

**ENGLISH MYTHS OF ORIGINS WITHIN THE SYSTEM OF
ARCHETYPES.
A REVIEW OF THE QUESTION**

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The goal of this study is review the place and role of the myths of origins in relationship with the concept of people and nation, to understand their structural function in a system of archetypes and to create an inventory of the findings of this research, i.e. to mention the occurrence of the archetypal structures with the British authors on focus. It does not set out to delve into the highly controversial welter of issues connected to the concept of myths of origin.

The sense of common descent is not necessarily linked up to consistent factual history. There is hardly any people in Europe to be able to flaunt a credibly pure origin. Present day nations are the outcome of the blending of sundry components. What a certain people lives through matters more than a mere stringing up of facts.

A nation in the modern sense of the word exists as long as its members share the intuitive belief of their common origin and a community of communication. The common origin can be an imagined one or it can go back to an invented tradition.(see Hobsbawm, 1991). This can be also said of the making of the English language and people. If the objectivists (Kohn, Greenfeld, Hastings, Gillingham) seem to uncover nations cherishing some national feeling as far back as the 10th century in England, the subjectivists (Renan, Hobsbawm, Anderson, Gellner) strongly stick to their creed according to which nations are the creations of 18th century modern Europe.

In the aftermath of Anderson (1991) we agree that national communities evince a certain structure that allows them to take pride in some immemorial past and to flow into some blurred and distant future. The looming lore of nationalism “makes hazard into destiny” (Anderson, 1991) as all the important events seem to fall into a certain preordained order of being.

We agree with Hastings that by the close of the first millennium, the sense of belonging cherished by the people sharing the same language, origins, customs, territory and government had struck deep roots in the medieval imaginary. It comes as no surprise that late 9th century England witnesses the awareness of this common origin which was symbolically expressed in the almighty title: KING OF ENGLAND which betokened the

political unity which the danger of the Vikings had sped up under the sceptre of Alfred.

The idea of kingdom strode in step with the idea of community which began to be upheld by sometimes fanciful myths of common origins claiming the authority of German Woden, of the Roman/Trojan Aeneas or of the biblical heroes. The rise of Englishness was strongly tied to the awareness of one kingdom ruled by one king swaying over one people. Reynolds (1983:251) calls this regnal awareness instead of national awareness. Regnal awareness leans heavily upon kinship and common origin.

Actually it is only after the rise of print, reformation and capitalism in Europe had shaped a monolingual readership that the nation as a politically imagined community came to the fore in the field of social categories. This is particularly true of England. Ethnic awareness was particularly boosted and uplifted in the days of Reformation as the question of an English protestant church was looked upon as an all-healer against the evil Catholicism of Rome and forthcoming modern nationhood was buttressed by a standard literary language.

For example, the Anglicanism of Henry VIII was at least stepping stone towards paving the way for modern nationhood, if not its very beginning (see also Greenfeld, 1992). The spread of the Bible printed in the vernacular and of the Book of Common Prayer heightened once again the sense of belonging to the common roots of Englishness, especially for like-minded speakers and practitioners of the Word of God.

Awareness of the ethnic origins is “a kind of being, doing and knowing” (Fishman, 1980: 84-85 apud Smith, 1998:183). This awareness has always been felt as a relational phenomenon, a kind of continuity within those who keep up the bonds throughout generations with their common ancestors. The sense of national belonging is partially couched as: “bones of their bones flesh of their flesh and blood of their blood” (Fishman, apud Smith, 1998:184). The human body itself is looked upon as a symbolic and organic carrier of ethnicity and this is usually deemed to be grounded in a (meta)-physical substance like blood, bones or flesh.

Regarding the myth of common origin we believe that it is exactly the foundation on which ethnicity leans. Horowitz (1985:52) adds “a certain notion of assumption, however diluted and the notion of kinship deriving from it”.

England is spelled out in biblical terms as a nation that can be defended like the Israel of the Old Testament. One becomes aware of the common popular feeling expressed on behalf of the kingdom and land,

something usually called England, although Britannia is also employed in order to focus on some local allegiance. (Hastings, 1997:42)

The Bible was set up as a model even in Israel for what a nation should betoken: unity of folk, tongue, religion, land and government. It may have stood for a monolithical ideal, reaching productivity after all sorts of fictional things were ousted, but it set an outspoken paragon for the Bible as to what should make a nation, a looking glass of the self national image, thus of an autoimage. (see also Hastings, 1997: 43)

Milton (apud Poliakov, 1971:64) bestows a great sense of destiny upon the “chosen folk” wrestling away from the claws of Catholic Spain and France:” The English are a chosen folk coming before the others from which the first bugles of Reformation will start sounding just like from Sion”.

A web of texts that we have looked at brings up the issue of the common origin of the English people. The list of authors starts with Gildas and Nennius, goes on with Bede, Aelfric, the authors of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC), Geoffroy of Monmouth, takes in Milton (see Poliakov 1971) and Blake (Jerusalem) and ends with the Victorian Teutomaniacs Arnold and Hopkins (see Poliakov 1971, Faverty 1951 and Roberts 1987).

Even some of the “findings” verge on sheer fantasy and are due to some wrong spelling, the origins put forward by these authors fall under four assumed headings: the Germanic, the Celtic, the Biblical/Hebrew and the Roman/Trojan origins. We can see once again that factual history does not always tally with the feeling of common origin, whatever the origin may be. The common origin is the farther end of a long chain of being running uninterruptedly towards the present day: in the case of the English people, at the farther end there may be a god: Woden, and/or a series of biblical heroes: Sem, Seth, Noah and Japhet via David Ebraucus/Ebraicus? or Aeneas. They are all claimed in turn to be the forefathers of the Englishmen (see also Poliakov 1971).

These myths underlie a complex web of social relations and make for ethical solidarity and social cohesion. They help build these autoimages, images of the collective self making up a tightly linked community of communication and count as true narrations of the ethnic becoming in the collective imaginary as they hold up to the members of the community a sort of prototypical ““persona”, which the average person will do his best to resemble.” (Orwell, 1970: 21, apud Miller, 1997:37).

The English people build their ethos on linguistic creations of narratives, but the essence of Englishness is made up of sundry things like: symbols, myths, allegiances, collective memories, laws and institutions. Speaking of collective memory we should mention Renan’s (apud Miller,

1997:39) remark that:” it is of the essence of nation that all individuals should have much in common, and further that they should all have forgotten much”. Certain inglorious factual historical events are implicitly acknowledged but these do not count as part and parcel of the national narrative. Thus collective memory is subjective, selective and axiological. That is why national histories as discourses play up certain events that uplift a certain political bias and downplay, overshadow or completely ignore other facts less subservient to the cause or completely running counter to it.

The myths of origins are set against a structural background making up a system of archetypes of the imaginary. The following table draws upon and adapts Boia’s system (1997). Boia finds 8 structures linked into a web. The names of the authors with which these structures get actualised are filled in as follows:

Structural archetypes	Content	Authors
Awareness of the preternatural	The preternatural is felt as the sacred. Man bestows sacredness upon sundry objects and beings. Monarchy is a case in point. The king is the anointed one. The king bestows sense upon history. (see also LeGoff, Les rois thaumaturges)	Gildas, ASC, Geoffrey of Monmouth
Doppelgaenger and hereafter	Sense of afterlife for the living creates a state of grace. Man can speak to ghosts and images of the double	Geoffrey of Monmouth
Otherness	A complex mesh of instances of otherness binds the Self to the others. Extreme otherness can either be animalist (downright lowered) or divine (utterly uplifted)	Geoffrey of Monmouth
Oneness	Any community strives for oneness and cohesion and any discourse, be it mythical	ASC, Gildas, Nennius, Milton, Arnold, Hopkins

	or ideological, should make for its coherence.	
Origins	The community that imagines itself (autoimage) as such needs to retell its past which lay the foundations for its present. By recalling the origins the community shows that they grasp their ontological essence and their forthcoming lot. These myths ensure the community's oneness against a background of otherness and warrant its continuation.	Gildas, Nennius, Bede, Aelfric, ASC, Geoffroy of Monmouth, Milton, Blake, Arnold, Hopkins
Forthcomingness	These myths read sense of forthcoming things essential for a community into the present state of things	Bede, Gildas, Geoffroy of Monmouth, Milton
Escapism	These mythical structures point out to an attempt at heroes fleeing from their lot, time or history	Bede
Coincidentia oppositorum	Paired off myths can attract, reject and complement each other.	Geoffrey of Monmouth, Blake, Milton

One can see that the myths of origins are a highly complex kind of reality, occurring within the collective consciousness as autoimages, i.e. images of the collective self. Myths are central to the gist of nationhood as national identity has a discursive character grounded in a legitimising and representative fictional narration. The legitimising might of these structures belonging to the realm of the imaginary is heightened by the synergetic merging of these myths of the system. Armstrong (1982) calls this mechanism a mythomoteur which lays down the rules for a specific identity.

The complex intertwining system of myths shapes out an intense kind of awareness of the community members concerning their shared lot. This awareness is driven in its turn by the feelings of solidarity against some fiendish might of otherness, entrenching itself by drawing out the borders

between the community and the others. The ethnic community of symbolic communication handles this tool to bridge the distance between the living and the dead over a long time span, something Braudel (1977) would call "la longue duree".

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IRIS MURDOCH IN ROMANIA

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Investigating how a foreign certain writer is being and has been received in another culture requires a deep awareness of two types of readers that actually make up the general notion of literature-oriented “public”. There are on the one hand the competent readers, that is the readers who approach the literary works in full consciousness of the latter’s being literary phenomena, and on the other hand the superficial readers, namely those who enjoy fiction as if it were simply a relaxing activity generating satisfaction through conscious or unconscious aesthetic pleasure.

The major difference between the two types of readers, and implicitly of the public, lies in the competent reader’s ability to analyse a literary piece of writing from different points of view, and therefore in the superficial readers’ incapacity of approaching a literary work methodically, on the grounds of their lack of a theoretical apparatus needed for such purpose. Such distinction is important especially because Iris Murdoch’s works have an enormous success among the competent readers, academic critics included, while the unpretentious-type of readers have been largely undecided and reticent in judging her books favourably. Some of them even avoid talking about Iris Murdoch since in their opinion she is not a writer interesting enough on whom to focus their attention. Those competent readers critiquing Iris Murdoch generally like to stress that she may be read at several levels, implying rather arrogantly, that the common reader finds satisfaction in her thrilling plots, while the discerning critic can detect subtleties hidden to less the acute eye. It is important to highlight that at the core of any criticisms is the readers’ reaction to a certain text. Like many critics before me, I uphold the opinion that the reading process is basically temporal, thus occurring in time and the consequence of this assumption is that any reading encourages a kind of interpretative activity. I tend to believe that the key concept in any discussion of a writer’s value is specific readers’ expectations. These are shaped, disrupted and reshaped by the author’s talent in creating a captivating and thrilling text. The test of truth in critical interpretation of literature is its social viability. The major activities in the history of literary study are acts of identifying values and making judgments of value. Henry Blamires in his book, *A History of Literary Criticism* considers that: “A judgement of meaning is a special form of a value-judgment, since it depends on the selective perception of the judge,

which in turn is determined by the set of values which govern his life. These values are forces whose behaviours are determined by rules of personality functioning and by the constraints of social existence.”(Blamires 1990:68) For the author, the work of literature is a response to his life experience. For the reader, the interpretation is the response to his reading experience. The understanding of the literary transaction creates a new scale of values for the serious study of literature and literary experience. The study of literature cannot proceed independently of the study of the people involved in the artistic transaction. At this point I think it is worth mentioning John Bayley’s opinion expressed in his biography on Iris Murdoch’s life: “She wanted, through her novels to reach all possible readers, in different ways by different means: by the excitement of her story, its pace and its comedy, through its ideas and its philosophical implications, though the numinous atmosphere of her own original and created world – the world she must have glimpsed as she considered and planned her first steps in the art of fiction.” (Bayley 2000:48) Both her fiction and her philosophical writings gave fruit for thought to many literary critics, philosophers and readers alike. At this point mention should be made of the fact that a good writer’s entering the circuit of a foreign literature and culture always represents an event that ought not to be easily overlooked. After all, were it not for the translators who were preoccupied with offering the Romanian public the opportunity to enjoy Iris Murdoch’s fiction, she would be a name that “does ring a bell” in the Romanian readers’ minds, except for a reduced number of readers belonging to the intellectual elite. Moreover, since the act of reception itself depends to a large extent on the accuracy of translations, the translator’s talent and capacity to render the original text’s intention into the target language plays an extremely important role in the shaping of the ulterior reader response.

The fact that in her youth she used to be a member of the Communist Party paved the way for the translation of her novels into Romanian long before 1989. It is important to notice that in the case of her works the state accepted the possible “corrupting” Western influences, and favoured the publication of her first novel in 1971. Generally speaking Iris Murdoch had enjoyed a considerable success in Romania. If for the simple, uninitiated reader the appeal of her writings was generated mainly by the complicated plots, the abundance of characters, each minutely described, and a very British sense of humour represented a challenge for the really informed, competent Romanian readers. The success of Iris Murdoch’s books in Romania testifies on the worthiness of all those who translated her works. Although some of her writings have not been translated yet at all, and I am referring here to *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *The Unicorn*, *A*

Severed Head, The Nice and the Good, A Fairly Honourable Defeat, The Black Prince, and The Good Apprentice. I consider that her masterpieces were all translated into Romanian. They are chronologically as follows: *Under the Net* translated by Ioana Maria Nicolau, in 1971 with a foreword written by Mircea Ivănescu, *The Sandcastle* translated in 1977 by Mihaela Bucur, *Bruno's Dream* translated by Dana Crivaț in 1978, *A Word Child* translated by Antoaneta Ralian in 1981, *The Sea, The Sea* translated by the same Antoaneta Ralian in 1983, *The Philosopher's Pupil* again by Antoaneta Ralian in 1983. The rest of the novels that appeared in the Romanian version were published after the events of December 1989 and they are only three: *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* translated by Virgil Stanciu in 1991, *Jackson's Dilemma* translated by in Angela Hondru in 1998 which benefits from an afterword written by Monica Bottez, and *The Bell* translated by Anca Gabriela Sîrbu in 2002, to which Ștefan Stoenescu wrote an interesting and well-documented, even if controversial, afterword. Two other translations should be mentioned since they appeared in 2003 at a different Publishing House than in their first edition. I am referring here to *A Word Child* and *The Sea, The Sea*, both translated by Antoaneta Ralian.

Since only three of the translations had the advantage of critical commentaries, I'll pursue my analysis of Iris Murdoch's reception in Romania by highlighting the main ideas expressed in them, leaving the articles and studies for the second part of this chapter. The reason for this approach is that, in my opinion, readers are more tempted to get acquainted with an author through the foreword or afterword written to a novel than by trying to find articles or reviews in different newspapers or magazines. That is why I cannot help being surprised that the Romanian version of *The Sea, The Sea*, winner of the Booker Prize, wasn't considered worthy of a critical commentary (not even in the second edition).

The first critical opinion on Iris Murdoch is to be found in the preface written by Mircea Ivanescu to *Under the Net*. It is a short and, in my opinion, not that impressive. He starts the analysis of Iris Murdoch's work with a brief presentation of the British feminine literature, thus associating her work with the major representatives of the female writers. It is a rather surprising point of view considering how little her novels have in common with the feminist literature and how opposed she was to this movement. Moreover, as his ideas are expressed almost twenty years after the first English edition of the novel, by which time Iris Murdoch had already published fourteen novels, I can overlook his commentaries only by taking into consideration the lack of proper information due to the difficulty of communication with the Western world. Another idea that caught my

attention and which, in my opinion undermines the one presented above, is the importance he lays on the particularity of the feminist writing less preoccupied with issues regarding narrative devices.

To be more precise, one could say that in the British literature – more representative than in the French classicism or German romanticism – the important books written by women signify a better proof for the expression of a certain essential feature and a feminine sensibility, but are rather the singular manifestations of a spontaneous genius, more reliable from the artistic point of view – less interested in matters regarding narrative technique and literary ability than those – so to speak – of the male writers. (1971: 6)

Mircea Ivanescu assumes that what made critics associate her with the Angry Young Men Movement is what he terms as the “conventional” characteristic of her first novel. It is strange that he felt bound to mention this out-dated labeling especially since the foreword to the novel was published in 1971 when no British critic would have dared consider Iris Murdoch “conventional”. Fortunately he does not forget to add that another reason for which Iris Murdoch could have been part of this Movement is the portrayal of the main characters. The critic continues the analysis of Iris Murdoch’s work by describing the defining feature of her novel writing, the one that separates her from the other writers. “The truth is that Iris Murdoch is a more serious, more mature and more ambitious writer than the colleagues – most of them younger – with whom she had been evaluated.” (1971: 7) It would have been interesting if he had discussed at least one of her philosophical works and her bent for philosophical debates carried out by her characters. It is surprising that he does not write anything about *The Sovereignty of Good* which appeared in 1970. The presence of this foreword in the first novel by Iris Murdoch published in Romanian shows that Mircea Ivanescu’s intention was to get the readers acquainted with the novel of an important British writer whose talent, as it seems, was not, at the time, neither understood nor appreciated by the Romanian critics. He ends his foreword by highlighting the same idea: “The present book represents a good introduction to the work of a writer who had evinced on many occasions her qualities of an analyst focussed on a certain intellectual condition typical of her fellow countrymen. In a fiction diversified and invariably interesting (to say the least) the author brought an important contribution to the diversity and “humanization” of the serious contemporary literature.”(1971: 7) Mircea Ivanescu’s attempt to give a short evaluation of Iris Murdoch’s work and his interpretation shows unfortunately a complete misunderstanding of her message and

craftsmanship regarding structure inventiveness. It also proves that he didn't grasp the essence of the novel. Nevertheless, his mentioning other novels written by her could have been an incentive for those few or many charmed or challenged by her style and knowledge of human nature.

Reviewing the translations of Iris Murdoch's novels into Romanian and the commentaries of different critics published as an explanation to her world, it seems ironic that the next one appeared in 1998 to no less than her last novel, *Jackson Dilemma*. The afterword written by Monica Bottez and entitled *Iris Murdoch and the universe of her work* (Bottez, 1998: 245) should have been, considering the date and the amount of information that could have been gathered by that time, a more comprehensive one. Unfortunately, despite a general presentation of her novels and their main themes, the article brings nothing new to the field of literary criticism on Iris Murdoch, being full of common place knowledge. I consider it important to be mentioned and analysed since it provides the Romanian reader with an overall view of Iris Murdoch's work mentioning for the first time two of her philosophical works, examining thus the connection existing between the philosopher and the novelist. The debate is seminal for the starting point of Iris Murdoch's fictional work and its very thematic underpinning. The starting point of the afterword is a pertinent remark on how Iris Murdoch was generally perceived by critics:

"Undoubtedly Iris Murdoch is a significant name in postwar fiction. She was acclaimed both as the best realist writer of these times, and accused of creating contrived and artificial plots. It goes without saying that the writer's philosophical studies explain her special interest in the issues and confrontations of ideas that mark contemporary society." (1998: 245).

Monica Bottez concludes her study with a rather farfetched remark as if she expects Iris Murdoch to write at least another ten novels. She claims (in a fragment that reminds us of a certain type of discourse defining a period of time dominated by the lack of interest in anything that has to do with a writer's own existence) that: "*Jackson's Dilemma* seems to point to an important evolution in the author's vision about the world and a shift of interest towards characters that are instances of the good or aspire to become good." (1998:259) I consider that Monica Bottez's errors regarding the perception of Iris Murdoch's world should not be overlooked, having in view the opening to Western culture of this country that occurred after the events of 1989. Nevertheless, she should be praised for pinning down, for the first time in a Romanian critical essay, the British writer's most important novels as well as her philosophical writings.

The next analysis of Iris Murdoch's work appeared in 2003 in the afterword of the translation to the novel *The Bell*. Under the title "Good is overflowing" Ștefan Stoenescu provides some fairly accurate biographical details as well as comments on her work, the former being inspired from Peter Conradi's biography. Since this is not a survey of the critic's general presentation I will only highlight certain aspects which draw my attention and which I consider important to mention. First of all, he is the first to underline the consequences of a good translation in the perception of a writer in another language. As in the case of the other two critics who tried to analyse the world brought to life by Iris Murdoch Șerban Stoenescu underscores the risk of trying to be too original and thus being prone to surprising mistakes. The essay however contains some inaccurate information referring to the translations that have appeared into Romanian. He relies in this attempt on John Fletcher's book *Iris Murdoch: The Foreign Translations*. His choice seems to me rather odd, especially since the book does not mention the translation of the novel *The Sea, The Sea*, published in two editions, the second in 2003 at the same publishing house as *The Bell*. He does not hesitate to state that Iris Murdoch's reception in Romania, due to the reduced number of translations – he also forgets to mention the translation of *A Philosopher's Pupil* and *Jackson's Dilemma* – was late in coming as compared to other countries. Șerban Stoenescu begins his analysis by focusing on the prominent and much talked about concepts present in Iris Murdoch's novels. "Truth, Good, Beauty and Love – all the cardinal concepts of Plato's discourse – are largely debated in the philosophical writings, and frequently referred to in the fiction of the world famous British-Irish writer." (Stoenescu 2002: 371) The author of this essay fails to make any remarks on the existence of the so called "enchanters" and their significance in the correct understanding of the powers of good and evil. Indeed, the concept is not even alluded to even though the critic quotes almost all the great philosophers that could have had any influence on the British writer and her writings, both philosophical and fictional. What he seems to be more interested in, and from a certain point of view I tend to favor his choice, is Iris Murdoch's life, her friends, her lovers and generally all that was unknown until John Bayley and Peter Conradi published their biographies of her. His afterword is worth being remembered and quoted especially because of his recounting of his meeting with her in Romania. It is instrumental for the way she was and is perceived, not only by critics but also by uninformed readers. Before I note any further discussion on Iris Murdoch's reception in Romania referring to the articles and studies that appeared in magazines and books it is important to point out a few facts regarding the translation of her novels into Romanian. Translating Iris

Murdoch is no easy task, as one never stops admiring the richness and wit of her language. The translator must grapple with a great deal of eloquence across an ever-increasing number of pages. Further, it is regrettable that of her nine novels translated into Romanian, only three benefited from critical commentaries. As it seems one of the defining features of the Romanian commentaries present to her translations is their varied perception of Iris Murdoch's in general. These generally biased opinions are due to the period of time in which they were published, each focusing on a separate aspect of her work and life. It is my opinion that a good translation is as important to the reception of an author in a foreign country as an interesting critical study. Another reason for the small number of commentaries is the richness and variety of Iris Murdoch's work that makes it difficult for any critic to be objective. Two of the afterwords appeared relatively late, after 1989, and it goes without saying that they were influenced by the British critics' opinion and by the enormous amount of studies published by that time. The Romanian critic grapples with great hardship trying to come up with original ideas. And this could be a possible explanation for Iris Murdoch's slow reception in Romania especially in the case of the non-trained reader.

Of all the articles, reviews and studies that appeared during this period I would like to underline those written by Andrei Brezianu. I consider them instrumental for the reception of Iris Murdoch in Romania not so much because of the ideas he states – more or less already expressed by British critics, but because of his original style, the metaphorical use of critical devices in analysing and interpreting a work of art. I share the opinion that without his well-documented, creative interpretation of Iris Murdoch's novels her presence in the Romanian culture would have been dull and less fascinating. His first article on Iris Murdoch was published in *România Literară* in 1970 and presented his views on the novel *A Fairly Honorable Defeat*. In it he remarks, quite amazingly, on the humorous side of this novel, and its narrative technique than the so obvious conflict between good and evil. "The novel, despite its clock formal perfection signals a deadlock. The writer's narrative flawlessness tends, with a certain degree of indifference towards a structure alienated from the direct moral involvement. Simple 'guignol' mechanism, the plot seems just an excuse for a humorous but unfriendly examination of the omniscient author."(Brezianu 1970: 19) In another article published in *Transilvania* in 1976, he refers to a recently published novel *A Word Child*. In my opinion he is right in assuming that:

A Word Child represents, no doubt, a step in a different direction. The novel evinces a change of tone. (...) The warmth that permeates the narrative texture, the

tone and the junctions of plot hold our attention for a while. But the book is also the story of a main character dominated by the magic and power - sometimes prophetic - of words. Hillary Burde, its hero, is trapped not only in his own past he would like to break away from, but also by his linguistic, philological and etymological concerns which secures him a position in the gallery of protagonists created by Iris Murdoch. (Brezianu 1976:5)

In the article entitled "Iris Murdoch, in London" published in *România literară* in 1978, Andrei Brezianu describes his meeting Iris Murdoch just before her winning the Booker Prize award for her novel *The Sea, The Sea*. He focuses on the topics of their discussion, highlighting his first impression, that of her kindness. "Iris Murdoch, who does not show her age, shocks one from the very beginning and surprises by lack of vanity in the choice of clothes and her general appearance: dressed almost like a boy it is the person within and the physical aspect that leaves its mark – and with all the possible warmth – once she directs on you the sincere, straightforward, friendly expression of her blue eyes." (Brezianu 1978: 20) The article is not exactly an interview, but Andrei Brezianu presents briefly her interest in the Romanian language and the bond he success in establishing with her. "As we talked about words and their significance, Iris Murdoch expresses her curiosity in hearing how certain phrases are translated into Romanian, urging me to a brief comparison between the two language structures." (1978:20) He concludes: "An exceptional presence, open-minded, of an admirable discretion and modesty both as a human being and writer. Her spirit burning with curiosity established – I realized with amazement - an environment of intense communication for our intellect and spirit that made us both equal partners, linked by mutual sympathy." (1978:20) In 1982, Andrei Brezianu published a collection of essays entitled "Conversions" (Brezianu 1982:243) which contains, what I consider to be the best and most original study of Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sea, The Sea*. Under the heading "Iris Murdoch's *Sea* or life considered as a stage" he starts the analysis by comparing the book, like many other critics, to Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. I tend to agree with Andrei Brezianu's opinion that the similarity between the novel and the play is manifest even for the less informed readers. "The main character of the novel *The Sea, The Sea* seems created as a modern, earth-bound, playful but by no means less striking counterpart to a Shakespearean essence which can be perceived immediately even by a common or uninformed reader." (1982: 245)

Andrei Brezianu concludes his essay by emphasizing the idea that Iris Murdoch envisages life as a stage, especially in *The Sea, The Sea*, a stage where upon she both directs and stars. He also gives prominence to the tone she makes use of, a tone key to the novelty brought about by this

award winning novel. "There is no doubt that the writer pictures life as a stage possibly more in this novel than in her other fictional writings. *The Sea*, *The Sea* presents us with a sophisticated component of comic parody. What catches our attention is exactly the novelty brought about by this unmistakable syncretic tone. It is a philosophical tone but warmer and more understanding, more direct and more seriously involved in all that is hidden behind the mechanism which binds and shatters with so much zest, humour, and ingenuity the soul and heart of the action."(1982:248)

I would also like to point out the two articles written by Antoaneta Ralian. The first was published in 1999 under the title "Iris Murdoch and Alzheimer"(Ralian 1999:19) amazingly just a few months before the writer's death. (The article was prompted by the publishing of John Bayley's biography on Iris Murdoch and it presents in translation fragments from it.) It is interesting to mention here that in the explanatory survey of Iris Murdoch's work and her marriage to John Bayley, Antoaneta Ralian discloses her twenty-two years of correspondence with the British writer. It is a pity that such a long documented relationship did not result in an informative essay on *The Sea*, *The Sea* (the book she translated into Romanian). The critical commentary in the periodical only focuses on the couple's existence and the impact of Alzheimer's Disease on their relationship. "Iris Murdoch formed together with John Bayley a strange symbiosis. This symbiosis experiences now a shift of qualities, the two remaining, in a way, still actor and spectator. The only thing that changes, by a weird inversion, is that the active, creative partner became a patient while the more or less passive critic turned into a tireless guardian."(1999:19) The *România Literară* of 1999 also printed the obituary of Iris Murdoch written by Antoaneta Ralian. In an article entitled "Iris Murdoch is no longer with us" (Ralian 1999:20) she presents another brief commentary on her life and work focusing this time more on her literary output. I tend to disagree with Antoaneta Ralian's view about the importance of eroticism in Iris Murdoch's work. In spite of my respect for Iris Murdoch's creative powers, I cannot claim that she never repeated herself. "Her numerous novels while of great epic density, with an intricate texture deeply rooted in eroticism, with complex characters minutely carved and psychologically motivated, are extraordinarily different and set apart. No recurrent theme, no literary tics are present. They are united only by a metaphysical attribute and a touch of the supernatural which seasons the realism rendered"(1999:20). I would also like to point out the description Antoaneta Ralian gives of her first meeting with the British writer 1974. I cannot help noticing the detailed portrayal that reminds me of Iris Murdoch's own character delineation. I tend to believe that this was exactly Antoaneta Ralian's aim. "When the door opened, in its frame appeared a commanding

figure, dressed in the usual English tweed, with a mobile, lively face, fringes of chestnut hair over a curved forehead, high reddish cheekbones, eyes slightly slanting, inquisitive, and a warm smile – extremely kind-hearted.”1999:20) Antoaneta Ralian concludes her article with a remark that I consider central to understanding the personality and writings of Iris Murdoch. “How is it that great people know to be so simple? Iris Murdoch belongs to posterity – to the eternity that appropriated her” (1999:20).

The reception of Iris Murdoch’s work in Romania can be divided into two periods: the one preceding the 1989 events and the one following them. Of the twenty-six novels, she wrote only six were translated into Romanian during the years before 1989 and few critical attempts were made to explain them. Whether the quality of the translations is partly to be blamed or not Iris Murdoch’s books seem to have made little impact and left the Romanian reader unimpressed. I can come up with only one reason why the years after 1989 were in no way different in what concerns Iris Murdoch’s reception in Romania. Namely, I tend to believe that translators were deterred from translating her novels because their length and their “intellectual” dialogues and substance.

It is my strong conviction that since 2004 marks eighty-five years since Iris Murdoch’s birth it will point people to the author herself. In any case I am positive that Romanian literary critics will show their respect by writing more interesting and original pages about this gifted and resourceful author.

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EUDORA WELTY: LOVE AND SEPARATENESS

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The concepts of love and separateness have more than thematic significance in Welty's fiction. They play a role in her assumptions about the nature of knowledge and, by extension, influence her decisions about such matters as withholding information from and revealing it to the readers. To understand the relationship between these notions and the implications of that relationship, it might be helpful to think along the lines suggested by the work of Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan and Susan Bordo.

In her book *Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), Chodorow shows that in their earliest experiences of self, people must find their identity and understand themselves as separate individuals in the context of their relationship with the mother. The process is different however for boys and girls: the former tend to find their identity as females relatively easy because their role models are (typically) right there with them. A girl establishes her identity vis-à-vis the person who has been the most important and prominent figure in her life since it began. For her, decisive separation from the mother is not necessary for identity formation, so identification may take place rather naturally, and separation tends to occur later in her childhood. In contrast, for sons, their identity has more often than not been formed through relationship with a male figure who is often secondary in the child's experience in the sense that he arrives on the scene after the mother. In developing a sense of gender as a male, a boy comes to understand masculinity in opposition to the powerfully felt femininity of the mother, in effect denying the degree of her power in order to embrace masculine traits and values as a stable part of the self. Separation is both decisive and positively valued because it enhances the task of identity formation.

Gilligan's book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982) reveals a masculine valorization of individualism and self-reliance that leads to a preference for moral principles, rules that constitute categorical imperatives for what is right. According to her, females more often work from context, asking questions about relationships and responsibilities, as they consider how to act.

In her turn, Susan Bordo (1986) explores the implications of the importance attributed to the mind/body dichotomy by Descartes and his

successors. The devaluation of the body in favour of “pure” mind or spirit is analogous to the devaluation of the power of the female/maternal body, itself rooted in the dread of women that is a residue of early infantile dependence on the mother. Holding dispassion, detachment, and objectivity as the highest values to achieving accurate knowledge of the world, Cartesian thought contributes directly to the sense of experience as occurring deeply within and bounded by a self.

It is in this context that we aim to explore the cognitive assumptions reflected in E. Welty’s fiction. We will do so by making constant reference to some of Faulkner’s texts as a counterpoint for the discussion of Welty’s treatment of similar themes and issues. While Faulkner’s texts consistently express a high valuation of autonomy as well as anxiety-filled responses to the implications of relationships, Welty’s fiction tends to address the consequences of choosing different degrees of isolation or relationship vis-à-vis others. Faulkner’s stories offer vivid examples of the felt experience of individuals whose patterns of response perpetually reinforce their belief in their independence from others and who will tend to feel overwhelmed if they are forced to be dependent.

A number of Faulkner’s protagonists (e.g. Carothers Edmonds in *The Fire and the Hearth*), seem Cartesian in their insistence on the “not-I-ness” of the other. They recognize in a deep and irrevocable way knowledge has somehow destroyed the possibility of reconnection, has made the shift in the nature of the relationship irreparable. They echo the Fall from innocence, the banishment from an original bliss associated with the feminine. The otherness of race and that of gender are conjoined in the figure of the “womanshenegro” toward whom Faulknerian protagonists feel the deepest ambivalence. They fluctuate between a nostalgic mythologizing of women such as Molly Beauchamp, and the complete denigration of women and a denial that one needs them at all.

In Welty’s story titled *Moon Lake* (1980: 361), the child Nina Carmichael discovers with awe that some of the girls with her at summer camp are orphans. The orphans have enviable rings of dirt on the backs of their necks, and nobody watches them, so they are not answerable to people the way Nina is. Observing their fascinating differences for a while, she ponders what it would be like to be someone else: "The orphan! she thought exultantly. The other way to live. There were secret ways. She thought, Time's really short, I've been only thinking like the others. It's only interesting, only worthy, to try for the fiercest secrets. To slip into them all - to change. To change for a moment into Gertrude, into Mrs. Gruenwald, into Twosie - into a boy. To *have been* an orphan."

Welty's text reveals a different approach. Cassie Morrison in *June Recital* (1980: 298) finds that knowledge comes through imagining yourself in another's place. Thinking of the sewing machine salesman, Mr. Voight, Cassie "could not now, any more than then, really describe Mr. Voight, but without thinking she could *be* Mr. Voight, which was more frightening still." And elsewhere, seeing Miss Eckhart, "Cassie felt that the teacher was filled with terror, perhaps with pain. She found it so easy ... to feel terror and pain in an outsider."

Welty's characters often make a conscious imaginative effort to understand and overcome the differences existing between themselves and others. Moreover, the failure to empathize with the otherness of others (as in *June Recital*, with the community's refusal to show compassion for Miss Eckhart, the piano teacher) is precisely the source, for Welty, of human tragedy. And although Faulkner, too, may show the failure of empathy as a source of evil—as in the deputy's complete lack of understanding of Rider in *Pantaloons in Black* - he does so in quite different ways, for example by juxtaposing, and thus both separating and opposing, sections of the story that feature the two main characters' thoughts. This structural device reaffirms the thematic point that Rider and the deputy cannot imagine one another's situations; the text itself precludes any possibility for meaningful interaction between them by locking them out of one another's experience. An imaginative placement of the self in another's shoes such as we find in Welty's stories is virtually absent in those of Faulkner. The isolation of his characters appears insurmountable.

This contrast reflects two opposing intellectual styles of encountering the new and the unknown and of assimilating new knowledge. One is a methodology of believing in the stance of the other (a somewhat more "feminine" way of responding), and the other a more "masculine" methodological doubt.

In Welty's fictive world, connection among things is perceived as the normal state of affairs while in Faulkner's stories, new, unknown things are perceived by his troubled protagonists as likely to be inimical. Characters run from things and are often panicked by them in Faulkner's fictive world, rarely or never in Welty's.

From a different perspective, Faulkner's characters often use the sense of sight to try to keep track of others; it reassures them that dangerous others are not too close to the self. Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine R. Grontkowski (1983:207) argue that in the "hierarchy of the senses" implicit in Western thought, vision is especially valorized, and that this emphasis on the visual "is not only symptomatic of the alienation of modern man, but is itself a major factor in the disruption of man's 'natural' relation to the

world.” The peculiarly spatial nature of vision encourages the separation of perceiver from the perceived, a separation that is characteristic of a mindset valuing autonomy and avoiding the feminine. This emphasis on vision is particularly evident in Faulkner's imagination with its focus on human isolation and the problematic nature of communication.

Another sense, touch, has an equally intimate bearing on the problems of otherness and distance. In Faulkner's fiction, all of those distinctions that characterize the ideological beliefs of the South - race, gender, class - are threatened with annihilation when touch eradicates the boundaries maintaining difference.

Rosa Coldfield (*Absalom! Absalom!*, 1986: 111-112):

with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both: touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I Am's private own ... But let flesh touch.

In Eudora Welty's fiction, characters are often immersed in experiences of touch and texture; they repeatedly reach out to the world and to particular objects. Delia Farrar, the protagonist of *A Sketching Trip* (1980:62) feels this:

It was a day you could touch. It was texture she had always wanted-she was excited, a little, going under the fragrant trees-and hoped so much to learn; and surely, texture she had felt as a child at Fergusson's Wells - then she had first put out her hand and touched what was around her, an outer world. At the time she knew it-that was the remarkable thing. She knew this was discovery; she had reached with her full reach, put out adoring hands and touched the world ... a touching of the outward pulse, the awareness of a tender surface underneath which flowed and trembled and pressed life itself. It was as if this pulse became the green of leaves, the roundness of fruit, the rise and fall of a hill.

The cognitive styles of these two authors suggest that Faulkner and Welty may be working from different basic definitions of key terms reflecting human experience. Perhaps the most salient example of this is that they view the unknown in quite different ways. Anticipating connection or relationship with something previously unknown, Faulkner's characters tend to expect the worst. The dichotomous thinking characteristic of his fictional world is part of an attempt to keep otherness away from the self, expecting it to be harmful, hostile. Welty's protagonists, on the other hand, expect discovery to involve recognizing commonality in newly encountered people and things.

These contrasting attitudes toward the unknown may explain why Faulkner and Welty also seem to work with different definitions of terms such as "love" and "knowledge". Echoing a preoccupation with control, Faulkner's characters typically exhibit a vigilance toward others in their efforts to understand the precise degree of threat that they represent. In Welty's fiction the experiences of love and knowledge are closely linked in meaning because they both involve a willing assumption of the other's similarity with the self. The very attempt to put yourself in another's place constitutes an act of love, even as it is an act of understanding. Whereas for Faulkner a character's intellect is typically used to orient the self toward others, as a way of speculating about and keeping track of them for the sake of distance and control, in Welty's fiction the use of one's intellect is motivated by love and the desire to reach an empathetic understanding. The fulfillment of love and that of knowledge are nearly indistinguishable events in Welty's fiction, and they are never accompanied by the anxiety that often appears in Faulkner's stories.

Violence also reflects the attitudes toward relationship and the unknown that are characteristic of Faulkner and Welty. Violence occurs often in Faulkner's world, especially that almost mechanical beating of others that his most despairing protagonists engage in (Joe Christmas beating the horse; Abner Snopes hitting his mules and then his son in *Barn Burning* "hard but without heat"). The relentless, passionless nature of these acts conveys the characters' hopelessness about ever gaining control of the events in their lives. Striking relatively helpless others, Faulkner's characters try to declare their autonomy by controlling something. Their ritual of violence is meant to re-establish the line of demarcation between the self and the other.

Violence also exists in Welty's fictional world but her attention goes to those who are the victims of violence rather than its perpetrators. There is something of a paradox built into Welty's treatment of such events. The southern female child is surrounded by prohibitions, cautions, and warnings about the other, imposed by her culture and intended to hold her back, circumscribe her activity, and keep her ignorant of things that would excessively frighten her. Yet, strangely enough, the females in Welty's texts who do encounter the darkest sides of human nature do not seem to find them unbearable after all. Although violence and evil are evident in terrible events, they are not as annihilating as the myths about them had suggested. In *June Recital* (1980: 301), when Miss Eckhart is attacked by a black man who jumps out from behind a bush at her, the reader is not told about the nature or context of the attack or its impact on the victim herself, but rather of the community's reaction. Miss Eckhart's neighbors would like her to

leave town so they can forget what has happened there. "But Miss Eckhart stayed, as though she considered one thing not so much more terrifying than another." It is as if violence, too, turns out not to be totally alien or incomprehensible. It does not lead, as it so often does in Faulkner, to a reaffirmed sense of one's separateness. Despite their vigilance, Faulkner's characters are repeatedly caught off guard and overwhelmed by what they find. The horror they undergo in confronting previously unknown phenomena is much worse than anything to be found in Welty's fiction. Instead, Welty's female characters survive the violence against them, as if Welty suggested that it is part of life and can no more be avoided than its other dimensions. Not surprisingly, then, Welty does not depict characters for whom violence is a strategy for survival, and she rarely attempts to reveal the thoughts of characters committing such acts. The basic attitudes toward life that her characters reveal: acceptance, curiosity, love of it - are depicted as remaining unchanged when violence occurs even for those who are its victims. Whereas Faulkner's characters seem to hold a remarkably consistent view of the dangers of relationship and therefore value autonomy highly, whether they actually achieve it or not, Welty's stories address the topic of relationship in all its varieties. Her characters ponder the entire range of choices-from the loneliness and "freedom" of the wanderers to the comfort and potential "suffocation" of familial and community expectations.

In an early story with the title *The Key* she addresses directly the subject of the self's need for-and right to privacy and detachment. The story concerns Albert and Ellie Morgan, a married couple, both deaf, who are waiting for a train to take them on a long-planned trip to Niagara Falls. Ellie is one of those deaf characters in Welty's fiction who assume that those who can hear experience degrees of communication she can only imagine. She has worked and planned carefully for a long time to make the trip to Niagara Falls happen because she has been told that in standing up close to the railing and experiencing the roar and motion of the falling water, she and Albert will feel through their bodies what it is like to "hear".

Albert, shy and somewhat dominated by his wife, is the more serene of the two. He seems less ambitious and has gone along with the idea of the trip as much to please Ellie as himself. He and his wife are both aware that their marriage has been based as much on the loneliness they have felt, being deaf, as it has been on love, and to some degree, Albert shares Ellie's hope that when they have seen the Falls, they may "get along better, have more understanding ... even fall in love, the way other people have done." (1980: 32) As the story evolves, however, a basic difference in what Ellie and Albert hope for is revealed. Ellie longs for closeness, communication, the kind of love in which she and Albert will share all their thoughts with

one another. The sudden and unexpected arrival of a key that rolls into sight at Albert's feet, unheard, brings the differences between the two into sharper relief. Albert sees in the appearance of the key a symbol for the possibility of their having "something that we deserve ... happiness in Niagara Falls." (1980: 32) As he talks with Ellie about his pleasure in finding the key, Albert discovers that it has significance for him that he does not want to share with her: "He had almost shared it with her - you realized that. He frowned and smiled almost at the same time. There was something-something he could almost remember but not quite-which would let him keep the key always to himself. He knew that, and he would remember it later, when he was alone." (1980: 34) What Albert realizes is that Ellie's longing to share everything with him has left him no privacy. Ellie, he feels, perceives every limitation in their relationship as something to be worried over and analyzed, and Albert recalls how she would cling to her sense of unhappiness, "worry about it, talk about it ... Just try to tell her that talking is useless, that care is not needed." (1980: 35)

As long as you let it alone everything goes peacefully, like an uneventful day on the farm - chores attended to, woman working in the house, you in the field, crop growing as well as can be expected, the cow giving, and the sky like a coverlet over it all - so that you're as full of yourself as a colt, in need of nothing, and nothing needing you. But when you pick up your hands and start to talk, if you don't watch carefully, this security will run away and leave you. You say something, make an observation, just to answer your wife's worryings, and everything is jolted, disturbed, laid open like the ground behind a plow, with you running along after it. (1980: 35)

Albert has the capacity to enjoy life as it comes, without struggling for things he does not have. As for Ellie, "You saw by her face that she was undauntedly wondering, unsatisfied, waiting for the future." (1980: 36) The narrator offers a final judgment on Ellie's limitations: "And you knew how she would sit and brood over this as over their conversations together, about every misunderstanding, every discussion, sometimes even about some agreement between them that had been all settled-even about the secret and proper separation that lies between a man and a woman, the thing that makes them what they are in themselves, their secret life, their memory of the past, their childhood, their dreams. This to Ellie was unhappiness." (1980: 36)

Welty therefore recognizes the impossibility of holding a position of complete autonomy and isolation, just as she does the implications of too powerful an interdependence, and in *The Key*, through the narrator's voice, she advocates a love that is mutually supportive but not intrusive. She shows the importance of an ultimate privacy of the soul and depicts Ellie's vision of love as violating something essential in her husband. What Albert wants to withhold from his wife is some sense of the mystery and wonder of his

own individual experience of life, the joy of the unexpected: "The key had come there, under his eyes on the floor in the station, all of a sudden, but yet not quite unexpected. That is the way things happen to you always. But Ellie did not comprehend this." (1980: 34)

Welty explores and articulates the nature of a viable distance that allows for selfhood as well as for living. Apart from the discomfort and threat of an interdependence with others that precludes solitude, Welty's concern with distance is enhanced by her belief in an essential mystery at the heart of human experience, without analysis and attempts at communication which – her fiction suggests – seem doomed to fail.

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A PERSONAL APPROACH TO ALICE WALKER AS DEPICTED IN HER OWN ESSAYS

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Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, in a poor family of sharecroppers, as the eighth, last and unwanted child. When a child, because of a tragic accident in her right eye, she had such a gloomy view on what was going on around her that she strove might and main to cope with the events.

In 1952, when she was eight, she would play cowboys with her older brothers after arriving home from the picture show.

Back home, 'on the ranch', we pretend we are Tom Mix, Hopalong Cassidy, Lash LaRue (we've even named one of our dogs Lash LaRue); we chase each other for hours rustling cattle, being outlaws, delivering damsels from distress. Then my parents decide to buy my brothers guns. These are not 'real' guns. They shoot 'BBs', copper pellets my brothers say will kill birds. Because I am girl, I do not get a gun. Instantly I am relegated to the position of Indian. Now there appears a great distance between us. They shoot and shoot at everything with their new guns. I try to keep up with my bow and arrows. (1983:386)

And this went on until one day when, while standing on top of their so-called garage, holding her bow and arrow and looking over the fields, she felt "an incredible blow" in her right eye. "I look down just in time to see my brother lower his gun" (386).

This was in fact the turning point in Walker's childhood. From now on she feels the need to isolate herself from the people around and takes a refuge in reading. She reads a lot. The older she grows, the wider the area of her interests and the greater the number of books and writers who 'enter' her life: Jean Toomer, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, the Bronte Sisters, Simone de Beauvoir, Flannery O'Connor, Kate Chopin, Virginia Woolf, Ovid, Gwendolyn Brooks, E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, Tolstoy, Dostoevski, Turgenev, and a lot many others. When referring to the Russian literature, Walker says that she thought "that Russia must have something floating about in the air that writers breathe from the time they are born. The only thing that began to bother me, many years later, was that I could find almost nothing written by a Russian woman writer" (257).

Because of her wound in her eye, the eight-year-old young girl began to hate school, "where all the students seem to be buddy criminals"

(388), but where beginning with the age of four and until the age of eight she had been an exceptionally industrious pupil. The glob of whitish scar tissue, the hideous cataract in her eye terrified Walker to such an extent that for the coming six years, until the age of fourteen when she had the glob removed, she did not stare at anyone because she did not raise her head. The obsession of the scar did not disappear entirely even when the writer was thirty-eight. She remembers how a female journalist came to visit and interview her and asked her to agree to appear on the front cover of a magazine, but during the night Walker was extremely agitated for fear that if she did not get enough sleep, her eye “would be tired and wander”. Under the pretext that if she appears on the front cover her family will realize that she writes “scandalous books”, there hides the real reason, the one that she avoids the journalist’s invitation being afraid that her eye “won’t be straight”.

Her spectacular reconciliation with the world, and above all with her own self, comes when she is almost twenty-nine. In the volume-closing essay “Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self”, Walker confesses that since Rebecca’s birth she has worried about her daughter’s discovery that her mother’s eyes are different from other people’s. She was tormented by what explanation Rebecca would find, and when she reached a much-about-dreamed-of solution to her problem, she celebrated life for the second time. She started explaining that “Every day she [Rebecca] watches a television program called ‘Big Blue Marble’ “, and then Walker goes on:

It begins with a picture of the earth as it appears from the moon. It is bluish, a little battered-looking, but full of light, with whitish clouds swirling around it. Every time I see it I weep with love, as if it is a picture of Grandma’s house. One day when I am putting Rebecca down for her nap, she suddenly focuses on my eye. Something inside me cringes, gets ready to try to protect myself. All children are cruel about physical differences, I know from experience, and that they don’t always mean to be is another matter. I assume Rebecca will be the same.

But no-o-o-o. She studies my face intently as we stand, her inside and me outside her crib. She even holds my face maternally between her dimpled little hands. Then looking every bit as serious and lawyerlike as her father, she says as if it may just possibly have slipped my attention: ‘Mommy, there’s *a world* in your eye... And then, gently, but with great interest:’ Mommy, where did you *get* that world in your eye? (1983:392-393)

Walker’s relief and reconciliation are expressed in the fragment to come:

For the most part, the pain left then... Crying and laughing I ran to the bathroom, while Rebecca mumbled and sang herself off to sleep. Yes, indeed, I realized, looking into the mirror. There was a world in my eye. And I saw that it was

possible to love it, that in fact, for all it had taught me of shame and anger and inner vision, I *did* love it. (393)

Undoubtedly, a boundless feeling of gratefulness to her little daughter springs out from the dedication printed in the opening of Walker's first volume of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*: "TO MY DAUGHTER REBECCA / Who saw in me / what I considered / a scar / and redefined it / as / a world," and undoubtedly that her thoughts fly back melancholically to her childhood, when she herself was only two and highly enjoyed, until the age of six, the presence of her best friend Cassie Mae Terrell, whom everyone called 'Sister' Terrell.

Years later, the young revolutionary college student and writer enrolled for the movement which was to bring "the great change" regarding civil rights in the America of the sixties. "Civil Rights movement: What Good Was It?" is the title of an essay which explains, from a directly implied in person's point of view, how people should act and how "change" should occur. In "Lulls", she talks about "worthless" marches, and in "Recording the Seasons", about the way she moved to Mississippi to "tirelessly observe it" and ended by being so sick of the movement that "at the end of our street, when the car stopped for a final farewell, I could not, would not look back. I did not expect ever to set foot in Mississippi again" (224). Walker tells us how in spite of the hectic life of the sixties, when John Kennedy and Malcolm X had already been assassinated, they, the youth of the age, believed they could change America because they "were young and bright and held ourselves responsible for changing it" (*You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* 86).

Walker was fascinated by the history of the African-American people and did her best to make it known to her contemporaries, men or women, young or old. Thus, she was offered the job as a consultant in black history for *Friends of the Children* in Mississippi, meaning that she had to create black history materials for the teachers of the children in the *Headstart* centers, "since *Friends of the Children* realized how impossible it would be for teachers to teach 'blackness' to small children if they had no grasp of what history was themselves" (*You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* 27). Walker began her job very enthusiastically, but because of the low level of her "students", and the lack of financial support from the state, before she had the chance to go very far with her workshops and sessions she was fired. When in the essay "But Yet and Still the Cotton Gin Kept on Working" she refers to this sad experience, she says in a half ironical, half disappointed tone:

Try to tell a sixty-year-old delta woman that black men invented anything, black women wrote sonnets, that black people long ago were every bit the human beings they are today. Try to tell her that kinky hair is delightful. Chances are she will begin to talk “Bible” to you, and you will discover to your dismay that the lady still believes in the curse of Ham. (28)

When talking about Alice Walker we must not avoid pointing out her interest in native Americans, too. She perceives “Indians of Africa” and “Indians of America” as linked in their suffering. In her journal she writes of how she feels linked with Central Americans because of the mixed blood and the personal history of poverty that she shares with them. According to Walker, “one of the best thing happening on the planet” is the effort made by the *International Indian Treaty Council* to open channels of communication among Indians of all continents.

She traveled a lot. It is both from her essays and her novels that we get this information. Her inborn vocation for traveling may be a real-life explanation of the meaning of her name. In her essay “A Name Is Sometimes an Ancestor Saying ‘Hi, I’m With You’ “, Walker admits that “there are always people in history (or her story) who help us” (97), and one such person in her case was Sojourner Truth. The writer was so happy when she realized that out of those “synchronicities” of life one is to be found in her own case! She was astonished to find out that Sojourner meant ‘traveler’, ‘journeyer’, ‘wanderer’, ‘walker’, and ‘alice’ was the Old Greek term for ‘truth’. A happy combination which could suggest to the reader that the interpretation of the author’s name is *the writer’s journey in search of truth*. The fact that the two women were linked by the same concern for women’s rights, by the same mysticism, and also by their names delighted Walker and gave her a sense of power that came especially from the name they shared. She did her best to be a ‘walker’, and she kept her maiden name in the memory of her great-great-great-grandmother, who walked from Virginia to Georgia with two babies on her hips.

As opposed to her female ancestors’ journeys which were fated to take place within the county or, at most, within the country, Walker’s journeys abroad brought a fresh wave of feelings and interpretations regarding the World. She traveled to France, Cuba and Ghana, to Europe, South America and Africa, and essays like “Nobody Was Supposed to Survive: the Move Massacre”, “Hugging Fidel”, or “You Have All Seen” prove her experience as a ‘walker’.

An incorrigible confident person in human nature, she tried hard to transfer some of the most envious characteristics of the humans to plants and animals. The spirit of ‘animism’ was something she believed very much

in. She was sure that the beings in nature and human beings could harmoniously live together only if people could adopt a ‘milder-aggressive’ attitude.

Walker is ‘desperately’ in love with *life* and *nature*, and she worries very much about the dangers that threaten our planet. “Without plant life,” she explains, “human beings could not breathe,” motivating that “Plants produce oxygen.” She adds, “without free animal life I believe we will lose the spiritual equivalent of oxygen”. To her, the total disappearance of birds, one day, for instance, caused by the poisoning of the air, water, and food would result into the impossibility to describe to our children “the wonder of their flight”(192).

Sixty years old, after a hectic life full of ups-and-downs (she is successful in her writing career, but in her private life a lot of losses mark her existence – the loss of her parents, especially of her mother, the divorce from her husband, and, in the nineties, the separation from Robert Allan, her best friend), Alice Walker is currently living in Mendocino, California, with her dog Marley, and her...PAST!

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POWER ROLES IN ANGELA CARTER'S *THE LOVES OF LADY PURPLE AND MASTER*

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Angela Carter is a central figure of the British contemporary literature, whose novels 'are like nobody else's' as Salman Rushdie commented in the introduction to her collected short stories (Carter, 1996:1). As a writer she has found a particular voice which is clearly heard in the face of a male, Western literary tradition. Her irony and humour twisted the workings of conventions and social constructions, for her aim was to expose the ways in which our attitudes and beliefs have been shaped and to question their validity.

Her work evolved and became more refined over the years, but the roots are present from her first novel or her first volume of fairytales. One theme that I consider dominant and which is the focus of this paper is the problematic of power. This paper explores power roles in two short stories written at the beginning of Angela Carter's career as a writer.

The Loves of Lady Purple and *Master* belong to her first volume of short fiction, *Fireworks* (1974), out of four. It was written after her spending two years in Japan to experience the foreign and the two themes that cross the collection are loneliness and power under different forms. The novels she had published up to 1974 were realistic and claustrophobic. Could the same be said about the short stories? In order to investigate how the theme of power was approached I will answer some questions in relation to both stories.

Who are the dominators?

In *The Loves of Lady Purple* we are introduced to an Asiatic professor who is a puppet master. He has travelled widely with his cart, accompanied by his two assistants, his deaf nephew and a dumb girl, and the beginning of the story finds them in a dark and superstitious Transylvania.

The second story, *Master*, opens with the presentation of a passionate white hunter who has travelled to Africa in pursuit of exotic prey. He has changed location, climate, the colour of his skin and hair, and the pupils of his eyes have been eroded by the burning sun.

What is the source of their power?

In the case of the Asiatic professor, his skill is his mastery of manipulating dolls. It is, on the one hand, described as something magical and, as the story unfolds, the strings and the preparations necessary to put up the spectacle and exploit the audience's taste for magic are exposed, on the other hand.

The puppet master is always dusted with a little darkness. In direct relation to his skill he propagates the most bewildering enigmas for, the more lifelike his marionettes, the more godlike his manipulations and the more radical the symbiosis between inarticulate doll and articulating fingers. The puppeteer speculates in a no-man's-land between the real and that which, although we know very well it is not, nevertheless seems to be real. He is the intermediary between us, his audience, the living, and they, the dolls, the undead. (1996:40)

Before each show he instructs his assistants how to set the stage. The puppet master speaks a language that nobody understands literally. Yet, magically perhaps, in every place he stops he has printed straps of paper which summarise the story brought to life with the help of the dolls.

The white hunter is very skilful as well as a result of improving his killing techniques. We are informed that *to kill became the only means that remained to him to confirm he himself was still alive[...]* Slaughter was his *only proclivity and his unique skill.* (1996:76)

He has started with killing young boys, women and, having got bored with it, has taken to torrid zones to kill animals. His speciality are now the big cats and his favourite prey the jaguar.

Who are the dominated?

The puppet master in *The Loves of Lady Purple* has lived within the fairground all his life but the only time he feels at home is when he gives life to his favourite doll, whom he's called Lady Purple. It is a life-size doll, beautifully made of a white and delicate leather that makes it look real. She has long nails that look like weapons and a wig of black hair arranged in a complicated way.

In *Master*, the dominated are the people and the animals that become his prey, falling victims to his sadistic appetite which seems impossible to satisfy. In search for the new, he buys a girl from a tribe he meets on the way, in exchange for the spare wheel of his jeep.

What are the dangers threatening the dominators?

The men's desire to control is the motor of the action in both stories. It is a conscious act on their part, but will eventually turn against them. The Asiatic professor, the puppet master, lets nobody touch the doll Lady Purple. He brings her to life by pulling her strings, he makes her up by giving her a story to star in and the most important quality of the story is that it has to be captivating. The handbills given to the audience before each representation read:

Come and see all that remains of Lady Purple, the famous prostitute and wonder of the East!
A unique sensation. See how the unappeasable appetites of turned her at last into the very puppet you see before you, pulled only by the strings of lust.' (1996:44)

What is more magical than the story of a marvellous and murderous prostitute whose cruelty has turned her into wood? This is a self-reflexive question and its answer might explain the success of the puppet show and, stepping outside the story frame, that kind of magical aura in Carter's fiction drawing the reader to consume more of it. It is an unexpected twist in the story. The puppet master tells the audience that the doll that plays the role of the prostitute in the show is the evil woman herself, turned to wood. This is the catch used to bring more people to the show. The doll has thus her strings pulled to play herself. It performs her years of youth when she killed her adoptive parents and set fire to her house, her adolescence and her becoming a prostitute who played with men and later murdered them for pleasure. During the show Lady Purple is given different costumes to perform the dances of seduction and death. The Professor's invented story ends with the doll's playing Lady Purple's transformation into a wooden doll.

The white hunter in the second story has bought the primitive girl and abuses her sexually. His violence gets more intense every day. The girl has neither a name nor knowledge of the hunter's language, but is given both name and voice as the doll in the first story. The hunter calls the girl *Friday* and teaches her to call him *Master*.

The separation of realms is the second threat. I have identified the presence of two realms in each story, but their presence presupposes a connection that is closer than it appears at first sight.

In *The Loves Of Lady Purple* the two realms brought to the reader's attention are *reality* and *fiction*. They are kept separate textually and through the narrator's intervention. On the one hand we have what is real in

the story world, the life of the puppet master, and the story told in the show he puts on. In the text they are kept separate, as the story is given an introduction, a title, a new page and at its end the narrative voice describes the ritual of the puppet master dismantling the stage and placing the doll into its box next to the puppet master's bed. The same narrative voice breaks the magic flow of Lady Purple's story to remind the reader that all happens thanks to the professor's skill in pulling the strings.

But the Professor and his assistants immediately put away the dolls who were, after all, only mundane wood and, next day, the play was played again. (1996:44)

In *Master* the realms are *the human* and *the animal*. We are informed that the girl was born in the clan of the jaguar and she perceived herself as somewhat verging between the ghosts and the animals. A distinctive physical feature, similar to the doll in the other story is an immovable smile on her face. To her, Master is the personification of death, as she is totally unfamiliar with the concept of killing.

What happens is that the two realms merge in both stories and the men having the dominating position are unable to perceive it. This overlapping is marked in both stories through a story.

In *The Loves Of Lady Purple* it is the story of Lady Purple's life, in M it is a story about how the jaguar received eyes made of water to be able to see in the dark. Once the stories within stories are told the turning point occurs.

The narrative voice signals the *necromantic vigour* of the doll, the colour of her clothes is *a purple the colour of blood in a love suicide*, she is compared to a monstrous goddess, the image of *irresistible evil*. Time passes and the puppet master starts to feel the effects of old age. Despite this, the mime of Lady Purple and her dance grow better

As though his energy, channelled for so long into a single purpose, refined itself more and more in time and was finally reduced to a single, purified, concentrated essence, which was transmitted to the doll. (1996:48)

The primitive girl in *Master* can see in the dark and at night she sees the ghosts of the jaguar Master has killed. The hunter and the girl travel and they reach a point where there are no more roads, so Master has to abandon his jeep. He has his bottle with him and uses the spirits to heal his fever. The gun and the bottle are the only souvenirs of civilisation he has.

Apart from the incapacity to notice they've crossed to another realm, the puppet master and the white hunter face a third danger, that of underestimating the women's capacity to learn.

Lady Purple learns by *repetition* for she performs in the story of her life and death every day. The actions are dressing up, prostitution and murder. The girl in *Master* learns by *imitation*: first she is taught to eat cooked meat, then to carry Master's things. Once he trusts her, she gets to carry his gun and her desire is to learn his magic, that of annihilating animals during the day, so that she may summon their ghosts at night. As a result, she learns to kill and becomes a better hunter, having, nevertheless, one reservation – she cannot kill the jaguar.

The last danger, which proves fatal to the dominators is women's metamorphosis, which is in fact a crossing of boundaries.

The doll comes to life, jumps from fiction to reality and this is in fact what the puppet master has secretly desired all along. The doll is alive and does what she has been taught, she kills the professor, sets fire to the stage and heads for the nearest brothel in town, ending the story.

The metamorphosis in the second story is gradual. The girl is first unable to eat cooked meat, her fingernails turn to claws, her mouth cannot utter *Master* but purr, and the tribal markings on her body and her scars make her similar to a jaguar. Eventually, she shoots Master and, soon after, her skin becomes plush-like. She has turned into a jaguar, a hunter, herself.

Fireworks was written in the first part of Angela Carter's career and this simple reversal of power roles in these two stories anticipates her later novels about women who take charge and enjoy it. The seeds are present already, even if the novels written in the same period present women as victims.

Other themes that appear in *The Loves of Lady Purple* and *Master*, which she will later exploit to full effect are the predilection for foreign spaces that have a magical aura, her examination of the artificial and the grotesque, her exploration of human and animal instincts and her technique of writing back to the canon.

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**THE VOICE OF IMAGINED COMMUNITIES: READING SALMAN
RUSHDIE'S *THE SATANIC VERSES***

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It is difficult to read *The Satanic Verses* as if it were not a scandalous novel. Nevertheless, Rushdie's novel, published in September 1988, has become well known as a result of the fatwa next February, and the scandal that followed for more than a decade. (While Rushdie's other novels have been available in Hungarian for years, *The Satanic Verses* was only translated in 2004, and the translator still remained anonymous. It seems that the scandal is far from being over.) *The Satanic Verses* received an unparalleled attention both on behalf of critics and general readers, and it became Rushdie's most famous novel, despite the fact that *Midnight's Children* received the Booker Prize in 1993.

What I perform in this article is perhaps an impossible reading: I read *The Satanic Verses* as one among Rushdie's novels, a text among other texts that address questions concerning nation and identity, and I attempt to put the fatwa and the scandal in brackets. A critic suggested that we can read *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses* as a loose trilogy, and I also think that these novels form a certain group, if not a trilogy, among Rushdie's novels. These three novels address questions concerning the nation as an imagined community, as a slippery, discursive formation, and they struggle to find ways for it to exist within the transmutations of a postmodern space. All of them are novels about nations, narrating India, Pakistan, and England respectively: *Midnight's Children* focuses India (but England and Pakistan also appear), *Shame* on Pakistan (but India is also there), *The Satanic Verses* on England and India. The question I address in this article is how *The Satanic Verses* narrates the nation as an ambivalent, postmodern category in the context of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, and I leave the usual issues critics investigate, namely, the question of free speech and the respect of religious belief, behind.

The Satanic Verses is the most dubious about the nation among the three narratives of the "trilogy." Though *Midnight's Children* envisages the Indian nation as an entity verging between magic and impossibility, it still acts as the central trope around which the narrative revolves: the main character, Saleem Sinai, as well as the miraculous children of midnight, become allegories of the Indian nation in the novel. In *The Satanic Verses*, on the other hand, instead of allegories of India, or England, what we see is

the total carnival of tropes, perspectives, and fragments of various imagined communities.

The Voice

The trope that structures the discourse of the nation in *Midnight's Children* is the magic conference of one thousand and one children, more precisely, their voice that echoes in the main character's head. The nation almost literally becomes an imagined community in the novel: Saleem, due to an accident in his family's washing chest, discovers the voices of the children inside his head, and becomes an imaginary radio, echoing the "voices of India." In *The Satanic Verses*, on the other hand, what we have is not a community producing one thousand and one voices, but a man, Saladin Chamcha, called "the Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice" (60), and instead of the innocent magic that the children of midnight possess, what Chamcha is known for is his ability to imitate voices in a self-conscious and devilish way. I argue that voice becomes the trope around which the discourse of the nation is organised in both novels, and, in a way, it is related to magic in both cases, as the number 1001 suggests. But whereas in *Midnight's Children* the voice is a feature that characterises the trope of the nation, in *The Satanic Verses* it is the very nation that becomes one attribute of the Voice with capital V, and whereas in *Midnight's Children* the voice remains miraculous and innocent, in *The Satanic Verses* it becomes self-conscious and deceptive: a Voice that we cannot trust. This means that one way to understand how the nation becomes relocated in *The Satanic Verses* is to listen to the Voice that speaks in the novel.

The reader cannot trust this Voice. First, there is the voice of God and Satan, blasphemously intermingled. A voice speaks to the prophet Mahound through Archangel Gibreel, and performs the so-called "satanic verses incident": first, it informs Mahound that the intercession of three pre-Islamic goddesses in the Koran is desired. Then it tells him that the previous revelation was wrong, it came from Satan, and Mahound should make no compromise concerning the three goddesses. The source of the Voice never becomes clear in the novel: besides God and Satan, it might come from Mahound himself, who desires to hear the revelation so much that he moves the jaws of the Archangel. The novel never names Satan, yet there is a "me" in the text, usually italicised, that might be associated with him:

Gibreel, hovering-watching from his highest camera angle, knows one small detail, just one tiny thing that's a bit of a problem here, namely that *it was me both times, baba, me first and second also me*. From my mouth, both the statement and the

repudiation, verses and converses, universes and reverses, the whole thing, and we all know how my mouth got worked. (123)

This “me” sometimes interrupts the narrative, as if a satanic first person narrator were intervening into the third person narrative, popping up at crucial moments and then disappearing again. That is, both the voice that speaks to Mahound and the voice that speaks to the reader are unreliable, have no clear source, and this ambiguity is what really makes them Satanic - in the sense of how this novel imagines Satan. Quoting Daniel Defoe’s *The History of the Devil* as a motto, *The Satanic Verses* locates Satan in the air, in an ambiguous space that postmodern critics, such as Gayatri C. Spivak, often associate with the space of the signifier:

Satan, being thus confined to a vagabond, wandering, unsettled condition, is without any certain abode; for though he has, in consequence of his angelic nature, a kind of empire in the liquid waste of air, yet this is certainly part of his punishment, that he is... without any fixed place or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon. (Motto)

The Sound of History

I think *The Satanic Verses*, in search of various humanistic ideas such as nation, belief, and identity, always encounters this Voice and several other voices that somehow start to fill the space of the missing but desired metaphysical entities. It seems that the novel wants to believe that the voice is able to *become* the nation, history, and the past that otherwise appears to be entirely inaccessible and inconceivable. At one point Saladin Chamcha, the anglophile immigrant, attempts to define what Englishness means to him, ending up with the following rhapsody:

Of material things, he had given his love to this city, London, preferring it to the city of his birth or to any other; had been creeping upon it, stealthily, with mounting excitement, freezing into a statue when it looked in his direction, dreaming of being the one to possess it and so, in a sense, *become* it, as when in the game of grandmother’s footsteps the child who touches the one who’s it (‘on it’, today’s young Londoners would say) takes over that cherished identity; as, also, in the myth of the Golden Bough. London, its conglomerate nature mirroring his own, its reticence also his; its gargoyles, the ghostly footfalls in the streets of Roman feet, the honks of its departing migrant geese. (398)

In search of the secrets of Englishness, Saladin ends up desiring to hear the sound of the Roman’s footsteps and the voice of English geese. It is not the trace of the Romans’ that he is looking for, which would involve the

absence of the very thing that produces the trace, but he desires to possess London through listening to the impossible sound of presence. He wants to touch London, like children in the game of “grandmother’s footsteps,” as if a certain contiguity were needed for acquiring a desired identity. Instead of looking or gazing, hearing and touching become the metaphors through which the history of England is resurrected, as if Saladin desired a more immediate contact with “Englishness” than the eye can provide. He wants to be there when the sound of Roman footsteps was produced, as if, through his imaginary, he could participate in the very creation of the nation, in the very unisonance that appears to be the secret of “Englishness.”

It is interesting to note that the English nation is constituted in the novel through such glorious defeats as the conquest of Romans, as in the above reference, and the Norman Conquest in another passage. The Norman Conquest haunts the novel like a ghost: an eighty-eight-year-old character called Rosa Diamond imagines “Willie-the-Conk” and the Norman fleet landing on the British shore whenever the moon is full:

Nine centuries past, the Norman fleet had sailed right through this Englishwoman’s home. On clear nights, when the moon was full, she waited for its shining, revenant ghost. Best place to see ‘em come, she reassured herself, grandstand view. Repetition had become a comfort in her antiquity; the well-worn phrases, *unfinished business*, *grandstand view*, made her feel solid, unchanging, sempiternal, instead of the creature of cracks and absences she knew herself to be. – When the full moon sets, the dark before the dawn, that’s their moment. Billow of sail, flash of oars, and the Conqueror himself at the flagship’s prow, sailing up the beach between the barnacled wooden breakwaters and a few inverted skulls. (129-130).

The Conquest appears as an unchanging point of reference, imagined as the memento of a Norman castle on the shore, as a “see-monster petrified by time.” (129). The solid, petrified, unchanging vision constitutes a certainty that the cracking subject needs in order to exist, in order not to fall apart: the ghost of William the Conqueror makes her feel solid “instead of the creature of cracks and absences she knew herself to be” (130). Though, paradoxically, the vision of the Conquest is far from being a point of reference one can trust; it is nothing but an imaginary creation of Rosa’s mind, based on popular accounts of history, similarly to Saladin’s vision of the Roman’s presence in London.

The main difference between Rosa and Saladin is that Saladin is an Indian migrant in search of the secrets of Englishness, whereas Rosa is an *Englishwoman* set on the same “mission.” The difference the novel posits between the two experiences is that Rosa’s search is more traumatic, or, rather, that she is more involved in the collective trauma of being English.

Repetition constitutes the memory of the conquest that Rosa experiences not as a memory, but as the very occurrence of the experience, the haunting of a collective trauma - a collective ghost that literally *haunts*: “O I’ve seen things in my time, always the gift, the phantom-sight. - The Conqueror in his pointy metal-nosed hat, passing through her front door, gliding betwixt the cakestands and antimacassared sofas [. . .]” (130). Though, however, the “*ghostly* footfalls” of the Romans that Saladin desires to hear also appear as ghosts; even at this point the novel refrains from positing an insider (Rosa) versus outsider (Saladin) perspective. Rosa is more involved in the trauma, but Saladin’s vision is also affected by a certain haunting. Both the Roman and the Norman Conquests appear as haunting defeats that endow the cracking self with an unchanging solidity and a collective national identity, whether an identity one is supposed to have since her birth (Rosa), or desires to acquire (Saladin).

Ghosts are usually silent, yet this ghost of the Normans also produces a certain sound, similarly to the sound of the ghostly Roman footsteps: we can see the Conqueror “passing through the front door [. . .], like an echo resounding faintly through that house of remembrances and yearnings; then falling silent; *as the grave*” (130). The Conquest appears as an echo, which is, obviously, an echo of the supposedly original but undoubtedly imaginary experience. The echo is also a sound, just as the footfalls: both Saladin and Rosa want to possess an identity through participating in an imaginary unisonance enabling them to acquire (or retain) the imaginary essence of Englishness.

The Voice of Satan

Imagining the sound and the voice as the basis of the imagined community, the novel locates the very core of the nation in the most ambivalent, semi-Satanic category. Very crudely put, whereas *Midnight’s Children* imagines *India* as a radio transmitting the discordant voices of the miraculous children and *Shame* depicts Pakistan as a palimpsest that is so incoherent that it visualises itself in more than one allegories, *The Satanic Verses* imagines the English nation as an attribute of a slippery, unreliable voice.

In *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem discovers the voices of the midnight’s children when he is hiding in the bathroom, in a washing chest, in a place that is confined more than once. The situation is quite paradoxical, since it suggests that Saleem encounters the “imagined community,” which is the most “external” category imaginable, through moving into the most “internal” and enclosed spaces that appear to be like

Chinese boxes - into the house, into his bathroom, washing chest, and finally, into his own head. There is a similar movement in *The Satanic Verses*: many enclosed spaces appear to be the containers of the “secret” of the English nation. One such confined space, for instance, is a film studio in London where, after a long separation, Gibreel and Saladin finally encounter each other. The space takes a very emphatic position: Gibreel and Saladin act as the dialectical opposites of good and bad in the novel (though, of course, intermingled in a Rushdiesque way), and, their encounter initiates the apocalypse the narrative is heading towards. In the film studio we encounter a huge recreation of Dickensian London: the scenery and characters from Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* appear, guests and actors converge, and the whole space becomes a microcosm of the most English-English icons. The sound of Englishness appears again:

The reborn city, even rearranged, still takes the breath away; most particularly in that part of the immense studio through which the river winds, the river with its fogs and Gaffer Hexam’s boat [a character from *Our Mutual Friend*], the ebbing Thames flowing beneath two bridges, one of iron, one of stone. - Upon its cobbled banks the guests’ gay footsteps fall, and there sound mournful, misty, footfalls of ominous note. A dry ice pea-supper lifts across the set. (422)

The “misty footfalls” become elements of the scenery, as the Dickensian attribute “misty” suggests (the pea supper in the next sentence also refers to yellow fog). Gay footsteps become mournful and ominous, as if the Dickensian scenery were structuring the sound that is produced in the present moment. In a way, this scene fulfils the dream of Saladin and Rosa Diamond, since the sound echoes a moment of unisonance, creating the illusion of participating in the secret voice of Englishness.

That is, in a way, we end up hearing the voice of the nation in a confined space in both novels. This space substitutes for the outside world: the voices in Saleem’s head speak for (and instead of) the Indian nation, whereas the Dickensian microcosm becomes a substitute for England. The film studio turns out to be a most intertextual microcosm indeed: amidst the Dickensian scenery, Shakespeare appears, since it is this place where Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha start to play *Othello*:

What follows is tragedy. - Or, at least the echo of tragedy, the full-blooded original being unavailable to modern men and women, so it’s said. [. . .] My Chamcha may be no Ancient of Venice, my Allie no smothered Desdemona, Farishta no match for the Moor, but they will, at least, be costumed in such explanations as my understanding will allow. - And so, now, Gibreel waves in greeting; Chamcha approaches; the curtain rises on a darkening stage. (424-425)

Re-enacting Shakespeare also appears as an echo, just like the echo of the Norman Conquest: Shakespeare, through his characters, becomes a resurrected icon in the novel, participating in the traumatic haunting of the past. *The Satanic Verses* puts various inconsistent elements upon one another (Romans, Normans, Dickens, Shakespeare, and so on), which appear to take the reader closer to the secret of the imagined community. But when “the curtain rises on a darkening stage” (425), instead of the secret, what we find is the mask and voice of actors. Instead of the voice of the one thousand and one children of midnight, we encounter the Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, “the Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice” (60).

Both Gibreel and Saladin are actors. Saladin’s major occupation is the imitation of voices - that is where his name, “the Man of a Thousand Voices” (60) comes from. He works for a radio programme called the Aliens Show (the very name suggests that he is the prototype of the alien migrant), becoming famous in England as a Voice without a face: “They pay you to imitate them, as long as they don’t have to look at you. Your voice becomes famous but they hide your face” (60). Later, as Iago, it is his voice again that seduces Gibreel-Othello through the telephone to kill Allie-Desdemona. Using his ability to imitate voices, Saladin whispers seductive messages that drive Gibreel into desperate jealousy:

*“I like coffee, I like tea,
I like things you do with me.”*

“Tell her that, the voice swooned, and rang off.” (444). Saladin’s “magic” (since one thousand and one is a magic number, despite all) consists in his talent for mimicry, which suggests that *The Satanic Verses* puts the self-conscious voice of the mimicking actor in the place of the naively innocent voices of the midnight’s children. The voice is undoubtedly satanic, seductive, and unreliable: it seduces Gibreel as it seduces the reader to take part in a game we cannot resist.

The Sound and the Voice

At this point we have to make a distinction between voice and sound. So far I have used these two metaphors more or less synonymously, since, I think, they are both related to the novel’s search for magic unisonance. The sound involved in historical traumas and the voice of the actor on the stage of Dickensian London speak about the same thing: they both address the secrets of the imagined community. (In Hungarian, we have only one word for voice and sound: “hang”.) Yet the difference between them is that the

voice is produced self-consciously: Saladin's mimicry appears as a self-conscious and subversive gesture, echoing Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry. It suggests that the English can be imitated, and this imitation conceals no presence or identity behind its mask:

In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of representation of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. Its threat, I would add, comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory 'identity effects' in the play of power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no 'itself' (Bhabha, 1994: 90).

That is, mimicry becomes a menace, raising several questions concerning whether there has ever been an originary Englishness, a presence prior to imitation, or is presence always produced through this subversive gesture of the mimic man. In other words, Saladin's voice, though satanic and unreliable, also carries the promise of challenging arbitrary constructions, such as the image "Englishness" parading as originary and coherent but hiding the fact that it is nothing but a compilation of irreconcilable elements, ranging from Dickens's London to Shakespeare's *Othello*.

The sound, on the other hand, evokes a presence of Englishness. Or, at least, instead of laughing in its face, the sound sets us out in search of such an essence. Unlike the voice, the sound is unselfconscious: the voice is produced, whereas the sound takes place; it happens. The ghostly footsteps of the Romans and William the Conqueror as a resounding echo do not seem to involve any agency on behalf of the subject. Both appear as a momentary unisonance, a sudden initiation. In this sense, the sound in *The Satanic Verses* might be compared to Cathy Caruth's (1996) concept of the voice that is released in traumatic encounters (though the terms are misleading, since what is voice in her theory becomes sound in mine.) Caruth depicts the traumatic experience as "the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that [the subject] himself cannot fully know." (Caruth, 1996: 3) Though *The Satanic Verses* might not witness such a "truth" that, according to Caruth, is the basis of traumatic experiences, the historical "sound effects" in the novel definitely point towards an unknowable and non-verbal dimension of the subject's encounter with history. The presence of non-verbal sounds also suggests that the Satanic-Angelic Voice that dominates the novel can never really tell us the story of a nation: there remains a dimension that does not become incorporated into the repertoire of the all too self-conscious Voice that speaks in the novel.

The sound and the voice are two sides of the same coin: another dialectic opposite in the chain opposites in the novel, ranging from the opposition of Gibreel and Saladin to opposites such as England and India, sand and water, male and female, and so on. To put it simply: we can read the sound and the voice as two aspects of how the English nation is imagined in *The Satanic Verses*: no longer a magic community of midnight's children producing miraculous but irreconcilable voices, the nation becomes an attribute of a mimic voice interrupted by traumatic sound effects.

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BRITISH LITERARY HERITAGE IN THE NOVELS OF PATRICK WHITE

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Patrick White (1912-1990), Australia's first Nobel Prize winner, read Modern Languages in Cambridge and his writings have affinities with European literature, especially, though not exclusively, with the modernism that was so much part of the cultural ambience in England in the thirties. However, that was also the reason why his work at first was not welcomed in Australia, where 'australianness' had for a long time been major indicator of literary value. This paper is an attempt to point out and analyse the way Patrick White used British literary tradition and built it into his own unique vision. Focusing on the novels of White's middle period the paper explores Bunyan's spiritual allegory, Lawrence's criticism of Western civilisation and the theme of marriage and Joyce's epiphanies as found in White's novels.

White shows spiritual progress of man and his protagonists are harried into pursuing illumination, either to fulfil their character or their destiny. Because his characters act out a role (as visionary, illuminate, divine fool, quester) and because aspects of the main characters are projected into other supporting characters, the fiction is to a great extent quasi-allegorical dramatisation. These spiritual questers are regarded as failures or even crazy or insane by the society immersed in everyday struggle for worldly success. The quest for reality is preferred over the complacent life in the world of illusions which is severely criticised as spiritually stultifying. Finally, in White's opinion the realistic novel is remote from art; the novel should heighten life, should give one an illuminating experience instead. The illuminating experience is communicated through those characters that possess the resources necessary for an inner quest. They are rewarded by moments of revelation.

Voss is an account of an expedition into the desert where White tells a new myth of colonisation enriched by psychological and metaphysical aspects giving the characters, their actions and relationships and the surroundings – urban and desert – symbolic meanings, thus opening the possibilities of a multilevel interpretation of the novel conceived upon a central metaphor of the voyage of discovery as an exploration of the self, the nature of man and his relationship to the world. On the allegorical level Voss's journey represents a progression of human soul towards God and it also includes a vision of the absolute the soul strives to reach. The narrative framework of a dream vision, which White introduces in climactic scenes of

the protagonist's spiritual growth, derives from the medieval allegorical tradition where *The Vision of Pierce Plowman* stands as a supreme example. Langland in his work, as well as White (1981) in *Voss*, combines an effective social satire and spiritual allegory of human soul in search of redemption. Bunyan's (1996) *The Pilgrim's Progress* follows the same pattern of spiritual autobiography so that the account of Christian's journey from the doomed City of Destruction to the Celestial City is given as the narrator's dream. However, the parallels between *Voss* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* run beyond the composition and narrative framework to include various episodes of White's novel. The complacent mid-19th century Sydney society, governed by stern principles of reason and regulated by legal and ethical norms of conduct, matches the description of Mount Sinai where there is a village named Morality where Mr Legality lives with his son Civility. Both places denote the deceptive possibilities of fulfilment and redemption. Voss's sojourn in the seductively idyllic pastoral surroundings of the station at Rhine Towers, connoting an earthly paradise, corresponds to Christian's sojourn in the paradisaal setting of the Delectable Mountains. Furthermore, Voss's stay in the squalid and brutal station of Jildra, where its owner Boyle, an aristocrat gone savage, has chosen to rot slowly in filth and lives in the house like a warped skeleton, is equivalent to Christian's stay in Interpreter's house, where the detestable sights of a dusty room and a savage man in cage symbolise neglected human soul. The road to the Celestial City leads through the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death, which is reflected in Voss's experience which inexorably results in the gradual destruction of his pride and brings him several times face to face with death, where both White and Bunyan borrow the Old Testament symbols of desert and wilderness. On the road leading to salvation both authors place the same obstacle of a swollen river the crossing of which marks the initiation into a new form of life. The people that Christian meets on his pilgrimage and who accompany him for a while represent various attitudes to life, the same as the members of Voss's expedition and the people Voss encounters in Sydney. For example, in the character of Faithful Bunyan pictures the possibility of salvation through self-sacrifice and suffering in faith. Such an alternative and its outcome White represents in the character of Palfreyman, who surrenders to the Aborigines in order to save the rest of the party. Mr Feeble-minded is led by his innocence and pure soul in the same way as Harry Robarts, who is weak in wit but strong in innocence and devotion to Voss. The man of words, poet Le Mesurier, hiding behind his cynicism and irony fails to come to the end of the road of salvation described in his poems, which equals him with the character of Talkative whose strength is solely found in his tongue. Finally, both writers

use the role of a spiritual guide and advisor, which is represented in the character of Evangelist in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and in the character of Laura in *Voss*.

Australia also experienced the social changes that occurred in Western civilisation in the 20th century while being spared the catastrophes that accompanied these changes in Europe. This historic background of social change is invoked in most of White's novels. Technical innovation and experimentation, the most prominent characteristics of modernism, became in the hands of Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence and others the means of recording the disintegration of traditional social values. White shares with the modernists that gleeful malice in the social satire. His early work reveals that his disdain for society was conditioned by literary influences at least as much as by observation of the actual. Throughout he retains a stock modernist response to society at large. There is the familiar complex of preferences for the natural, the organic and the communal as against the artificial, the mechanical and the 'social' (conceived in terms of modern, mass urban society). White sees the modern age and progress as destructive forces. Emptiness, sterility and rootlessness seem always to have struck Patrick White as dominant elements of Australian life, accompanied by the striking isolation of the individual. Moreover, those are aspects of human life in general and Australian milieu provided the necessary symbol. In *Voss* we find an exposure of the middle class which had already established itself in the young country. It is a satirical social criticism and equally satirical account of the ways of a class that lives in a manner as undenyng as it is materialistic and superficial. It is a class that has no feeling for the unique features of nature and has only contempt for and non-acceptance of the land they have settled in. In *Riders in the Chariot* criticism is directed to the culture of suburbia. White creates an imaginary suburb, Sarsaparilla, hellish suburbia, a spiritual desert in which the mind is the least of possessions and where the grey, conformist forces within society perpetually seek to crucify the individual, the group, who dares to be different. The climactic scene in the novel is the pseudo-crucifixion of Himmelfarb, the Jew, one of the four visionaries in the novel, by his fellow workers in the factory.

Furthermore, White belongs to the 'moderns' who are not satisfied with merely realistic description of society around them, but are concerned with the response of the individual to the totality of experience, not simply social life. It is possible to trace back to Lawrence White's conception of nature as a possible source of warmth to his 'elect' in a cold world of status symbols. Moreover, White shares with Lawrence a fellow-sympathy with those who are participants in the agitation of living. White and Lawrence also have a similar lack of sympathy towards what they consider the sterile

and the dead in society (their judgement on those who have fossilised into rigidly conventional behaviour and into a mechanical materialism).

In White's novels, as in Lawrence's, this preoccupation with subjective experience is accompanied by an often explicit rejection of society – more, of civilisation – and a search for a harmony with nature that man's inner instinctual being demands. Accordingly, the search, or the absence of it, is the dividing line between the characters both writers create. Patrick White's principal characters are divided into *the living* and *the dead* (which is the title of his second novel as well). The explorers and artists, the true spiritual seekers, regardless of their physical or mental status, belong to 'the living', while those devoted to a materialist way of life, concerned with permanence and safety, are 'the dead' ones. 'The living' are exceptional, different and, most of all, isolated – they estrange themselves from the patterns of a bourgeois society, which in turn rejects them. Similarly, Lawrence does not oppose life to death proper, but to a kind of living death which is the result, for Lawrence, of degenerate modern existence. 'We have to choose between the quick and the dead', he writes in his 1925 essay 'The Novel': 'The quick is God-flame, in everything ... the sum and source of all quickness, we will call God. And the sum and total of all deadness we may call human.' (Williams, 1997:13) Underpinning this is a bitter critique of industrialised, over-cerebral humanity as well as, at its opposite, a celebration of life forms and artistic expressions which have freed themselves of 'deadness'. The living people are in touch with the source, and the source is represented in the key term 'life' (or quickness). 'Life' is Lawrence's governing philosophical principle and it is present within the natural organic and inorganic world, and we lose touch with it at our peril. The betrayal of 'life' is at the root of Lawrence's ongoing critique of Western consumerism and industrial development.

White (1974) frequently invites comparison with Lawrence, most consistently in *The Tree of Man* but also by his general readiness to probe the roots of experience and his overriding concern with man in nature. White seems to share with Lawrence a contempt for modern mass civilisation, is concerned with deeper levels of awareness than society can provide, and explores the possibility, at least, of individual fulfilment in and through nature. Both Lawrence and White lament the civilisation, embodied in 'red rust' of industrial housing in Lawrence and 'fibro homes' or 'brick boxes' in White, creeping ever nearer and threatening to natural domains. Consequently, both writers seem to be driven by a pantheistic impulse to search for 'life' in nature, to find God embodied in nature, to see nature as an instrument as well as the setting of human salvation and fulfilment. In Lawrence's 1929 essay 'New Mexico' he advocates religious practice

within which 'the whole life-effort of man was to get his life into direct contact with the elemental life of the cosmos, mountain-life, cloud-life, thunder-life, air-life, sun-life. To come into immediately *felt* contact, and so derive energy, power, and a dark sort of joy.' (Williams, 1997:19) The same idea lies at the heart of the title of White's novel *The Tree of Man* (1974) which metaphorically equals man with the tree thus reflecting one of the main elements of White's vision that a firm connection with nature leads to illumination and for the transient man opens the door to a transcendent, eternal reality termed God. It means that man in order to grow (spiritually), that is, to stretch to God, and reach a higher level of existence has to be firmly rooted in nature, to be part of nature, to be one with the earth in the same way as the roots of a tree have to be firmly rooted in earth if the tree is to be strong, to grow and branch. Moreover, the tree is a powerful symbol of totality of existence because it includes the four elements: earth, which holds its roots; air, which holds its visible parts; water, which is drawn from the earth by its roots; and fire, most dramatically evoked by bushfires. The connection with the man, Stan, is made by means of traditional motives of drought, storm, flood and fire, which are the major factors in the life of the protagonist. Stan typically achieves his moments of lucidity in the presence of these elemental forces in nature, and the rhythms of the Parkers' life are related to the rhythms of nature, each phase of their marital life underlined by one of the catastrophes.

The character of Mary Hare in *Riders in the Chariot* (1984) is the most fully of all White's characters conceived in accordance with the idea of salutary power of nature. The four riders represent four ways of redemption, illumination or fulfilment (depending on the level of interpretation): by means of faith (Himmelfarb), love understood as *agape* (Mrs Godbold), art (Alf Dubbo) and identification with natural world (Miss Hare). Mary Hare is a nature mystic who experiences a sense of union with natural objects and creatures. She feels that she is part of everything around her. She recalls 'occasions when she had lost her identity in those of trees, bushes, inanimate objects, or entered into the minds of animals' (White, 1984:83). When enquired by her housekeeper about her beliefs, she confesses to believing in a thunderstorm, wet grass, patches of light, and stillness. Her God is called Nature and her ecstatic experience of nature is primarily a religious experience. Nature is the source by which her spirit finds refreshment and renewal. In Lawrence (1958), nature - the deep non-self - can be swooned into and the ego dematerialised. Thus comes a fuller understanding of the self; though as Ursula's experience with the horses shows towards the end of *The Rainbow*, this rebirth can be terrifying.

The tree in *The Tree of Man* is also a symbol of continuity and regenerative power of nature and White relates it to the idea of man's ability to last through his posterity. *The Tree of Man* is the chronicle of a rural family traced across three generations and as such invites a comparison with Lawrence's (1958) novel *The Rainbow*, especially in exploring the changes in relationships between men and women against the background of social changes. The time frame of *The Rainbow* is from around 1840 up to the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a period witnessing the gradual disappearance of natural landscape due to industrial expansion accompanied by the disappearance of spontaneity of man, ever more suppressed by mechanical organisation, who is forced to spend his life in the darkness of the underworld symbolised in mines. The three generations reflect the changes in society due to industrialisation so that *The Rainbow* can be read as an exploration of progressive paralysis of the modern industrial world in the area of the most intimate human relationships. Although *The Tree of Man* spans three generations, its main focus is on Stan and Amy Parker, that is, the first generation, and the way the progress is reflected in their relationship.

The first relationship of *The Rainbow* is that between Alfred Brangwen and his wife. They live on the river bank as farmers, full of natural life and freshness inspired by natural surroundings. They are part of nature and nature is the corner stone of their life and relationship in marriage, their lives governed by the cycle of nature and seasons. While turning more towards the city, the desire will emerge that life is no longer lived in the rhythm of changing seasons but according to the rhythm of a working machine and the logics of economical functioning. Carefully premeditated and calculated will and mind become not only the center of economic but also of the most intimate human life. The scenery is also changing, cut by channels and mines with the singing of birds substituted by the shrieks of steam engines. In a similar manner, the early stage of the Parkers' marriage is marked by a harmonious relationship on their remote farm where they find consolation, support and satisfaction in each other in everyday struggle to scratch a living from and domesticate hostile surroundings of the bush. However, as civilisation draws closer and the area becomes more populated turning into a settlement which gets its name, a post office and a store, Amy is attracted by new possibilities of modern life while Stan holds on to the last remnants of pastoral life and becomes more engaged in his metaphysical quest, the quest for understanding, his search for the grounds of his belief.

The second relationship of *The Rainbow*, the one between Tom Brangwen and Lydia Lensky, shows the first impact of civilisation and

urbanisation. Their love is purely sensational, 'a flower without a root', that is, it is divorced from nature. This middle step between full understanding and fruitful communication and utter absence of communication is also seen in Stan and Amy's marriage when the only contact between them is reduced to brief moments of sexual desire.

The third generation, Lydia's daughter by her first husband, Anna, and Tom's nephew, Will Brangwen, displays a discrepancy of mental and spiritual longing reflected in Anna's inability to come to terms with Will's religious inclinations so that they fail to establish any meeting of minds. Their love is killed by Anna's calculating and rational mind and self-conscious attitude the result of which is the loss of natural practices and mechanisation of love, the mechanical rhythm of arguing, to be more precise. The novel then moves on to their daughter, Ursula Brangwen, and her developing consciousness. Her relationship with Anton Skrebensky shows how consciousness paralyses love as well as desire resulting, as with Skrebensky, in impotence. There is no emotion whatsoever or passion, just plain indifference, they do not even argue. So, when he leaves to take part in the Boer war she has an intense relationship of a lesbian nature with Winifred Inger, a teacher at the school where Ursula is a student-teacher, which can be read as a desperate substitution for a natural relationship. Neither of these relationships proves to be satisfactory for her. The corresponding phases of the Parker's life show the 'machinery of their lives' and 'the mechanics of the face', the turning of love into habit with the distance between them filled with doing little things for each other. The final split between Stan and Amy, reflected in the utter lack of communication, is marked by her intense adulterous sexual relationship with a commercial traveller, which is an expression of her frustrating inability to understand Stan, on the one hand, and her romantic and dreamy strain for years suppressed by the environment, on the other. However, Amy's 'experiment' with the commercial traveller is a futile act of fulfilment as well as Ursula's with Winifred and as her attempt to live an independent life as a teacher. She is finally left alone not being able to go through with the marriage and with Skrebensky marrying someone else. Amy is also ultimately left alone after Stan's final moment of enlightenment which comes just before his death. He 'marries' or joins the One in his death; the One, the hidden reality or God he has been striving to comprehend all his life.

It can be concluded that both Lawrence and White chronicle the impediments that pervert the original instinct in man to love. They record difficulties and perversities of love rather than its fulfilment. They choose to write of a more strenuous type of love, not the contentment of love

achieved, but the perplexity, struggles and torments of love thwarted or distorted.

Joyce is also one of major influences on White and this can be clearly seen in the fact that White uses the same literary device of epiphany in his spiritual biographies. Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* follows the development of an artist through the development of his consciousness and his spiritual growth. Crucial moments in the life of Stephen Dedalus are marked by epiphanies, sudden moments of revelation, clear insight and condensed intuition, moments of enlightenment. Each epiphany is a symbol of a completed phase in Stephen's life (for example, Christmas dinner, the visit to his father's school, the girl in the river). However, White does not simply copy Joyce's mechanism but makes it more complex as he works on it to adjust it to his artistic purposes. Joyce's epiphany generally has three segments: firstly, a shape is detected; secondly, the harmony and concord of the scene are grasped and finally, the meaning of the experience is understood.

White's epiphany is a moment in which the character has a fleeting experience of a spiritual reality underlying the phenomenal world, a reality the existence of which he knows by intuition and spends his life searching for and trying to become part of. This reality in White's novels often bears the name of God because White employs Christian terminology to communicate the incommunicable experience. Although the timeless moments in White take different forms, they have the same rhythm and the same features. They tend to be organised around the movement of three stages of spiritual growth in which arrogance or a sense of pseudo-divinity gives way to humility or even despair, which is, in turn, replaced by a moment of final revelation and return to God. Within this rhythm Peter Beatson (1977:75-78) distinguishes six component elements which cluster around the central event. Firstly, these moments begin with some kind of transition in which the character moves out of his mundane setting into a condition of expectancy. Secondly, the world of sense impressions is heightened to an almost hallucinatory pitch, although never completely obliterated, which is also often found in Joyce's epiphanies, especially peculiar combinations of colours which makes the scene as if seen through stained glass. Thirdly, strange emotions of love, tranquility and fulfilment spread around the character. Fourthly, there is often a profound sense of communion with another or with the nature. Fifthly, mythical or archetypal resonances grow out of the particular images of the world of here and now which momentarily lift the plane of the action from the temporal to the eternal. Finally, light – whose source is only apparently natural – suffuses the scene, and hints that this is, indeed, a moment of illumination.

Epiphanies for White's characters are intimations of worlds beyond their experience. For example, for Stan they come through reading Shakespeare, or hearing talk of 'gold and ebony' on a stranger's lips, or as he goes about his work on the evening after a thunderstorm. He is half-aware of a revelation that has approached, but has not yet come. Such fleeting moments occur to characters throughout their lives, but they tend to centre around two key encounters with the heart of the mystery. The first occurs during the height of maturity and is both a casting down and a lifting up. It humbles the individual who may have become over-confident of his self-sufficiency, but at the same time it is a foretaste, a promise and a pledge. It rewards him for the perseverance up to this point, lifts him for a moment onto a higher plane where he glimpses the numinous world behind the forms of nature, and then drops him back into the stream of becoming. Such a pledge is given to Stan Parker during the storm, to Himmelfarb and Mary Hare in their glimpses of the Chariot. The road to be followed after this first encounter is often more difficult than that which led up to it. If the road is followed, however, and the quester sincerely tries to live out the implications of the mystery that has been revealed, then his lifetime will be crowned by the second appearance of God. The second encounter with eternity is a fulfilment of the promise, the redemption of the pledge and marks the end of characters' lives, their becoming one with the timeless source. This reveals the different nature of Joyce's and White's epiphanies. Although both writers use them to mark major stages in characters' development, Joyce's epiphanies are complete in themselves while White's are cumulative, leading to the final one.

The successful synthesis of the allegorical tradition, Australian history, Australian traditional novel and modern European literature in White's novels confirms the significant role of Patrick White in the development of Australian literature.

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**LIBERATION THROUGH ATAVISM:
POST-*HUMAN* FIGURES IN DAN SIMMONS'S HYPERION
NOVELS**

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Dan Simmons's wildly entertaining and highly intellectual HYPERION novels adhere to a strong environmental ethic based on the fundamental ideas of Darwinian evolution. Of the various galactic races featured in the tetralogy—all mutated human forms—the Ousters and Ouster-affiliates (Templars and some old-style humans) live in an ecologically conscious way, respecting their environments and morphing their bodies through genetic modification and nanotechnology to fit those habitats. *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, *Endymion*, and *The Rise of Endymion* warn against the excessive development of machines. Ousters keep machines at bay, their major equipment remaining their bodies that are mutated to respond to continuously changing natural environments and keep up with the forces of natural selection. Most Ousters bear animal features. I will attempt to show that in the flight from the machine-dominated universe atavistic bestiality becomes the grounds for an organic ethic in the HYPERION tetralogy. The novels display the concept of the human in a radically novel context, creating an understanding of the posthuman—in an almost direct opposition to cyborg ontology—balanced on the verge of the prehuman or abhuman.

The HYPERION novels depict two trajectories of human evolution. One is the Ouster evolution, an eco-friendly, genetic mutation aiming at biological accommodation to various habitats on alien worlds; the other is the co-evolution of human beings in the Hegemony (and the later Pax) and the Artificial Intelligences or AIs (the so-called TechnoCore, an equivalent of William Gibson's cyberspace) that enhance yet undermine the global welfare of humans. The novels depict the ongoing struggle for power and TechnoCore's true desires to obliterate the human race. This history of corruption, the Faustian bargain between humankind and the machine—not unlike Donna Haraway's "informatics of domination" (2001:2281) or Herbert Marcuse's "technocracy"—nullifies the idea of a potential peaceful symbiosis of Hegemony citizens and the AIs. In Simmons's dystopia we are not "brothers and sisters to our machines" (Dyson 1998:x).

Simmons's dark diagnosis extends to the utter extremes. Hegemony and Pax history shows the paths of man and machine first converge in a symbiotic relationship, then suddenly bifurcate through an apocalyptic warfare. The TechnoCore's colonizing tendencies slowly come to the

surface: the bodiless AIs, it turns out, operate within an “offbeat” hardware environment—they utilize the neurons of the millions of unsuspecting people stepping in and out of “farcasters,” the atomizing-teleporting devices that have revolutionized transportation. Beside enslaving the minds and bodies of Hegemony citizens, the AIs are also creating an Ultimate Intelligence for themselves, as an attempt to finalize their awkward mimesis of human evolution and to gain total independence from and control over their creators. God comes last for the AIs, conjuring up images of Frank J. Tipler’s “omega point,” Terence McKenna’s “transcendental object at the end of time” (Dery 1996:9), or Olaf Stapledon’s words in “Interplanetary Man:” ““God, who created all things in the beginning, is himself created by all things in the end”” (qtd. in Dyson 36). This “apotheosis of technology” (Baudrillard 1996a:102) is a direct result of the building of the farcasters, devices of wholly AI design.

Kevin Warwick’s warning in *March of the Machines*—“the control of machines building machines is critical” (1997:239)—applies here^a. Already with the farcaster network the TechnoCore have stepped beyond the limits of humanly conceivable technology, but with the creation of an UI the AIs would irrevocably move beyond human understanding and control, and would be able to, so to speak, shed the outer layer of human civilization as a worn-off skin. Warwick theorizes that machines, once they have the intelligence and consciousness of a human being, will not let themselves be turned off by a simple flick of the switch (214). His speculation that “[m]issiles and other military weapons and vehicles are obviously an important driving force in the push for more and more intelligent machines” (241) conjure up terrifying images of hi-tech war from *Hyperion*. The AIs lead a terrible attack against the peaceful Templars: “[. . .] a hundred-meter-wide beam skipped like a tornado through the forest less than a kilometer from the Worldtree. The ancient forest exploded in flame, creating a corridor of fire rising ten kilometers into the night sky” (Simmons 1990:372).

The excess of technology drives humanity into near-slavery in *HYPERION*. Samuel Butler’s anti-industrialist thoughts from 1863 ring as true for Simmons’s novels as for our time:

The machines are gaining ground upon us; day by day we are becoming subservient to them; more men are daily bound down as slaves to tend

^a Warwick himself is a designer and tester of new and intelligent machines. He is also to be regarded as a genuine cyborg: he has successfully implanted various chips in his body that communicate with the hardware environment around him.

them; more men are daily devoting energies of their whole lives to the development of mechanical life. (qtd. in Dyson 1998:25)

As if to plead guilty, Ummon, the AI, professes in verse:

We enslaved you
With power/
Technology/
Beads and trinkets
Of devices you could neither build nor understand\\
(Simmons 1995:421)

As the AIs' true intentions come to the surface, the TechnoCore is seen more as a *parasite* than a symbiont. With the so-called "cruciforms," which the world-ruler Catholic Church (the Pax) so willingly utilizes in *Endymion*, comes the direct instrument of extermination. The cruciforms—*seemingly organic* parasites that, by being planted upon a human's chest, can store their genetic data and can revive the deceased host—each turn out to be an AI individual, tormenting or killing the host at will. When at the climax of *The Fall of Hyperion* Meina Gladstone, the Hegemony's CEO, decides to cut the cord—to "*cauterize*" the machine from the body of humanity through destroying the farcaster system with the whole establishment of the TechnoCore in it (479)—she is unaware that the AI individuals have already transferred from the farcasters to the cruciforms. They have become mobile, traveling on the bodies of their human hosts, among them the most prestigious in the later Pax's administration, like the pope and his cardinals. As Mark Dery emphasizes, "technology is inextricably woven into the warp and woof of our lives" (1996:14). Even worse, the inhuman AIs manage to penetrate the heart of human civilization itself.

Discussion of the human/inhuman in *HYPERION* has to surrender any dichotomizing tendencies and enter the field of the posthuman, since the novels depict not only one but many types of human beings—Lusians, Templars, Ousters, even semi-organic Androids, many of whom are inscribed on the borderlands of taxa and rigid definitions. N. Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* argues that discussion on the posthuman is "opening up new ways of thinking about what being human means" (1998:248). *HYPERION*, too, opens up novel paths for the definition of human by simply administering a rupture in the history of the human race: with the quasi-nuclear holocaust of the Great Mistake, Earth's inhabitants are forced to leave their beloved planet in a migration later epitomized as the "Hegira" (taken by Simmons, of course, from Muslim

history). Humans have no other choice than evolve biologically and technologically—into different human types fitting the new habitats—to survive the world-wide trauma. Of these types the bestial-monstrous Ousters are the most interesting, since they are not only the weirdest in outlook and attitude but also *The Rise of Endymion* offers them as a kind of key in resolving the galactic crisis the human race is driven toward by the pandemonium of events. We see Gould and Eldredge’s “punctuated equilibrium” (1997:68) or “jerky evolution” (Dawkins 1988:242) augmented in a fantastic way in the HYPERION saga: whereas the time of the full development of a new taxon, by the estimate of G. Ledyard Stebbins, should normally be about a hundred thousand years (242), “Ousters, it turned out, *had* changed physically in three centuries” (Simmons 1990:142).

Simmons’s posthuman-evolutionary irony cuts to the quick of the nineteenth-century idea of progress and human exceptionalism that still holds sway in the greater part of the Western world today. The notion in a scientific context is partly attributed to Thomas H. Huxley, one of the first Darwinian evolutionists, who expounds in “Evolution and Ethics”: “Man, the animal, in fact, has worked his way to the headship of the sentient world, and has become the superb animal“ (2001:170). If humans in the far future are of many species, some of which are more animal-like than what the Huxleites would have liked to observe, Simmons’s rendition of animal and human is closer to Richard Dawkins’s, who equates man with the other animals through the argument for complexity: “*We animals* are the most complicated things in the known universe” (1988:1, italics added). Similarly, Kelly Hurley in *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the fin de siècle* takes the argument for complexity and transforms it into the argument for beastliness and the fundamental, “archetypal” monstrosity of the body: “Any admixture of diverse morphic traits is possible, so that even highly complex bodies, ingeniously specialized for their environment [. . .] are abominable” (1996:90).

The Ousters, adapted to their environments, are also monstrous and atavistic to the utter extremes. Theo Lane, a character in *The Fall of Hyperion* encounters

[. . .] humans cloaked in fur and scales; humans with bodies like bees and eyes to match, multifaceted receptors and antennae; humans as fragile and thin as wire sculptures, great black wings extending from their thin shoulders and folding around them like capes; humans apparently designed for massive-g worlds, short and stout and muscular as cape buffalo, making Lusians look fragile in comparison; humans with short bodies and long arms covered with orange fur, only their pale and sensitive faces separating them from some holo of Old Earth’s long-extinct orangutans; and other humans looking more lemur than humanoid,

more aquiline or leonine or ursine or anthropoid than manlike. (Simmons 1995:390)

The Biblical ark-symbolism of the Ouster Swarms—the exporting of all Earth’s animal life through their incorporation in the Ousters’ bestial anatomy (Ousters actually call their ships “arks” [Simmons 1998:537])—is met by a clever rendition of the atavistically defined human. As Hurley observes: “Atavism reveals that the human body is too compendious, too full of incompatible histories, too full of strange narrative lines waiting to be developed. The human body, at least potentially, is utterly chaotic, unable to maintain its distinctions from a whole world of animal possibilities” (1996:94). Chaotic Ouster bodies do not understand or answer to limitations between different forms or taxa. While Haraway in “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” sees cybernetic bodies as open to any “deassembly and reassembly” (2001:2283), Hurley contends, “Such a body is not just liable to abhuman becomings, but also reveals itself as always already abhuman, a strange compilation of morphic traits, fractured across multiple species-boundaries” (1996:92). Simmons, while offering his novels as a playground to the metamorphoses of the bestial body, also reverses the process of observation. In *HYPERION*’s discourse the monstrous or bestial does not lurk horrifyingly in the shadows—as Hurley sees it, analyzing nineteenth-century Gothic fiction—but becomes desirable for organic and non-teleological evolution. It is important to emphasize that atavism does not equal de-evolution in *HYPERION*. It is one of the main tenets of Aenea, the human race’s young female messiah, that “Life doesn’t retreat” (Simmons 1998:465). Simmons’s atavistic Ousters are only monstrous in their anatomies—their minds and spirits are evolved to deal with the scientific and technological problems their asteroid habitats and their nanotechnological evolution presents them with. Ousters, as Science Fiction creatures, are post-*human*.

This is the reason for Simmons’s Ousters being different from Hurley’s abhuman or Hayles’s posthuman bodies: in their argument the body is the surface on which the workings of emergent, chaotic mechanisms imprint new meanings. Thus Hurley argues that the posthuman is an anti-liberalistic concept (1998:288). Simmons, however, depicts not only contingency through his posthuman figures—the concept that Baudrillard calls “[b]estiality, and its principle of uncertainty” (1996b:129)—but also restores the idea of free will: the distance the Ousters physically travel or nanotechnologically evolve is the way to liberation from the dominance of the machine. Simmons defines Ouster anatomy far from, for instance, David Cronenberg’s “uncontrollable flesh” (Dery 1996:235): *HYPERION* lets the

idea of human freedom of choice sift through the chaotic understanding of the body, too, equating it with the animal instinct for survival. Although the chaotic landscape imprints its messages on the posthuman Ouster bodies, those bodies in turn are free to choose those chaotic habitats. Their ease in traveling in person on great energy-wings driven by solar winds (Simmons 1998:563-68) or their graceful behavior when listening to music (Simmons 1995:389-91), for instance, all suggest that the Ousters—bodily and spiritually—are truly liberated.

Ousters are a revision of the figure of the cyborg: even though they search for connectedness and are liable to “deassembly and reassembly” (regarding their chaotic anatomical features, that is) they do not fall prey to the various posthuman trends or illnesses, like the will to “discorporation” (Dery 1996:234), or simple ascetic “body loathing” (236). The Ousters and their human allies do not wish to escape from the body, like the cyberpukes; they are wary of “leaving the body behind” (Bordo 2001:2376). The Ousters wish to escape *with* the body, *within* the body, for they—as Aenea, whose widely distributed, nanotechnologically altered blood proves to be the only weapon to fight the AIs—understand its vital evolutionary importance. As Hayles emphasizes, “The body is the net result of thousands of years of sedimented evolutionary history, and it is naive to think that history does not affect human behaviors at every level of thought and action” (1998:284). Simmons’s search for some human essence *as connected to the body*, after all, is not as idealistic an attempt as it first seems. Hurley describes the same idea as having originated from Charles Darwin himself: “In *The Origin of Species*, talking about species in general Darwin presents the body as a compendium, on and within which the whole history of the species is inscribed” (1996:91). In *HYPERION*, the evolutionary understanding of the body as “a congealed metaphor” (Hayles 1998:284) resonates with Pierre Bourdieu’s idea that “culture is ‘made body’” (qtd. in Bordo 2001:2362), since Ouster evolution, Ouster lifestyle, and the Ouster body are various attributes of the same system.

Simmons in *HYPERION* is on the hot track of human existence, “a spine-chilling mystery” (Dawkins 1988:xiv). Since, the “sinful symbiosis” of man and machine is an “evolutionary dead end,” as Sek Hardeen, *The True Voice of the Worldtree* claims (Simmons 1995:370), humans and human values “ousted” by machines find shelter in the arms of ab/posthuman evolution. The atavism described in *The Fall of Hyperion*, however, is not biological mire. Human beings may remain human, what is more, they may find a “more human” state in the abhuman. As, Hurley, quoting William Hope Hodgson, articulates, “man never had been ‘properly a man’” (1996:91), and, in Simmons’s posthuman world, man will never

have to be a man to remain human. George Gaylord Simpson's comments apply here: "On the biological side, few inhabitants of a human body can possibly think that it is perfect and that some change in it would not be highly desirable. [...] change is impossible without variation. We can therefore expect neither biological nor social progress unless we tolerate human differences both in physical type and in social ideas" (1951:168, 173). Stephen Jay Gould in *Full House* points out that Darwin's original ideas of evolution did not involve goal, progress, teleology, or any definite directionality, since "he chose to honor life's bursting and bustling variety" (1997:230). *Hyperion* also promotes the thinking that life equals diversity, not progress. As Aenea says in *The Rise of Endymion*, "We've been stuck in one species since our Cro-Magnon ancestors helped to wipe out the smarter Neanderthals [...] Now it's our chance to diversify rapidly [...]" (Simmons 1998:467).

The Fall of Hyperion is not merely a jeremiad of environmentalism. It is a rebellion against the decorporizing tendencies of the cyber-world; it is a hymn to the body with Darwinian overtones, a paean to life's endless diversity and interminability. Simmons's evolutionary ethic suggests that human beings equal much more than the sum of their bodily organs, but stresses that it is only within and not outside that body—however morphed, mutated, atavistic, bestial, monstrous, or *alien* it may be—that they can find their links, their freedom, and their soul.

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DEFERRING THE MOMENT OF JUSTICE IN ANTHONY BURGESS'S "TREMOR OF INTENT"

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The demanding task of analysing Anthony Burgess's novels calls for finding a unifying element of his work which would prove that diverse as it is, his *oeuvre* has "a hidden syllabus" as a conceptual background. Having in view his Catholic upbringing one would be tempted to consider Burgess just another Catholic writer following the tradition of Graham Greene. In fact the belief he was attracted to was Manichaeism.

This dualistic belief considers that man lives in a "dualistic universe" or "duoverse", as Burgess calls it, torn apart by conflicting opposites: Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, Spirit and Matter, which cannot exist without one another.

Tremor of Intent is one of the novels encapsulating the same vision and making once again overt references to Manichaeism. It is an "eschatological spy thriller" (as it was labelled by most critics) set in the cold period of postwar Europe. The novel can be read as a spy story in its own right, written in the tradition of Ian Fleming and John Le Carré, because it is based on the conceptual framework of the genre: spying, plotting, action, sex and violence.

The plot attends indeed to the conventions of the spy thriller and recounts Dennis Hillier's last pre-retirement mission, as a British secret agent. He is sent by the "circus" to The Soviet Union to recover a scientist, Edwin Roper, and was chosen for the job both because he is fluent in Russian and, moreover, because he is a friend of the defector's. The remembrance of their boyhood years at a Catholic boarding school, brings up the issues of Catholic dogma, and we learn that Roper has lost his faith first in religion and later on in patriotism. It means that Hillier's mission, which is extremely difficult, gets even more complicated when, while trying to convince Roper to return to England, he is interrupted by Wriste, his steward aboard the ship which brought him to the Soviet Union. The latter proves to be employed by the British government to kill both Hillier and Roper. They are saved, nevertheless, by the thirteen-year-old Alan Walters, another passenger on the ship, who kills Wriste. Because Roper, refuses to return with them, Hillier and Alan leave for England and the

former stops in Istanbul, to kill Theodorescu, another “independent” spy who has been on the ship bringing them to the Soviet Union.

What is really interesting in the novel is the constant changing of the narrative point of view. Part one, which presents to the reader the beginning of the friendship between Roper and Hillier in a Catholic school, is written in the form of a letter written by Hillier to one of his superiors. We learn from the former’s confession that he is worried that Roper would be killed once brought back to Great Britain, as it had happened to another spy. Hillier tries to justify the betrayal of his friend by stating that he does it for money which he needs for his retirement. In the end we find out that the letter will not be sent and that it is only a rehearsal for Roper’s defence.

The rest of the novel is written from an omniscient point of view, with the notable exception of Part Three in which “Roper’s Memoirs” are presented with footnotes containing Hillier’s comments. These oscillations of point of view have as an effect the breaking of the novel’s linearity. Even more, the law of cause and effect is also broken and the reader is not really sure of whether Hillier’s actions are caused by his friendship for Roper or by the need for money.

In the last scene of the book, belonging to Part Four and taking place one year later, we learn that Hillier, the spy, is living secretly in Ireland, as a priest. If in the opening of the novel Hillier describes himself as suffering from satyriasis and gluttony which, he claims, “continue to cancel each other out,” (Burgess, 1969:7) now he has clearly sacrificed both. As John J. Stinson remarked,

[the book] contains just about all the usual trappings and devices of the spy novel: the multiskilled, mostly unflappable protagonist; the beautiful ingenue in need of protection (here sixteen-year-old Clara Walters); the seductive fleshpot (Miss Devi) in league with a villain; a defector scientist (Roper); double agents (Theodorescu and Wriste); hairbreadth escapes; false identities; veiled hints and encoded messages of various kinds; forged passports; reversals; violent death; quick unravellings; ampoules of instantly deadly poison. (Stinson, 1991:42-43)

Burgess’s reputed critic is right, but it should be noted that the author’s switching of the points of view makes more of this novel. Its narrative structure actually confronts the reader with slightly different stories and thus compels him to make his own choices.

Another level of reading may interpret the novel as a parody of the spy thriller because of the parodic exaggerations of the motifs and

themes present in the works of Ian Fleming and John Le Carré. But everything from violence to sex is justified and the result is a novel of great vividness. (Lodge, 1971: 20-21)

Yet, I will try to prove that it is more than that, because *Tremor of Intent* reflects a duality based on the false assumption that the West is good and the East is bad, because the “evil” Russians have blackmailed and forced Roper to defect, while the “good” British agents are trying to rescue and bring him back home. This false assumption is reversed by Roper later on in the novel:

Capitalist intrigues and ambushes and spying and wars. Guns and get-away cars. Disguises. If I went back to the West they wouldn't use me for the conquest of space. Oh, no. Has England ever tried to put a man into space? Don't make me laugh.... Whenever I start weakening and thinking of the bloody village green British tommies nursing babies and what they call justice and democracy and fair play – whenever I think of the House of Commons and Shakespeare and the Queen's corgis I... (Burgess, 1969: 130-131)

Burgess's point is that the political choice he faces the reader with is not between “good” West and “bad” East (which prove to be “the two sides of the coin of ultimate reality”), but that between this duality and another evil, which is even worse, neutrality, since “we'd all rather see devil-worship than bland neutrality.” (Burgess, 1969: 199) What the author implies is that commitment to either of the interpenetrating opposites is better than neutrality as embodied by the independent spies Theodorescu and Wriste.

Burgess himself had no particular interest in politics except a “just vaguely cynical” one, a fact asserted in the interview with Samuel Coale when he admitted that he had never been “politically minded.” (Coale, 1981: 437) This may be due to the fact that, like Hillier, he believed that “the temporal wars are a mere copy [of] the real war that goes on in heaven.” (Burgess, 1969: 197-199) In light of recent political events the novel is prophetic as well because as proved by history the real division is not between the East and the West.

More convincing evidence of Burgess's Manichaeic vision are the other doubles present in the book. The plot (Hillier's assignment to bring Roper back to England) is balanced by a counter plot (Wriste's assignment to kill both Hillier and Roper). Even structurally, the novel is constructed on a series of double scenes: Hillier visits Miss Devi twice, he has two sexual experiences (with Miss Devi and with Clara)

and he stuffs Theodorescu twice – once with food and once with information. The food stuffing scene is quite memorable in that it is a parody of Fleming's James Bond who is described as a refined gourmand. The quality of food is remarkable since it consists of thirteen courses: lobster medallions in sauce cardinale, court-bouillon made with shells set alight in warm pernod, red mullet and artichoke hearts, fillets of sole Queen Elizabeth with sauce blonde, shell-fish tart with sauce Newburg, *soufflé au foie gras*, avocado halves with caviar and a cold chiffon sauce, *fillet mignon à la romana*, butterfly pasta and a few zucchini, roast lamb *persillé* and onion, gruyère casserole with green beans and celery julienne, pheasant with pecan stuffing, bread sauce and game chips with broccoli blossoms, poussin with barley and sauce *bechamel velouté*, spinach and minced mushrooms, roast potatoes with sausage stuffing and of course several kinds of deserts. (Burgess, 1969: 62-68)

As for the characters, there are two independent spies, one working overtly (Theodorescu) and one working in disguise (Wriste); two beautiful women: Miss Devi, the dark accomplice of Theodorescu, and Clara Walters, the fair-haired ingenue; moreover Roper and Hillier have both three women in their lives – Brigitte, Lucy, Ethel and Brigitte, Miss Devi, Clara respectively.

The novel itself is developed on two levels: the obvious spy story level and the eschatological level – the one dealing “in the flesh (and hence the spirit) through gross eating, carnal lust and horrifying murder.” (Dix, 1971: 17) These two levels, the entertaining one and the theological one, merge continually within the general framework of a Manichaean universe.

If most critics agree that from a thematic point of view *Tremor of Intent* is a novel of a quest for spiritual, intellectual and moral commitment, James I. Bly, who is less interested in the thematic framework states in a very interesting essay that the novel is structured by close analogy to a musical form, namely the sonata. (Bly, 1981: 490)

It is common knowledge that most novels written by Burgess are famous for their arresting openings. *Tremor of Intent* has evidently an arresting ending, which points to the beginning and prevents the informed reader from considering it a simple spy-thriller. As Kennard very well observed, “Burgess explodes the spy-thriller form by relating its essential characteristic, sensationalism, to the evil of the book, Mr. Theodorescu.” (Kennard, 1987: 71) Within this surface conceptual form – the spy novel attending to all the conventions of the

genre – Burgess actually writes a metaphysical fable, since there is, as Wriste notices, some connection between metaphysics and spying:

Perhaps all of us who are engaged in this sort of work-international intrigue, espionage, scarlet pimpnel-lianism, hired assassination – seek something deeper than what most people term life, meaning a pattern of simple gratifications. (Burgess, 1969: 136)

Even Hillier's *tremor of intent* (i.e. his deferring the moment of justice) may be interpreted as a metaphysical tremor of doubt that is overcome after the killing of Theodorescu. The truth he reaches is made plain as the book ends: "We need new terms. God and Notgod. Salvation and damnation of equal dignity, the two sides of the coin of ultimate reality. As for the evil, they have to be liquidated." (Burgess, 1969: 197)

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WHY WE DON'T LIKE JOHN FOWLES ANYMORE

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I have opted in this essay for a view of *The Magus* from the perspective of the reception theory developed as an extension and reaction to the *New Criticism* of the late '60s, undertaking this enterprise on the basis of a few considerations related to the reader-response criticism.

The first reason is that this type of analysis allows a greater range of possibilities of meaning in any fictional work, virtually infinite, and in turn and in accordance with the characteristics of the openness we call today postmodernity, can prompt a direct response in the writer, quantifiable in the alterations an already published work is subjected to, subsequent to the various reactions of its readers. Secondly, because the work of art in general, fiction in particular is directed to and addresses first of all the readers and less the critics or scholars who make a name for themselves from filling up libraries with thousands of pages that detour the reader very often from the direct, unmediated and innocent experiencing of literature. Thirdly, because in Fowles' particular case we deal with the very type of criticism he approves of, and he does so with few directions in modern thought, so that I could call this investigation author-friendly in the sense that it assumes an idiosyncratic orientation with the writer. And finally, to my knowledge, less has been written from this perspective, when compared to any other type of critical analysis. The invitation is almost contained not only in the forewords that preface Fowles' books, but also in the fictional intentions of the writer. Is it not the parable of *The Prince and the Magician* a permanent invitation of the kind?

A few theoretical considerations on the main directions followed or rather taken as guidelines in this investigation are necessary. Reader-response criticism shifts the focus in literary studies from the **author** and **work** to the **reader** and the **text**. The idea of the meaning being *contained* in the words on the written page is replaced by a more dynamic model of research, according to which the focus moves to the *process of meaning* or the way the meaning is produced with the active participation of the audience or reader (Regan, 2003: 140).

In contrast to the traditional scholarship with its emphasis on the author and authorial intentions, with the explosion of the new approaches and methods that we today call "New Criticism", from 1960's onwards,

there is a shift of interest towards the notion of “textual autonomy”, with an insistence on the formal properties of the text. New criticism may be broadly characterized by putting these two closely related issues – meaning and form – at the centre of the literary study and thus invoking the necessity of “close reading” as its basic principle. Reader-response criticism on the other side concentrates on the ways a reader might encounter a literary text, as a complex experience made up of a series of shifting viewpoints, revealing the “meaning” of a certain work not at once, but in significant sequences of understanding: “what the experience of reading reveals is not a kernel of meaning waiting to be dislodged” from the textual shell, but “a process or sequence of adjustments in perspective” (Regan, 2003: 140).

With each such adjustment the reader’s assumptions and expectations are challenged and renewed.

The role of the reader in the process of interpretation is thoroughly challenged in this perspective, as it shifts from the stance of a passive recipient to that of an active producer of meaning. James R. Aubrey’s *A Reference Companion to John Fowles*, mentions very few critical investigations of *The Magus* undertaken from a reader-response perspective, among which Robert Scholes’s 1969 essay on “the orgasmic rhythm of the narrative”. Using an analogy between the act of reading and the sexual intercourse, Robert Scholes’s ambition is to illustrate the narrative devices Fowles uses in his work in order to capture the reader’s attention in a way a seducer would do with his prey. According to Scholes, Fowles uses surprise, frustration, delay, intensification, climax and resolution, among other experiences (Aubrey, 1996: 150) to shape the responses of a reader who “strives to mate with the writer” (Aubrey, 1996: 151).

An interesting investigation has been carried out by Franf G. Novak in his article “The Dialectics of Debasement in *The Magus*”, which records the responses of college students to the mentioned novel. In contrast to all our expectations the critic claims that the book “often affects these young readers in unexpected and unsettling ways” (Aubrey, 1996: 151) inducing in this community of readers a feeling of deep **anxiety**, which is explained by the view of the world the book offers. This view is triggering fear, anxiety and instability as long as through its lenses the world appears mysterious beyond understanding and control. One of the basic assumptions of the scientific laic culture which impregnates our society’s schemes of thought is that the world can be understood and controlled through rational means, while the novel Fowles writes unsettles and stirs the reader’s certainties to such an extent that he/she almost feels landed or prisoner on another planet, governed by rules that escape their understanding.

A recurrent idea which should find its place in this context and which became almost a theme in Fowles's thinking is the astronaut metaphor, used in one of his first book reviews in 1970 (Aubrey, 1996: 1), where Fowles compares readers to astronauts because, as he explains, reading one of Dickens' novels makes them feel as if they have landed on a new planet. This is equally true for any type of fiction which creates an imaginary world that requires from readers an astronaut-like exploration and discovery of new territory. Even if the exploration takes place on a mental level only, the discoveries always bear in some way upon the psychology and knowledge of the explorer. And ultimately fiction, as Fowles sees it, aims to bring about a change in the reader, the only course that validates good fiction in his view.

Furthermore, this is the primary declared aim of Fowles when writing *The Magus*, as he points out in the *Preface* to the revised 1977 edition of the book. He clearly states here that his desire is to accomplish something that would haunt people, the way Alain-Fournier's *The Wanderer* haunted him as an adolescent: "the capacity of *Le Grand Meaulnes* (for some of us, at any rate) to provide **an experience beyond the literary** was precisely what I wanted to instil in my own story." (Fowles, 1977) A few questions arise from this confession, related to the nature of the experience beyond the literary that the author aims to trigger in his readers, to the narrative devices used in order to accomplish it, to the kind of targeted reader and to the extent to which the accomplishment can be qualified and quantified on the basis of the methodology provided by the literary critical theory.

In his theory of reception Hans Robert Jauss emphasizes the socially formative role of the work of art in general, which shapes in Fowles' case both his fiction and the expectances he has from his readers. Reader-response theories insist that literature has not only a representational or expressive function, but also, as Jauss points out, "an emancipatory effect: the experience of reading can liberate the reader from existing prejudices and invite a new perception of *lived praxis*" (Jauss, 1982: 15). The analysis of this formative role of fiction leads Jauss to the conclusion that a text is valuable if it prompts the reader to new levels of awareness, reflection and judgment, that is to say "the work lives to the extent it has influence" (Jauss, 1982: 142).

This conviction that the quality of a work can be determined by the degree of influence on a presupposed audience, brings us to the issue of the history of reception of a specific work and to the different criticism it may have received in different historical contexts. Thus besides different evaluations both from the part of the reader and the critic at different times,

a text can be more or less influential within the same context according to the age of the audience, its social, psychological, cultural and even economic background. From this perspective, even if *The Magus*, has been almost contemporary with many of us, the little time since its publication in 1966 can still be relevant to the changes in the consciousness of the targeted audience, if we consider, as Jauss does that criticism involves “a fusion of horizons – a recognition of the successive unfolding of the potential for meaning that is embedded in a work and actualised in the various stages of its historical reception” (Regan, 2003: 146).

In this respect it is interesting to mention not only the variety and the changes in the reception of the work, synchronically and diachronically, but also the author’s own response at a certain distance in time, as he himself should be integrated in the readers’ community with a right to add relevant information about his work if this contributes to its understanding, contrary to the view made current in “The Intentional Fallacy” that a meaning of a text could only be known by the examination of the text itself and that “no extra-textual evidence (say, letters or essays by the author offering his or her view of the text’s meaning) be used to delimit the implications of a text for a modern reader” (Graham, 2003: 92).

We agree with Wimsatt and Beardsley’s conviction that the clarification of the authorial intentions by writers is no guarantee of their success in accomplishing these intentions fictionally, but nevertheless we think the author has much to say about his work and deserves attention to be paid, even if of a critical kind.

Despite being Fowles’s favorite novel, the first edition of *The Magus* turned out to be far less successful than its author had expected, receiving unfavourable reviews particularly in England: “*The Spectator* referred to *intellectual vulgarity*, *The Times Literary Supplement* to a *silly book and an unhealthy one*, and *The Reporter* to a *jumble of vast platitudes*” (Aubrey, 1996: 100). Penelope Mortimer notes in the *New Statesman* that the novel has a bewildering effect upon the reader, which is due to the fact that “*one cannot understand that there is nothing there*” (Aubrey, 1996: 100). As it has often happened with the English novel in the course of its history, harsh reception in England almost automatically triggered the opposite across the ocean. Here it was called from the beginning “a civilizing novel” (Aubrey, 1996: 100) and it became a cult novel on the American college campuses, “prompting more letters to the author than any of Fowles’s other books”. James R. Aubrey understands these very different responses in terms of reflections of the readers’ reactions to what they are being taught in the novel: “those who were put off by Fowles’s evidently didactic intentions found the book pretentious, and those who were willing to suspend belief in

their own intellectual adulthood found the book exciting” (Aubrey, 1996: 100).

As a curiosity it would be interesting to try to imagine the same book or a sequel of it, with the main character embodied by the young American who is supposed to follow in the Englishman’s footsteps taking the same position of a teacher on the island of Phraxos the following year. But the book is written by John Fowles who addresses a readership in England, which ironically enough can be easily recognized in the portrait of the narrator and main character of the novel, a portrait realized through dissociation and rejection. At the same time the readers are also the educated young people, a category to which Nicholas belongs. One of the questions that I found intriguing during my investigation is who these readers are and why the book failed to maintain its success over the years. Are they what we call competent readers like Nicholas the narrator, who have graduated from Oxford or an other university, who entertain various eclectic ideas about literature and critical theory, or a polymorphous mass with no literary background but rooted in the British culture and who will be collectively named “the English”? Are they today the literary critics mainly? These are issues, which deserve to be dealt with thoroughly and at length as they can highlight many mysteries that have intrigued those who tackled Fowles’s work through the eyes of his critical reception.

The publication of *The Magus* in Romania, for the first time in 1987, was definitely a huge success. I remember during my high-school years people of all ages going crazy about *The Magus*, reading it passionately with the sense of discovering the grand truths of life and I didn’t realize at that time that it was just another way of escaping the austerity and ugliness of the communist imprisonment travelling together with the hero to a mesmerizing, mysterious island where all the adventures of the mind were possible. For many generations it was a book about freedom and imagination in a country devoid of both. If we are to use the distinction Hirsch is making in *Validity of Interpretation* between the concept of “meaning” which is confined to the authorial intention for a text when first completed and “significance” for the series of different meanings that later generations of readers have discovered, we may say that even a book like *The Magus* gains in significance and can signify unexpectedly different in an alien context like that of the totalitarian dictatorship. Peter Conradi’s sentential description of the only character in *The Magus* unable to join the spiritual adventure of the Bourani team, strongly supports this idea. Trapped within the limits of his own rigidity of mind, he doesn’t allow himself the liberty of transformation: “Conchis’s method is powerless against *totalitarians* like Urfe’s immediate predecessor, Mitford” (Conradi, 1982:

54). Despite of our proper physical imprisonment by the communist regime, most of the readership in Romania was trying to preserve its mental and spiritual freedom, and the enormous success of *The Magus* in the late 80's proves that they succeeded.

Looking back at the author's response to *The Magus* one will learn from direct statements that Fowles feels profoundly attached to this novel, even after many years since its first publication and this attachment explains to some extent the history of its writing. Like a parent who directs more love towards the less accomplished child, Fowles has often declared his disappointment related to the rushed form and style of the novel, in spite of which it has continued to remain his favourite, and the only one he would care to reread. However, in the revised edition of 1977, he "further crafted the style, deleted some passages and extended some of the dialogic and sexual teasing" (Aubrey, 1996: 94), along with altering significant details of the ending of the novel.

In the Foreword to the revised edition he explains that the changes he operated were due not to the critics and reviewers, mostly displeased by the first edition, but to the readers, to whom the book mainly addresses. He emphasizes repeatedly that he does not attempt to answer "the many justified criticism of excess, over-complexity, artificiality and the rest that the book received from the more sternly adult reviewers on its first appearance" but that he has "taken this somewhat unusual course not least because – if letters are any test – the book has aroused more interest than anything else I have written." (Fowles, 1977: 5)

In 1977, eleven years after its first appearance, and almost twenty (he started working at it immediately after returning from Greece, in 1954) since the beginning of its conception, Fowles realizes that the novel meant to address every man in search of his true self, mostly appeals to the people not entirely formed yet, not completely mature, still "partly green" - as writers should remain as well till the day they die - the preservation of this younger spirit providing a rich resourcefulness of fertility. It is relevant for the reader's response to his own work that after so many years such understanding and acceptance of the failure should be encountered: "I know *now* the generation whose mind it most attracts, and that it must always substantially remain a novel of adolescence written by a retarded adolescent" (Fowles, 1977: 6).

Although Fowles does assert the freedom of interpretation and does not interfere with the readers' options of reading his novel, in the Foreword to the revised edition he also strongly feels the need to throw a few thread lines to guide the novice into the labyrinth of meanings and he does so by suggesting very clearly his authorial intentions. So, on the one side he states

as an answer to his students, which he wants extended to all readership, that the novel's "meaning is whatever reaction it provokes in the reader", with a poignant emphasis on the fact that "so far as I am concerned there is no given right reaction" (Fowles, 1977: 6), while on the other side he deliberately confines the range of interpretations to a few leading paths, illuminating the right ways and directions to be followed.

This step is fully justified if we acknowledge the fact that despite the attacks on occultism of any kind and its straightforward propaganda for the freedom of thought, as Peter Conradi rightly remarks, "one of the apt ironies of *The Magus*'s reception has been the audience it has shared with Hesse, Tolkien and Castaneda. It has found its most appreciative audience among the otherworldly carnival in which the decade of desperate optimism and of its first publication abounded" (Conradi, 1996: 20). Conradi finds this kind of response predictable and almost predicted if we were to preserve within the same semantic key, with the help of a conversation between Conchis and Urfe, which the critic calls "prophetic". Asked by Nicholas if he got any response from his pamphlet written for a French journal on the theme of art as institutionalised illusion, the answer seems almost premonitory for at least some large part of Fowles's own audience:

"A great deal. From the wrong people. From the miserable vultures who prey on the human longing for the solution of the final mysteries. The spiritualists, the clairvoyants, the cosmopaths, the summer-landers, the blue-islanders, the apportists – all that galere. (p.235)

Using the vocabulary of the reception theory this large mass of readers concerned with spiritualist purposes can be assigned to the same *interpretive community*. According to Fish, particular communities of readers produce particular meanings, which means that meaning emerges from communally established and historically determined interests and beliefs. To apply his *politics of reading* to the very existence of such reading communities, means to bring forth broader sociological and historical issues that define the postmodern age which accommodates all these different perspectives. Their abundance can also be explained by a view of the reader response theory rooted more in psychoanalysis, which holds that the dynamics of the literary response varies according to the needs and demands of individual psychology (Norman Holland and David Bleich), therefore the concern with the influence of personality on literary interpretation. As long as readers can re-create works of literature according to their personal identity or desire for self-knowledge and the demand for rational explanations of the world becomes less and less not satisfying, occult interpretation of *The Magus* easily finds ways of justification. The popular esoteric concoction behind the metaphorical structure of the narrative,

together with what Fowles ironically calls in the Foreword “the stew of intuitions about the nature of human existence” (Fowles, 1077: 9) reveals in many cases to embody the main attraction of novel.

Returning to the main questions posed by this essay, why different readers produce different interpretations, and how the reception of a text is predetermined by the context in which it is published, we think an emphasis of the author himself on the freedom of interpretation can be relevant, especially as Fowles seems to add his own concise view of the reader-response theory. Referring to *The Magus* in the Foreword to the revised edition he asserts his belief in the reader’s potential to activate a plurality of meanings of his novel, none of them being wrong or more justified as long as the text offers the clues to support a particular interpretation: “Novels, even much more lucidly conceived and controlled ones than this, are not like crosswords puzzles, with one unique set of correct answers, behind the clues – an analogy I sometimes despair of ever extirpating from the contemporary student mind. If *The Magus* has any *real significance* it is no more than that of Rorschach test in psychology. Its meaning it’s whatever reaction it provokes in the reader, and so far as I am concerned there is no given right reaction” (Fowles, 1077: 9). This approach is very similar to the theoretical precepts of a critic like Stanley Fish who maintains that literature is the activity that the reader performs because the place where meaning occurs is in the reader’s mind and not in the space between the covers of a book. And as long as the novel provokes a reaction, whatever it may be, in the reader’s mind, Fowles declares himself content, because his ultimate aim is not to entertain or to preach in vain, but to prompt readers to think about their condition, stimulating the development of a moral dimension inherent to the human existence. However, from his interviews and book reviews, an alignment with the strain of psychologist criticism becomes evident, as he calls for more understanding of the general psychopathology of the novelist, that is less attention to the text and far more to the process of meaning. But like in the case of his own fiction he believes that similarly “good criticism must induce a feeling of greater knowledge of himself or herself in the reader” (Fish, 1967: 83), that kind of knowledge which fiction strives to achieve as well and whose kernel is encapsulated in the often quoted passage from T.S. Eliott’s “Little Gidding:

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time”.

But in order to achieve such a novel freshness of perception which should enable us to see the world with new eyes, the reader must let himself immersed in the Maelstrom of the book like in a ritual of initiation and emerge reborn, together with the hero, in new parameters of thought, liberated from prejudices and capable a new levels of self awareness. If we go back to the question of readership in 1966, when the novel was first published, in order to understand the reader responses of that period and be able to make an apt comparison with the 2000 responses, the first step of the investigation requires a thorough insight into the type of readership the English society of that time produced. Fowles's novels are helpful in this sense.

What governs the reader's developing responses to a work of fiction is a set of "interpretive strategies" (Fish, 1967) – shared rules and conventions – which readers internalize and learn to apply in particular situations, in which case we are talking about an informed or competent reader. The structuralist critic Jonathan Culler extends the idea of competent reader, insisting that "competence", far from being a neutral term, is being shaped and governed by those social institutions that teach us to read and, in doing so "establish what might be deemed as an *acceptable* or *appropriate* interpretation" (Regan, 1003: 142). The virtual reader of the book, according to the information we have from Fowles directly and from the feed-back of literary history, including the reception history of novel, is the green man, the educated adolescent able to some extent to decode, within the limits of his own competence, the densely symbolic and allegoric novel of the Magus. Nicholas Urfe stands for his generation, Fowles tells us as a "typical inauthentic man of the 1945-50 period" (Conradi, 1982: 40). Peter Conradi describes him as "a middle class Oxford graduate, a poetaster given to portentous vapourings (his name links him with the seventeenth century French writer of pastoral romance, d'Urfe), a chilly narcissist and apprentice dandy, a second rate Lothario who romanticizes his commonplace treatment of women as *crimes* and a hollow man who has learnt at Oxford to dignify his attitudinising as existentialist. He grandly perceives himself as an original and an *exile* from the *mass-produced middle class world* from which he comes" (Conradi, 1982: 42). He is prisoner like the virtual English reader in his own mental cage constructed with the help of the educational system and the conventions of a society unable to transgress its Victorian determinations. The whole Britain in this respect is seen as a *gabbia*, both in the beginning and at the end of the novel, an extension of the character's incapacity to authenticate his freedom and individuality. The use of this metaphor to describe his existential situation, allows Urfe to contemplate his complicity with the huge network of illusions he has

enveloped himself in: “Years later I saw a gabbia at Piacenza: a harsh black canary - cage strung high up the side of the towering campanile, in which prisoners were left to starve to death and rot in full view of the town bellow. And looking up at it I remembered that winter in Greece, that gabbia I had constructed for myself out of light, solitude and self-delusions.” (p.62)

The disclosure of the interwoven illusions starts with the very first page of the novel, seen retrospectively as a possible explanation for the narrator’s seeming honesty: “I was born 1927, the only child of middle-class parents, both English and themselves born in the grotesquely elongated shadow, which they never rose sufficiently above history to leave, of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria. I was sent to a public school, I wasted two years doing my national service, I went to Oxford and there I discovered I was not the person I wanted to be” (Fowles, 1977: 167). He goes on by displaying his leading two lives, his inconsequential existentialism, his acquiring of expensive bad habits and affected manners, together with “a third class degree and a first-class illusion” that he was a poet, and deploring above all his cynicism and boredom with life in general and the idea of making a living in particular. This description bears resemblance not only with the feelings of a whole generation of Oxford breed, which Fowles is bringing under the spotlight of the reader, but also with the author himself. He had never denied having used biographical material in his novels, but on the contrary helped the researcher by pointing to those details that could shed any light on his writing. Therefore it is not extremely surprising to learn that he used much the same language to describe himself after he left the marines:” I ...began to hate what I was becoming in life – a British Establishment young hopeful. I decided instead to become a sort of anarchist” (Aubrey, 1996:14).

Oxford where he read Sartre and Camus and participated in “incoherent philosophical discussions combining seriousness and frivolity” helped him articulate his own existentialist views and define the concept of authenticity. But he was aware all the time, like his character that he indirectly criticizes in the novel, that existentialism was only “a smart style” which imposed its jargon in conversation as a norm. Later on, like Nicholas, Fowles was never happy with the position of a teacher he took between 1951-1953 at a school on the island of Spetsai, sixty miles south west of Athens, where he was supposed to recreate the atmosphere of the English college schools, but nevertheless he found Greece magical beyond words.

To sum up, one of the main category of Fowles’s readers is represented by the group of young educated people with literary leanings Nicholas stands for, while the other great majority is made up of the conventional English in general, from whom he tries to cut himself off. To

do so is the first step to individual freedom and authenticity. But who and mainly how they are, are the issues which I have circumscribed to the theme I will call the criticism of England. This starts with a not very flattering view brought before us by Urfe himself. Parentage:

Parents: English middle-class, born in the grotesquely elongated shadow of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria; contempt for the sort of life their son is going to lead; mere providers

Mother: the model of a would-be major-general's wife; she never argued with him and always behaved as if he were listening in the next room, even when he was thousands of miles away.

Father: brigadier; in place of an intellect he had accumulated an armoury of capitalized key-words like Discipline and Tradition and Responsibility; when contradicted "he would produce one of those totem words and cosh me with it" (p.15)

Nicholas: "I led two lives"; reputation as aesthete and cynic; forms a small club "les Hommes Revoltes"; dedicated to ideas in vogue, professes a certain kind of inconsequential existentialism; true to the eternal dandyism of Oxford, like his clubmated wants to be different; I acquired expensive habits and affected manners; pretentious illusion that he is a poet; a terrible boredom with life in general and making a living in particular; positive aspects of personality - he absorbed a small dose of one permanently useful thing, Oxford's greatest gift to civilized life: Socratic honesty. (Authorial comments: in the form of anticipation - "I was too green to know that all cynicism masks a failure to cope - an impotence, in short" (p.15); "handsomely equipped to fail, I went out into the world" (p.17).

Like many other Oxford graduates he looks for a teaching position in a school. His dissociation from the English educational environment becomes one of the recurrent motifs of the book and the need to escape from gradually turning into what he so much despises will initiate the subsequent quest. Two types of unhappiness can be detected in Nicholas at the beginning of the book. One is the cultivated stance of a romantic protagonist; an orphan enshrouded in solitude, misunderstood, narcissist, anguished and existentialist, displaying an affected spleen and dandyish manners. The other one comes from a realistic criticism of the English environment with its conventions and morals.

He complains of the standardization of the pupils he has to teach, almost mass-produced middle-class boys, of the claustrophobic atmosphere of the school especially the intolerable common-room and more or less conscious of this feeling, he starts to fear his life may have gotten to predictable dead-end unless he finds a quick exit to save himself. "Boredom, the numbing annual predictability of life, hung over the staff like

a cloud. And it was real boredom, not my modish ennui. From it flowed cant, hypocrisy and the impotent rage of the old who know they have failed and the young who suspect they will fail. The senior masters stood like gallows sermons; with some of them one had a sort of vertigo, a glimpse of the bottom-less pit of human futility ... or so I began to feel during my second term.” (p.18)

However hopeful the solution of resigning from such a place could appear, it would have meant by far less than enough, since the school was nothing more than a perfect mirror of the whole society that oppressed Urfe's real maturation and self development. England at this point seems to be the corruptive agent that threatens to stop the hero's growing (Urfe – stunned, whose normal growing was stopped). Decamping from Britain appears clearly as the only solution for salvation: “I could not spend my life crossing such Sahara; and the more I felt it, the more I felt also that the smug, petrified school was a toy model of the entire country and that to quit the one and not the other would be ridiculous”.

Along with the fear of getting entrapped in a life-sentence kind of existence, Nicholas acknowledges that what he needs is an entire new territory to explore and only a new mystery could extract him from the lethal boredom of the English school system (“I didn't know where I was going, but I knew what I needed. I needed a new land, a new race, a new language; and, although I couldn't have put it into words then, I needed a new mystery”). It is interesting to note that in this respect too we can find an autobiographical dimension reflected in the character, if we take into account the bleak image Fowles's own school experiences render. He taught at a variety of schools in England, ending up in London, but particularly worthy of attention is one of his letters to Robert Huffacker, at the time when he used to teach at Ashridge, as his remarks seem to be echoed so closely by those of Nicholas. Here Fowles observes that “most of the work there was to do with the management/trade union courses; endless rhubarb about time-and motion ergonomics” (Fowles, 1977: 28).

He also wrote critically about the methods used in schools to teach literature: “I think the first sign I might one day become a novelist was the passionate detestation I developed at my own school for all those editions of examination books that began with a long introduction: an anatomy lesson that always reduced the original text to a corpse by the time one got to it”. But Fowles is mainly critical about the middle class self-sufficient English, unable to adapt, or at least to truly open his heart to anything new unless it has the same form, smell, colour as his own island. The meeting Nicholas has before leaving Greece with one of the British Council's officers in Athens proves to be a failure in communication as well as a failure in his

attempt to reintegrate with his lost home, which makes him understand he is an exiled character who is now subjected to a new exile: the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The gap that grows between him and his own English culture measures his failure to identify himself with any of the English he encounters in Greece, or with the values they embody: "The dinner that evening was dreadful, the epitome of English vacuity" (p.559). He sees them trapped in armours of conventions that beat their capacity to authenticate their existence, making them look almost like wax figures in history museum: "But they were all the same, each mind set in the same weird armour, like a dinosaur's ruff, like a fringe of icicles. All I heard the whole evening was the tinkle of broken ice-needles, as people tried timidly and vainly to reach through the stale fence of words, tinkle, tinkle and then withdrew." (p. 260) The double life or worse the vacuity cannot be hidden: "Nobody said what they really wanted, what they really thought; nobody behaved with breath, with warmth, with naturalness. And finally it became pathetic."(p. 260)

Nicholas fully realizes the utter impossibility of the English to break the barriers of a certain cold and detached attitude as well as their effort to confine their feelings to some standard certainty and social acceptability. Even when it becomes obvious that the British Council officer and his wife nourish a genuine appreciation and love of Greece, they do not have the courage to express it, but rather keep it choked in their throats. Any subtle and sensitive remark is at once dismissed with a "cheap squirt of malice". This makes Nicholas see himself reflected to some extent in this caricatures afraid of their own feelings and sentenced to let them rot inside, in a perpetual cycle of repression and self-denial. Sadly he acknowledges not only his formal appurtenance to the English, but the inescapability of this condition: "We were all the same; I said hardly anything, but that made me no more innocent or less conditioned. The solemn figures of the Old Country, the Queen, the Public School, Oxbridge, the Right Accent, People Like Us, stood around the table like secret police ready to crush down in an instant on any attempt at an intelligent European humanity." (p.261) As opposed to these suffocating prototypes of Englishness, the alternative world(s) proposed by Conchis is European, diverse, plural, open, and potentially endless in manifestations and meanings, like the geography which parallels the dichotomy English vs. European, with its recurrent symbolism of the island and the sea. But while the British island is described as a claustrophobic, grey and ordinary place, Greece means the mesmerizing vistas that lead beyond the limits of the horizon, light, colour and warmth, which can disturb the spirit to neurosis and anxiety.

Nicholas defines himself always in contrast to the English society he emerges from. His manner of viewing himself resembles a technique which is used in painting (an art Fowles is more than familiar with), called *repousoir*, that uses an obscure, dark background which by the contrast it creates, highlights the characteristics of the object in focus. Towards the end of the book a dramatic change was supposed to take place within his personality, a change that should make him appear in an ever-greater contrast to the dark background of his Englishness, once he finally manages to break the barriers that confine him to this inherited condition. Embracing a European thinking devoid of the clichéistic ideology that defines any national identity is the necessary condition for the transformation of Urfe into a free, authentic man. We are suggested by the author that this transformation indeed took place. But Urfe is one of the elected, aren't we told so? Hazard makes it that the others simply find *The Magus* too anguishing. Is it possible that we, as readers, have become more and more reluctant to embracing the idea of a literature, as conceived of by John Fowles, whose chief aim is not to entertain but to transform?

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**THE TRICKSTER AND THE PRISON HOUSE: THE
BAKHTINIAN DIMENSION OF 'THE CARNIVALESQUE' IN
BREYTENBACH'S
*TRUE CONFESSIONS OF AN ALBINO TERRORIST***

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Introduction

Breytenbach the poet, prose writer, painter, public figure and exile is also an ex-convict and – as he calls himself mockingly in his prison book – an “albino terrorist”. Having received a nine-year sentence for political offences, he served seven and a half, with the first two spent in solitary confinement: “a spell from which” — as J.M. Coetzee believes — “he emerged with his sanity miraculously unimpaired” (Coetzee, 1992:376). What may have led Coetzee to this conclusion was that, although Breytenbach wrote the memoir after his release from prison, the general tenor of the book suggests to readers that they are in the company of a mind actually experiencing the immediacy of the daily prison condition, while in full control of all its faculties. Intrigued by Breytenbach’s ability to cope with the evil effects of imprisonment, especially with prison space, Coetzee goes on to ponder that what will survive of *True Confessions* is not the narrative of capture, interrogation and imprisonment, absorbing though that is. Rather, it will be Breytenbach’s transformation of the physical constraints of the prison cell into the metaphysical state of the internal exile. It is the “metaphysical cell” (Davies, 1990) that leaves its mark. Coetzee tries to give an explanation by viewing Breytenbach the memoirist primarily as a poet whose poetry “stops at nothing: there is no limit that cannot be questioned. His writing goes beyond in more senses than one”(1992:379).

As regards the memoir, *True Confessions* ‘goes beyond’ the documentary value of the standard prison memoir and also avoids the embittered attitude so characteristic of many prison memoirists. One need only consider the prison memoirs of political prisoners such as Ruth First (1988), Molefe Pheto (1985) and Caesarina Kona Makhoere (1988) in order to understand how a rigid opposition to the ‘hostile space’ makes it extremely difficult for the imprisoned person to come to terms with incarceration, and to survive with psychic equilibrium unimpaired. Aware of the danger of psychic dissociation in prison, Breytenbach, as he recollects in *True Confessions*, self-consciously embarked upon a sustained practice of disciplining his mind, a process that closely resembles Albie Sachs’s earlier

efforts of mentally suppressing aggressive attitudes towards his captors, as described in *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (1966). Breytenbach's desire to survive the hostile space is very clearly stated in the Introduction to Part Four (Breytenbach 1984b), in which he invokes Sarasvati, the Hindu goddess of wisdom, to help him cope with the conditions of incarceration:

I invoke thee, I concentrate on thee, I salute thee.
Come onto my tongue and never leave me again.
May my intellectual faculties never go astray,
May my errors not weigh unduly on my becoming.
Give that I be freed from the vicissitudes of life.
In times of peril, may my spirit not go mad;
May my intelligence function without obstacles.

Gallows humour as coping mechanism

What is evident in the above quotation is Breytenbach's determination to survive the damaging effects of imprisonment through an intellectual understanding and mastery of his situation. This is apparent at several layers throughout the memoir, and initially it may be surprising to the reader that the apparently light-hearted vein in which the memoir is written is also part of a spiritually-based programme of opposition. As we shall see, spiritual mastery and irreverent laughter are not, in Breytenbach's case, necessarily contradictory conditions.

At the outset, Breytenbach recognises that already "the game was up" (1984b:16. *All quotes from prison memoir refer to 1984a*). Towards the end, he refers to the entire prison experience as "this macabre dance, this fatal game — because", he says, "there are certainly elements of a game present" (341). As he puts it in the Introduction to Part One, the autobiography is the story of "how a foolish fellow got caught in the antechambers of No-Man's-Land; describing the interesting events, including a trial where various actors and clowns perform" (11).

To present prison as a "No-Man's-Land" or as "a private zoo", as he calls it elsewhere (44), a place where various "caricatures of mankind" (44) are housed, certainly contains some "elements of a game", which makes it possible for the prisoner to "talk and to laugh, to situate himself" (280). On inspecting the laughter and irreverence which allow Breytenbach to "situate himself", however, the reader is struck by the resemblance his 'gallows humour' has to what Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World* (1965) calls 'the carnivalesque' with its inherent grotesque realism.

The healing potential of laughter

Despite differences in time and place between Bakhtin and Breytenbach, parallels in their response to, and conceptions of, life are evident. The nature of this response creates an open textual space within which the writer inscribes himself and out of which he challenges the general closure of his times.

Although he was not physically imprisoned, Bakhtin developed an original critical theory around the relativising concept of the carnivalesque, the symbols of which are “filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of *gay relativity* [my emphasis] of prevailing rules and authorities” (Bakhtin, 1984:11). This theory bears many resemblances to the imprisoned Breytenbach’s use of gallows humour as a coping mechanism. It is doubtful whether Breytenbach was familiar with Bakhtin’s writings; nonetheless, it is interesting to consider the circumstances that in the two writers provoked a carnivalesque interpretation of the oppressive conditions of their existence. It is not only physical incarceration (as in Breytenbach’s case), of course, that may induce states of extreme distress; an equally traumatic experience may be the psyche’s incarceration in the oppressive ideology of a totalitarian system. Turning to Bakhtin, we need to recall that he witnessed the worst days of Stalinist dictatorship, that era of “total incarceration” (Davies, 1990:8), where political constraints forced him to address his theory of the carnivalesque not to Russian society itself, but (by analogy) to another time and place, i.e. to the sixteenth century world of Rabelais, so as to avoid a direct confrontation with the cultural censors of his own day. (Rabelais’ courageous attacks on obscurantism, we may recall, brought on him the ire of the Sorbonne and the French parliament.) Breytenbach was physically imprisoned for opposing apartheid, another form of totalitarianism. The works of Bakhtin and Breytenbach, therefore, spring from an age of ideological totalism, with the South African’s gallows humour and the Russian’s carnivalesque both pointing to the healing potential of laughter in that the roar of laughter symbolically destroys the monolithic seriousness and authority of the ‘official’ culture. Just as Bakhtin’s carnivalesque points to a whole world turned upside down, so Breytenbach’s humour serves to subvert the external pressure to which he was constantly subjected in prison. His mockery turns the captor/ victim relationship upside down and renders it harmless, the victim becoming both an actor in, and a spectator of, his own captivity.

This attitude is also in keeping with the paradoxical spirit of some Far Eastern spiritual disciplines, especially with Zen Buddhism, which

Breytenbach was practising at the time of his imprisonment. To put it briefly, the aim of Zen is to assist individuals attain a state of maximum spiritual awareness, *satori*, while liberating their natural energies and “giving free play to all creative and benevolent impulses inherently lying in their hearts” (Fromm, 1960:114). The spirit of relativisation as advocated by Zen is based on unconventional logic and the polyphony of points of view. Breytenbach’s invocation to Sarasvati, which I quoted earlier, will be seen as a suggestive aspect of this response.

The spirit of the ‘carnavalesque’

As concerns the carnivalesque, the emphasis lies, for some, with the semiotics of the grotesque body, i.e. with an intensely physical rejection of the authority figures. For Bakhtin and for Breytenbach, however, it is the mental attitudes exemplified by the carnival. To put it briefly, it is the spirit of laughter and mockery that constitutes the power of their rebellion rather than the minute descriptions of grotesque bodies and the space they inhabit.

In important ways, Bakhtin regarded the carnival as a semiotics of the grotesque. In equally important (and related) ways, the carnival signified a mental attitude: the carnival of laughter and mockery as a power of rebellion. It is the latter sense that applies most pertinently to Breytenbach.

We also need to see the carnivalesque as part of Bakhtin’s conception of ‘dialogism’, which, he says, “is the *sine qua non* for the novel structure”, to the same degree that “carnivalisation is the condition for the ‘ultimate structure’ of life. ... Dialogue so conceived [language as constitutively intersubjective] is opposed to the ‘authoritarian word’ in the same way as carnival is opposed to official culture” (Pomorska, 1984: x).

What literary critics have often forgotten about Bakhtin is that terms like *heteroglossia*, *multiplicity of styles*, *multi-accentuality*, *polyphony*, *dialogism*, etc, are for the Russian critic only part of a lifetime inquiry into profound questions about the entire enterprise of thinking about what human life means. As Wayne Booth recognises, Bakhtin’s ultimate value — full acknowledgment of, and participation in, a Great Dialogue — is thus not to be addressed as just one more piece of literary criticism. “It is a philosophical inquiry into our limited ways of mirroring and improving our lives” (Booth, 1989:xxiv). What is significant about “The Great Dialogue” — as Booth concludes — is that there is a religious dimension: the dialogue occurs between *homo religiosus* and God. But this dimension of Bakhtin’s existence is usually ignored in the fashion for Bakhtinian revival in contemporary ‘postmodernist’ criticism. Living as he did during the heyday of Communist dictatorship, Bakhtin could not afford to be explicit about his

religious convictions in his writings. Nonetheless, “he was unusual in retaining his Christian faith, in the Russian Orthodox tradition” (Lodge, 1990:2). At this point it must be emphasised that Christianity, for a citizen in an atheist state, constitutes an oppositional ethos comparable to Breytenbach’s Zen Buddhism in the context of his own Calvinist Afrikaner inheritance, an inheritance which, as a Paris-based intellectual artist, he has tried to master even as he admits that he could not evade his ‘South African’ commitment.

This is the frame, then, within which Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque should be seen as applicable to Breytenbach. The carnivalesque acts as a device to challenge the totalist aspirations of the official culture, which are in conflict with the aspirations of the individual. The spirit of irreverence becomes a form of inner defiance in its open sense, which is implicitly a subversive openness that seeks to “destroy the forces of stasis and official ideology through parodying them” (Holquist, 1984:xvi). Laughter explodes the forces of stasis and “builds its own world in opposition to the official world, its own church in opposition to the official church, its own state in opposition to the official state” (Bakhtin, 1984:88). This alternative polis of the dissident subculture is “finally a symbol of freedom, of the courage needed to establish it and the cunning required to maintain it” (Holquist, 1984:xxi). Throughout history, the aim of the carnival festivities has largely been one of parodying serious rituals and important events in order to gain some detachment from official authority and oppressive ‘official truths’. As Bakhtin has it, “one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order ... it was hostile to everything immortalised and completed”(1984:10). While referring to Rabelais, Bakhtin says that there is in Rabelais’ images “no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness ... These images are opposed to all that is *finished* [my emphasis] and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook”(1984: 3).

Breytenbach has a similar subversely open attitude against the ‘forces of stasis’ as regards the closed mind and space of the apartheid prison house:

There is no composition like decomposition: not just a rearranging or a falling apart, but verily rotting to the bone to bring to light the essential structure. The further you go, the more you realize that there are no *finites* [my emphasis], just movements of the mind, only processes (Breytenbach 1984a:151).

What this sort of rebellion suggests is a “ritual spectacle” attitude (towards oppression), one of Bakhtin’s three categories of the carnivalesque. I shall look at this manifestation in detail before turning briefly to Bakhtin’s second category, that of the “comic verbal composition”.

In this article I will not deal with the third category referred to as “various genres of billingsgate” (cf. Bakhtin 1984: 5).

The ‘life-as-spectacle’ attitude

Bakhtin’s “ritual spectacle” parallels what Breytenbach calls “gallows gladness” (1984a:363), which can be illustrated in the ‘albino terrorist’s’ mocking ‘life-as-spectacle’ attitude towards his prison experience, as well as in his use of the literary device of the trickster, according to which he mockingly scrutinises his own identity.

The concept of ‘life-as-spectacle’ is most explicitly employed by Breytenbach in the two trial scenes, which are staged in the narrative in such a way as to highlight the perverse rituals of the law and to undermine the ‘monolithic’ seriousness of its ‘immortalised’ truths. Breytenbach’s trials had stirred considerable interest at the time of their occurrence (1975 and 1977) and the tragi-comic register informing the memoirist’s recollections of them corresponds, to a large extent, to the literal truth that had played itself out in the courtroom and in Breytenbach’s wisecracking, clowning attitude towards his interrogators. Peter Dreyer, one of the Breytenbach case commentators, for instance, describes the first trial in the following terms: “The public scarcely knew whether it was being presented with a Greek tragedy, a James Bond farce or an Agatha Christie thriller”(1980: 16).

Breytenbach himself describes his trial as a “dance of the law” (60) and a “circus” (67): that is, the trial is transported into ‘life-as-spectacle’ as the memoirist seeks some detachment to make possible the creation of a reconstructed inner space, an inner space permitting a humorous interpretation of the dictum “the Law Is” (251): what is interrogated is the corrupt system of law and its lackeys. As Breytenbach describes it, the first trial was presided over by “an old flunkey going by the name of Silly” (63), who must have received his orders from the mock-honorifically nicknamed Sitting Bull himself, i.e. the then prime minister, B.J. Vorster. Another representative of the Law is the prosecutor’s senior assistant, a supercilious man who ‘opens his heart’ to Breytenbach by confessing that he is a Satanist. Breytenbach comments: “and we felt we might have something in common here, as he sensed, he said, an admiration for the Devil in me too” (63). Whether the state functionary realised it or not, his identification of Breytenbach with the devil suggested something of his fear that the

prisoner, through his clowning, may have had the capacity to bring the solemnity of the proceedings into disrepute.

In this gallery of buffoons there is, however, one supreme clown, Colonel Huntingdon, who stands out by virtue of his utterly split personality. His schizoid mental associations allow him to believe that he is able to combine his duties as a Security Police officer with his having humane feelings towards the prisoner. Thus, he pretends — before the trial begins — to defend Breytenbach's interests, really believing that his intention is to assist the prisoner: "Why bother to have legal representation? .. why don't you leave it in my hands? — I shall defend you!" (61). Later on, during the trial, Huntingdon, wishing to 'defend' Breytenbach, testifies to the latter's cooperation. As Breytenbach writes: "to my everlasting shame, he went up to testify to my cooperation" (66). The trial-circus ends with Huntingdon pretending "to be aggrieved and surprised by the severity of the sentence" (98).

What all these prison-carnival-figures, or embodiments of "State the Father", have in common is that "they are fascinated by the mechanism of the trial-as-ritual. They love to assist at the conclusion and the accomplishment of their handiwork" (64) because, as Breytenbach puts it in a lighter note now — that barely conceals the sinister undertone — they want "to make sure that the noose fits snugly" (64) and that "the show ... goes on!" (67).

The trickster-in-prison

The spirit of laughter and irreverence is not only apparent in Breytenbach's mocking 'life-as-spectacle' attitude, but is also mediated in the memoir through the use of the trickster figure. In Jungian psychology, which Bakhtin clearly evokes, the archetypal 'trickster' functions to restore proportion and perspective in relation to the network of constituting circumstances in which one may find oneself trapped. Once having developed a 'theory' about what is going on, once capable of predicting which 'play' is on, the trickster-in-prison begins to recast his experience as a contrived drama, in which he can play-act while keeping in touch with his sense of identity. The trickster is thus internally a liberated man: one who no longer confuses his own identity as individual human being with that of his socially inscribed role (in this case, as prisoner). As Jung has it, the trickster is an ambivalent figure, the embodiment of both sides, not 'either/or', but 'both/and'. He is "a wounded wounder ... a sufferer who takes away suffering through ... the transformation of the meaningless into the meaningful" (Jung, 1980:256).

To transform “the meaningless” is to subvert the arbitrary meaning which the state machinery is determined to impose on the individual. In attempting to subvert the meaning of trial and imprisonment, the albino terrorist turns to mockery. Probably one of the best illustrations of the autobiographer’s paradoxical self-mockery is to be found in the title of the memoir itself, which is meant to cast doubt on the truthfulness of “the true confessions” that the ensuing pages claim to offer. While the word *confessions* recalls St. Augustine’s and Rousseau’s time-honoured autobiographies, the second part of the formulation, “of an albino terrorist”, suggests (in the context of apartheid) the debunking of official language and veracity. Breytenbach is evidently playing around with his own ambivalent status as “an albino in a white country” (260) by looking at himself from more than one point of view.

This point is reinforced at the end of the book: on being released from prison, where he had served time as a ‘terrorist’, this trickster goes for a swim in the ocean and is surrounded by black children for whom he is just another ‘albino’: “I was surrounded by small Black children who saw nothing wrong with this Whitey being in the water with them. Ignorant little bastards — haven’t you heard about Apartheid yet?” (331). Breytenbach’s whiteness here has an extremely ambivalent connotation: the newly released prisoner does not claim any right to admiration for having once attempted to strike a blow at the very structure of racial discrimination to which he now draws the children’s attention.

Clearly, the ritual spectacle has involved stratagems of comic verbal composition: Bakhtin’s second category of the carnivalesque, a strategy closely linked to the coping mechanism of preserving the personality in the hostile environment. Throughout the memoir, for example, ‘the albino terrorist’ has been aware of the multitude of personae lying behind the name Breyten Breytenbach — in his schizoid role as “an albino in a white country”. This is evident when we simply list all the other names he seems to consider appropriate for defining the various circumstances in which he finds himself, and which call forth different frames of mind. Breytenbach calls himself Dick, Antoine, Hervé, which are all various political aliases adopted prior to his incarceration; Jean-Marc Galaska, the name under which he returned to South Africa in 1975; in prison, he becomes Mr Bird, Bangai Bird; the less educated inmates calling him Professor, Professor Bird; after his hair has been cut and his head shaved, he becomes Billiard Ball; there is also Jan Blom, an earlier poet-mask of Breytenbach’s, as well as Don Espejuelo, literally ‘the knight of the mirror’, who is responsible for the metaphysical meditations. These personae serve temporary purposes for the trickster, whose taste for nominal transformation seems to point to the

fact that “there is not one person that can be named and in the process of naming be fixed for all eternity” (13). This kind of awareness may also be detected in the scene in which a warder asks Breytenbach who in actual fact he is, while the ‘albino terrorist’ pretends not to be quite sure either: “He wanted to know whether I was indeed Breytenbach. A metaphysical question admittedly, but I took the risk of saying ‘yes’” (233).

Conclusion: The limits of laughter

As a further point of comparison and consideration, I finally wish to turn to another autobiographical text that was conceived in the spirit of laughter and irreverence. It is tellingly entitled *History's Carnival: A Dissident's Autobiography* (1979), and written by the Soviet mathematician Leonid Plyushch, who served time in prison and psychiatric wards for his anti-totalitarian attitudes. Plyushch says: “The role of laughter essentially is to overcome fear, death, and everything deadening and dying. It has been said that Rabelais’ laughter broke ground for the French Revolution. The Russian Revolution was accompanied by buffoonery and satire” (1979:301).

When referring directly to Mikhail Bakhtin and his concept of ‘the carnivalesque’, Plyushch briefly summarises the theory of “the all-destroying and all-creating laughter” as follows:

... laughter destroys the old and moribund and gives birth to the new ... it throws dirt at everything that degrades and oppresses man. What are the limits of laughter? If laughter in its totality engenders a dialectical attitude toward the world, then, it too should be dialectical in both negating the old and creating the new. Otherwise, it is reduced to a laughter of nihilism, cynicism and madness.(1979:301-302)

Why I have mentioned Plyushch here is that the issues he raises have peculiar pertinence to the way we may want to see Breytenbach today. His brand of mockery has been regarded by some in South Africa as little more than nihilism. It is difficult for politically radical critics, for example, to erase the recollections of Breytenbach at his own trial: instead of seeing Breytenbach in command of any ‘ritual spectacle’, these critics are embarrassed to recall the Afrikaner-dominated security police pleading for the minimum sentence on behalf of one of the sons, albeit a ‘prodigal son’. An inevitable question, therefore, might be: what is the value of Breytenbach’s essentially intellectual rebellion in relationship to the majority of the oppressed? How one answers this depends on how one situates oneself in South African politics. The positioning is not simple and would need to account not only for a ‘community of the oppressed’ but also

for a 'community of the oppressors': that is, we would need to locate Breytenbach firmly within the community in which he inescapably has his roots. Accordingly, we may wish to see his laughter as an attack directed back against the dour Calvinist way of life of his own background. Certainly his actions have been interpreted by some as a form of attack on Afrikanerdom and this has not prevented his being acclaimed by the Afrikaner literati; his prizes tend to be awarded for 'literary craftsmanship' rather than for the 'political content' of his writings. Such a clear-cut separation of functions features in many critical responses to his work.

The reaction against Afrikaner Calvinism may be a valid one that should not be interpreted as merely cynical or nihilistic. Neither should we really be merely cynical about the fact that Breytenbach's suffering was of a different, less physical kind from that of the black oppressed. His rebellion may not have been grounded in the physical deprivation of the disenfranchised; we should not, however, underestimate the effects of psychological torture on the sensitive mind. In fact, his rebellion of the mind touches very personal convictions. Behind the carnivalesque in Breytenbach, as well as Bakhtin and Plyushch, there are allegiances to what one might call a 'symbolic community' of those practising morality as a private act: something based on deep moral and religious precepts. Although this attitude towards incarceration (incarceration in the broad sense of the word) may be prone to attacks by social commitment, it should be borne in mind that the individual gestures of resisting either physical or psychic/ "total" (Davies 1990) incarceration acquire collective and political significance by each dissident's suggesting a symbolic role model in facing forms of extreme oppression with dignity. Thus, through a feedback effect these gestures come to strengthen the collective struggle itself. The various strategies of coping with, and reconstructing, the hostile space become, in effect, political gestures, in that politicisation means — according to Emma Mashinini — "I am human. I exist. I am a complete person"(1989:24). The feeble and lonely voices of dissenters speak of the right to bear witness, as individuals, to the suffering of the many who do not possess the power of articulating their suffering and/or investing it with meaning. This represents "a new symbolic community: the community of those who suffer and live to tell and are ready to suffer again for the right to tell" (Tamas 1993:15). But, to reiterate, behind the societal claim is a spiritual core. The right to bear witness to, and tell about, one's own and others' suffering has more than verbal implications. As I have suggested, the implication is spiritual in nature. Whereas Bakhtin was a devout Christian, Breytenbach and Plyushch share deep-seated beliefs in Zen Buddhism. Of course, in the harsh political climate of South Africa in the 1980s (when Breytenbach wrote *True*

Confessions), one might have been tempted to reject Breytenbach's interest in, and practice of, Zen Buddhism as an indulgence. It is a fact, nonetheless, that despite the diversity of styles and subject-matters he has adopted throughout his writing career, Breytenbach's interest in the general principles of Zen Buddhism has been constant. In drawing parallels with the Russian prisoner's interest in Zen, we are reminded that Breytenbach belongs to a broader intellectual community and that his writing is neither simply an effect of the rebellious sixties in Western Europe (where his 'modernism' had its apprenticeship), nor can it, as I suggested above, be confined to South African political specificities. Rather, this symbolic network gives the overworked terms of 'universalism' and 'autonomy of art' spiritual strength and social substance.

Whether this makes Breytenbach less a South African writer and more of an 'international' one is, within the terms of this paper, beside the point.

Clearly, Breytenbach's spirit of irreverence has nothing to do with "the laughter of nihilism, cynicism and madness". What I am suggesting is a possible answer to Plyushch's question: "What are the limits of laughter?" An appropriate understanding of the laughter of Breytenbach as prisoner and as memoirist suggests its value for his survival as a whole human being.

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UNHAPPY FAMILIES: INVOCATION AND RE-CREATION IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT LOWELL

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Running throughout Lowell's poetry is a given – death – and its invocation and re-creation in elegies concerned with his family and ancestors, particularly those on the maternal side of the line. One can, too, observe the changes and contrasts in attitude to his relatives, by taking examples from *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946) and the work collected in *Life Studies* (1959).

Robert Lowell's biographer, Ian Hamilton, wrote that "[t]here is an interest, therefore, in reflecting how little of his life up to 1945 can be constructed from the poems in *Lord Weary's Castle*" (Hamilton, 1983:106), and if we do get a glimmer of the Boston backdrop or the Puritan background, nothing is deliberately made explicit. Perhaps on one level, it is hatred and rage for people, whom he had loved and died, leaving him to sort out his guilt and grief. From another angle, not irreconcilable with the former, it could have stemmed from his religious conversion and rejection of all that baggage with which he had been brought up. For Hamilton, though:

There are elegies in the book addressed to dead relatives but these carry little direct feeling, nor do we get from them any direct sense of who these people were: would it be known, for instance, from "In Memory of Arthur Winslow" that Lowell had revered the old man in his youth, and spent the happiest of his boyhood holidays messing about at his grandfather's farm at Mattapoisett? Nostalgia could not, of course, sit easily with Lowell's vatic zeal (Hamilton, 107).

If Hamilton is, to an extent, right in his rather dismissive use of the word "vatic," because in his early work, Lowell did want to be something of the religious prophet or seer in his new-found Catholicism, raging against the hollowness of the everyday mid-century world of America. It is also true in the poems like "In Memory of Arthur Winslow" or "Mary Winslow," that what comes through is a powerful strand of personal aggression, and these works do carry feeling, albeit negative, about his family and his connection with his closest relatives. What Hamilton thinks of as "little direct feeling" is to an extent the early Lowell attempting to exert wilful control over material that is of a personal nature. This control, nevertheless, is only tentative in these early elegies, but personal matters will become central to his later work. "In Memory of Arthur Winslow" shows one – negative –

side to the poetic display of feeling, a side which will begin to be worked through by the time he embarks on the composition of the elegies in *Life Studies*.

Lowell, as a boy, had worshipped his grandfather, but Hamilton's point is irrelevant, because here we see the critic-biographer looking back at the whole oeuvre with the gift of hindsight. Lowell's "zeal" and intolerance has been overcome by the time he comes to write "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Wilson," "Dunbarton," and "Grandparents" in the 1959 volume, and he is able to write with greater ease about relatives. If there is still uncertainty about the memorialisation of family members, there is also a gradual awakening of sympathy and compassion.

Lord Weary's Castle, however, delivers elegies for relatives that are infused with what seems, at times, a boiling rage, as in the first section, "Death from Cancer," of "In Memory of Arthur Winslow," where Lowell's grandfather is seen in hospital, struggling with the cancer from which he is dying.

This Easter, Arthur Winslow, less than dead,
Your people set you up in Phillips House
To settle off your wrestling with the crab –
The claws drop flesh upon your yachting blouse
Until longshoreman Charon come and stab
Through your adjusted bed
And crush the crab.

This is a violent, brutal picture of Arthur Winslow's death and he is foreseen as being carried off into the land of the dead not by the classical Charon, the ferryman crossing the Styx or Acheron, but Charon the longshoreman, who is a thoroughly contemporary figure and who is now likened to a Boston longshoreman, with its distinct suggestion of class division, and even the hint of the Irish immigrant who had begun to displace and overthrow the Brahmin world of the Lowells and Winslows. In the second stanza of this section, the exhortation – in memory – that his grandfather look out of his hospital room window at the island in Boston's Public Gardens, a site once only inhabited by the upper classes, who passed time there, and where now "with tub/And strainer the mid-Sunday Irish scare/The sun-struck shallows for the dusky chub" carries with it a spiteful delight in the overthrow of Brahminian power. The reference looks back and contrasts Phillips House, the expensive private wing of the Massachusetts General Hospital, with these "mid-Sunday Irish." This reminds the reader of the "longshoreman Charon," where the idea of lifting machinery along the banks of a dock links to the dying Winslow's "adjusted bed." Charon has

become a docker, a loader of dead bodies on to the boats. It is unclear, however, if the vehemence of his bitterness does not leave Lowell himself tainted with the snobbery of his own relatives. If he has joined “the mid-Sunday Irish” in their Catholic religion, he hints, too, in his descriptions, to the fact that he is still a Lowell and a Winslow, despite his open rebellion to what he saw as having become their diluted, indifferent Protestant religion.

When we come to the second section, “Dunbarton” (not to be confused with the later poem, “Dunbarton,” in *Life Studies* [see below]) the contemporary world of the Lowell/Winslow clan has been thinned out, has become entropic in its energy-less existence, unlike the seventeenth-century Pilgrim Fathers and Puritans from whom the family has sprung. Even the landscape which Lowell invokes in this section has become decayed:

The stones are yellow and the grass is gray
Past Concord by the rotten lake and hill
Where crutch and trumpet meet the limousine
And half-forgotten Starks and Winslows fill
The granite plot and the dwarf pines are green
From watching for the day
When the great year of the little yeomen come
Bringing its landed promise and the faith
That made the Pilgrim Makers take a lathe
And point their wooden steeples lest the Word be dumb.

Of course, the contrasting of present and past contains a long history of looking back to a “Golden Age,” but this is an angry portrayal of family members, who, like the greyness of the grass and the stagnant lake, have been either reduced to “crutch and trumpet,” unable to walk or hear unaided, or, like Grandfather Winslow, have entered the land of the dead. There is, too, in the invocation of the “half-forgotten Starks and Winslows,” who fill the graveyard, a hint that they have inhabited an America they once understood and ruled, but have now become the “half-forgotten,” irrelevant in the modern world.

Despite Lowell’s temporary and troubled conversion to Catholicism and rigorous rejection of the Calvinist past of his family, he often gives a hint of irritation when contrasting the contemporary family with their New England ancestors, because the “Pilgrim Makers,” taking “a lathe” to build their version of the New Jerusalem had more practicality, vigour, and, indeed, faith than their descendents show in mid-twentieth-century America. There is an ambiguity here: on one level, the Pilgrim Fathers were strong and devoted in their Calvinist faith; on the other hand, they were tainted with cupidity. Change is taking place, subtly altering the thread between

past and present in this family history, although, as the second stanza of the “Dunbarton” section shows: “The preacher’s mouthings still/Deafen my poor relations on the hill:/Their sunken landmarks echo what our fathers preached.” This is a perfect photographic image, giving us the view of a cemetery where the tombstones and graves have subsided in the course of time. It reveals the long line of historical ancestors buried in Dunbarton, as well as familial decay. Yes, but who is being deafened by the preacher, those relatives hard of hearing and presenting their ear trumpets to the preacher’s bland “mouthings,” or the dead lying in the graveyard? Whatever, the reader is left with the impression that the funeral ritual is meaningless and only what his grandfather deserves.

In the third section, “Five Years Later,” Arthur Winslow is attacked for his money-making:

This Easter, Arthur Winslow, five years gone
I came to mourn you, not to praise the craft
That netted you a million dollars, late
Hosing out gold in Colorado’s waste,
Then lost it all in Boston real estate.

In echoing and reversing Mark Antony’s words in *Julius Caesar* (III. Ii. 74), where Antony is about to upset everything that Brutus has said about Caesar, Lowell has not come to persuade in favour of his grandfather’s endeavours in life, but to attack the whole concept of what the man stood for in the world of American commerce or in Boston’s higher social classes. Winslow’s monetary gain proved to be ephemeral: gold, something solid and tangible, disappeared in property speculation, a private financial collapse that perhaps mirrors the wider economic instabilities of the economy of the United States in the years leading up to the Second World War.

Now from the train, at dawn
Leaving Columbus in Ohio, shell
On shell of our stark culture strikes the sun
To fill my head with all our fathers won
When Cotton Mather wrestled with the fiends from hell.
You must have hankered for our family’s craft:
The block-house Edward made, the Governor,
At Marshfield, and the slight coin-silver spoons
The sheriff beat to shame the gaunt Revere,
And General Stark’s coarse bas-relief in bronze
Set on your granite shaft
In rough Dumbarton; for what else could bring
You, Arthur, to the veined and alien West

But devil's notions that your gold at least
Could give back life to men who whipped or backed the King?

Arthur Winslow had been a mining engineer and executive, and as such had a "craft," though unlike his ancestors, it is suggested that he had no skill, merely the brute force to hose out gold.

The point about Lowell's invocation and re-creation is that in his work, as Randall Jarrell pointed out, "[h]is present contains the past – especially Rome, the late Middle Ages, and New England – as an operative skeleton just under the skin," (Jarrell, 1972:214). What Lowell is able to summon up and deal with is an argument between the present-day world and history, which at one and the same time blends and mixes the personal and the national. Hugh B. Staples, an early critic of Robert Lowell, commented on this in stating that "[t]hroughout the poem runs a dialectic of past and present, in which the past, or history is favourably compared to the present" (Staples, 1962:30). This idea of history being viewed as being in some way better than the contemporary America of the poem is not, however, entirely correct if one looks at particular points in this section of the poem, where Puritan ancestors, though contrasted with modern-day relatives for their religious devotion and energy, are themselves capable of dishonesty and untrustworthiness. The view from the train running through Ohio shows a modern "stark culture" (this was 1943 and the United States was at war), and Lowell gives full vent to his anger at his grandfather's life, but he also becomes no less ruthless with his ancestors. With "shell/On shell of our stark culture," Lowell plays with two meanings of that word "stark": in a general sense, it is the historical stripping bare of American culture, like the flushing out of gold from "Colorado's waste," but it is also a reminder of all that Lowell himself has inherited from the starkness of his Puritan past (this is the genetic inheritance that has made an Arthur Winslow, let alone a Robert Lowell). "General Stark's coarse bas-relief" serves to echo back to those "half-forgotten Starks and Winslows."

There is a catalogue of historical (familial) names to contend with: Edward Winslow, one of the founders of the Plymouth Colony; Sheriff Edward Winslow III, a silversmith and high sheriff to George II; John Stark, a Revolutionary War general and founder of Starkstown, which was renamed Dunbarton. And, naturally, Lowell argues that his grandfather, Arthur Winslow, believed that he could, in a fine contradiction, go "to the veined and alien West" (alien to Boston Brahmins, at least; a far-away wilderness in contrast to the *stark* Massachusetts culture with which they were familiar) and buy back a solid blood-line that had become dissipated. There is, nevertheless, a nasty swipe at age itself, as we all become veined

and alien to the young, poets or otherwise. The image of “the slight-coin silver spoons” conjures up not only the delicacy and intricacy of the work, but also refers to “the gaunt Revere.” Paul Revere became a folk hero, famous for his ride to warn the Bostonians that the British were coming, and Revere himself was a silversmith, a series of his metal engravings becoming famous, because they portrayed the Boston Massacre, the work undertaken out of economic necessity as much as a memorial to the American fight for independence (Revere had a growing and enlarging family to support).

It is here that we see Lowell the Poet at his harshest with his grandfather, whom he views as being led on by “devil’s notions. On the personal level, Lowell’s anger with his grandfather is perhaps as much to do with “the contemporary domination of secular concern over religious insight” (Cosgrave, 1970:53) and his acidity is concerned with how the materialism of Winslow’s life has concealed any transcendental meaning from him and from contemporary human beings and has allowed quotidian existence to dominate over spiritual values. Lowell’s conclusion of the poem, in section four, ambiguously suggests that his grandfather will “Sink like Atlantis in the Devil’s jaw” unless, like Lazarus, he is raised up by a special intercession of the Virgin Mary.

Another poem, “Mary Winslow,” is equally brutal in showing the death of an ageing relative.

Her Irish maids could never spoon out mush
Or orange-juice enough; the body cools
And smiles as a sick child
Who adds up figures, and a hush
Grips at the poised relations sipping sherry
And tracking up the carpets of her four
Room kingdom.

Where Arthur Winslow is seen as “less than dead,” Mary Winslow is seen at the moment following her death, just as “the body cools.” A demanding and self-absorbed patient, she had insisted upon constant attention, had to be fed mush and orange juice, and was loud in her complaints. Now “Charon, the Lubber, clammers from his wherry,/And stops her hideous baby-squawks and yells.” The entire description is mocking and satiric. As with “In Memory of Arthur Winslow,” no quarter is given and impatience is uppermost in the searing words of the poem. Charon is again seen as less than classical, in this case as a lubber, a hulking, awkward person, who struggles out of his barge to silence Mary Winslow once and for all. The wherry, or barge, not only returns the reader to the idea of Charon as having fallen into twentieth-century commercialism, but points to the second

stanza, in which Mary Winslow is seen as “our Copley ancestress,/Grandiloquent, square-jowled and worldly-wise,/ A Cleopatra in her housewife’s dress.” But this Cleopatra is not going to be transported in a barge “like a burnished throne,” as was Shakespeare’s heroine.

With the family elegies in *Life Studies*, however, his writing about his maternal relatives showed a new and different focus. *Life Studies* turned from a formal structure to one that has been called a “confessional” style, though succeeding critics have been taken in by this word and it is a mine-trap with which one has to be careful. Nevertheless, the first three poems in *Life Studies* are elegies, which, in a way, parallel and contrast with “In Memory of Arthur Winslow” and “Mary Winslow.”

As Jay Martin has observed, “the 1959 sequence ‘undid’ the anger in the 1946 series” (Martin, in Axelrod and Deese, 1986:33), because there is an unravelling of the aggressive attitudes of the earlier elegies, as if a dam had been broken. “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow,” “Dunbarton,” and “Grandparents” show Lowell subsuming his anger and antagonism, and moving towards an accommodation, in which there is an acceptance and a recognition of loss.

“My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow” is connected to the earlier elegy, “In Memory of Arthur Winslow,” in part because of its four-section structure and also because it relates not only to his uncle, but also to his grandfather, Arthur Winslow. This was Lowell’s first encounter with death, when, as a five-year-old, he saw his uncle dying. Interwoven with this experience is his love for his grandfather, and he does not use the cruelly critical eye here in writing about the man with “devil’s notions.” In “In Memory of Arthur Winslow,” he had used his grandfather’s first name in part to distance the man from his blood relationship, but also to be more patronising and demeaning. It remains, though, that Lowell’s continual struggle with his parents and the memory of his parents is in evidence at the beginning of the elegy, though “Grandpa” has now replaced “Arthur Winslow” or “Arthur”:

I won’t go with you. I want to stay with Grandpa!
That’s how I threw cold water
on my Mother and Father’s
watery martini pipe dreams at Sunday dinner.

This a more heartfelt elegy than the earlier one in *Lord Weary’s Castle* and memories of love and death come together in this poem: “Nowhere was anywhere after a summer/at my Grandfather’s farm.” Yet as Philip Hobsbaum has noted, “The whole poem, however, is an evocation of [Uncle

Devereux's] doomed culture; and this context is at least as important as the man himself. [...] The images that obtrude on the boy may, to us, seem overly-statedly masculine, but [i]n the face of so elaborate a mixture, it is no wonder that the 'watery martini pipe dreams' of the Lowell parents are rejected" (Hobsbaum, 1988:78).

Three things are going on here. Firstly, there is the recollection of details concerned with Lowell's grandfather's presence; secondly, there is an acknowledgement that the farm will be closed, because the summer is over; thirdly, the conception of summer as a dying thing is put into the context of human death: "Uncle Devereux was closing camp for the winter," has, at its core, the intrusion of human death into the child's world, for on the farm "No one had died there in my lifetime .../Only Cinder, our Scottie puppy/paralyzed from eating toads."

His blue coat and white trousers
grew sharper and straighter.

* * *

He was dying of the incurable Hodgkin's Disease ...
My hands were warm, then cool, on the piles
Of earth and lime,
a black pile and a white pile. ...
Come winter,
Uncle Devereux would blend to the one color.

And this death is reflected in the "piles/Of earth and lime," with which the boy Lowell is playing, though the poet reverses the idea of a fertile earth by making it "cool" and the lime, used to destroy bodies, "warm." As an elegy, it combines a five-and-a-half-year-old boy's confusions with the adult poet's grief, not only for his uncle, but also for his grandfather.

In "Dunbarton," the feelings Lowell had for his grandfather are confronted directly. Not only was Lowell's father away on sea-duty, but he was often seen as a distant, ineffectual man by Lowell's mother. Both parents were microscopically examined in his oeuvre and he eventually came to an accommodation with them, albeit an uneasy one. His grandfather, however, was seen in a different relationship: "He was my father. I was his son." Two sides of a shared love with his grandfather are shown in "Dunbarton": "My Grandfather found/ his grandson's fogbound solitudes/ sweeter than human society." Where Lowell had earlier questioned the ancestral line and come close to denouncing both his forebears and Arthur Winslow in "In Memory of Arthur Winslow," he now recalls that:

Grandfather and I
Raked leaves from our dead forebears,
Defied the dank weather
With “dragon” bonfires.

What Lowell does in “Dunbarton” is challenge his former self and his own earlier poetic encounter with his grandfather’s memory. This elegy is lifted away from the coldly distant emotions of the poem contained in *Lord Weary’s Castle*. This later poem also changes the earlier landscape’s stagnation and decay, so that it becomes a view, which is infused with warmth and can, in turn, connect with one of the ancestors mentioned in “Arthur Winslow:”

The clump of virgin pine still stretched patchy ostrich necks
over the disused millpond’s fragrantly woodstained water,
a reddish blur,
like the ever-blackening wine-dark coat
in our portrait of Edward Winslow
once sheriff for George the Second,
the sire of bankrupt Tories.

There is tranquillity in these lines, as well as a sense of mutual possession, which links the two men – “our portrait.” Gone is the almost shrill hectoring of the “Arthur Winslow” poem, which has now been replaced by an acceptance of the love between grandfather and grandson.

The third elegy in the sequence, “Grandparents,” explicitly examines Lowell’s relationship with and attitudes towards his grandparents. He has become their inheritor, literally. Once a visitor, he now owns the farm, but his grandfather is

Never again
to walk there, chalk our cues,
insist on shooting for us both,
Grandpa! Have me, hold me, cherish me!
Tears smut my fingers.

The unleashing of a dammed-up emotion allows Lowell to mourn for his lost grandfather.

By concentrating on specific poems written in that period of Lowell’s poetic career before and during the time he was developing into the pre-eminent “autobiographical” poet of the twentieth-century writing in English, we can see the evolution of his thought concerning the elegy form. The process Lowell undertakes in the poems I have mentioned is one of

invocation. His first poetic impulses and responses were characterised by anger, but by the 1959 *Life Studies* volume, these had been re-created into grief and mourning that would continue throughout his poetic output.

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DANTICAT'S *THE FARMING OF BONES* AND MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

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In her article “A Bench by the Road” Toni Morrison refers to the incomprehensible absence of any kind of monument in honor of slavery victims, denouncing the lack of a necessary commemorative reminder of a nefarious historical institution that should have never existed: “There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There’s no 300-foot tower. There’s no small bench by the road ... And because such a place doesn’t exist (that I know of), the book [*Beloved*] had to” (1989a: 4). About ten years later, in her novel *The Farming of Bones*,² Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat makes a similar statement referring to all the innocent victims who perished in the Haitian Massacre occurred in 1937 in the Dominican Republic: “There were no graves, no markers. If we tried to dance on graves, we would be dancing on air” (270). Standing on the banks of the Massacre river, where the genocide had taken place, Danticat “fully realized that she wanted to make a novel out of the story” because, as she states, “There are no markers. I felt like I was standing on top of a huge mass grave, and just couldn’t see the bodies. That’s the first time I remember thinking, ‘Nature has no memory’ ...’and that’s why we have to have memory’ (Charters 1998). The genesis of both *Beloved* and *TFOB* has as its basis the need these writers feel to remember and honor the victims of genocide, rescuing them from the oblivion they were forced into by history. As Danticat admits,

The massacre is not as well-known here as it is in Haiti...But I wasn’t thinking so much I wanted to popularize it with a larger audience as with younger people, like my brothers, who didn’t know about it at all. It’s a part of our history, as Haitians, but it’s also a part of the history of the world. Writing about it is an act of remembrance. (Charters 1998)

In the light of an absence of commemorative monuments, the literary discourse of the novel turns out to be an apt means to remember and pay tribute to the silenced by unnecessary oppression and death. It is precisely through the process that Morrison terms “literary archeology” (1987: 112) that the past is revisited and revised, notwithstanding the pain triggered by a too

² Hereafter abbreviated to *TFOB*.

often uncomfortable journey into “unspeakable things unspoken” (Morrison 1989b: 1). Although from different time frames and settings, Morrison and Danticat are fully aware that “the past is not something to be escaped, avoided, or controlled...the past is something with which we must come to terms” (Hutcheon 1989: 58).

But it is not only thematically that *Beloved* and *TFOB* present important similarities; narrative technique and stylistic traits also unite these two works which, however, have not been systematically compared to date by literary critics. From an intertextual perspective, the present essay will attempt to delineate the main thematic and theoretical lines on which these novels can be compared, to show the multiple connections between them and their authors, who, despite the time span between their writings and the differences in spatial background, ultimately write out of the same narrative impulse to “historicize the event of the dehistoricized” (Bhabha 1994: 198) and share the same ancestral African roots as well as the oppression they entail amidst dominant groups in the Americas.

The Bible and history revisited.

Toni Morrison’s characteristic use and revision of the Bible, especially in *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*, is one of her defining literary strategies.³ The inclusion in her works of biblical allusions together with religious and folkloric elements from West African religions add to the hybridity and eclecticism of her literary stance, advocating the inclusion, confluence and acceptance of different or divergent doctrines and viewpoints. In a similar manner, Edwidge Danticat draws on the Bible to open her novel and thus introduce one crucial thematic element that stands at the basis of the oppression that smites her people.

Morrison’s choice of an epigraph for *Beloved* is in keeping with the spirit of the novel and with the author’s intention to make justice to the ethnic, emotional and physically demoted and demonized because of “the range of color on a palette” (Morrison 1992: 7). After a brief historical reference to the Middle Passage in a short epigraph that reads “Sixty Million and more,” appears a Biblical quotation from Romans 9:25, where the reiteration of key terms like “people” and “beloved” is highly significant: “I will call them my people,/ which were not my people;/ and her beloved,/ which was not beloved”. The people referred to in this passage represent the Gentiles, as opposed to the Jews, who were the people chosen and loved by God. These verses refer back to Old Testament prophet Hosea, whose adulterous wife is

³ See, for instance, Henderson, Bowers and, more recently, Ochoa.

said to be eligible to enter the group of God's beloved, hence the phrase "and her beloved". This antagonism between the group of Jews and that of the Gentiles parallels the confrontation between white Christians and African Americans in the United States, where the latter would represent the outcast unbeloved Gentiles as opposed to the respected and beloved white society. In establishing this patent parallelism, Morrison wisely turns upside down the whole system of slavery and racism claiming her people's natural right to freedom, love and respect or, ultimately, her people's natural right to be simply human.

In the context of slavery, love was often a luxury which slaves could not partake of freely. The separation of whole families, where mothers were taken apart from their offspring hindered the proper manifestation of motherly and filial love. This is what transpires in the relationship between Sethe and her returned daughter Beloved, whose name is but a pun on the complexity and indeterminacy of this character and the feeling of love itself.⁴ On the one hand, this ghost turned flesh is the object of Sethe's love until she forces herself to kill her in order to save her from the death in life that slavery represented. On the other hand, the materialized Beloved is not really beloved, since no-one wants to remember or claim her, for she is the embodiment of a horrific past that everyone wants to forget. Beloved feels she has been abandoned by her mother. If we interpret this character as the reincarnation of the baby Sethe killed, Beloved would return to claim her mother's love and presence, which she considers truncated after her sacrifice. Conversely, if we read Beloved as an African woman who has lost her mother on the journey through the Middle Passage, she would still have the same claims over Sethe, whom she takes as her lost mother. However, Beloved's assumption that her mother did not really love her is not accurate. The fact that she was truly beloved by Sethe is demonstrated precisely by her deciding to kill her as a baby just to prevent her from all the suffering and humiliation she would otherwise have undergone as a slave woman. Therefore, it is precisely out of that "too thick love," as another character puts it (164), that Sethe's killing hand commits its deed.

⁴ In the postmodern context in which Morrison writes, and also taking into account her indebtedness to aspects of African religious and philosophical discourse, the play on words that the term "beloved" constitutes alludes not only to the postmodern indeterminacy and elusiveness of meanings and representation but also to the African god Legba and what he implies as "the epitome of paradox", since Legba is a sign "of the penetration of thresholds, the exchange between discursive universes...neither male nor female, neither this nor that, but both...Esu is a figure of doubled duality, of unreconciled opposites, living in harmony..." (*Signifying* 29-30).

At the end of the novel there is a re-enactment or “antiverbal exorcism” (Brogan 1998: 91) of the baby’s death when Mr. Bodwin, the white man who comes to take Denver to work, reminds Sethe of cruel Schoolteacher back in her slave years. This time, however, the object of her attack is the white man and not her own daughter. Despite Sethe’s reaction, or maybe because it was apparently intended to prevent Denver from being taken away, as a kind of repetition of the past, Beloved feels abandoned once again:

Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling...Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding...running into...the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then Denver, running too...(262)

Beloved has finally been exorcised and Sethe, after confronting the past and re-telling parts of it to others and to herself, ultimately comes to terms with herself. And Beloved’s final disappearance plunges her, once again, into a different kind of oblivion, once the act of remembering has been completed: “Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for...they forgot her like a bad dream...” (274). As Ashraf Rushdy aptly argues, “*Beloved* is the story that stops haunting when told, and stops being when disremembered, but must be remembered to be told, and must be told to be disremembered” (1990: 317).

If *Beloved* “re-collects the history of all the ‘disremembered and unaccounted for’...who fell victim to the African American genocide” (Broad 1994: 191), so does *TFOB* with the Haitian victims of the 1937 Massacre. A biblical passage from the Old Testament is the epigraph chosen by Danticat to introduce her novel:

Jephthah called together the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. The gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead asked him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he replied, “No,” they said, “All right, say ‘Shibboleth.’” If he said, “Sibboleth,” because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-thousand were killed at the time. (Judges 12: 4-6)

The duality of language as both empowering and destructive is underscored in this episode, which is parallel to the experience of Haitian laborers trying to cross the Massacre River into Haitian territory. In the persecution carried out under the rule of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, thousands of Haitians who worked on the sugar plantations in the Dominican Republic were massacred on the border and their bodies remained unburied in the waters of the Massacre River. Under the excuse of liberating his

impoverished nation from the threat Haitian laborers meant for the job market, Trujillo implemented his racist and nationalist ideas on the racial cleansing of October 1937. In order to identify Haitians, soldiers asked them to pronounce the word “parsley” in Spanish. Haitians’ difficulty to pronounce the “r” in “perejil” gave away their Kreyol accent and condemned them to a secure death. As Amabelle Desir, a survivor from the genocide states, “We use parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides. Perhaps the Generalissimo in some larger order was trying to do the same for his country” (203). For an oppressed and persecuted people, language represents an empowering vehicle of identity formation and reaffirmation as well as a means to possess an own voice. Yet, language can also be brandished as a powerful token of domination by the oppressor, as it has usually been the case in the history of colonialism. In this novel Danticat clearly underscores the twofold nature of language. Although one word pronounced can bring about death, it is still “the great discomfort of those trying to silence the world to discover that we have voices sealed inside our heads, voices that with each passing day, grow even louder than the clamor of the world outside” as Amabelle concludes (266). The right to use one’s language must be exercised against all odds, since “silence...is like sleep, a close second to death” (13).

In her analysis of the Haitian Massacre, Michele Wucker refers to the historical whitewashing Trujillo and his men tried to achieve by offering a partial and manipulated version of history: “Trujillo’s men were revising history to justify what he had done. His protege, Joaquin Balaguer, wrote that the massacre was ‘the crystallization in the heart of our country of a sentiment of protest and defense against four centuries of Haitian depredations.’ Grateful for this elegant defense, Trujillo made him, in 1960, the last of three puppet presidents” (Wucker 1998). This is but one significant proof of the constructedness of history and its necessary partiality, since it has traditionally been written by those in power, marginalizing the oppressed and silenced. The two novels under study here have it as their main aim to revisit and revise historical records to introduce in them the formerly thwarted versions and voices of African American slaves and Haitian laborers. Giving voices to those who lacked them and giving life to the dead, inscribing them in the eternity of the literary discourse, “rescuing them from the grave of time and inattention” (Morrison 1985: 593), is the best way to make them justice.

(Masked) faces, names and identities.

One of the most interesting similarities between *Beloved* and *TFOB* lies in the names of the protagonists. Despite their apparent lack of connection, a closer analysis reveals a pattern of intertwined meanings and implications

behind them. The name “Amabelle” has its etymological origins in Latin “amabilis,” which means “lovable.” The protagonist’s last name is “Desir,” a French word whose meaning in English is “desire.” Thus, the connection between the two names, Amabelle Desir and Beloved, resides in the love they receive from others, a feeling that is finally truncated in both cases because of a premature and abrupt separation. Both of them are separated not only from their lovers, Sebastien and Halle, but also from their mothers, whom they seem to be constantly looking for throughout the novel. The separation takes place either as a consequence of drowning or as the devastating effect of the injustice and violence of two horrendous historical episodes, namely slavery and the Massacre. Furthermore, Beloved and Amabelle share a painful feeling of abandonment by their mothers. In the first case, such abandonment is somehow forced by the very evils of slavery, which made slave mothers resort to drastic ways out of their dehumanizing circumstances such as killing or suicide. In her attempt to make herself loved by her mother Sethe, Beloved turns her desire into jealousy and possession, vying with Denver and Paul D for Sethe’s attention and love, to the point of asserting

I AM BELOVED and she is mine...I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing...I see her face which is mine...her face comes through the water a hot thing her face is mine...I have to have my face...I am in the water and she is coming...I want to join...Sethe’s is the face that left me Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile her smiling face is the place for me it is the face I lost she is my face smiling at me...now we can join (210, 212-13)

In the second case, faithful to the implications of her last name, Amabelle’s desire to secure her mother’s love recurs even in her dreams. Her narration of one of those dreams is strikingly similar to Beloved’s claim of the mother figure:

In my sleep, I see my mother rising, like the mother spirit of the rivers, above the current that drowned her...Her face is like mine is now, in fact it is the exact same long, three-different-shades-of-night face, and she is smiling a both-rows-of-teeth revealing smile... “Why did you not love me then?”... “I will never be a whole woman,” I say, “for the absence of your face.” (208)

The two passages tellingly revolve around the image of faces, which symbolizes both characters’ constant yearning and search for their mothers. Faces, together with names, are the main and most direct identifying features of a person’s identity. In their longing for motherly love and physical presence under the pain of forced separation, Beloved and Amabelle identify themselves with and claim their absent mothers, since without them they are

not complete. Furthermore, both describe their mother's faces as coming from the water, be it from the Middle Passage or from the Massacre River.

Amabelle's recurrent dreams of her mother are complemented as it were by those about the so called sugar woman. Interestingly enough, the account of these dreams bears, once again, important similarities with Beloved's reference to her mother as well as with Sethe's memories of her own mother:

I dream of the sugar woman. Again...Around her face, she wears a shiny silver muzzle, and on her neck there is a collar with a clasped lock dangling from it...The sugar woman grabs her skirt and skips back and forth around my room. She seems to be dancing a kalanda in a very fast spin, locks arms with the air...As she swings and shuffles, the chains on her ankles cymbal a rattled melody. She hops to the sound of the jingle of the chains, which with her twists grows louder and louder..." (132)

In Morrison's novel it is precisely through music and dance that Sethe remembers her slave mother:

Of that place where she was born...she remembered only song and dance...Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope. The men as well as the ma'ams, one of whom was certainly her own. They shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. (30-31)

This time, Amabelle's dream includes an implicit reference to slavery in the symbolic presence of chains. Amabelle's obsession with faces comes to the foreground once again in the shape of a question: "Is your face underneath this [mask]?" I ask" (132). Upon uttering those words, Amabelle realizes that "The voice that comes out of my mouth...is the voice of the orphaned child at the stream" (132). Judging from the obvious condition of slave of this unidentified woman whose face cannot be seen completely, and still bearing in mind Sethe's references to her mother, we could suggest the identification of the sugar woman as Amabelle's grandmother or another female ancestor back in slavery times.⁵

Another intriguing coincidence in the characters of Sethe's and Amabelle's mothers is the emphasis placed on their smile. About her mother, Sethe says that "She'd had the bit so many times she smiles. When she wasn't smiling she smiled, and I never saw her own smile...They said it was the bit

⁵. Indeed the metaphor of the mask as a representation of the ancestors is also pointed out by Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka when referring to the "masquerade" or "cult of ancestors" as one of his people's traditions, where "the masquerader...is an ancestor" ("At Century's End" 58).

that made her smile when she didn't want to" (203). Similarly, Amabelle's mother appears to her "smiling a both-rows-of-teeth revealing smile" (208). And the sugar woman comes to her dreams "laughing a metallic laugh that echoes inside the mask" (132). The powerful image of the mask and Sethe's claim that she had never seen her mother's "own smile" constitute an insightful allusion to the tremendous capacity of the slavery system to dispossess slaves from their own identities, hence the presence of a mask behind which are hidden the downtrodden personhood and voices of slaves. A naturally positive gesture as it is the smile turns into the irrefutable proof of such an inversion of values.

Faithful to the postmodern eschewal of totalizing unitary interpretations and opening up to the duality or multiplicity of representation, Danticat engages in a play on the multilayered image of the mask, whose implications go further from those suggested above. Dealing with the great relevance of masks in African art, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that

Once effected, the mask is a vehicle for the primary evocation of a complete hermetic universe, one of force or being, an autonomous world, marked both by a demonstrably interior cohesion and by a complete neutrality to exterior mores or norms. This internal cogency makes it impervious to the accident of place or time. The mask, with its immobilized features all the while mobile, itself is a metaphor for dialectic--specifically, a dialectic or binary opposition embracing unresolved or potentially unresolvable social forms, notions of origins, or complex issues of value. Mask is the essence of immobility fused with the essence of mobility, fixity with transience, order with chaos, permanence with the transitory, the substantial with the evanescent...the mask effects the 'spiritual consolidation' of the race of a people, surely a fundamental aesthetic value in all of African art. (1987:168).

Gates' analysis of the mask is in keeping with the "codes of meaning" created by slaves to communicate among themselves without being understood by their white masters as well as the African components of their folklore, culture and beliefs, which resisted the efforts of white slave holders to dispossess slaves of their cultural background. In such a new and hostile environment, uprooted from their homeland, African slaves "were compelled not only to maintain their cultural heritage at a *meta* (as opposed to a material) level but also to apprehend the operative metaphysics of various alien cultures. Primary to their survival was the work of *consciousness*, of nonmaterial counterintelligence" (Baker 1991:38). Spirituality and the preservation of part of their original culture meant for African slaves a means of survival which allowed them not to succumb to a kind of spiritual slavery and imprisonment. The embracing of what in Western culture are binary opposites, away from a clear-cut division between life and death, past and present, corporeal and spiritual, secular and sacred, constitutes a defining trait of that original culture

and the mask works as a metaphor for that harmonious coexistence of opposites, as Gates points out, as well as for the indeterminacy of representation and the interpretive ambiguity to which the two novels under study adhere.

If we take into account the etymological origin of the word “mask” which, as Gates specifies quoting from Thass-Thienemann, comes from Arabic *mas-chara*, “denoting the masked person, like a clown or buffoon--thus a live doll” (1987:168), then we can establish further associations with Danticat’s novel. In one of Amabelle’s dreams her mother makes her a doll while she is sick in bed. At one point she sees the doll rise and jump rope with her thread hairs while singing a song. Then she assures Amabelle with a “gentle, musical” voice “You will be well again, ma belle Amabelle. I know this to be true” (58). These are the same words uttered by Amabelle’s mother in another dream followed by the phrase “You, my eternity” (208), which is in turn also pronounced by the sugar woman (133). We can conclude that since the moving doll represents a “masked person” (Gates 1987:168) then it can be equated with the equally anonymous masked sugar woman and, at the same time, with the protagonist’s mother. The recurring and telling reference to eternity echoes the quality of being “impervious to the accident of place or time” Gates confers to the image of the mask (1987:168). The eternity of the literary discourse functions as the perfect means to pass on the dead’s forgotten stories and to claim their identities.

Water endings.

If the meaningful image of the mask evokes the reconciliation or syncretism of binary oppositions and the abstraction from delimited spatial and chronological dimensions, as shown before, so does the powerful image of water, which pervades both *Beloved* and *TFOB*. Dealing precisely with the metaphor of water, Ann-Janine Morey argues that

Women write about entering water willingly in order to dissolve, escape, and rethink the imprisoning boundaries governing conventional wisdom about male/female, natural/supernatural, self and other. In these fictions...all that we call solid and real is seen to be of illusory solidity. Crossing the margin of normality sends the characters into a condition I call *watertime*, a confluence of time and space in which all normal boundaries are suspended, in which the gods are dislocated, or redefined by an underwater perspective without necessarily being abolished or denied. In so doing, the writer affirms the ambiguous structures of representation. (1997:248)

Water and water elements abound in both novels and are used by both authors in similar manners. A journey through the Atlantic Ocean called Middle Passage and two rivers, the Ohio and the Massacre, act as crucial settings. Interestingly enough, both rivers not only act as dividers between two countries--Haiti and the Dominican Republic--and two states--Ohio and Kentucky--but they also represent the dividing--albeit simultaneously unifying--space between the living and the dead. It is from the waters of the Ohio River that Beloved emerges while the Massacre River witnesses the drowning of Amabelle's parents at the same time that it functions as a communal grave for the victims of the 1937 Massacre. These connotations of destruction and death are concomitant with the healing, life-giving quality of water as seen, for instance, in Amabelle Desir's final return to the river.

The Middle Passage stands as an infamous landmark in African American history, as in it perished many slaves who died on board the slave ships or committed suicide jumping onto the ocean. The dreadful experience of this forced journey is narrated by Beloved in passages that deal with a mother whom she now identifies with Sethe:

I am always crouching the man on my face is dead...I do not eat the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink small rats do not wait for us to sleep someone is thrashing but here is no room to do it in...the woman is there with the face I want the face that is mine...the iron circle is around our neck...I am alone...Sethe's is the face that left me. (210-13)

Eighteen years after the baby's death at the hands of her mother, what might be read as her ghost comes back embodied in a young woman who appears from the waters of the Ohio River. Her constantly being thirsty strengthens her metaphorical association with water:

A fully dressed woman walked out of the water...everything hurt but her lungs most of all...Sethe's bladder filled to capacity...more like flooding the boat when Denver was born...there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now...The woman gulped water from a specked tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it, and four times the woman drank as though she had crossed a desert. (50-51)

The nurturing and life-giving connotations of the amniotic fluid coexist with the deathly implications of the Middle Passage water. To such an extent is Beloved associated with water elements, that one of the multiple subjectivities that define her is that of the riverain Yoruba orisa Osun, who is described by Philip Neimark as "the personification of beauty and sexuality" (1993:137) thus strengthening the common links with Morrison's character.

This dual metaphor of destruction and nurture similarly dominates Danticat's novel. Whereas water reminds Amabelle of her parents' drowning, water images are also tokens of love, protection and immortality, all of which coalesce in the conch shell her lover gives her, "saying that in there flowed the sound fishes hear when they swim deep inside the ocean's caves" (45). Upon the disappearance of Sebastien Onius, the narrator's lover, she is left in a state of utter confusion about his whereabouts, the only hope residing in the embracing and healing nature of water: "Perhaps there was water to greet his last fall, to fold around him and embrace him like a feather-filled mattress...His name is Sebastien Onius and his spirit must be inside the waterfall cave at the source of the stream where the cane workers bathe..." (282).

Water is also used as a metaphor of home, not only for the dead but also for the oppressed living who, like Amabelle, Sebastien and the rest of Haitian laborers, have left their country in search for a better life in another country that ostracizes them instead. This deep feeling of dispossession and uprootedness gives way to the nurturing identification with nature and with water. This in-between liminal space is therefore claimed as the legitimate home of a downtrodden people:

I had never desired to run away. I knew what was happening but I did not want to flee. "Where to?", "Who to?", was always chiming in my head.

Of all the people killed, I will wager that there were many asking like me "Who to?" Even when they were dying and the priests were standing over them reciting ceremonial farewells, they must have been asking themselves, "Go in peace. But where?"

Heaven--my heaven--is the veil of water that stands between my parents and me. (264-65)

Amabelle shares with Beloved her layered subjectivity, which allows the reader to posit diverse and complementary interpretations regarding the identity of these two characters. If we suggested the reading of Beloved not only as a ghost but also as a riverain goddess, there is enough evidence in Danticat's novel to suggest such reading of Amabelle Desir too. Her constant attraction towards streams, waterfalls and rivers, her helping Señora Valencia to deliver twins and her final return to the Massacre river to melt with its waters point to a spiritual identity which draws on West African religious beliefs, according to which the dead inhabit the bottom of rivers and places like caves, waterfalls, river banks and rocks are used as "sacred places where worship is offered" (Mbiti 1989:73). Apart from being the epitome of beauty

and sexuality, the Yoruba goddess Osun is the deity of love and rivers, deliverer of babies and guardian of twins (Neimark 1993:108,140). Amabelle's knowledge of births is passed down on to her by her parents. The woman she works for gives birth to twins and she is successfully assisted by Amabelle.

The re-enactment of the past in the confluence of time and space that Morey's "watertime" suggests is one of the most striking coincidences in *TFOB* and *Beloved*. In one case, the protagonist's finally entering the river and welcoming the waters where her parents had drowned while trying to go back to Haiti and where "Every now and then...a swimmer finds a set of white spongy bones, a skeleton, thinned by time and being buried too long in the riverbed" (308), represents a cathartic act of coming to terms with the past. In the second case, Sethe's instinctive attack on white Mr Bodwin, whose presence reminds her of Schoolteacher and his evil recapturing purposes, exorcises the ghosts of a past that had nonetheless to be remembered and dealt with in order to give it a final rest and proper burial. In both cases we can talk about a re-birth of both characters, which occurs precisely after this ritual re-enactments, since "it is only through ritual that death can be understood as rebirth" (Richards 1981:267).

Many years after the Haitian genocide, Amabelle will walk into the Massacre River at the same time of the year when it had taken place, October, a ritual that triggers the spiritual re-birth of a foetus-like Amabelle:

Unclothed, I slipped into the current. The water was warm for October, warm and shallow, so shallow that I could lie on my back in it with my shoulders only half submerged, the current floating over me in a less than gentle caress, the pebbles in the riverbed scouring my back...I looked to my dreams for softness, for a gentler embrace, for relief from the fear of mudslides and blood bubbling out of the riverbed, where it is said the dead add their tears to the river flow...me lying there, cradled by the current, paddling like a newborn in a washbasin... (310)

In clear opposition to a totalizing closed ending, Morrison and Danticat opt for open, fluid and ambiguous endings--thus resembling the characteristics of water, or what we could term "water endings," which allow for the reader's active participation. Despite *Beloved*'s disappearance at the closing of the novel, the future looms peopled with the haunting ghosts of a past that, albeit remembered and exorcised, must not "pass on," as the book's final and ambiguous refrain suggests, referring both to oblivion and transmission.

As Mary P. Carden aptly argues, "*Beloved* reaches beyond linear historical narratives with beginning, middle, end. Her diffuse, multilayered, and unresolvable 'story' cannot be deployed to demonstrate national progress or to display African American recovery. Instead, she continues to haunt all

locales of normalcy” (1999:22). In a similar manner, Danticat’s choice of a closing scene points only to partial inconclusiveness and ambiguity. Amabelle’s re-union with the dead in the river could symbolize the exorcizing of her past and her ensuing spiritual re-birth, but the possibility of Amabelle’s physical death and total reunion with the river ghosts remains hanging in the closing pages, where images of death and life intermingle and merge and where Amabelle’s questions about life and death remain unresolved:

I thought that if I relived the moment often enough, the answer would become clear, that they [her parents] had wanted either for us all to die together or for me to go on living, even if by myself. I also thought that if I came to the river on the right day, at the right hour, the surface of the water might provide the answer: a clearer sense of the moment, a stronger memory. But nature has no memory. And soon, perhaps, neither will I. (309)

In her final journey Amabelle is accompanied by the mad professor, a living victim of the Haitian Massacre whose insanity or spiritual death makes of him a “ghost with a smile on his face” (309). He, like Amabelle, “was looking for the dawn” (310), searching for a water eternity.

Conclusion.

Drawing from the postmodern revisionary impulse and also from the holistic and dialogic essence of African and African American cultures, Morrison and Danticat engage in a rewriting and revision of two historical episodes steeped in violence and racism. In their common deconstructive attempt, they resort to similar literary devices such as the use of dreams and visions, symbolism and metaphors, spirituality, and, above all, the power of memory, since “(re)membrance is activation in the face of stasis, a restoration of fluidity, translucence, and movement” (Holloway 1992:68). Fluidity, translucence and movement are all characteristics of water, an element that functions as the main and probably most compelling metaphor of both novels. Water represents precisely the inappropriateness of fixed borders, static monolithic realities and one-dimensional worlds, advocating instead the idea of a dialogic multiplicity as well as the presence of unconventional open world views. It is in that kind of world that there must always remain a place for the memories of those who perished unjustly, victims of racial genocide. *Beloved* and *TFOB* inscribe in the permanence of the literary discourse the stories of those victims represented by their characters, to provide them with some kind of name and identity, since “[i]t is only those nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke into the early morning air” (Danticat 1998:282).

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BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND FICTION IN KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S SHORT STORIES

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Introduction

Katherine Anne Porter has a special place in American literature. She is known to have refined the fiction containing female experience and having presented different gender problems via conflicts with standard/conventional female norms. In a way, she has stopped the so-called biographical silence of many women writers. Using autobiographical elements in her works, Porter sensitively presents gender problems, the subjects of which, according to Carolyn Heilbrun, are the following: the struggle for predecessors and models to look to, friendship and partnership between women, marriage, sexuality, anger, power and aging (quoted in Klein, 2000:1). Many of her stories, as Paul Reuben states, use “the geographic locales of the South, the Southwest, and Mexico” (Reuben, 2004:1). According to D. H. Unrue, the years in Mexico were very important, as they were the source of many experiences upon which Porter based her first works in fiction (Unrue, 1964:2). As Cathy Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin assume, in her short stories Porter demonstrated “her ability to transform her experience into fiction” and constructed “from a history of poverty, marital failures, and abject loneliness a more tolerable personal narrative” (Davidson, Wagner-Martin, 1995:696-697). Thus, Porter’s fiction, especially, short fiction can be considered as one of the best examples of the close links between the autobiographic writing and fiction.

Links between an Autobiography and Fiction

J. A. Cuddon assumes that “many novels are in part autobiographical. Some are more obviously so than others” (Cuddon, 1991:68). What is an autobiography? The usual answer would be that it is an account of a person’s life by himself/herself. J. A. Cuddon argues that memory may be unreliable and that few can recall clear details of their early life and therefore be dependent on other people’s impressions, of necessity equally unreliable (Cuddon, 1991:68). Moreover, everyone tends to remember what he wants to remember. Disagreeable facts are sometimes glossed over or repressed, and truth may be distorted for the sake of convenience or harmony. As Cathy Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin

(Davidson, Wagner-Martin, 1995:85) state, autobiographers represent their life story in order to share it with others, while assuming their experiential history as referential base and point of departure. It is possible to assume that an autobiographer interprets his/her life story, so that a reader receives only an interpretation of reality.

An autobiography may be largely fictional, and because of the interpretative nature of any autobiographical act, according to Cathy Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin (Davidson, Wagner-Martin, 1995:85), “the distinction between autobiographical narrative and fiction remains elusive”. In this aspect, Katherine Ann Porter’s short stories serve as an example of fictional autobiography: her works are full of autobiographical elements, concerning the author herself and those who surrounded her. The analysis of some of her short stories highlights these autobiographical details of Porter’s fiction and demonstrates how the life of the writers can be precisely reflected in their work.

Most critics rightly analyze Porter’s fiction divided according to the periods of her life: Mexico, The Old South, The Rural Southwest, New England and others. This division varies a little in different critical works. As the first period in her works, the Mexican Period can be distinguished. According to Willene and George Hendrick (1998), in 1921, Porter returned to New York and for a few years continued writing fiction set in Mexico. During that period Katherine Anne Porter got married for the second time. This marriage was unhappy and ended up with the second divorce, which was a source of several short stories, such as “Rope” and others. Katherine Anne Porter continued in the same mode all her life. She was falling in love with men much younger than she, getting married and finding herself unhappy, left with the ruined relationship (Hendrick, 1988: 6).

However, all her travels, unsuccessful marriages inspired the writer to create. Her fiction can be viewed as autobiographic, containing many facts from the author’s life and reflecting her personal experiences. In other words, she wrote stories that concerned herself, her relatives and her acquaintances. According to Carol Altieri (Altieri, 1985:1), Katherine Anne Porter often used flashbacks, foreshadowing, and shifted back and forth between the present to the past to give the necessary background information about the meaning and the characters, their prototypes being taken from her life.

As W. and G. Hendrick state, “[Porter’s] life was troubled and chaotic, but her fiction imposes order on the chaos of the universe” (Hendrick, 1988:12). However, Carolyn Heilbrun assumes that “Porter believed wholeheartedly in the full humanity and the full capacity of women in general”, and she created female characters who reflected as much

(quoted in Klein, 2000:1-2). As a writer, Porter's life also deflates the myth of woman's isolation from other women – a myth that erases the frequent and supportive connections between many women of great accomplishment. According to Carolyn Heilbrun, throughout her life, Porter developed and treasured friendships, working relationships and supportive connections to other female writers and publishers, including among others Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor or Edith Sitwell. She felt a kinship to and great admiration for Virginia Woolf, though they never met (in Klein, 2000:2).

Related to the myth of woman's isolation from other women is the myth of the marriage plot. Here too, Porter rejected a script that did not work for her or reflect her reality. She married and divorced four times. She had passionate love affairs, sometimes with men significantly younger than herself, and she enjoyed the fullness of those experiences, very often writing quite comfortably and frankly about her relationship with men.

Finally, Porter's life explodes the myth of female aging. This is well seen not only from her productive later years (she published her bestseller at the age of 72, and won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer in her mid-70's as well), but also in the female characters of her short stories. As Carolyn Heilbrun states (quoted in Klein, 2000; 2), in this she "rewrote the narrative models of female reality" and became an amazing example of interconnections between the life of a woman and the life as a writer.

Early Childhood Experiences

W. and G. Hendrick state that "social structure in Porter's childhood was clearly defined, [and that] the older generation - those who were products of the South before the Civil War - still ruled" (Hendrick, 1988:39). Porter's grandmother belonged to that old order, old generation. She also had the most important influence on Porter's early childhood. From the reminiscences of those days the series of short stories under the title of "The Old Order" with the character of Sophia Jane Rhea (the prototype of Porter's grandmother) appeared. This sequence of short stories is of great value in demonstrating the presence of autobiographical details in Katherine Anne Porter's works.

The reader can find many references to the author's place of living or her grandmother as well as many other important facts and names from the author's life. The critics agree about the fact that the girl Miranda presented in those stories is an autobiographical heroine. As W. and G. Hendrick (1988) claim in their book on K. A. Porter's life and creative work, while living in Paris, Porter "began to make use of her Texas past and to write or think about the stories concerned with her autobiographical

heroine, Miranda, and her grandmother” (Hendrick, 1988:10). This opinion is supported by other critics, such as Kathleen Kuiper (1995), who agrees that Porter wrote stories containing the main character Miranda as her own prototype (Kuiper, 1995:898).

The short story “The Source” is an introduction to the grandmother and her family (including Miranda) and the southern society. W. and G. Hendrick (1988) state that this short story “provides a fascinating but fragmentary account of the world of Sophia Jane Rhea, a world that helped mould the character of Miranda or Katherine Anne Porter both as “a person and artist” (Hendrick, 1988:40). The short story tells about the life of the family consisting of a widowed father, three children and, obviously, the grandmother. They are preparing to leave the town house and visit the farm. The grandmother begins to think of life at the farm and to talk about the change and relaxation, although, in fact, going to the farm means even more work, including strict control over the whole family. As D. H. Unrue states, “grandmother had her unbroken position of rule in the family” (Unrue, 1964:52). The whole story is about the grandmother, her past and relationship with other family members, the main focus being on Porter’s childhood experience. Later, the author admitted that she had used the memories from her past in Texas while writing this sequence of the short stories. The comparison of Porter’s life and the short story “The Source” proves the presence of biographical elements.

Grandmother Sophia Jane Rhea is a prototype of Porter’s grandmother. The first thing, which points to the similarity, is their personalities. Porter’s grandmother and the one in the short story are both strong personalities, domineering, willful and keeping matters in their hands. It was only because of her domination and ruling that the family kept together. Here the reader also encounters weak men surrounding the grandmother. Thus, Porter exhibits the true situation as it was the same with her grandmother. The children treated her as a tyrant who supervised every step of theirs but at the same time they understood that “she was the only fixed reality for them after their mother had died young” (Hendrick, 1988: 41). This is evident in the following example:

They loved their grandmother; she was the only reality to them in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge, since their mother had died so early that only the eldest girl remembered her vaguely: just the same they felt Grandmother was tyrant, and they wished to be free of her (Porter “The Source”, 1964:338).

Thus, in this story Katherine Anne Porter introduces her life to the reader, speaks about her childhood and tells about the person who had been, as

Unrue suggests, “the source of the family and the source of Miranda’s (that is Porter’s) views and strengths” (Unrue, 1964:52). This strong and obstinate woman, the same as her prototype Sophia, had the greatest influence on her granddaughter’s (Porter’s) life. The description of this grandmother-granddaughter relationship proves the existence of close links between Porter’s life and fiction.

This short story starts the sequence of other stories. If in “The Source” the grandmother seems to play the main role and Miranda is only mentioned, in the following stories Miranda prevails over other characters. “The Source” is a significant short story as it leads to Porter’s early childhood where the grandmother performed the largest and most important part and at the same time this story leads to the development and maturity of Miranda. Also, the grandmother’s portrait represents the notion of reversing the myth of female aging.

In the following stories it can be observed that Miranda’s point of view has changed. In “The Source” the grandmother dominated and, although the narrator of the story is a child, this child seemed to accept the world of the grandmother. Whereas in “The Fig Tree”, according to W. and G. Hendrick (Hendrick, 1988:46), Miranda “tries to find her way in a world far different from the seemingly stable universe of Grandmother Rhea, <...> she has a particular, tangible past, a product of the lost Cause and its aftermath, a true granddaughter of Sophia Jane”.

On the Road to Adolescence

In “The Fig Tree”, Miranda’s development becomes the main focus of the story. Here, the presence of an autobiographic heroine becomes even more evident. The story starts with the family moving to Cedar Grove. Everyone views this journey differently: the father hates it because it is too hot there; the grandmother loves it because she has been going there for fifty summers, which has become a tradition. Miranda is glad to go there, as it is a pleasant and idyllic place, full of different interesting and mystic things that have to be explored. This story shows Miranda between the states of innocence and experience. Everyone tries to keep her pure and innocent but the opposite is inevitable. Miranda feels gradually rising senses, she matures and analyses the questions of life and death. Here, Porter reveals her feelings and life after her mother’s death:

Another strange way her father had of talking was calling Grandmother ‘Mammy’. Sometimes he called Grandmother ‘Mama’, but she wasn’t Mama either, she was really Grandmother. Mama was dead. Dead meant gone away forever. Dying was something that happened all the time, to people and everything else.

Somebody died, and there was a long string of carriages going at a slow walk over the rocky ridge of the hill towards the river while the bell tolled and tolled, and that person was never seen again by anybody (Porter "The Fig Tree", 1964:370).

As W. and G. Hendrick notice (Hendrick, 1988:48), this scene is an accurate reproduction of the Indian Creek landscape, where Porter's family lived until her mother's death. The funeral procession that is fixed in Miranda's memory may be the procession of Porter's mother's funeral as Katherine Anne Porter saw it in Indian Creek.

Another example proving the presence of autobiographical details in Porter's works is the short story "The Grave". D. H. Unrue suggests that this story is the most important in "The Old Order" series, the sequence of stories about Miranda, and "perhaps in the whole of the Miranda saga, because it includes the last scene in Miranda's rite of passage" (Unrue, 1964:59). The short story takes up where "The Fig Tree" ended. According to W. and G. Hendrick (Hendrick, 1988: 54-55), this story was meant to show what Miranda had learned - "that life is doomed to death, but that one's reaction to this knowledge is important" and that this "experience dramatically highlights the wandering journey of Miranda, who cannot accept family legend, cannot live in family tradition, and finds herself an alien in a corrupt world". In this short story, Porter reveals her adolescent experiences more from the psychological point of view. Feelings and memories are more important than concrete details of the daily life in the Southwest, Eastern Texas, where her family lived after leaving Kentucky and where the short stories of this sequence are set. The actual names of places, dates, facts pointing to Porter's life cannot be found except that Miranda's brother is Paul. One of Porter's brothers was Harry Ray and his name was changed later to Harrison Paul but everybody called him Paul. So it is the only concrete detail that shows the relationship of the story to the life of the author herself. The themes of life and death reoccur in this particular short story and they can be considered crucial in Porter's life as they always surrounded her: her mother died young while giving birth; when everything improved, the grandmother died. Another reason why the theme of birth was so significant to Porter was that she did not have any children of her own.

In the short story "The Grave" one is confronted only with the author's feelings, her experiences and how they influenced her further life. Portraying her inner thoughts or feelings is of the same value as considering the true facts and events in order to tell one's life. The readers are given the opportunity to find out those facts of Porter's life that the biographers do not usually include in their books as only the person herself can display that

other side of her life known only to her. Thus, the link between the work of the author and her life becomes very close.

Life as a Mature Woman

The biographers writing about Katherine Anne Porter claim that she led quite an active style of life: unwiring traveler and heartbreaker. All her loves and disappointment, of which her chaotic life consisted, are reflected in her short stories such as "Rope" or "Theft".

According to W. and G. Hendrick, Porter's second marriage, which faced a failure as well as the other three, provided the material for "Rope" (Hendrick, 1988:75). Although the characters are nameless and are referred to as "he" and "she", and the place and the time are also very vague, "Rope" is "the first story Porter wrote reflecting her mature experience" (Unrue, 1964:51). The story is about a married couple who has already experienced difficult and oppressive periods of the marital life. The first fascination ended and the oppressive primness came to act. The quarrel over the unnecessary rope that the husband has bought suggests Porter's attitude to marriage in general and to Porter's distressing and rancorous experience of her marital life. During her life, Porter met only enervated, powerless men and the solid, indestructible grandmother as the only female representative and such an image of the family life has been formed in her mind like an appropriate model. It can be claimed that all her four marriages were a complete fiasco because Porter endeavored to retain power in her hands as well as control of her life, marriage and husband. Throughout her life she encountered the men who were rather dissimilar from those that she knew before. This inadequacy between what Porter thought the marriage should be and the real situation led her marriages to disaster. According to Joan Givner, there was a certain pattern in Porter's love life: "Porter was repeatedly finding herself attracted to men younger than she, men who resembled the handsome but weak father she remembered from her early childhood" (quoted in Hendrick, 1988:7).

In "Rope", the reader encounters Porter's disillusionment with marriage and her inability to create a perfect partnership. It can be argued that this anonymous "she" is the prototype of the author herself. Though it is hard to imagine K. A. Porter living in the rural scene and running the house, but the main character "she" demonstrates astonishing resemblance to the author.

Anita in another short story "Theft" can be viewed as the author's prototype as well. The main character is no-longer a young writer. She finds that her purse was stolen and remembers all the events of the preceding day,

which also revive all her relationships with four men: Camilo, Roger, Bill, Eddie. As D. H. Unrue rightly observes, “each has represented an unsatisfactory love relationship. Camilo lives by impractical, romantic standards; Roger will be reconciled with a woman named Stella; Bill has cheated the protagonist out of money; and the missing Eddie has finally ended the relationship that he implies in his letter the protagonist had already destroyed” (Unrue, 1964:94-95). Finally, she discovers herself all alone and the last misfortune is the stolen purse. By this symbolic theft of the purse the author tries to show that the main character has been numerously robbed in her life and not only of material things.

According to W. and G. Hendrick, the main character realizes that she has let others rob her and wishes to get her purse back, at the same time trying to regain her identity and not to lose herself completely in such a way. She feels responsible and the only one to blame for all her losses and love relationships (Hendrick, 1988:82). Everything turns against her as she stubbornly tries to get the purse back:

The janitress looked up at her with hatred and said: ‘I don’t want it either now. My niece is young and pretty, she don’t need fixin’ up to be pretty, she’s young and pretty anyhow. I guess you need it worse than she does.’ <...>

She laid the purse on the table, and sat down with the cup of chilled coffee, and thought: ‘I was right not to be afraid of any thief but myself, who will end by leaving nothing.’ (Porter “Theft”, 1964:55).

She gets her material possession back but from this she realizes her other, more important losses that cannot be returned and she herself is guilty of being left all alone. The search and longing for love is an important theme of this complex story. As W. and G. Hendrick state, the narrator rejects different men only to be “left with a gold purse and cold coffee, a wasteland figure without any kind of love” (Hendrick, 1988:82).

So it is obvious that Katherine Anne Porter, being desperately disappointed after one of her love affairs, reflected all her feelings and emotions in this short story. Her life strikes the reader as being paradoxically similar to that of the heroine. Porter was known as a person who always ‘moved away from troubled relationships’ (Hendrick, 1988:11). Porter’s behavior was also strikingly similar to that of the heroine in the short story: numerous love affairs suggest that she wanted to love and be loved and all her life she was seeking for this state but her attempts were unsuccessful. All her marriages and other relationships ended as a complete failure because she rejected everyone who seemed to feel deeper emotions, and really was concerned about her. This tendency of rejecting men continued through all her life. She was always getting disappointed with

men and the reader finds the evidence of that in her work.

Contrary to “Rope”, in “Theft” the details of the external world, description of the appearance and characters correspond to those of the author herself. The heroine is a writer who also earns a living by writing reviews for the newspaper. The setting is also a reminder of the author’s life. The city of New York is viewed from the perspective of 1920’s: New York was one of those places visited by K. A. Porter. The characters presented in this story are “bohemian, insecure and poor” (Hendrick, 1988:80). The presentation of the main character points directly to the author’s life. It should be noticed that the short story “Theft” seems to reflect the author’s life even more obviously than the previous story “Rope” where only the main character was a prototype of Porter, whereas in “Theft” the reader finds the setting, the mood and the characters resembling to those that surrounded Porter.

Conclusion

The autobiographical elements are always very significant and present in the creative work of many authors. Writers often make use of their past or present life either consciously or not and they do that in different ways: writing directly about the events of their life or reporting the impression that one or another thing has made upon them.

Paradoxically, Katherine Anne Porter was asked several times to write an autobiography; however, she admitted that “it’s no good writing about yourself unless you are prepared to tell the whole truth, or at least what you honestly believe to be that” (quoted in Klein, 2000:1). In fact, what she is doing in her works is mainly that – writing truthfully. In this way, she is writing a different type of an autobiography – the search-and-recovery of the self in the heroic narrative. As Carolyn Heilbrun states, she has attempted “to cut a new path with few known models to look to” (quoted in Klein, 2000:1) in her search for peculiar forms of personal narrative. Her short stories demonstrate that Porter was especially interested in the tension between the Fact and Truth in telling a life, clouded or illuminated by that called memory.

Many critics tend to analyze Katherine Anne Porter’s fiction as containing a great number of the autobiographical details. The life of this author was rather chaotic and troubled and namely such a style of life has inspired her to create and reflect everything in her works. A kind of pattern can be distinguished while analyzing Porter’s fiction and comparing it to her life: she went through some period of her life, then recorded everything with the purpose of putting her chaotic life in order, reliving every event in a way

she wanted or rather viewing the episodes of her life from a distance. Porter's fiction can be viewed as the whole of separate, but connected, fragments of a much larger plan, that is her life.

Thus, it possible to assume that her short stories are the constituent parts of the author's diary adopting the content but not the form of such a genre. The readers are confronted with her feelings, her experiences and thoughts as well as with more concrete notions such as places where she lived and worked, people that surrounded her and loved or were loved by her. It is quite obvious that while writing about oneself the person wants to elaborate the story or to suppress something that is too intimate to display. Sometimes the person does not want to admit something or to remember. This was not alien to Porter. As no one knew her life better than she did, it would be impossible today to testify what she had suppressed. However, the great resemblance between her work and her real life points to the fact that Porter used her life as the source of inspiration and described her life in the short stories.

The analysis of K. A. Porter's short stories confirms the belief that autobiographic elements are of great importance in her work and should not be disregarded in the process of evaluating and interpreting her fiction. Porter's short stories can be justifiably considered a form, or rather a blend, of autobiography, diaries or confessional literature.

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