,b), which contains both notes by the author and editorial notes. The notes were kept when the translation was reissued in 1982, 1985, 1997, 1998, 2005 and 2009, but the 2006, 2010 and 2018 editions lack footnotes. In addition to this, all the editions of the translation published by Alianza include a glossary at the end of the book; this glossary comprises fifty words in the first two editions and fifty-one in the others. Most of the words refer to Indian concepts or objects and come from languages other than English, such as Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian or Arabic; a small number is included in the *Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy* and are considered to be fully assimilated into the Spanish orthographic and phonological systems (since they are not italicized).

## 5. Conclusion

The editions of López Muñoz's translation into Spanish of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* published by Alianza have changed over time in an interesting way. The translation was first titled *Un viaje a la India*, a short-lived title that none of the translations of Whitman's poem, available at the time, shared. It was soon replaced by the title *Pasaje a la India*, a change that has been generally criticized and seems to have been motivated by the desire to cash in on the movie's success: not only was the 1985 edition released at the same time as the movie, which was unfailingly used in every newspaper advert publicizing the book in order to lure in the readers, but the cover image used in the two first editions was also replaced by a still from Lean's movie. The text about the novel, printed on the back cover of the first editions, describes Forster's novel as a political and historical book, but also as a poetic and symbolic work or art, and both the confrontation between East and West and human miscommunication are presented as the novel's main themes. The direct reference to the political and historical nature of the novel is lost in the shortened version of this text, printed on the back cover of the 1997, 2005 and 2018 editions (as well as their reprints). The text printed on the back cover of the 2007 and 2010 editions is significantly different and reads as the synopsis of a historical courtroom mystery, although it does not fail to point out the confrontation between East and West as one of the novel's underlying themes; in addition to this, these editions are the only ones to include some separate information about Forster, mainly concerning his status and popularity (the first two editions only include information directly related to the writing of *A Passage to India*, i.e. his trips to the country). But for the title, the last edition published by Alianza is the first one in thirty-three years to fail to make either visual or verbal reference to David Lean's adaptation, as well as the first one to print the name of the translator on the (back) cover. It is also interesting to note that the considerable amount of translator's notes in the first editions of this translation (the other two translations of *A Passage to India* into Spanish have less than a dozen) were dispensed with in the 2006, 2010 and 2018 editions. These notes (as well as the definitions included in the glossary at the back of the book) offered information mainly about India, and the translator or publisher arguably considered such information to be necessary or at the very least useful for their readers. Since the last editions lack the former (but not the latter), we could argue that additional information about the novel's political, historical and cultural references is no longer considered to be valuable enough to be included in the translation, whereas providing the meaning of those foreign words preserved in the translated text is still considered to be indispensable (even though some of them can be found in the *Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy*).

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# THE GAPS THAT SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES OR HOW TO CREATE A CLOZE (T)...

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***Abstract:** The present paper looks at a type of language test commonly referred to as cloze test, which can be used both as a testing instrument and as a teaching tool, thus benefiting students of English as a foreign language. I begin with an overview of the concept of cloze procedure, with some emphasis on its origin and types, followed by a detailed analysis of one of the cloze tests I created for classroom use, based on the rational-deletion approach as opposed to the standard fixed-ratio procedure.*

***Keywords:** coherence, cohesion, fixed-ratio cloze, Gestalt, rational-deletion cloze*

## 1. Introduction

What we call a cloze test today was first introduced in 1953 by Wilson Taylor as a method of assessing the readability of a text, i.e. how easy or difficult it is for a reader to understand written discourse. He called this approach “the cloze procedure”, which he defined as “a new psychological tool for measuring the effectiveness of communication” (Taylor 1953: 415). The intriguing aspect of his definition, in my opinion, is that he did not just attempt to define a new concept, but he appeared to set high aims for it right from the start: “If future research substantiates the results so far, this tool seems likely to have a variety of applications, both theoretical and practical, in other fields involving communication functions” (ibid.).

Looking back at what he then called “future research”, one cannot but be amazed (as no doubt Taylor himself would be) at the rush of excitement and enthusiasm, on the one hand, and scepticism or reservation, on the other, that his urge was able to stir amongst workers in the field of language testing. Since not even the briefest overview of the literature on the pros and cons of the cloze procedure would do any justice to either side, I will first focus on a concise presentation of this procedure, including different types of cloze tests, with their advantages and disadvantages. This will be followed by a discussion of a cloze test I created for classroom use with my MA students of linguistics.

## 2. The cloze procedure

The cloze procedure is theoretically grounded on the findings in Gestalt psychology, the central tenet of which is that we are able to “acquire and maintain meaningful perceptions in an apparently chaotic world” (*Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*). The term *Gestalt* (which in German means “shape”) was also used in connection with the concept of closure, denoting a shape which – though physically incomplete or fractured – will nevertheless be mentally perceived as

complete and meaningful. The word *cloze* was then derived through back-formation from *closure*.

The picture of a Dalmatian dog below is a very common example of such an incomplete shape that can nonetheless be easily perceived as a meaningful whole.



I have always felt that the irresistible appeal of this *law of closure* or *Gestalt effect* for educational psychologists must lie precisely in the marvellous ability of the human brain to grasp what our eyes fail to see, to see the unseen – as it were. This feeling is also supported by Brown (2002: 109): “It is not difficult to get people to try taking a cloze test because of *the human need to fill gaps (closure) which appears to be almost a compulsion among students*” (italics mine).

### 2.1. The fixed-ratio cloze

In its original, purest form, a cloze test consists of a written fragment from which single words have been omitted at regular intervals, leaving blanks which the test-takers have to complete. This standard type is variously called the *fixed-ratio/rate cloze*, the *random-deletion cloze*, etc., with the most common options being every 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> word. The ideal intervals at which deletion should occur have also been a matter of debate, but there is a general consensus among researchers that the shorter the distance between gaps, the more difficult it is for the test-takers to find a correct or suitable filler.

*Note:* Reconsidering the fragmented image of a dog given earlier, we can now see how deceptive this analogy can be, as in that case, the closer the gaps are, the easier it is to acquire a correct (i.e. meaningful) perception of the whole. The only explanation I can think of is that the incomplete image of the dog stands for one test item in the cloze test, while all the dots (bigger or smaller) represent the different clues surrounding the gap in the test, which are relevant in helping the test-taker to retrieve the missing word.

It is not difficult to identify the main advantage and disadvantage of the fixed-rate cloze: this cloze test type is the easiest for the test writer to produce, since all s/he has to do is delete words at regular intervals; on the other hand, it can result in a number of gaps which are both virtually impossible and/or unnecessarily difficult to fill in, like names, numbers, creative or rare collocations, etc.

### 2.2. The modified fixed-ratio cloze

The second type of cloze test, the *modified fixed-ratio cloze*, has been proposed as a solution to avoid the unreasonably difficult gaps. While, for the most part, words are still deleted on a regular counting basis, the word preceding or following the problematic blank is deleted instead.

Harrison (1990: 42) believes that such interference would result in something which is not strictly cloze at all: “Modifying the procedure in this way reduces the technical precision of the test, which is claimed to be at its most valid and reliable in its pure form.”

In my opinion, however, the main shortcoming of this approach is that modifying a cloze test should not only serve the purpose of avoiding those problematic gaps, but also that of making every gap a useful and relevant contribution to what the test writer intends to assess. And this is only possible by giving up a purist’s approach and selecting the words to be deleted through the use of the third type, namely the *rational-deletion cloze*.

### 2.3. The rational-deletion cloze

James Dean Brown, a researcher whose interest in cloze tests now spans nearly four decades, has this to say:

I am not sure we should continue letting the cards fall where they will by selecting every  $n^{\text{th}}$  word in developing cloze tests [...]. Instead, we should probably use what we now know about the way some cloze items discriminate (and most others do not) to refine the strategies we use to tailor cloze tests that are efficient [...] by shaping them to our language testing purposes. (Brown 2002: 110)

The advantages of this type are immediately obvious: the cloze test developer enjoys greater flexibility to manipulate the text’s inherent redundancy in order to suit both his/her assessment plan and the student’s proficiency level. According to Hughes (2003: 187), “the deliberate reduction of redundancy” can be used to estimate the learner’s overall foreign language ability.

Another advantage would be that we can now address the issue raised by some researchers who claim that cloze tests primarily assess lower-order skills, like the ability to comprehend syntactic structures and meaning at sentence level only. Cloze items can assess a wide range of higher-order skills, which are needed for a proper understanding of how cohesion and coherence work at discourse level.

But are there any disadvantages related to this cloze type? My answer to this, pre-eminently from a teacher’s perspective, is “yes and no”, in the sense that the greater freedom the test creator now enjoys is by itself no guarantee of success, but rather an opportunity or indeed a challenge he or she will have to meet in keeping with some carefully planned testing purposes.

The standard cloze tests must be modified in accordance with what exactly the test writer/teacher intends to assess and thus, setting more specific objectives will require modifications of the “pure” cloze test to a greater or lesser degree. On the other hand, we must not forget that cloze tests are an excellent integrative tool which has been used to assess overall language proficiency (e.g. as in the Cambridge Advanced or Proficiency Examinations). Therefore, it must not be used to measure the student’s performance in one direction only (e.g. the use of prepositions, verb tenses, pronouns, etc.). In other words, it should be more than just a gap-filling task focusing on one language aspect only.

According to Ikeguchi (1995: 175), the principle behind a rational-deletion cloze is “to identify a set of criteria for classifying and selecting the words to be deleted, perhaps using the following three deletion types: a) syntactic (understanding of words and their relationship within clause); b) cohesive (based

on the student's understanding of meaning and structure in [*sic*] the intersentential level); c) strategic (depends on long range patterns of coherence, i.e. comprehension of the passage)."

### 3. A rational-deletion cloze-test: *Faces in the Subway*

In this part, I will discuss one of the many rational-deletion cloze tests I created over the past thirty years for students of EFL in various programs at undergraduate and post-graduate level (Appendix A: *Faces in the Subway*). The numbered words printed in italics represent my deletion choices which are intended to test, teach and/or reinforce a wide range of language aspects and linguistic topics at discourse level. The subscripts which appear after some words are explained and discussed below, in the order in which they appear in this text. The subscripts may follow words which were selected as gaps in the text or words and phrases which were left undeleted, but are relevant for in-class text analysis. The underlined bits of the text followed by a subscript point either to such undeleted words which are worth looking at from a discourse analytical perspective or to lexical gaps which belong to a higher structural unit (e.g. a phrase or a clause).

REP: *repetition*; here, it suggests not just the excessive advertising in subway stations, but also the speed of the train (a first example of iconicity in this text). This note is relevant for a general discussion of the text, but a cloze test writer may choose to delete the last word (i.e. BUY BUY \_\_\_\_\_) so that a student's answer like BUY BUY NOW or BUY BUY CHEAP may be acceptable from a lexico-grammatical point of view, but falls short of the writer's stylistic intentions.

LexFmb: *member of a lexical field*; according to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 4), cohesion occurs "when the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another" and lexical cohesion is achieved when two or more lexical items share a lexical field (in this case, *nostrils*, *ears* and *mouths* all belong to the lexical field "face", which can be traced back to the title).

NEW/OLD: *new information/old information*; when *wait* appears for the first time in the text, it is significantly stressed (i.e. accented), whereas its repetition as an old item of information is deaccented. The lexical constraint at the level of new information (i.e. *wait* rather than *yawn*, for instance) as well as the grammatical constraint after the gap signalled by the obligatory preposition *for* ought to serve as sufficient clues in this case. More interestingly perhaps, there is a subtle and effective interplay between new and old information (or between rheme and theme, respectively) over a number of 4-5 lines; it is one of the possible variants described by McCarthy (1991: 55), where the rheme of a sentence becomes the theme of the following sentence, while losing nuclear prominence which is assigned to the new item and so on. Thus *smell*<sub>NEW</sub> is repeated as *all these smells*<sub>OLD</sub>, *linger*<sub>CONTR/NEW</sub> is repeated as *linger*<sub>OLD</sub> (which prompts the recovery of the deleted adverb *too*), *faces*<sub>NEW</sub> reappears in *unmoving*<sub>NEW</sub> *faces*<sub>OLD</sub> and finally, *unmoving*<sub>NEW</sub> is loosely echoed in *a quiver*<sub>OLD</sub> *of emotion* (*quiver* – "a slight movement"). In fact, this internal patterning occurs over still larger stretches of text, through which some global cohesion is achieved (e.g. *the heel of life*<sub>OLD</sub> and *stamped these faces*<sub>OLD</sub> in the last paragraph).

ALLIT HEND: *alliterative hendiadys*; hendiadys is a rhetorical figure in which two words are linked by *and* (e.g. *nice and warm*, *sick and tired*, etc.) to express a single idea in a more emphatic way; in alliterative hendiadys, the two

conjuncts begin with the same letter or sound – common examples include: *fame and fortune, health and happiness, peace and prosperity, beg or borrow, chop and change*.

SemF: *semantic field*; unlike the previous example with the lexical field “face”, the lexical items in the enumeration “toilet water, halitosis, etc.” are only contextually related and point to the domain of “smells”, hence “semantic field” would be a better description, even if the distinction between the two concepts does not fall within the scope of this paper.

CONTR: *contrastive information*; the information contained in *linger* is contrastive rather than new, because it is opposed to *disappear* and thus, it helps to recover the deleted adversative *but*.

ICONIC: here, *iconic rhythm*, which I define as a rhythmic pattern that connects lexical content to some aspects of extralinguistic context by imitating the latter (in this case, the stress-timed sequence matches the “rocking and rolling” of the physical “shaking car”).

COLLOC: *collocation*; *pouting* and *lip* are collocates because of the strong semantic bond between the two (*pout* – “to push out one’s lips”).

EMPH: *emphatic*; the sentence reads perfectly well without the adverb *surely*, which prompts the recovery of an emphatic means of expression.

ANCHOR: a word which regrounds the text in the spatio-temporal coordinates in which it best makes sense; here, due to its central position, it is a cohesive device which, through repetition, preserves the unity of the text.

REC: *recursion*; here, the repetition of identically phrased relative clauses.

DIST/PROX: *distal/proximal*; here, I use this distinction to refer to the contrast between distance and proximity in deitic expressions of time; for the contrast to be effective in this case, the only acceptable solution is *night* (cf. *month, week, etc.*).

COHER: *coherence*; here, it works over longer stretches of text and challenges the students’ ability to link disparate textual clues to each other and to prior knowledge (e.g. the torrent of questions, all left unanswered). After all, the title itself could be rephrased as “The Mystery of the Faces in the Subway”.

In order to compare my rational-deletion approach with the fixed-ratio method used in creating a standard cloze test, I have used an online cloze test generator (available at <http://l.georges.online.fr/tools/cloze.html>) for the second and third paragraphs only (see Appendix B). The  $n^{\text{th}}$  parameter was set at 8, which is the value that yields a number of gaps reasonably comparable to the number of gaps for the same paragraphs in my cloze test. Thus, the automatic deletion resulted in 19 gaps (see the underlined words) and the number of gaps I originally used for the same length of text is 14. I marked the level of difficulty with subscripts after each deleted item on a scale from I to III as follows: I – too easy for the current testing purposes; II – moderately difficult, even if none of those lexical items represented my choice in this test; III – too difficult, if not impossible, for the students to fill in. The lexical items which I have originally opted to delete are typed in italics.

For ease of reference, the lexical items marked I and III are grouped and listed below:

I: *for, I, see, nose, that, to, my*

III: *nostrils, linger, quiver, womb*

It is not difficult to see what may happen when the cloze test writer is not in full control. The deleted items marked I and III are each wasted, for different but

obvious reasons: a high degree of predictability for those listed under ‘I’, and creative collocations or metaphorical uses too difficult to predict for those grouped under ‘III’. Thus, the extra five gaps obtained by automatic deletion do not add much to the validity of the test.

#### 4. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have argued for the rational-deletion approach and against the fixed-ratio method in creating a cloze test, in the belief that the test writer and/or teacher must be allowed individual freedom in writing a test that suits his or her testing and/or teaching intentions. I would like to stress at this point that this individual freedom also entails flexibility in the way one and the same text is used to create a cloze test. Such flexibility necessarily leads to the following two implications: 1) a cloze test writer can use the same text to create different cloze tests in order to suit new conditions or situations, and 2) different test writers can produce different versions of cloze tests starting from the same text.

I was particularly aware of the second implication when I considered as worth testing, for instance, the preposition *to* in the phrase *nose to nose* in order to compare it with such English phrases as *arm in arm* and *hand in hand* or to contrast it with the Romanian phrase *nas în nas*. For other cloze test authors, however, my design may seem irrelevant, since the preposition *to* could be discarded as highly predictable. In a similar vein, retrieving the noun *lip* in the lexical collocation (*a pouting lip*) may be considered unnecessarily difficult and discarded accordingly. However, if the test writer decides to include this test item as a means of reinforcing previously acquired verbs related to the vocabulary of facial expressions (e.g. *pout*, *scowl*, *sneer*, *frown*, etc.), then s/he must be free to do so.

I would like to conclude by bringing into sharp focus two more aspects that I consider very important. First, if the cloze test is to measure “the effectiveness of communication” – to take up Taylor’s original point – it is then a challenge for the test writer as well, since communication is a two-way process: in order for the students to understand a gapped text, the creator of the test must first make him/herself understood. Finally, despite some divergent opinions and occasional scepticism, the person ultimately entitled to create a cloze test is the teacher, since in-class testing is a natural extension of classroom work.

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### Appendix A: Rational-deletion cloze test

Fill in the blanks\* with one word only.

(\*the numbered words printed in italics represent the blanks in the original cloze test).

#### Faces in the Subway

The faces in the subway are stamped by the heel of life. Every morning and night I see the faces of sadness, vacant eyes staring at wild "BUY BUY BUY"<sub>REP</sub> ads. Of these faces I write.

I stand transfixed, entangled with legs and feet I (1) *cannot* see. I stare into cavernous nostrils, bottomless ears, gaping (2) *mouths*<sub>LexFmb</sub> – and wait<sub>NEW</sub>. (3) *Wait*<sub>OLD</sub> for what? For anything! I wait for the train to stop rocking and (4) *rolling*<sub>ALLIT HEND</sub>, for a thought to distract me, for the (5) *smell*<sub>NEW, SemF</sub> of toilet water, halitosis, Pepsodent, Chanel N°5, alcohol and hair lotion to disappear. (6) *But* all these smells<sub>SOLD</sub> linger<sub>CONTR</sub>, hanging close to the roof of the shaking car<sub>ICONIC</sub>.

The faces<sub>NEW</sub> linger<sub>OLD</sub> (7) *too*. They are mostly unmoving<sub>NEW</sub> (8) *faces*<sub>OLD</sub>. At times I detect a quiver of emotion in a pouting (9) *lip*<sub>COLLOC</sub> and I tremble, for this must (10) *surely*<sub>EMPH</sub> be a madman. No one smiles in the (11) *subway*<sub>ANCHOR</sub>. I see a multitude of people standing nose (12) *to* nose, staring vacantly ahead. Far down in the womb of the city I inspect the faces that (13) *inspect* my face and the face next to me that inspects the face that (14) *inspects* my face<sub>REC</sub>.

But (15) *there* must be thought behind those faces. That man! There! He is clean-shaven, has a prominent brow and thin lips. Where will he be an hour from (16) *now*? What will he be doing? Does he love someone? Does he know hate? Sorrow? When was the last time a (17) *tear* fell from that blue eye? Was it twenty years ago or last (18) *night*<sub>DIST/PROX</sub>? Does he know that I'm (19) *watching* him?

They cannot (20) *all* be sad faces. Behind them there must be a spark of (21) *hope*<sub>COLLOC</sub>, a surge of joy. Surely the heel of life<sub>OLD</sub> that (22) *stamped* these faces<sub>OLD</sub> (23) *must* be padded with prayers and dreams. Someday I will solve the (24) *mystery*<sub>COHER</sub> of these faces in the subway.

(adapted from Shefter 1960:66-67)

**Appendix B:** Fixed-ratio deletion cloze (every 8<sup>th</sup> word) for the second and third paragraphs

I stand transfixed, entangled with legs and feet<sub>II</sub> I *cannot* see. I stare into cavernous nostrils<sub>III</sub>, bottomless ears, gaping *mouths* – and wait. *Wait for*<sub>I</sub> what? For anything! I wait for the train<sub>II</sub> to stop rocking and *rolling*, for a thought<sub>II</sub> to distract me, for the *smell* of toilet<sub>I</sub> water, halitosis, Pepsodent, Chanel N°5, alcohol and hair<sub>II</sub> lotion to disappear. *But* all these smells linger<sub>III</sub>, hanging close to the roof of the shaking<sub>II</sub> car.

The faces linger *too*. They are mostly<sub>VI</sub> unmoving *faces*. At times I detect a quiver<sub>III</sub> of emotion in a pouting *lip* and I<sub>I</sub> tremble, for this must surely be a madman<sub>II</sub>. No one smiles in the *subway*. I see<sub>I</sub> a multitude of people standing nose *to* nose<sub>I</sub>, staring vacantly ahead. Far down in the womb<sub>III</sub> of the city I inspect the faces that<sub>I</sub> *inspect* my face and the face next to<sub>I</sub> me that inspects the face that *inspects* my<sub>I</sub> face.

# THE IMPACT OF MOTHER TONGUE ON TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY

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***Abstract:** The paper presents the results of a research project carried out for three months with the help of forty-eight 1<sup>st</sup> year students divided into two groups – an experimental group and a control group. The former group was taught English grammar and vocabulary by resorting to explanations in the Montenegrin language and the latter group exclusively in English. Their achievements are assessed through three tests. The students were also asked to complete a questionnaire about how they perceive these two types of teaching.*

***Keywords:** English, grammar, mother tongue, vocabulary*

## 1. Introduction

The official language of Montenegro is Montenegrin, and other recognized minority languages in the country are Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Albanian (Constitution of Montenegro, Article 13). All these languages, except Albanian, have derived from the Serbo-Croatian language which was spoken in ex-Yugoslavia. In this paper, we use Montenegrin and Serbian (Montenegrin/Serbian) to indicate the mother tongue, as it is the author’s personal choice. English is learned as a foreign language from the first grade of primary school and it is a mandatory subject throughout the whole education (primary, secondary and tertiary).

The education policy in Montenegro stipulates that after the completion of primary school, a student should reach A2+ level of English, according to Common European Framework Reference of Languages (CEFR), level B2 or B2+ after secondary school, and C1 after graduating from a faculty. In the curricula for primary and secondary schools, it is suggested that the use of the mother tongue should be avoided in English classes, but never at the expense of pursuing set goals. Students should be encouraged to use English as much as their current knowledge allows it, and their mother tongue, when it is more efficient and productive. However, teachers are advised not to overuse the mother tongue with younger children, as they might get confused or frightened of the foreign language (Ministarstvo prosvjete i nauke; Zavod za školstvo, 2017).

## 2. Mother tongue and language learning

Throughout the history of English language teaching, the issue of mother tongue use in class has been a key issue. Whereas the Grammar-Translation Method proposed the mother tongue as the language of instruction in the classroom, the Direct Method forbade it. Along the years, the role of the mother tongue in a language class has changed, depending on what method or approach in language teaching and learning was in focus.

In the era of Communicative Language Teaching, it is suggested that the mother tongue should be used only when it is necessary. Thus, Larsen-Freeman (2000) explains that the use of mother tongue is permitted in an English language class, but English should be used during communicative activities, as well as for explaining the activities to students or in assigning homework. In addition, Kescskes and Papp (2000: 3) state that “FL students lack the background experience and knowledge they need to develop a nativelike command of the target language”.

Carver (1983: 88-91) lists several reasons for mother tongue use, some of which we also find supportive for our teaching of English:

- when giving a translation equivalent (it is less time consuming than explaining, miming, etc.), i.e. for teaching vocabulary;
- when explaining rules (it facilitates their understanding) – therefore, for teaching grammar;
- when preparing for a written composition – giving ideas;
- when testing.

Also, Harmer (2001: 132) suggests that teachers should use “English in language study and oral productive activities, but [to] be more relaxed about it in other pedagogical situations”.

Having all this in mind, and in order to check how our students receive the use of the mother tongue for vocabulary explanations and grammar instructions, we conducted a research with the 1<sup>st</sup> year students of the Faculty of Information Technology (FIT), University “Mediterranean” Podgorica, Montenegro.

### 3. Research

Even though students in Montenegro are officially declared to have a B2 level of English language proficiency when they finish secondary school, our experience is different. Their real level of knowledge is much lower, so they study English at level B1 during their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study, and this research is based on that language level.

#### 3.1. Participants

48 1<sup>st</sup> year students agreed to take part in this research and they were divided into two groups of 24 – a control and an experimental group.

#### 3.2. Research procedure

The research was conducted during the summer semester (12 February - 07 May) 2018, and, due to the number of students who participated in it, it represents a case study. The syllabus for English Language for this semester foresees lessons 7-12 of *Face2face* course book, intermediate level (Redston and Cunningham 2006). According to the curriculum, students have three 45-minute classes a week.

The focus of this research is on the use of the indefinite and definite articles, 2<sup>nd</sup> type of conditional sentences and the passive voice, and the key vocabulary in Units 7 and 8. Group 1, the control group, was given explanations and instructions in English, and Group 2, the experimental group, got them in Montenegrin/Serbian, their mother tongue. The teacher used the mother tongue only when new vocabulary or grammar was introduced and the students did not use it at all.

The students did three tests during the set period: an initial test, a final test and a retest. All three tests consisted of 36 multiple choice questions, related to the

grammar and vocabulary the students were to be taught. First, all students did an initial test whose aim was to check how familiar they were with these topics and also to ensure that the students were organized in two equal groups.

The final test was conducted six weeks later, after the set syllabus was covered, and the retest another six weeks after the final test.

Finally, the students were asked to answer a short questionnaire related to the use of their mother tongue and the English Language in teaching English. They did it online, over the Moodle learning platform, which is used regularly at the FIT.

### 3.3. Data analysis

The results obtained from the three tests were processed using SPSS 20 software for the statistical analysis of the data, by using the following statistical parameters: sample size (N), the arithmetic mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), and the *t*-test in order to determine the statistical significance of the differences in achievement between students in the experimental and the control groups on the initial test, the final test and retest.

The results of the questionnaire were processed by Moodle itself.

### 3.4. Results of the analysis

The statistical parameters of the initial test, the final test and the retest in general are presented in Table 1: the average achievement of students in the experimental group on the initial test was 28.208 points, and that of the students in the control group was 29.041 points. The difference of mean values between the two groups was 0.833 points in favour of the control group and was not statistically significant ( $t=0.502$ ;  $df=46$ ; the two-tailed value  $p$  equals  $0.613 > 0.05$ ). Based on these values, the experimental and control groups were equalized at the beginning of the educational research according to previous knowledge of the English language shown by students.

**Table 1.** Statistical data of the three tests

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	df	P
Initial test	Experimental	24	28.208	6.909	0.509	46	0.613
	Control	24	29.041	4.080			
Final test	Experimental	24	28.791	6.192	2.090	46	0.042
	Control	24	31.960	4.102			
Retest	Experimental	24	29.875	5.847	1.575	46	0.122
	Control	24	32.000	3.079			

The results of the final test (Table 1) reveal that the students in the experimental group had an average achievement of 28.791 points, while the average achievement of students in the control group was 31.960 points. The difference in the students' achievements between the experimental and the control groups on the final test amounts to 3.169 points in favour of experimental group and it was statistically significant ( $t=2.090$ ;  $p=0.042<0.05$ ).

Interestingly, the analysis of the average number of points on the retest showed that the experimental group of students reached 29.875 points, while the control group of students reached 32.000 points. The difference in the number of points between two groups at the retest was 2.125 points in favour of control group and was not statistically significant ( $t=1.575$ ;  $df=46$ ;  $p=0.122>0.05$ ).

The established differences in the students' achievements on the final test in favour of the control group showed that the use of the mother tongue in the teaching of English vocabulary and grammar did not contribute to an increase in the students' knowledge of the English language. However, the results of the retest show that there is hardly any difference in the students' achievements, whether the language of instruction was their mother tongue or the English language.

Some questions arise from this research, such as: *May the 42-days period between the tests have any significance for the results? What would the results be like if the students took another retest? How was it possible that some students had worse results in the final test than in the initial test, and then good ones again in the retest, or vice versa?* These and some other questions can be a starting point for some further research.

I have also analysed the results of individual students' and we have come to the same conclusion: individual students belonging to the experimental group, i.e. those who were taught in Montenegrin, had better results in the use of definite and indefinite articles. The reason for this might be that it was easier for students to understand the use of the English articles explained in their mother tongue, as the Montenegrin/Serbian language does not have an article system. On the other hand, the individual students belonging to the control group were slightly better at using the hypothetical conditional sentences and the passive voice. There was no significant difference in vocabulary acquisition.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the use of the mother tongue in teaching of English, we carried out a questionnaire with the students.

### 3.5. Questionnaire

After the final test, the students had to complete a very short questionnaire containing only three questions about how they perceived the language of instruction in language classes. Due to the fact that the questionnaire was supposed to be done in a short period of time, which included a public holiday, only 19 students from the control and the experimental group answered it. The first question was how well they understood spoken English. The students were supposed to rate their understanding on a scale from 1-5, where 1 means "not at all" and 5 means "excellent". 58 per cent (11) of them rated it 5; 31.5 per cent (6) students evaluated it as 4; and 3 of them, or 10.5 per cent chose rate 3. The average rate is very high – 4.47, which leads us to the conclusion that students do not have problems with understanding grammar and vocabulary instructions in English.

The following question was “Which language do you prefer as a medium of instruction for teaching English grammar and vocabulary – Montenegrin/Serbian or English?” and 73 per cent of the students indicated English. This is another proof that students feel confident about the use of English in teaching. They were asked to elaborate on their previous answer, and some of them wrote: *I like listening to English; Because in that way (= by using English) we understand English better; It is more useful to learn English when it is taught in English* (three similar answers), but the students who opted for the mother tongue in most cases had the comment *I don't understand English very well.*

The results of the questionnaire show that most of the students do not find it difficult to listen to lectures in English. Moreover, they prefer English as the language of instruction.

When we compare the students' answers to the questionnaire and their test results, we come to the conclusion that not only do they prefer English as a medium of instruction, but the outcome of the language input given in English is much better.

#### 4. Conclusion

Many researchers have discussed if the use of the mother tongue in a language class is beneficial (Atkinson 1987, Harmer 2001, Rommel and Tonelli 2017, Warton 2007). While it had a crucial role in an English language class in the past, later its use was questioned, and nowadays it is acceptable in certain situations.

Some of the conclusions based on this limited research are the following:

a) even though in the final test statistical significance was found to be in favour of the use of English only, the initial test and the retest did not confirm it. Therefore, one may state that there is no difference in the students' level of English acquisition, and it is irrelevant what language (the mother tongue or English) is used in teaching grammar and vocabulary;

b) the mother tongue may be useful when explaining grammatical units and/or structures that students are not familiar with at all, that is, when they do not have equivalent forms in their own language;

c) students prefer the use of English as a medium of instruction in English language classes.

Of course, further research would be necessary to clarify various other issues that have arisen from this short research project.

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