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BRITISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES

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TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

REVIEWS

MY CLEANER: HELP OR FOE?

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ABSTRACT. *My Cleaner: Help or Foe?* Maggie Gee's *My Cleaner* tackles the problem of racism and family life in the lives of two women who intend to support or "help" each other and end up bringing out the worst in each other. Profound racism and an acute sense of class difference alienate the two women: Vanessa Henman and Mary Tendo, her cleaner from Uganda. The theoretical background of the paper is offered by the theories of Paul Gilroy.

Keywords: racism, clash of cultures, Uganda, London, blacks, whites, understanding, cosmopolitan.

REZUMAT. *Menajera mea: ajutor sau duşman?* Romanul *Menajera mea* a lui Maggie Gee se ocupă de problema rasismului şi a familiei în vieţile a două femei care intenţionează să se sprijine sau să se "ajute" reciproc şi sfârşesc prin a aduce ceea ce e mai rău pentru fiecare. Rasismul profund şi un act simţ al diferenţei de clasă le alienează pe cele două femei: Vanessa Henman şi Mary Tendo, menajera ei din Uganda. Baza teoretică a acestei lucrări este oferită de către teoriile lui Paul Gilroy.

Cuvinte cheie: rasism, confruntare între culturi, Uganda, Londra, negri, albi, înţelegere, cosmopolit.

Maggie Gee's 2005 novel *My Cleaner* successfully tackles the subject of racism as well as the twist and turns of human relationships in the multicultural setting of London at the turn of the century. The novel also foregrounds power

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struggles, the interactions between people with particular emphasis on how various historical and socio-economic factors implicate ways in which characters relate to one another. Our analysis focuses on inter-cultural encounters and co-habitation using the work of Paul Gilroy, especially his conceptualization of "conviviality".

According to Gilroy, if we want to reorient the discussion on racial difference towards the future, we have to place a "higher value upon the cosmopolitan histories and transcultural experiences" (qtd in Bleiswicjk 6). In his widely celebrated *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Gilroy defines conviviality as "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere (xi). He further suggests that

> [t]he challenge of being in the same present, of synchronizing difference and articulating cosmopolitan hope upward from below rather than imposing it downward ... provides some help in seeing how we might invent conceptions of humanity that allow for the presumption of equal value and go beyond the issue of tolerance into a more active engagement with the irreducible value of diversity within sameness (75).

In *The Cleaner*, Maggie Gee critically analyzes the dynamics of what Gilroy calls "convivial culture" with reference to the relationship between whites and blacks in contemporary London. Instead of writing the novel from the perspective of a white author, she employs two alternating points of view: that of the white "liberal" Vanessa and that of the Ugandan Mary Tendo. Gee's interest in the inter-cultural encounter and its discontents is also noted by Elif Özbatak Avcı who observes:

> Gee engages in her fiction with the social, political and cultural problems suffered particularly by disadvantaged social groups, and wrestles with liberal complacencies as well as the assumptions underpinning the compartmentalization she points out (478).

So, one of Gee's main targets in *My Cleaner* is the self-deception of the white liberals, represented by Vanessa, in a cosmopolitan setting still riddled with inter-racial and inter-cultural conflict.

Vanessa Henman is a white, middle class, single woman living in London. In the words of Kılıç, Vanessa is

> a product of British supermarket culture. As the one-eyed writer in the land of the divorcee, of single parents, fat children, lost children,

> depression, yoga classes, de-tox, diets, ex-husbands, self-help books
> and friendships maintained on the phone, Vanessa is far from the
> romantic idea of an author (142).

She prioritizes her career as a college lecturer and writer over her role as a mother and finds little time for her son Justin. She lives in a big empty house, too big for only two people, and tends to blame her ex-husband Trevor for the problems she currently has with her son. Justin, a gifted but depressed twenty-two year old young man who seems to love and connect with Mary, the cleaner/nanny who brought him up, more than with members of his own family.

Mary Tendo was employed as Vanessa's cleaner in the past but returned to her native Uganda many years ago. She is now living in Kampala as a Makarere University graduate. She is devoted to her son Jamil whom her Libyan ex-husband took to Tripoli and who is now missing. She is, at the same time, a woman who is comfortable in her own skin and proud to be African. She makes it abundantly clear that she does not feel inferior to the Europeans, which clearly shows in her conversations with Vanessa. She frequently makes the point that the Europeans are trapped in their superficial and consumerist lifestyle which she finds to be devoid of meaning. As an intelligent, warm, and humorous woman, she enjoys life and is grateful for everything she has. Struggling in her efforts to connect with her severely depressed son Justin, Vanessa writes a desperate letter to Mary asking her to come back to England to work for her once again, this time as a "nanny" to Justin. Mary accepts the offer, primarily for financial reasons although it becomes clear that she deeply loves Justin as well.

The clash between the two women is used by Gee to explore racism and class conflict. Although they may appear to be very different people from the outside, they gradually discover their similarities. A writer and a cleaner may appear, to an outsider, to have very opposing identities but the reality is quite different. Nobody knows this better than Gee who used to teach fiction writing classes and worked as a cleaner to make some money during her university years.

The story focuses on the complex relationship between these two women. The self-confident and lively Mary is in a stark contrast to the cold, insecure, and self-centered Vanessa. It is significant that Gee portrays Vanessa and Mary not simply as individuals but also as representative figures whose perceptions and outlook on life reveal important insights into their home culture. The reader is invited to compare and contrast the life of a white working mother in London with that of an African mother working in Uganda and England. In this context, the book also tackles important contemporary issues including the difficulties inherent in inter-cultural and inter-personal communication, the clash of perceptions and cultures, as well as possible

challenges and opportunites posed by the salience of globalism. The continuing legacy of colonialism and imperialism, especially with regard to its relationship with racism and the persistence of economic inequalities, is also treated with great attention throughout the book.

In her examination of the banal cosmopolitan conviviality in Maggie Gee's *My Cleaner* and Tessa Hadley's *The London Train*, Johansen offers the following analysis:

> Significantly, both novels – in their attention to a shift from the welfare state to the neoliberal state, and the parallel shift from the village to the city – resist a vision of multicultural history and interaction that can be reduced to increased exposure to and passive tolerance of difference, suggesting instead that a subject's (and, implicitly, the nation- state's) response to alterity is indexed to the pervasive logic of neoliberal capital (296).

In other words, the relationship between the financially secure but emotionally troubled Vanessa and the "lower class" black woman Mary who comes from a postcolonial developing country, cannot be divorced from the wider socio-economic context.

Situating her characters and their interaction within a wider socio-historical framework, Gee suggests that it is impossible to accurately understand and evaluate Vanessa and Mary's relationship without taking into account the history of colonialism and imperial policies that have brought about economic disparities on a global scale. In brief, the poverty experienced in countries like Uganda (that forces people like Mary to work abroad) as well as the exploitation of foreign workers in the so-called First World is intimately linked with the political and economic power dynamics that shape the lives of millions. This background is also vital in understanding the roots of racial tension that underlies the perception and responses of both characters. A careful reading of *My Cleaner*, especially the chapters written from Mary Tendo's perspective, shows that the interwined issues of race/politics/history remain relevant in understanding our world today despite the fact that the period of institutionalised racism and colonialism is officially over. Through her intensive interrogation of these issues, Gee uses her literary imagination to inquire ways of dealing with alterity and living with it. As Gilroy aptly remarks:

> [w]e need to know what sorts of insight and reflection might actually help increasingly differentiated societies and anxious individuals to cope successfully with the challenges involved in dwelling comfortably in proximity to the unfamiliar without becoming fearful and hostile (3).

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Gee's concerns in *My Cleaner* are very much in tune with Gilroy's observations and they support them.

The relationship between Vanessa and Mary, especially the power struggle in their interactions, should be examined against this backdrop. Racism and class difference inform their relationship, so the clash between the two women draws attention to the problems inherent in inter-personal communication as well as to racial issues. In this sense, Maggie Gee's *My Cleaner* is an interesting examination of the shifting power dynamics between a black Ugandan cleaner and a white European housewife. Despite the conflict and obvious differences between these characters, Gee's avowed aim is to assert the idea that we are all equal. In her words:

> I do believe that empathy and sympathy between people are possible. So there is a basis for trying to imagine each other; for writing across geographical, gender and cultural barriers. And I see that act not as colonisation but on the contrary as a belief in our essential equality (17).

Thus, Gee writes not only to reveal differences of opinion and outlook between people but also to promote mutual understanding by means of cultivating sympathy and empathy.

Towards that end of the novel, Gee takes care to highlight the similarities between the two main characters as well. Nothwithstanding their differences in terms of character, background and outlook on life, Vanessa and Mary also have certain things in common. Both women are deeply fond of their sons, they want to write about their childhoods and to connect with their roots. This stance is very much in tune with Gilroy's suggestion that we should relinquish the focus on racial difference which "obstructs empathy and makes ethnocentricism inescapable" (63).

Maggie Gee also examines the identity of authorship. "Vanessa is the "parody author" whose public image is constructed by the politics of the literary market" (Kılıç 142). Vanessa gives creative writing classes, but the only book she has co-authored is: *The Long Lean Line: Pilates for Everyone*. The only book mentioned to have been read by her is: *Salads for life. How to Make a Mixed Salad.* Vanessa does not take any pleasure from writing and in fact she considers her writing classes take up much of her time and they are an utter waste of time. On the other hand, Mary writes her texts unnoticed in the midst of household chores. Vanessa and her son cannot really associate authorship with Mary because of their racial and class prejudices. For instance, when Justin who wants to play the Hangman game with Mary, she says: "Perhaps Later, Justin, I'm writing something", at which he foolishly responds by asking: " Is it

a shopping list?" (296). In contrast to Vanessa, Mary writes because she genuinely enjoys it. To quote Kılıç: "Mary enjoys a spontaneous act of writing as a natural flow of experiences and memories, like 'unravelling ribbon'transcribed into the text" (147).

In her own comment on the book, Gee suggests, "I was writing about how both characters are dealing with difference, looking across a boundary category that at times collide them to each other" (15-16). Thus, a major authorial concern is how people of different racial/cultural backgrounds engage one another and how the process of engaging difference implicates their conceptualization of their selves. As a white English woman Gee also has worries concerning her ability to imagine the inner feelings of Mary Tendo, a black woman from Uganda. She asks herself, "Did I have the right to inhabit Mary Tendo's mind? Would I get it wrong? Could I *be* Mary, in the first person?" (16).

In *Writing the Condition-of-England Novel* Mine Özyurt Kılıç suggests that Gee's *My Cleaner* and its sequel *My Driver* are about "the intense antagonism between different subjects and about the state of Britain in transnational times, they go far beyond a simple portrayal of opposing conditions through their use of, in Gee's words, 'the chemistry between' their writer characters" (140-141). Kılıç further argues that these books are perfect examples of migrant literature "characterized by a shift, or shifts, in identity as its essential feature" (141). I would add that, in this context, multicultural/cosmopolitan London functions as a contact zone where such transformative encounters take place. The book starts with Mary's birthday. She goes to the post office and collects a letter from Vanessa, her former employer, who is calling her back to England. Vanessa apparently has serious problems with her son Justin, who used to feel closer to Mary than her mother. Right after Vanessa informs Justin that she wrote a letter to Mary, Justin says:

> 'It's the fourth of July. It's Mary's birthday'. He suddenly smiles a radiant smile, and colour returns to his big, loose mouth, ana his cheeks lift, and he is very handsome; but his pointless happiness enrages Vanessa. 'How can he *posssibly* remember?' Suddenly he irritates her beyond bearing, his great pale nakedness, his soft sulky voice, his haywire corona of uncut yellow curls, the fact he is here in her study in the morning when normally he sleeps until four pm, his ridiculous pretence of remembering Mary's birthday – When only a few weeks ago, he forgot his mother's. She sits and stares at him, vibrating faintly, wondering if he really is her son. (11)

This quotation shows the extent to which mother and son are estranged from each other and how deeply Justin still cares for Mary even after so many

years since she left. Even the thought of Mary cheers him up and makes him feel much better. Vanessa, on the other hand, has difficulty understanding and tolerating Justin's obvious fondness for Mary. It is clear that she is very jealous of her and angry that Justin values Mary more than his own mother. The enduring bond between Justin and Mary enrages Vanessa, which means that writing to Mary, begging her to come back must have been a difficult thing for Vanessa to do. On the other hand, Vanessa had no other choice than writing to Mary since Justin stays in his room the whole day and suffers from severe depression. He believes only Mary can help him out of this anguished mental state. Thus, Vanessa is literally forced to write to Mary although the two did not get on very well in the past. Recalling the first time she met Vanessa, Mary observes:

> I went round to see her smiling, smiling. She shook my hands as we were equals. (I was never equal to the people I cleaned for). I knew all about them, all their dirtiness, the secret habits that no one else knew, the places they left snot, or sanitary towels, the fruit they left to mouldering the bins meant for paper. So I was suspicious (32).

Mary believes that although white people may charge blacks with dirtiness, whites themselves are much dirtier in reality. In fact, when Mary wanted to bring her son Jamil to stay with Justin, Vanessa's son, Vanessa was not pleased with the idea, thinking that Jamil could infect Justin. Behind Mary's explicitly condescending attitude towards the white people she worked for is the recognition of racial and class difference. In fact, Mary is not their equal, but rather their superior. As a black maid, Mary has been treated by her white employers as inferior so she feels rightly suspicious when Vanessa approaches her *as if* they were equals. Mary is perceptive enough to know that despite Vanessa's seemingly cordial manners, neither of them considers this relationship as one between equals.

Mary Tendo's account of her life in England is full of many other examples showing that decolonization has, by no means, led to the emergence of a culture of equality:

> The British Empire was already just a memory. And yet, these Office workers were still our masters. They never knew us or talked to us, but we knew about them, from their wastepaper baskets. I wanted to arrive in a suit, as they did, and drink the coffee from the coffee machine, and use their phones to call my family, and drop old chewing-gum like them, as if the ground would swallow it up. I wanted those people to know my name. (We had names for them, too, they knew nothing about: 'Hair Shedder', 'Sticky Pants', 'Snot Finger'). (17)

Mary draws attention to the legacy of colonialism that has survived the demise of official colonisation. The British may no longer be the colonial masters, yet they are still the ruling class. From the perspective of a subaltern like Mary, it is poignantly clear that white people still consider themselves superior to the people of colour, especially if they are working class. In this sense, Mary's account reads like a detailed story of the trials and tribulations of an immigrant worker trying to survive in an unfriendly environment. This quotation also reveals Mary's longing to be treated humanely, that is as an equal to white people. She desires to have what they have, and most of all, she desires to be acknowledged as an individual.

Ultimately, the given circumstances of people's background have significant bearing on their definition of themselves as individuals and implicate interpersonal relations. To be more precise, Mary's identity as a black working class individual from a post-colonial developing country shapes the nature of her interaction with Vanessa, a white well-off woman from England. Recalling her days in England, Mary maintains that

> I did my work like the other foreigners, cleaning the offices of the sleeping English. They arrived, yawning, as we went for our breakfast, we hundreds of thousands of people from the empire. (They say that Uganda was not part of the empire, they say it was just a 'protectorate', which makes me laugh! Protecting us from what? From the other competing *bazungu* empires) (17).

An intelligent and educated woman, Mary has the ability to critically evaluate the colonial period and challenge its myths. She is fully aware of her position in England as an ex-colonial immigrant worker, she feels solidarity with fellow immigrant workers, but does not see it as her inescapable destiny. Here, as elsewhere in the novel, she openly calls into question and challenges the enduring presence of colonial attitudes and the injustice they breed. When she comes back to England, her determination to resituate herself in this world is obvious in her every thought and move.

The novel focuses on the idea that changing circumstances can bring about reconfiguration of positions in relationships. In this vein, Mary seems to be in a much more advantageous position the second time she comes to England. She needs the money but if necessary she can find another place, whereas Vanessa cannot find another "Mary Tendo" who has a special place in Justin's heart. Vanessa and Mary's interaction suggests that human relationships are shaped by shifting power dynamics. When people realize that they have the upper hand, they will try to assert their dominance over people who are in a weaker position. In an interesting reversal of conventional roles, Mary - the working

class ex-colonial - has the powerful position in this case. Mary Tendo knows that Vanessa, her former mistress, needs her desperately, so she will use this newly-gained power to bargain for better conditions for herself; both socially and financially. In the end Mary Tendo agrees to work for Vanessa for 500 pounds, which for Mary is a huge sum. She is delighted that her financial expectations are met by her employer because now she can save a considerable amount of money.

Mary, a subaltern, can find a voce in this case because the changing social circumstances allow her to have the upper hand. One must not forget that Mary is an educated, intelligent, woman: she knows how to adapt to and profit from changing circumstances. Not always can the subaltern find such favorable political and social conditions. It is telling that Vanessa attributes Mary's assertiveness about money not only to the latter's more confident, bossier new self but also to her being African:

> Of course money is problematic, with Africans. They don't understand that we borrow everything, that we are poor in a different way. That my house cost me more than she can earn in a lifetime. They never understand we have money troubles, too. That life in London is hideously expensive. I suppose it is a failure of imagination (45).

Although she is an educated, intellectual woman, Vanessa's perspective is shaped by stereotypical notions about Africans. As a particularly narrow-minded and arrogant individual, Vanessa is in for a very difficult time with the more assertive and self-confident Mary. The difference between Mary and Vanessa comes out more overtly in their understanding of the notion of "family". For Vanessa, family is the nuclear family consisting of parents and children. In fact, Vanessa's family consists only of her son and herself, whereas for Mary, family means extended family, including parents, children, uncles, aunts, grandparents, etc. Mary also despises Vanessa as a mother. She believes that Vanessa has raised her son to be always dependant on her and denied him the opportunity to find his individual identity. On the contrary, Mary urges Vanessa's sone to have closer relations with his father and develop a more independent identity.

It is also significant that Mary does not consider herself to be simply a cleaner, she tells Vanessa, "I was your cleaner once but not anymore" (155). Fully aware of her significance in the eyes of Justin and, thus, of Vanessa, she renegotiates new terms for her employment, going as far as to suggest that Vanessa should find herself a new cleaner. Since she considers herself a companion, a healer for Justin, Mary makes the point that she should be treated differently and receive the respect she rightly deserves. Whereas Mary wants to rise on the social scale just like Vanessa, the latter still sees Mary Tendo as a

simple cleaner. This is an important point of contention and causes tension between the two women.

The novel explores at some length various competing attitudes of the whites and the blacks on several subjects, including love, health, freedom, money and work ethic. Love, or rather different perceptions of love, is one of the major issues that Gee examines in the novel. Mary Tendo is portrayed as having a more mature and grounded personality, a fact that probably accounts for her ability (and capacity) to love others in a relatively disinterested and selfless fashion. Vanessa surely loves her son, but her love seems to be of the egoistical/self-centered kind which privileges her wants over his needs.

In general, the novel depicts white people as more attached to things than people. Vanessa wants to be closer to her son, but she doesn't allow him to come near her when she is working. Lacking insight and understanding, she is trapped in her narrow views and fails to connect with her son. The absence of proper parental support and guidance is certainly a very important factor that must have contributed to Justin's depression. When Mary first arrives in their home, Vanessa gradually feels that he seems to love her more than herself and his aunties. Anxious and jealous of Justin's strong emotional attachment to Mary, she reminds him that Mary "is only a paid help". When Justin asks her who aunt Isabel is, Vanessa can't believe that her son has forgotten his Godmother. Justin observes: "I only see Aunt Becky at Christmas. Why don't you pay them, too?". Then he says something that makes the matters worse: "Why hasn't any one paid you to love me?"(47). This question alone is revealing in that it shows how disconnected mother and son have become. In stark contrast to the cold and distant Vanessa, Mary is warm and understanding in her attitude toward Justin and his love for Zakira. Mary tries to help Justin and his girfriend. She recalls her feelings for Omar, remembers what it was like to be in love. She tries to help the young couple by visiting the girl's house and arranging a meeting for them. She tries to smooth the misunderstanding between the couple and urges Justin to accept his responsibility towards his lover and unborn child. She also helps Justin regain his confidence and self-esteem. The scene when they are trapped in snow is a good example. Mary says:

> Justin I want you to listen to me. I need to sleep for an hour or two. Probably, the traffic isn't going to move but if it does, you will have to do the driving. Mary, he whines, in explosive panic, you have to be joking, you know I can't drive, my mother made you promise to look after me. Yes, says Mary nineteen years ago. But now it is over. You are no longer a baby. I do not have to look after you. Now, I shall get out, so you can take over (308).

Unlike Vanessa who still sees Justin as a dependent weakling, Mary tries to bring out the best in Justin by pushing his limits.

The clash of cultures is one of the important themes of the book. Mary believes that Africans prefer life in the open, whereas the English are more secretive and hypocritical. According to her:

> The English houses are like lost worlds, detached from each other, overgrown with plants, and strangled with secrets. Whereas life in Kampala is lived outside. The houses there have, thin walls, and big windows, and quarrels and weddings are all out in the open, though sometime the people are beaten in secret. But here in London everything is secret (59).

Coming from a collectivist culture, Mary defines herself by relationships and disapproves of egotism. She has a hard time understanding the individualist culture of England and the individualist mindsets such cultures foster. In her mind, Vanessa is a perfect representative of this culture as she exclusively defines herself through her accomplishments and celebrates her 'independent' self. On the contrary, Vanessa looks down on the values and norms of collectivist cultures where identity is defined by social connections and solidarity. When Mary first meets Vanessa, she asks her where her family is. Vanessa is initially puzzled at this question and then starts laughing: "You are from Africa, of course. This is a single-parent family. That means, it is just me and my boy. Women like me rather like it that way" (32). Mary is perceptive enough to gather the meaning of "women like me". When Vanessa said this phrase, she

> meant modern women, not African women with too many children and aunts and sisters and grandparents. I thought, well somewhere there must be a father, unless this woman is the Virgin Mary, but I said nothing, only smiled politely, and looked at her as if I admired her. (But how can you be happy not to have a family?) (32).

As such exchanges show, racial prejudice abounds in the novel as both white people and black people resort to different modes of 'othering' and 'stereotyping'. White people tend to look down on the blacks thinking they are backward, whereas blacks despise the whites because they are not in tune with their bodies and their environment. Whereas the white man seeks to assert his dominance over nature in his pursuit of possessions and material wealth, Africans choose to live in harmony with nature since they value the bond between themselves and nature. Fully aware of her heritage, Mary Tendo, when leaving for her country, also thanks God that she is an African and reconfirms that the whites are not in tune with nature. She had read in a newspaper that Adam and Eve were Africans and she comments,

So Adam and Eve belonged to us. I carried the cutting in my handbag, till the paper was yellow. It helped me to see their littleness. The little lives of the rich bazangue. They are rich and clear but are like swarming insects that cover the sun. They will fall away as the insects do. Thank God, I am an African woman (49).

Although Mary resents the power and material wealth the white people have, she clearly seems to think that the privileges they enjoy are undeserved. What's more, she finds their lack of awareness and short-sightedness pathetic. They may be wealthy, she reasons, but their materialistic attitude to life has not brought them happiness and peace of mind.

Another important issue explored in the novel is the differences between white and black people with regard to their attitude to work and money. Black people are portrayed as being willing and happy to work in any kind of job. On the other hand, white people can afford to be more picky. They consider certain jobs, such as housework, to be beneath them. In the words of Mary:

All over the world, people live by cleaning. I did not understand this until I was in England. No one wants to touch used sanitary towels. These women take them out and forget about them. I do not suppose they do it on purpose ... But when I pray to Jesus, I pray against these women, I pray He will make them do their own dirty business (123).

Mary also believes that at the root of Justin's illness lies his inactivity, his staying idle at home without work. Thus, she urges him to start working with his father. Vanessa does not agree with this idea because she believes that this arrangement may gradually alienate her son from her. Governed by selfish motives, she wants her son to be always by her side. In this sense, she forgets that real love for one's children may sometimes demand a parent to forget about his own wishes and let children go away from the family.

In stark contrast to Vanessa, whose love for Justin seems to be more about 'keeping' him as her own even at the cost of his own good, for Mary loving is doing what is good for your children. Mary is an acute observer of her environment and offers an outsider's perspective on the British. She sees that they look pretty depressed and lonely and in that sense many of them seem to suffer from some kind of mental disorder. Although they live in a so-called first-world country, they cannot avoid feeling alienated and isolated. So she considers depression to be endemic in British society. Mary also recalls her first meeting with Justin. She got fond of him at once. She remembers, "The more I liked him, the less I liked her" (31). However, Mary's love for Justin does not deter her from being angry with him from time to time: "but all of a

sudden, I was very angry I did not show it but I wanted to strike him. I thought of the sickness in the villages. This Mummy's boy should be sent to Uganda" (71). What informs the sentiments expressed in this revealing statement is the profound resentment that Mary feels when considering the racial, economic and political inequalities that underlie a global social system that is both unfair and corrupt. Mary loves Justin as an individual but she cannot let go of the fact that he is also a spoilt white boy who enjoys several blessings kids his age in Uganda are denied of. Knowing both worlds intimately, Mary is tormented with the knowledge of the great gap between the so-called first and third worlds and the injustices that this gap engenders.

A very interesting point of this is the author's interest in exploring the problem of racism from both perspectives. In the words of Maggie Gee: "In the end, I think that what I call 'the viewpoint of the other' is always of legitimate interest: how a woman imagines a man, how a young person imagines an old person, how a cleaner sees an employer and vice versa. The focus swings back and forth from the other to the self" (2009, 18). The racist attitude always shows condescension, a feeling of superiority. Vanessa looks down on black people and in her turn Mary Tendo criticizes the whites.

Mary despises Vanessa for several reasons, she finds fault with her habits and general attitude towards life. From Mary's point of view, many of Vanessa's shortcomings and flaws can be observed in the white people, in general. "These people are dirtier than (people) in our village. something my mother would not believe" (33). Mary thinks that one of the reasons why white people are dirtier than black people is the fact that there is too much clutter in their homes. They stuff their houses with "things" since they give importance to worthless objects. The rampant consumerism in Western societies leads to uncleanliness and lack of proper hygiene. "More dust than at home because the things were everywhere" says Mary. "All of the houses were stuffed with things; mirrors, pictures, toys, money, left lying around, mostly white people's Money. And the dust was gray, mostly white people's dust. It came from their skins, their hands, their heads" (118). Her proud conclusion is that "The English are too lazy to be cleaners" (119). It is as if white people are trying to fill the emptiness in their lives and in their hearts with material possessions. Mary finds their efforts futile, and their priorities misplaced. She is also aware of the fact that habits are conditioned by one's social and cultural background. "I know everything there is to know about cleaning. Because African people are forced to be clean. In Uganda there are many diseases that kill you if you are not clean" (122). As Mary aptly suggests, habits that communities collectively endorse are influenced by several environmental factors intimately linked with social, historical, and political conditions.

Having lived under dire economic conditions which certainly cannot be divorced from the history of colonisation and imperial plunder, the Ugandans must live and deal with the manifold challenges posed by poverty. For Mary (as well as Vanessa), the values of her home culture constitutes the norm against which she perceives and judges the others. Hence, it comes as no surprise that people of different cultural origins often find one another lacking sense or simply plain wrong, in one sense or another.

Mary is keen on utilizing the power of words in the colonizer's language in order to empower herself. In doing so she articulates a new agency that is very much in tune with the spirit of the times: "I am 'post-colonial' and 'post- imperial', and so I have exactly the right context. Though if anyone else said it, I would be annoyed. I do not want the empire and the colonies attached to me like a long tail of tin cans. I am going to write about my life in England, Uganda and all over the world" (116). Asserting her identity as a post-colonial, Mary reveals her desire to be rid of the legacy of colonialism and all the traumas it caused in the African psyche. She wants to be acknowled and respected as a human being with equal rights and status.

Ultimately, *My Cleaner* is a novel that explores how people might cross the racial and cultural divide. As Gee was writing this story, she understood that she was writing at two hands and one of the central themes was not just Vanessa's misunderstandings, but how Mary and Vanessa misunderstand each other, and also how they slowly work towards something better. Mary gets Vanessa wrong just as much as Vanessa gets Mary wrong. "In short," says Gee

> I was writing about how both characters are dealing with difference,
> looking across a boundary category that at times blinds them to each
> other. And very soon indeed the thing I was writing had grown too long
> to be a short story and was on its way to being a novel. (2009, 15-16)

It is not that Vanessa and Mary don't understand each other's characters, they misjudge each other's cultures. The two women's trip to Vanessa's village helps build a bridge between two characers and allows them to better understand each other's cultures. Mary sees that Vanessa was raised in a very poor community in a house that is considered a "hut" even in Uganda. Impressed by Mary's determination to rise above the circumstances of her birth and upbringing, Vanessa comes to admire Mary's ability and efficiency. Though reluctantly, she shows Mary the letter coming from the publisher which shows his admiration for Mary's essay. The positive note on which the novel ends suggests that if one can overcome one's racial and class prejudices, true and sustainable friendships may be formed crossculturally.

Undoubtedly, *My Cleaner* is a moving novel that tactfully deals with both universal and contemporary themes through the interwined stories of Mary Tendo and Vanessa Henman. Although Gee's thematic scope is admittedly ambitious and her narrative multilayered, the book is accessible and well structured. Most importantly, *My Cleaner* contributes to the ongoing efforts to build bridges between different cultures and races by stressing the importance of sympathy and empathy. Only by cultivating these traits can people overcome perceptual blockages and othering. I would argue that her stance is very much in tune with Gilroy's call for the kind of multicultural ethics and politics that is premised upon "an agonistic, planetary humanism capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon each other" (4). Looking into and understanding the origins of each other, the two characters finally create a bond between themselves. After visiting Vanessa's village which is poorer than hers, Mary's perception of Vanessa changes significantly. Fischer notes that "[s]ymbolically, this is shown by the fact that the glasses she thought she had left at home somehow appear in her pocket, and she drives back to London seeing more clearly" (202) . It is a symbolic improvement of vision. Fischer adds that "the clearer vison begins when they literally see themselves reflected together in a mirror on the road, reflecting 'two small living things on an enormous planet' who 'merge together into the same bright dot'" (220).

To conclude, neither Vanessa nor Mary openly accepts that they have racial biases but each of them continuously displays this attitude. Mary Tendo observes: "I myself am not prejudiced. I learned this at Makarere, where everyone teaches that racism is bad. And the Bible says we're all God's children" (119). The end of the book suggests a compromise. Both Vanessa and Mary belong to different races and cultures but they have many things in common. Both women love their sons, both want to suceed in life and both want to return to their origins. Mary also finds out that Vanessa herself originally comes from a village maybe poorer than hers. Last but not the least, both women are in search for love and a meaningful life. As Özbatak-Avcı points out:

> Not only does Gee critically explore domestic service in today's London from a global perspective, but she also makes use of the relationship between Mary Tendo, an immigrant servant woman from Uganda, (one of Britain's former colonies) and her white, middle-class English employer, Vanessa Henman, to explore the tensions, contestations and renegotiations within narratives of Englishness (490).

Moreover, "making use of the parallels between the liminal position of the literary servant and that of the migrant, the novel unsettles the hierarchical boundaries between England and its Others both abroad and within" (490). In

dealing with such timely and significant current issues, Gee participates in the heated debates on multiculturalism, inter-cultural interaction, and conflict. All in all, the writer considers that if we can see the common points that connect different racial/cultural groups to one another, it will be much easier to overcome our differences and cultivate mutual understanding.

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A TRIBUTE TO THEODORE ROSZAK.
THE MAKING OF A COUNTERCULTURE

ŞTEFAN BORBÉLY[1]

ABSTRACT. *A Tribute to Theodore Roszak. The Making of a Counterculture.*
The American professor Theodore Roszak (1933 – 2011) is generally credited
with the invention of the term "counterculture", although his seminal book
from 1969, *The Making of a Counter Culture* spells the two words separately.
To us, today it seems to be the work of a rather cautious, but pioneering
sociologist, who acknowledges indeed the legitimacy of the student revolts of
the Sixties but at the same time tries to distance himself from their heat with
the cool objectivity of the academic observer.

Keywords: counterculture, the Sixties, Theodore Roszak.

REZUMAT. *Omagiu lui Theodore Roszak. Facerea unei contraculturi*.
Profesorul American Theodore Roszak (1933 – 2011) este îndeobşte creditat cu
inventarea cuvântului "contracultură", deşi cartea sa de referinţă din 1969, *The
Making of a Counter Culture* (*Facerea contraculturii*) ortografiază separat cele
două cuvinte. Astăzi, cartea ne apare ca fiind opera de pionierat a unui sociolog
mai degrabă circumspect, care admite, e drept, legitimitatea revoltelor studenţeşti
din anii 1960, dar se şi distanţează de incandescenţa lor cu obiectivitatea rece a
unui observator academic.

Cuvinte cheie: contracultură, anii 1960, Theodore Roszak.

Why a tribute to Theodore Roszak? It is probably because the former
Californian sociology professor (1933 – 2011) enjoys an unmerited underdog
status within the Sixties, which is far below his credentials. A few encyclopedias
dedicated to the hippy culture mention his name, although everybody knows
that he was the guy who had coined the term 'counter culture', written in two

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words, without a hyphen in his seminal book published in 1969, *The Making of a Counter Culture*. Roszak didn't enjoy the status of a giant lent to Marcuse, Allen Ginsberg, Norman Mailer, Kerouac or Dean Moriarty, the list being much-much longer. Witnesses of those times do not hesitate to mention that Roszak wasn't a hippy or a protester, and neither a fan of LSD or of other, more or less sacred mushrooms.

In order to grasp his status correctly, we must rely on a term taken from another field, hoping that it will not induce a fatal misunderstanding. Roszak was a "fellow traveler" within the Counterculture of the Sixties. He enjoyed the movement, its sense of "Dionysian frenzy" and freedom, but was reluctant to undress his professional suit-and-tie correctness in order to merge with the sit-ins or the promiscuous parties held in Haight-Ashbury. As you certainly know, the term "fellow traveler" ("poputchik" in Russian) was coined by Trotsky in order to label those intellectuals who were hesitant in taking over the ideals promoted by the revolution. But they liked them, didn't confront them.

Trotsky also said that in order to become a "fellow traveler", you must be a bright, very clever person. This means that your intelligence stays *between* reluctance and spontaneity, functioning as a cautious, but creative inhibition. Roszak was this type of man: too brilliant in order to surrender uncritically, he was caught between the existential and the cognitive halves of the Sixties. In the deepest realms of his heart he openly enjoyed the existential frenzy of the Counterculture, which he once called "barbaric". Counter culture – he said – means "*a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbaric intrusion. An image comes at once to mind: the invasion of centaurs that is recorded on the pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. Drunken and incensed, the centaurs burst in upon the civilized festivities that are in progress*" (42). On the other hand, he took over the role of the clever civilizer, calming down the "barbarians" with the brilliance of his mind, intellect and civilization. The quote above runs forward: "*But a stem Apollo, the guardian of the orthodox culture, steps forward to admonish the gate-crashers and drive them back.*"

A marginal myself, I instinctively love the marginalized and the dispossessed, and Roszak seemed to me an excellent case study in order to verify my own ambiguities. Actually they are not only mine, because they belong to my whole generation. Communism, censorship and Secret Police enslaved the Romanian society at the time of the Counterculture of the Sixties. I do not want to say that we hadn't at all remnants of it, even within our faculty, who had its own Joan Baez, who took us to the green in order to chant, to murmur folk songs and to dress ethnically, emptying of rural garments our

grandparents' dusty wardrobes and drawers. But, paradoxically enough, we had suffered a *détournement*, in Guy Debord's terms, being forced to have the *intellectual* perception of a phenomenon which was actually *existential*. We had ideas about what Counterculture must be, but we were not allowed to experience it existentially. The paradox repeated itself following the December 1989 anti-Communist revolution, when a few of us have decided to call back the Counterculture of the Sixties from the mists of the past, and transform it into a field of academic study. Again, the approach was an intellective one: it was the work of our minds, not of our senses or of our body.

This is how I started to deepen myself into Theodore Roszak's works, because he seemed to be a relative of myself and of many of my intellectual pals: a highly clever diagnostician of the novelties of his epoch, who retreats within the protection of his more or less utopian cabinet in order to avoid contamination. He does so not because he is a coward, but because he is convinced that, if he wants to stay sincere with his own feelings, he has to go beyond the intellectual stereotypes and the intellectual certainties instilled to his personality by his intellectual formation.

In Theodore Roszak's peculiar perception, to understand "Counter Culture" is to understand something which goes *against* Theodore Roszak. It is as if life bursts into your office, smashing the door, the windows and your customary habits. Roszak identifies the kernel of the crisis in what he calls "reductive humanism", composed by strictly rational tasks and imperatives, piled up in schools and universities as a dead stock of presuppositions and stereotypes: "*It is quite impossible any longer to ignore the fact that our conception of intellect has been narrowed disastrously by the prevailing assumption, especially in the academies, that the life of the spirit is: (1) a lunatic fringe best left to artists and marginal visionaries; (2) an historical boneyard for antiquarian scholarship; (3) a highly specialized adjunct of professional anthropology; (4) an antiquated vocabulary still used by the clergy, but intelligently soft-pedaled by its more enlightened members*" (147). The truth is still valid today. Nothing has changed, especially in our swish will to be the narcissistic culprits of our academically adorned hypocrisy.

Going beyond the narrow borders of the already mentioned "reductive humanism", we shall find that it is actually the by-product of a wider manipulative field, which is technocracy. "*By the technocracy* – Roszak says - , *I mean that social form in which an industrial society reaches the peak of its organizational integration. It is the ideal men usually have in mind when they speak of modernizing, up-dating, rationalizing, planning*" (5). Technocracy is owned by the State, it is offered by the State to its people as an ideal of social accomplishment and personal wellbeing. As Marcuse has already stated, it is a

cunning gift, because it is the basis of the so-called "repressive desublimation", a phrase loved and cherished by Roszak. The main idea is this: each State affirms that its goal is the perfectly rational and organized society. One must be insane to suspect or to say no to such a generous perspective. Neurotic individuals can challenge the goal, but everybody will say they do it because they are neurotic, because they have traumatic repressions. So the generous and all caring State jumps in to take over and integrate these repressions. Marcuse calls the procedure "new authoritarianism", since "*technocracy does indeed seem capable of anabolizing every form of discontent into its system.*"

In the 7th chapter of his book, entitled *The Myth of Objective Consciousness*, Roszak traces the upper limits of this ration-centered hypnosis in what he calls to be the "programmed environment". Its aim is to obtain a perfectly programmed individual within a perfectly programmed environment. He quotes both Lewis Mumford (*The Myth of the Machine*) and especially Jacques Ellul to make his idea to be understood: "*Technique requires predictability and, no less, exactness of prediction. It is necessary, then, that technique prevail over the human being. For technique, this is a matter of life and death. Technique must reduce man to a technical animal, the king of the slaves of technique. Human caprice crumbles before this necessity; there can be no human autonomy in the face of technical autonomy. The individual must be fashioned by techniques, either negatively (by the techniques of understanding man) or positively (by the adaptation of man to the technical framework), in order to wipe out the blots his personal determination introduces into the perfect design of the organization*" (2).

If we read these words correctly, we reach he conclusion that the perfect future of the perfectly organized human is post-humanism. It is a nice, perfectly logical premonition. When Roszak wrote his *Counter Culture*, it was a negative utopia. People shivered to get rid of it. Times have changed: nowadays we experience it wholeheartedly.

It is interesting that by denouncing our "*joyless, rapacious, and egomaniacal order of our technological society*" (137), and by asserting that the solution to the rationalized eschatology is the integration "*of the living power of myth, ritual and rite*" into our lives Roszak does not rely on Max Weber's formula of the "re-enchantment" of the world, which is very similar to what the American author has in mind. Both Weber and Roszak target the deconstruction of the extreme rationalization inaugurated in the 18th century, and, nevertheless, the name of the German thinker appears only once in *The Making of the Counter Culture*, within a neutral list of sociologists dealing with technology. Similarly to Weber, Roszak's idea relies on a sensitive re-conversion of the world: "*Yet, if there is to be an alternative to the technocracy,*

there must be an appeal from this reductive rationality which the objective consciousness dictates. This, so I have argued, is the primary project of our counter culture: to proclaim a new heaven and a new earth so vast, so marvelous that the inordinate claims of technical expertise must of necessity withdraw in the presence of such splendor to a subordinate and marginal status in the lives of men. To create and broadcast such a consciousness of life entails nothing less than the willingness to open ourselves to the visionary imagination on its own demanding terms." (240).

Will it be, if we read it correctly, the replacement of Roszak's professional God, which is Marx, with the Supreme Being resident in heaven? It might be so, when our author asserts that "*in contrast, the beauty of the magical vision is the beauty of the deeply sensed, sacramental presence*" (252-253).

Killing Marx proved to be a real challenge for Roszak, because his formation was that of an honest Marxist. The Counterculture urged him to read Marx critically, even to replace him with Freud and the imaginative tradition of the new culture, deeply permeated by psychoanalysis. Marx has given Roszak the scientific objectivity and rationality of his analytical, but outstanding mind, and it is as if Counterculture came from behind, in order to surprise him with a more imaginative understanding of science, life and society. Was he longing for it? Probably; but, fair enough, he does not kill his idol directly, but lends the privilege to H.B. Acton to do it: "*As H. B. Acton observes, the only «mental production» Marx seems to have excused from the derogatory category of ideology is religion, dreams, visions: such were the dark waters Freud fished to find his conception of human nature. But for all this occult matter Marx had little patience. Instead, he chose to spend dismal hours poring over the industrial statistics of the British Blue Books, where man has little occasion to appear in any role but homo economicus, homo faber. In contrast, Marcuse and Brown insist that we have more to learn of man from the fabulous images of Narcissus, Orpheus, Dionysius, Apollo, than from the hard data of getting and spending.*" (91-92).

Filtered by the expressionists, Marx gave Roszak the understanding of history as a confrontation – but not of social classes, but of generations. History moves forward by progressively structured generational gaps – and the Counterculture was precisely the gap Roszak was looking for to assert the idea. Because of the already mentioned "repressive desublimation" Roszak avoided to suggest a direct clash between the two generations in conflict – the adaptable, conformist generation of the elders and the insurgency of the youth –, by offering instead the old and verified solution of the *dissent*. Back in 1968 he edited a very challenging anthology dedicated to the Dissenters, entitled

The Dissenting Academy[2], with a juicy subtitle: *Essays criticizing the teaching of humanities in the American universities.* The classical dissenters of the 18th century were members of the Protestant religious sects (Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers) who refused to conform to the liturgy and rites of the Church of England. They did not confront *directly* the Church, but established a parallel educational and cultural system, whose significance was – according to H. George Hahn – "*that it kept alive dissenting religion and gave to it an intellectual voice. It opened higher education to dissenters and promoted modern education by bringing «practical» subjects into the curriculum long before Oxford and Cambridge*" (194), the two highly esteemed universities whose curricula and acceptance codes had been blocked by the Act of Uniformity (1662) and by the Clarendon Code (1661 – 1665).

Similarly, Roszak believed that the "Counter Culture" must be not a confrontational, but a dissenting culture, the idea being taken over by those who believe that the most important outcome of the Counterculture of the Sixties is the creation of the *subculture* network. Roszak quotes the Italian Nicola Chiaromonte, who said "*that dissenters must detach themselves, must become resolute «heretics». They must detach themselves, without shouting or riots, indeed in silence and secrecy; not alone but in groups, in real «societies» that will create, as far as possible, a life that is independent and wise. It would be … a non-rhetorical form of «total rejection»"* (23)

Subcultures, Roszak asserted, are non-political forms of stepping aside from the mainstream: "*The tribalized young gather in gay costume on a high hill in the public park to salute the midsummer sun in its rising and setting. They dance, they sing, they make love as each feels moved, without order or plan. Perhaps the folklore of the affair is pathetically ersatz at this point - but is the intention so foolish after all? There is the chance to express passion, to shout and stamp, to caress and play communally. All have equal access to the event; no one is misled or manipulated. Neither kingdom, nor power, nor glory is desperately at stake*" (149).

It is so, he suggested, because in the near future the State will be replaced by the new kingdom of magic: "*The truth of the matter is: no society, not even our severely secularized technocracy, can ever dispense with mystery and magical ritual. These are the very bonds of social life, the inarticulate assumptions and motivations that weave together the collective fabric of society and which require periodic collective affirmation.*" (147).

We might therefore say that the Counterculture of the Sixties re-formatted Roszak, lending him some sort of illicit effervescence he hadn't

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[2] *The Dissenting Academy. Essays criticizing the teaching of humanities in the American universities.* Edited by Theodore Roszak. Peter Lang, Oxford – Bern – Berlin – Bruxelles – Frankfurt am Main – New York – Wien, 1968

experience during the years of his rational formation. He managed to keep the exuberance long after *The Making of a Counter Culture* became a respected reference book – but never a *best seller*. Roszak proved to be a privileged witness of his period, and when Timothy Leary said that "*the computer will be the LSD of the nineties*", fueling a special addiction similar to what drugs have given a decade or so before, Roszak published two books dedicated to the newly emerged computer world: *From Satori to Silicon Valley* and *The Cult of Information: The Folklore of Computers and the True Art of Thinking*, both in 1986.

Let's select only two fruitful ideas from these books. The first one, developed in both of them, says that by turning onto the computers – an addiction Roszak continued to suspect, because computing is nothing more than technocracy on a higher level – our mind structure will change by leaping from *knowledge* to *information*. Information is presented as the "counter culture" of knowledge: a more or less "barbaric" intrusion into the logical syntax of the dialectic knowledge, equivalent to a hysterical network made up of shortcuts. While building up knowledge means to develop intricate layers and systems of thinking, information is necessarily a reduction. Paradoxically, but logically enough, Roszak suggests that the mind of the future will be based on reductions. It's a sado-masochistic self infliction: the will to freely use the knife against your own body, against your own complexity as a human being.

The second idea is related to the word we find in the subtitle of *The Cult of Information*, that is *folklore*. Have in mind, while reading it, the residual culture of postmodernism, but please do not forget Norbert Elias' seminal work *The Civilizing Process* (*Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*), published too early, in a year, 1939, which was not prepared to take it. The book will be really cheered later, within the 60s and the 70s. It's a profound and challenging description of a social system whose march forward is marked by the residual waste it leaves behind.

Norbert Elias' main idea relies on the demonstration that the "process of civilizing" generates several sets of cultural and psychological byproducts, called by the author "second nature". They are related to violence, sexuality, bodily behavior, psychological habits and language, which are progressively censored by the mainstream civilization and culture, but are still functioning within them, as a residual waste bearing affective or symbolic values.

In contrast to the thoroughly organized cabinets of the rational modernity, the waste generated by it is piled up randomly, similar to what we do in our backyard storage closets. In Roszak's terms, and he was extremely flexible in imagining the process, the countercultural subcultures necessarily generate and fuel residual remnants within our existence. For instance, when analyzing the "*youthful renaissance of mythical religious interest*" within the Counterculture

of the Sixties, he declares himself dissatisfied that "*the young reduce it in their ignorance to an esoteric collection of peer-group symbols and slogans, vaguely daring and ultimately trivial. Then, instead of culture, we get collage: a miscellaneous heaping together, as if one had simply ransacked The* Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics *and the* Celestia Arcana *for exotic tidbits*" (147).

"Collage" is a creative term already used by Thomas Mann or Borges – not to mention the others. Postmodernists pile up seemingly incoherent items into very sophisticated fragmentary deconstructions. In *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964), Umberto Eco smilingly heralds the future mixture of high and low culture, by integrating the so-called "low" urban folklore into the crystal clear temple of the high-brow canon. There jumps the conclusion: if you want to understand the culture we are living in, please visit the dustbin. Your cabinet is too clean to have revelations.

This is why Roszak was happy while enjoying counterculture: it gave him the permission to visit the shadows and the marginalized.

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FLICKER

CONSTANTINA RAVECA BULEU[1]

ABSTRACT. *Flicker.* Theodore Roszak's sophisticated and extreme long novel *Flicker*, published in 1991, resonates in many ways with the masterpieces of the cryptographic thriller tradition, like Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* (1980) or Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* (2003). Its core lies in the conspiracy theories, due a fictional plot driven from the deep shadows of the world of cinematography. By doing some research, a UCLA film scholar comes across the films made by a rather allusive American director protected by a secret organization. The director's hidden biography takes us back to the interwar Germany, making the scholar to discover that his subject's films contain hidden messages that can be deciphered by means of a special device.

Keywords: *Theodore Roszak, Flicker, counterculture, the Sixties, cinema, cryptographic novels*

REZUMAT. *Sfârșitul lumii în alb și negru.* Sofisticatul și foarte lungul roman *Flicker* de Theodore Roszak (1991), publicat în românește sub *titlul Sfârșitul lumii în alb și negru*, seamănă în multe privințe cu operele de vârf ale tradiției ficționale criptografice, cum sunt *Numele trandafirului* al lui Umberto Eco (1980) sau *Codul lui Da Vinci* al lui Dan Brown (2003). Trăgându-și obârșia din vastul domeniu al practicilor conspirative, acțiunea lui ne poartă înspre lumea întunecată a cinematografiei, prin intermediul unui cercetător care descoperă în mod accidental filmoteca unui nu foarte cunoscut regizor american, a cărui biografie secretă se prelungește până în Germania dintre cele două războaie mondiale. Adâncindu-și căutările, protagonistul înțelege că filmele produse de către regizor ascund mesaje secrete, care pot fi descifrate cu ajutorul unui decriptor special.

Cuvinte cheie: *Theodore Roszak, Flicker, contracultură, anii 1960, cinematografie, roman criptografic*

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Published in 1991, the cryptographic novel *Flicker* by Theodore Roszak traces, at its first level, the existential and intellectual links of the protagonist, Jonathan Gates with cinematography, and especially with the work of a B movies director named Max Castle. It is the history of an obsession with accidental causes, through which a rather superficial UCLA film scholar, Jonathan Gates, comes across the strange movies completed by the former German director Max von Kastell (a.k.a. Max Castell). Gates' further investigations lead him into the shadowy world of an esoteric conspiracy, orchestrated by the so-called Children of the Storm/Sturmwaisen, a secret organization responsible for keeping alive the former Gnostic Cathars far beyond the beginning of the 20th century.

The scenario seems plausible within a cryptographic novel like *Flicker*, fueled by the Romantic treatment of the Cathars during the nineteenth century – especially by writers like Napoléon Peyrat, a priest who mythologized the Cathars by placing them rather conveniently at the roots of the Protestants –, but it is not endorsed by the scholars. Sean Martin (146), for example, asserts that the very last Cathars lived in Piedmont in the fourteenth century, coexisting with the fugitive Waldensians, chased by the Inquisition. At his turn Michael Frasetto (102) remarks that the Albigensian Crusade did not eradicate the heresy completely because the Cathars will disappear only during the fourteenth century, after enjoying one final success under the guidance of their last important missionary, the perfect or „Good Man", Pierre Autier. Stating that the Cathars have indeed disappeared – „*le catharisme a disparu bel et bien en tant que religion organisée et pratiquée*" (171) –, but their spirit stayed alive, an interesting argument being the vivid emergence of Protestantism in the former areas inhabited by the Cathars (it is by no means a casual effect) Jean Markale (58) mentions as the last Cathar stronghold in the region the church of Sabarthès, and says that beyond the fourteenth century we could only speak about neo-Cathar resurrections – and here we have the premises of the fictional plot imagined by Theodore Roszak in *Flicker*.

Strategically, Jonathan Gates' fist contact with Max Castle's cinematography is presented as an initiation rite equivalent to predestination, sustained by the biography of the protagonist. Born in 1939, the "annus mirabilis" (Roszak 9) of the Hollywood film industry, since many iconic movies were screened before the United States joined the WWII, Gates thinks his life in terms of cinematographic events, even his birth being connected to movies, because his mother felt the pains of the delivery while watching *Gone with the Wind* for the third time in a row. Later on Gates literally absorbs voraciously everything related to cinema, identifying himself with the iconic rebels of the 50s, Marlon Brando and James Dean.

The identification is projected onto the identity crisis of his generation, sterilized by the hypocrisy of the Eisenhower epoch and by the film censorship instilled by the National Legion of Decency. The crisis grows a "*glandular attraction*" (Roszak 15) in Gates towards the foreign films projected in underground cinemas, like *The Classic*, a filthy projection hall situated in the western part of Los Angeles, where Gates gets acquainted with the French New Wave Cinema (François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol) as well as the Italian Neo-realists (Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni).

To put it differently, the liberation of his sexuality from the taboos functions as a lure for Gates, and marks the first steps of his shadowy adventure which makes him enter the labyrinth which goes to Max Castle. Its first step is the dissociation between sexuality and sensuality, between the instinct and its artistic expression, which gives Gates the opportunity to unleash a virtually infinite intellectual game, through which the idealized body is transformed in the so-called "*non-corporal emblem*" (23).

Another initiator of Gates' cinema-erotic education is Clarissa Swan (Clare), co-owner (with Don Sharkey) of *The Classic*, who will later become an acclaimed film critic. An antipode of the American standard female ideal, Clare has abandoned her career in a period when the interest in cinematography fell outside the academic curriculum, and refined her taste for films in Paris, at the Cinémathèque Française, where she also met Jean-Paul Sartre, sharing a few of his ideas. Another of her acquaintance is André Bazin[2], the founder of the prestigious *Cahiers du cinema*. Clare becomes Gates' mentor for several years, teaching him that the movies are "literature for the eyes", "*much more than a bag of optical illusions*" (Roszak 57).

The history of the mechanisms that generate the optical illusions is taught to Jonathan Gates by the other owner of *The Classic*, Don Sharkey. With him we enter into the history of technicality facilitated by *Zoetrope*, one of the many pre-film animation devices that produce the illusion of motion by displaying a sequence of drawings or photographs by showing the progressive phases of that motion. According to Sharkey the inventors of this device are the "*Zoetrope Worshippers*" (Roszak 81) living on the "Biblical lands". One of them is Louis Aimé Augustin LePrince, a French artist and the inventor of an early motion picture camera, who might have been the very first person who shot a moving picture sequence by using a single lens camera and a strip of (paper) film.

LePrince is interesting for our story because he disappears mysteriously in 1890, generating a lot of theories related to conspiracy, ranging from a perfect suicide to a murder caused by the battle for the innovation patent, because the

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[2] Bazin's call for objective reality, deep focus, and lack of <u>montage</u> are linked to his belief that the interpretation of a film or scene should be left to the spectator.

other competitor was Edison's kinetograph. Another conspiracy inserted in Sharkey's history is related to a secret organization called *Oculus Dei*, interested in fighting the dark sides of evil promoted by the movies, but also responsible for equaling cinematographic illusion with black magic. The Oculus Dei was created in order to challenge the evil effects of the first moving projections done during the Middle Ages by the Templars and by the Knights of Malta – and that's why we have a very real device called "Maltese cross" inside the projector. Acknowledging the narcotic effect of the *laterna magica* (Roszak 84-85)*,* Sharkey, who is influenced by a fanatic Oculus Dei Jesuit (the fictional assassin of Henri Langlois) whom he met in Paris, concludes that the "theology of cinematography" lies on four pillars: Good, Evil, Reality and Illusion (Roszak 84).

Clare's obsession for *Les Enfants du Paradis,* a film made by the French Marcel Carné during the German occupation, and bought at auction by the son of a former Nazi minister of culture, leads her to discover a mysterious film happily recuperated from an orphanage near Dessau. *Judas Jedermann* (*Judas Everyman*), was made in the 20s by the director Max von Kastell for UFA (Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft, the most renowned German film production company founded in 1917), being censored by the authorities.

The fictional von Kastell is presented as belonging to a group of German directors specialized in Gothic fantasies, a very popular genre in the years following WWI. The real masterpiece of the domain is *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) from 1920, a German silent horror film, directed by Robert Wiene, considered the quintessential work of German Expressionist cinema. In short, the film tells the story of an insane hypnotist who manipulate a somnambulist to commit murders. The script was inspired by various experiences from the lives of Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer (the writers), who were left distrustful of authority after their experiences with the military during WWI. In a book published in 1947, entitled *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Siegfried Kracauer confirms the exponential position of the film within the aesthetic of the period, also suggesting that there will be a link between the apolitical and escapist orientation of the Weimar-era cinema and the later Nazi totalitarianism. Introduced by Roszak into his novel, Kracauer's theories draw a connection between the Gothic German cinema saturated by vampires, werewolves, hypnotic malefic warlocks and the symptoms of evil promoted by the Nazi, Hitler presented as the greatest hypnotist being the ultimate reference of the link, due his hypnotic skills to turn the spectators into zombie assassins while watching the film.

Max von Kastell's promising career is chopped down by the Nazi censorship. His other film was *Simon the Magus*, which pours a secret Gnostic

ingredient into our novel, the fictional cast of this film, listed by Roszak in his text, including also Louise Brooks, one of the former idols of the silent movies, recuperated after the WW II, who was the real protagonist of Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*), a film originating in Frank Wedekind's play *Erdgeist* (*Earth Spirit*). Moving to the US in 1926, along with an impressive group of prominent German film directors – the exodus is real –, von Kastell becomes Max Castle, being hired by MGM to direct *The Martyr*, a film dedicated to the early years of Christianity. The film, screened in a version wanted by the studio, but disapproved by Castle proved to be a disaster. Also a disaster will be Castle's attempt to screen Joseph Conrad's *Heart of the Darkness*. Despite Orson Welles' personal support (also fictionalized in *Flicker*) the production was labeled a "man-devouring film" (Roszak 341). Marginalized by the big studios and relegated to make B-movies productions, Castle will specialize himself in low budget horror movies, produced by obscure studios, sometimes even under pseudonyms, like Maurice Roche.

Additionally, Castle is presented as helping Orson Welles to produce *Citizen Kane* (1941), and he is, the same year, John Houston's counselor when making *The Maltese Falcon*, in an attempt to deepen the religious symbolism of the film, focused on the falcon and the Maltese cross. While the fictitious Houston was positive in asserting that Castle belonged to a bizarre religious sect similar to the Rosicrucian, Orson Welles acknowledged that each cinema project shared by Castle had its secret, shadowy dimension. The fictionalized Welles remarks that Castle has always been interested in the *Unenthüllte,* which is the unseen, something perceived only by the dark half of the mind. In a last attempt to turn Conrad's novel into a movie, Castle pays a trip to Zürich in 1941, to look for money at the headquarters of the Orphans of the Storm, but vanishes during his journey.

Many years later Jonathan Gates visits the Cathar orphanage in Zürich, located in a gruesome construction elevated by Zwingli and taken over in 1738 by the order which considers itself older than Catholicism. Dedicated to "*the light that shines in the darkness and cannot be penetrated*" (Roszak 476), the building bears the sign of the order, the Maltese cross, with an encircled logo superimposing the letters A and X. In the church Jonathan comes across a violent iconography, whose protagonists are the martyrs of the cult, but he also finds a version of the myth of the Gnostic Sophia, which is subtly replicated in Max Castle's movies, including the scenes shot in Mexico for *The Heart of the Darkness*. By analyzing the images, Gates realizes that the director has used in an artistic manner, which is in a sacrilegious way, the ritual of the Cathars, the dance of the black bird (the true divinity) and the dance of the white woman (Sophia), in order to impregnate the ritual of Conrad's primitives

with power and expressivity. He was therefore punished and exiled on a deserted island, while the rest of the world knows that he has died.

The words used by Roszak to describe his protagonist's initiation are boisterous. *The Classic,* where Gates gets firstly acquainted with Max Castle's films, expands and becomes a place full of initiatory attributes. Mixing symbols of ethereal purity and dark Gothic, it becomes "a *small, legendary temple of the arts*" (Roszak 7), a sacred, but hidden space of common urban geography and decrepitude, assimilated to a "*crypt*" (Roszak 7, 152). Gates' revealing experience is compared to the "*last supper*" (Roszak 8), to Christ's revelation in the catacombs, long before the sign of the cross and the Gospels become "*the guiding light of mankind*" (Roszak 7).

The narrator sees himself as a "*dumbfound neophyte wandering in the dark womb of a reformed belief"* (Roszak 7)*,* where he finds something miraculous, undefined, alien and enigmatic. By doubling the identity, the already mentioned neophyte is associated to a "*searcher*" (Roszak 8-9), able the grasp the great mystery from within the decaying matter, to feel "*the taste of the Eucharist*" and, fully transformed, to herald the outer world "*the apocalyptic word*". As I've already said, the words are too big and too loud to describe the experience of a simple, more or less understood movie watching, but the author wants to suggest that at the beginning of the Sixties, when the protagonist gets acquainted with Castle's movies, it is especially his innocence and lack of theory that makes him the ideal candidate to promote the forgotten director's films, and to sense "*the vague and flickering revelation of the dark god whose scriptures tell the secret history of the cinematography*" (Roszak 9).

Jonathan Gates deepens himself into Castle's fragmentary universe, made of his interviews and of his written texts associated to *Judas Jedermann*. They reveal an ambivalent dichotomy *light vs. darkness*, because, on the one hand, it can be experienced directly, as the light which tears apart the total darkness of a cinema theater, and, on the other, it is the spiritual light of the cinema which molds our souls. According to Castle, the fictional director, the actors are always "*children of light*" (Roszak 61), luminescent entities capable of chasing away the dark sides of life, as well as the deep darkness of the underworld.

When watching *Judas Everyman* for the first time, Jonathan experiences an overwhelming terror, coming from repulsion mixed nevertheless with fascination, because the spectators are prompted to share Judah's guilt. Conceived as the drama of the psyche, Castle's movie places Judah into a modern frame, equaling Judah's guilt with any betrayal of a political fellow. By looking for the deepest message of the movie, Jonathan's subconscious

instinctively selects "unclean", a hidden code which he later discovers in other movies directed by Castle too.

In this early phase of his research on Castle's movies Gates misses another code, revealed to him by Shannon, an unsophisticated girl: "*It's enough to put you off sex for the rest of your life*" (Roszak 172). Jonathan realizes that cinema could be the greatest conspiracy of all times, because Castle's films actually implement the sterilizing theology of the Cathars, who believe that the world is a struggle between light and darkness, between spirit and flesh. Manichean at its core, the belief asserts the simultaneous existence of the God of the Light and of the God of the Darkness. Their conflict is the fight between the soul and the body, whose aim is to liberate the divine sparkle existing within the humans. A similar struggle can be found in the flicker of the films, transforming cinematography into a secret tool of religious recruitment.

Reshaped into a church which hosts and educates the orphans, the Cathars sneak hidden symbols and messages into their movies, in order to make people to take the way of the light, by restricting the voices of the flesh and of the sexuality, associated, in a pure Gnostic tradition, to the procreation of the evil side of our personality, namely the body. The restriction also explains why the Cathars rely on the orphans in order to recruit new members: it is because they provide a non-biological ascendance. The fanatic Castle had suggested that the habit of procreation did nothing else but "*nurtured the Devil*" (Roszak 446), as it happened with different political systems like the Nazis, who needed children and therefore promoted procreation.

Castle's obsession with abstinence is also illustrated by the disciplined, yogic sexuality of his former lover, Olga Tell, cast in different sequences of the projected *Heart of Darkness*. She calls the free from procreation sexuality *bhoga*, which in Sanskrit (yogapedia.com) means indulgence, enjoyment, consumption, experience and sensual pleasure. In the yogic philosophy, *bhoga* is a term used in several ways. Some see *bhoga* as the enjoyment of earthly pleasure that prevents self-realization. Others see it as a type of pleasure without engagement, necessary for a healthy mind and body. An extreme example in the novel is the fictional Simon Dunkel's film entitled *Deserters of Birth*, featuring fetuses reluctant to be born, which hide themselves instead deep in their mothers' womb.

Step by step Jonathan deciphers the exact Manichean symbols hidden in Castle's films, as well as a long series of premeditated subliminal symbols having a tremendous impact on the spectators. He is helped by Castle's former camera man, Arnold (Zip) Lipsky, who owns several original versions of the films made by Castle (*Count Lazarus, Bloodhouse, Doctor Zombie, The Kiss of the Vampires, Sing Sing Shadows, Axis Agent, From Man to Monster*). Zip Lipsky

gives Jonathan a device called *sallyrand* (from the name of a burlesque dancer of the era), a technical tool capable to see and decipher the hidden layers of a given movie. The sallyrand is a stripper which unfolds a film, allowing the person who uses it to see what is behind the front image. (Jonathan discovers that a similar device is currently used by the members of the Children of the Storm, but they call it anamorphotic multiphilter. The technicality of the name is explicable by the plain fact that the school produces technicians, not artists, Castle's artistry being conceded as a heresy by the order.

Nevertheless, from time to time the Church encourages the artistic fulfillment of one of its orphans with outstandingly high technical skills. One of them is the albino Simon Dunkle – the name is a fusion between Simon the Magus and the word *Dunkel* in German, meaning darkness, – who was educated in the Californian orphanage of the order, called Saint Jacques the Martyr, in order to honor the former Great Master Jacques de Molay. Dunkle is the author of several films dominated by primary violence and by the exacerbated lusts of flesh, promoted aesthetically by the so-called Morb Culture (a prolongation of the heavy metal), whose aim is to reject everything, be it present, past or future.

Simon belongs to a group of directors interested in overemphasizing sadism within their films, as it happened in the successful *Psycho* (1960), "*the beginning of a very bad thing*" (Roszak 536), according to Clare's profound diagnosis. This is the reason why Roszak picks an Alfred Hitchcock quote for the motto of his novel: „*The stronger the evil, the stronger the film*". Simon's nihilist message reaches its highest peak in a movie dedicated to a planetary Holocaust, „*the nothingness from the end of all nothingnesses*" (Roszak 591), which is also a tool to assert the director's Messianic power, attributed to him by the Order. The shadowy vision is validated by the Cathars who are convinced that our world is a hellish place, it belongs to the realms of the darkness, the quoted authority being the prophet Seth, the substitute son given to Adam by God in order to replace the killed Abel. Simon Dunkle shares the malefic ideology, thinks that the Devil, Ahriman, Satan and Yahweh are variations of the same dark god, that the body is the creation of the malefic god, that the black bird is the true god himself, and Castle is his prophet, because his films tell the truth unseen by the others.

Jonathan Gates first uses the *sallyrand* in order to decipher *Doctor Zombie*, in which a Führer, the leader of a plantation transforms the locals into zombies, but they are freed by a doctor who gives them a magical drink, an elixir. But they refuse to be free, which brings us to Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, who explains emergence of the modern totalitarian regimes by the fear of freedom experienced by their subjects. The *sallyrand* allows Gates to

watch the second layer of the film, the movie behind the movie, in which images taken from the Nazi marches are mixed with the murders of WWI and superimposed upon the scenes presenting the zombies attacking their doctor. According to the author, "*Castle sneaked into a horror film a peculiar interpretation of the zombie status. He focused on it as the symbol of the people who want to be slaves, a desire that generated catastrophes during his days*" (Roszak 225).

Jonathan's wish to pursue an academic career based on the interpretation of the coded movies comes true due to the Counterculture of the Sixties, to the Vietnam War, the protests of the so-called "Groucho-Marxists", and the emergence of Pop Art, especially of Andy Warhol's. In Clare's teachings, for instance, the films that feature heroes like James Dean or Marlon Brando promote the necessity of conflicting the generations, giving way to ideas related to the rejection of the fathers and of their values.

Nevertheless the times also bring forth academic competition. For Jonathan Gates the harshest academic challenge is represented by the French neuro-semiotician Victor Saint-Cyr, who asserts that movies are places for a programmed collective hypnosis, induced by the flickers of the light and by the codes of light that go on and off. According to one of Saint-Cyr's most brilliant students, Julien, the hypnosis is premeditated, induced by the wish to deepen collective alienation by reducing the analytical time gap allowing the spectators to move from one image to another. According to the fictitious researchers, the generation of the year 2000 will totally reduce the time gap between two images, losing freedom by dependency, which will lead the scientists to the conclusion that the experiment has been a success. Actually, the experiment is about programmed regression: the great majority of the population will regress to the state of the primates, while the revolutionary elite will put aside enough superior neurological material in order to reconstruct "*the positive and hypnotic side of the conscience*" (Roszak 404). And, of course, to rule over it.

Realizing that cinema discourse is permeated by different codes of conspiracy, Jonathan Gates becomes a target for the Cathars, is kidnapped and taken to a deserted island, where he meets the real Max Castle. There they replicate *The Classic* Movie Theater into a cave, killing their time by combining separate scenes taken from movies having no connection one with the other into sophisticated "aesthetic apocalypses". Detached from any responsibility, they become the new children of the Apocalypse, guided by Rhett Butler's replica from *Gone with the Wind*: "*Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."*

Additionally, Jonathan sets up to write his memories, entitled *Flicker*. They will be about the mystique of conspiracy transmitted secretly by the movies to a happy child exiled together with his idol on a deserted island not found on the maps.

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"WE STOPPED DREAMING": JULIE OTSUKA'S (UN)TOLD STORIES OF PICTURE BRIDES

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ABSTRACT. *"We Stopped Dreaming": Julie Otsuka's (Un)Told Stories of Picture Brides.* Focusing on Julie Otsuka's acclaimed 2011 novel, *The Buddha in the Attic*, this paper will investigate the picture bride phenomenon as a multilayered trade of lives, identities, emotions and expectations, drawing a vivid picture of the protagonists' subjection to exploitation, abuse, discrimination and deceit.

Keywords: American Dream, collective voice, immigration, Japanese, legislation, marriage, picture brides, socio-historical context.

REZUMAT. *"Am încetat să visăm": Julie Otsuka şi poveştile (ne)spuse ale mireselor prin corespondenţă.* Pornind de la elogiatul roman din 2011 al scriitoarei Julie Otsuka, *Buddha din podul casei*, lucrarea de faţă va analiza fenomenul mireselor prin corespondenţă drept comerţ cu vieţi, identităţi, emoţii şi aşteptări, oferind un viu portret al confruntării protagonistelor cu exploatarea, abuzul, discriminarea şi înşelătoria.

Cuvinte cheie: Visul American, voce colectivă, imigraţie, japonezi, legislaţie, căsătorie, mirese prin corespondenţă, context socio-istoric.

1. Introduction

While the general phenomenon of immigration to the United States, alongside the specific cases of various communities, has been and still is under constant and persistent academic investigation, the various historical episodes and ramifications of each case-study are numerous and, therefore, difficult to exhaust. They form, however, the intricate background to the development of ethnic communities in the United States, and they are worthy of close inspection,

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as they are essential to the community members' identity shaping and (trans)formation in between homelands. Illustratively, picture brides are part and parcel of a larger phenomenon, which Yuji Ichioka's article entitled *'Amerika Nadeshiko: Japanese Immigrant Women in the United States, 1900-1924'* addresses in detail: the status of Japanese immigrant women in the early twentieth century United States, more often than not neglected by official accounts.

Observing the rise of Japanese female immigration at the dawn of the twentieth century and pointing at the increasing number of already married women entering the United States, this researcher emphasizes a quite widely spread, institutionalized policy of promoting the permanent residence of Japanese men via the summoning of their significant others from Japan. One of the notable organizations which strongly supported this particular stand was the Japanese Association of America (JAA): its main aim was to advocate cultural assimilation as a means of successful minority integration within the host country's normative patterns. While their strategies were multiple, one of the most relevant for this discussion revolved around the fact that

> Japanese emigration law stipulated that farmers and businessmen were permitted to send for wives, while unskilled laborers were not. Because of this, itinerant men were encouraged to become settled agriculturists in order to take advantage of the opportunity to bring Japanese wives to the United States and make families in their adoptive homes. Once reclassified as agriculturalists, these men could send for their relatives in Japan, or make arrangements to sponsor a 'picture bride' (Kaibara 19).

2. Meeting Halfway: Professional Match-Making

The analysis of such elements of socio-historical and, evidently, legal context, is particularly useful in order to make notions that may seem mundane and ignoble to the culturally unaccustomed mind easier to grasp. At the level of individual, personal beliefs and reactions, which the novel strives to capture and comprehend via its protagonists, the idea of marriage was, oftentimes idealistically, associated with the ineffable, yet desirable ones of emotional connection, spiritual and physical well-being, mutual communication and understanding (despite all obstacles and misfortunes, "deep down, most of us were really happy, for soon we would be in America with our new husbands, who had written to us many times over the months" – Otsuka). In the aforementioned case, the laborers' efforts to find ways to comply with the laws were remarkable, and so was their willingness to find means that would

satisfy both Japanese and American requirements. Understandably, however, from the point of view of the precariousness of most immigrants' situation, the prospect of building a family in the new country was often hindered by the distance from their native country, the costs of a journey back home and the time necessary to find a proper life partner in person.

As a result, the alternative of professional match-making gradually gained ground within the community of Japanese bachelors in the United States. It is, therefore, important for readers of picture brides' - fictional and non-fictional - accounts to be well-acquainted with the specific circumstances behind this practical mechanism, in order to comprehend the reasons for the Japanese workers' quite frequent decisions to

> resort to the so-called picture-bride practice, the third way by which women entered immigrant society. The practice itself did not diverge sharply from traditional Japanese custom. In Japan, marriage was never an individual matter but always a family affair. Heads of households selected marriage partners for family members through go-betweens. An exchange of photographs sometimes took place in the screening process, with family genealogy, wealth, education, and health figuring heavily in the selection criteria. Go-betweens arranged parleys between families at which heads of households discussed proposed unions (Ichioka 342)

As one can easily notice, not only was this practice an adapted version of the customarily employed arrangements of Japanese marriages between suitable partners via a specialized broker; it also promoted the annihilation of individual agency in favor of family decision (preferable, nevertheless, to the fate of "our older and prettier sisters who had been sold to the geisha houses by our fathers so that the rest of us might eat" – Otsuka). While, as emphasized by observers of the phenomenon, to the Western mind such a process might have seemed exotically inappropriate, it appeared extremely natural to the Eastern society of Japan, wherein choosing a spouse was a carefully-planned group transaction rather than an acknowledgement of mutual feeling and appreciation, which were not considered prerequisites of a happy union. Thus, by extension, the practice was understandably embraced by Japanese men working in the United States. It would clearly spare the men various kinds of trouble to simply send one's "demographic information to a marriage broker in Japan, and the agent would match his information with that of a Japanese woman whose parents had also registered her with the broker" (Kaibara 22).

The meticulous match-making to follow included, primarily, elements having to do with the candidates' native region, background and financial status, all of which were theoretically well-meant, yet remarkably indifferent to emotional involvement and, consequently, particularly suspicious to Americans

unfamiliar with such wedding practices. It is this particular side of the entire process that writers like Julie Otsuka highlight in their empathetic fictional versions of such real-life experiences. After the selection had been made,

> after both sides agreed to the marriage, the woman would go to the local magistrate in Japan with paperwork from the broker to register the marriage and be officially entered into her husband's family registry. This registration was the only legal requirement for marriage in Japan – after this, the couple was legally united in the eyes of the Japanese government, even if they had never met (Kaibara 22).

It was in this quite precarious, though legal, bondage that quite a number of Japanese women found themselves, many times as part of a larger family plan, which had little to do with their own private intentions, beliefs, or wishes. In order for their union with literally unknown men to be fulfilled in practice, they were shipped to the United States on long and tortuous ocean voyages, during which, in a considerable number of cases, anticipation and anxiety did nothing but grow. Such neglected aspects of the picture bride 'business' are chosen by Julie Otsuka as nuclei of her novel, *The Buddha in the Attic*.

3. Collective (Dis)Illusionments

Narrated by a collective voice belonging to a group of women whose dramatic transcontinental fates it foregrounds, the story is fragmented and highly impactful, as identities are drowned in the communal emotional rollercoaster of a massive dispatch of traded lives. The ingenious first person plural aids in creating an overwhelming sense of belonging to a community of perpetual migrants, whose future, readily decided by their families, is uncertain while they are travelling towards unknown partners and lives. Moreover, it helps create a sense of unity in diversity, as the voices that blend into the picture bride chorus tell stories of characters whose backgrounds, features, and aspirations may differ, but whose trajectories become similar once they all become part(s) of this peculiar transnational migration: "The youngest of us was twelve, and from the eastern shore of Lake Biwa, and had not yet begun to bleed. *My parents married me off for the betrothal money.* The oldest of us was thirty-seven, and from Niigata, and had spent her entire life taking care of her invalid father, whose recent death made her both happy and sad. *I knew I could marry only if he died.*" (Otsuka)

The writer's primary strategy is to unite the characters' thoughts, fears, dilemmas, naivetés, and goals in a colorful puzzle of otherwise muted destinies. The construction of a remote, mediated version of the American dream of prosperity and opportunity is made clear by the women's collective, hopeful, and hardly critical reliance on the pictures they have been presented with, which

feature not only suitable partners, but also transparent symbols of better living in a promised land.

> ON THE BOAT the first thing we did - before deciding who we liked and didn't like, before telling each other which one of the islands we were from, and why we were leaving, before even bothering to learn each other's names - was compare photographs of our husbands. They were handsome young men with dark eyes and full heads of hair and skin that was smooth and unblemished. Their chins were strong. Their posture, good. Their noses were straight and high. They looked like our brothers and fathers back home, only better dressed, in gray frock coats and fine Western three-piece suits. Some of them were standing on sidewalks in front of wooden A-frame houses with white picket fences and neatly mowed lawns, and some were leaning in driveways against Model T Fords. Some were sitting in studios on stiff high-backed chairs with their hands neatly folded and staring straight into the camera, as though they were ready to take on the world. All of them had promised to be there, waiting for us, in San Francisco, when we sailed into port.
> ON THE BOAT, we often wondered: Would we like them? Would we love them? Would we recognize them from their pictures when we first saw them on the dock?" (Otsuka)

Despite their inherent anxieties, unanswered questions and silent prayers, at the beginning of a life-changing journey, encouraging perspectives seemed to await the brides who were not only looking forward to meeting their picture-perfect, too-good-to-be-true husbands, but also to the lifestyle that these presumably honest visual representations advertised. Overlapping the familiar allure of the Eastern men with the sophistication and well-being of the Western, self-possessed home-and-car owners, the photographs were alleged guarantees of determination, success, reliability, full access to the rights and advantages that America had in store. Behind the confidence that had been instilled in them by relatives and friends, the women did, however, feel the need to go beyond the appearances, wondering whether these handsome strangers they were already tied and indebted to would match their romantic expectations as well. Moreover, the natural suspicion that the pictures might not be entirely true to the facts could not be easily overcome, particularly as, in many of the cases, it would turn out to be justified.

In order to better understand the nuances of such situations, one must be well aware of the historical context of the early 1900s in the United States regarding Japanese immigration, determined by major landmarks such as The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Forced to either avoid being drafted or, subsequently, reinvigorate their country's economy by working abroad, the male Japanese workers who had reached Hawaii

and the Pacific Coast found themselves trapped by the strict prohibition of interracial marriages and various other manifestations of the growing American negativity towards them. Thus, the import of picture brides became a justifiable – if not ideal – means for them to start families in their adoptive country, while counting on the unknown spouses' willingness to embark upon an adventure which could, potentially, improve their living standards (alongside those of the families which they left behind).

The rough conditions on the ships crossing the Pacific were obstinately withstood, even countered, by women determined to believe in their chance and in the happy ending to their sacrifice. *"Remind me one more time, I'm Mrs. Who?* Some of us clutched our stomachs and prayed out loud to Kannon, the goddess of mercy - *Where are you?* - while others of us preferred to turn silently green" (Otsuka). In fact, "dreams of an idyllic romantic life for Japanese women were destroyed by harsh reality as the Issei, or first generation women, entered America [...] In 1908, the influx of more than 20,000 Japanese picture brides brought change to the situation as men no longer outnumbered women" (Sakamoto 98). The reasons for that particular transformation of the immigration patterns shall be discussed shortly. Nevertheless, in terms of the novel under discussion, it is essential to bear in mind the blatant discrepancies, in most cases, between the women's expectations of their new homes and homeland, and the oftentimes humiliating, diminishing, excruciating experiences awaiting them ("Some of us worked quickly because our husbands had warned us that if we did not they would send us home on the very next boat. *I asked for a wife who was able and strong".* – Otsuka).

4. Pathways to the American Dream

Apart from the obvious awareness-raising, Otsuka's fictionalization of this real-life experience, shared by thousands of women at a specific point in time, attempts and manages to accomplish an attentive exploration of the psychological mechanisms behind the picture bride process and the motivations and illusions upon which it quasi-implausibly relied. Her collective protagonist(s)' testimonials stand proof of a baffling combination of resilience, stoicism and undeterred, almost religious, faith in the dream. The never-ending sea voyages are presented as pilgrimages in search of salvation, while the cherished, and often deceitful photographs of the husbands, appear to be iconic representations of the new deities to be revered upon arrival.

> ON THE BOAT we carried our husbands' pictures in tiny oval lockets that hung on long chains from our necks. We carried them in silk purses and old tea tins and red lacquer boxes and in the thick brown envelopes from

America in which they had originally been sent. We carried them in the sleeves of our kimonos, which we touched often, just to make sure they were still there. We carried them pressed flat between the pages of old, well-worn volumes of the Buddhist sutras, and one of us, who was Christian, and ate meat, and prayed to a different and longer-haired god, carried hers between the pages of a King James Bible. And when we asked her which man she liked better - the man in the photograph or the Lord Jesus Himself - she smiled mysteriously and replied, "Him, of course." (Otsuka)

The aforementioned reason for the unprecedented female Japanese immigration to the United States after 1907 was the famous Gentlemen's Agreement, negotiated by President Theodore Roosevelt with the Japanese government: a two-sided deal by which Japan agreed to bar the emigration of male laborers to Hawaii or the United States, while, in exchange, the United States agreed to grant admission exclusively to the families of the Japanese workers who were already on their territory. It was thus that the picture bride way into the grand American (dis)illusion was legally paved, and it is around the clichés and (mis)representations that guided it that *The Buddha in the Attic* ultimately revolves. The ocean voyage of initiation reveals tender, sometimes amusing, yet also quite ignorant perspectives on the part of the women who have been fed with mythical imagery and fairy-tale-like representations of a faraway, though bizarre, land of plenty ("And was it true that the women in America did not have to kneel down before their husbands or cover their mouths when they laughed? (Charles stared at a passing ship on the horizon and then sighed and said, "Sadly, yes.") And did the men and women there really dance cheek to cheek all night long? (Only on Saturdays, Charles explained). - Otsuka)

The abundant depictions of and speculations about the ways in which, throughout weeks of travel, the women projected images of their long-awaited, yet sometimes feared, future existences are highly revealing of the inner struggle that few official records would ever focus upon. Yet, the struggle was real, and the figments of innocent imaginations – equally endearing and worrisome.

ON THE BOAT we crowded into each other's bunks every night and stayed up for hours discussing the unknown continent ahead of us. The people there were said to eat nothing but meat and their bodies were covered with hair (we were mostly Buddhist, and did not eat meat, and only had hair in the appropriate places). The trees were enormous. The plains were vast. The women were loud and tall —a full head taller, we had heard, than the tallest of our men. The language was ten times as difficult as our own and the customs were unfathomably strange. Books were read from back to front and soap was used in the bath. Noses were blown on dirty cloths that were stuffed back into pockets only to be taken out later and used again and again. The opposite of white was not red, but black. (Otsuka)

Part of an orally transmitted mythology, representation and, inevitably, exaggeration of the unknown, such an account brings together stereotypes of the menacing otherness and inferiority complexes, fearful and disdainful mental pictures of cultural difference. It speaks about the women's dread of an unfamiliar universe in terms that prefigure a difficult adaptation and highlight the heavy emotional burden of taking on a new relationship in a foreign country. Identity-shattering as it is, such an episode may, in some cases, alter one forever, and the prospect of alienation from their own homegrown, Japanese selves haunts the travelers ("We reached out for our mothers then, in whose arms we had slept until the morning we left home. Were they sleeping now? Were they dreaming? Were they thinking of us night and day?" – Otsuka). Otsuka also uses this opportunity to emphasize the fact that hyphenation and cultural transmutation involve mutual bias and suspicion: it is not only the American majority that mistrusts the aliens, whether they are legal or not, it is also the immigrants who harbor preconceived ideas about their foster society before even reaching it and experiencing it first-hand.

Under such circumstances, wherein uncertainty reigns on multiple levels, the women are left with nothing but their own fantasies, worries and determinations, in the physical absence of the betrotheds and still separated from their future lives. Otsuka explores their emotional struggle, bringing it closer to the reader and decoding, up to a certain point, the almost inexplicable consent of so many individuals to be part of a rather debatable ritual.

> What would become of us, we wondered, in such an alien land? We imagined ourselves - an unusually small people armed only with our guidebooks - entering a country of giants. Would we be laughed at? Spat on? Or, worse yet, would we not be taken seriously at all? But even the most reluctant of us had to admit that it was better to marry a stranger in America than grow old with a farmer from the village. Because in America the women did not have to work in the fields and there was plenty of rice and firewood for all. And wherever you went the men held open the doors and tipped their hats and called out, "Ladies first" and "After you." (Otsuka)

5. Inconvenient Truths

Such passages, while capturing the women's reluctance vis-à-vis entering an unchartered cultural space, bring to the fore the core of their beliefs: an American dream that stemmed rather from the precariousness of their home environment than from the envisaged country's realities, an illusion of economic well-being and social courtesy derived from daydreaming of an improved status, not from realistic understanding of the immigrant condition. The actual circumstances were quite different, as emphasized by Helen F. Eckerson's study

on *'Immigration and National Origins'*, which analyzes immigration control in the U.S. via national-origins provisions, going over successive waves of immigration, legally imposed restrictions, and the Asian community's gradual inclusion in the quota system.

Going back to the first records of Japanese immigration to the U.S., signaling the high points of the influx and outlining significant legislation (geographical delimitation clauses, immigration quotas a. o.), the researcher highlights the importance of family reunion to the considerable Japanese immigration rates at the beginning of the twentieth century: "'Picture or proxy' brides came to the United States until the Japanese government agreed in 1920 to stop issuing passports to "picture" brides. This was followed by a period when Japanese men under special legislation went back to Japan to marry and return with their wives. Japanese immigration dropped only after passage of the Immigration Act of 1924" (Eckerson 10). One of the background elements that is particularly relevant for Otsuka's novel and her protagonists' fate in the United States is the diverse reactions to the incoming Asian foreigners from the American media, politics, and academia. They included extreme cases such as James D. Phelan's who, as a U.S. Senator for California, harshly condemned '*The Japanese Evil in California'*, outlining various concerns as to the immigrants' potentially mischievous marriage practices and their implicit goals.

As a direct witness to the arrival of a shipload of picture brides to San Francisco, Phelan chose to focus, at some point, on the women's ordeal upon glimpsing their husbands for the first time. In keeping with his political agenda, he exposed what he claimed to be the real purpose of such unceremonious unions: "They are led away by their masters and serve a twofold purpose, both in violation of the spirit of the Agreement, which was to restrict the increase of Japanese laborers. They are laborers. They work in the fields as laborers, side by side with the men; and, being remarkably prolific, they bear many children to them to swell the increasing Japanese tide." (326). Although obviously generalizing and highly contributing to the growth of the stereotypical, aggressive anti-Asian sentiment in the United States, the politician did touch a sore spot regarding the crushed expectations of the incoming Japanese women, many of whom had been led on by carefully-planned deception schemes.

Otsuka's collective voice does not shy away from evoking such episodes, which dwell upon the dishonesty and despair that dominated an age of broken dreams, on both sides of the Pacific:

> ON THE BOAT we could not have known that when we first saw our husbands we would have no idea who they were. That the crowd of men in knit caps and shabby black coats waiting for us down below on the dock would bear no resemblance to the handsome young men in the

photographs. That the photographs we had been sent were twenty years old. That the letters we had had been written to us by people other than our husbands, professional people with beautiful handwriting whose job it was to tell lies and win hearts. That when we first heard our names being called out across the water one of us would cover her eyes and turn away - I want to go home - but the rest of us would lower our heads and smooth down the skirts of our kimonos and walk down the gangplank and step out into the still warm day. This is America, we would say to ourselves, there is no need to worry. And we would be wrong. (Otsuka)

The revelation of unspoken and, undoubtedly, inconvenient truths, is essential to Otsuka's novel, as she does not seek to justify the picture bride practice in a socio-politically constrictive context, but rather to analyze its complex, oftentimes negative effects upon the objectified, traded women. Her fictional discourse is based upon careful documentation of the shock and disappointment accompanying the brides' arrival in the United States, which feature quite frequently in research upon this particular cultural phenomenon. To illustrate the close interrelation between Otsuka's epic descriptions and scientific studies of the major topic of her narrative, we shall resort to a highly telling excerpt from Yuji Ichioka's account on *'Japanese Immigrant Women in the United States, 1900-1924'* which, in quite similar passages to the fictional ones, captures the desolating reality of long-distance unions based on deceit:

> Many picture-brides were genuinely shocked to see their husbands. Sometimes the person was much older than he appeared in his photograph. As a rule husbands were older than wives by ten to fifteen years, and occasionally more. Men often forwarded photographs taken in their youth or touched- up ones that concealed their real age. No wonder some picture-brides, upon sighting their spouses, lamented dejectedly that they had married an old man. Husbands appeared unexpectedly different in other ways. Some men had photographs touched up, not just to look youthful but to improve their overall appearance. They had all traces of facial blemishes and baldness removed. Picture-brides understandably were taken aback because such men did not physically correspond with their photographs at all. Suave, handsome appearing gentlemen proved to be pockmarked, country bumpkins. A few disillusioned picture-brides declined to join their husbands and asked to be sent back to Japan (Ichioka 347).

Placing Otsuka's work side by side with such articles, one can fully appreciate both her documentation efforts, and her determination to illustrate a challenging reality with the novelist's tools. In the era of virtual reality, dating websites, Facebook/Twitter/Instagram accounts and all other sorts of media which revolve around the fabrication of images and the projection of convenient and masterfully-tailored versions of the physical and spiritual self, such episodes

may seem mere anticipations. However, in the case of the misled young women that ventured to a Promised Land and found themselves in a bondage they could not even fully denounce - as they had, allegedly, consented to it, even if not fully aware of its true dimensions -, the outcomes of the existential lie they had been pushed into were often destabilizing. Instead of finding themselves in the desired position of becoming respectable, hard-working citizens in a law-abiding, democratic society, a considerable number of them shortly became victims of discrimination, abuse and marginalization, without having ever fathomed that this was going to be their future.

6. Work Ethic and Endurance

According to Otsuka's intertwining stories, many of the picture brides did, indeed, end up as farm laborers alongside their not-quite-gentleman-like husbands, living in improvised camps and shelters at the margins of the bigger American settlements, or simply wandering across the State of California in search of fruit and vegetable picking jobs, in exchange for nickels and dimes, not appropriate salaries. As they barely spoke the language, lacking suitable education or social skills, and being practically dependent on partners who were, in many cases, not much more integrated or successful as themselves, the women's horizon was limited to low-paying, temporary employment, a perpetual state of discomfort and uncertainty, and the frustration of having both little control over their own fate and practically no opportunity to share their plight with the loved ones they had naively hoped to support by leaving Japan ("We developed a coldness inside us that still has not thawed. *I fear my soul has died*. We stopped writing home to our mothers. We lost weight and grew thin. We stopped bleeding. We stopped dreaming. We stopped wanting. We simply worked, that was all" – Otsuka). Nevertheless, many took responsibility for their unfortunate choices and, in spite of the grim perspectives, opted for the preservation of their marriages, in the framework of deeply-rooted Japanese values.

Though unrelated to literary renditions of the discussed matters, Masako Ishii-Kuntz' article on *'Intergenerational Relationships Among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans'* makes interesting points concerning the Asian-American ideal family myth (as integral part of the model minority myth[2]). It emphasizes the respect for the elderly and the traditional value of filial responsibility, including providing financial aid for the parents (23). It is,

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[2] While the 'model minority myth' is commonly-known and widely-discussed among (Asian)-American studies specialists, a brief introduction of the concept ("a group whose hard work, initiative, personal responsibility, and success offer proof that American meritocracy works as intended") to a wider readership can be found, for instance, in a recent article published in *The Atlantic*, available at https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/06/professional-burdens-model-minority-asian-americans/485492/

therefore, understandable why many picture brides would go on with what they perceived as their obligations, both to the relatives they had left behind and to their new family. In the racially enlarged context of the American society of the time, "as a result of their strong work-ethic, the Issei became a threat to others; willing to work as cheap laborers and often more successful than white farmers and business owners. The Issei woman was characterized as subordinate and degraded in the society" (Sakamoto 99).

As a direct consequence of this paradoxical double burden, which comes simultaneously from within and without her community, it is easy for Otsuka to create an inner discourse of the generic picture bride: dismissed by the majority because of ethnic clichés, simultaneously pitied and vilified as her husband's imported property, she will, eventually, admit, if only to herself, that, had she known the truth in advance, she "never would have come to America to do the work that no self-respecting American would do" (Otsuka). Nevertheless, the women in this complicated position found themselves caught between the white majority's stereotypical fear of minority dominance and subsequent discrimination (cf. Hosokawa 1980, passim), and their obedience to their parents, whom their conservative upbringing did not allow them to offend. A fine observer and in-depth connoisseur of such problematic allegiances, Otsuka manages to capture the tension in passages such as the following:

> We worked in basement laundries in Japantowns in the most run-down sections of their cities - San Francisco, Sacramento, Santa Barbara, L.A. - and every morning we rose before dawn with our husbands and we washed and we boiled and we scrubbed. And at night when we put down our brushes and climbed into bed we dreamed we were still washing, as we would every night for years. And even though we had not come all the way to America to live in a tiny, curtained-off room at the back of the Royal Hand Laundry, we knew we could not go home. *If you come home*, our fathers had written to us, *you will disgrace the entire family. If you come home your younger sisters will never marry. If you come home no man will ever have you again.* And so we stayed in J-town with our new husbands, and grew old before our time (Otsuka)

Apart from creating a believable, communal voice, and succeeding in exposing delicate issues that are habitually left aside by mere statistics, official records, and even most literature other than the autobiographical, confessional type, Otsuka's main achievement is her critical approach to the picture bride phenomenon, which brings to the fore an entire series of potentially unexpected (human) factors in the traded women's sinuous trajectories. Thus, she stresses the unrealistic, constrictive expectations of the victims' old, as well as new, country communities, alongside their tacit and obedient agreement to a system that perpetuated deceit, implicitly creating suspiciousness, unhappiness,

estrangement and isolation ("My husband is not the man in the photograph. My husband is the man in the photograph but aged by many years. My husband's handsome best friend is the man in the photograph. My husband is a drunkard. – Otsuka). While making themselves useful, yet invisible to their American masters, the women "did not mention them in our letters to our mothers. We did not mention them in our letters to our sisters or friends. Because in Japan the lowliest job a woman could have was that of a maid" (Otsuka)

By inserting such episodes into her narrative, the writer emphasizes the extent of the disappointment and debasement encountered by these women in their new, foster (home)land, which appeared all the more serious when compared to the noble, high standards of their home culture. A different type of pressure was added by Japanese organizations in the United States, who strove to counter the anti-Japanese sentiment amongst mainstream Americans by resorting to the persuasiveness of the united family image. The reformers banked on public sympathy, placing an even heavier burden on the Japanese immigrant wives and mothers, who were seen as the main promoters of a transformed, positive, unthreatening image of the entire community. Thus, the JAA went as far as to put together a guide for Issei women, who

> were reminded that they were "obliged to demonstrate the virtue of Japanese women and compel Americans to admit them as first-rate women in their world". The responsibilities these women were charged with in the host country went beyond the typical duties expected by Japanese culture of creating a home of "comfort" and "a place of relaxation", for her husband. In the United States, the Issei wife would also have to run a moral household, discourage "unsavory conduct, foul speech, gambling, drinking, and smoking." The importance of this vigilance was to uphold the good image and national honor of Japan and prevent future generations of Nikkeijin from inheriting the vices of their fathers (Kaibara 24).

Conclusion

By giving voice to the muted, stifled and utterly voiceless, by articulating a complex, yet highly recognizable and identifiable narrative of a particular enclave within the Japanese-American community - the group of women who crossed the ocean as picture brides and faced the ups and downs, potential gains and unexpected consequences of their and their families' decisions - Julie Otsuka unearths a lesser publicized and rather forgotten episode in the contemporary rush of history. As illustrated by the forequoted passages, the collective story-teller simultaneously highlights the diversity within the rather bizarre gathering of protagonists (as relevant as the diversity within the umbrella term of Asian-Americanness itself), and scrutinizes the multiple, challenging, at times insurmountable cultural differences between continentally different societies,

their customs, lifestyles, values, mentalities. Addressing matters of depression, denial, rejection, renunciation, physical and mental degradation ("One sat down one day in the middle of an onion patch and said she wished she'd never been born" – Otsuka), she construes her novel as an opportunity to outline the generous range of actions and reactions that the human mind and behavior can develop and accommodate at times of crisis.

The picture bride phenomenon does not constitute Otsuka's sole focal point (her treatment of internment camps can offer an entirely different research topic), but rather allows her to expand her views to the generations that sprung from the sacrifice of her collective heroines, as she interweaves stories of forgiveness and revenge, kindness and cruelty, gratefulness and spite. She is devoted to the multiple perspectives and manages to solidly anchor a narrative construction that shelters anxieties, sorrows, excitements, disappointments, discoveries of cultural transplantation, while illustrating the layered nature of reality, the convolutedness of history, the intricate nature of human relationships, as well as the intriguing mechanisms of the human mind, with its fascinating, frustrating, sometimes paradoxical everyday workings. Indebted to history, anthropology, sociology, biographical and, evidently, literary studies, *The Buddha in the Attic* is the work of a fine artist not only literally, but symbolically as well, asking important questions from the inner perspective of the forever silent, into which she provides the valuable creative insight this paper has aimed to instantiate.

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HUMOUR MECHANISMS IN TRANSLATING P. G. WODEHOUSE INTO ROMANIAN

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ABSTRACT. *Humour Mechanisms in Translation P.G. Wodehouse into Romanian.* The aim of the present study is to analyse the Romanian translation of several instances of Wodehousian humour from the novels *Thank You, Jeeves* and *Right Ho, Jeeves*. We shall point to the humour mechanisms that may lead to the untranslatability of humour and to its being lost or destroyed during the translation process. However, this apparent untranslatability is not insurmountable, and humour can actually travel safely around the world.

Keywords: P. G. Wodehouse, humour mechanisms, untranslatability of humour, travel.

REZUMAT. *Mecanisme ale umorului în traducerea lui P. G. Wodehouse în limba română.* Studiul de faţă îşi propune să analizeze o serie de exemple de umor wodehousian din romanele *Thank You, Jeeves* şi *Right Ho*, *Jeeves*. Vom dezvălui mecanismele umorului care pot conduce la intraductibilitatea acestuia sau la pierderea lui în procesul de traducere. Totuşi, această aparentă intraductibilitate nu este insurmontabilă, iar umorul poate într-adevăr călători în siguranţă în jurul lumii.

Cuvinte cheie: P. G. Wodehouse, mecanisme ale umorului, intraductibilitatea umorului, călătorie.

> *When it comes to translating humour,*
> *the operation proves to be as desperate*
> *as that of translating poetry* (Diot 84).

1. Introduction

It is common knowledge that translating humour is no easy task. Sometimes it even seems an impossible mission or a "paradigm case of untranslatability" (Vandaele 149). Apart from the difficulties that translation

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implies in general, difficulties which derive from the complexity of the social and cultural world reflected by the source language and the target language, translating humour is particularly demanding, since humour relies mostly on incongruity and surprise, two critical components that are mainly achieved by means of an original play on language. Therefore, the translator has to surprise the reader and make him or her smile or laugh and the anticipation of the eventual absence of the salient manifestation of this aesthetic reaction puts even more pressure on the translator. Regarding the diagnostic function of the physiological correlates of humour, Vandaele notices that "any translation failure will therefore be very visible: it is obvious that the translator has failed when no one laughs at the translated humor" (149).

In regard to the question of untranslatable instances of humour, von Stackelberg asks himself: "Should the translator be allowed to make us laugh at his own ideas rather than at those of the author? We do not think so" (12). We dare to reject this pessimistic acceptance of the untranslatability of humour. Undoubtedly, sometimes humour does appear to be untranslatable, especially when it comes to jokes based on wordplay and linguistic ambiguity, but this limitation does not rule out the translator's freedom to substitute an untranslatable content for another one which would hold water in the target language. Regarding this, Chiaro points out that

> It would appear that translators are often afraid of moving away from the text and replacing an untranslatable joke with another which would work in the target language, even if it is completely different from the original. (...) Even a totally different comment, in place of an untranslatable joke, would often be preferable to translation 'gaffes'. (85-86)

Referring to the freedom of the translator, Zabelbeascoa considers that it is "a dangerous simplification to presume that (...) the nature of humour must be the same in both source text and its translation" (187). Consequently, it seems that it takes courage and creativity to translate humour. The translator has to tame the words, find new attire for them, extract their hilarious essence and eventually make the reader laugh. This would mean that the translator has the freedom to rewrite the original without being accused of unfaithfulness. However, as Bassnett points out, "What is interesting is that such freedom should be widely accepted in the translation practice of most text types, but that is continually disputed when it comes to thinking about the amount of freedom a literary translator may exercise" (148).

We consider that when confronted with untranslatable humor, the translator should have a great amount of freedom in order to obtain a functional equivalence that could elicit laughter as the original does. Otherwise, the reader will be faced with a *non sequitur*. This is what happens, for example, in the

Romanian translation of a dialogue between aunt Dahlia and Bertie, in another Wodehousian novel, *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* which is not the subject of the present work but is worth mentioning here. In the context of an extremely intricate scheme, aunt Dahlia wants Bertie to steal a necklace from her own room. Here follows their dialogue in the original and its translation into Romanian:

> 'So there's nothing to stop you, Bertie.' (...)
> 'Nothing at all,' I replied cordially. Nothing whatever. You provide the necklace, and I will do the rest. Which is your room?'
> 'The last one on the left.'
> 'Right.'
> 'Left, fool.' (*Jeeves and the Feudal* 120-121)

> – Aşa că nu mai e nimic care să te împiedice, Bertie. (...)
> – Nimic, am replicat eu cu amabilitate. Absolut nimic. Tu pune-mi la dispoziţie colierul, iar eu mă ocup de restul. Care-i camera ta ?
> – Ultima pe stânga.
> – Bine.
> – Pe stânga, cretinule. (*Jeeves şi spiritul* 155-156)

We can notice that in the original the humorous effect achieved by Wodehouse derives from the linguistic exploitation of the polysemous word „right", in such a way that when Bertie uses it as an exclamation to show that he accepts the statement about the location of the room ("The last one on the left"), aunt Dahlia interprets his answer as a mishearing and "right" takes on an adverbial value, i.e. the room on the right, hence aunt Dahlia's correction "Left, fool". In the Romanian translation this correction is kept ("Pe stânga, cretinule"), but it represents a *non sequitur*, since the reader, although accustomed to aunt Dahlia's impulsive nature, cannot understand why she would insult him. After all, he agreed with what she said. In the Romanian translation there is no collision between "stânga" and "bine" and no play on the polysemy of the words with which the dialogue is garnished. We can envisage two possible ways of disentangling this translation quandary. One solution would be to leave out aunt Dahlia's quip, "Pe stânga, cretinule", but this would mean being unfaithful to Wodehouse. The second solution would be to find a functional equivalence that would work in the Romanian language. This would imply trying to also play on the polysemous vein of words and create some ambiguity that could connect two opposed meanings in the text. If in Romanian "drept" can be used both as an adjective and an adverb, then maybe the dialogue would be more hilarious if it were translated in the following way:

> *– Aşa că nu mai e nimic care să te împiedice, Bertie. (...)*
> *– Nimic, am replicat eu cu amabilitate. Absolut nimic. Tu pune-mi la dispoziţie colierul, iar eu mă ocup de restul. Care-i camera ta ?*
> *– Ultima de pe flancul stâng.*

– Drept grăieşti.
– Stâng, cretinule.

Of course, restructuring the dialogue into the target language implies adding new words, "flanc" and "grăieşti", but at least in this way the *non sequitur* is removed and maybe the reader will smile.

The analysis of the above-mentioned instance of Wodehousian humor translated into Romanian represents the starting point for the present study in which we aim to examine some of the difficulties that arise while translating Wodehouse into Romanian, namely the two novels that represent the subject of this work – *Thank You, Jeeves* and *Right Ho, Jeeves*. Our analysis of the translated versions will be guided by the following questions: What happens with the humor mechanisms that function in the original during the translation process? Do they change, or do they remain the same? If at times they are altered, is this required by the untranslatability of Wodehousian humor? In the next section we aim at answering these questions by analyzing several instances of humor translated into Romanian.

2. Humour Mechanisms in Translating *Thank You, Jeeves* and *Right Ho, Jeeves* into Romanian

When it comes to translating humour, the untranslatability is a dilemma that often gives the translator lots of food for thought. Susan Bassnett supplies the translator with a series of guidelines which could make his or her task easier:

(1) Accept the untranslatability of the SL phrase in the TL on the linguistic level.

(2) Accept the lack of a similar cultural convention in the TL.

(3) Consider the range of TL phrases available, having regard to the presentation of class, status, age, sex of the speaker, his relationship to the listeners and the context of their meeting in the SL.

(4) Consider the significance of the phrase in its particular context – i.e. as a moment of high tension in the dramatic text.

(5) Replace in the TL the invariant core of the SL phrase in its two referential systems

(the particular system of the text and the system of culture out of which the text has sprung). (31)

Apart from bearing in mind the above mentioned guidelines, the translator could also benefit from the theoretical models yielded by humour studies. Thus, if the translator were aware of the mechanisms which underlie the functioning of humour, certain translation problems could be solved out more easily and more efficiently.

Next we will analyse the Romanian translation of some instances of humour extracted from the novels *Thank You, Jeeves* and *Right Ho, Jeeves*. Our goal will be to

point out the main translation problems and the changes undergone by certain humor mechanisms during the translation process. We will focus on three cases: when humor was lost in translation, when the humor mechanisms in the original version of the two novels were successfully maintained in the target language and when they were changed so as to obtain a functional equivalent in the translated version. Alternative translation solutions will be suggested whenever possible.

With regard to the loss of humor during the translation process, we will analyses two dialogues extracted from the novel *Thank You, Jeeves*. The first one is a conversation between Pauline Stoker and Bertie:

> 'You know, Bertie, steps should be taken about you.'
> 'Eh?'
> 'You ought to be in some sort of a home.'
> 'I am,' I replied coldly and rather cleverly. 'My own. The point I wish to thresh out is, what are you doing in it?' (*Thank You* 79)

> – Ştii, Bertie, ar fi cazul să facem ceva cu tine.
> – Hă?
> – Ar trebui să te afli într-un soi de cămin.
> – Sunt, am replicat eu glacial şi destul de spiritual. Într-al meu. Chestia
> pe care vreau s-o subliniez e: ce faci tu în el? (*Mulţumesc* 84)

In this dialogue Wodehouse plays on the polysemy of the word "home". Pauline is referring to a home for the mentally ill, while Bertie's perspective triggers a different script, that of a house, i.e. his home. In the Romanian version the humor mechanism, namely disclosure humor, underlying Bertie's quip is lost since the translator failed to find a word that means both a house and a madhouse. The word "cămin" could mean an old people's home, but not a lunatic asylum, therefore we consider that a possible solution would be to substitute the term "cămin" for "casă", since the latter better alludes to "casă de nebuni" ("madhouse"), to which Pauline is actually referring. Also, the verb "a se afla" should be kept and not replaced with "a fi". Thus, the original shape of the first script is better maintained and prepared for the drastic change caused by the new meaning of the word "casă". Consequently, we suggest the following translation:

> – *Ştii, Bertie, ar fi cazul să facem ceva cu tine.*
> – *Hă?*
> – *Ar trebui să te afli într-un soi de casă.*
> – *Mă aflu, am replicat eu glacial şi destul de spiritual. Într-a mea. Chestia*
> *pe care vreau s-o subliniez e: ce faci tu în ea?*

The second dialogue in which we consider that humour was lost while being translated takes place between Bertie and Constable Dobson of the Chuffnel Regis police force:

'I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir. I thought you was the marauder.' (...)
'Quite all right, Constable. Quite all right. Just going for a stroll.'
'I understand, sir. Breath of air.'
'You have put it in a nutshell. A breath, as you astutely observe, of air.
The house is quite close.'
'Yes, sir, just over there.'
'I mean stuffy.'
'Oh, yes, sir. Well, good night, sir.' (*Thank You* 94)

– Fără-ndoială, domnule, îmi cer scuze. Am crezut că sînteți hoțul. (...)
– Nu-i nimic, domnule polițist. Nu-i nimic. Mă duc să mă plimb puțin.
– Înțeleg, domnule. Luați o gură de aer.
– Da, ai zis-o pe scurt. Iau o gură – așa cum ai remarcat tu foarte ager –
de aer. Casa e destul de aproape.
– Da, domnule. Chiar acolo.
– Vreau să spun că e cam sufocantă.
– O, da, domnule. Ei bine, noapte bună, domnule. (*Mulțumesc* 100)

In this particular instance of humour the script oppositeness elicited by the polysemous word "close" – "near" and "stuffy" – is lost in the translated version where the adverb "aproape" and the adjective "sufocantă" do not yield two opposed scripts that are compatible with the setting of the humorous dialogue which Wodehouse meant to construct. Therefore, the translator should have searched for a polysemous word that could have conveyed a similar hilarious message in the target language. The solution we suggest may seem far-fetched, since it puts some extra words in the mouth of Constable Dobson, but it conveys a script oppositeness, while also retaining one script from the original version, i.e. the stuffiness script, and moreover, it preserves the stereotype about policemen's doubtful intelligence. Here follows our translation solution:

– Fără-ndoială, domnule, îmi cer scuze. Am crezut că sînteți hoțul. (...)
– Nu-i nimic, domnule polițist. Nu-i nimic. Mă duc să mă plimb puțin.
– Înțeleg, domnule. Luați o gură de aer.
– Da, ai zis-o pe scurt. Iau o gură – așa cum ai remarcat tu foarte ager –
de aer. Casa e destul de închisă.
– Da, domnule. E bine să fiți prevăzător.
– Vreau să spun că aerul e cam închis.
– O, da, domnule. Ei bine, noapte bună, domnule.

In this suggested translation the word "închisă" is the ambiguous element meant to signify both "stuffy" and "locked", but Constable Dobson's views, which are limited to the universe of his profession, filter out this meaning and retain only the meaning "locked".

With the exception of these few situations in which humor was lost in translation, the Romanian version of the two novels analyzed in this work,

Thank You, Jeeves and *Right Ho, Jeeves*, are a balm to the reader's spirit. There are far too many examples that we could quote in order to illustrate how wonderfully Wodehouse's humorous morphological, syntactic and lexical universe found its expression in the Romanian language due to its translator, Carmen Toader. Here we will only analyses some instances of humour in which specific humour mechanisms were successfully preserved or changed in order to obtain a hilarious functional equivalent in Romanian.

Thus, in the translation of the novel *Thank You, Jeeves* the translator succeeds in achieving a ludicrous effect by preserving the Bergsonian humour mechanism which posits that humour is obtained by introducing an absurd variation in a ready-made formula (Bergson 51). This is what happens in the case of Bertie's own coinage of a biblical teaching. Here follows the original version and its successful translation:

> 'I am not drivelling. This animal yaps all day and not infrequently far into the night. So Mrs.Tinkler-Moulke has had the nerve to complain of my banjolele, has she? Ha! Let her first pluck out the Pom which is in her own eye,' I said, becoming a bit scriptural. (*Thank You* 16)

> – Nu deviez de la subiect. Animalul ăsta latră toată ziua şi nu rareori până noaptea târziu. Deci doamna Tinkler-Moulke a avut tupeul să se plângă de banjoul meu, nu-i aşa? Ha! Mai bine să-şi vadă potaia din ochiul ei, am spus eu, devenind niţeluş biblic. (*Mulţumesc* 16)

Also, in the translation of the novel *Thank You, Jeeves* the translator preserves the mechanism of distortion humour and thus succeeds in conveying a humorous cross-talk based on a mishearing that twists the reality of the words:

> 'I can confide in you, can't I, Bertie?'
> 'Of course.'
> 'I knew I could. That's the comfort of having been engaged to a man. When you break it off, you feel such a sister.'
> 'I don't regard you as a blister at all,' I said warmly. 'You had a perfect right...'
> 'Not blister. Sister!'
> 'Oh, sister? You mean, you look on me as a brother.'
> 'Yes, a brother. How quick you are.' (*Thank You* 44-45)

> – Pot avea încredere în tine, nu-i aşa, Bertie?
> – Bineînţeles.
> – Ştiam eu. Ăsta-i avantajul când ai fost logodită cu un bărbat. După ce rupi logodna, te simţi ca o rudă cu el.
> – Nu te consider deloc o bubă! am spus eu cu înflăcărare. Aveai tot dreptul să...

– Nu bubă. Rudă!
– O, rudă? Adică mă vezi ca pe un frate?
– Da, ca pe un frate. Ce ager eşti! (*Mulţumesc* 48)

It is worth nothing that in the Romanian version of the above mentioned dialogue, the translator, apart from managing to create a humorous mishearing, also preserved the semantic area of the words used in the original ("sister"/"rudă" and "blister"/"bubă").

Script oppositeness based on the polysemy of words is another humour mechanism successfully preserved in the Romanian translation of the two novels analyzed in the present work. Just one example, a conversation between Pauline Stoker and Bertie, extracted from the novel *Thank You, Jeeves*:

'I always esteemed you most highly.'
'You did what? Where do you pick up these expressions?'
'Well, I suppose from Jeeves, mostly. My late man. He had a fine vocabulary.'
'When you say "late", do you mean he's dead? Or just unpunctual?'
'He's left me. He didn't like me playing the banjolele (…).' (*Thank You* 44)

– Întotdeauna ţi-am purtat cea mai înaltă stimă.
– Ce-ai făcut? De unde culegi expresiile astea?
– Păi, presupun că mai ales de la Jeeves. Servitorul meu dispărut. Avea un vocabular rafinat.
 – Când zici "dispărut", vrei să spui că a murit? Sau că nu mai ştii nimic de el?
– M-a părăsit. Nu i-a plăcut că exersam la banjo. (*Mulţumesc* 47-48)

In the original version of this dialogue, the word "late" conveys three meanings: *having recently occupied a position* (the meaning intended by Bertie Wooster), *no longer alive* and *delayed*, the last two meanings being the ones suggested by Pauline Stoker. We can notice that in the Romanian version of the dialogue the translator found a polysemous equivalent for "late", namely "dispărut" with two meanings: *no longer alive* and *vanished without trace*. Thus, apart from creating a humorous ambiguity, the translator also managed to preserve one meaning present in the original. However, the meaning intended by Bertie, *having recently occupied a position* is lost and consequently the degree of ambiguity is reduced. Moreover, Jeeves did not vanish without track, but handed in his notice, therefore this translation solution, "dispărut" is successful only up to a certain point, beyond which it is unfaithful to the real action of the novel. This is the reason why we suggest that "dispărut" be substituted for "plecat" which can have three meanings, as in the original, while also preserving two meanings conveyed in the English version, namely *having recently occupied a position* and *no longer alive*. Thus, the degree of ambiguity is not diminished,

and the translation solution cannot be considered to incur accusations of unfaithfulness to the action of the novel. Here follows the suggested translation:

> – Întotdeauna ţi-am purtat cea mai înaltă stimă.
> – Ce-ai făcut? De unde culegi expresiile astea?
> – Păi, presupun că mai ales de la Jeeves. Servitorul meu plecat. Avea un vocabular rafinat.
> – Când zici "plecat", vrei să spui că a plecat dintre noi? Sau că e plecat cu sorcova ?
> – A plecat din serviciul meu. Nu i-a plăcut că exersam la banjo.

The last translation example that we will analyses is an instance of humour where the hilarious effect was successfully preserved in the target language although the humour mechanism used in the original version was changed. We chose to analyses the memorable eyebrow-raising episode. In this episode, extracted from the novel *Right Ho, Jeeves*, Wodehouse varies an automatic formula, namely the British expression "to be in good form", by introducing in its structure an uncanny element which has been repeatedly used in the depiction of a previous scene. A Bergsonian humorous contrast is thus achieved:

> I shot a glance at Jeeves. He allowed his right eyebrow to flicker slightly, which is as near as he ever gets to a display of the emotions.
> 'Hullo?' I yipped.
> 'Let me in, blast you!' responded Tuppy's voice from without. 'Who locked this door?'
> I consulted Jeeves once more in the language of the eyebrow. He raised one of his. I raised one of mine. He raised his other. I raised my other. Then we both raised both. Finally, there seeming no policy to pursue, I flung wide the gates and Tuppy came shooting in.
> 'Now what?' I said, as nonchalantly as I could manage.
> 'Why was the door locked?' demanded Tuppy.
> I was in pretty good eyebrow-raising form by now, so I gave him a touch of it. (*Right Ho* 233)

In the Romanian translation this Bergsonian mechanism is changed. In order to convey the hilarious message of the variation "I was in pretty good eyebrow-raising form" the translator resorts to a phrasal verb ("a se pricepe la"), which does not allow too much uncanny variation. However, since the translator adapts its semantic content to the eyebrow-raising pattern, she succeeds in obtaining a humorous effect:

> Am aruncat o privire spre Jeeves. Şi-a lăsat sprânceana dreaptă să tremure niţeluş, adică cel mai vizibil fel al lui de a-şi manifesta emoţiile.
> – Da? am chelălăit eu.
> – Lsă-mă să intru, naiba să te ia! s-a auzit vocea lui Glossop de afară. Cine a încuiat uşa asta?

> L-am consultat încă o dată pe Jeeves prin limbajul sprâncenelor. El şi-a ridicat una. Eu mi-am ridicat una. El şi-a ridicat-o pe cealaltă. Eu mi-am ridicat-o pe cealaltă. Apoi amândoi ni le-am ridicat pe amândouă. Într-un final fiindcă nu părea să existe vreo alternativă, am deschis larg porţile şi Tuppy s-a năpustit înăuntru.
> – Ce mai e? l-am întrebat cât am putut de dezinvolt.
> – De ce era încuiată uşa? s-a interesat Glossop.
> Deja mă pricepeam binişor la chestia cu sprâncenele ridicate, aşa că i-am servit o mostră. (*S-a făcut* 262)

One possible way in order to preserve the Bergsonian humour mechanism mentioned above would be to find a Romanian equivalent for the British "to be in good form" and vary it uncannily in the context of the eyebrow-raising pattern. We venture to suggest the following solution: *Eram deja într-o formă sprâncenoasă de invidiat, aşa că i-am servit o mostră*. Is it far-fetched? Is it wrong? How can we be sure that humour is translated well? How many readers out of all those who read a certain humorous novel smiled and how many laughed heartily? How many did not smile and did not laugh at all? These are questions to be answered in future studies focused on the reception of humorous fiction. Until then, let us be optimistic and believe that humour can travel safely around the world due to its translators.

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REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN THE 2010s HIP-HOP

NÓRA MÁTHÉ[1]

ABSTRACT. *Representations of Black Masculinity in the 2010s Hip-Hop.* One of the most well-known perceptions of contemporary African-American males comes from hip-hop music, a genre dominated largely by Black men. The overly sexual, hypermasculine, angry and aggressive persona is a characteristic of these performers. However, in recent years, this toxic masculinity has been challenged and deconstructed by mainstream artists. Important voices in hip-hop, such as Kendrick Lamar, Kanye West and Jay-Z are embracing a more truthful and intellectual approach to what it means to be a Black man in the United States. This paper sets out to explore these changes, exemplifying them through the lyrics of commercially successful and critically acclaimed rappers.

Keywords: hip-hop, rapper, Black masculinity, Jay-Z, Kendrick Lamar.

REZUMAT. *Reprezentări ale masculinităţii de culoare în muzica Hip-Hop contemporană.* Una dintre cele mai cunoscute percepţii asupra bărbaţilor afro-americani contemporani provine din muzica hip-hop, un gen dominat în mare parte de bărbaţii negri. Personalitatea excesiv de sexuală, hipermasculină, furioasă şi agresivă este o caracteristică a acestor artişti. Cu toate acestea, în ultimii ani, această masculinitate toxică a fost contestată şi deconstruită de artişti în vogă precum Kendrick Lamar, Jay-Z şi Kanye West, care adoptă o abordare mai onestă şi mai intelectuală asupra ceea ce înseamnă să fii un bărbat de culoare în Statele Unite. Această lucrare îşi propune să analizeze aceste schimbări, exemplificându-le prin versurile rapperilor comerciali de success şi a celor apreciaţi de critici.

Cuvinte cheie: hip-hop, rapper, masculinitate afro-americană, Jay-Z, Kendrick Lamar.

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Hip-Hop History and its Effect on Black Masculinity

The 2018 Pulitzer Prize in music was awarded to Kendrick Lamar, a hip-hop artist from the streets of Compton. He was the first non-jazz or classical artist to receive such an accolade. Lamar's 2017 album, *DAMN.*, offers a look at the lives of young Black men who experience extreme poverty and gang violence, but it also offers insight into the inner struggles, insecurities, and worries of Black men. This theme is not new to Lamar's music, but the sweeping commercial success and the critical acclaim of the album signals an important change in what is considered the "usual" style and topic of hip-hop.

Hip-Hop functions as a reflection on the culture surrounding the American Black community. Its origins can be traced back to 1973, to Kool DJ Herc who first used the turntable to creates beats in a way which had not been done before (Blanchard). However, the spoken word rhyming structure predates hip-hop. Blanchard claims that its predecessor could be "African-American rhyming games, as forms of resistance to systems of subjugation and slavery" (Blanchard). With this tactic, African-American slaves were already using a pre-concept of today's rap as a means of social advocacy. Furthermore, Blanchard underlines that "rhyming games encoded race relations between African-American slaves and their white masters in a way that allowed them to pass the scrutiny of suspicious overseers. Additionally, rhyming games allowed slaves to use their creative intellect to provide inspiration and entertainment." The entertainment and inspirational value is a very prominent feature of contemporary rap music, as well.

This genre is often named "the CNN of Black people" because of the above-mentioned role it plays. Many rappers use their experiences and reflect on the issues their communities face; even today, social and political advocacy is a common trait of this style, although a lot of it has become different with the commercialization of hip-hop. In this paper, I will discuss contemporary mainstream rappers' works, mainly focusing on their lyrics. The idea of Black masculinity is closely tied to hip-hop because it is a Black male-dominated genre and it showcases one of the most well-known Black male roles.[2] This stereotyping also occurs with Black male athletes: the main characteristics of these men are closely tied to their physical prowess; they are viewed as exceptionally strong, violent, hypermasculine and sexually promiscuous. Lemelle (51) argues that the buying and selling of Black men between various sports teams is very similar to the slave trade, and it is a way of controlling the

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[2] This occurs not necessarily because the sterotypes are true, but because the genre is very popular in the United States and globally, it is also one of the only Black male-dominated areas of entertainment, so it has a great effect on how Black men are perceived.

Black male image. It is important to also note that Black male rappers and athletes are characterized similarly: their public image generally portrays them as wild, violent, criminal or improper in some capacity. This image is contested and challenged by both rappers and athletes in various ways. Throughout my paper, I will examine the way rappers respond to these stereotypes. Athletes, on the other hand, have also made progress to diminish the savage stereotype associated with them. For example, in 2014, football player Michael Sam announced publicly that he is gay (Connelly), before the NFL draft began. After the draft, Michael Sam has become the first openly gay NFL player. Similarly, NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick started protesting in 2016 during the national anthems played before games. He did not stand up, and after a while he started kneeling during the anthems, as opposed to standing with his hand on his heart. "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color", he explained to NFL Media.

Rappers arguably have a more prominent social role because their main media format revolves around language. Blanchard mentions that "rappers are viewed as the voice of poor, urban African-American youth, whose lives are generally dismissed or misrepresented by the mainstream media. They are the keepers of contemporary African-American working-class history and concerns." Many rappers fit into the role of prophet, activist, or the voice of their community, but in some cases, these positive attributes are met with negative stereotypes, the most prominent one being the hypermasculinity with which the hip-hop scene has been saturated for the longest time. This archetype of the overtly sexual, misogynistic, homophobic and violent Black male was extremely popular for many reasons, which I will elaborate on in this paper. However, in recent years, the image of black men in hip-hop has been shifting towards a more subdued and less violent one. Ioan Marc Jones argues that mainstream rappers such as J. Cole, Kendrick Lamar, and Kid Cudi are paving the way for black men to embrace and show the vulnerability which was either hidden behind bravado or completely rejected before. In my paper, I will explore and exemplify these changes through select contemporary mainstream artists' work, focusing on themes which are discussed in their music, compared to prior rappers and their topics and personas. First, I will examine Jay-Z's career because he started out as a typical "gangsta rapper", but his style and the topics he discusses in his music have gone through a change from the 1990s to today. I chose to examine Kendrick Lamar as the quintessential contemporary rapper because of his sweeping commercial success and because his brand and public image incorporate inquisitiveness and social commentary. There are other artists such as J. Cole, Common, Kid

Cudi or Chance the Rapper whose work incorporates similar ideals and social commentary. Further research and discussion will expand the contemporary rapper's image.

Black Men in Early Hip-Hop

Why is the black male so exaggeratedly violent and hypermasculine in hip-hop? Blanchard argues that it is not a picture deliberately created by the artists, it is, in actuality, the reality from which they come to the forefront of popular culture. "Violence in rap is not an affective agent that threatens to harm America's youth; rather, it is the outcry of an already-existing problem from youth whose worldviews have been shaped by experiencing deep economic inequalities divided largely along racial lines." The imagery used by rappers reflects the violence and helplessness of the low-income, crime-riddled communities they come from. Songs such as N. W. A.'s "Fuck tha Police" (1988) touch upon the violence committed not only by the Compton-community, but also by the police officers who racially profile black males as drug dealers and violent offenders, even if they are simply occupying a space such as the streets of their neighborhoods.

> Fuck the police comin' straight from the underground
> A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown
> And not the other color so police think
> they have the authority to kill a minority
> (…) Fuckin' with me cause I'm a teenager
> With a little bit of gold and a pager
> Searchin' my car, lookin' for the product
> Thinkin' every nigga is sellin' narcotics (N.W.A.a)

The lyrics are violent and provocative, but they discuss the reality black men faced on the streets of Compton in 1988. The rap group N.W.A. was even under FBI surveillance and protested by politicians for their harsh and outspoken nature, even though they were not breaking any laws (*The Defiant Ones*). The band members also showcased the strong, overly masculine and "hard" personas which were commonly associated with gang members or criminals in 'hoods which were considered dangerous or criminally charged. In earlier songs, the topics of social injustice are presented with more bravado and attitude, and the problems were shown through the eyes of a strong black man who is standing up to authority. Gangsta rap defines violence as a part of life or even as something necessary to prove one's worth in society. N.W.A.'s song "Straight Outta Compton" (1988) defines the band as a gang and introduces

its members as strong men who do not respect the law, have guns and are not afraid of violence. The lyrics are charged with bravado and each band member displays a "hard" attitude:

> Straight outta Compton!
> Crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube
> From the gang called Niggas Wit Attitudes
> When I'm called off, I got a sawed-off
> Squeeze the trigger and bodies get hauled off (N.W.A.b)

The first verse by Ice Cube sets the tone to the entire song in which all three band members assert their dominance similarly, by making claims about how they operate the same way street gangs do and how they are strong and smart with "street knowledge" (N.W.A.b) to avoid prosecution and weapons and power to intimidate other gangs – both in music and in the hood.

So, according to depictions that appear in earlier hip-hop, black men are strong, hypermasculine and confrontational, sex is a motivating factor and black men's sexual performance is regarded as a matter of pride. On the other hand, women are viewed through this sexist perspective as well, referred to as "hos", "bitches" or other derogatory terms. The topic of women is generally closely tied to sex. As the song "I Get Around" by 2Pac shows, men are expected to be with many partners and to not be in a committed relationship, and women are reduced to their sexual desires and availability.

> Back to get wrecked, all respect
> To those who break their neck to keep their hoes in check
> 'Cause, oh, they sweat a brother majorly
> And I don't know why your girl keeps pagin' me
> She tell me that she needs me, cries when she leaves me
> And every time she sees me, she squeeze me—lady, take it easy!
> Hate to sound sleazy, but tease me
> I don't want it if it's that easy
> Ayo, bust it, baby got a problem saying "bye-bye"
> Just another hazard of a fly guy (2Pac, Shock-G, Money-B)

Sexual dominance is a very strong stereotype linked to black males, Lemelle points out that the black penis image is prominent in culture since the times of slavery (49). He quotes Alvin Poussant and Amy Alexander who found that taking pride in their sexuality is characteristic of urban African-American youth "who have little else to be proud of than their perceived sexual prowess" (49). Lemelle uses feminist rhetoric to argue that although black hypermasculinity is a strong stereotype, the black male is also feminized by

the Eurocentric culture (50): although he is viewed as strong and savage, he has no power over white society, led by white men, so he is reduced to a role similar to what womn hold. Through the white gaze, black masculinity is viewed as savage behavior. Miles and Brown point out that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Europeans used the antithetical images of savage vs civilized to create a division between the two races. And, "[i]n the act of defining Africans as 'black' and 'savages', and thereby excluding them from their world, Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were representing themselves as 'white' and 'civilised'" (50).

Lemelle notes that this racist distinction is still present in contemporary culture and the hypermasculine, overly sexualized black male body is still treated similarly to slaves: one obvious example is the treatment of black athletes through buying and selling them to teams in a manner similar to the slave trade, as I mentioned above. Lemelle also brings up the strong discrimination in the prison and housing system: segregation kept African-Americans in slum housing, in bad schools and deliberately held them back from social progress; even today, these obstacles are not entirely gone. Hip-Hop music also has a similar connotation: while this genre is mainly black-controlled, record labels are generally owned by white people who profit off the enormous success of black artists. Marketing strategies are developed around the stereotype of the hypermasculine black male because it confirms the biases of the white gaze. Lemelle (51) argues that the black man labeled "other" is also feminized because he is placed under the white male who still dominates him.

In 2010s hip-hop, however, there is a definite change in what is considered the quintessential black male rapper. The gangsta attitude which was very prominent in the early 1990s and stretched over the following decade of rap music is slowly fading or it is deconstructed by many mainstream rappers who no longer identify with the violent hypermasculine persona. The "gangsta" attitude, however, is not gone, there are many rappers who still identify with it, simply because many of them come from backgrounds which involve gangs (e.g. 21 Savage's name refers to the 21 gang he belonged to). Another change from the early days of hip-hop to contemporary is the breakthrough and sweeping commercial success of female rappers such as Nicki Minaj or Cardi B. Of course, there were women rappers before them as well (Missy Elliot, Lil' Kim, Lauryn Hill, etc.), but the impact of contemporary rappers is important to underline. Nicki Minaj is critically acclaimed and commercially as successful as her male counterparts. She uses similar bravado and style to push back against the male perspective; this is showcased in her 2018 single, "Barbie Dreams" where she pushes male rappers into the role of "hoes" and she becomes the "playa", the promiscuous, sexually in control woman whose

sexual prowess is desired by the men around her. She uses The Notorious B.I.G.'s 1994 song "Just Playing (Dreams)" where he discusses his desire towards various R&B singers. The chorus repeats "Dreams of fucking an R&B bitch / I'm just playing… I'm just saying" (Notorious B.I.G.). Nicki Minaj samples the song and uses its premise to exert power over some rappers, naming them and questioning their sexual prowess and bravado: "Man I ain't got no type like Jxmmi or Swae Lees / But if he can't fuck three times a night, peace! / I tried to fuck 50 for a powerful hour / But all that nigga wants is to talk *Power* for hours." (Nicki Minaj) Then she proceeds to change the original song's chorus to "Dreams of fucking one of these little rappers / I'm just playing, I'm just saying.", thus further diminishing the named men's power. Of course, the subject of female rappers and the roles they play is a topic of research which could not be fit into this paper, but it is important to note their presence because they discuss and challenge male rappers' behavior.

It was pointed out by critics that this widely circulated gangsta figure portrayed by many rappers may have had detrimental effects on how black youth view themselves; the lyrics and the cocky, boisterous attitude is passed on to the young black men who listen to hip-hop. This is certainly true in some aspects, but Belle (288) claims that "although in some ways, hip-hop is a microcosm of patriarchal and hegemonic ideals promoting male domination physically, financially, and lyrically, I also encourage listeners and critics to acknowledge the undeniable sense of freedom hip-hop manages to provide to Black men, particularly those from working-class communities." She also points out that rappers are mixing the "thug"[3] persona with intellectualism (289). She uses "Otis" by Kanye West and Jay-Z to illustrate the sophisticated nature of their material. The line "Build your fences, we building tunnels / can't you see we getting money up under you? / Can't you see the private jets flying over you?" (Jay-Z, Kanye West) is not only bragging about wealth, which used to be quite common for rappers who made millions and managed to become rich and famous. Kanye and Jay-Z challenge the authority of powerful white men, referencing the wall being built at the southern border of the United States, with the intent to keep immigrants out of the country. These lines signify the fact that although the white elite constantly creates obstacles for people of color to succeed, they find a way to overcome the systematic oppression. Jay-Z is a great example of change in both tone and attitude, he began his career in the era of gangsta rap but today he plays a different role.

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[3] Belle explains that she uses the term "thug" as "a play on the stereotypical representations of Black men and masculinity in the media that present the image that Black men are too aggressive, violent, and angry" (289). This persona was adopted by most gangsta rappers in the early 1990s.

Jay-Z: Drug Dealer Turned Millionaire

At the beginning of his career and at the top of his commercial success, Jay-Z implemented most of the above-mentioned tropes of black masculinity into his work, and, as Belle (295) points out, he contemplates masculinity in many songs. His most famous song, "99 Problems" has a hook which would lead listeners to think that it is a sexist song about women: "If you're having girl problems, I feel bad for you, son / I got ninety-nine problems but a bitch ain't one" (Jay-Z 2003). Although this is repeated throughout the song, it addresses three different topics which have little to do with women. Jay-Z addresses critics who claim that mainstream rappers are losing their legitimacy because they keep rapping about riches:

> I've got the Rap Patrol on the gat patrol
> Foes that wanna make sure my casket's closed
> Rap critics that say he's Money, Cash, Hoes
> I'm from the hood, stupid! What type of facts are those?
> If you grew up with holes in your Zapatos
> You'd celebrate the minute you was havin' dough (Jay-Z 2003)

He also addresses racial profiling and racist cops in the second verse: "I heard 'Son, do you know why I'm stopping you for?'/ 'Cause I'm young and I'm Black and my hat's real low? / Do I look like a mind reader, sir? I don't know" (2003). However, in the third verse, he switches to a third theme, a man who he deems a "pussy" because he pretends to be tough. Belle (296) explains that "[b]ecause the said man would not "'bust a grape in a fruit fight,'" the suggestion is that he is not a man, because he cannot exert violent force onto another man." Violent behavior used to be expected from Black men in mainstream hip-hop songs: "You gain 'street credibility' by being hyperviolent, homophobic, and heteronormative, while degrading women" (Belle 296).

Today, Jay-Z is a very different rapper: having started out as a drug dealer in Brooklyn, he is now a millionaire with many businesses next to his successful rap career. In his more current music, he sheds the bravado and the hypermasculine behavior. Instead, he becomes much more introspective and he shows vulnerability. His 2017 album, *4:44* focuses on his marriage with Beyoncé, and the very public fact that he had cheated on her. In the track "4:44" he candidly discusses his guilt and pleads for forgiveness from his wife:

> Took me too long for this song, I don't deserve you
> I harassed you out in Paris
> 'Please come back to Rome,' you make it home

We talked for hours when you were on tour
'Please pick up the phone, pick up the phone!'
I said 'don't embarrass me' instead of 'be mine'
That was my proposal for us to go steady
That was your twenty-first birthday
You matured faster than me, I wasn't ready
So I apologize (Jay-Z 2017a)

He addresses the bravado and the lack of emotion with which he treated his wife, owns up to the fact that he was emotionally unavailable and even apologizes for not being more empathetic when Beyoncé suffered a miscarriage. The emotional vulnerability intensifies in the third verse where he expresses anxiety over the possibility that he will have to explain his behavior in the future to his children.

And if my children knew, I don't even know what I would do
If they ain't look at me the same
I would prob'ly die with all the shame
'You did what with who?'
What good is a ménage à trois when you have a soulmate?
'You risked that for Blue[4]?'
If I wasn't a superhero in your face
My heart breaks for the day I had to explain my mistakes
And the mask goes away and Santa Claus is fake (Jay-Z 2017a)

The way Jay-Z handles the subject matter certainly changes his image in the eyes of the public. He completely sheds his former persona and replaces it with a more subdued, vulnerable man's voice, a voice which is not trying to exert power or dominance. Thus, the lyrics come across as more sincere and thoughtful compared to "99 Problems" where his tone suggests power and self-assuredness.

A similar tone is used in "The Story of O.J.", a song in which Jay-Z addresses the hardships Black men face in the United States. Even as a very successful and respected millionaire, he finds that he cannot be equal to white men. "Light nigga, dark nigga, faux nigga, real nigga / Rich nigga, poor nigga, house nigga, field nigga / Still nigga" (Jay-Z 2017b) is the hook of the song in which he claims that no matter what status a Black man has in the United States, his main characteristic will still be his blackness. However, it is important to note that he does not express any wish to erase his blackness or become white. On the contrary, he continues with "O.J. be like 'I'm not Black,

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[4] Blue Ivy is Jay-Z and Beyoncé's daughter.

I'm O.J.'… Okay." He leaves a three-second pause before the "okay", creating a judgemental tone. O.J. Simpson reportedly uttered the controversial sentence sometime around his criminal trial, but ultimately his skin color was the main factor which helped him avoid a prison sentence. O.J. Simpson is a black man who used to be a very successful football player in the 1970s and who was tried and acquitted in 1995 for the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown-Simpson and her friend, Ron Goldman. His trial began closely after the L.A. Riots and, although DNA evidence tied him to the crime scene, O.J. was acquitted because his lawyers tactfully used his race and the systematic oppression of black men to create sympathy for him amongst the jury. These tactics are considered controversial because O.J. did not advocate for black people once he had earned his fame and fortune, instead he adapted to the rich white elite who were now his neighbors and friends.

Jay-Z continues by expressing his dismay with O.J. who assimilated into the white elite, instead of advocating for the Black community.

> House nigga, don't fuck with me
> I'm a field nigga, go shine cutlery
> Go play the quarters where the butlers be
> Imma play the corners where the hustlers be (Jay-Z 2017b)

Jay-Z still wrestles with the thought of true freedom for Black Americans. He feels as though their skin color traps them under the whites in the social hierarchy. His only hope is financial independence:

> You wanna know what's more important than throwin' away money at
> a strip club? Credit
> You ever wonder why Jewish people own all the property in America?
> This how they did it
> Financial freedom my only hope
> Fuck livin' rich and dyin' broke
> I bought some artwork for one million
> Two years later, that shit worth two million
> Few years later, that shit worth eight million
> I can't wait to give this shit to my children

The tone Jay-Z picks to discuss these heavy topics is not the usual dominant, hypermasculine one which was quite prominent in his earlier work. He presents himself as more intellectual and most of the songs on *4:44* do not revolve around masculinity. Although he continually discusses the options of Black men in a country dominated by white men, the toxic masculinity does

not serve a purpose in his musings any longer. The reason behind this change may be the financial security and its freedoms he now has, compared to the beginning of his career when he only experienced life as an oppressed Black man struggling to make ends meet. He addresses his own change in attitude: "Y'all think it's bougie, I'm like, fine, / But I'm tryin' to give you a million dollars worth of game for $9.99 (…) Y'all on the 'gram holdin' money to your ear / There's a disconnect, we don't call that money over here." He chooses the voice of an educator who is trying to teach the younger generations about how to gain freedom from their oppressor. The song samples "Four Women" by Nina Simone (1966) in which she paints a picture of four different Black women from slavery to current times. "My life has been rough, / I'm awfully bitter these days / Cause my parents were slaves" is the confession of the fourth and most current black woman in Nina Simone's song. By sampling it, Jay-Z adds another, more contemporary layer to its message, claiming that although more time had passed since 1966, racism still holds Black people back.

Kendrick Lamar – The New Voice of Black Masculinity

While Jay-Z seemingly matured into the new role of an intellectual rapper, Kendrick Lamar's entire mainstream career defies the above-mentioned hypermasculine persona most rappers used to adopt. Born in 1987, he is part of a younger generation of rappers, he started rapping long after the "gangsta rap" craze. Although that style shaped rap music and still continues to have an effect on it, it is much less prominent than in the early 1990s. "Reminiscent of James Baldwin, Lamar uses rap music to paint an intense, beautifully blemished picture of his struggles to overcome, yet often succumbing to, peer pressure, misogyny, alcoholism, and violence" (Love 1).

Often referred to as the new "king of hip-hop", Lamar's work, which stretches over four full-length albums, showcases his personal struggles and allows him to question his own views and presumptions about certain topics he had addressed before. "Blacker than Berry" clearly shows his ambivalence:

> I'm the biggest hypocrite in 2015
> When I finish this if you listenin'
> I'm sure you will agree
> This plot is bigger than me,
> it's generational hatred
> It's genocism, it's grimy, little justification
> I'm African-American, I'm African
> I'm black as the heart of a fuckin' Aryan
> I'm black as the name of Tyrone and Dareous

Excuse my French but fuck you, no fuck ya'll
That's as blunt as it gets
I know you hate me, don't you?
You hate my people, I can tell because it's threats when I see you
I can tell because your ways deceitful
Know I can tell because you're in love with the Desert Eagle
Thinkin' maliciously, he get a chain then you gone bleed him
It's funny how Zulu and Xhosa might go to war
Two tribal armies that want to build and destroy
Remind me of these Compton crip gangs that live next door
Beefin' with Piru's, only death settle the score
So don't matter how much I say I like to preach with the Panthers
Or tell Georgia State "Marcus Garvey got all the answers"
Or try to celebrate February like it's my B-Day
Or eat watermelon, chicken and Kool-Aid on weekdays
Or jump high enough to get Michael Jordan endorsements
Or watch BET cause urban support is important
So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street?
When gang banging make me kill a nigga blacker than me?
Hypocrite! (Lamar 2015)

His views are not crystallized and they evolve with him and in "The Blacker the Berry" he truly showcases this. He feels an amalgam of emotions linked to his race, from hatred to biased love, from a critical eye to an overly emotional reaction, and this results in a nearly six minutes long song, delivered in a furious tone. Galil points out that "Lamar's clearly bolstering his initial points with "The Blacker the Berry." But he also maps out the complexities of race, pushes back against stereotypes, and explores the gray area of prescribed roles for young African-Americans." It is a very difficult task to – publicly – address the inner problems which the Black community faces and Lamar finds himself in the position of a hypocrite for criticizing and supporting his peers at the same time. These clashing concepts make it more difficult for him to fit into the role of the activist, however, this nuanced attitude shows a deep understanding of his community and its problems.

Lamar uses very vivid imagery to discuss topics such as addiction and peer pressure. His 2012 song, "Swimming Pools (Drank)" stresses the issue of alcoholism and the way it is perpetuated by his family and friends as a normal part of life. Even the cover for *Good Kid, M.A.A.D. City*, the album on which the song appears, showcases a photo of Lamar's childhood. "The album's cover art, a grubby Polaroid, provides a visual prompt for the scene: Baby Kendrick dangles off an uncle's knee in front of a squat kitchen table displaying a 40-

ounce[5] and Lamar's baby bottle" (Greene). The presence of alcohol is normal in Lamar's life; he claims that "Now I done grew up round some people living their life in bottles / Granddaddy had the golden flask back stroke every day in Chicago / Some people like the way it feels / Some people wanna kill their sorrows", then asks the question: "Then what's my problem?" The chorus gives the explanation:

> Nigga why you babysittin' only 2 or 3 shots?
> I'mma show you how to turn it up a notch
> First you get a swimming pool full of liquor, then you dive in it
> Pool full of liquor, then you dive in it
> I wave a few bottles, then I watch 'em all flock
> All the girls wanna play Baywatch
> I got a swimming pool full of liquor and they dive in it
> Pool full of liquor I'mma dive in it (Lamar 2012a)

The strong metaphor paints a very familiar picture for many who experienced peer pressure before and Lamar matches the lyrics with a subdued flowing melody which manifests drunkeness. Wild parties are also heavily featured in rappers' performances, part of the hypermasculine personality: hip-hop's Black male attends parties, gets drunk, gets high and conquers women. Lamar challenges this concept with "Swimming Pools (Drank)"; instead of the bravado, he shows the negative effects of peer pressure.

Finally, in "HUMBLE." Kendrick takes a very strong stance against the boisterous Black male figure which has been part of hip-hop culture for decades. The first single off *DAMN.* is a rise against the hypermasculine, violent, and misogynistic Black male concept, Lamar repeats "Sit down / Be humble" as a command for other rappers to follow. He advocates for fidelity and respect towards women by vocalizing his dismay when it comes to retouching women's photos in the media: "I'm so fuckin' sick and tired of the Photoshop / Show me somethin' natural like afro on Richard Pryor / Show me somethin' natural like ass with some stretchmarks." As the "new king of hip-hop", his voice is definitely heard and he is setting an example of a different, more layered view of Black men in the United States. Lamar's strength is his way of reflecting on current political and social problems in a sincere way, without any bravado or unnecessary means of gaining reactions from his listeners. His emotions are justified in his music, he expresses genuine anger and frustration with many situations where Black people are discriminated against, but he does not try to emulate toughness to match his anger. He

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[5] A large, opened beer bottle.

expresses vulnerability and grief, confusion and self-doubt which is why his words resonate with so many all around the world.

Rap music has gone through many changes from its early stages to today and it is one of the most well-established Black-dominated areas of entertainment, thus its influence cannot be denied. The mainly male-dominated genre initially showcased Black men mostly as hypermasculine, tough, and savage people who used bravado to make themselves look even more menacing and serious. This ideal used to be the most prominent depiction of Black men, however, a new generation of rappers is challenging it today. The dangers of substance abuse are more widely recognized and discussed by artists, instead of discussing drugs or alcohol as a quintessential part of Black masculinity. Of course, this stereotype has not disappeared from rap, but many important voices challenge and deconstruct this image. The hardships of lower class Black youth and the dangers of gangs and the violence of the police force are no longer met with bravado in the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar. It is serious and it is a very complex problem which he tries to analyze and make sense of. He showcases the young Black men as vulnerable "good kids" who have no choice but to live in these conditions: "Joey packed the nine, / Pakistan on every porch is fine, we adapt to crime / Pack a van with four guns at a time / With the sliding door, fuck is up?" (Lamar 2012b) The reality Kendrick Lamar knows is that in hoods such as Compton a young man needs to adapt to the criminal lifestyle and belong to one street gang or another to be part of the community, even though it is dangerous and by no means glamorous or a good choice. Lamar discusses the problems young Black men face and depicts them as human beings in dire situations, stripping the lives of drug dealers and gang members of any Hollywood sugar coating.

As a member of the "gangsta rapper" generation, Jay-Z used to depict the hard and hypermasculine persona which used to be popular in the early 1990s, but by today he has abandoned it. His huge lifestyle change and his financial security shaped him into a different person compared to 1994 when "99 Problems" came out, but he is still very invested in what less fortunate Black communities go through in the United States. Both Jay-Z's and Kendrick Lamar's personas showcase elements of activism and social and political consciousness. Jay-Z uses his platform and his far-reaching voice to diminish stereotypes and to show the importance of Black culture, while also underlining the hardships of Black men that are still prominent in society. Both Jay-Z and Kendrick Lamar are proof of a new, more conscious and more honest representation of the Black American man in hip-hop: these artists' lyrics give depth to what once used to be the boisterous, savage, promiscuous man, thus slowly but surely prying off stereotypes which hold back the Black community.

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HERMAN MELVILLE'S *BENITO CERENO* AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE SLAVERY IDEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT. *Herman Melville's Benito Cereno and the Subversion of the Slavery Ideology.* The current paper aims to analyse in Herman Melville's novella the interplay between the ambiguous narrative voice limited by Amasa Delano's racially charged perception of events and the auctorial presence in the text. We argue that in *Benito Cereno*, the writer has constructed a symbolically charged but carefully targeted criticism against the social and moral failure of the slavery system in the U.S.

Keywords: ideology, power relations, racial dynamics, racial stereotypes, subversion, slavery.

REZUMAT. *Subminarea ideologiei sclaviei în nuvela lui Herman Melville „Benito Cereno".* Articolul de față își propune să analizeze nuvela lui Herman Melville din punctul de vedere al jocului dintre ambiguitatea vocii narative limitate de percepția încărcat rasială a personajului Amasa Delano și prezența auctorială în text care pare să ezite între identificarea cu naratorul și respingerea înțelegerii realității de pe corbia cu sclavi dată de cel din urmă. Considerăm că prin *Benito Cereno* scriitorul a construit o critică încărcată simbolic dar bine țintită împotriva eșecului social și moral al sistemului sclavagist din Statele Unite.

Cuvinte cheie: ideologie, relații de putere, dinamica relațiilor rasiale, stereotipuri rasiale, subminare, sclavie.

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1. Introduction

A subject of dispute among literary critics along the years, (interpreted either as an example of the author's reflection of the 19th century's prejudiced outlook on the time's interracial dynamics, or as an exquisite rendering of the writer's subtle criticism regarding the evil of slavery), *Benito Cereno* has certainly made generations of readers gasp at the crescendo of tension and gothic horrors that gradually built up on the deck of the once proud and glorious slave ship "San Dominick". The very same readers, upon reaching the blood-chilling end of the book, were made by the author, through his skilful use of narrative technique, go back to the beginning to read it all again from a new perspective, in the hope of deciphering the hidden meaning of the clues and foresights scattered along the way to the denouement.

One of the possible sources for this wide array of interpretations offered by critics and scholars to the novella, could originate in the writer's use of a third person narrator who presents the events for the readers using the distorted, racially-charged perception belonging to one of the main characters, captain Amasa Delano. His apparently benevolent, but truly naïve and racist, world view that keeps surfacing in the narration, quite often makes readers think that his point of view might be that of the author too. Nonetheless, on a closer inspection, one can repeatedly detect the author's presence in text subtly introducing doubt about the anomalies in Delano's perceptions. This gradual sedimentation of the erroneous assessment of events and human characters done by Amasa Delano, and the understated auctorial presence that contradicts the afore-mentioned narratorial evaluation, has turned this short story into a source of conflicting interpretations for the critics. "Did or did not Melville express a racist outlook in this short story?" – seems to be the question several scholars have raised. As I will illustrate further on, the historical context of the appearance of the novella and the fact that *Benito Cereno* was initially published in instalments in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine,* one of the few publications that had committed to the anti-slavery cause in the mid-19th century (when few others dared to raise their voices against the atrocities and the ethical failure of human bondage) are tremendously important. Based on these two elements and on an analysis of the power relations between the characters, I would argue that the novella was intended as a criticism of the ideological construct asserting that men of a different skin colour and ethnic origin could be considered inferior, and therefore be subjected to their fellow men from other richer, more powerful countries.

Probably written in the winter of 1854-55, firstly published in 1855 and then republished in 1856 in a volume called *The Piazza Tales*, the novella

must have been a serious warning about the moral effects of supporting slavery to the New Englanders who read it. Presumably they were all too aware of the schizoid reality of their times, when a considerable part of the population was still in favour of a world built upon racism, injustice, cruelty and a double moral standard, while still believing that their proud country was the land of the free, of a bourgeoning democracy supportive of equality and the pursuit of happiness.

Moreover, the novella also must have echoed in that age the chilling thought that salves might take to arms again and seek justice for themselves, as they have done before during the Southampton Insurrection from Virginia. In August 1831 the slave leader Nat Turner, a self-educated black man, conducted a rebellion against the white masters, where at least 51 white people were killed. Although the revolt was quickly suppressed, and the leaders executed, it showed to the baffled American public that things had run out of control and that at any moment, the revolutionary powder could be ignited again by slaves that had been stereotypically presented as submissive, good-natured, and highly obedient regarding their masters. A divergent perspective on the implications of *Benito Cereno*'s historical context and on the writer's view on the issue of slavery is presented by Kevin Hayes in his study dedicated to Melville's work (2007). The critic insists on the author's reluctance to openly condemn slavery and to clearly disapprove it in the novella:

> In his writings before the war, Melville never assumed the role of polemicist. Not even in "Benito Cereno", his fullest treatment of slavery, did he launch a diatribe against its practice. Melville eschewed abolitionist rhetoric. It has become cliché to call slavery a national sin. Melville took a much broader view. Instead of seeing slavery as unique to African descendants in the United States, he saw it as a universal condition that could afflict anyone. Whoever lets someone control their behaviour becomes a slave. (Hayes 22)

Indeed, the novella raises poignant universally valid issues on the nature and source of leadership, on the flimsy character of freedom and power, on the importance of asserting the basic humanity of all people, regardless of the skin colour. The author also ponders on the inherent depravity that potentially comes with the human condition. Nonetheless, I would like to underline the fact that the book was published only six years before the start of the Civil War, in a climate of national tension and bitter debates regarding the values embraced by the United States at the time. In this historical context, Herman Melville brings to the attention of his American readers this gloomy story of Gothic inspiration, of a marooned ship of rebellious slaves who play a perfect,

acquiescent pantomime (most of them lacking a voice of their own) in front of an unsuspecting, eager-to-help American captain, in order to win their way to freedom and revenge. The connection to the condition of the slaves in the Southern states, the dilemmas faced by the politicians and the potential for open conflict on the U.S. territory seem to be utterly transparent to me.

2. Racial blindness and asserting the conventional

Herman Melville's main source for the short story was the 1817 memoir of the real-life captain Amasa Delano that delineated some similar events that took place in 1805 in a deserted bay at the island of Santa Maria, along the coast of Chile, when his vessel the "Perseverance" encountered the slave vessel the "Tryal". Admittedly, the auctorial intervention in the fictionalized set of events made several changes to the actual unfolding of the episode, probably in order to emphasize the irreconcilable conditions of the protagonists, and to heighten the crescendo effect of tension and terror. Most importantly, the date of the events is changed to 1799 and the names of the two ships are transformed into the "Bachelor's Delight" for the American one, suggestive of a young, naive, unsuspecting and optimistic captain, crew and national political outlook – if we are to extrapolate – and into "San Dominick" for the slave ship.

Both the fictional date of events and the name of the Spaniard ship resonate with the French colony island of Saint Domingue – modern day Haiti – a place that following the slave rebellions from the 1790s became the first free black republic in the Americas. Incidentally, Haiti was one of the first landing places for Cristopher Columbus and the European-induced destruction and slavery legacy that he brought with him. The contagious nature of the freedom-for-the-slaves ideal that began to engulf the two Americas and the Caribbean islands couldn't have been lost on the American public, which had been confronted with Nat Turner's revolt on the American soil just a few decades earlier. It is precisely this historical context that Eric Sundquist sees in his study "Melville, Delany and New World Slavery" (1998) as being decisive in revealing the author's view on the slavery issue:

> It is, indeed, the spectral presence of San Domingo within Melville's story that constitutes the most sombre, suffusing "shadow of the Negro" that falls on Benito Cereno (and Melville's reader) at the story's end. The threat of black rebellion is historically latent in all contemporary allusions to San Domingo – and always barely repressed, by extension, in the slaveholding South's psyche – but it also provides a continual analogue and point of reference for antebellum debates about the expansion of the slavery. From Melville's perspective in the early 1850s,

the nature and the extent of future American power inevitably remained a function of the unfolding pattern of anticolonial and slave revolutions in the Americas. [...] The region offered in miniature an emblem of the Americas in their historical revolutionary moment, with the remnants of Spain's great empire (Benito Cereno), free blacks who have revolutionized their own nation (Babo), and the American expansionist interests (Delano) all in contention. *Benito Cereno* does not prophesy a civil war but rather anticipates, just as plausibly, an explosive heightening of the conflict between American democracy, Old World despotism, and Caribbean New World revolution. [...] Melville's ship is a perfect chronotope (in Bakhtin's phrase) of his story's engagement in the historical moment. (Sundquist 832, 833)

In presenting the truth about the unfolding events as always eluding the rational mind of the American captain, who apparently is always analysing facts and seeking for presumably objective interpretations, Melville refuses to acknowledge the dominant 19th century cultural construct of a "coherent self" and pre-defined social order. On the slave ship the hierarchy seems to be the expected one with the Spanish captain in command and the blacks under the supervision of the European sailors. Yet time and again, little incidents build up in the reader a sense of unease and discomfort that Amasa Delano brushes away, based on the assumed moral superiority of his condition as a white, American, free man in charge of many other less socially important fellow-men.

This pattern of suspicion and subsequent reassurance in front of obvious discordant events as presented by the captive Spaniard Benito Cereno and reinforced by the clamorous voices of the blacks on the ship, renders the narrator an intellectually obtuse man, impervious to the evil that hovers around him. For the writer, this makes the suspense easy to sustain and the build-up of tension towards the denouement brings the end as a shock both to reader and character, since the narratorial objectivity is limited to Delano's misperception of reality. The captain's portrait depicted by the author speaks about the gullibility of the American from the very first lines. Seeing for the first time the strange ship that "showed no colours", no form of identification, with a potential pirate, lawless crew according to the naval customs of those days, Delano nevertheless sets aside all concern. The author's irony regarding his character's reasoning and assessing capacity is evident.

Considering the lawlessness and loneliness of the spot, and the sort of stories, at that day, associated with those seas, Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms,

any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception may be left to the wise to determine. (Melville 35).

The American captain's inaccurate perceptions of the racial dynamics on the boat are caused by the racial stereotypes that govern his worldview. After all, he is a man of his age. He is blind to the truth because the conventional assumptions about the slaves were that they could not be but docile, kind-hearted, affectionate and simplistic servants, in a child-like, even dog-like manner. Repeatedly, Babo and the other slaves are presented – by Amasa Delano, to be noted – as loyal dogs, happy to serve their masters. Sometimes they are even sketched as being not fully human, as being as void of a soul and will as ordinary lifeless cargo.

> By his side [Benito Cereno's] stood a black of small nature, in whose rude face, as occasionally like a shepherd's dog, he mutedly turned it up into the Spaniard's, sorrow and affection were equally blended. (Melville 39). Sometimes the negro gave his master his arm, or took his handkerchief out of his pocket for him; performing these and similar offices with that affectionate zeal which transmutes into something filial or fraternal acts in themselves, but menial; and which has gained for the negro the repute of making the most pleasing body servant in the world; one, too, whom a master need not be on stiffy superior terms with, but may treat with familiar trust, less servant than a devoted companion. (Melville 40) The San Dominick was in the condition of a transatlantic emigrant ship, among whose multitude of living freight are some individuals, doubtless, as little troublesome as crates and bales. (Melville 42) (...) There is something in the negro which, in a peculiar way, fits him for advocations about one's person. Most negroes are natural valets and hair-dressers; taking to the comb and the brush congenially as to the castinets, and flourishing them apparently with almost equal satisfaction. […] When to all this is added the docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind, and that susceptibility of blind attachment sometimes inhering in indisputable inferiors, […] Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs. (Melville 70, 71).

To find out in the end that the head of the tragically heroic, African slave-leader Babo could master a desperate revolt and come up with an intricate plan to dispose of the white masters and return the ship to Africa and therefore freedom, is the ultimate blow to the safe, self-sufficient and pro-slavery mentality that Delano embodies. That Babo's head could be a "hive of

subtlety" (Melville 102) is inconceivable at the beginning to the white captain, whose rationalizations and mode of action have already been shaped by the epoch's slavery ideology. What the cultural conventions of the time refused to associate with the salves was the capacity for thinking, planning ahead, having the potential to express volition and pursuing their goals of a free life lived on equal terms with the white masters. The realm of the black slaves revolves in the novella around the strong feelings or even better said, life instincts and impulses that ordinarily are associated with the animal kingdom. The benevolent Amasa loves to find reassurance for his disquietude in the delightful sight of a carelessly sleeping black woman whom he sees like a doe in the shade of the forest. The carefully constructed dreamlike, heavenly harmony of contrasts – leopardesses and doves at the same time – is meant as a distraction from the all too real, mundane realities of a slave ship in distress and the repeated, disturbing, metallic sounds of the black hatchet polishers.

> Sprawling at her lapped breasts was her wide-awake fawn, stark naked, its black little body half lifted from the deck, crosswise with its dam's; its hands, like two paws, clambering upon her […] There's naked nature, now, pure tenderness and love, thought Captain Delano, well pleased. This incident prompted him to remark the other negresses more particularly than before. He was gratified with their manners; like most uncivilized women, they seemed at once tender of heart and tough of constitution; equally ready to die for their infants or fight for them. Unsophisticated as leopardesses; loving as doves." (Melville 60, 61)

The fact that slaves could harbour nothing less than a warm, protective, natural instinct towards their babies and masters alike seems to be self-evident to Delano. His American trust in the goodness of people and in the rightness of the makings of the world as conceived by the white man bears no contradiction to him. Those are the resorts of the world he lives in. The American captain is the outcome of the culture of his country and he cannot act or believe otherwise. To him it is unconceivable that a white man of noble extraction, privileged education and condition could be under the dominion of a black servant. Regarding the presence of an ideological construct at work in the novella, James H. Kavanagh directs our attention in his article "That Hive of Subtlety: 'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero" (1986) to the fact that "ideology" may signify more than a set of explicit political ideas, but a "lived relation to the real", a relation mediated not necessarily by ideas, but by preconscious images that show the subject as a version of the of the social world and his/her place in it. And Delano's racial misperceptions clearly support this interpretation.

> Because ideology works most effectively through its *unconscious* hold on the subject, it resists being made conscious or explicit. An ideology structures "seeing" and "feeling" before it structures "thinking" and appears to have no historical or social specificity but to be simply the *natural* way of perceiving reality. [...] Ideological conflicts can be deadly because at stake in them are not different *opinions*, but different *realities.* The ideological, in this sense, is not some mental sphere or dogma or doctrine, that one can embrace or reject at will [...] but an unavoidable terrain of social practice, where collective imaginations are fabricated, where the social construction of reality is continually articulated with the constitution of the self. (Kavanagh 353)

Trapped in a power game he does not master, Amasa Delano falls prey to his own misrepresentation of the world and the dangers around him. He asserts to the end, even after the trial, the conventions of his time because without them, life does not make sense to him. With the execution of the rebellious slave leader Babo and restoration of the world order he is familiar with, things fall in their usual place again. That is why he cannot understand the "shadow" that had been cast over the dispirited Spaniard. The weakness he sees in the unassertive, incapacitated Benito Cereno are just a reflection of his own debilitated capacity to understand obvious ominous signs and to read people for what they truly are. His vision is distorted by a racism he is not even aware of possessing. If he admires the black race, it is for their perceived servility and closeness to "nature" rather than for their humanity.

3. Power games – inverted leadership

Considering that the American captain is the prisoner of the conventions of his time, Benito Cereno, the Spanish captain is a hostage in a spatial enclosure, his own ship he lost control of. Delano is a prisoner of time, of a history he doesn't understand, while the European captain is despite his youth, laden with the weight of a corrupted old heritage – slavery – the dimensions, severity and the consequences of which he is well aware of. Unlike Amasa, who notices everything but understands nothing, Benito seems to float above the current, mundane concerns, making the American draw the only correct assessment regarding the entire line of events: that Cereno is just a "paper captain", an ineffectual leader. However, the locus of real leadership is hidden from him due to the obtuseness of his racial perceptions.

One can say that the novella is built on an antinomical structure brought together by the shadow of slavery and the complicity in human evil: the naïve optimism of the American narrator (Delano) and the enduring

pessimism of its protagonist (Cereno) are both questioned by the author. Neither of them can try, or is able to fathom a more just future for mankind, one that does not encompass slavery, or is built on its burdensome past.

Benito Cereno is no more than a puppet, carefully handled by Babo, the skilful ventriloquist in a play where each man if faced with his worst fears and demons: greed, violence, guilt, harmful ignorance, a prejudiced mind, cruelty. The background for this descent into the heart of darkness is not the African continent like in Conrad's novel, but not surprisingly for Melville, the sea. It is depicted from the very beginning as a grey, gloomy canvas, reflective of the events to come and mirroring the laden mobility of the humans' condition. Though in control of the ship, the slaves are nevertheless not free, while the free American captain, the intruder in this static, metallic, trapped-in-time universe, becomes himself captive in the minstrelsy play carefully woven around him by the deceptive slaves. It is the paradoxical immobility of this aquatic realm that forces the characters and readers alike to confront their limitations. The ambiguity of the atmosphere is suggestive of the ambiguity of the moral standing of the two captains and of the precarious, temporary rule of the slaves on the ship. In between white and black, the two non-colours of the highly charged racial spectrum of the novella, grey/ "gray" is the indefinite, confused middle ground where none of the two dominates.

> Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that cooled and set in the smelter's mold. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled sea vapours among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before the storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come. (Melville 35)

When the benevolent and trusting Amasa Delano sets his foot on board the San Dominick, from the point of view of the power relations, he finds there a reversed polarity crisis. The former slaves turned themselves into masters, and the masters, stripped of their freedom and control, were reduced to the menial condition of captives with their humanity cancelled. That is why, on repeated occasions, Benito is described less like a living human being and more like a zombie, a ghostlike presence of his former self, always on the verge of fainting and needing the constant support of his "loyal servant", Babo. The narrator goes even further, in comparing Don Benito's languor and dejection to that of the Spanish emperor, Charles V, in an obvious drive to make the Spanish captain an embodiment of the decaying status of European political, economic and moral power.

> Had Benito Cereno been a man of greater energy, misrule would hardly have come to the present pass. But the debility, constitutional or induced by the hardships, bodily and mental, of the Spanish captain, was too obvious to be overlooked. A prey to settled dejection, as if long mocked with hope he would not now indulge it, even when it had ceased to be a mock, the prospect of that day or evening at furthest, lying at anchor, with plenty of water for his people, and a brother captain to counsel and befriend, seemed in no perceptible degree to encourage him. His mind appeared unstrung, if not still more seriously affected. [...] His manner upon such occasions was, in its degree, not unlike that which might be supposed to have been his imperial countryman's, Charles V., just previous to the anchoritish retirement of that monarch from the throne. (Melville 40, 41)

One of the most poignant scenes in the short story is the description of the weather and time-worn slave ship as first seen by captain Delano, a spatial symbol of the disintegrating power of the old European empires built on ruthless conquest, human bondage and even annihilation of the New World natives. The sentence that ironically coagulates and reveals the true meaning of all the loose, cryptic messages that Benito and the old white sailor tries to transmit to the confused Delano, is the one inscribed on the forward side of the ship "Seguid vuestro jefe!, (follow your leader)" (Melville 37), a sentence scribbled near a figure-head concealed in a shroud-like canvas. At the end of the story, as a shock to both Amasa Delano and the readers alike, we learn that the initial statue represented Cristopher Columbus, the discoverer of the New World. The figure had been morbidly replaced by the angry slave mob with the defleshed corpse of Don Alexandro Aranda, Benito Cereno's friend and owner of the slaves transported on the ship.

In her analysis of the power balance within the novel, Tracy B. Strong, in an article entitled "'Follow your Leader' Melville's *Benito Cereno* and the Case of Two Ships" (2013), ponders on the relationship between the (potential) capital of power the characters have at the beginning of their voyage and the way it is exercised en route to the colonies, given the fact that it basically changes hands. The co-dependent nature of slavery keeps master-and-slave (whoever would take these roles in turn) bound in a mutually destructive relationship.

> If one reads this book as being about only the *institution* of slavery, one must read it as simply a dialectic between oppressor and the oppressed, as having a bipartite structure. Yet there is another way of reading. Babo, now a leader, had been a slave who was then enslaved by Don Aranda. Cereno, once in command, is now a slave. If this book is about slavery, it is about slavery as a consequence of the fact of

domination, and it is thus about the meaning of how one follows one who is in power. [...] Throughout the story he [Babo] is presented as joined to Benito Cereno. They are leaning on each other in their first appearance to Delano, who finds in the tableau an example of the proper and admirable relation of whites to blacks. [...] Yet this union has multiple dimensions. Beyond this inseparability, however, they are also "irreconcilable": Babo seeks to kill Cereno after the latter leaps into the boat; Cereno will not confront or even face Babo at the trial. Finally, the two are "interchangeable": the two cross at the plaza at the end in the same direction. Master and slave are not a question of race but of domination. From all this, violence is inevitable. [...] There are no masters without slaves, no slaves without masters. Once Babo takes over the ship and makes Cereno the equivalent of his slave, he is just as much caught in this web as was Cereno before the revolt. This is the reason why Melville *appears* ambivalent about the slavery question: he understood that turning things upside down only reproduced the previous dynamics. [...] (Strong 290, 297)

What readers cannot ignore while closely following the unfolding events, are the many instances in which the black slaves are characterized as having real power and authority, if only for a fleeting moment. The dignified, royal-like manner in which the chained "gigantic black" Atufal, a former African king, presents himself before Don Benito, the ineffectual captain and refuses to acknowledge his authority by bending before him, the way the three black boys stab a Spaniard sailor without fear of punitive measures, the "cymbaling of the hatchet-polishers" (Melville 46), all allude to the temporary reversal of the poles of power. The ironical words uttered by Babo when referring to the chained Atufal and Benito's position as the holder of the secrets is revealing in this sense: "The slave here carries the padlock, but master here carries the key" (Melville 51). What the American captain and the readers don't know at that moment is that the roles had been exchanged between the two. That is the mystery Amasa Delano cannot unlock, the Gordian knot he is symbolically invited to untie by the old Spaniard sailor. The fact that he cannot do that is a measure of his own entrapment and precarious condition on the now slaves-owned ship.

4. Individual and collective black agency

Babo has no voice of his own in the trial (and neither do the other slaves). Although everything revolves around him and he is the mastermind behind all that happens on the ship, he is the only one who is given no voice by the author. The African refuses to utter a word in his defence or explain his

deeds, knowing all too well that in the society he lives in, a slave is seen as just a tool, an instrument in the hands of the master, which can be used only for the benefit of the white people. Therefore, he rejects the court's offer to be instrumentalized again in helping them justify their sentence and their world and life views. He simply knows that there is no mercy or escape for him at the hands of white people. His thoughts and feelings about what had occurred and about his fate as a slave are never presented, but there is no need to, because deeds speak louder than words. What Melville does in refusing Babo a voice of his own, other than that of the minstrelsy role that he plays, is to put in front of the 19th century American society a mirror in which it could see all its inner lights and more importantly, shadows.

An interesting perspective is brought by Herman Beavers in his article "The Blind Leading the Blind: The Racial Gaze as Plot Dilemma in 'Benito Cereno' and 'The Heroic Slave' (1996) to the aspect of Babo's post-rebellion silence and the magnetic, almost demonically powerful gaze of his severed head, raised on a pike in the Plaza, overlooking the cemetery where his former's master body was laid to "rest". The playful symmetry of their destinies both in life and death is chilling: the European master turned feeble slave and the black slave turned all-powerful and controlling leader of the rebellious ship, meet again to spend the eternity one under the watchful gaze of the other. Not even death can exorcize the evil that was done to them both: slaves being stripped of their humanity and turned into objects or animal-like creatures that can be owned, and masters later on humiliated, tortured and murdered by the enraged slaves seeking revenge, freedom and the restoration of their initial condition.

> Melville's language proposes that the affair reaches its conclusion because Babo's head is separated from his body. However, as the narrator takes care to inform us, Babo has, from the moment of his capture, refused to speak, choosing silence over speech of any form. The narrator, bearing more than a trace of Captain Delano's sense of racial superiority perhaps, attributes this silence to Babo's realization that "all was over", moving from conjecture to ventriloquism to argue that the slave's reticence plainly states, "Since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak". But this interpretation of Babo's decision needs to be questioned. Should we accept the narrator's characterization of Babo's silence as an act of resignation or submission? For Babo's silence is just as easily read as an act of resistance, a recognition of "the use his words would be put to by the Spanish court" and his unwillingness to cooperate. The "order" we find restored at the close of the court proceedings culminates not only in Babo's death, but in the installation of his head on the pike in the Plaza, where his lifeless countenance can gaze at – and be gazed

upon by – the whites who require reassurance that the matter has come to a successful end and that the threat has passed. [...] In short, Babo serves as both visual trope of power and palliative gesture, for if he is a tangible symbol of the power of the slave-owner (and the State's endorsement of that power), he would seem to be, just as well, a symbol of the powerlessness of the slave, reinforcing the notion that whites not only have more power than blacks but also that the state will respond in like manner to any rebellious threat that they may choose to mount in the future. (Beavers 207)

The white masters' frail predicament and sense of insecurity are bountifully illustrated through the story on each occasion that the Spanish captain is seen as needing the support of his slave in order to walk around the ship, to give "orders", to speak, even to stand up. The message is transparent in its bitter reinstatement of the realities of the American economy, especially the one from the Southern States: at that time white people needed slaves for their economic survival and prosperity. Without them, their whole social and financial constructs would crumble. Sterling Stuckey in his 1998 article "The Tambourine Glory: African Culture in Melville's Art" draws attention to the way African singing and dancing performed by the black women on board serve as ceremonial, war-connected rites meant to reinforce this master-slave dialectic: "Melville was under Hegelian influence in one vital respect: [...] in 'Benito Cereno' [...] the slave is the creative force, the master parasitic." (Stuckey 54). The critic admits not finding any reference to Hegel in Melville's work, yet he considers that Melville's work illustrates skilfully in literature the master-slave dialectic found in Hegel's philosophical work.

In this interrogation on the nature of the human condition, the essence of freedom and the source of power that is Benito Cereno, many critics have pointed out the fact that precisely at the moment when the readers see the events from Babo's perspective, he is silenced by the author.

This fact can be seen as suggestive not of a bias in Melville's mind, but of the fact that in the 19th century, black slaves did not have a voice and were not the masters of their destiny. In this case the author does nothing more than present to his countrymen reality as it was, filtered through the artistic vision. If this narrative device makes current readers wonder about the African's point of view and the way Babo – as the archetypal slave – saw and lived things; one can also suspect that Melville's contemporary readership must have had the same reaction. In her article "What Babo Saw. *Benito Cereno* and '*the World We Live In*'" (2013), Lawrie Balfour ponders on the way the "performance" of friendship was used in support of a brutal, unjust social order based on racial discrimination. Time and again, Babo, like countless

other slaves before and after him, has to acquiesce to an impeccably performed pantomime of servility, concern and friendly devotion for his "master" Don Benito, so as to sustain the appearance of "normality" on the ship for the inquisitive eyes of the American captain. Not even once does he allow himself to speak the truth or show his real thoughts and intentions, for fear that his plans for gaining freedom and returning back to Africa would be hindered by Amasa Delano. Tragically enough, even when he has gained control of the ship and therefore freedom from his master, the slave still has to play the role of the friendly, faithful servant. He is seen as a supportive aid to the enfeebled master the moment the outside world bursts in by the intermediary of the American captain.

> Whether "presenting himself as a crutch" [...] for his master or explaining away an injury vindictively inflicted by Cereno, Babo demonstrates a virtuosic command of the conviviality through which slavery was sustained. [...] Although Delano is deceived about who commands the *San Dominick*, the faked friendship he witnesses between Babo and Cereno copies precisely the everyday performances of familial and friendly relations that were part and parcel of the order of slavery. Babo's self-fashioning as a loving and loyal friend to Cereno exposes an order based in "violence and ventriloquism", feigned enjoyment and affection. (Balfour 266)

This outside-sealed universe on board the ship, described by the author as a volcano on the verge of eruption, somehow manages to transfer its potential for destruction to the external world of the peaceful monastery where Don Benito Cereno was brought during the final days of his life. Still troubled by the events he lived, even if his tormentor's body was burnt to ashes and his head raised on a pike in the plaza – so seemingly justice was done to him and the Spanish crew – he is still unable to find rest and peace for his soul. Faced with Delano's encouragement and urge to turn over a new leaf in his life, the same way nature in its unity, sun-sea-sky, continues to glow and impart a joy for life, the moribund captain has a chilling answer.

> "But the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, you bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves."
> "Because they have no memory", he dejectedly replied; "because they are not human." (Melville 101)

What Melville knew and transmitted to his readers by putting these words in Delano's mouth is that an essential part of our humanity is the

memory of the past that has shaped our present and probably, unknown to us, would also influence our future to some degree. Moral human beings that hope for a better life in a more equalitarian and just society cannot forget the tragedies and the mistakes of the past, lest they repeat them. The world may go on despite all the turmoil in people's souls, but individuals cannot escape the responsibility they have for their deeds.

5. Conclusions

The novella *Benito Cereno* brims with subtle foresights of tense, incoming stormy weather and events, being also dotted with barely sketched ironies regarding the gullible nature of an all-trusting, all-superior white man who thinks he cannot possibly be wrong in his interpretation of reality and in his way of relating to the racially Other. As such, it highlights once again Melville's talent in depicting the intricacies of the human condition, the ambiguity of appearances and the pervasiveness of evil. The latter is seen as corroding the base of all racial and ethnic groups alike, when harm and misery is brought to the others. This may happen either from a putrid desire for wealth and power at all costs, or from a need for justice and/or revenge taken to the edge of the human limit. Never the one to point the finger and assign guilt or a verdict, Melville nonetheless, in the apparent Gothic mystery and suspense of this tale of sea adventures, casts a chilling warning regarding the potential consequences of processing reality through the filter of prejudice, racism and an unsubstantiated high moral ground. A lesson that unfortunately still rings true, almost three centuries later.

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BETWEEN LAW AND CUSTOM: A VIEW OF THE RACIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN CHARLES WADDELL CHESNUTT'S "THE HOUSE BEHIND THE CEDARS"

IULIA ANDREEA MILICĂ[1]

ABSTRACT. *Between Law and Custom: A View of the Racial Relationships in Charles Waddell's Chesnutt's "The House behind the Cedars".* The aim of this paper is to investigate the manner in which Charles Waddell Chesnutt skillfully uses the conventions of the sentimental novel and of the tragic mulatto/a character, familiar to his white readers, in order to dismantle racial preconceptions and expose the terrible ramifications of racism. The novel *The House behind the Cedars* shows that race is artificially constructed out of various external markers such as custom, law, dubious scientific findings, which, however, can have dire consequences for the individuals who need to obey such limitations.

Keywords: mixed-race, racism, prejudice, tragic mulatto/a, African-American literature, law, passing.

REZUMAT. *Între lege și tradiție: o privire asupra relațiilor rasiale din romanul „The House behind the Cedars" de Charles Waddell Chesnutt.* Scopul acestei lucrări este acela de a investiga maniera în care Charles Waddell Chesnutt se folosește de convențiile romanului sentimental și ale pesonajului tipic "mulatrul/mulatra tragic/ă", familiare cititorilor din epoca sa, pentru a submina prejudecățile rasiale și pentru a expune teribilele ramificații ale rasismului în America. Romanul *The House behind the Cedars* arată faptul că rasa este o construcție artificială tributară unor elemente constitutive externe cum ar fi: tradiția, legea, descoperiri științifice dubioase, dar care are consecințe tragice pentru persoanele care sunt forțate să se supună limitărilor sociale impuse de legile rasiale.

Cuvinte cheie: rasă mixtă, rasism, prejudecată, mulatrul/mulatra tragic/ă, literatură afro-americană, lege, *a trece drept alb.*

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Charles Waddell Chesnutt is considered to be the first African-American writer in American Literature to gain recognition for his literary achievement. The presence of African-American writers on the literary stage had been, up to the end of the nineteenth century, rather sporadic and mostly connected with the fight for emancipation. Many white writers, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, George Washington Cable, Kate Chopin, only to mention few of the most famous, had been interested in the depiction of race or mixed race in their works, but "no other American writer had so assiduously (and so interestingly) probed the profound and growing diversity of the US and, indeed, the central role race has played (and continues to play) in the formation and evolution of the country" (Duncan 68).

Chesnutt's life and career were marked by contradictions arising from his racial heritage, as a man of mixed race, white enough to pass, but refusing to do so, from his career, as a school teacher, lawyer and man of letters, and from his position, as a writer in nineteenth century American literature dominated by white voices, but gradually opening towards regional and ethnical diversity. These contradictions are visible in his writings, as Chesnutt turns to the novel traditions of his time, such as the plantation romance, the sentimental novel, or the novel of manners, that were largely used by pro-slavery, nostalgic Southern writers as the medium for the transmission of racist ideas. In reality, Chesnutt was aware of the seeming dangers of his choices, but was faithful to them as he strongly believed that, by using conventions familiar to his white audiences, he could "educate white readers about African Americans" (Duncan 71). As he confessed,

> The object of my writings would be not so much the elevation of colored people as the elevation of the whites – for I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism – I consider this a barrier to the moral progress of the American people; and I would be one of the first to head a determined, organized crusade against it. Not a fierce indiscriminate onset, not an appeal to force, for this is something that force can but slightly affect, but a moral revolution which must be brought about in a different manner. The subtle almost indefinable feeling of repulsion toward the Negro, which is common to most Americans cannot be stormed and taken by assault; the garrison will not capitulate, so their position must be mined, and we will find ourselves in their midst before they think it. (qtd. in Bell 64)

Just like himself, his mixed-race characters, lead a complicated and often contradictory existence, too white to accept inclusion in the black community, segregated and marginalized after the Reconstruction, black enough to suffer the consequences of the "one-drop" rule, they lead a marginal existence, struggling to find their place in still racist society. Thus, he tried to reveal to his white audiences the terrifying consequences of racism by appealing to mixed blood characters because, as Werner Sollors aptly notes, "conceived for white readers, these characters invite empathy because they are so much like whites and so little like blacks" (225). Chesnutt was aware, therefore, that racism was a delicate matter that should be treated with great care. He knew that, though the tragic mulatto/a was not a character new to American readers, problems could arise from the audiences' tolerance to them and from the writers' ability to turn his characters into a subversive weapon used in order to alter the public's preconceptions about race. Ryan Simmons mentions some of the difficulties Chesnutt encountered in his endeavor to "educate" his readers:

> Although he assumed that a sympathetic audience, consisting of some black readers but primarily liberal whites, was capable of supporting his writing career, he also seemed to sense that this audience would react favorably only to an approach that was reassuring rather than challenging. He writes implicitly with the attitude that his white, Northern readership will welcome an exposé of racism in the South, but might squirm if asked too directly to regard their own implication in racial injustice or to consider their own responsibility to act. Such an approach as his readers would find acceptable could not satisfy Chesnutt's desire to be a politically effective writer unless he managed to exercise great care and skill, and his attempts to negotiate the problem of audience carefully and skillfully account for much of what can be seen in his fiction. (57)

Matthew Wilson also points out the difficulties encountered by Chesnutt, an African-American writer who, using the convention employed mostly by white writers, tries to transmit a different, and potentially rebellious view on race and racism: "when Chesnutt decided to write a novel primarily for that white audience, he realized that he had to be less subtle but not so confrontational that he risked alienating his audience. In other words, he faced a complicated problem of genre and audience" (60).

His first novel, *The House behind the Cedars*, published in 1900 and based on a previous short story *Rena,* uses the conventions of the sentimental melodrama in a story of "passing" that presents the destinies of two siblings, brother and sister, with white skin and black ancestry, in the post-Civil War South. Like other writings by Chesnutt, this novel deals with inter- and intra-

racial relationships that highlight the liminal position of the mulattoes in a segregated and racist society. By combining the conventions of the "passing" novel with his legal insight, Chesnutt tries to expose the artificiality of race as a social and legal construct.

The "passing" novel is closely connected with the drama of the mixed race individuals who, in their attempt to avoid the discrimination and marginalization of the African-Americans in a post-Civil War America, pretend to be white. "Passing" is short for "passing for white" defined by Werner Sollors as " 'crossing over' the color line in the United States from the black to the white side" (266). But, Sollors insists, passing is more than this, it implies entering a "forbidden" community, concealing his original racial ancestry suggesting that "only a situation of sharp inequality between groups would create the need for the emergence of a socially significant number of cases of 'passing'" and so, passing occurs in those communities in which racism is accentuated and the subordinate race is degraded and marginalized (252). What these "passing" situations suggest is that the racial boundary is much more difficult to cross than the class boundary reflected in the attempts of the poor to rise in the society:

> The boundary between Negro and white is not simply a class line which can be successfully crossed by education, integration into the national culture, and individual economic advancement. The boundary is fixed. It is not a temporary expediency during an apprenticeship in the national culture. It is a bar erected with the intention of permanency. It is directed against the whole group. Actually, however, "passing" as a white person is possible when a Negro is white enough to conceal his Negro heritage. But the difference between "passing" and ordinary social climbing reveals the distinction between a class line, in the ordinary sense, and a caste line. (Gunnar 58)

Thus "passing" is considered a form of betrayal of race, of dishonesty and deception, an "instance of racial self-hatred or disloyalty. It is predicated, so the argument goes, on renouncing blackness – an 'authentic' identity, in favor of whiteness, an 'opportunistic' one" (Pfeiffer 2). The result of this negative view on passing is that "many passing narratives focus on the experience of disconnect between a character's inner (supposedly black) self and his or her outer (ostensibly white) self" (Pfeiffer 4). Therefore, it seems that passing, instead of blurring the color line, highlights it by implying that the people who try to pass commit a dishonest and illegal act, only pretending to be what they are not and thus deceiving those around them, both the "white race" where they want to be included, and their "black ancestry," which they need to forget. What Chesnutt tries to imply is that passing can be viewed from a different

perspective. The division between the white and the black race, argues Chesnutt, is a legal division and these people pass because they are legally black but visibly white. In this light, the argument according to which they "cheat" their way into the white race can be easily contradicted since they are as much white as they are black. If "passing for white" means, in the eyes of the nineteenth century conscience, renouncing their black ancestry, does it not mean that "remaining black" would imply renouncing the white ancestry? What is "black" and "white", anyway? Chesnutt implies in an essay entitled *What is a White Man?* published in *The Independent* in 1889. In this famous article, he investigates the legal situation of the mixed-race individuals, whose double ancestry makes them a difficult case for the legislature. Because of the ambiguity of racial inclusion, these mixed-race individuals challenge the white supremacist claims of the Southern states who tried hard to establish the color lines according to the "proportion of African blood", from one-sixteenth "Negro blood" to one-fourth. Henceforth, Chesnutt gives several examples, from Missouri, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina to the Northern States of Ohio and Michigan, only to suggest the artificiality of a law that establishes different percentages of "Negro blood" in deeming a person legally white or black. He also pays specific attention to the state of South Carolina, more lenient to this problem and where, even if the color line is established at "one-eighths African blood", the judge may have the freedom to decide the race of a person also on account of "reputation" and "reception into society" (*Essays* 70-71). The creation of these laws was subjected to various factors. For instance, Chesnutt suggests, the South Carolina law may have been influenced by the fact that "the colored population of South Carolina always outnumbered the white population, and the eagerness of the latter to recruit their ranks was sufficient to overcome in some measure their prejudice against the Negro blood" (*Essays* 71), while the law in Ohio was influenced by its proximity to the slave states. These details further enforce the idea that race does not have a real, biological determination, but an artificial, legal basis submitted to contextual variables.

Chesnutt also argues that there is great variety in the types of legal documents connected to the color line in the American states: such as Federal Laws, state codes, decisions of the Supreme Court that clarify state laws, and even judges and juries who can decide whether a person is black or white on account of various factors exposed in the law. These laws do not only vary from state to state, but they also differ from one period of time to the other: "Some of these laws are of legislative origin; others are judge-made laws, brought out by the exigencies of special cases which came before the courts for determination. Some day they will, perhaps, become mere curiosities of jurisprudence; the 'black laws' will be bracketed with the 'blue laws,' and will

be at best but landmarks by which to measure the progress of the nation" (Chesnutt, *Essays* 69). Nevertheless, these laws have terrible consequences for those who need to abide by them. First, there is what Chesnutt bitterly calls the "disability of color" (*Essays* 69) as he refers to the fact that, while enforcing white supremacy and striving to classify people according to race, the Southern states condemn a part of their population to a life of submission, pain and veiled slavery, preventing them from enjoying the liberties that come with the status of "American citizen." In other words, since the variety of definitions of "whiteness" existing in the state laws suggests that there is no consensus on what a white or black man is in the United States, it is possible that in one state a person could be legally white, henceforth free and in full possession of all the rights of an American citizen, while in another state, the same person could be legally black, and, as such, segregated, discriminated, living in "hopeless degradation" (Chesnutt, *Essays* 68). Moreover, there are other legal ramifications of these racial classifications besides the obvious abidance of the African-Americans to the segregation codes, which touch the realm of the family, more precisely marriage. On account of the legal difference between races, interracial marriages are forbidden in many states in order to protect "the purity of the white race" (Chesnutt, *Essays* 71), and, Chesnutt points out, in this situation, the presumption of illegitimacy is, or at least was, true for most people of mixed blood. Since this mixed-blood population, says the author, is "more than half of the colored people of the United States" (*Essays* 73), it is time to reconsider this reality and the laws that result from it:

> Whether or not, therefore, laws which stamp these children as illegitimate, and which by indirection establish a lower standard of morality for a large part of the population than the remaining part is judged by, are wise laws; and whether or not the purity of the white race could not be as well preserved by the exercise of virtue, and the operation of those natural laws which are so often quoted by Southern writers as the justification of all sorts of Southern "policies" are questions which the good citizen may at least turn over in his mind occasionally, pending the settlement of other complications which have grown out of the presence of the Negro on this continent. (Chesnutt, *Essays* 73)

All these legal complications are, in fact, the outcome of slavery and the coexistence of the two races on the American continent coupled with the impossible dream of white purity which, in fact, was meant to hide the centuries of abuse, discrimination and humiliation of the black population. The presence of the light-skinned Americans is the best example of the impossibility of racial purity and, basically, race differences are not real, but a "historically

produced social fiction" (Wilson 19) enforced by the law. The law, on the other hand, Chesnutt seems to suggest, is made by people who can and need to change their opinion and adapt to new conditions. In fact, in another essay published in 1900, the same year as the novel *The House behind the Cedars,* and entitled *The Future American*, Chesnutt argues that "proceeding then upon the firm basis laid down by science and the historic parallel, it ought to be quite clear that the future American race, the future American ethnic type will be formed of a mingling, in a yet to be ascertained proportion, of the various racial varieties which make up the present population of the United States" (*Essays* 122). According to the census, he argues, "any dream of a pure white race, of the Anglo-Saxon type, for the United States, may as well be abandoned as impossible, even if desirable" (*Essays* 123), since the future of the nation consists in a harmonious mingling of the white, black and Indian.

In the light of such theoretical considerations that offer a background to his fictional texts, it is clear that his novels are based upon a thorough knowledge of the law and are meant to make people ponder upon the effects of racism and segregation in a world in which racial amalgamation can become, in Chesnutt's view, the future of a better America. With this legal background in mind, Chesnutt chooses to set the plot of his novel right after the Civil War, a time in which more lenient race laws made it easier for light-skinned individuals to pass. According to Matthew Wilson, Chesnutt refers to the same Supreme Court decision of 1831 in South Carolina he mentioned in *What is a White Man?* and which made this state one of the most tolerant with regard to the definition of whiteness. Wilson further refers to other legal provisions: "this decision was superseded by an 1879 law in which the legislature decided that anyone with one quarter or more of black blood was Negro; in 1895, that proportion was reduced to one-eighth" (88). Thus, Chesnutt chooses for his characters a "historical window" between 1865 and 1879, "a period less racially repressive than his readers' present, and he is trying to recover a part of the past that was being erased by the more rigid enforcement of the color line in the era of Jim Crow. In this interregnum, John can pass into the white world" (Wilson 88). According to Ryan Simmons, the choice of this specific time-frame for the novel's setting can bear further significance, as the readers of the 1900, when the novel was published are part of the novel's future and "Chesnutt uses the theme of time in an attempt to make the novel's events personally compelling for readers, something in which readers are involved rather than a document to be inspected from an abstract, detached position" (74).

These legal oscillations enhance the artificiality of race as a social and historical construct. The novel's main characters, John and Rena, are legally white in South Carolina and legally black in their hometown, Patesville, in North

Carolina. They are born out of the illegal union between a beautiful mixed-race free woman and her white lover, a rich Southerner, who failed to draft a will and officially acknowledge his children. Moreover, their dilemmas do not arise only from the law, but also from the people's mentalities that do not change so easily. As Judge Straight remarks to the young John Walden/Warwick, a light-skinned man who passed for white: "I remember we went over the law, which was in your favor; but custom is stronger than law – in these matters custom IS law" (Chesnutt, *The House* 15). Chesnutt, therefore, does not focus on the dangers of passing as a form of breaking the law by setting his story at a time when the law was more favorable. Instead, he dwells on the complications that arise from custom, from people's mentalities that are harder to change than the laws. Moreover, by foregrounding a pair of siblings, brother and sister, Chesnutt reveals a variety of issues that are connected to the fate of the mulattoes, from legal provisions to impediments of custom and prejudice, from racial distinctions to gender conditioning. Discriminated and forced to pass on account of their race, John and Rena do not, however, share the same fate, as they are separated by their gender and the ensuing ramifications of nineteenth century mentalities connected to the roles and opportunities of men and women.

The plot revolves mostly around Rena, a beautiful quadroon, who leaves her home and her mother, enticed by her brother, John, who settled in the adjoining state, South Carolina, passing for white and entering an important land-owning family. Hoping to start a new life, free from the constraints of their race, Rena falls in love with a white young man. The hopes of happiness and freedom are shattered as her identity is accidentally discovered by George Tryon, her suitor. The situation is complicated by the unwanted attention of a mulatto, Jeff Wain, who pretends to be rich and single only to draw Rena in an unlawful relationship. Running away from both of them, Rena loses her way and her health in a ravaging storm, and dies soon after being found by a third lover, Frank Fowler, son of a former slave, the only one who was loyal and loving, but whose dark skin and slave past prevented him from hoping that his love could be shared. The three man in Rena's life: the white, rich heir, the mulatto, and the black worker are, in fact, the possibilities offered to her: passing for white, leading a middle-class existence in an ever smaller group of light-skinned, yet discriminated individuals or accepting the black, low class existence offered by the newly-emancipated slaves.

Chesnutt uses the conventions of sentimental fiction, "evocative of 'heavy' emotions, tough confrontations between the recognizable forces of good and evil, innocence beleaguered by perfidious villainy, disastrous turns of the plot, the power of coincidence, and tears at the end" (Sollors 243). Though apparently recognizable, these conventions are used by Chesnutt to a

different purpose as his characters are more nuanced than the traditional two-dimensionality of the sentimental novel. Caught at the crossroads of their own individuality, desires and aspirations, humanity and the conditioning of a particular environment, the characters are more than embodiments of good and evil and represent an almost naturalistic confrontation between humanity and milieu, between the desire of exceptional individuals to fight against injustice and the exceptional power of the environment to stifle them. According to Simmons, "the characters' agency is, as the novel portrays it, exceedingly limited: the best one can hope to do is to capture a glimpse of the forces by which he or she is constrained, but even that insight is likely to carry a heavy cost" (66). In this way, the characters' actions and reactions should not be read as simply good and evil, but with a special attention to the particular environment that produced them. Coincidence and fate, which function as external forces that control the actions of the characters, have the role of shifting the focus from internal weakness, or villainy to external agency (Delmar 98). It does not mean, however, that human beings are not flawed, but they are mostly controlled by stronger forces that work against them. In this way, Chesnutt is able to stress the utterly negative effects of racism and bigotry that distort people's souls.

The protagonists of the novel, Rena and John, seem to be prototypes of sentimental fiction, but, at a closer look, they offer a nuanced view of race and passing. Apparently, John may be seen as a tragic mulatto, "possessing an inner flaw in his overwhelming ambition to pass" (Watson 60), while Rena's defect is her weakness and her attachment to her family, which lead to the terrible chain of coincidences resulting in the discovery of her origin. Seeing them, though, only in terms of the traditional mulatto/a figure of sentimental melodrama is a narrowing vision, and, in Chesnutt's view, Rena and John, born out of the illegitimate union between a quadroon and a white man, legally black because of their mother's African descent, but visibly white, become the protagonists of a racist drama. John chooses passing by rejecting his ancestry, moving to another state, becoming a lawyer and marrying into a white family. In many ways, John, though racially marked, can be seen as a typical representative of American individualism connected to "notions of autonomy, self-determination, and free choice" (Pfeiffer 4). Always looking towards the future, he urges his sister to forget the past and embrace the white identity he offered her through education and social position: "George Tryon loves you for yourself alone; it is not your ancestors that he seeks to marry" (Chesnutt, *The House* 32). Having a white father, he claims his right to enjoy all the opportunities America offers to this race and embraces the "American dream of perpetual renewal and reinvention" becoming a "figure of the frontier ideology, for the endless

possibilities of rootlessness" (Ryan 39). At end of the novel, he takes his son and leaves the South opting for a new identity and a new life as a white, free citizen.

Rena does not manage to sustain the white identity for too long. Constantly drawn to her childhood home and to the aging, ill mother, Rena finds it almost impossible to break with her past and ignore her family's background. Rena's failure to imitate her brother's model is explained by Melissa Ryan on account of gender difference: "John becomes a white man, but Rena becomes something quite different: a white woman. In attempting to transcend race, Rena encounters gender" (40). While John creates this new, white identity for himself, through his own efforts, Rena can do so only with the help of men: her brother and, even better, a white husband. She may be successful in passing only if, as an object of desire, she draws the attention of a white man. Time and again, Rena's body is "seen" by John, Tryon, Wain, and Frank. She is rejected by Tryon when she appear not to be white enough and coveted by Wain for being whiter than he expected a mixed-race girl to be. Posing as a southern belle in a tournament when she draws the attention of young Tryon, she turns into a desirable quadroon when her identity is discovered: "her now public identity as an attractive, light-skinned African American woman leaves her vulnerable to the advances of both black and white men" (Rudolph 31), just as her mother had been. In any situation, black or white, wife or mistress, she depends on the men who choose her. Kirsten Rudolph insists on the importance of gender, suggesting that:

> African American men who were light enough to pass had an advantage in that their assumed white masculinity referenced a firmer, more secure social capital than that of passing women. The light-skinned John may fare better in the postbellum racist South because his masculinity enables him to more easily bypass a racial past that is predominantly transacted over the African American woman's body, her symbolically exaggerated sexuality and her reproductive role in birthing babies that may or may not look black. (33)

The gendered difference between the siblings is highlighted by the fact that John: rational, cold, aloof opposes a more sentimental and superstition Rena, gnawed by doubt, care for the mother she left behind, bad dreams and premonitions. This distinction between reason and feelings appears to be stereotypical, forcing the woman into an inferior position. However, out of the two, Rena is more complex as a character. While John simply chooses the path of passing, Rena oscillated between the two identities that are part of her, but which do not allow her to fully embrace any of the two worlds: the white, or the black. Born in the house behind the cedars, lost in the storm and then

dying in the same house, Rena reenacts the drama of many other women of her time, white or black, confined in their homes, limited in their choices, eliminated from the public sphere and from the opportunities offered to men, victimized, desired, seen, chosen by others, but lacking the freedom to choose for themselves. She is allowed to leave the narrow spaces of her existence only after she dies, her spirit free of the racial and gender conditioning that ultimately led to her death: "Mary B. threw open a window to make way for the passing spirit, and the red and golden glory of the setting sun, triumphantly ending his daily course, flooded the narrow room with light" (Chesnutt, *The House* 114).

The same nuanced approach is visible in the delineation of the other characters. Though close to the requirements of the sentimental novel, Tryon, Wain and Frank, the men whose actions are decisive for Rena's final fate, cannot be dismissed easily, as either heroic or villainous. Tryon and Wain, for instance, could be more easily associated with the villain prototype, as their actions cause Rena's death. However, seen within the context that created them and conditioned their way of thinking and behaving, they appear more complicated.

Tryon is ultimately a good man. Genuinely in love with Rena, he first rejects her when he finds out that she is not white, but them returns to her, ready to accept her black ancestry in the name of love, only to discover that this change came too late. In reality, just like Rena, Tryon is caught between his love for Rena and his family obligations that push him towards Blanche, a woman his mother approves of, in other words, following his heart or abiding by an age-old Southern code of obligations, duty and white supremacy. Even before knowing that Rena is black, he creates, in his mind, a clear distinction between white and black women, thinking he could never fall in love with the latter: "He could not possibly have been interested in a colored girl, under any circumstances, and he was engaged to be married to the most beautiful white woman on earth. To mention a negro woman in the same room where he was thinking of Rena seemed little short of profanation" (Chesnutt, *The House* 47). He is conditioned in his reactions by his upbringing as a Southern gentleman, which makes him agree with Dr. Green who becomes the spokesman of white supremacy in the novel:

> "The negro is an inferior creature; God has marked him with the badge of servitude, and has adjusted his intellect to a servile condition. We will not long submit to his domination. I give you a toast, sir: The Anglo-Saxon race: may it remain forever, as now, the head and front of creation, never yielding its rights, and ready always to die, if need be, in defense of its liberties!"

> "With all my heart, sir," replied Tryon, who felt in this company a thrill of that pleasure which accompanies conscious superiority, - "with all my heart, sir, if the ladies will permit me." (Chesnutt, *The House* 54)

Dr. Green and George Tryon become united in their upholding of the values of the Old South that seem to survive into the age of the Reconstruction and they cherish the idea of keeping the black population in an inferior position as they resist the changes brought about by the Civil War and the Emancipation. However, Chesnutt's attitude towards them is nuanced as "they are not the 'villains' of the novel. They have not authored bigotry in the South; they are merely subscribers to it, and, in the case of Tryon, at times tragically ambivalent toward its code." (Andrews 284).

Tryon's first reaction upon discovering that Rena was not white ranges from astonishment and horror, to rage and disgust. Such feelings are the result of his education as a white Southerner who feels betrayed:

> A negro girl had been foisted upon him for a white woman, and he had almost committed the unpardonable sin against his race of marrying her. Such a step, he felt, would have been criminal at any time; it would have been the most odious treachery at this epoch, when his people had been subjugated and humiliated by the Northern invaders, who had preached negro equality and abolished the wholesome laws decreeing the separation of the races. But no Southerner who loved his poor, downtrodden country, or his race, the proud Anglo-Saxon race which traced the clear stream of its blood to the cavaliers of England, could tolerate the idea that even in distant generations that unsullied current could be polluted by the blood of slaves. The very thought was an insult to the white people of the South. (Chesnutt, *The House* 57)

He sees passing as an unpardonable sin, a crime and his thoughts seem to recall all the elements present in the lost cause ideology: the humiliation of the South by the North, the pride of the Southern cavalier, the need to preserve white supremacy and racial purity as part of the duty of every Southerner. These words seem artificial and pompous because they are not his genuine feelings, but a sort of rehearsed reaction coming from his belonging to a specific social and racial background. A more honest reaction is his despair, longing for Rena, regret and love, as he declares that: "Custom was tyranny. Love was the only law" (Chesnutt, *The House* 114). His words mirror Judge Straight's bitter comment at the beginning of the novel, that custom is stronger than law in the South. Unfortunately, the tragic the denouement of the novel supports the judge's experience and not Tryon's belated awakening to the truth of humanity and emotion out of the fake world of customs and prejudice.

Uneducated, not white enough to pass, lying about his real family and financial situation, violent and shrewd, Wain embodies all the stereotypical traits associated with the black character in fiction. The fact that his skin is lighter makes him acceptable to Rena's mother who dreams of a caste of lighter-skinned people, separate from the former slaves with dark skins and evidently superior to them. Wain is never truly in love with Rena, like Tryon, but merely drawn to her whiteness, which, to him, becomes a symbol of superiority and a possibility of advancing into a higher caste: "Wain stared a moment in genuine astonishment, and then bent himself nearly double, keeping his eyes fixed meanwhile upon Rena's face. He had expected to see a pretty yellow girl, but had been prepared for no such radiant vision of beauty as this which now confronted him" (Chesnutt, *The House* 79). Though he appears as the villain in the novel, Chesnutt does not allow Wain to control the action in any way as he suggests a different reading of Wain's behavior, one conditioned by "feelings of self-hatred...formed by the institution of slavery and racism" (Watson 56). Matthew Wilson, on the other hand, considers Wain a failure, "a figure out of a plethora of Southern fictions of this period" (97), the black rapist, the sexual predator who pursues Rena because he perceives her as white. Wilson concludes that: "In the end, the figure of Wain goes a long way toward canceling the force of the rest of the novel – both John and Tryon are atypical in their life choices, in their willingness to undermine current racial orthodoxy; Wain simply confirms that orthodoxy" (97). On the other hand, though, by introducing this "evil" mulatto, an apparently realistic image to the nineteenth century readers, alongside the "good", educated, intelligent one, John, an almost idealized figure, Chesnutt also plays with literary stereotypes arguing that, to the white audiences, the mulatto is only a constructed literary character, never fully understood, inexistent in reality. Disappearing from the novel without punishment, Wain remains a cardboard figure, a fake vision of race in the white minds of nineteenth century readers of plantation romances.

A more complex figure and a possible choice for Rena is Frank Fowler. Born into a slave family, Frank is honest, hardworking, loyal and truly in love with Rena. For many of the novel's readers at the time of its publication, the choice of Frank would have been more valid than a union with Tryon, as Rena would remain faithful to her own race. The last reference to her, at the end of the novel, is: "a young cullud 'oman" who just died (Chesnutt, *The House* 114), suggesting that this is her real (social) image. On the other hand, though, Chesnutt does not allow this interracial relationship to be fulfilled, though Frank definitely was her most devoted lover. The color of the skin, the writer seems to suggest, is just a biological "fact" that does not define Rena as a person and so, there is no reason why she should choose the black race over the white.

Just as in the case of Jeff Wain, critics found fault in the creation of Frank. Trudier Harris considers that Frank is close to the plantation romance stereotype of the "happy darky" in his loyalty, benevolence and docility: "it is just this loyalty, this goodness, this faithfulness, which, while viewed in a positive light for certain actions of the novel, condemns and eliminates Frank from Chesnutt's criteria for equality. The quest for equality suggests an awareness of and pride in self that Frank simply does not have" (222). Thus, Harris accuses Chesnutt of racism, arguing that he "has not been able to lift himself far enough above his own prejudices to convincingly make the case that all blacks are to be included in the grand adventure" (228). Similarly, Sally Ann Ferguson suggests that the platonic relationship between Rena and Frank supports Chesnutt's theory of race "which opposes black intraracial breeding and promotes miscegenation as the answer to America's racial problem" since only the light-skinned children can be physically and culturally assimilable (47).

On the other hand, though, we should not read either Frank, or Wain as failures. It is much too evident that, up to a certain extent, all the choices given to Rena: Tryon, Wain and Frank, and even her brother, are stereotypical and common to passing novels. It does not necessarily mean that it is a fault. This particular choice was carefully conceived, since Chesnutt consciously used the conventions of the sentimental melodrama and of the novel of passing in order to prove a point, namely, to highlight racial injustices. He does not offer solutions because the America of his time does not have legal or moral solutions to the racial problem. Separated by race, law and custom, all of these characters, white, black or mixed-race, suffer the consequences of centuries of racism, discrimination and intolerance. An assertion of humanity, virtue, moral choices is laudable, but inefficient in a segregated America where individuals are required to choose a racial identity, either white, or black, as the only measure of their worth in the world. In fact, Chesnutt constructs race through various markers: color of the skin, speech, behavior, laws, medical documents (like the ones found in Dr. Green office), but all these elements are external, shifting, adjustable and changing: "Chesnutt's protagonists' black identities are not a set of inherent tendencies that need to be viewed scientifically and accommodated for in the race progress" (Boeckmann 160). As external markers, they can be manipulated, changed, just as one can change the name, the relationships, the place where he lives. Identity becomes a fictional construct, and Chesnutt ironically appeals to Sir Walter Scott, whose historical romances form the basis of the Southern aristocratic ideology, when he presents Rena, crowned "Queen of Love and Beauty", in a tournament reenactment where she chooses to embody Rowena, Scott's heroine. Thus, in a specific context, Rena can be the epitome of white beauty, the exquisite

Southern belle, while, in another, she is just a colored girl. The reality, though, is much more frightful, symbolized by the swamp and the storm where she loses her life, running away from both Tryon and Wain – a dangerous, liminal, blurry space of loss, shadows, fear and lack of identity. She dies in her childhood home behind the cedars, hidden from view, an illegitimate child coming out of an interracial union and unable to find a viable place in America of her time.

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"THE OUTLOOK THAT WOULD BE RIGHT."
WALLACE STEVENS'S CINEMATIC VISION

OCTAVIAN MORE[1]

ABSTRACT. *"The Outlook That Would Be Right." Wallace Stevens's Cinematic Vision.* Drawing on the premise that a fundamental characteristic of modernist art is the convergence of various expressive and technical modes, this paper provides an examination of a selection of texts by Wallace Stevens in which the poetic vision and method intersect with the principles of cinematic montage, with a view to demonstrating the persistence throughout his oeuvre of a particular form of "sight", employed for tackling a series of epistemological and aesthetic issues.

Keywords: Wallace Stevens, cinema, montage, painting, perception, modernism.

REZUMAT. *"Perspectiva care ar fi potrivită." Vederea cinematică a lui Wallace Stevens.* Pornind de la premisa că o trăsătură fundamentală a artei moderniste constă în convergenţa unor variate moduri expresive şi tehnice, în lucrarea de faţă ne propunem să examinăm un segment de texte din opera lui Wallace Stevens în care viziunea şi metoda poetică se intersectează cu principiile montajului cinematografic, cu scopul de a demonstra prezenţa constantă în opera acestuia a unei forme specifice de "vedere", utilizate în abordarea unei suite de probleme de natură epistemologică şi estetică.

Cuvinte cheie: Wallace Stevens, cinema, montaj, pictură, percepţie, modernism.

1. Introduction: the master-man, anti-floribund ascetic

Among the major names of literary modernism, Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) occupies a somewhat odd position. A non-degree special student at Harvard (later, a New York Law School graduate), Stevens chose to spend most of his professional life as an insurance man at the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. One might expect few resounding contributions

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twentieth-century Anglo-American poetry from such a reclusive figure, who would compose much of his verse either during the long, solitary walks to his office (Sperry 35) or in the comforting quiet of his study, seeking inspiration in "the pleasure of exclusion, the delight of withdrawing into the private world of the self." (Sperry 26) Stevens's creative process was meticulous and painstaking, and the result, commensurate with the effort. From half-formed thoughts collected in the midst of routine activities or disparate fragments dictated to his secretary, there emerged a verse which would appear almost impenetrable to many casual readers of modern poetry.

In 1923, the year he published his first volume, *Harmonium*, Stevens was nearing middle-age. The modernist poetic norm had already witnessed significant transformations through Imagism and Vorticism and was taking up a different course. T. S. Eliot had just published his signature text, *The Waste Land,* while a year earlier Ezra Pound had warned the world that "[t]he intimate essence of the universe is *not* of the same nature as our own consciousness." (125) Audiences found it hard to accept that a grown-up artist like Stevens would give them such seemingly antiquated lines as "The soul, O ganders, flies beyond the parks / And far beyond the discords of the wind" (*CP* 4)[2], "Timeless mother, / How is it that your aspic nipples / For once vent honey?" (*CP* 5), only to bemuse them elsewhere in the same volume with philosophical paradoxes like "[...] the listener, who listens in the snow, / And, nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (*CP* 10) or rhetorical formulae of the type "Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil, / The sovereign ghost. As such, the Socrates / Of snails, musician of pears, principium / And lex." (*CP* 27)

For most of Stevens's poetic career, the linguistic, aesthetic and ideatic blueprint employed for composing *Harmonium* will undergo few significant modifications. The later volumes will include pieces indicative of a vision, sensibility and artistic vocabulary delimited by several antithetical poles and drives: romantic exuberance undermined by modernist angst, faith in the capacity of imagination to bring order into a world of fragments despite the possibility that "in the sum of the parts, there are only the parts" (*CP* 204), and the belief that poetry can serve as a "supreme fiction" (*CP* 59) complemented by a sharp awareness that metaphor can also be "degeneration" (*CP* 444). In fact, it is precisely this polarisation that testifies to Stevens's affinity with the modernist lot. Unlike Eliot or Pound, who offered their readers numerous insights into their aesthetic principles, ideals and conception of art via a series of manifestos or essays, Stevens expressed his views on such matters obliquely, that is, through (and, frequently, between) the lines of his verse. For

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2 The following abbreviations will be used hereafter when quoting passages from Stevens's works: *CP = The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, L = Letters of Wallace Stevens, NA = The Necessary Angel. Essays on Reality and the Imagination.*

example, in one of his later pieces, "Landscape with Boat," he mocks the inflexible stance of the staunch rationalist, the obsolete "anti-master, floribund ascetic" looking for "imperceptible air," for an eye that could see beyond the surface, which nonetheless would "not be touched by blue" (*CP* 241). The problem with this position, Stevens informs us, is that it fails to acknowledge the profoundly dialectical nature of the modern experience and existence:

> He never supposed
> That he might be truth, himself, or part of it,
> That the things that he rejected might be part
> And the irregular turquoise, part, the perceptible blue
> Grown denser, part, the eye so touched, so played
> Upon by clouds, the ear so magnified
> By thunder, parts, and all these things together,
> Parts, and more things, parts. (*CP* 242)

Indeed, the universe may not be *of the same nature* as our consciousness, as Pound claimed, but, Stevens suggests, our consciousness, our position within this physical world and the subjective vantage point relative to the other occupants of the same space (be they people, objects or even ideas) are not merely parts of a complete edifice. Rather, they are a reflection of it—an extension of the knowable, asking to be known. In other words, as he declares at some point in *Harmonium,* "If they tried rhomboids, / Cones, waving lines, ellipses— / As, for example, the ellipse of the half moon— / Rationalists would wear sombreros." (*CP* 75) Stevens's ideal viewer, it appears, is in fact the exact opposite of the perceiving subject in "Landscape with a Boat." We may call him, to pun, the "anti-floribund master man"—one capable of admitting, in a manner akin the confession of the poetic alter-ego of "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," that "the world in which I walked, and what I saw / Or heard or felt came not but from myself" (*CP* 65).

In addition to revealing Stevens's creed that the subjective and objective realms are interdependent (a thought that will underpin a large portion of his artistic explorations), such lines are also indicative of a central characteristic of a significant segment of his poetry that focuses on the question of perception, its *modus operandi*, and its epistemological implications and limits. If "[t]he eye's plain version is a thing apart, / The vulgate of experience," as stated in the opening lines of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (*CP* 465), it must be possible (provided that one finds the right perspective) to engage in an immersive experience conducive to a clearer, more intimate knowledge of the world. In this scheme, the poet's duty is to find the proper angle and use the most appropriate approach, so as to enable his readers to share his revelations in their turn. "[T]he outlook that would be right," says Stevens in "The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain," may eventually lead to a holistic experience in whose wake the subject will be integrated, as through a natural homecoming, into the flux of the universe:

It reminded him how he had needed
A place to go to in his own direction,

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,

For the outlook that would be right,
Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:

The exact rock where his inexactnesses
Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had edged,

Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
Recognize his unique and solitary home. (*CP* 512)

Starting from these preliminary observations, in this paper I will look at a number of select texts pertaining to the aforementioned segment of Stevens's poetry of perception, more exactly, a series of pieces in which "sight" is equipped with a revelatory function. My goal is not to highlight the peculiarities of the poet's treatment of the subject relative to other writers or to provide a comprehensive discussion of the whole corpus of Stevensian poetry. As important as such tasks might be, the nature and limitations of an academic paper would render them impractical here. Rather, in an attempt to produce further examples that could testify to the dialectical nature of the modern experience (and, implicitly, of modernist poetry), I will focus on a possible connection between Stevens's verse and a major technique employed by another quintessentially modern art, cinema. In particular, through the close reading of the chosen texts I will try to pinpoint certain intersections between Stevens's "visual mode" and the early-twentieth century filmic *montage*.

Since the expected audience of my discussion is, in principle, the literary scholar, I have considered it necessary to preface the interpretive section of my study by a more theoretical one, intent on providing a succinct presentation of the principal stages of development of a genuinely modern form of sight and of some of the key-issues involved in such comparatist studies.

2. Poetry, painting, film: a modern(ist) affair

In a letter sent to Ronald Lane Latimer, the editor of his forthcoming fourth volume, *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), Stevens provides us with one of the rare statements that encompass the essence of his entire artistic effort. The texts prepared for publication, the poet confesses, "deal with the relation or balance between imagined things and real things which, as you know, is a constant source of trouble to me." (*L* 358) We may regard these

words merely as a reformulation in more accessible terms of the main ideas expressed throughout much of his verse (such as in the excerpts quoted in the introductory section of this paper). What is important to note, however, is the emphasis laid on "relation" and "balance". Stevens's perspective, once again, is ascribable to the fundamental dialectical worldview of modernism (the effort to reconcile opposites, relativism, indetermination, etc.). The poet's relational vantage point is in fact further clarified in his next explanatory note:

> Actually, they are not abstractions, even though what I have just said about them suggests that. Perhaps it would be better to say that what they really deal with is the painter's problem of realization: I have been trying to see the world about me *both as I see it and as it is*. This means seeing the world as an imaginative man sees it.
>
> (*L* 358, emphasis added)

Stevens's manner of seeing, we are to understand, transcends both the traditional poetic formula of description and the direct treatment of the object proposed by the Imagists. Through this, he emerges as a prime exponent of the visual revolution responsible for the birth of many of the emblematic modernist texts (for example, the fragmented scenes and sights of Eliot's verse or Pound's ideogrammatic poems). In what follows, I will provide an overview of the prominent factors that contributed to the emergence of this distinctively modern mode of perception.

The earliest signs of a change of visual paradigm can be found in impressionist painting and its anti-realist stance. Among the implications of the impressionists' preference for light and colour over form and proportion was a type of double transgression. On one hand, the solid physicality of objects was shattered through the elements of the picture-plane, which no longer remained discrete but, rather, tended to encroach upon each other; on the other, colour and tone became "things" in their own right, occupying their own autonomous realms. Consequent on these, the emphasis shifted from the thing perceived to perception itself and the role of the percipient in constructing meanings. The changes affecting visual arts continued through post-impressionism. Clement Greenberg draws our attention in this sense to another evolutionary moment, resulting in the appearance of a new type of dynamic vision. Since, Greenberg argues, "sculptural illusion" is no longer possible due to the "heightened sensibility of the picture plane", the modernist artist creates an "optical illusion [...] into which one can look, can travel though, only with the eye." (107) As Rosalind Krauss further explains, another effect of such changes was the inseparability of sight and motion, the "paring away" of vision into a state of pure present similar to the perception of a baseball hitter at the very instant he is hitting the ball (284).

The other two forces contributing to the modernist visual revolution—photography and cinema—can be seen as different evolutionary phases of the same novel technology that came to challenge the prevailing pictorial mode of representation. The impact of photography was noticeable not so much at a technical level, as in a psychological and epistemological sense. In itself a "double-thing", a composite of representation and re-presentation (an image of the object carrying the memory of it), the photographic picture was the next natural step in the process of reification of vision. As a reminder of things past, the photograph added a temporal dimension to the perceptive act, forcing the percipient to confront not only the transitory nature of things but also his own transience.[3] At the same time, being the end-product of a technical process intrinsically connected with the production modes of a machine (the camera), it also had the complementary effect of relegating the subject to a secondary position. The photograph led to the "commodification of representation" and this "new order of commodification […] replaced subjects and objects with agentless things" (Schleifer and West 57). Thirdly, through its ability to reproduce a static scene (even as an illusion), it also begot a kind of precision-optics eye that could observe and examine in depth details that would be otherwise invisible or ignored. Thus, "a public inundated with the sheer physicality of things" found it possible "to re-view the world, to look more deeply into a reality that still remained part and parcel of the material 'outside'" (Schleifer and West 49-50). In modernist poetry, this is noticeable in the poets' increased attention to particulars, even to the extent of contravening the readers' intentions. The modernist poets "not only supplement but transform perception and conception," thus "reconfiguring" the subjects and objects of experience (Schleifer and West 51).

While reliant in part on the technique behind photography, cinematography left its own distinctive mark upon the development of the "modernist eye". As David Trotter explains in an article that examines the connections between Eliot's poetry and early cinema (2006), the motion picture, with its unique aesthetic, production mechanisms, technical approaches and transmission channel, represented an alternative to the human eye. Its far reaching implications were both epistemological and ontological. Thus, since film can see in a way that is inaccessible to the subject, it "became a meta-technology: a medium whose constant subject-matter was the limits of the human." (Trotter 239) Modernist poets, Trotter argues, were mainly interested in cinema's potential to render "an image of the world formed

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[3] Further insight into the double valence of the photograph is provided by Skibsrud (2012). The author draws attention to its simultaneous reality and unreality, as an object that occupies a "'space' beyond a play of representation— defined, that is, not by what is present but by what is not" (75). We can argue in this sense that the photograph, while being essentially an *optical* illusion (functioning, as such, in a manner that is analogous to the post-impressionist pictorial plane), complicates the viewer's perception of the object by creating an additional *temporal* illusion.

automatically" (239). Cinematic techniques such as montage, close-cutting or panning quickly found an equivalent in the works of both novelists and poets intent on examining the implications of the mechanisation of the modern subject. However, based only on these points, it would be wrong to presume that cinema's contribution to the twentieth-century visual revolution (and its subsequent poetic expressions) is to be found solely in the further reification of sight and the seeing subject. As a more sophisticated medium, it enabled the artists of the age to explore new horizons, beyond the reach of painting or photography. Due to its ability to compress or stretch time at will, to create composite images through superimposition of individual frames and manipulate transitions between unrelated scenes, film is a multilayered medium that engages the subject's sense of space and time (later, with the addition of recorded sound, it also became a multimodal medium). Therefore, its primary task, according to Jean Debrix, is "to wean us from routine seeing and make an esthetic organ of the eye also." (101) Early cinema made this possible by supplying poetry with "a new gamut of sensations" (Debrix 101).

The implications of film for twentieth-century are, in fact, far more complex. Besides becoming the most serious challenger of the old visual modes, its early engagement in an ongoing dialogue with the other arts both broadened the modernist dialectic and created a fertile ground for academic discussions. With a view to motivating my own approach to Stevens's cinematic vision, I will present in the remainder of this section some of the main directions and methodological implications of this dialogue.

As Ágnes Pethő points out (2008), the interest for examining the relations between cinema and other artistic modes dates back to the earliest public screenings of films and their first attempts "to present narratives and produce emotions by a combination of images, music and words." (1) The foundation of such preoccupations has to be sought in the distinctive character of cinema as "the ultimate mixed medium that combines all kinds of media in its texture of signification, as a filmic image can never be conceived as only one image, or even as image for that matter." (1) Consequent upon this state of affairs, the author explains, "the semantics of the cinematic image can never be defined in itself" (2), requiring instead a broader perspective which takes into account the plethora of relations on which such a complex image depends (for example, between the images that are part of the same cinematic production, between the image and the viewer's experiential world, between different films and, above all, between the distinct media incorporated within the same cinematic discursive space—visual, verbal, musical, etc.) (2).

Alqadi (2015) identifies one of the principal preoccupations of such comparatist studies (which, we may argue, is also one of its shortcomings): the study of the literary influences in cinema, such as the assessment of the "degree to which a movie is faithful to a text or a novel." (42) While this manner of tackling

the subject of intermedial relations has had a long history (despite being limited in insights due to its historiographic-monographic character), scholars from various fields and backgrounds have also explored other investigative paths, with varying degrees of appeal and success. Thus, as Trotter has aptly pointed out, the studies of cinema's effect on poetry have followed, by and large, two directions. Most of the research on the subject has relied on arguments based on analogy: "[t]he literary text, we are told, is structured like a film, in whole or in part: it has its 'close-ups,' its 'tracks' and 'pans', its 'cuts' from one 'shot' to another." (238) Trotter also notes that in the case of the discussions of modernism's relations with cinema the dominant "transferrable narrative technique" has revolved around the significance of "montage" (238). An example is represented by Richardson's book (1969), which addresses such seminal issues as the literary roots of cinema, technique in literature and cinema or "the question of order and coherence in poetry and film," to which the author dedicates an entire chapter (91-103). Richardson's merit consists in having highlighted some of the intersections between early twentieth-century cinema and the technical or aesthetic concerns of a number of modernist voices (Vachel Lindsay, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Wallace Stevens and T. S. Eliot), with insistence mainly on the Imagist core of their works. Other studies reliant on the argument by analogy have concentrated on the shared "logic" of cinema and poetry. For instance, addressing the question of structure in film and poetry, Maya Deren (1970) notes that it is possible to speak of a type of "verticality" common to both. Like film, says Deren, poetry "is a 'vertical' investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth" (174). Dreams, montage and poetry "are related because they are held together by either an emotion or a meaning that they have in common, rather than by the logical action." (178) A somewhat similar understanding lies at the basis of Pier Paolo Pasolini's essay, "The Cinema of Poetry", which argues in favour of connecting the two on the grounds of their technico-stylistic commonalities, indebted to the same neo-formalist background (Pasolini 558). More recently, we find the argument by analogy in a book by Susan McCabe dedicated to modernist poetry and film (2005). Using a critical apparatus informed by gender-studies, the author offers insights into the poetry of Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, H.D. and Marianne Moore by examining such topics as male hysteria, fragmented bodies, existence on the borderline, fetishism or bisexuality. In its turn, McCabe's method is rooted in the conviction that many of their works, at a structural level, follow the logic of film, having been influenced by its vocabulary and technical peculiarities (such as montage and camera work).

Predictably, given its longer history, the analogy-based approach has yielded the most substantial corpus of comparatist and intermedial research.

However, its findings have been complemented by other possible investigative methods. One of them is what Trotter calls the "model of parallelism" or "parallel histories," an intersection of historiography, cultural, and literary studies. Trotter's own study of T.S. Eliot's connections with cinema pursues this model, with a view to highlighting Eliot's poetic development before the publication of *The Waste Land*, in a period that saw "the emergence [...] of a fully narrative cinema" (242). To this end, the author provides a close examination of Eliot's notes on cinema included in his poetic an non-poetic works (essays, letters) (242-261).

More recently, the interdisciplinary efforts have been enriched through perspectives centred on previously unexplored topics (thus reaching beyond the scope and investigative range of research originating from the more traditional spheres of literary and cultural studies). Such is the case of Coëgnarts study of "cinema and the embodied mind" (2017), which combines the methods and insights of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Embodied Simulation Theory, with a view to "reconciling the conceptual nature of metaphor with the non-conceptual nature of cinema," along an argument intended to demonstrate that a "first order world" can be structured through typical cinematic devices (camera movement, editing) in a manner that allows for "a process of metaphorical mapping in which the inferential logic of image schemas is appropriated to express conceptual knowledge." (12)

The method of textual analysis I propose in the following section of this paper is closer to the argument based on analogy. The reason for this choice is dictated by the lack of information (unlike in Eliot's case) regarding Stevens's technical interest in cinema. More exactly, neither his letters, nor his theoretical essays in *The Necessary Angel* provide us with any direct evidence that might entitle us to state with certainty that he conceived at least some of his poems by employing in a conscious manner the techniques or methods of early twentieth-century film-making.[4] Nevertheless, since his creative period coincides with the decades that saw the rise of modern cinema, it is possible to look at least for signs of "kinship" between his vision and the perceptual revolution occasioned by the camera and film montage. Indeed, as Schwartz points out in reference to Stevens's favourite stylistic device, the metaphor,

> [w]hen Stevens formed his poetic and aesthetic principles, silent cinema — as well as modern painting and sculpture—were demanding intense attention. Stevens's rapidly changing metaphors not only have a kinship with cinema, but mime the condition of modern perception in which man has far more impressions to deal with than his predecessors. (15)

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[4] In fact, a thorough search by keyword of his published letters and the texts included in *The Collected Poems* and *The Necessary Angel* gives no results for "film", "movie" or "cinema" (or any of their derivatives).

According to Schwartz, the rapid succession of metaphors that characterises many of Stevens's poems (the "metaferocity" of his texts, to use the author's term) is indebted in part to the early technique of filmic composition developed by Eadweard Muybridge—the illusion of motion created by the combination of individual photographic shots of successive moments of a moving object. Schwartz even goes so far as to claim that Stevens's quintessential piece "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" depends on a "process of successive exposure", although, he admits, it can also be interpreted as a "non-linear collage" (Schwartz 15).

The argument by analogy appears to have stronger justification if we return to the question of the dialogue of arts in modernism. Stevens himself recognised the need to adopt a relational standpoint in his commentaries on the connections between poetry and painting, as illustrated in these lines:

> It seems to me that *the subject of modern relations is best to be approached as a whole*. The paramount relation between poetry and painting today, between modern man and modern art is simply this: that in an age in which disbelief is so profoundly prevalent or, if not disbelief, indifference to questions of belief, poetry and painting, and the arts in general, are, in their measure, a compensation for what has been lost. (*NA* 170-171, emphasis added)

In other words, within a modern / modernist context, the relational perspective is not only a possibility, but also a requisite recuperatory effort in a world of shattering values. Elsewhere in the same essay Stevens goes further, acknowledging (as some of the aforementioned scholars have done) that the study of one artistic mode can produce valuable insights for others— "that it would be possible to study poetry by studying painting or that one could become a painter after one had become a poet" (*NA* 160).

With these points in mind, I will devote my attention in what follows to examining some major points of intersection between Stevens's poetry of perception and the visual methods of modern cinema. To this end, I will rely on the close reading of three illustrative texts from each period of the poet's oeuvre (early, middle, late), with additional references to various passages from other Stevensian texts.

3. Firecats and scrawny cries: Stevens's cinematic vision

A survey of Stevens's entire creative opus indicates that his preoccupation with the epistemological and aesthetic function of sight became materialised, principally, in two categories of poems: poems *of* perception and

poems *about* perception. Both of them are announced already in his first volume of poetry, through a number of texts in which he addresses the question of the nature and limits of cognition.

A common strategy in Stevens's early pieces is to place a physical object in a barren landscape and invest it with a magnetic potential. Whether it is a jar "round […] upon a hill" in Tennessee (*CP* 76) or a candle burning "in an immense valley" (*CP* 51), Stevens's object is not simply an inert thing offered up for passive contemplation. Rather, through the central position it occupies in an uncharacteristic context, it is a force that causes disturbances in the scene, violating its internal logic and organisation. Thus, despite being "gray and bare" and "[l]ike nothing else in Tennessee", the jar "took dominion everywhere" (*CP* 76), imposing its own materiality upon the surrounding objects. The solitary "valley candle" displays similar characteristics, being capable of outlasting its brief earthly existence through the impression left upon its neighbourhood:

> My candle burned alone in an immense valley.
> Beams of the huge night converged upon it,
> Until the wind blew.
>
> Then beams of the huge night
> Converged upon its image,
> Until the wind blew. (*CP* 51)

Not only do such objects contravene the percipient's aesthetic sense (through their un-naturalness and plainness), they provide no justification for their presence in these environments and offer no clues relative to their significance. "It did not give of bird or bush," says Stevens about the slovenly jar (*CP* 76). Clearly, these are not exercises in painterly composition, for no hidden meanings are left to transpire through the act. Like the subject of "Anecdote of Canna", "the mighty thought, the mighty man" (*CP* 55), we are informed merely of a possible continuity between the seen and the unseen. Yet, Stevens suggests, there may be no revelations unless we become all eyes and persist in this condition: "X promenades the dewy stones, / Observes the canna with a clinging eye, / Observes and then continues to observe." (*CP* 55) What matters more in these cases, it appears, is the gesture of displacement and re-emplacement, whereby the reader (and complicit observer) is made to acknowledge the work of the invisible director as well as his own role as participant in the scene.

It is precisely when Stevens's attention shifts from a more contemplative stance focused on a static object towards the examination of the mechanisms of visual perception that his strategy becomes more closely aligned with the operating and compositional modes of cinematography. The epistemological concern remains, since in most of these pieces Stevens continues to display an

interest in the co-dependence of percipient, perception and thing perceived. Exemplary in this sense is another early poem, "Tattoo", which may be read as a brief investigation of the effects of light upon a waking consciousness:

> The light is like a spider.
> It crawls over the water.
> It crawls over the edges of the snow.
> It crawls under your eyelids
> And spreads its webs there
> —Its two webs. (*CP* 81)

What distinguishes this poem from the examples mentioned above is Stevens's insistence on motion and its consequences. We are not dealing here with the photographer's lamp, employed as for highlighting diverse parts of an inert arrangement. On the contrary, this spider-like presence is now the vivid equivalent of the disruptive objects in the aforementioned pieces. Like them, it populates the scene, relegating everything else (things, natural phenomena, people) to a secondary plane. However, we have here but another anecdote, for, as the poem progresses, we discover its actual focus—the effect of subjective perception upon the thing perceived:

> The webs of your eyes
> Are fastened
> To the flesh and bones of you
> As to rafters or grass.
>
> There are filaments of your eyes
> On the surface of the water
> And in the edges of the snow. (*CP* 81)

In other words, Stevens admits that the revelatory potential of light is fundamentally reliant on the observer's standpoint and, once again, that perspective, depending on how it is manipulated, may lead to different forms of knowing the physical thing. It is no longer the poet, Stevens suggests, but us, who are directing the scene.

Stevens's more "dynamic" poems of perception are illustrative of further overlaps with cinematic elements and techniques. While in many of his longer works (especially those of his later period, such as "Esthétique du Mal", "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" or "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven") he displays a preference for the modernist collage, it is possible to find in each of his creative stages a number of texts whose composition and construction point in the direction of filmic montage. In fact, Stevens's awareness of the revelatory

potential of a well-placed part of a whole is demonstrated even by the thorough sequencing of his volumes. Thus, *Harmonium* begins with "Earthy Anecdote", while his last volume, *The Rock*, concludes with "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself". In both, sight occupies a central position, and a montage-like method is employed for revealing its relevance.

Sergei Eisenstein regarded montage as the "nerve" of cinema (48) and defined it as a technique whereby "fragments are combined in various ways." (3) While montage, Eisenstein explains, is retraceable in other arts too (3), only cinema can valorise its full potential, for "cinema is able, more than any other art, to disclose the process that goes on microscopically in all other arts" (5). My intention in the remainder of this interpretive section is therefore to highlight this "microscopic" or hidden foundation of the poems proposed for discussion—that is, how the careful sequencing of connected images can enable the reader to abstract a complex idea that would otherwise remain obscured.

Even upon a thorough examination, the above-mentioned "Earthy Anecdote" will strike most of the readers as a cryptic, almost incomprehensible piece. It has as much obvious meaning and logic as a nursery rhyme or a riddle: some bucks crossing Oklahoma are hindered in their progress by a leaping firecat, which forces them to change course repeatedly. Both parties persist in their efforts until, in the end, the firecat goes to sleep for no apparent reason:

> Every time the bucks went clattering
> Over Oklahoma
> A firecat bristled in the way.
>
> Wherever they went,
> They went clattering,
> Until they swerved
> In a swift, circular line
> To the right,
> Because of the firecat. (*CP* 3)

Stevens gives us no explanation regarding the protagonists of the scene. Where these creatures come from, what their destination might be or what makes them act the way they do are questions that remain, on the surface, unanswered (just as we are left to wonder about Stevens's motives for writing this piece and placing it strategically at the beginning of *Harmonium*). Indeed, as Sigler argues, the poem is "like a nursery rhyme without the rhyme, or better yet a cartoon, the primitive kind one would see on movie screens in 1923." (par. 2) Given this, in order to extract *some* meaning from it we must take a closer look at the patterning of images and words. The first thing we notice in this sense, as has been the case with "Tattoo", is the strong dynamic core of the poem. Not only is it about motion,

it also requires from the reader to shift his perspective continuously as the focus changes from the bucks to the firecat and back. Stevens creates a complex flowing picture by alternating contrasting, even antithetical elements: "bucks" (a nondescript mass) *vs.* "firecat" (an outstanding singular presence), "went clattering" (monotonous, droning movement) *vs.* "went leaping" (punctuated, momentary move), "circular line" (continuity, order) *vs.* "swerved" (disruption, fragmentation), "bristled" (frenzied action) *vs.* "closed his eyes and slept" (repose). This particular arrangement adds dramatic tension to a relatively common situation (a hunter playing with its prey prior to capturing and killing it). The sense of drama is enhanced through repetition and the subtle phonic layer of the verses—a composition reliant on fricatives and liquids punctuated by stops (Oklahoma, clattering, swerved, closed, bright, slept, etc.):

> The bucks clattered.
> The firecat went leaping,
> To the right, to the left,
> And
> Bristled in the way.
>
> Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes
> And slept. (*CP* 3)

As the lights go out, the mystery is not elucidated, and no singular meaning emerges. What matters, however, is the immersive experience the reader has been subjected to through an ongoing assault on the visual and auditory nerves. By heavily relying on contrast, "Earthy Anecdote" is analogous to montage, for, as Eisenstein noted, "montage is conflict" (77). In fact, we can retrace here almost all of the types of conflict illustrated by montage: "conflict of graphic dimensions" / "lines either static or dynamic" (leaping firecat *vs.* sleeping firecat), "conflict of volumes" (fragility of the predator *vs.* bulkiness of the herd), "conflict of depth" (the implied aerial view of the bucks over Oklahoma *vs.* the foregrounded closing image of the sleeping firecat), "pieces of darkness and pieces of lightness" ("closed" *vs.* "bright eyes") and "the conflict in the sound film between acoustics and optics" (aural fragmentation *vs.* continuously unfolding scene).[5] Based on these points, we may argue that this text is best approached as a parable (or extended metaphor) about order and chaos and the percipient's experience and revelation of them.

The same subject is tackled in the next poem I propose for discussion, "On the Road Home", included in the later volume *Parts of a World*. Yet another of Stevens's shorter pieces, it is conceptually similar to "Earthy Anecdote" in

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[5] For further discussion and examples of conflict in montage, see Eisenstein (77 ff.).

that is builds upon movement and contrast. However, it also differs from it by being a multilayered text, a characteristic indicated by the opening stanza:

> It was when I said,
> "There is no such thing as the truth,"
> That the grapes seemed fatter.
> The fox ran out of his hole. (*CP* 203)

We observe here the presence of two types of contrastive pairs. On one level, there are the human protagonists, engaged in a conversation about the nature of truth. Running parallel to it and creating a higher-level opposition, there is the natural order, governed, as it seems, by its own laws and indifferent to the two subjective presences. Our attention is thus dissipated between concomitant realities, a fact further complicated by the added temporal dimension in which the events unfold. Similar to a film camera, our eye is forced to pan between the various elements of the scene—from one speaker to another and, along with it, from the internal to the external realms:

> You ... You said,
> "There are many truths,
> But they are not parts of a truth."
> Then the tree, at night, began to change,
>
> Smoking through green and smoking blue.
> We were two figures in a wood.
> We said we stood alone. (*CP* 203)

This effort temporarily distracts the reader from the serious topic of the conversation and the argumentative strategy that leads to the gradual disclosure of the actual subject of the poem—the recognition of the relativity of perspectives and interpretations and the paradoxical nature of this revelation. If we accept that the "many truths" are not integral parts of a single truth and "words are not forms of a single word" (*CP* 203), it follows that all our statements about the world are devoid of value, including those that might support such observations. Within such a scheme, everything is true and untrue at once. The subtlety of Stevens's method becomes evident if we understand how easily he has sidetracked us from the important point, evidenced by the key line of the poem, "the world must be measured by eye":

> It was when I said,
> "Words are not forms of a single word.
> In the sum of the parts, there are only the parts.
> The world must be measured by eye"; (*CP* 203)

This, in fact, is the only statement that is not self-contradictory in this text. It may be tempting to assume that the gradual transformation of the natural elements (the grapes that "seemed" fatter at the beginning of the poem and later on the tree which "at night, began to change") is somehow determined by the argumentative turns and subsequent opinion shifts of the speakers. Yet, in the closing stanza, we are confronted solely with the physical world:

> It was at that time, that the silence was largest
> And longest, the night was roundest,
> The fragrance of the autumn warmest,
> Closest and strongest. (*CP* 203)

It is not the mind, Stevens reminds us, but the eye that co-creates the world, making it possible to attain the kind of harmony and perfection suggested by the superlatives occurring in these lines. Only a detached percipient (such as someone who was once witness to the developing scene and recorded it for repeated later viewings) can fully experience this "roundest", "warmest", "closest" and "strongest" whole. Here, the poet's approach is congruent with what Eisenstein called "overtonal montage", since the ultimate meaning of the poem is actuated by no single particular "dominant" (that is, a stimulus that determines all subsequent stimuli), but by a combination of all of them. The repetition of certain words ("truth", "you", "I"), the linear and gradated progression of the individual scenes, as well as the intertwining of sight and sound create a "compound perception", as exemplified through the synaesthetic condition presented in the closing stanza. As with overtonal montage, which acknowledges the irreducibility of the aural and visual perceptions to a common denominator, the emergent meaning must be "felt" before it can be understood (Eisenstein 71). We can see thus that by endowing his eye with the capacity to "measure" the world, Stevens eventually makes it possible for his percipient to experience reality in an integrative manner—investigating, evaluating and appraising it at once.

The last text I discuss here, "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself", is emblematic both for Stevens's philosophical concerns and his compositional technique. This time, the title leaves no doubt regarding the poet's intention—that of writing a definitive piece about perception, knowledge and the *ding-an-sich*. The dialectic of the internal and external realms remains, but, unlike in the previously examined text, Stevens no longer views them as incompatible elements:

> At the earliest ending of winter,
> In March, a scrawny cry from outside
> Seemed like a sound in his mind.

> He knew that he heard it,
> A bird's cry, at daylight or before,
> In the early March wind. (*CP* 534)

Right from the outset, Stevens proposes another integrative experience that reminds us of cinema's multimodal approach. As before, he relies on the suggestive power of sound to complement and enhance the visual space. By a repetition of fricatives ("earlie<u>s</u>t", "<u>s</u>crawny", out<u>s</u>ide", "<u>s</u>eemed", "<u>s</u>ound", "hi<u>s</u>"), the opening stanza compels us to "feel" the progressive intrusion of the objective sphere into the subject's private expanse, but after this initial moment our eye is made to rest on the inner world. It is almost as if the visual recedes to a secondary position once we are transported to the percipient's memory. From this point onward, we expect to see with the mind's eye and learn about the subject's mental state, but this presumption is soon invalidated, for Stevens's vantage point immediately shifts back to what lies outside the percipient:

> The sun was rising at six,
> No longer a battered panache above snow.
> It would have been outside.
>
> It was not from the vast ventriloquism
> Of sleep's faded papier-mâché ...
> The sun was coming from outside. (*CP* 534)

As the poem draws to a close, the subject itself becomes a mere imprint on the retina. There is, however, a growing sense of the presence of a third participant, the "commentator" who informs us of the significance of the scene. Our sight inhabits his eye and thus we are made part of the experience as we follow the movements of this detached, objective and all-knowing camera that captures, with documentary precision, past and present, objects in the foreground and objects in the background. Through this tactic, Stevens assures us that nothing important will escape our perception. In addition, by putting together the individual frames (the bird, the memory of the initial observer, the parts of the natural setting) and complementing the montage with his expository interventions, he guides us toward the intended meaning:

> That scrawny cry—it was
> A chorister whose c preceded the choir.
> It was part of the colossal sun,
>
> Surrounded by its choral rings,
> Still far away. It was like
> A new knowledge of reality. (*CP* 534)

Indeed, his *Collected Poems* are perfectly rounded up. As in "Earthy Anecdote", various types of conflict serve as montage material: "conflict of scales" ("*vast* ventriloquism" *vs.* "*collossal* sun"), "conflict of volumes" (bird *vs.* subject *vs.* sun, "scrawny cry" *vs.* "choir"), "conflict of depth" (spring "[s]till far away" *vs.* the already visible "choral rings"), and the conflict between "acoustics and optics" (the dissonance created through the combination of stops and fricatives *vs.* the serenity of the contemplated scene). Unlike in his early piece though, we see here a stronger dependence on the temporal element, which is doubly articulated—once through the slowly succeeding frames that pinpoint the transition from the inner to the outer space, and then, as in "On the Road Home", through the gap between the moment of the narrative and the time of the narrated things. It may be argued in fact that the compositional strategy employed for this piece exemplifies what Eisenstein has called the "fourth dimension" of cinema: the combination of the three-dimensional spatial coordinates that describe the images presented through shots and frames and the time coordinate required for comprehending the overtonal montage (Eisenstein 69).

The conclusive segment of the poem hints at one last similarity with film and cinema. By concentrating on the percipient's growing "sense" of spring occasioned by his exposure to the "scrawny cry", Stevens informs us of the theme of this piece—the cognitive and "illuminating" role of juxtapositions and analogies. The physical experience "was *like* / A new knowledge of reality", we are told. Yet, for obtaining genuine knowledge, we have to make sense of the signs and clues provided by the parts, we must read them contextually and in relation to all the constitutive elements of the scene. The same is true for the film-frame, which is "never an inflexible *letter of the alphabet*" but "a multiple-meaning *ideogram*" that acquires "its specific significance, meaning, and even pronunciation [...] only when combined with a separately indicated reading or tiny meaning—an indicator for the exact reading—placed alongside the basic hieroglyph." (Eisenstein 65-66).

With these in mind, I will now formulate some general observations that will serve as a conclusion for my paper.

4. Concluding remarks: not ideas about the eye, but the eye itself

My brief interpretive excursion into Stevens's poetry of sight has focused, on the whole, on the revelatory function of this mode of sensorial experience—that is, on how the eye, working occasionally in a manner that is analogous to the filming and compositional techniques of early twentieth-century cinema, is capable of disclosing meanings that would otherwise remain dormant in the physical world or in the scene unfolding before the percipient.

For Stevens, sight is a faculty of prime importance, invested with a double significance: it is simultaneously a cognitive device and a stepping-stone for one's detachment from the restrictive realm of materiality. "The ultimate poem is abstract", claims Stevens in an eponymous piece (*CP* 429). Yet, it is also "the cry of its occasion, / Part of the res itself and not about" (*CP* 473). Stevens's cinematic vision resolves such an apparent contradiction at least in part. In the poems that have been discussed here the eye itself becomes a "dominant" of the scene and, like the film camera, it takes upon itself the task of rendering the selected material by giving it a coherent shape. However, the eventual cohering of the discrete sights is made possible only by endowing the eye with the ability to move, if necessary, even independently of the percipient's will. Thus, although they are not poems about the eye, in these texts the eye becomes a voice that expresses "[t]he less legible meanings of sounds, the little reds / Not often realized, the lighter words / In the heavy drum of speech" (*CP* 488). Stevens's cinematic eye is therefore both a felt presence, "a force that traverses a shade" (*CP* 489), and a metonym for the abstract condition of pure sight toward which the contemplated scenes converge. As Skibsrud has noted with regard to "Landscape with Boat", Stevens's percipient is guided by "the desire to assume ultimate responsibility; not for the scene itself, but for the faculties by which it is perceived, manipulated, and represented." (76) Paradoxically, Stevens's viewer does become in the end a kind of "anti-master-man", appearing to us as "the un-masterable sense of sight itself—wholly extraneous to and therefore no longer contingent upon the objects of its own perception." (Skibsrud 76) In other words, whether the poet looks at the objects with a camera-eye or in a painterly manner, the result is the same—it makes us become, as Robinson has aptly noted, "meta-men: more than real, no longer objects ourselves, [...] but eyes, intense but detached." (8)

With all these, sight in Stevens is not independent from other senses, and it is not the sole source of knowledge. If, as he says in "Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly",[6] reality "is visibly a source, / Too wide, too irised, to be more than calm, // Too much like thinking to be less than thought" (*CP* 518), then the eye is but a precondition and a starting point for a wholly immersive experience:

> What we know in what we see, what we feel in what
> We hear, what we are, beyond mystic disputation,
> In the tumult of integrations out of the sky,

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[6] On closer examination, we observe that the peculiar word choice in this title once again points to Stevens's vision being simultaneously a condition and a process: "looking" suggests stasis, while "watching" implies an engaging activity.

> And what we think, a breathing like the wind,
> A moving part of a motion, a discovery
> Part of a discovery, a change part of a change (*CP* 518)

With this, we have arrived at one last point of intersection between Stevens and the experience of cinema. As exemplified through my selection of pieces from Stevens's poetry of perception, concomitant with sight, a host of other faculties are engaged merely by the subject's visual contact with the things perceived. In a similar fashion, Sobchack explains, the cinematic experience requires the simultaneous co-operation of all sensorial mechanisms and channels. Seeing does not imply relinquishing the other senses, for "vision is only one modality of […] access to the world and only one means of making the world of objects and others sensible" (Sobchack section II par. 6). Since in Stevens's universe the physical objects "bud the whitest eye, the pallidest sprout," creating "[n]ew senses in the engenderings of sense" (*CP* 527), his percipient may be considered a genuinely "cinesthetic subject" (Sobchack section II par. 10). Like someone watching a film, Stevens's spectator (and, implicitly, the reader who sees the scene through his eyes), "through an embodied vision in-formed by the knowledge of the other senses, 'makes sense' of what it is to 'see' a movie—both 'in the flesh' and as it 'matters." (Sobchack section II par. 17) As a result, perception through and by the eye may acquire even an ontological significance, leading to one final realisation:

> It is as if being was to be observed,
> As if, among the possible purposes
> Of what one sees, the purpose that comes first,
> The surface, is the purpose to be seen,
>
> […]
>
> So much just to be seen—a purpose, empty
> Perhaps, absurd perhaps, but at least a purpose,
> Certain and ever more fresh. Ah! Certain, for
> sure ... (*CP* 531-532)

As I have stated early on, this discussion of the affinities between Stevens's mode of seeing and the techniques of modern cinema has not been guided by an ambition to exhaust the full potential of the subject. The body of texts in which Stevens tackles the problematic of cognition through sight (and its relevance for poetic explorations) is considerably more ample than what could be examined within the space of an article. There are also other related aspects that

would warrant further consideration, such as the relationship between montage and collage (given Stevens's interest in painting) or the study of the compositional methods of spoken cinema, with emphasis on the relationship between the aural and the visual layers (of special importance for intermedial research and in light of the relational nature of modernism). In their turn, such prospective efforts are likely to be founded upon the argument by analogy.

In the end though, with Stevens, we should not consider this a limitation, but rather a necessity, for, as Balbo has pointed out,

> [i]t is not exactly accurate to say that Stevens borrowed from the world of art and art theory; rather, he felt himself inextricably immersed in the aesthetic movements of his time. Stevens's imagination was of a kind that searches for unities: disparate ideas, images, locales (real or imaginary), and aesthetic experiences were to be examined, explored, and finally, brought into a unified vision within the body of work. (99)

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JENNIFER EGAN'S *A VISION FROM THE GOOD SQUAD*: A NARRATIVE OF HEALTH, DISEASE, AND DEATH

MIHAELA MUDURE[1]

ABSTRACT. *Jennifer Egan's A Vision from the Good Squad: A Narrative of Health, Disease and Death.* This paper analyzes Jennifer Egan's novel/ short story cycle entitled *A Visit from the Goon Squad,* winner of the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The chapters/stories shift back and forth in time, moving from the late sixties to the present day and into the near future. The Proustian influence is obvious in this fascinating narrative of the self, the ailing body, and finally death. The interesting structure of the book, due to the influence of the TV series and the power point slides, adds a fascinating quality to this text which is the result of a vision that has all the characteristics of the contemporary age.

Keywords: death, disease, the sixties, age, time, body.

REZUMAT. *A Visit from the Good Squad de Jennifer Egan: o naraţiune despre sănătate, boală şi moarte*. Această lucrare analizează romanul/ciclul de povestiri al lui Jennifer Egan intitulat *A Visit from the Goon Squad,* câştigătorul Premiului Pulitzer pentru proză, în 2011. Capitolele/povestirile se mişcă încoace şi încolo în timp, deplasându-se de la sfârşitul anilor şaizeci până în prezent şi chiar în viitorul apropiat. Influenţa proustiană e evidentă în această fascinantă naraţiune a eului, a trupului măcinat de boală şi, în final, de moarte. Interesanta structură a cărţii, datorată influenţei serialelor de televiziune şi a diapozitivelor de power point, adaugă o calitate deosebită acestui text care este rezultatul unei viziuni ce are toate caracteristicile epocii contemporane.

Cuvinte cheie: moarte, boală, anii şaizeci, vârstă, timp, trup.

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Jennifer Egan is a contemporary American writer who was born in Chicago, in 1962. She was raised in San Francisco and consequently, was influenced by the atmosphere of the sixties, San Francisco being the cradle of the American revolt during the turbulent decade. Her literary work shows this filiation in a very convincing way. This paper analyzes Jennifer Egan's novel/ short story cycle[2] - there is some hesitation here - entitled *A Visit from the Goon Squad,* winner of the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The book has not been the object of too much critical attention from the specialized readers (literary critics). Actually, the critical bibliography on *A Visit from the Goon Squad* consists mostly of reviews and journalistic articles. See: Julie Bosman, Ron Charles, Jennifer Schuessler, Judy Woodruff, Jeffrey Brown, Jane Ciabattari, Christian House, Marko Fong, Robert Fulford, Lynn Neary, Cathleen Schine, and some anonymous reviews. The present article is also an attempt to dwindle this lack. Our analysis of this polyfocal narrative focuses on the following issues: disease and death, the relation between the self and the body in first person narratives, the peculiarities of self-writing when talking about the body and the self.

Can *Goon Squad* be considered a short story cycle? Of course. Can it be considered a novel? Both answers can be positive. The duality of the literary format called "the short story cycle" has already been under close examination by Ingram and Nagel, two classics of short story studies. The short story cycle is made up of short stories that have, each of them, the coherence of a chapter in the novel but they can also be read and understood separately. The short story cycle is, therefore, the object of two coherence strategies: one at the level of each component short story and one at the level of the whole text. Certainly, this is an exercise of exquisite literary craftsmanship in terms of constructing a narrative. We can also talk in this respect about the influence of television as each of the chapters/stories has its own autonomy exactly as a single episode of a television does. In an interview given to Ron Charles, Egan admits that four of the stories were completed before she had the overall concept for her book but the result is masterly. Egan succeeded in giving an impressive unity to the whole text by a linking theme, that is time and its effect on the frail human body: aging, disease, death. When the stories are seen as a group, the analepses and the prolepses between them deepen the meaning and the emotion of the reading experience. It is relevant for the understanding of Egan's literary structure that the author refers to her book as "entangled stories" ("2011 Pulitzer Prizes for Letters, Drama and Music." *New York Times*, 18 April 2011). Neary makes a recommendation following Egan's own advice

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[2] We distinguish between the short story collection and the short story cycle. The short story collection is made of disparate stories which have their own meaning but do not shed a unitary meaning upon each other as in the short story cycle. In the short story collection it is only the title which can spread its metaphorical, symbolical call to all the short stories, but this is a quite elusive narrative man oeuvre if compared with the unity of the short story cycle.

for her readers, "You can call it linked short stories; you can call it a novel — just don't call it experimental". The authorial refusal of experimentation goes hand in hand with the process of turning the culture of the sixties (the background of the basic stories in this collection) as a classical period in the history of American culture. Schine goes so far in this classical-ization process of Egan's narrative that she compares it with a Dickensian novel. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* " would be "an enormous nineteenth-century-style epic brilliantly disguised as ironic postmodern pastiche".

A very important point of Egan's short story cycle is the realization that America's decline was catalyzed by 9/11, it did not begin with it. The young people of the sixties turn old and ill, dying after the year 2000. Their disease is the biological, bodily manifestation of the country's pathologization.

Most of the stories in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* concern Bennie Salazar, an aging man who used to be part of the rock music circles of the sixties, his former assistant, Sasha, and their various friends and associates from the same period. The book which also has powerful dramatic qualities relies on a large number of mostly self-destructive characters as they grow older and fate sends them in directions they did not intend to go. The stories shift back and forth in time, moving from the late sixties to the present day and even into the near future. The Proustian influence is obvious in this fascinating narrative of the self, of the ailing body, and finally death. Christian House explains this influence in the following terms: "*A Visit from the Goon Squad* is obsessed with time: how it passes, how we pass through it, how it changes everything and, more pertinently, wears everything down, including us, to little more than specks of sand in the great desert of history".

The possible comparisons with Joyce[3] and Proust show that Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is a postmodern display of stories commenting on human relations in the digital age connecting on the lives of the listless people who experience disease and death. Jennifer Egan has the unique ability to tie humor to disease and death, which lose their tragic edge, and the result is a cynical perspective on our contemporary world.

An important linking element in this short story cycle is the music of the sixties, the symbol of a whole generation. Characters either create it, market it, or just listen to it. From the adolescents in San Francisco who delight in the music of the punk bands to the downfall of the music business of the sixties presented against the disappointments of the characters in New York, everywhere there is a musical connection that can remind one also of Huxley's modernist literary-musical construction *Point Counterpoint*. Egan connects music to the way she structures her social critique of America around one of the most visible

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[3] Especially, with the Joycean short story cycle: *Dubliners.*

problems of the digital era, namely the problem of limitless reproduction defying copyright regulations. And contemporary music offers such relevant examples, in this respect.

Egan's narrative agility is amazing. We find details about a character's childhood, then about his adulthood, and then she jumps back to the initiation years in one's life[4]. Her technique relies on an unpredictable ability to put together isolated scenes. According to Fulford, her technique is inspired from the way our memory works: "we sometimes hear about old friends only in brief glimpses that don't really make sense until we think about them later". Every chapter/story is a narrative shock. And every chapter/story is a confrontation with disease and death. Jennifer Egan is able to shift from a first person narrator to narrative omniscience. One story relies on the journalistic style, the last one is a dystopian sci-fi, and another is a Power Point, which is a radically different writing.

Alison, a very bright twelve-year old girl, uses PowerPoint to overcome her family's failure to communicate. Her digitalized writing is an effort to overcome the lack of communication within her family. The parents refuse to go back to an accidental death that happened a long time ago. Alison's brother, Lincoln, suffers from a form of Asperger's syndrome and consequently, has an obsessive interest in the pauses on famous records, such as David Bowie's *Young Americans*.

The connection from one character to another is very quick, even abrupt, like a mad narrative race. The first character who appears in the narrative texture is Sasha. The analepses and the prolepses lead to our understanding of Sasha as a broken human being who has healed only partly at middle-age. A childhood of abuse, followed by a difficult young adulthood in Europe, and by the accidental death of a friend only leaves her more listless back in America. Sasha's mid-adulthood life is compromised by anxieties and ghosts.

Sasha works for Bennie who is an executive in the world of musical records. Lou is Bennie's protector and he is seduced by Jocelyn who was in love with Scotty, a guitar player for the Flaming Dildos, a San Francisco punk band. This musical group also links Scotty to Bennie who also played bass guitar for the Flaming Dildos. This happened before Bennie married Stephanie who tried to revive the career of Bosco, a rock legend of the sixties. Stephanie's interest in Bosco can only be explained by the fact that the latter had given permission to Jules Jones, Stephanie's brother and a journalist, to cover his farewell "suicide tour". The narrative continues with Jones' attempt to seduce Kitty Jackson, another starlet of the sixties. Kitty has to work for La Doll, Stephanie's advisor in advertisement, because her career went down while Sasha was a prostitute in Naples. The latter will work for Bennie and then disappear into the desert to dedicate her life to sculpture and family together with Drew, her college boyfriend. The forty years of the narrative are covered in 13 stories/ chapters

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[4] John Maslin even calls *A Visit from the Goon Squad* "an acrobatic book".

linked by the painful feeling of time that wrecks both love and body by disease, aging, and death.

We fully disagree with Ron Charles who reviewed the novel for *Washington Post* and who talks bitterly about "Egan's sloppy work". According to Charles, "[i]n presenting her cast of characters as indicative of contemporary America, Egan makes the mistake of sacrificing intimacy to achieve universality, which makes any pronouncement hollow. Egan wants so badly to say something that she says nothing of worth. Her characters, for all their tragic flaws, feel like symptoms, not people, and *A Visit from the Goon Squad* holds few pleasures outside the child's play of the implied character relations falling into place".

On the contrary we appreciate Egan's narrative voice which is always the voice of the protagonist. Exquisite is also the narrative perspective presenting the unfolding events with the gaps inherent to a limited personal vision characteristic of the first person singular. The cases of disease are numerous in this novel/short story cycle and Egan excels in overpassing the medical discourse through the multitude of tropes. Here is, for instance, a public toilet where Sasha, the kleptomaniac, gets fascinated by a woman's wallet. "She'd glimpsed the wallet, tender and overripe as a peach. She'd plucked it, from a woman's back and slipped it into her own small handbag, which she's zipped shut before the sound of peeing had stopped. She'd flicked open the bathroom door and floated back through the lobby to the bar. She and the wallet's owner had never seen each other" (5). Egan's sentences sound as implacable as the pathological call of disease.

Bennie Salazar, another important character of this thought provoking fiction, has his own medical problems. He sprinkles gold flakes into his coffee and pesticide at his armpits. "He'd begun this regimen two months ago after reading in a book on Aztec medicine that gold and coffee together were believed to ensure sexual potency. Bennie's goal was more basic than potency: the sexual drive, his own having mysteriously expired" (21). Other characters are not at all healthier. Benny's idol, Lou Kline, "had died after being paralyzed from a stroke" (37). Bosco, the star of *The Conduits*, a punk rock group, becomes "obese, alcoholic and cancer-ridden" (113). A visit from his former admirers now eager to put him back on track as a kind of musical relic reveals the implacable effects of time. Remembering how they used to consume drugs and tried to avoid the police, the characters (the goon squad[5]) create a kind of bodily symphony of memories. "Now he [Bosco] was huge – from medications, he claimed – but at a glance into his trash can nearly always reveal an empty gallon box of Dreyer's Rocky Road ice cream. His red hair had devolved into a stringy gray ponytail. An unsuccessful hip replacement had left him with the lurching, belly-hoisting walk of a refrigerator on a hand truck" (125).

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[5] In American English, the goon squad is a group of mercenaries or criminals. Drug users refer to themselves in this way relying on specific group solidarity.

Equally worn out but still keen on singing for ever younger audiences is Scotty Housman. "A guy with gutted cheeks and hands so red and gnarled he looked like he'd have trouble playing a hand of poker, much less the strange sensuous instrument clutched between his knees" (332).

The body is pathologized in Jennifer Egan's novel by the treacheries of the individual. See, for instance, Stephanie after discovering Bennie's adulterous relationship with her friend, Kathy. "She lay down curled on her side in the grass, as if she were shielding the damaged part of herself, or trying to contain the pain that issues from it. Every turn of her thoughts increased her sense of horror, her belief that she couldn't recover, had no more resources to draw on" (135).

The body is also pathologized by the unhealthy atmosphere in which the whole nation is obliged to live: "… to generations of war and surveillance had left people craving the embodiment of their own unease in the form of a lone, unsteady man on a slide guitar" (335).

The most important sequence from the point of view of the death and disease discourse in this narrative structure is Chapter (Story) 5: "You Plural". Bennie tracks down five of the former admirers of Lou and invites him to say good bye to the former star. Lou is "in the bedroom, in a hospital bed, tubes up his nose. The second stroke really knocked him out – the first one wasn't so bad, just one of his legs was a little shaky. The view of so much decrepitude logically leads to questions about the insidious arrival of old age which occurs from the moment when we are born. 'How did you get so old? Was it all at once, in a day or did you peter out bit by bit? When did you stop having parties? Did everyone else get, too, or was it just you? Are other people still hiding in the palm trees or holding their breath under water? When did you last swim your laps? Do your bones hurt? Do you know this was coming and hide that you knew, or did it ambush you from behind?' "(85). For John Donne, the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poet, youth is an ambush in the sermon Donne delivered on 8 March during the Lent of 1625. In Donne's words: "[a]ge is a sickness, and youth is still an ambush" (123). We don't know whether Egan was aware of this intertextual vicinity or this trope is just a coincidence. However, the insidiousness of old age and the treacherous nature of youth, the battle of the body with disease, all these are marvelously caught by both writers. The body whom the young people think unbeatable is an ambush of time.

In the twenty-first century old age comes with a whole set of technological devices meant to replace the decaying physical functions of the body. Look at Lou, for instance. The writer fights stylistically, in an admirable way, for the accurate representation of Lou. "A guy comes in dressed in black, a diamond in his ear, and he fiddles with Lou's tubes and takes his blood pressure. From under the cover, tubes twirl from other parts of Lou into clear plastic bags, I try not to look at" (87). The oral sex scene, underwear present from Jocelyn, is a daring act of love defying death and impotence. But questions about the

inevitability of death never stop. Does all that begins also have an end? Inescapably? "Was this outcome a freak aberration from natural laws, or was it normal – a thing they should have seen coming? Had they somehow brought it on?" (132).

There is no definite answer to this fundamental question from Jennifer Egan but the chronological placement of the narratives suggests an answer in itself. "Nineteen eighty is almost here, thank God. The hippies are getting old, they blew their brains on acid and now they're begging on street corners all over San Francisco. Their hair is tangled and their bare feet are thick and gray as shoes. We're sick of them" (40-41). They pass, we are passing, everything passes.

A Visit from the Goon Squad is, therefore, obsessed with questions about time and body. How does time pass? How does time change everything? And the most pertinent question: how does time wear our body down leading it into disease and death? The Pulitzer of 2011 for fiction is a moving panorama of stories about bodies and selves and a categorical statement that one can never escape his body: be it healthy, or ailing, or dying.

Disease and death shape the Augustinian eternal present that Egan makes the temporal background of her narration. In the end she tells us, readers, through one of her characters, "Time's a goon. You gonna let that goon push you around?"[6]. Time works through the cracks of memory represented, from a narrative point of view, through the gaps between chapters and in the distance between different views of the same event. Jennifer Egan's *Visit from the Goon Squad* is a brave book which faces the tragedy of our lives and bodies built in time and submitted to time through disease, aging, and finally death.

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[6] According to Jane Ciabattari, the writer explained, "time is the stealth goon, the one you ignore because you are so busy worrying about the goons right in front of you." This declaration backs and reinforces the thesis of this article: *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is meditation upon time and its effects on our body through disease, aging, and death.

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QUEERING THE FAIRY-TALE IN ANNE SEXTON'S *TRANSFORMATIONS*

FLORINA NĂSTASE[1]

ABSTRACT. *Queering the Fairy-Tale in Anne Sexton's Transformations.*
The current paper explores Anne Sexton's volume of poetry, *Transformations*
(1971), from a queer, feminist perspective. Each of the seventeen poems
offers a distorted retelling of a Brothers Grimm fairy-tale, often replete with
pop culture references and black humor. The paper examines the strategies of
queering that the poet employs in her deconstruction of myths, storytelling,
family relations (such as motherhood and fatherhood), gender roles,
deformity and disability, and many other difficult subjects. The author makes
use of feminist and queer theory, while also casting light upon the construct
of the fairy-tale and why it offers a space for queer exploration. The fairy-tale
allows the poet to examine aspects of trauma and intimacy at a remove, but
with a view towards catharsis.

Keywords: fairy-tale, queer, queer theory, retelling, feminism, abject.

REZUMAT. *Invertirea basmului în volumul „Transformations" de Anne
Sexton.* Lucrarea de față își propune să exploreze volumul de poezie
„Transformations" (1971) al poetei Anne Sexton din perspectivă feministă,
„queer". Fiecare dintre cele șaptesprezece poezii oferă o repovestire distorsionată
a unui basm cules de frații Grimm, repovestire care abundă în referințe culturale
și umor negru. Lucrarea examinează strategiile de invertire („queering") pe
care poeta le folosește în demersul ei de a demonta mituri culturale, arta
povestirii, relațiile de familie (cum ar fi maternitatea și paternitatea), rolurile
de gen, diformitatea și dezabilitatea și multe alte subiecte dificile. Autoarea
întrebuințează teoria feministă și „queer", punându-se accent și pe structura
basmului și pe motivul pentru care această specie literară oferă spațiu de
explorar „queer". Basmul permite poetei să exploreze anumite aspecte ale
traumei și intimității de la distanță, scopul final fiind catartic.

Cuvinte cheie: basm, invertire, teorie „queer", repovestire, feminism, abjecțiune.

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In the foreword to the poetry volume *Transformations* (1971), Kurt Vonnegut refers to Anne Sexton as a poet who "domesticates my terror, examines it and describes it, teaches it some tricks which will amuse me, then lets it gallop into my forest once more" (Apud McGowan 73). Vonnegut suggests that Sexton offers the reader a reprieve by making the unknowable inside each of us knowable for a few brief moments. She still releases the unknown back into the "forest", meaning that she leaves our mystery intact, but this dual effect is certainly part of the allure of *Transformations*, where Sexton rereads and retells famous Grimm fairy-tales in a nonconventional fashion. The poet takes familiar narratives, embedded in our collective consciousness, and turns them inside out, domesticating their terror while also multiplying it. Many of the retold fairy-tales in *Transformations* are, as Vernon Young opines, "occasionally vulgar, often brilliant, nearly always hilarious" (Apud Colburn 255), the overall effect being that of a satirical distortion rendered from a feminist point of view. The following paper will examine the ways in which Sexton modifies the fairy-tale and ultimately "queers" the main tenets of its narrative by disrupting and inverting gender roles, as well as questioning performative aspects of compulsory heterosexuality.

To "queer" a narrative, a text, or a system of beliefs is to render it bare and to question its "timelessness and fixity" (Hall 14). The action of queering does not altogether dismantle old tenets, but rather, it "presses upon them, torturing their lines of demarcation, pressuring their easy designations" (14). This is most obviously achieved in the recasting of normative sexuality and its tributary identities. Social identity has always been a precarious construct; on the one hand, it has tried to ground itself on concrete symbols of power (race, class, gender), while on the other hand, it has eschewed the elements which cannot be governed or tamed into stability, such as sexuality and desire. Sexuality and desire pose a particular problem to the hegemonies in place because they are "so very amorphous, so hard to know or pin down, so potentially changeable in small and sometimes dramatic ways over time" (Hall 14). Desire is eminently irrational and guided by aspects of the self which are difficult to grasp or even accept. More importantly, one's desires may disturb the old value systems by which normality and abnormality are clearly delineated (Hall 14). Sexual mores and ways of being which used to be carefully monitored and penalized in the nineteenth century have emerged as complicated manifestations of desire and identity which trouble heterosexual norms in patriarchal societies.

Societal norms that validate or invalidate certain sexual practices are also a more recent invention. In centuries past, men and women who engaged in various sexual practices that did not accord with the norms of society were not heavily disciplined because the norms themselves were subject to constant change, depending on circumstance. For instance, punishment for sodomy in male-dominant spaces such as aboard ships was often not enforced, unless the offender had committed other serious crimes (Neill 408). It was with the

advent of the industrial revolution and its market-based economy, as well as the "discursive explosion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Foucault 38) that abnormal sexualities which threatened hegemonic interests became a matter of public opprobrium. This led to homosexuality being described as a pathology which defined the individual's very character. As Foucault attests in *A History of Sexuality*, homosexuality "was consubstantial with [the individual], less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature" (43). What was on trial was not an isolated sexual act or habit, but rather a deviancy in nature and character.

Due to their relatively recent institutionalization, these so-called "deviant" sexualities escape clear demarcations. The denomination "queer" itself is an umbrella term which is meant to include not only homosexual or lesbian practices and modes of being but various other manifestations that do not agree with pre-established norms. To be queer is to be unfixed, unmoored, and often indefinable. Queer theory itself is ultimately a discipline that "refuses to be disciplined" (Sullivan v), precisely because sexuality and desire, as mentioned previously, are so difficult to map. Therefore, to "queer" a text, as in our case, means to break down traditional literary analysis and put "pressure on simplistic notions of identity" (Hall 14), while at the same time disturbing "the value systems that underlie designations of normal and abnormal identity, sexual identity in particular" (14). With that in mind, the paper will look at the way in which Sexton disrupts and even collapses notions of identity, femininity and sexuality in her poetic retellings of classic fairy-tales.

Anne Sexton was a difficult poet of the post-war generation. Labeled a confessionalist for having the courage to include certain taboo aspects of her personal life in her work, Sexton was committed to a rebellious, authentic aesthetic that shone a light on "the female medical body" and its multifaceted presence in "beauty culture, domesticity, psychiatry, and medicine" (Salvio 18). She was in the position to do so since she suffered from clinical depression for most of her adult life and was frequently committed to mental institutions. Many of her poems give a first-hand account of what it is like to be "mad", to be – as she called herself repeatedly – a "possessed witch" (Sexton 15), a female presence who disrupts the rosy domesticity of middle class America. In that sense, one of the "terrors" in Sexton's poetry is the uncontainable mad woman, a glutton and a narcissist, a persona that threatens to upend the mores of her generation. This persona takes on various roles; in *Transformations*, Sexton focuses, among other things, on her role as a mother and the complications that her mental instability has wrought upon her relationship with her children. Sexton's speaker mirrors many of her own struggles. Indeed, the volume is addressed to her daughter, Linda, and she and her sister, Joyce, are meant to be the surface audience of these retellings. The mother engages in a subversive act by telling her children inverted bedtime stories and, from that perspective, the volume is not only an experiment with the format of the fairy-tale but also an attempt to explore what it means to be a mother, even a "failed" one. The fairy-

tale provides the space for such transgressive topics because it is, by its very nature, "queer", meaning eccentric and strange (Turner, Greenhill 4), but it also often deviates from what is prescribed, aligning itself with the theoretical definitions of "queer" (4). The fairy-tale is compatible with what Lee Edelman describes as the "unassimilable that troubles the relentlessly totalizing impulse informing normativity" (Apud Turner, Greenhill 5). Tales where people can be changed into animals and objects can metamorphose into human beings are more amenable to queer readings and interpretations (5) and at the root of it all is the idea of transformation. Jack Zipes considers "transformation" to be the constant in almost every fairy-tale, embedded in its structure and theme (xvii), allowing characters to undergo certain experiences that would not be sustainable in the real world. This leitmotif of transformation opens the gates for expressing ways of being that do not accord with the norms of reality.

Comprising 17 poems overall, *Transformations* is unified by the poetic persona of the mother who playfully introduces and catalogs each fairy-tale. The very first poem, "The Gold Key", is based on the fairy-tale *The Golden Key*, collected by the Brothers Grimm, in which a young boy finds an iron chest full of magical secrets. Yet we do not find out what those secrets are or if the chest is even magical, for when the story ends the boy is still turning the golden key inside the lock. The fairy-tale frustrates expectations and leaves the audience in a perpetual state of waiting. Sexton adopts this ambiguity and makes the poem and indeed, the entire volume, about the possibility and impossibility of finding answers: "It is not enough to read Hesse / and drink clam chowder / we must have answers" (Sexton 223). The poet poses this problem to her children as an essential aspect of life; we are all perpetually searching for something, chasing an elusive question mark regarding ourselves and others, and it is this search that unites the boy of the fairy-tale, the mother, and her children: "He is sixteen and he wants some answers / He is each of us. / I mean you. / I mean me." (223). This commonality places Sexton in the immediate vicinity of her offspring; she is just as restless as the younger generation and can give them no clarifications. Her authority as a mother hinges less on superior knowledge and more on her ability to offer a space for exploration, a space for "transformations". After all, the boy in the story hopes that the ordinary will be rendered extraordinary with the help of the magical chest: "Upon finding a string / he would look for a harp" (Sexton 224). Likewise, through her speaker, Sexton reminds her children that storytelling and fairy-tales can, if not answer their questions, at least provide the means for inquiry. The open-endedness of the endeavor is meant to attract rather than repel. The speaker summons not only her children, but also imaginary offspring whom she projects into the future, thus bridging the gap in age: "Alice / at fifty-six, do you remember? (…) Samuel, / at twenty-two have you forgotten?" (223). Her children are meant to be young enough to still have a passion for fantasy: "have you forgotten (…) the ten PM dreams/where the wicked king / went up in

smoke?" (223)", and yet old enough to understand the deeper, more ambiguous meaning beyond the story: "Are you comatose / Are you undersea?" (223), she asks them, probing their psyche. The children must employ critical thinking, but they must not be dead or "comatose" to the world of fantasy. The focus on the children's formation as future adults makes sense; the volume was first published when her eldest daughter, Linda, was eighteen – legally an adult, but still caught in-between adolescence and maturity.

The poet also prepares the children for the difficult experience of getting to know their mother. She announces at the beginning of the poem that, "The speaker in this case / is a middle-aged witch, me" (223). The use of "witch" comes with a double portend; Sexton is playing make-believe as a fairy-tale character, but she is also warning the children that the point of view from here on out is that of the outsider, the rebellious and villainous "witch" who presents a skewed vision of the world, namely *her* vision. In this manner, Sexton queers the very act of fairy-*telling*; the poet does not cater to her children's particular interests, she is not giving them familiar stories. She is telling *her* story, which de-familiarizes the fairy-tale and alters its overall effect. According to Jack Zipes, every fairy tale has a didactical purpose, facilitating a "learning process" (xix) through which the individual may be socialized and integrated within society (xix). Zipes argues that "listeners are enriched by encounters with extraordinary characters and situations" (xix). In this case, however, the children are enriched by the encounter with the voice of the mother. She is the "extraordinary" character who they come to know as a woman, as a deeply flawed human being, separate from her role of caregiver. This is one of the "transformations" that occur throughout the volume.

In the following poems, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" and "The White Snake", Sexton plays with the idea of the unattainable as an impossible yearning which haunts the collective conscious. The traditional narrative of *Snow White* is foregrounded on the young princess' beauty as her defining characteristic and means of agency (Friedenthal 168). It is thanks to beauty that she overcomes many of the obstacles in her path; after all, the hunter and the dwarfs are kind to her primarily because of her physical appearance (168). In Sexton's poem, however, the focus is on Snow White's "purity", her status as an untouched virgin:

> No matter what life you lead/the virgin is a lovely number: / cheeks as fragile as / cigarette paper, / arms and legs made of Limoges, / lips like Vin du Rhone, /
> rolling her china-blue doll eyes / open and shut. / Open to say, / Good Day Mama, / and shut for the thrust / of the unicorn. / She is unsoiled. (224)

Snow White is likened to luxury commodities, such as porcelain and fine wine, expensive items which enhance her prestige. At the same time, she is mockingly reduced to "cigarette paper", her worth alternating according to the

consumer's tastes. There is something of artifice about her; she is a manufactured doll who is "unsoiled" and who firmly opposes any phallic "thrust" that might tarnish the illusion of her pristineness. Yet this vaunted virginity must only be a temporary digression until the prince arrives to assume his rights over the princess. If Snow White remains a virgin for too long, it may disturb the order of the world around her. The threat of a woman, particularly one so beautiful, going to waste or becoming a spinster is quite real; as Rachel Carroll argues, "the spinster is the one who has not fully acceded to her place within the order of reproductive sexuality" and as such, becomes "something other than a woman" (30). Snow White must manage to remain pure while also not rendering her purity a threat. She must deftly navigate the many phallic symbols placed in her path, from the "hungry wolf / his tongue lolling out like a worm" (Sexton 226) to "the snakes hung down in loops" (226) and the "dwarfs, those little hot dogs / [who] walked three times around Snow White, / the sleeping virgin" (226), while at the same time still making herself available to the men around her. When she is poisoned and put to sleep by the wicked queen, the dwarfs are not content with letting her virginal body go to waste; the poet describes the way in which they "washed her with wine / and rubbed her with butter" (228) as if to be consumed. Even in death, Snow White must not be an old maid.

The manner in which the poet concludes the fairy-tale is yet more subversive, deconstructing the happy marriage to the prince and reframing it as a regression for Snow White, who has now ironically taken up the role of her wicked stepmother:

> Meanwhile, Snow White held court, / rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut / and sometimes referring to her mirror / as women do. (229)

Snow White already replicates the mannerisms and behavior of the previous generation and, like her stepmother, she refers to the mirror to remind herself of what she lacks. Once married, Snow White is no longer "unsoiled", no longer pristine and pure and hence, she searches for the unattainable purity which she has forever lost; she looks in the mirror for the next Snow White. Some of her artificial features remain, such as the "china-blue doll eyes", suggesting that her virginity may have been as much of a construct as her doll-like countenance. Marriage, in any case, is presented to the children as a reversal of fortune and an unexciting end to the fairy-tale, because what was really fascinating and even adventurous about Snow White was her unblemished state and whether she would manage to preserve it. The end of the fairy-tale is the end of possibilities for the heroine and it means the erasure of her very name: she is no longer Snow White but rather a woman among many ("as women do").

In the poem "The White Snake", the unattainable is no longer rooted in beauty and virginity but rather in language. In the Brothers Grimm fairy-tale, a

young servant partakes of the secret dish meant for the king, a white snake. After taking a single bite, the servant finds himself endowed with the power to speak with and understand the speech of animals, which leads him on a quest to prove himself and test his new abilities. Sexton begins the poem in the first person, placing herself at the center of the story as she did in "The Gold Key". She, like the servant, discovers an ability to communicate with the creatures around her:

> There was a day / when all the animals talked to me. /Ten birds at my window / saying, / Throw us some seeds, / Dame Sexton, / or we will shrink. / The worms / in my son's fishing pail / said, It is chilly! / It is chilly on our way to the hook! /
> (...) And then I knew that the voice/ of the spirits had been let in – / as intense as an epileptic aura – / and that no longer would I sing / alone (229).

In the poet's case, the ability to hear the voices of the animals coincides with the "epileptic aura", the shadow of mental illness. In the world of the fairy-tale, hearing "voices" is a gift and a marker of strength, while in the real world it is proof of disorder and disability. Yet the poet questions the estrangement of Man from animals. In Biblical terms, the failure to understand the beasts of the land was a consequence of the Fall (Fudge 102). Adam was able to name the animals because he was in communion with them, just as he conversed freely with God (103). The loss of intelligibility after the Fall signified decay and disorder and as such, the silence we take for sanity is a symbol of our disgrace, the condition of singing "alone", as the poet remarks. In choosing to comingle aspects of the fairy-tale with aspects of the psychical, Sexton blurs the lines between fiction and reality and queers the notion of madness. Later in the poem, when she begins to tell the tale of the servant, she describes the moment in which he starts hearing voices as both enlightening and terrifying: "He was inside / He had walked into a building / with no exit. / From all sides / the animals spoke up like puppets. / A cold sweat broke out on his upper lip / for now he was wise" (230). Alienation becomes a rite of passage and a necessary step in order to recapture the connection with the animal. The poet also reroutes the Fall of Man by having the servant give the princess the apple she hungers for, feeding her and also passing on to her the knowledge he acquired from the white snake: "The apple was as smooth as oilskin (...) Their bodies met over such a dish. / His tongue lay in her mouth/ as delicately as the white snake" (232). The poem thus inverts certain aspects of myth and tradition, emphasizing the queer potential of the human-animal bond and the forbidden knowledge it may unlock. The true "Fall" for Man comes with matrimony. Like in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", the couple is condemned to a lackluster marriage which smothers the creative magic of the white snake and renders them ignorantly happy: "They played house, little charmers, / exceptionally well. / So, of course, / they were placed in a box / and painted

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identically blue / and thus passed their days / living happily ever after - / a kind of coffin / a kind of blue funk. / Is it not?" (232). The rhetorical question posed at the end expresses a clear choice; between the madness of 'speaking tongues' and the humdrum of patriarchal domesticity, the poet would choose the latter.

A similar cynical tone regarding marriage is employed in the poem "Cinderella". The poet humorously synthetizes the tale for her children as a reversal of fortune: "From toilets to riches / That story. (...) From diapers to Dior / That story. (...) From mops to Bonwit Teller / That story" (256). The fairy-tale is framed as a story of material advancement where the prince's ball is simply an occasion for making the right connections: "Next came the ball, as you all know. It was a marriage market" (256). The happy ending represented by the union of Cinderella and the prince is yet another form of deception. The two are described "like two dolls in a museum case / never bothered by diapers or dust, / never arguing over the timing of an egg (...) their darling smiles pasted on for eternity" (258). Such contemptuous depictions of conjugality reflect the mindset of the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and the disavowal of marriage as the natural conclusion to romantic and sexual relationships (Hill 83). They also hint at the shortcomings of the heterosexual couple which is limited by conventions of gender and sexuality. Sexton describes Cinderella and her prince as "Regular Bobbsey Twins" (258), referring to the early twentieth-century mystery novels about two sets of upper-middle class twins who solve petty crimes committed in their neighborhood. The spouses are like the Bobbsey Twins because their approach to married life is infantile, their actions having as small a scope as the twins' sleuthing in their hometown. They are also less 'husband and wife' and more 'brother and sister', yet without the frisson of incest. In other words, they are dull and passive, never getting into an argument about "the timing of an egg" (258) or dealing with the less glamorous aspects of domestic life because avoiding communication suits them better and is the "proper" thing to do.

In sharing such disagreeable aspects of married life with her attentive audience, the children, Sexton is unburdening herself, revealing frustrations pertaining to her own troubled marriage. As a young woman, the poet had a glamorous beginning in modeling and relative independence as a bookstore clerk, while her husband was away in Korea (Kumin xii). Upon his return, and with the arrival of children, she became a housewife and started suffering from anxiety and other mental disorders (xii). One can't help but notice the regret captured in the poem "The Twelve Dancing Princesses", where the young women have to give up their exciting lifestyle after one of the sisters is married. In fact, the women seem to lose the drive which made them want to dance all night: "At the wedding the princesses averted their eyes / and sagged like old sweatshirts. / Now the runaways would run no more and never / again would their hair be tangled into diamonds" (281). There can be no sadder visual contrast than between the dour "sweatshirts" of the present and the glittering "diamonds" of

the past, aligning the life of the housewife and the life of the model, respectively. It is also noteworthy that the sisters' self-sufficient, gynocentric world in which "they slept together, bed by bed / in a kind of girls' dormitory" (278) is suddenly upended by the departure of one sister and the intrusion of one man.

A more troubling gynocentric world is fully realized in the poem "Rapunzel", in which the poet blatantly "queers" the text of the original fairy-tale. Mother Gothel, the witch who takes the child away from the parents who steal from her garden, bears an erotic, incestuous love for Rapunzel. She considers the girl both daughter and lover, as she beckons to her repeatedly: "Hold me, my young dear, hold me" (246). In the context of the fairy-tale, Mother Gothel is meant to be a surrogate mother to Rapunzel, yet the attachment between the two women is ambiguous. On the one hand, the witch has taken the child to raise by herself, keeping her locked away from the world; on the other hand, Gothel demands affection from the young girl beyond the normal boundaries of motherly love. There are many hints of sexual attraction and even sexual intercourse between them: "Let your dress fall down your shoulder, / come touch a copy of you (…) Put your pale arms around my neck" (245), "do not discover us / for we lie together all in green, / like pond weeds" (246). The poet places emphasis on the women's affinity for each other, their converging femininities: "We are two clouds/ glistening in the bottle glass. / We are two birds / washing in the same mirror" (246). Their sameness is, by and large, also a form of abjection; as Julia Kristeva argues, "intercourse between same and same" is a form of abjection because "it disturbs identity, system, order" (Apud Palmer 50). By displacing the man and claiming the woman for herself, Mother Gothel inverts the roles set out for her and Rapunzel. Instead of seizing the girl in order to punish her parents, the witch seizes her for her own pleasure: "Because Rapunzel was a beautiful girl / Mother Gothel treasured her beyond all things. / As she grew older Mother Gothel thought: / None but I will ever see her or touch her" (247).

The two women possess each other, blurring the lines of authority; one wonders whether Mother Gothel is in charge of Rapunzel or whether the young girl controls the surrogate mother through the desire the older woman feels for her. Sexton deftly weaves the fairy-tale elements to heighten the women's Sapphic bond; Mother Gothel who, in some versions of the tale, draws her youth from Rapunzel's long hair, now draws her youth from her desire for Rapunzel: "They play mother-me-do / all day. / A woman / who loves a woman / is forever young" (246). Thus, the path to immortality is achieved through the woman and by loving Rapunzel the witch may keep her youth and flourish. Of course, the fact that Gothel is required to love in order to maintain her influence also queers notions of power and authority. Sexton makes a larger point about the queering effect of generational bonds between women in the very beginning of the poem:

> A woman / who loves a woman / is forever young. / The mentor / and the student / feed off each other. / Many a girl / had an old aunt / who locked her in/ the study/ to keep the boys away. / They would play rummy / or lie on the couch / and touch and touch. / Old breast against young breast (245)

The images here are quite potent and do not shy away from physicality. Like in the poem "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", the existence of the virginal "old maid" disturbs the order of things, particularly when the spinster threatens to possess the young woman and render the "boys" ineffectual. There is also a sense that mentorship between women is always a dangerous affair; a man may guide a young girl from adolescence to womanhood, but an older woman is apt to cause trouble. The mother / daughter relationship, seen as another form of mentorship, may be disrupted by the inability of mother and daughter to let go of each other and their over-reliance on each other may impede their evolution as full women. As Evelyn Bassoff argues,

> In order to realize the full possibilities of her individual life the middle-aged mother must not only separate from her adolescent daughter, she must also complete her separation from her aging mother. It is, after all, only as mothers and daughters grow apart, that each becomes a full woman (Apud Walters 193).

In "Rapunzel", Sexton seems to question whether the two women need to be forcefully separated in order to become full individuals. While Rapunzel enjoys the prince's frequent visits to her tower, he is only a superficial distraction: "Yet he dazzled her with his dancing stick" (248). When Rapunzel is finally united with him in marriage, the poet describes their new state with subtle irony: "They lived happily as you might expect / proving that mother-me-do / can be outgrown (…) The world, some say, / is made up of couples. / A rose must have a stem" (249). The phallic imagery is a crude reminder of the conventionality of sexual roles, but it also questions the performative aspect of heterosexual femininity for, if Mother Gothel may effectively compete with the man for Rapunzel's love, then the compulsory aspects of the heterosexual relationship are defrocked. As Christine Holmlund notes, drawing from Luce Irigaray's theories of sexual identity, "the lesbian mimics and plays with the masculinity and femininity of psychoanalytic discourse, thereby making both "visible" as constructions and performances" (Apud Palmer 50). Despite the fact that "a rose must have a stem", a rose may also enjoy the company of another rose and it is the possibility of pleasure found in "sameness" that projects women outside precepts of male-defined femininity. Instead, as Irigaray contends, "they also remain elsewhere" (Apud Palmer 50). Therefore, in reworking the relationship between Rapunzel and Mother Gothel, Sexton also places the women outside "the world…made up of couples" (249). Their lesbian love is not annihilated by Rapunzel's marriage. Rather, that love and

its possibilities remain in expectancy. The final image of the poem is of the witch, Gothel, dreaming of Rapunzel as "moonlight sift[s] into her mouth" (249). The image is Sapphic and sexual, counteracting the phallic symbolism of the rose's stem. In dreams, therefore, Gothel still has access to her lover.

Another queer facet of the mother-daughter relationship is depicted in the poem "One-Eye, Two-Eyes, Three-Eyes", where Sexton argues that mothers thrive on the anomaly of their children. In the original fairy-tale, three daughters are born with one eye, two eyes, and three eyes respectively, but their mother considers the two-eyed girl too common, too much like everyone else, and hence bestows her affection on the "uncommon" daughters. The poet makes the case that, in fact, the mother derives strength from the children's impairment and lives off their need for her: "When a child stays needy until he is fifty – / oh mother-eye, oh mother-eye, crush me in – / the parent is as strong as a telephone pole" (260). This co-dependency is underlined by the phallic imagery of the "telephone pole", an exaggerated phallus that dominates and subjugates the child in the same way that the phallus dominates collective consciousness. Despite the fact that the child "might live to the age of fifty" (260) in otherwise good health, her physical or mental anomaly offers the mother the chance to become a martyr: "her mother planned a Mass of the Angels / and wore her martyrdom / like a string of pearls" (260). There is also the sense that the abnormal child is "simple" and "innocent" and therefore more easily controlled by the mother: "I knew a child once / With the mind of a hen. / She was the favored one / for she was as innocent as a snowflake" (259). Such assessments of motherhood mirror Sexton's own struggle with her role as flawed and even exacting caregiver.

The poem also abounds in descriptions of deformity and bodily abjection which are recast as signs of God's favor, the maimed child having an affinity for all things mystical: "Even in the pink crib / the somehow deficient / the somehow maimed, / are thought to have / a special pipeline to the mystical / the faint smell of the occult / a large ear on the God-horn" (258-9). The fascination which the abject is connected to the mother ("the pink crib") for, as Kristeva argues, the desire to dissolve physical boundaries and return to the womb is what prompts our attraction to certain forms of filth and decay (Kutzbach Mueller 9). The abject itself is an expression of chaos which we must reject once we are out of the womb for, as Kristeva warns, we risk "falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Apud Kutzbach Mueller 8). The poet is aware of this dual force of attraction and repulsion and, therefore, insists upon chaotic, abject imagery to underline the fraught, voyeuristic connection between the spectators and the spectated: "The idiot child, / a stuffed doll who can only masturbate / The hunchback carrying his hump / like a bag of onions… / Oh how we treasure / their scenic value" (260). The same fascination with the misshapen and deformed is depicted in the poem

"The Maiden Without Hands", where the maiden's mangled stumps are an object of desire and obsession: "The maiden held up her stumps / as helpless as dog's paws / and that made the wizard / want her. He wanted to lap / her up like strawberry preserve" (273). Sexton also stresses the fact that the crippled maiden offers comfort to those around her and makes them certain of their physical wholeness, by contrast: "Lady, bring me your wooden leg / so I may stand on my own / two pink pig feet. / If someone burns out your eye / I will take your socket / and use it for an ashtray (…) My apple has no worm in it! / My apple is whole!" (273). As such, the irregularity of one ensures the regularity of many and the abjection of the crippled is thus fetishized and counteracted. The wizard may be drawn to the maiden's bloody stumps, but he does not wish to be less than whole himself.

A final, more destructive aspect of motherhood is shown in the poem "Hansel and Gretel", where, like a Medea undoing her children, the mother wants to consume her offspring so as to spare them the misery of hunger, but also because she is starving herself. If, as Madeleine Pober puts it, "Mothers strive for fusion, while their offspring seek disengagement" (Apud Walters 193), the final fusion between mother and child is the return to the womb via stomach:

> Little plum, / said the mother to her son, / I want to bite, / I want to chew, / I want to eat you up. / Little child, / little nubkin, / sweet as fudge (…) / Your neck as smooth / as a hard-boiled egg; / soft cheeks, my pears, / let me buzz you on the neck / and take a bite (…) / Oh succulent one, / it is but one turn in the road / and I would be a cannibal! (286-7)

The mother's tone is gleeful, verging on mad, revealing how easy it would be for the bonds of family to be annihilated for the sake of primeval survival. At the same time, the mother's namesakes for the child, "little nubkin", "little plum" imply that a mother's affection is always mingled with hunger - a need to possess and contain. The innocent gestures of affection such as kissing the soft "pear" cheeks or playfully "buzzing" the neck are construed now as a desire to devour and reclaim the child who used to be inside her. The end of the poem presents us with an ambiguity; while Hansel and Gretel manage to fool the witch of the gingerbread house and cook her alive, when they return home they find that their mother has died and, as they sit at the table, the siblings begin to recall "the woe of the oven/ the smell of the cooking witch" (290). This seems to hint at the fact that perhaps it was the mother, the presumed cannibal, who was the witch all along and it was she who was burned alive. Such an interpretation hinges once more on the need of the child to disengage from the mother, with often violent consequences.

If the mother undergoes various transformations throughout the volume, the father is not left far behind. A much darker and more disturbing

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depiction of parental violence is shown in the poem "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)", where the poet weaves a narrative of trauma and abuse around the patriarchal figure. Like Mother Gothel in "Rapunzel", the king displays a possessive need to keep Briar Rose to himself: "Briar Rose grew to be a goddess / and each night the king/ bit the hem of her gown to keep her safe (…) He forced every male in the court/ to scour his tongue with Bab-o/ lest they poison the air she dwelt in. / Thus she dwelt in his odor. / Rank as honeysuckle." (291-2). Beyond the slightly humorous depiction of the king's actions, there is a sense of unease and danger, of something foul and "rank" in his measures of protection. The act of scrubbing the young men's tongues with bleach harkens to the domestic practice of washing children's mouth with soap for speaking out of turn. The king's gesture is an extreme measure, underlining his need for control, while literally suffocating his subjects. In the same vein, women like Briar Rose (and Sexton herself) are suffocated by the roles they have to perform, particularly in a domestic setting.

In any case, the father-king is an unwanted element. If in "Rapunzel" the two women seem to desire each other, in "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)"*,* the princess is haunted by the father figure and his unwanted ministrations. Even after the prince kisses her awake and breaks the curse, Briar Rose is tormented by the memory of the king: "and she woke up crying / Daddy! Daddy! / Presto! She's out of prison! / She married the prince / and all went well / except for the fear - / the fear of sleep." (293). The girl cannot fully come into her new role as wife because she is split between her persona when she is awake and the "Sleeping Beauty" who was taken advantage of every night. The point of view shifts from third-person to first-person as Briar Rose confesses to the ways in which her father raped her, while her body was asleep and her mind was awake. The past and the present seem to become indistinguishable, as Briar Rose cannot tell if the abuse is still being perpetrated:

> You can stick a needle / through my kneecap and I won't flinch. / I'm all shot up with Novocain. / This trance girl/ is yours to do with (…) / I was passed hand to hand / like a bowl of fruit. / Each night I am nailed into place / and I forget who I am. / Daddy? / That's another kind of prison. / It's not the prince at all, /
> but my father/ drunkenly bent over my bed, /circling the abyss like a shark, / my father thick upon me / like some sleeping jellyfish (294).

The helplessness and passivity of the victim make certain the impossibility of either reciprocation or refusal. The father, described as a circling shark, imprisons the girl more effectively than the spindle's curse. In fact, one may wonder if the sleeping spell that comes upon her when she becomes an

adolescent is not simply the aftermath of the father's possession. After all, the curse was completed when the princess "pricked her finger" (292), an action mired in phallic symbolism. This retelling is probably the most radical in terms of departure from the source material, though, in fact, Sexton may be basing her poem on an older source. The poet may have been familiar with Giambattista Basile's seventeenth-century collection, *Il Pentamerone*, and his version of Sleeping Beauty called *Sun, Moon, and Talia*, wherein the sleeping woman is not awoken with a kiss. Rather, she is raped repeatedly by a less than gallant king and as a result she is impregnated, while still being unconscious. She is only awoken when she gives birth to the children, but otherwise remains wholly ignorant of what has been done to her body. Sexton effectively rewrites *Sun, Moon, and Talia*, making the young girl painfully aware of the assault on her body. At the same time, the portrayal of trauma in the poem hints to it being inspired by the poet's troubled childhood. She herself suffered from her father's abuse and molestation and the violence of the act is often alluded to in Sexton's poetic work (Salvio 94). Considering that her hypothetical audience is her daughters, sharing such traumatic aspects of family life broadens the possibilities of engagement with them, putting into context Sexton's own abusive behavior towards her children (Salvio 84) while striving for catharsis.

      Other iterations of fatherhood that appear in poems such as "Red Riding Hood" and "Rumpelstiltskin" have to do with the queering of gender roles. In "Red Riding Hood", the huntsman has to perform a "caesarian section" on the wolf in order to release the girl and the grandmother from his belly. The two emerge like newborns, "remembering / nothing naked and brutal / from that little death, / that little birth, / from their going down / and their lifting up" (272). In a strange reversal, the wolf consumes the women who then become his biological children and must be reborn from him. The young girl and the grandmother, despite their difference in age, must undergo the same rite of passage. Though they have faced death, they come out of the womb like newborns, with no memories of their previous adventure. As for the wolf, he is described as a "kind of transvestite" (270) since he disguises himself as the grandmother, but it seems that his deception turns into reality and he shifts from one state to the other, even becoming "pregnant" with his victims: "Now he was fat./ He appeared to be in his ninth month" (271). In the poem "Rumpelstiltskin", it is revealed that the titular villain does not want to take the firstborn away just because he has struck a deal with the miller's daughter, but because he wants a child of his own: "Indeed! I have become a papa! / cried the little man. / She offered him all the kingdom/ but he wanted only this - / a living thing / to call his own" (235). This is the only magic Rumpelstiltskin is not able to perform, that of giving birth. In the end, when the miller's daughter guesses his name,

the dwarf tears himself in half: "He laid his two sides down on the floor, / one part soft as a woman, / one part a barbed hook, / one part papa, / one part Doppelganger" (237). Like the transvestite wolf, the dwarf is described in gender-queer terms as a fluid being whose identity is complicated by his yearning to be both mother and father. At the same time, Sexton calls him a "Doppelganger" because she claims that Rumpelstiltskin is a presence within all of us:

> Inside many of us / is a small old man / who wants to get out (...) / He is a monster of despair. / He is all decay. / He speaks as tiny as an earphone / with Truman's asexual voice: / I am your dwarf. / I am the enemy within / I am the boss of your dreams (...) / I am the law of your members, / the kindred of blackness and impulse (...) / It is your Doppelganger / trying to get out (233).

Even though the poet describes him as a "monster of despair", she shifts sympathy from the heroine of the tale to the villain; it is Rumpelstiltskin we should empathize with because his unrealized cravings and his unfinished identity belong to us. We live in troubled symbiosis with him. He is coded queer not only due to the reference to Truman Capote's "asexual voice" but also because he represents the underbelly of our identity, the inexpressible. If, As Annamarie Jagose claims, "queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire" (Apud Turner 4), Rumpelstilskin represents that mismatch and the possibilities of the Other within us. He is also a pitiful creature because he is a "freak" who is denied certain aspects of normal life: "I am eighteen inches high. / I am no bigger than a partridge / I am your evil eye / and no child will ever call me Papa" (234). His desire to have a child is framed as an attempt to vindicate his existence and find meaning, rather than merely as a game of wits.

As evidenced in poems such as "One-Eye, Two-Eyes, Three-Eyes" and "The Maiden Without Hands", Sexton is drawn to the outcasts, the freaks, the misshapen, partly because she considers herself an outsider too. In "Red Riding Hood", she begins the poem with a meditation on deception and how easily we conceal ourselves from others. She confesses that there is always a mismatch between outward appearance and inner life: "And I. I too. / Quite collected at cocktail parties, / Meanwhile in my head/ I'm undergoing open-heart surgery" (269). The volume *Transformations* is her attempt to foreground the outcast inside herself with the help of fairy-tales. As mentioned previously, Sexton offers space for exploration but no final resolution; she offers catharsis but does not remove discomfort. She may "domesticate" the terror, as Kurt Vonnegut surmised, but she does not reduce it; rather she sets it free. For that is the ethos of queer epistemology: to provide, as Annamarie Jagose claims, "an ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation" (Apud Sullivan 43).

In this sense, *Transformations* engages with the unmoored and undefined aspects of the self and contests the self's limitations with the help of the generous frame of the fairy-tale. The poet takes advantage of its inherent fluidity and adaptability to enact "transformations" which might be difficult to access in a real life setting. Sexton taps into the queer potential of the fairy-tale and as a result, makes the undisciplined, "queer" aspects of desire and trauma communicable.

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LIFE AFTER PEOPLE: ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE AND THE STRUCTURES OF THE POST-HUMAN GLOBAL IMAGINARY

ADRIANA NEAGU[1]

ABSTRACT. *Life after People: Zombie Apocalypse and the Structures of the Post-Human Global Imaginary.* The paper examines post-humanist representations in Anglo-American film productions from a perspective informed by global and hypermodern cultural theory. It is an enquiry into aspects of dystopian sensibility featuring in global cinema, which are seen as manifest in the prolific zombie genre of the post-apocalyptic strand. It is premised on the assumption that global society is endemically marred by a catastrophic horizon of expectation, whose most congenial form of expression is dystopia, a genre on the rise worldwide, especially productive in Anglo-American cinematic practice. Drawing on global cultural theory, I seek to narrow down the enquiry into dystopian modes and bring the zombie dominant to bear on what I construe as the post-apocalyptic imagination of globality.

Keywords: post-humanism; dystopia; apocalypticism; 9/11; cinematography; global (dis)order; vampires; zombies; global theory; hypermodernity; disjuncture.

REZUMAT. *Viața după dispariția omului : apocalipsa zombie și structurile imaginarului postuman în era globală.* Lucrarea analizează reprezentări postumaniste în producții cinematografice anglo-americane din perspectiva teoriei culturale globale și a hipermodernității. Demersul își propune să trateze aspecte ale sensibilității distopice manifestate în cinematografia globală, aspecte considerate reprezentative pentru filmele zombie din cadrul genului postapocaliptic. Premisa lucrării este dată de teza conform căreia societatea globală este caracterizată de un orizont de așteptare catastrofic, al cărei forme predilecte de expresie este distopia, un gen care înregistrează, în

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general, o creştere spectaculoasă pe glob şi, în special, în cinematografia anglo-americană. Demersul este fundamentat de o grilă teoretică ancorată în teoria globală şi vizează fenomenul zombie perceput ca o dominantă a imaginarului postapocaliptic.

Cuvinte cheie: *postumanism; distopie; spirit apocaliptic; cinema; dezordine globală; vampir; zombie; teorie globală; hipermodernitate; disjuncţie.*

> The zombie genre is ubiquitous in the postmodern apocalyptic landscape (in film, literature, graphic novels, video games, miniseries, etc.). This genre represents a postmodern myth which is resurrected again and again in various incarnations to embody a particular audience's current anxieties. As Bruce Lincoln notes in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*, myths "are not snapshot presentations of stable taxonomies and hierarchies" (Dailey-Bailey 1).

To a self-respecting scholar immersed in 'real', presumed consequential research matters, the very mention of the term 'zombie' will raise quite a few eyebrows, reading like a serious intellectual offense. Yet, currently the most basic of searches of the term in scholarly data bases hits a staggering 17,436 results. For this many papers to date to mention indeed take the trouble to concern themselves with the zombie phenomenon, it follows zombies are a manifesting, ongoing cultural production of significant currency, potentially a game changer at that, testifying to the existence of an 'authentic' zombie phenomenon out large. As an emerging, fast growing specialism, zombiology or zombie studies cover a relatively vast area, gravitating around the significance and symbolism of the walking corpse, come back from the dead:

> The recent interest attached to the Zombie figure in Popular Culture did not come overnight. Stretching back to the early twentieth Century, with William B. Seabrook's 1929 novel *The Magic Island* and Victor Halperin's 1932 movie *White Zombie*, the Undead has gained wide recognition after George A. Romero's seminal 1968 film *The Night of the Living Dead*, whose main themes have been quickly replicated in the US and abroad by Romero himself, Lucio Fulci, and a handful of lesser-known directors. However, it is at the turn of the century that Zombies have progressively gained central stage in the Gotha of established popular monstrosities (Bishop 2006, 2010; Reed and Penfold-Mounce 2015). The Zombie theme has crossed the borders of cinema and spilled over to other media and arts, like literature, videogames and, most importantly for our purposes, TV (data are available, among others, in Drezner 2014). (Locatelli 2)

The zombie transfiguration from a locus-specific myth into a dominant motif of global popular culture is no doubt reflective of major changes in the mindset of the post-apocalyptic trend, pointing to a subject marred by the terror of the *revenant*:

> As part of an extended family of horrific antagonists, zombies have offered bureaucratically managed representations of cultural anxiety for more than 80 years. To ignore these mass-mediated cultural representations of fear and terror is to ignore one of the largest and most enduring cultural sites in which thought and discussion of and about fear and terror occurs. Sociology – as a discipline designed to unearth the influences of economic, political, institutional, and social forces – is ideally equipped to unsheathe the broader significance of zombie culture and, thus, add to debates in zombie studies (cf. Dowd 1999, Sutherland and Feltey 2012, Tudor 2000). (Platts 548-9)

Contrary to what consumers of the genre may be inclined to believe, the anthropology and archetypology of zombies are vast and alembicated fields of study, involving a plethora of complex, imbricated typologies and taxonomies and relatively few viable comparisons. To the extent that they are humanoid, reanimated corpses returned from the dead and preying on the living, zombies resemble vampires, perhaps the closest, albeit not entirely likely analogy that comes to mind. Yet, unlike vampires, zombies are portrayed as day-and-night monstrous creatures typically moving around in hordes, whereas vampires thrive as independent, night creatures, living solitary lives and acting on their own. Endowed with superhuman powers, eternal youth and extra-ordinary looks, vampires are intelligent entities, alluring and terrifying at one and the same time, caught between this world and the hereafter, the embodiment of the quintessential figure of the immortal, whose sole enemy is sunlight and, according to some variations of the vampire myth, river-crossing. Zombies, on the other hand possess no sublimating quality, featuring as disposable, mindless, witless, barbarous mutants, certain to die out shortly after transformation. The lure of vampires transcends the fear they induce; zombies, on the other hand, are repugnant, abominable life forms inducing disgust and sheer terror, reminiscent of humans' inherent beastlike nature. The vampires' dual nature offers a fascinating insight into the dichotomies of human nature, the doctors Jekyll and misters Hyde lying dormant in the individual. Zombies' grotesque, coarse, 'in the face' brutality is devoid of any inspiring quality, its sole *rationale* being that of holding up a mirror to inhumanity, indeed to the posthuman extermination war, the association most often reiterated in cinematic productions.

To an even larger extent than in the case of the zombie figure, the genealogy of the vampire is an imbricated story meandering in various critical-creative directions, as *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead* -- a compendious, all-inclusive resource covering every conceivable manifestation of the undead and their representations in fiction-- copiously demonstrates. The volume traces vampires from Babylon and Assyria to ancient Greece addressing, among other, the unlikely connections between Christianity and vampirology resonant in the iconic *Nosferatu*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and its screen adaptations, as well as in *Addams Family*, *Buffy the Vampire*, *Interview with a Vampire, The Twilight* novels by Stephanie Meyer, and the film saga, in the author's phrasing, "riding the largest wave of vampire interest that there has ever been […] the most comprehensive and exhaustive exposition of everything relating to vampires […] keeping pace with the latest developments in the ever-expanding world of bloodthirsty undead" (Melton XIII). Contributing a mesmerizing breadth of knowledge on the subject, the compendium touches upon every conceivable aspect of vampirism, testifying to a whole 'vampire world' out there. Gothic literature, with its eerie atmosphere, from Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897) to Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* has thrived in the representation of the vampire.

Fandom object as well as object of enquiry, the vampire has galvanized popular imagination throughout the centuries, generating a considerable degree of scholarship, as evident in the welder of vampire research centres and associations the likes of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula, The Vampire Research Society and Queens Vampire Research Centre. Fan practices point to an entire vampire subculture vividly present in comic book vampires and their outlandish protagonists such as Vampirella, vampress Luxura of the Vamperotica comics, or the Vampyr video game. The outcast or outlaw *par excellence*, the vampire is the "grand architect of all the dark, repressed urges in the human heart" (Melton XIII). Depending on the kind of energy they feed on, vampires are born or 'turned', energy vampires, psychic vampires, sexual vampires, emotional vampires, economic vampires, political vampires, the innumerable existing taxonomies being in themselves indicative of the myriad ways in which the myth taps into the occult beliefs of various cultures. Of the numerous types of documented vampire-like creatures, feeding off the life force of living creatures, literally draining the life out of the living: the *lamai*, the *empusai*, and the *mormoloykiai* together with a vampire witch referred to as *strige*, a night demon killing infants by sucking their blood are the most prominent.

The zombie *topos* in literature dates back to the Middle Ages, zombies being portrayed as demonic figures the church evokes to instil fear in the congregation and provide a sharp contrast to Christian spiritual and moral

values (Dondeynaz 26). With its origins in Haitian religion and Vodoun rituals, zombyism is a phenomenon that agglutinates a crude, pathetic dimension of folk superstition, i.e. of 'zombification' through ingestion of 'zombie powder' or *fugu*, puffer fish. The zombie apocalypse projects a macabre end to humanity, extinction not by environmental cataclysm, but by cannibalism, the *homo homine lupus* scenario playing into man's starkest, deepest anxieties. The symbolical *locus* of the zombie in analytical psychology, possibly in the Jungian pattern of the shadow, of the repressed or disowned part of ourselves is highly suggestive of the deep-seated zombiemania/ phobia. Abhorrent, zombies, real and imagined are the 'monsters of the twenty first century' that tap into our wildest nightmare, that of losing our humanity and being colonized by the beast. In a logic stemming from the increasingly widening global disparities in economy, extreme inequality, power concentrated in a select few hands at the top, deregulation and civil rights, the zombie becomes a metaphor of global crisis. The enormity of the prospect of being lobotomized and led by a mindless, ruthless elite being fostered by the innumerable extreme narratives of globality:

> Commonly understood as corpses raised from the dead and imbued with a ravenous instinct to devour the living, zombies address fears that are both inherent to the human condition and specific to the time of their resurrection. From an evolutionary perspective, zombies engender terror because of ingrained phobia of infectious contagion, loss of personal autonomy, and death (Clasen 2010).

From a cultural view, zombies represent a monstrous *tabula rasa* whose construction registers extant social anxieties (Bishop 2009, 2010; Dendle 2007; McIntosh 2008; Muntean and Payne 2009). In their modern form, zombie narratives commonly present apocalyptic parables of societies in the state collapse (or have already collapsed) wherein a handful of survivors receive claustrophobic refuge from undead hordes. The survivors' temporary rampart disintegrates not because of the zombies but because of the survivors' inability to cooperate despite their differences. Zombie narratives often rely on images of communal desolation, infected others, piles of untended human corpses, and roving gangs of vigilantes. (Platts 547)

Whereas sharing in common traits with the vampire revenant, the zombie figure therefore draws on a cultural logic considerably different from that of the vampire. Here, too typologies abound, zombiepedia listing categories such as: 'generic zombies', walkers, runners, Voodoo zombies, Romero zombies, gay zombies, carriers, crawlers, screamers, bonies, stalkers, spitters, exploders, bursters, ghouls, tanks, armored, melting et al. Eli Roth's documentary *History of Horror* further distinguishes among fast zombies, slow zombies, and comedy

zombies, the cultural affiliations of which branch off into countless variations of flesh and brain eaters. Types range from 'medical' or 'chemical zombies' infecting the living thorough blood, supernatural zombies, brought back by wizards through acts of magic, to scholastic categories such as 'Greek Zombies', a notion developed by Princeton psychologist Julian Jaynes, which foregrounds ancient Greeks as originally having *un*conscious minds. To these of course add the ambivalences at work in the zombies represented in North American cultures as opposed to the undead in various folkloric traditions.

Deceptively mimetic, the multifarious zombie categories that have mushroomed in popular culture over the last decades, come down to two major significant divisions, perhaps the only two relevant ones from a hermeneutical point of view: the supernatural, horror-movie zombie and the post-apocalyptic, futuristic, dystopian one, a genre shift in itself very significant, as Laios Brons aptly notes:

> For reasons that are somewhat mysterious to me, zombie movies remain fairly popular. There has been a notable change in the genre, however. A few decades ago, zombie movies were probably best classified as a sub-genre of horror, while nowadays they seem to be a variety of disaster movie – particularly, a variety of the end-of-the-world disaster movie. Picking up on this subtle, but telling genre shift, Brad Evans and Henry Giroux write in *Disposable Futures*, a book on the role of (depictions of) violence in contemporary society that the zombie figure "speaks to a future in which survival fully colonizes the meaning of life, a future that both anticipates and consents to the possibility of extinction". (Brons 1)

The morphing of the once marginal zombie figure into a mainstream global trope is indeed symptomatic of the extent to which zombyism has turned into a metonym for a collapsing, self-destroying society, and for the perceived threat of immigration. Discussing the sociological implications of today's zombie culture, Todd Platts illustrates how unlike traditional horror films, dystopian zombie films, whether parodies, such as *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright, 2004), or *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Burr Steers, 2016), humorous books like *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003), or dramas such as *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle 2002), or *World War Z* (Marc Forster 2013) thrive on a posthuman imagology to which infectious contagion and our ingrained fear of undead hordes are central.

> That such stories should witness a resurgence in popularity after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the anthrax and SARS

scares, and Hurricane Katrina is seen as no coincidence (Bishop 2009, Newitz 2009). As Robert Wuthnow (1989, 3) argues, "if cultural products do not articulate closely enough with their social settings, they are likely to be regarded" as "irrelevant, unrealistic, artificial, and overly abstract, or worse, their producers will be unlikely to receive the support necessary to carry on their work". (Platts 547).

Beyond their eschatological potential, zombie representations best capture the turmoil and confusion, indeed the state of ataxia emblematical of global disorder. As Yari Lanci points out, in "Subjectivation in Times of Apocalypse," the 'contemporary' nature of the zombie phenomenon owes a lot to its capacity to encapsulate scenes of a derelict humanity thrown into disarray:

> The relatively recent return of the zombie in various forms of media seems to mark a high point in its history – from the revival of the zombie theme in cinema productions since the beginning of the new millennium, to the increased number of TV series, comic books, and videogames on the same 'undead' topic. The horde of the undead has admittedly infected our collective imagination. As reported by Richard Seymour on his *Lenin's Tomb* blog, during the riots in London in August 2011 many witnesses affirmed:
> "it's like *28 Days Later* out there."5 Following the example offered by the director Zack Snyder in his 2004 remake of George Romero's seminal *Dawn of the Dead*, it has apparently become easy to associate images of public urban disorders with the feeling of uncontrollable chaos with which many zombies narratives begin. (Lanci 26)

Across culture history, modern dystopias have envisioned all manner of anxieties, pre- and post-cold War, among these, fear of brainwashing, of indoctrination, of autocratic regimes and the total surveillance state, of extraterrestrial colonization, of the machine. In contrast, the zombie apocalypse is paradigmatic of global anxieties *par excellence*, of the fear of the anthropocene, of the extinction of the human race altogether, or rather, of its dehumanization and survival in beastly, mindless, in short zombified forms, hence the congeniality and plausibility of the genre in the twenty first century:

> Along these lines, Kyle Bishop (2009, 18) observes, "Because the aftereffects of war, terrorism, and natural disasters so closely resemble the scenarios of zombie cinema [they have] all the more power to shock and terrify a population that has become otherwise jaded by more traditional horror films." (Platts 548)

The nature of the anxiety embedded in the zombie apocalypse is what distinguishes the posthumanist dystopian imaginary from other dystopian modes. Unlike other postapocalyptic projections that render visions of the conquest or extinction of the human species by technology, atomic wars, or extraterrestrial forces, posthumanist dystopia, grounded as it is in anthropocene and fuelled by the age of terror, a new geological age, in which annihilation is not the ultimate scare; rather, it is the fear of survival in an 'undead' life form that mars the horizon of global man engendering the belief systems constitutive of the ethos and structures of the posthuman popular imagination. For the 'post-human', the stake is nothing short of phylogenetic continuity and the survival of the 'environmentally fittest'. In an analytical enquiry, Sabine Wilke approaches the anthropocenic stage in the history of humankind from the perspective of the theoretical humanities, calling for the need for a radical critique of what she calls the "normative framework for global environmental justice":

> For over a decade now the idea of the Anthropocene, a new epoch of man, has been migrating. From its original context in the geological sciences to other academic disciplines, as well as into the popular imagination via magazines and other venues. While the approach developed in these debates is broad and includes perspectives ranging from the sciences to media and the arts, there have been only rudimentary attempts to develop a critique of the underlying assumptions of such a concept. I would like to outline the parameters for such a critique from the perspective of gender and race, postcolonial studies, and the need for a normative framework for global environmental justice. If humanity is indeed the force behind the changes on our planet, then the humanities are called to explore the new directions ahead of us, for they concern themselves with the study of intellectual creation and the critique of dominant narratives, myths, and ideologies, and the critical engagement with fundamental questions of meaning, value, responsibility, and purpose in a period of escalating crisis. (Wilke 67)

Wilke's is thus a recourse to the humanities as best placed to revisit Kant's transcendental philosophy, in so doing, taking stock of the developments and departures in the fundamentals of Cartesian metaphysics, intrinsic value and extrinsic knowledge. To begin developing such a critical perspective, we need to acknowledge the fact that the concept of the Anthropocene represents nothing less than a serious challenge to the basic axioms of Western metaphysics, specifically Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy (Kant [1781] 1855). Kant distinguished between that which we humans can know and what he calls the "thing in itself" (*das Ding an sich*) which cannot really be known by us. The thing in itself lies before and outside of thought and perception.

> Human perception is limited to phenomena that become the object of our sensory perception. Kant's emphasis on the role of human subjectivity had an enormous influence on how the relation between humans and the non-human world was perceived and consequently constructed in terms of privileging human existence over the existence of non-humans. (Wilke 67)

Wilke's deconstruction of the Anthropocene and its articulations with humanocentrism provides one of the broadest reading keys to understanding the zombie renaissance and how it can be made to bear on issues pertaining to metaphysical doubt and alterity, calling into question new forms of intersubjectivity. The approach combines Kantian and environmental philosophy, shedding invaluable light on how the 'postman' relates to the non-human other:

> If no direct connection can be established between pure ideas and objective experiences, we are left with a position that amounts to a transcendental anthropocentrism where objects are said to conform to the mind of the subject and then and only then have the ability to become products of human cognition. Post-Kantian metaphysics rests on this concept of a human-world correlate and it is this presumption that is radically called into question by the idea of the Anthropocene, for in the age of man all relations between humans and non-humans unfold within the realm of interconnectivity. (Wilke 67)

Lanci, who looks at the zombie trope from the vantage point of the political allegories underpinning it in global culture history, provides an equally insightful account of the ideologies, indeed the "zombified cultural framework" that fuels the zombie phenomenon:

> In recent times, the zombie has been celebrated as the "official monster of our Great Recession." From the allegories and metaphors employed by different cultural theorists to describe neoliberal economics, to the wave of protesters who dressed as zombies to couple their explicit political discontent with a specific aesthetic figuration, the zombie aesthetic imaginary appears to have saturated many cultural and political discussions. (26)

Ironically, when viewed from the perspective of their political and politisizable potential, zombies acquire countercultural overtones, interpretable as parables of resistance:

> However, besides the repetitiveness of this trope in cultural, political, and economic debates, [I argue that] the critical potential of the figure

of the walking dead has not been investigated thoroughly enough. The figure of the zombie could be further employed as a way of understanding our subjective position under a politico-economic framework dominated by neoliberal economics. This critical potential can be found in the relation between the metaphor of the zombie – considered here as referring to a determinate political subjectivation – and the representation of the end of the world so common in these narratives. (27)

Representations of the zombie in cinema and television underwent considerable changes since Romero's classic horror movie monster to the post-9/11 productions…the propensity of global man to conjure up end-times scenarios. As most film culture theorists are quick to point out, the revenant dominant gave way to the zombie as a site of contamination, epitomising the endemic fear of the spread of viral infection after the attacks at 9/11. The rise in the terrorism threat in post-9/11 context, gave a particular impetus to the zombie narrative, the zombie apocalypse emerging overnight as the kindred spirit of posthumanist dystopias. As Joseph LeBlanc indicates, zombie movies not only proliferated against the backdrop of the war on terror paranoia[2], but the zombie figure acquired valences associated with gay sex as a mode of cannibal murder:

> Film and cultural theorists have long explored the horror movie monster as social commentary; for example, George Romero's zombie film series has been explained as critiques of miscegenation, consumer consumption, and the Cold War. This presentation suggests the new-found rise of the zombie narrative has found particular resonance in a post-9/11 world, where the figure of the zombie has shifted from the undead to the infected, conflating the AIDS pandemic, LGBTQ paranoia, and the newer rhetoric of terrorism. In particular, this presentation sees the zombie as a drag figure, representing an excess of death and contamination and its role in exposing a heteromasculine penetration paranoia during the War on Terror and the development – turning? – of a queer zombie epistemology. (LeBlanc 1)

A pioneering zombie apocalypse production in its own right, Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (screenplay by Alex Garland), is regarded as a genuine genre re-inventor. Drawing inspiration from Romero's formative, thriller-oriented mystery film, Boyle contributes to the genre complexities defining of the posthuman landscape, pushing the boundaries of social allegory:

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[2] At the start of the year 2019 IMDB listed a staggering number of 1259 titles of movies featuring "zombie" as keyword.

Social allegories seem simplistic at a glance. They generally deal with topics and issues that have been discussed repeatedly (such as time, individualism and survival), and then branch off into multi-layered, ambiguous symbolism. They can range in tone from sarcastic and satirical to sinister and sorrowful. Many film genres today can be used as social allegories: the Western allegorically represents Vietnam War; but of all the filmic allegories represented in contemporary cinema, the zombie film as social allegory is perhaps the most pervasive and striking. (Bass 1)

Excelling in the sense of verisimilitude that it conveys, the story line gravitates around the outbreak of a rage virus triggered by the attempt of a group of animal rights activists to release lab apes. While depicting a credible picture of zombie infestation, the film is a disquieting exploration of the limits of civilization and the short day's journey into utter dehumanization. The protagonist, Jim wakes up alone in an empty hospital to a deserted, zombie-plagued London, 28 days after the outbreak of the virus. In a zombie-ambushed church, he comes across other survivors, Selena and Mark who come to Jim's rescue, together setting off on an extreme mission: staying alive. In the process, they discover a father and a daughter, Frank and Hannah barricaded in a hotel and join forces with them in an attempt to locate an army base whose radio signal they pick up. Boyle's sophisticated mise-en-scene poignantly comes to light in the film's remarkable gradation and powerful structure. Instead of the outcome one would expect, reaching the army base acts as a second start for the action, as Jim, Selena and Hannah, now the sole survivors of the group, experience revelations far more disturbing then the virus infestation. All credit to Boyle's unique sense of pace and defamiliarisation technique, striking from the very opening of the film. In a memorable nine-minute travelogue depicting Jim's awakening, Boyle conveys horrific scenes of a believable, post-catastrophe London frozen in time, buried in garbage and raided by psychotic monkeys and zombies. Powered by momentum building effects and a highly atmospheric variation of lighting, *28 Days Later* portrays images of desolation, solitude and despair, the intensity of which create great authenticity. As well as the emotion it generates in the viewer, the film is a morality tale that invites a timely reconsideration of nihilism and Darwinism from the perspective of global ethics:

28 Days Later could best be described as the thinking man's zombie movie" (IMDb). It is a postmodern, semi-nihilistic take on the genre. No longer are the zombies created from toxic waste that we settled for in the past, these zombies are the by-product of scientific experimentation on

our society. The establishing shot in the film begins with scenes of police brutality, global warfare, rioting, nuclear explosions, and supreme anarchy. The shot zooms out to show that these images are coming from a television in an animal experimentation lab. These heavy images are symbolic of how humans treat each other. It is, essentially, survival of the fittest. We are weeding each other out until there is no more existence. (Bass 3)

With the zombie pandemic explicitly as its subject, the right doze of gore and violence for the blood-thirsty and the usual attempt at an uplifting, meaningful ending, *World War Z* is a mainstream, typically Hollywood production managing little of the subtlety and complexity of *28 Days Later*. Chaos and panic wreak havoc in the lives of former United Nations employee, Gerry Lane and his family following the outbreak of an unprecedentedly virulent, lethal virus that turns healthy individuals into feral, rabid creatures eating the living alive. Making a narrow escape with his wife and two daughters in a stolen RV trailer, Lane is commissioned to investigate the pest and find a cure for what spreads at an alarming rate, threatening to destroy the whole of humanity. His task is to assist a renowned virologist, Dr. Andrew Fassbach, in identifying the source of the worldwide outbreak and develop a vaccine. Unremarkable in both the manner in which it develops the theme, and examines the circumstances and implications of a like pandemic, the film scores reasonably high in the element plausibility and atmosphere (what with the SARS and swine flu scares). The opening scenes, describing the general turmoil, the congestion in the Philadelphia traffic with helicopters circling all around, and the horde of freshly reanimated undead roaming around and attacking cars and pedestrians are quite effective in terms of creating suspense. No short of tension is also the depiction of abandoned tenements, visceral terror, and the encroaching site and range of devastation captured in fine, expressive detail. Narrower in scope, however, this is an action-horror blockbuster that recycles old clichés of the genre, picturing the military as essentially the 'good guys' and zombies as potentially perennial, viciously voracious and attracted to noise.

Marking an upsurge in the zombie pop culture, AMC's *The Walking Dead* TV series (Andrew Lincoln, Norman Reedus, Melissa McBride, 2010), based on the novel by the same title, takes the zombie apocalypse theme to further eschatological levels in its representations of extremes of civilization, where survival is the only thing at stake. With 6 series aired and one currently in production, it has met with wide acclaim, contributing to what is shaping out as the global 'zombie culture'. It tells the story of a group of survivors of a zombie apocalypse that seek to reconstitute whatever remnants of the lost

humanity they can. As well as presenting a rich typology of post-apocalyptic characters, the series is a vivid rendition of a posthumanist universe where, the disappearance of one of one's kind may be the end of that kind. Much *28 Days Later* it raises fundamental questions regarding power relations, political action and the global flows, in so doing, thematising 'life after people' in a posthumanist realm characterized by the total collapse of state institutions.

In final analysis, poetics and politics, epistemology and ontology, indeed conceivability and plausibility aside, the zombie trope in global fiction is increasingly omnipresent, contextualized to the current politics and fragmented, dislocated, and alienating nature of existence at a juncture in time when humans have turned redundant and the prospect of the species perpetuating in non-human forms is the ultimate, irreconcilable and irredeemable future.

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THE TRUTH FROM FACT TO FICTION IN TWO SHORT STORIES OF THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY OLD SOUTH

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ABSTRACT. *The Truth from Fact to Fiction in Two Short Stories of the Twentieth Century Old South.* The short-stories I have chosen to discuss here are "A Worn Path" (1941) by Eudora Welty and "The Artificial Nigger" (1955) by Flannery O'Connor. They are complementary – as I hope to prove – illustrating two versions of a one-(grand)parent family tale. The white grandfather in O'Connor's story and the black grandmother in Welty's story have to cope with ever more difficult tasks in terms of *truth*(telling/teaching) and (self-)discovery. For truth – at least personally, if not philosophically – may mean facing all dangers as an ancient grandmother, for the sake of her sick grandson; it can mean coming to terms with one's own old self – in both stories; it may mean facing qualms of conscience and merciless loneliness – for both young and old.

Keywords: black – white; grandparents – grandchildren; irony; truth – facts – fiction; prejudice – reality; guilt – grotesque – growing-up; countryside – city; the Old South.

REZUMAT. *Adevărul de la fapt la ficțiune în două povestiri ale Vechiului Sud de secol XX.* Povestirile asupra cărora m-am oprit aici sunt „O potecă bătută" (1941) de Eudora Welty şi „Negrul artificial" (1955) de Flannery O'Connor. Ele sunt complementare – aşa cum sper să demonstrez – ilustrând două versiuni ale istoriei de familie cu un singur bunic. Bunicul alb din nuvela lui O'Connor şi bunica neagră din nuvela lui Welty au de înfruntat încercări tot mai grele în privința (spunerii/învățării) *adevărului* şi a (auto)descoperirii. Căci adevărul – măcar personal, dacă nu filosofic – poate însemna înfruntarea tuturor primejdiilor, ca bunică bătrână, de dragul nepotului bolnav; mai poate însemna negocierea interioară cu bătrânul sine şi acceptarea (limitelor) acestuia – în ambele nuvele; mai poate însemna înfruntarea remuşcării şi a nemiloasei singurătăți – atât pentru tineri, cât şi pentru bătrâni.

Cuvinte cheie: negru – alb; bunici – nepoți; ironie; adevăr – fapte – ficțiune; prejudecată – realitate; vină – grotesc – maturizare; rural – urban; Vechiul Sud.

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The two short stories "A Worn Path" (1941) by Eudora Welty and "The Artificial Nigger" (1955) by Flannery O'Connor share quite a few funny facts of fiction. Their authors are outstanding white representatives of the Old South feminine modern prose. Perhaps this is the main paradoxical privilege that they both enjoy and that entitles them to continue writing a kind of fiction with a moral meaning, during the mid-twentieth century cynical decades. It is actually the ambiguity of this disquieting moral meaning that surprises us (post)postmodern readers, who may have thought ourselves immune to such old-fashioned – if not classic and universal – challenges.

Both short stories focus on anti-heroic/unwise grandparents of orphaned grandchildren. The gap between generations is double, the parents are missing and being silently missed by both young and old. In the first story there is black Phoenix Jackson, whose age is a mystery even to herself:

> "How old are you, Granny?" he was saying.
> "There is no telling, mister," she said, "no telling." (Welty, 2002: 134)

Bearing a ridiculously mythical name that none the less may suggest some secret hope (or even doom) for endless renaissance, Phoenix walks from her village all the way to Natchez, through the woods and across the fields, all by herself, at Christmas time, in order to get the free medicine for her grandson's sore throat.

In the second story, white Mr. Head, sixty years old, Nelson's grandfather, takes his ten-year-old grandson to Atlanta, on (what should be) an initiating trip to show the motherless boy his native city.

By the end of both short stories, both grandparents – black Phoenix Jackson and white Mr. Head – evince a heavy conscience, remorse-ridden, deepening their helpless awkward love for their grandsons. Obviously, in both cases, the road the grandparents take is an allegory of mature guilty introspection. If it only were for these above-mentioned qualities, they would still prove enough to consecrate both short stories as literary masterpieces. Yet the list of such narrative qualities is much richer and runs ever deeper with each new rereading.

"A Worn Path" is an extremely concise story relying on the classic-modern dramatic-narrative technique of the (interior) monologue. Brave, fearless, fragile, frumpish, sly, old Phoenix Jackson talks to herself incessantly, both loudly and silently; moreover, she addresses the animals who may happen to appear in her way, the thorns of a bush, a scarecrow, invisible alligators (this is the Old South), and a stray dog who (almost) attacks her. She would soon talk to a hunter, then to a "nice lady" passing down a street in Natchez, she asks her to tie up her shoe laces; then she talks with an attendant and a nurse at the hospital where she arrives. Finally, she gets the charity medicine for her grandson back home.

For such a voluble character, with her moral vigor and stamina defying all obstacles and despite her old age, Phoenix could hardly be expected to suffer from an absolute rhetorical blank. Yet she is suddenly struck dumb, as if

by (unlikely) amnesia as soon as she has eventually reached the hospital – the actual destination of her formidable and solitary journey. The moment she gets there, for an instant, Phoenix seems to have forgotten both the purpose of her arrival at all and her grandson altogether.

For a superficial reader, this moment in the story might correspond to no more than a realistic depiction of some senile amnesia crisis. Yet when Phoenix says "I'm not going to forget him again, no, the whole enduring time. I could tell him from all the others in creation" (Welty 138) – the *true* meaning of her desperate outburst is a profound sense of guilt. Phoenix's grandson, whom one might assume to be around five years of age, had "swallowed lye" – as the nurse remembers, some two or three years before. This had fatally damaged his throat and the doctor promised Phoenix the charity "soothing medicine" for as long as she could come and get it for the poor child. "But it's an obstinate case" (Welty 137) – according to the nurse.

By this *double* instance of "forgetting her grandson" and the purpose of her own arriving at the hospital, the grandmother allows the reader to get a glimpse at her innermost conscience turmoil: her inescapable memory of herself having neglected the baby boy a couple of years before, for just a couple of moments, enough for the child to have drunk lye. And there is no forgiving herself for this – for as long as she lives. The charity medicine Christmas ritual works as a sort of repentance – if it can work at all for her.

Phoenix would do anything for her grandson now, trespass any conventional moral frontiers: she would even steal a (lost) nickel, from the hunter who had chased the stray dog away, and then jokingly pointed his gun at her, never guessing she *did* have the nickel on her conscience:

> "Doesn't the gun scare you?" he said, still pointing it.
> "No, sir, I seen plenty go off closer by, in my day, and for less than what
> I have done," she said, holding utterly still. (Welty, 2000: 135)

Then she would leave her pride aside and ask "stiffly" for the second nickel, from the considerate hospital attendant. She wants to buy her grandson "a little windmill" (138) as a Christmas gift, a paper toy that represents the ultimate luxury for the poor sick boy, but also to his guilty grandmother.

Eudora Welty's short story is especially admirable in that its narrator avoids any kind of melodramatic trap. The reader feels bound to resume "A Worn Path" – since the comic and picturesque instances, the tense witty dialogues function so well as to wrap up its tragic *true* meaning in many layers which are so effective narratologically. The reader's path gets itself *worn* in this compelling attempt at deciphering the *true* significance between the narrative lines – thus the reader's conscience is itself empathetically scrutinized. "A Worn Path" is Eudora Welty's sober reflection of/on the classical myth of Sisyphus, the right intertextual allusion for a modern writer like herself.

Perhaps this Sisyphus stamina at the deepest stratum of the story can also exemplify Eudora Welty's claim that "A Worn Path" is about the way in

which her own stories had come into being. There seems to be always a (more or less abstract) contest between *facts* and *fiction* in the writer's quest for *truth*; and perhaps the reader may better grasp this message somewhat indirectly, by glancing at a tale-telling memoir testimony:

> It was taken entirely for granted that there wasn't any lying in our family, and I was advanced in adolescence before I realized that in plenty of homes where I played with schoolmates and went to their parties, children lied to their parents and parents lied to their children and to each other. It took me a long time to realize that these very same everyday lies, and the stratagems and jokes and tricks and dares that went with them, were in fact the basis of the *scenes* I so well loved to hear about and hoped for and treasured in the conversation of adults. My instinct – the dramatic instinct – was to lead me, eventually, on the right track for a storyteller: the *scene* was full of hints, pointers, suggestions, and promises of things to find out and know about human beings. I had to grow up and learn to listen for the unspoken as well as the spoken – and to know a truth, I also had to recognize a lie. (Welty, 2003: 42; emphasis in the original text)

<div align="center">*</div>

Like Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor was well aware of her own excellent writer's skills. "The Artificial Nigger" has been often praised as a narrative tour de force: my concern is the possibility that this example of O'Connor's narrative virtuosity may have found if not a model, at least a precursor in Welty's "A Worn Path."

The story "The Artificial Nigger" is a much more complex endeavor – for both writer and reader. This time the allegorical journey is undertaken by grandfather and grandson, together, with an openly declared 'moral' purpose: that it should teach arrogant young Nelson a lesson. The 'lesson' is itself ambiguous: on the one hand, it may seem to be a lesson in humility – in which case little had the self-assured grandfather known that his would-be didactic demonstration would eventually hit himself, too, like a boomerang. This is the kind of elusive *truth* that puts Flannery O'Connor on the map not only of the Old South, but also of the best writers of the world ever.

On the other hand, Mr. Head's lesson may be – above his own (thick) *head* – one against narrow-mindedness and racial prejudice, and intolerance; also one against cowardice – in which case again he would be himself the *true* target of a terrible revelation. An "artificial nigger" shatters the stubborn conscience of an old white man and brings about a shock of *authenticity* to his mind, regarding (his own way of looking at) *true*/living African Americans all around – on the one hand, and his own white implacably growing-up grandson – on the other hand.

Flannery O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger" may satirically illustrate *avant la lettre* African American writer Toni Morrison's concept of *Africanism* – i.e. the

white writers'/people's tendency to project any fallible aspect of mortal humanity, any moral flaw upon the wide screen of the African race (Morrison 1993; 6 – 7). Here in O'Connor's daring story, this screen is *doubled* by the cityscape. To the self-righteous white Mr. Head, Atlanta is what Natchez is to versatile black Phoenix Jackson in Welty's short story: the *double* screen upon which utter moral defeat is projected – irrespective of the anti-heroic grandparent's skin color. The guilty shadow of an old conscience has to come out to light here and now.

Unable to make up for his embarrassment in the boy's eyes, Mr. Head gets (them both) lost in Atlanta – and thus the old man painfully reveals his actual lack of life experience, despite all efforts to cover it under his insistence on racial prejudice as a would-be piece of wisdom. His rhetoric is too poor to cover the *truth*. As a mocking image of the illuminating guide, he finds himself at a loss in the (mock-Dantesque) infernal city, thus awkwardly getting Nelson entrapped, as well, in this nightmare by daylight.

Then the old man abandons and "denies" his own grandchild. When Nelson accidentally runs into a passer-by and the outraged lady threatens to call the police, Mr. Head betrays and repudiates the boy, in front of a horrified mob of perfect strangers:

> Mr. Head was trying to detach Nelson's fingers from the flesh in the back of his legs. The old man's head had lowered itself into his collar like a turtle's; his eyes were glazed with fear and caution.
> "Your boy has broken my ankle!" the old woman shouted. "Police!"
> Mr. Head sensed the approach of the policeman from behind. He stared straight ahead at the women who were massed in their fury like a solid wall to block his escape.
> "*This is not my boy*," he said. "*I never seen him before.*"
> He felt Nelson's fingers fall out of his flesh.
> The women dropped back, staring at him with horror, as if they were so repulsed by *a man who would deny his own image and likeness* that they could not bear to lay hands on him. Mr. Head walked on, through a space they silently cleared, and left Nelson behind. Ahead of him he saw nothing but a hollow tunnel that had once been the street. (O'Connor, 1962: 209 – 210; emphasis mine)

The dramatic quality of this scene is even heightened by a minimum of descriptive details; the focus is obviously on the (*double*) conscience: on the one hand – that of the protagonist, on the other hand – that of the mob. There can be no way back after this decisive moment. Nelson has just realized he is on his own from now on. Mr. Head has signed his sentence to loneliness for the rest of his life. The solipsistic revelation of the terrible *truth* is therefore *double*. And the classically anonymous mob has just witnessed and confirmed it.

Yet somehow, Mr. Head and Nelson must get back to their countryside home from this urban inferno. There comes the rescuing "fat man" guiding

them to the suburb train stop, since it is already too late for the two travelers to reach the station anymore. Still the moral break between grandfather and grandson seems beyond redemption.

Then the *deus ex machina* appears in the funny (ironical) shape of a plaster lawn jockey – the so-called "artificial nigger" that gives the story its title:

> He had not walked five hundred yards down the road when he saw, within reach of him, the plaster figure of a Negro sitting bent over on a low yellow brick fence that curved around a wide lawn. The Negro was about Nelson's size and he was pitched forward at an unsteady angle because the putty that held him to the wall had cracked. One of his eyes was entirely white and he held a piece of brown watermelon.
> Mr. Head stood looking at him silently until Nelson stopped at a little distance. Then as the two of them stood there, Mr. Head breathed, "An artificial nigger!"
> It was not possible to tell if the artificial Negro were meant to be young or old; he looked too miserable to be either. He was meant to look happy because his mouth was stretched up at the corners but the chipped eye and the angle he was cocked at gave him a wild look of misery instead.
> "An artificial nigger!" Nelson repeated in Mr. Head's exact tone. (O'Connor, 1962: 212)

This kitsch decorative object, so specifically Southern, miraculously brings about the reconciliation they had both lost any hope for. Grumpy Mr. Head exclaims: "An artificial nigger!" – and "*Nelson repeated in Mr. Head's exact tone*" (my emphasis) the same dumb remark. This is enough for them, more than any formal agreement: now they can go back home together again; they belong together.

The remark itself sounds shrill, meaningless, pointless; it seems to belong to the theater of the absurd rather than to a (decent) realistic short story, but its moral mission has been accomplished and this is all that matters. Mr. Head's conventionally/perfunctory *racist rhetoric* is resumed – for this obviously expresses the *conformity* of the white people from the Old South above any genuine race-hatred. Having spent his entire life in his obscure little village, Mr. Head evidently lacks the necessary life-experience that would provide him with any reasonable argument for such a mentality. Mr. Head's blunt racism works as another expression of his fear of the other, of the unknown; maybe even his fear of inevitably losing Nelson, one day, to the frightening city.

Yet, as if just to confirm this unhoped-for return to the precarious normality of their routine relationship, as grandfather and grandson, Mr. Head needs to acknowledge the secret significance of this reconciliation moment in his own awkward narrow-minded way:

> Nelson's eyes seemed to implore him to explain once and for all the mystery of existence.

> Mr. Head opened his lips to make a lofty statement and heard himself say, "They ain't got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one."
> After a second, the boy nodded with a strange shivering about his mouth, and said, "Let's go home before we get ourselves lost again." (O'Connor, 1962: 213)

Poor things, grandfather and grandson, belong together again, bound now to that ineffable place they both call *home*. Nelson has learned forgiveness. Mr. Head has learned to acknowledge "his true depravity" (O'Connor 213) and to be grateful not only for divine mercy, but also for his grandson's forgiveness. The artificial Negro reflects in their *double* image: neither young, nor old; neither happy, nor miserable.

In the reader's memory, this is how they will stay, the touching awkward *double* image of (un)heroic *truth* above all facts of life:

> *The two of them stood there with their necks forward at almost the same angle and their shoulders curved in almost exactly the same way and their hands trembling identically in their pockets. Mr. Head looked like an ancient child and Nelson like a miniature old man.* They stood gazing at the artificial Negro as if they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat. (O'Connor, 1962: 212 – 213; emphasis mine)

Perhaps it is particularly this appearance of local color that attracts more and more today's readers to Flannery O'Connor's sharp short stories. With(in) it there may be an illusion of safety, of reading just for curiosity, about remote places and their utterly different cultures.

Yet in her non-fiction writings, which can be just as sharp as her fiction, Flannery O'Connor herself warned such willingly self-deluding readers against their superficiality. Wherever her readers may be, they cannot be too far from her universal *diegesis* that is free from picturesque idealization. Here is a most convincing illustration:

> When we look at a good deal of serious modern fiction, and particularly Southern fiction, we find this quality about it that is generally described, in a pejorative sense, as grotesque. Of course, I have found out that *anything that comes from the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic.* (O'Connor, 1995: 40; emphasis mine)

There are multiple layers of *truth*, from (mere) facts of life to the disquieting/shifty/pragmatic Jamesian concept of *truth-in-the-making*. There is also the *personal truth* of both Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor – the truth of being white women writers of the Old South, therefore bound to deal with the black character's presence in their fiction. Then there is the hard historical/

political/*social truth* of the Old South, which allows no honest writer to (pretend to) just ignore it. Then there is the (poetic) *truth* of the story-making and the self-denying detachment writers need when writing *about* the writing of their fiction.

And yet the inexhaustible layers of fiction itself are even more numerous, hard to grasp and alluring. How safely far away from their fiction can such wise writers stay – I wonder – even then and there, writing about their own craft?

Though a white Southern writer, Eudora Welty created a(n in)credible short story about an old African American grandmother and her *Sisyphus*-like *doom of a heavy heart*. She was soon followed by Flannery O'Connor, known as a Southern Catholic white writer, (paradoxically) judged by some literary critics as the anti-intellectual Southern writer *par excellence* – who achieved here a strange unforgettable story, about a white American grandfather failing his grandson and trying to recover him by all means, even by the preposterous image of garden gnome as an artificial Negro.

There is no possible conclusion/reconciliation/solution to the complicated issues of such relationships as those between grandparents and their (orphan) grandchildren; just as those between black and white people in the American Old South. Paradoxically, due to their exquisite literary gift, irrespective of their skin color, writers of the Old South have reached a better way to tell the *truth* about these intricate issues.

Today, after the age of Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, as we are reading compelling African American women writers like Toni Morrison, or even so much younger (but no less talented) Yaa Gyasi – we can contemplate many of the same intricate issues also from the opposite viewpoint. All their ineffably metaphorical fiction is incomparably more convincing and closer to unfathomable *truth* than most clear-cut facts, whether recorded or not, as dry dignified history.

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JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *THE STONE GODS* AS AN EBULLITION OF GENRES

ALINA PREDA[1]

ABSTRACT. *Jeanette Winterson's The Stone Gods as an Ebullition of Genres.* This article examines, through the lenses of genre theory applied to *The Stone Gods*, the reasons why the novel has been harshly criticised for failing to satisfy as science fiction. The analysis does justice to the novel's complexity, revealing its multifarious nature, an example of the ebullition of literary genres that characterises many modernist and post-modernist works.

Keywords: modernist and post-modernist trends, the hybridization of genres, science fiction.

REZUMAT. *Opera wintersoniană Zeii de piatră – un amalgam de genuri literare.* Acest articol examinează, prin prisma teoriei genurilor, motivele pentru care romanul *Zeii de piatră* a fost aspru criticat pentru că nu ar satisface criteriile genului *science fiction*. Analiza scoate în evidenţă complexitatea romanului, care ilustrează tendinţele moderniste şi postmoderniste spre o amalgamare a genurilor literare.

Cuvinte cheie: modernism, postmodernism, hibridizarea genurilor literare, science fiction.

Starting from the variant attempts to justify the prominence of one or the other member of the writer-reader-text triad and continuing with the literary critics' constant efforts to assign texts to a given genre, the world of literary theory and criticism has been evolving under the hovering spectre of taxonomical vagueness. This fundamental ambiguity resulted from the incessant dynamism of the writing process that characterises the literary

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imagination, as well as from the affluence of possible interpretations fostered by truly valuable literary creations. Notoriously difficult to appraise, categorise and label, the work of Jeanette Winterson is a case in point, examined in this article through the lenses of genre theory applied to *The Stone Gods*. The 2007 novel has been harshly criticised for failing to satisfy as science fiction, resulting in its author being chastised for what was perceived as supercilious reluctance to fully embrace this genre.

In their introduction to the volume *L'éclatement des genres au XXe siècle* the editors, Marc Dambre and Monique Gosselin-Noat, justify their choice of title by explaining that, out of a plethora of possibilities, such as "dislocation", "drift", "dynamics", "deconstruction", "compositeness", "transgression", "transformation", "indeterminateness", "crisis" and "erasure", they favoured the term "outburst" ("éclatement"), as it conveys the sense of emergence, flourishing and positive explosion of unfamiliar combinations of genres peculiar to the end of the 20th century and to the beginning of the 21st (5). This study relies on a different term, one that refers to the act of boiling up, seething or overflowing, term employed not only literally, in physics – as in "the absolute point of ebullition", namely "the point at which a gas in a container will condense to a liquid solely by the application of pressure," defined in 1860 by Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev (Britannica), but also figuratively, in the literary realm, as in "did not (…) give way to any ebullitions of private grief" – William Makepeace Thackeray's reference to a desperate outpouring of emotion (7). A Latin word that entered the English language due to French influences, "ebullition" enjoys dynamic connotations of positive outburst or sudden emergence of surprisingly new combinations that push literary works beyond the outer limits of genre delimitation. The term "ebullition" is, thus, dynamically expressive and, since it allows for a phonetic word-play with the word "abolition", it also serves to intimate the futility of expecting literary works to fit into neatly defined categories, and to further the idea that embracing difference, boundary crossing and genre transgressions constitutes the only way towards a better understanding and a full appreciation of literature.

Nowadays, the problem of genres needs to be assessed in relation to the concept of modernity, since it has been through the addition of more recent genres to the classical ones that the currently obvious hybridisation occurred. The romantic notion of a literary work's singularity which presupposed its unremitting return upon itself as a result of its purity of genre has been overpassed by the evolution of the novel to its current form which reflects an awareness of the challenges posed by a dynamics of heterogeneity stemming from the apprehension of reality in its vast diversity and from the ensuing impossibility to subscribe to a forcibly unified view of said reality. Born out of

a veritable creative instinct, the modernist novel now embodies a form that requires a more sophisticated audience, as well as better-equipped critics and readers, able to cope with the neoteric ethics, the ludic eroticism and the hybridization of genres displayed together with an ever increasing defiance against fixed lines of demarcation, against clear boundaries and against severe limitations (Dambre and Gosselin-Noat 6-7). Alastair Renfrew points out that, as early as 1941, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin expounded the elusive nature of the novel, which eschews all classification attempts made from definite, stable and unitary positions, showing that even such generic markers as length, fictionality or non-verse structure can easily be dismissed: see Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) versus Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* (1942), Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) or David Peace's *GB84* (2004), and Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin's novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* of 1833 (Renfrew 101-102). Bakhtin defines the novel as "a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (262) and claims that, being a unique genre, in that it is not a straightforward one, the novel fosters the development of certain stylistic requirements that give shape to discursive layers orchestrated in such a way as to create the novelistic image of another's language, style, consciousness and outlook on the world, without which the characters could not enter "the zone of *dialogical contact*", a zone of "potential contact with the author" (45).

Through her novels, Jeanette Winterson seeks to "reinvent the form for a modern age" by designing "strange and beautiful parables that dispense with straightforward narratives" (Merritt). *The Stone Gods*, like all Wintersonian stories, displays a narrative strategy recurrently employed by Winterson in her attempt to prod away at the relationship between story-telling and life: a blend of the fictional, the historical and the autobiographical that consistently baffles the readers' horizon of expectations. As Fiona Capp argues, "the degree of urgency and prophetic angst" simmering throughout this work is "a reminder of Winterson's evangelical origins", probed in her autobiographical novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, and is informed by "her familiarity with the idea of apocalypse". *The Stone Gods* starts with "overtones of Orwell's *1984*" and ends in a complementary fashion, with grisly images of a "post-nuclear holocaust world" (Capp "Review").

What appears, at first sight, to be a science fiction novel recounting life on a new planet, reveals itself to be much more. The seemingly futuristic depiction of a world facing destruction traces, in fact, not the future of Mother Earth, a.k.a. Planet Blue, but the past of Orbus, a.k.a. Planet Red. Not a new planet, but an old one, and one of many, at that: the sense that one grasps in the process of reading is that of "the devolution (as opposed to an evolution) of

mankind", a self-destructiveness brought forth by the nefarious alliance between anthropocentrism and capitalist patriarchy, which bred a worldview "instrumental to the systematic exploitation of resources leading to environmental devastation" (Preda, "Agential Realism" 26). The novel opens with the presentation of Orbus, approximately 65 million years ago, a red planet that had begun to totter due to the recklessness of its human inhabitants who, in the past, had seemingly managed to bring several other planets to the brink of extinction. Among them, Planet White, which had eventually gotten much too close to its sun, the same one that serves the newly discovered Planet Blue:

> There had been oceans on the white planet. We found a sea-floor, ridged and scooped, and shells as brittle as promises, and bones cracked like hope. White, everything white, but not the white of a morning when the sun will pour through it, nor the white of a clean cloth; (…). This was the white at the end of the world when nothing is left, not the past, not the present and, most fearful of all, not the future. There was no future in this bleached and boiled place. (…) Without armour of a kind, anyone would be crushed. Without oxygen, no one here can breathe at all. Without fireproof clothing, you would be charred as the rest of what was once life. And yet there was once life here, naked and free and optimistic. (SG 52)

This is just one of the strangely familiar accounts delivered by *Starship Resolution*'s crew, a spacecraft under the command of Captain Handsome, commissioned to wipe out the dinosaurs inhabiting Planet Blue, thus turning it into a hospitable environment for the relocation of the population fleeing Orbus. On this dying planet, the three powers fighting for supremacy, namely the communist Sino-Mosco Pact, the religiously fanatic Eastern Caliphate and the technologically advanced Central Power, are neither able nor willing to avoid the sweeping red sandstorms which fire up ecological disaster, or to effectively and judiciously temporize impending conflicts between the Collective and the Believers, conflicts bound to eventually draw in even the peace-loving folks of the Central Power, who want "to live responsibly on a crowded planet" while the others are "scanning the skies for God, and draining the last drop of oil out of the ground" (SG 7-8). This political power-group pretending to aim at peaceful coexistence employs "the euphemism-laden rhetoric of warring civilizations" and displays both a "caustic corruption posing as democracy" (Preda, "New Planets for Old" 148-149), and the political demagogy characteristic of the autocratic state:

> The new planet will be home to the universe's first advanced civilization.
> It will be a democracy – because whatever we say in public, the Eastern

Caliphate isn't going to be allowed within a yatto-mile of the place. We'll shoot 'em down before they land. No, we won't shoot them down, because the President of the Central Power has just announced a new world programme of No War. We will not shoot down the Eastern Caliphate, we will robustly repel them. (SG 6)

The avant-garde of the colonisers-to-come is a party of four people and a dog, Rufus, travelling on the *Resolution* spacecraft: Captain Handsome and his protégée, Spike, the Robo *Sapiens* who had explored Planet Blue and was supposed to be destroyed for data-protection purposes, Pink McMurphy, a woman whose husband's proclivity for youthful appearance forces her to consider getting genetically fixed in order to look twelve, Rufus and his master, Billie Crusoe, a female scientist accused of terrorism for her refusal to give up working on her traditional farm, "the last of its line – like an ancient ancestor everyone forgot", "a bio-dome world, secret and sealed: a message in a bottle from another time" (SG 11) and for her pertinacity to live not in the city, but on this very farm, in a "compact stone house, water-barrel by the front door, apple tree at the gate" (SG 40). Captain Handsome had rescued Spike from the terminal process of dismantling and recycling in the hope that he could teach this female robot the subtleties of love, yet Billie Crusoe is actually the one who, at Spike's prompting, shall embark on this major undertaking in the final pages of the first chapter.

Unfortunately, the meteor that the Captain rerouted towards the new planet accelerates, and the collision happens at too high a speed, four days early and in the wrong spot, triggering an Ice Age that, while bringing forth the demise of the scaled monsters, ultimately forestalls the zealously anticipated swift colonisation. A disaster for the crew hired to eradicate the dinosaurs, who decide to use the ship's Landpods to reach the breeding colony's landing-place where there is a food depot and a shelter for the sixty deportees, Class A political prisoners' part of Central Power's colonisation experiment, and where they might have a chance of being rescued. Only Captain Handsome and Pink McMurphy set out on this journey in the end, the latter anticipating an Arctic romance, "with that robot out of the way" (SG 79), as Spike chooses to stay on the ship and persevere in her attempts to contact Orbus and ask for help. She tells Billie: "One day, tens of millions of years from now, someone will find me rusted into the mud of a world they have never seen, and when they crumble me between their fingers, it will be you they find" (SG 79). Climactically, Billie resolves not to abandon the robot, whose feelings of love she obviously reciprocates, if their history up to that point is carefully considered. Billie Crusoe had impressed Spike so much that, as her Last Request before being drained of data, the robot had selected her to do the final interview for

The One Minute Show. Spike had been designed to look gorgeous so as to be of service to the boys sent in Space, because inter-species sex was only illegal on Orbus. Impressed by Spike's beauty from the start, Billie cannot process such outrageous information:

> 'So you had sex with spacemen for three years? (…) But you were also the most advanced member of the crew'.
> 'I'm still a woman'. (…) I want to be outraged on this woman's behalf, but she isn't a woman, she's a robot, and isn't it better that they used a robot instead of dispatching a couple of sex-slaves? And yet. And yet Robo *sapiens* are not us, but they may become a nearer relative than the ape.
> 'Humans share ninety-seven per cent of their genetic material with apes,' said Spike, 'but they feel no kinship.'
> 'Do we feel kinship with robots?'
> 'In time you will, as the differences between us decrease.' (…)
> I decide to ignore the vast implications of this statement as unsuitable for an *In-depth One Minute Special*. Instead I press Record and turn, smiling, to Spike. 'I have a question that will interest many people,' I say, knowing that nearly everyone would be much more interested to hear about robot-sex in space. 'If your data can be transferred, as is happening now, then why must we dismantle you when you cost so much to build?' (…) 'Why aren't you a machine for re-use?'
> 'Because I am not a machine.'
> When she smiles it's like light at the beginning of the day. 'Robo *sapiens* were programmed to evolve'
> 'Within limits.'
> 'We have broken those limits.' (SG 28-29)

Although Billie had agreed to facilitate Spike' escape, the robot benefitted from Captain Handsome's timely help and they only met again on Starship *Resolution* where the budding relationship blossomed nurtured by profound conversations about what it means to be human, about why the robot, who is endowed with neural rather than limbic systems, claims to experience feelings, about whether Robo *sapiens* and *Homo sapiens*, being both conscious beings, might have more in common than previously expected. Still astonished at being wooed by a lover with "an articulated titanium skeleton and a fibre-optic neural highway", yet able to wonder whether one can only love what one knows, and willing to "find a language of beginning" for their love experiment, Billie initially states that she cannot sleep with a computer, but is touched by the green-eyed, dark-haired, olive-skinned robot's desire to feel what it is like to love someone the way Captain Handsome loved her (SG

68). The Captain had opened the floodgates to emotional turmoil and Spike, eager to be an active lover, chose Billie to accompany her on that pioneering voyage. So Billie resolves that, whilst a robot is "an intelligent, ultra-sensitive moving lump of metal", a human may be even less, a "moving lump of flesh", more often than not lacking both intelligence and sensitivity (SG 81).

Following several unsuccessful attempts to contact Orbus, once the air system broke down, the two are coerced into leaving ship and pressed to embark on what is bound to be their last journey. The cold affects them both, albeit differently, since Spike experiences it as "a depletion of energy" (SG 85) and, as the snowy weather relentlessly wears Spike's energy down, the discussion they had back on the Ship regarding biology versus consciousness – "If I were to lop off your arms, your legs, your ears, your nose, put out your eyes, roll up your tongue, would you still be you?" (SG 63) – is tragically mirrored by the self-inflicted dismemberment Spike is forced to resort to:

> Spike said, 'Pass me the screwdriver.'
> 'What are you going to do?'
> 'Take off my leg. I need to conserve energy.'
> With her knife she was already incising the skin at the top of her thigh.
> In minutes she had removed the limb.
> 'Now the other one ... '
> While she was intent on her operation, she was talking but not looking at me. 'Didn't I ask you what was really you? If I lopped off your legs would you be less than you?' (...)
> Spike wants me to remove one of her arms, then another. She is speaking slowly because her cells are low. (...) Silently we agree that I will detach her head from her torso. I first unfasten, then lay down, her chest, like a breastplate. Her body is a piece of armour she has taken off. Now she is what she said life would be – consciousness. (SG 88-91)

The two lovers wait for their demise while reading James Cook's journals, which Billie had been given by Captain Handsome, a lover of literature in all its forms. Thus, the first chapter of the novel ends, and the second begins with the story of Billy and Spikkers, two lads who fall in love on Easter Island while witnessing another moment in the devolution of mankind. A young sailor left ashore by Captain Cook's crew as they were fleeing the natives, Billy gives up hope of ever setting foot on the Ship called *Resolution*, and tries to survive on this formerly verdant and luxurious island turned barren by its inhabitants, who felled all the trees in order to transport massive statues carved in stone to the coastline. These stone gods hauled to the outer perimeter of Easter Island are now an apple of discord for the natives, and Spikkers – an island-born half Dutch, half native young man, succeeds in protecting Billy from the

warring factions but dies while trying to settle the conflict. This micro-cosmos is the perfect example of an ecosystem brought to the brink of extinction by human recklessness, this time in the name of religious fanaticism rather than financial greed or thirst for power, and works to show that, whatever the drive, men seem to be "doomed to rape the planet and destroy one another" (Merritt "Review").

This denouement is confirmed in the novel's third and fourth chapters, whose action is entirely set on Planet Blue, this time itself very close to becoming uninhabitable. The third section opens with autobiographical references, as the first-person narrator, later identified as Billie Crusoe, chances upon a book manuscript whose title, *The Stone Gods*, immediately reminds her of Easter Island. She glances at fragments familiar to the readers from the first two sections of the book: Daniel Defoe is mentioned here, as well as Dante, Dickens, Emerson, George Eliot and Adam Smith, as the narrator alternates manuscript reading with life telling, her memories scarred by abandonment at the very young age of twenty-eight days. Her mother had been born in 1943, during World War 2, which had been supposed to bring long-lasting freedom but, instead, inveigled contraptions that fostered extremism in all areas of life:

> Identity cards. Tracking devices in vehicles. Compulsory finger print database. Guilty until proven innocent. No right of appeal for convicted terrorists. (...) Diplomatic-style immunity from investigation and prosecution for all elected politicians. Stop and Search. Police powers of arrest extended to 'reason to believe ... '. End of dual citizenship. Curfew Zones. Routine military patrols in 'areas of tension'. CCTV on every street. CCTV compulsory in mosques. Chip implants for prisoners on probation and for young offenders. No demonstrations, on-line protests shut down, those responsible cautioned. New Public Order laws, the Freedom Act, to be signed by all citizens and including the requirement to 'report any person or persons who are or who appear to be acting contrary to the rights and responsibilities of ordinary citizens as outlined in the Act'. Right to enter homes and businesses without a warrant. (SG 130)

And, soon, disaster struck: advertised as a peaceful war, meant to liberate the people of China, Pakistan and Iran, the next global conflict turned nuclear when the latter dropped the bomb ushering in the Post-3 War age. Following World War 3, the nuclear warfare that has left the planet in a state of devastation similar to the one that had plagued Orbus, a near-future London is ruled by the MORE Corporation, a global company whose slogan is "No MORE War" and whose reluctant employee Billie currently is. At MORE-*Futures*, she works with Spike, the first Robo *sapiens*, who does not need a

body, being just a beautiful clear-skinned, green-eyed, dark-haired robot head fixed on a titanium plate. Developed to take over the decision-making process influential on a global scale form the inapt human beings who have been in charge so far, Spike is "Oz, she's Medusa, she's Winnie, she's God" (SG 132). Just like its namesake in the first part, Spike, devoid of limbic pathways and, thus, unable to experience emotion, pursues poetry in order to gain insight into what it means to be human, a rather surprising feat in a world that deems art and love trivial, worthless and incommodious, given the widespread belief that the latest war was "a crisis of over-emotionalism" (SG 141). Billie, the only programmer that does not treat Spike like a robot, gives her *The Stone Gods* manuscript to read, in an attempt to make her understand that loneliness "is about finding a landing-place" and that the opposite of loneliness is not company, but return – "A place to return" (SG 145).

In search of such a landing place, Billie takes Spike, in the final part of the novel, to Wreck City – a No Zone positioned at the outskirts of Tech City. Those who live here view Tech City as a puppet show run by MORE, and among the area's inhabitants who, like the Pilgrim Fathers of 1620, are trying to found an Alternative Community, Billie Crusoe finds her Man Friday. They reminisce about the Pre-War period, deplore the times of conflict, sharply dissect their disastrous outcome and browse through shelves packed with out-dated print media where a copy of James Cook's journals is quickly spotted by the main character. A reminder that these repeating worlds construed in the novel revolve around similarly-named pairs of characters bound to fall in love, eventually. Indeed, Friday warns Billie not to go through the Dead Forest – part of the heavily policed Red Zone, which she plans to explore in an attempt to locate the runaway robot head whose disappearance was noticed by MORE-*Security* and blamed on Billie. He finally helps reunite the two, both outlaws now, since Billie stands accused of having stolen Spike, while the robot has chosen to defect, severing contact with the Mainframe computer before engaging in a surreal lesbian sex-scene with one of the Alternative Community's members. Spike explains: "I am programmed to accept new experiences. Therefore, when Nebraska suggested that I might try this, I was able to agree without consulting my Mainframe" (SG 176). By disabling her Mainframe connection, Spike seals Billie's fate, as now she stands accused not only of negligence or theft, but of terrorist acts, and Tech City's security forces, MORE-*Peace*, "Army and Police rolled into one" (SG 192), have an excuse for invading Wreck City. And, once again, Billie refuses to abandon Spike and save herself. Then the robot head picks up, from a 1960s telescope, "what can only be described as a message in a bottle – except that it isn't in a bottle, it's in a wavelength": a signal sent sixty-five million years before, "one line of programming code for a Robo *sapiens*" (SG 202). Putting

two and two together, the signal and the telescope, James Cook's *The Journals* and *The Stone Gods* manuscript, Billie, in the wake of a revelation tantamount to a transcendental anagnorisis, makes a definitive gesture:

> I put the pages on the desk, picked up Spike and kissed her lightly on the mouth. Then I put her on top of the pages.
> 'See you in sixty-five million years, maybe.'
> 'Billie?'
> 'Spike?'
> 'I'll miss you.'
> 'That's limbic.'
> 'I can't help it.'
> 'That's limbic too.'
> I set off (…) I didn't notice the soldiers coming towards me. (…) Then I heard three reports in quick succession, and I fell down. (…) When I open my eyes again, I'm at the bottom of the track. (…) I know I'm bleeding but the wound was always there. (…) At the bend in the track, I see what I know I will see: the compact seventeenth-century house, built on the sheer fall of the drop to the stream. There's a water-barrel by the front door, and a tin cup hung on a chain, and an apple tree at the beginning of the garden, where it meets the track. (SG 205-206)

And, thus, it all comes full-circle and Billie is back at the farm described in the first chapter, her own "message in a bottle from another time" (SG 11) as the novel ends with its leitmotif: "Everything is imprinted for ever with what it once was" (SG 207).

Throughout *The Stone Gods*, the initiated reader will easily spot startling samples of interdisciplinary discourse playing on both intertextuality and intratextuality, such as literary references to the Bible, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Captain James Cook's journals, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, William Shakespeare's *109th Sonnet* and to the works of Dante Alighieri, Adam Smith, Charles Dickens, Agatha Christie, Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Eliot, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, W. H. Auden, and to Winterson's own *The Powerbook*, as well as non-literary allusions to Liza Minnelli's song *Maybe This Time*, to the Pilgrim Fathers' *Mayflower* voyage, to Bernard Lovell's telescope and Laika's spaceflight, to the Cuban Missile Crisis, to president Kennedy's civil rights speech, to scientific theories – the existence of a quantum universe, neither random nor determined, a "universe of potentialities, waiting for an intervention to affect the outcome" (SG 205), and to philosophical questions that have extensively been pondered by great thinkers – the nature of consciousness, the evolution of emotions, the essentials of

human existence, what it means to be human, what happens after death, and the forthcoming entropic doom. Additionally, the statement made in the first part of the novel, "This is a great day for science." (SG 9), is a leitmotif of the *Dexter's Laboratory* animated series (1996-2003), whilst Captain Handsome's relationship with Spike, initially rooted in books, mainly works of poetry, leads to a description of the robot inspired by John Donne's poem "The Sun Rising" – "She is all States, all Princes I, Nothing else is …" and plausibly motivated by the fact that Spike is both solar powered and the centre of the Captain's emotional universe. Intriguingly, Earth Billie's chancing upon the manuscript of *The Stone Gods* on the tube is a happening rooted in reality, as the novel's manuscript forgotten by a Penguin Books employee on a bench at Balham tube station was, indeed, found by Martha Osten in March, 2007 (Briggs) and the integration of this event in the narrative's third part is an intratextual genial gimmick that allows Winterson to consistently reference bits of the first two parts of the novel, taking even further her spirited self-referencing endeavour. Moreover, as Adeline Johns-Putra explains, the fact that the end of the world scenario closing the novel's fourth chapter is a rather open ending, thus devoid of closure, complements the openness of the narrative:

> The novel links an 'open' worldview (receptiveness to new paradigms beyond the status quo, to other beings beyond the familiar) with 'open' narrative form (non-linearity, repetition, and open-endedness). For one thing, it represents openness in terms of plot and practices openness in terms of structure; for another, it makes explicit comments throughout on the illusory nature of conventional narrative continuity and closure. (180)

What is more, the author opportunely employs philosophical, technical, economic, legal and scientific jargon, the narrative discourse brimming with metalanguage characteristic of fields as diverse as art, music, history, philosophy, evolutionary biology, anthropology, psychology, medicine, astronomy, microeconomics as well as macroeconomics, information science and technology.

Orbus's twisted hi-tech world reminds readers of the *Black Mirror* anthology series, especially the *Nosedive* and *White Christmas* episodes, and the Post-3 War devastated Earth makes them recall not only *Blade Runner*, the 1982 sci-fi thriller, based on Philip K. Dick's 1968 science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, but other prominent cyberpunk works as well, such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* of 1984 or Shirow Masamune's *Ghost in the Shell* of 1989, which also brought to life worlds ruled by corporations that turned democracy into an out-dated system of government, much like Orbus's and Post-3 War Earth's Tech City, where the MORE corporation is pulling the

strings to run the show and to control each and every area of individuals' existence. There can, consequently, be no denying that *The Stone Gods* displays features associated with the science fiction genre: samples of soft and social SF, as well as of cyberpunk and feminist science fiction, combine with episodes of pastoral fantasy, time travel or alternate history, Space Western, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, etc. Nevertheless, in the case of fictional works, at least, genre assignment should not be performed on the sole basis of preponderance. No matter how many features belonging to this genre *The Stone Gods* may parade, the definitive assertion that this is a sci-fi novel can best be described as a *non sequitur* and anyone moderately familiar with Winterson's work would avoid jumping to such a conclusion unless, of course, they had a different agenda.

It is actually true that, on 25 August 2007, not too long after sending *The Stone Gods* manuscript to Penguin Books, in an interview for *New Scientist*, the free-spoken Winterson did glibly assert that she hates science fiction, but her statement was meant to emphasise the dangers of borrowing from science irresponsibly and indiscriminately: "science is crucial to our world (…). But you shouldn't fake it because science is too important, it's the basis for our lives. I expect a lot more science in fiction because science is so rich". Regarding *The Stone Gods*, she rationalised: "it is fiction, and it has science in it, and it is set (mostly) in the future, but the labels are meaningless" ("September-2007"). This asseveration is particularly justified when made with reference to a protean genre like science fiction, which is "non-creedal", as Carlos Aranaga emphasises:

> there are as many takes on what constitutes it as there are readers and writers. Some see magical realist novels and works of visionary fiction as within the fold. For others, sci-fi is fantasy for the literal-minded. If not grounded in real science, then it shouldn't be labelled science fiction, some maintain. Such is the cry of a movement afoot promoting "mundane science fiction", a sort of gearhead reaction at the use of non-peer-reviewed devices such as hyper-drives or time travel. ("Review")

Since it comprises such a wide range of subgenres, topoi and tropes, science fiction is a notably difficult to define genre, and yet critics are determined to claim that Winterson "ventures into that realm of writing science fiction without wanting to admit that she's writing science fiction (right down to having characters mentioning how much they hate SF)" (Farquhar "Review"). Even Ursula Le Guin complains that it is "odd to find characters in a science-fiction novel repeatedly announcing that they hate science fiction" ("Review"). This is twice amiss: it was a one-time occurrence – only **one** character, Earth

Billie, stated this **once** at the beginning of the Post-3 War chapter (SG 119); plus, such an imputation shows its initiators' complete disregard for the fact that an author's participation in the novel is limited to "almost no direct language of his own", as the author's and the characters' distinct languages inter-animate one another, forming a "system of intersecting planes" (Bakhtin 47-48). The author is the mastermind organising the intermingling of the novel's different language levels, but the discursive strata "are to various degrees distant from this authorial centre", so it comes as no surprise that the novelistic discourse always criticises itself (Bakhtin 49), and Winterson actuates such criticism with the cheerful irreverence characteristic of writers skilled in the art of parody and travesty: "parodic-travestying literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, (…) the corrective of reality that is always richer, (…) too contradictory and heteroglot to be fit into a high and straightforward genre" (Bakhtin 55).

Additionally, in the readers' case, such accusations might have emanated from a misapprehension on the part of the genre's aficionados, who viewed the author's apparent reserve as conceited disdain for what is sometimes considered low-range consumer fiction. And, if this were the case, it would not be singular. In a discussion on David Mitchell's 2015 book, *Slade House*, Damien Walter explains that literary authors are "the luxury brands of the writing world, the Mercedes, the Harrods and the Luis Vuitton of high culture", whereas genre writers are "mid-range consumer brands, with an equivalent status to Skoda, Argos and Primark", so it is always problematic if "one of literature's big beasts wanders off the reservation into the bad lands of genre" ("Literature vs. genre"). If Winterson had actually avoided forthrightly embracing science fiction by belittling the genre while reaping the pecuniary benefits associated with it, the opprobrium would have been justified. But, Winterson's *New Scientist* allegation notwithstanding, she is not in the habit of making disparaging remarks about commercial genres in general. Instead, she has continually punctuated her lack of concern for marketing categories. Among her writings there are, besides novels, children's books, short stories, a comic-book, a cover version of the myth of Atlas and Heracles, a horror story, etc. All these successfully meet both literary and commercial requirements, without devolving into the banal, the superficial or the cliché. That she chose to engage with such a liberal range of genres openly shows her disapproval of imposing a vertical assessment on cultural production at the expense of a horizontal one, and patently indicates her endorsement of Damien Walter's opinion that literary and genre fiction are "two halves of the same craft, and if the art of fiction is to remain healthy, we should stop narrowing its range with snobbery" ("Literature vs. genre").

In contemporary literature and literary theorisation, science fiction is a genre that had, for a long time, retained a problematic status, as Radu Pavel Gheo rightfully lamented, pointing out, in his discussion of *Hochliteratur* and *Trivialliteratur*, that this distinction, meant to be one between genres, had forcefully been converted into one between valuable and valueless works, by using nothing more than what Eugen Ionescu had termed an "anarchic method" (Gheo 9-10). But Winterson's comments do not evince an outright rejection of popular genres; her value judgements are made based on different criteria. She does consider certain naturalistic works "a kind of printed version of TV dramas" and she does resent the samples of fantasy writing that "feed into a regressive undeveloped imagination" ("September-2007") because she finds the escapism of both counterproductive. Yet she is convinced that not all naturalistic or fantasy writings lack literary quality, nor do science fiction works, as long as through expressive symbolism and varied layers of meaning they can move beyond a single superficial plot, be it chronological or not, amounting to a profound exploration of the human condition that emulates a "fully realised central vision" of the author:

> I have tried to use the exactness of a heightened poetic language to prompt thought and to make new connections – not surface connections, but deeper joints. (...) *The Stone Gods* is not a linear book, and it is not a left-brain book. I know by now that left-brain linear people don't really like my stuff, and I am not criticising them for that (though I wish they would not criticise me quite so much). I write for people whose minds move more like a game of chess than a game of chase. I never go in straight lines. I am sure that when not corralled, the mind moves more in a maze than it does down a motorway. And my mind only moves in a-maze-ment. One thing you learn over time as a writer is quite a lot about your own mind. (Winterson "September-2007").

Jeanette Winterson did not try to avoid the association of *The Stone Gods* with the sci-fi genre in the hope that her novel might be considered a higher form of fiction. This would indubitably have been a hollow gesture since, in spite of many columnists, reviewers and the general public's more or less conspicuous lack of awareness in this regard, world-renowned theorists such a Brian McHale have shown that the boundaries between "high" and "low" literature are growing dimmer and dimmer. Furthermore, just as the detective thriller can be viewed as "modernist fiction's sister-genre", so can science-fiction be seen as "postmodernism's noncanonized or 'low art' double", given that it is "governed by the ontological dominant" (McHale 59) and thus constitutes "the ontological genre *par excellence* (as the detective story is the

epistemological genre *par excellence*)" (McHale 16). Therefore, postmodernist fiction and science fiction are "two ontological sister-genres" (McHale 65). Unlike other postmodernist writers, such as Alasdair Gray or Raymond Federman, who expostulate that they ***are not*** writing science-fiction, and who adamantly refuse to acknowledge "their borrowings from their sister-genre, presumably because of the "low art" stigma that still attaches to science fiction" (McHale 65), Jeanette Winterson neither protests nor remonstrates when *The Stone Gods* is classed as science fiction. Rather, while acquiescing angled reliance on sci-fi topoi and tropes, she reiterates her dismissal of labels, given that her agenda was of a different nature. She is, after all, a gender-bender keen on playful experimentation, less interested in plot, chronology and sequential writing, more focused on emotion, puzzles and fragmentariness, as these are able to deflect readers' attention from the action, inciting them to focus on the workings of language.

Such subtleties, however, are lost on critics like Victoria A. Brownworth, for instance, who is under the impression that Winterson "does not take her subject(s) seriously enough" and who avers that this novel is her "flimsiest" work. She maintains that "[l]ike the world it depicts, *The Stone Gods* is a bit of a mess. Winterson seems to have thought it might be fun to write a sci-fi novel, but Ursula Le Guin or Joanna Russ she's not. At best, *The Stone Gods* is a rant, at worst it's simply not well written", urging Winterson to "stick to the genre she knows best and captures so incisively – the landscape of interpersonal relationships – and leave the world of sci-fi to those who take it seriously" (Brownworth "Review"). Unlike Brownworth, Ursula Le Guin at least grants this novel a closing sense of coherence, reassuring the readers that "it does all add up", despite "some apparently arbitrary initial confusions", as the connections will slowly but surely become apparent. Both critics, however, fail to perceive the relevance of the Easter Island section which, Brownworth states, has been tackled "far more compellingly and intelligently" elsewhere and which, according to Le Guin, displays "distressingly sentimental" outbursts of emotion. But it is not the fact that "this hinge-point of the book" (Le Guin "Review") recounts past occurrences rather than a possible sample of future history that makes critic Philip Palmer conclude that "Winterson is right: this is not science fiction at all. It looks like SF, it has all the elements we commonly associate with SF but it's really a different genre of book entirely". Palmer actually finds the Easter Island episode the easiest to interpret as, he contends, it is the only part of the novel that actually makes sense, since it merely constitutes a variation on the anthropocentrically driven destruction-laden theme, whereas all the other parts display so many inconsistencies as to immediately dismiss any claim this work might make to the science fiction

genre. Magic has no place in science fiction, whose narrative must cluster around a core of rationally explainable occurrences, nor do illogical twists and self-contradictory events, such as Orbus Billie reading James Cook's journals, 65 million years before the explorer's actual birth, or Earth Billie Crusoe reading a book entitled *The Stone Gods*, not long before meeting and befriending Friday, her future guide through the labyrinthine Dead Forest (Palmer "Review"). *The Stone Gods*, Palmer explains, is neither a realist novel nor a science-fiction one, not even a work of magic realism, since "even magic realism has rules and consistencies". Still, piercing through the mist of generic delimitations, he pertinently points out that even though the novel makes no sense, "in the way that abstract art and certain kinds of modernist poetry make no sense", it is **not** nonsensical. While "confuting and mocking the underlying principle of science and hence science fiction – that, ultimately, everything has a rational explanation", Winterson also "connects by simile and metaphor and mirroring and impossible coincidences", using the laws of poetry rather than those of physics to shape "a particular form of literary construct – a prose-poem" (Palmer "Review"). Thus, to a certain degree, his analysis eventually does justice to Winterson's novel, rescuing it from forced compartmentalisation.

As a whole, this prose-poem in novelistic form, simmering with an ebullition of genres, can be considered an environmentalist manifesto doubled by an evolutionary theory bordering on religious criticism, disguised as a geminated traveller's tale. The narrative shadows the human species' errant explorations in search of new planets that they first colonise and then destroy, but this wide scope interpretation infolds another, a narrow scope one, which recounts two distinct versions, mottled with pornographic glimpses, of Billie and Spike's interplanetary lesbian romance, as well as Billy and Spikkers' homosexual romantic interlude on Easter Island. The couple travel from one planet to another, from one island to another, looking for freedom and happiness, for a new home and a new beginning, their journey through variant space-times entailing an interior journey as well, one of self-discovery, self-identification and self-definition, which prompted Jane Shilling to call this novel "an oddly familiar time-travelling romance" (Shilling "Review"). The ever-present, constantly reiterated, connections between these two characters bring to mind a "similarly nested in time novel" (Aranaga "Review"), namely David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*: "we cross, crisscross and recross our old tracks like figure skaters." (88) "Souls cross the skies o' time (…) like clouds crossin' skies o' the world." (160) "Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies, an' tho' a cloud's shape nor hue nor size don't stay the same, it's still a cloud an' so is a soul" (163). The love that Billie and Spike share transcends the limitations of the flesh, the barriers of time, the confines of space, and even the curbs of

reality once the reader takes the playful make-believe stance required to fully engage with any fictional work. These traveller's tales reiterate human beings' tendency to become their very own apex predator, bound to bring about their own demise, lest the only arch-enemy of Greed, namely Love, is allowed to take over and eventually rescue humanity from impending doom. As Cyan James explains, Billie and Spike's "different versions playing in the same basic story of destruction" create the feeling that they are archetypes which "symbolize Winterson's greater concerns (and her lesser concern regarding plot and specifics)", that they are merely "kaleidoscope fragments that let Winterson constantly shift her focus". By creating alternate chronicles in which the two protagonists are forced to undergo essentially similar predicaments, Jeanette Winterson emphasises the fact that the self-destructive behaviour of humans begs the question of whether salvation is, at all, possible, since "there is no Bruce Willis or Terminator waiting in the wings, no Will Smith or Neo who will deliver last-minute, microwaved salvation. There is only love, or the echo, or futile longing for love" (James "Review"). Since Love keeps trying yet succeeds not in conquering all else, these fictional worlds lack a rightful superhero able to save the day, so the worst possible scenario gets rehashed time and time again, every story echoing each of the others, "by means of repetitions-with-a-difference of recurrent motifs, thus creating what Mónica Calvo has described as a pattern of 'recursive symmetry' along the different narrative strands" (Onega 31).

The worlds inhabited by Billie and Spike closely resemble our own and this allows the novelist to engage with yet another genre: a merciless form of socio-political satire, targeted at anthropocentrism and its harrowing effects on the environment, at the weakening state of Western democracies revealed by agonising civil rights movements and by cutthroat bonds between government and corporate entities, at the technologically driven illiteracy, apathy, superficiality and lack of privacy, at the rampant corruption, the wanton consumerism and the condonance of sexism, ageism, paedophiliac tendencies and violence against both body and spirit, against living beings and living planets. The satirical effect is secured through commentary on and allusion to hot button socio-political issues that our contemporary world has been struggling with. Part one makes it clear that, although it enjoys political, military and economic supremacy, the Central Power is far from epitomizing a land of endless opportunities and even further from engendering democracy. This comes as no surprise, given that the term "Central Powers" historically refers to the coalition initially formed by central European oligarchic states (the German and the Austro-Hungarian empires) during World War I, and that the very concept of a Central Power rests on inherently autocratic principles

of governance. Hence the gravitational pull of the red tape, the highly invasive law enforcement prowess, the cranky obsession with corporate autocracy, the over-encroaching reign of computer technology, the incautious reliance on technologically mediated activities and on electronic information channels which nurtures mass illiteracy, represses real communication abilities and hampers active critical thinking skills. The diet culture's foolhardy infatuation with lab-produced cloned meat and genetically altered food is shown to have led to the eradication of bio-agriculture and farming, whilst the hare-brained obsession with celebrities, the uncouth hunger for standardized beauty, fame and stardom, the narcissistic artificiality combined with the infatuation with youthful appearance have bred an addiction to young age Genetic Fixing. This readily available genetic modification fosters not only sexual perversion in the form of paedophilia but also overpopulation, a terrible predicament for an already superannuated planet, marred by a lack of resources doomed to beget conflicts so riotous as to reach genocidal levels. The failed attempt to prepare Planet Blue for colonisation was an utter disaster for the people on Orbus, since they had recklessly accelerated global warming and increased pollution levels through the unregulated consumption of fossil fuels and via a continuous irresponsible exploitation of the environment.

In the third chapter of the novel it becomes obvious that the Orbus narrative had detailed the past and not the future, that our planet Earth was not the Red Planet, but the newly discovered Planet Blue, whose conjecturable prospect is now presented as a timely warning that humans are headed for an apocalyptic offing. So we are now back-to-the-future, where the new world programme of No War announced by the President of the Central Power in chapter one (SG 6) gives way to No MORE War, "the new slogan for a new kind of global company" (SG 134). This corporate entity, whose name thinly references both acronyms like HSBC, FIAT, ESPN, GEICO, etc. and the prevalent disgruntlement of humankind, constantly searching and wishing for more, is an avatar of human greed and represents the super-villain, the Big-Brother element whose looming presence smothers the inhabitants in each and every setting, just like the Central Power did in the first part of the novel, and the Stone Gods in the second. There seems never to be enough planet, enough Mo'ai statues, enough power or enough money. As Billie explains to Spike, nobody ever concedes that they have sufficient financial resources: "The more we had, the less it seemed to buy, and the more we bought, the less satisfied we became", so MORE turned the "Buy-me-Buy-me world into a Rent-me-Rent-me world" by implementing "the jeton scheme" to replace wages and cash (SG 137-138). The deep connection between addictive consumerism and people's sense of insecurity, instability and isolation supports Billie's dismissal

of the awry claim that what had caused World War 3 was heightened emotionalism: "I think we need more emotion, not less. But I think, too, that we need to educate people in how to feel. Emotionalism is not the same as emotion. We cannot cut out emotion – in the economy of the human body, it is the limbic, not the neural, highway that takes precedence. We are not robots" (SG 141-142).

The fourth part of the novel chronicles Billie Crusoe's Space Western Odyssey, as she follows the robot throughout the "bad lands beyond the boundaries of official civilisation – where, despite its bodiless state, the head contrives to strike up a liaison with a lissom lesbian rock chick" (Shilling "Review"). The depiction of Wreck City, Tech City's unfortunate stepsister populated by misfits, rebels and mutants who must fend for themselves in the absence of authoritarian regulations and state protection, conjures up the semblance of a postnuclear Wild West endowed, however, with an almost dionysiac aura. This lawless, anarchic city is marked by an electrifying diversity – its inhabitants freely parade their idiosyncrasies, often displaying dangerous yet authentic behaviour, but theirs is a much more cohesive and popularly supportive community than the one making up the *1984*-esque world that unfolds beyond its confines, where the MORE corporation has been turning the denizens of Tech City into brainwashed insensitive shopworn automatons. It is this last chapter of *The Stone Gods* that reveals the astounding structural gimmick Winterson has resorted to: the way in which she has been putting forward the caricatural characters (Friday, Alaska, Nebraska, Sister Mary McMurphy, the awe-inspiring rebels, the toxic radioactive mutants) and the graphic environment (the No Zone called Wreck City, the Black Market, the Playa, the Unknown, the Red Zone including the Dead Forest) evokes a paradoxically captivating hostile atmosphere characteristic of the comics genre, an atmosphere whose effect is amplified by the sense of narrative frieze that emerges in the process of reading this last chapter of the novel. At this point, a perceptive reader cannot fail to apprehend that the novel's configuration is fleshed out so as to connect all the scenes from all four parts together, just like comic book panels would, with very specific passages of description added at the perfect time in order to string together related scenes and to further enhance the active reading experience. The information is conveyed non-sequentially and through words rather than pictures: the written counterparts of comic panels non-chronologically displayed set the scene for the innovatively immersive layout the readers are presented with. If, at first, they appeared to be "loosely, almost slackly structured" pieces of writing, "a collection of carelessly linked short stories rather than a novel" (Holgate "Review"), the outwardly fractured chapters now reveal themselves

to be artfully designed individual pieces of writerly work that make up the complete image in the readers' minds once the proper perspective is adopted and as soon as the expectations are adjusted accordingly.

Issues scrutinised in the first part are revisited in parts three and four, as the author's satirical spree continues through dialogues about what it means to be human in a world beset by highly intrusive and readily available genetic modifications and enhancements, DNA screenings and even cloning, about the impossibility to resist or fight the technologized corporatist system once most people's existence is dependent on it, and about the fate of the self-destructive, aggressive, reckless humans, compared to that of the solar-powered, self-repairing, intelligent, peaceful robots. Part three also hosts conversational exchanges between Spike and Billie which occasion philosophical digressions related not only to the underpinnings of poverty in light of the "transition from the economics of greed to the economics of purpose" based on the realignment of resources (SG 136-137) through the shift from consumerism to rental agreements, from Capitalism to Paternalism, once MORE was granted "complete control of everything and everyone" (SG 139), but also to the existence of God and to the scaffolding of belief. Thus, a smooth connection is made between the opening chapter of the novel and its final ones by the Easter Island episode, which voices environmentalist concerns while revealing the insanity underlying religious controversy. This is achieved through both caricature and allusion, as reference is made to a real world context whose fictionalisation is marked by exaggerated features meant to raise historical awareness whilst articulating an urgent call to action. This second part of *The Stone Gods*, in conjunction both with the socio-political satire that dominates the novel's first chapter, and with the combination between a science fiction back-to-the-future fable and a comic-book futuristic dystopia whittled in the last two sections of the book, ponderously contributes to the rich mixture of stories laced with humour that Winterson employs in order to fully engage her audience in the socio-political issues, thickly threaded with an environmentalist twist, which are covered in this novel. The artful mixing and blurring of generic conventions allows Jeanette Winterson to genuinely pay homage to all these various genres, by borrowing some of their tropes in order to affectionately mock and skilfully subvert them in a ustopian postmodern pastiche that lends further credence to Ingeborg Hoesterey's claim that nowadays pastiches are "allegories of culture as a process of meaning constitution, as system, as ideology" (502).

Despite the obvious science fiction tropes permeating it, Winterson's novel may fail to offer what critics and readers would normally expect form a work belonging to this genre; yet, in fact, this work is not a failure, but a

triumph. It is the triumph of the author's writing craft, a celebration of her uncanny ability to create her own brand of science-fiction. The novelist was not deceptive and her work is not a gimmick. *The Stone Gods* may not constitute the futuristic vision of a prophetic science fiction author but it showcases Winterson's unique take on sci-fi writing. This dystopian masterpiece was the only way in which the author, interested neither in politics nor in docu-drama, determined that she could make a difference in today's world by offering "a response to where we are now, and where this now might be taking us" (Winterson "September-2007"). The tone of the novel is infused with Winterson's evangelical drive, and bespeaks her deeply held conviction that ever new creative possibilities **can** and **will** endow story-telling with opportunities to bring about change. The state that our world finds itself in no longer allows writers to be bystanders, so the repeating histories of destruction do not only decry the human species' toxicity for the environment, do not merely denounce the profit-driven agenda of capitalist enterprise, they argue in favour of urgently making determined attempts to reach planetary sustainability before time runs out. Humans are portrayed as agents of doom in *The Stone Gods* because its author cannot ignore the signs of our planet's impending catastrophe and, while searching for solutions, she entertains no illusions about the nature of human beings and their capacity to destroy each other.

The author is torn between two visions: destruction or salvation. The former foreshadows the terrors of war with a sense of apocalyptic annihilation as a result of recurring self-destructive scenarios; the latter takes the shape of romantic encounters, love being the ultimate saviour. The Orwellian innuendos thus combine with "strands of purple prose depicting the juicy details of a futuristic lesbian love affair – an interplanetary romance between a woman and a female robot" (Preda, "New Planets for Old" 146), mixing critical dystopia with romantic utopia. These two genres, which "mutually encapsulate latent versions of each other", are the two sides of one and the same coin, but they "cannot be cleanly dissociated as the exhilarating side and the dispiriting flipside of utopian thought, which transcends reality and challenges the existing order of things" (Borbély and Petrar 27). In Winterson's ustopia even romance accrues additional overtones, being forged as a posthuman project characterised not by objectivism but rather by "reflexive epistemology", since "distributed cognition overrides autonomous will, embodiment rather than the body seen as nothing more than a support system for the mind"; the writer educes a sense of posthuman subjectivity, suggesting that humans and intelligent machines can "enjoy the dynamic partnership of the end" just as Billie and Spike do (Diamant 109). Consequently, *The Stone Gods* can be considered "a fictional encompassment of the theoretical construction of

posthumanist relational subjectivity" as articulated by Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, and by Lucy A. Suchman's *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions*, both published in the same year as this particular novel (Preda, "Agential Realism" 24). Moreover, a stream of anti-anthropocentric, bio-egalitarian and environmentalist consciousness runs through all four parts of the novel, overflowing with details that reflect Winterson's verdant powers of aesthetic innovation in combining science fiction with posthumanist experimentalism:

> Winterson's emphasis on the astounding possibilities of reconfiguration with regard to categories such as human/machine, subject/object, social/material, male/female, nature/culture, matter/discourse and interaction/intra-action enables a reframing of accountability issues and a relocation of agency from the separateness of realms (human agency versus machine agency) to an intra-active field of commonalities where on-going socio-material practices come into effect as the boundaries between humans and machines are negotiated, disrupted and transgressed, produced and re-produced, configured and re-configured, constructed, de-constructed and re-constructed. (Preda, "Agential Realism" 36).

A work of impressive structural complexity, *The Stone Gods* tackles an abundance of interrelated themes, many of which have captivated Jeanette Winterson in earlier works: love, loss and risk, boundaries and desire, gender stereotypes, the tussle for power; anthropocentrism, technological advances and their impact on the environment; time, death, memory and the concept of history; identity, metamorphosis, transformation and crossing over; the journey and the homecoming; life as a story and, last but not least, the exacting command of narrative. Her reflections on these topics are "couched in language of thrilling richness and invention" through which "we are reminded that Winterson is a pasticheuse of brilliance, a tender writer on (...) states of longing, (...), an ingenious cartographer of imaginary worlds" (Shilling "Review").

Whilst literary genres have consistently played an important role in the analysis of literary texts, especially in the case of classical and folk literature, it has been argued that genre allotment no longer suits most literary works that belong to the modernist and post-modernist trends. Nevertheless, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer explains, no text can be placed outside the framework of generic norms, since alterity is always relative. Literature is not merely a fixed corpus comprising the tally of the respective individual works, but rather a web of relational threads that they incessantly weave with one another (Schaeffer 12). Moreover, as far as authorship is concerned, out of "an infinite

game of prescriptions and interdictions, of imitations and transformations, of reproductions and subversions", literature egresses as "a collective entity with multiple paternal figures", as a network whose nodes and links intersect in unpredictable ways, yielding "a galaxy of forms, themes and discursive types, getting perpetually reorganised" (Schaeffer 12). In what concerns the reader, "any re-construction of a literary work requires prior knowledge and endorsement of general discursive conventions, knowledge obtained only in the course of acquiring the literary experience necessary to create an adequate horizon of expectations" (Preda, *Metamorphoses* 18).

On the one hand, genre constitutes a framework able to display a system of assessing credibility by tracking facts against assumptions when interpreting a particular work, to grant an undimmed perception of important details, to foster a clearer understanding of literary works, and to reveal untrodden ways of recognizing and responding to different literary techniques. On the other hand, if unwisely chosen along the interpretation route, genre can easily become a rather limiting construct that thwarts understanding, given that it is only the pertinent classification of a literary text into the proper genre that ultimately "facilitates engagement in an informed reading process and provides a means of revealing or constructing new meanings" throughout the labyrinthine process of uncovering a text's true message (Preda, *Interferences* 14). This is why some literary critics' persistence in placing a one and only label on modernist and postmodernist works of literature is conspicuously unsettling, given their not infrequently successful attempts to box in a novel, such as *The Stone Gods*, for instance, by purposely overlooking its multifarious nature and by wittingly undermining, with negative comments, the audience's interest in it.

The review of the plot, the conspectus of the motifs and the synopsis of the themes as outlined above fail, of course, to do justice to Winterson's novel, because this particular author's work does not easily lend itself to abridgement, any compression being tantamount to the lessening of its impact and to the distortion of its message. Yet, however unwieldy, these attempts have at least shown that *The Stone Gods* can be viewed as socio-political satire, environmentalist manifesto, an evolutionary theory bordering on religious criticism, a traveller's tale, a sample of interdisciplinary discourse playing on intertextuality, an interplanetary lesbian romance with pornographic glimpses, a novel of ideas masquerading as postmodern pastiche, a ustopia, a comic-book futuristic dystopia or a science fiction back-to-the-future fable. Hopefully, the analysis has also revealed that the book is none of those, yet all into one, so it would be highly inappropriate to call it by only one of these names taken separately, whatever that chosen name might be.

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REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR AND TRAUMA IN PAT BARKER'S *REGENERATION*

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ABSTRACT. *Representations of War and Trauma in Pat Barker's Regeneration*. The Regeneration Trilogy focuses on the British soldiers of the Great War who, besides their physical wounds, often suffered from psychic and psychosomatic disorders, more or less disabling. The aim of this article is to discuss how trauma generated neurological and psychic disorders and affected the lives of soldiers, how the doctors of the time attempted to cure them and make them able to return to the frontlines. The article refers mostly to *Regeneration*, the first novel in the sequence.

Keywords: *army, aphasia, neurosis, trauma, treatment, war.*

REZUMAT. *Reprezentări ale războiului şi traumei în romanul Regeneration de Pat Barker*. Principala preocupare a Trilogiei lui Pat Barker sunt soldaţii britanici din Marele Război care, pe lângă rănile fizice, au fost afectaţi adesea de tulburări psihice şi psihosomatice, mai mult sau mai puţin incapacitative. Scopul acestui articol este analiza modului în care traumele au generat tulburări neurologice şi psihic, a manierei în care medicii de atunci au încercat să le vindece şi să-i facă să se poată întoarce pe front. Articolul se ocupă în principal de *Regeneration*, primul roman din secvenţă.

Cuvinte cheie: *armată, afazie, nevroză, traumă, tratament, război.*

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> **Motto**: 'I know. I was there. I saw the great void in your soul, and you saw mine.' (Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong*)

Pat (Patricia) Barker, the author of the *Regeneration Trilogy*– made up of *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995) – is one of those lesser known British novelists awarded with the Booker Prize, after the publication in 1995 of her novel *The Ghost Road*. Based on autobiographical elements – her step-grandfather's wartime experiences– the three novels, a 'historiographic trilogy' (Brannigan 15), offer the reader an interesting blend of history and fiction, an exploration of the nature and archetype of evil and victimhood (Ross 137).They deal with the trauma generated by the war experience of the combatants involved in the First World War. Many events or locations retrieved by the author belong to the historical, factual world– such as the Great War itself, Craiglockhart Hospital in Scotland or the National Hospital in London. So do real-life personalities of the period who appear as novel characters – such as the war writers Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves or the anthropologist, neurologist and psychiatrist William H.R. Rivers, a pioneer of the treatments of posttraumatic stress disorder during and after the First World War. Barker herself acknowledged this fact when, in the Author's Notice placed at the end of the novel *Regeneration*, she inserted a list of the real figures contained in her novel, preceded by the statement that 'Fact and fiction are so interwoven in this book that it may help the reader to know what is historical and what is not.' (*Regeneration*[2], Kindle loc. 4129)

As mentioned, the novel *Regeneration* features several army officers as characters who – after a particularly traumatic war experience rendering them temporarily unfit for combat – end up at the Craiglockhart Military Psychiatric Hospital, located in Scotland, under the care of neurologist and psychiatrist William Rivers. In her recreation of the figures of officers affected in their minds as much as in their bodies by their war experiences, Pat Barker was inspired by the Dr Rivers' medical writings. As Razzaq ascertains (194-5), the affected officers' traumas manifested themselves through a multiplicity of more or less incapacitating symptoms and disorders which reveal that a more general malaise, a psychic disturbance has taken over their minds. Most of

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[2] Henceforward cited as 'R' with Kindle locations.

these manifestations are language disorders – from simple stuttering to aphasia. Many of them also suffer from nightmares, hallucinations and various psychosomatic manifestations, like uncontrollable tremors.

These symptoms, especially those related to language, are indicative of insurmountable tensions that inhabit and tear the traumatized fighters. There is, in fact, a profound strain between the understandable aversion of any individual for the nameless horror of the violence of confrontation and the command, clearly internalized, to act like a good soldier ready to defend fundamental values such as courage and patriotism. But this primary tension can, in each officer, be coupled with a discordance between an almost visceral impulse towards a denunciation of the abominations of war and the awareness that such denunciations would be fatally condemned by the military institution and, perhaps, also by the public opinion of the common people. Such was the case of Siegfried Sassoon whose critical open letter 'Finished with the War'– inserted at the beginning of the novel *Regeneration* –earned him a stay at Craiglockhart to avoid the other possible alternative, that of being court-martialled. The novel sheds light on how the military culture of silent obedience can be harmful to the individuals who suffer from it, particularly in the context of the Great War when the notion of 'bravery' was still fundamentally linked to the idea of absolute 'obedience', associated with extreme self-censorship of opinion and expression: 'The Great War took place in what was compared with us, a static world, where [...] obedient soldiers were still brave.' (Fussell 21-2) The culture of war that serves as a backdrop to the Great War conflict is a culture of bravery and refusal of any complaint or protest.

The novel *Regeneration* suggests that, faced with this censorship of opinions and words, only the body can still express discomfort or protest. The abundance of fighters who stutter or suffer from mutism because they have no other choice is revealing in Barker's work. The image of the horse's bit found at the end of the novel – '[a] horse's bit. Not an electrode, not a teaspoon. A bit. An instrument of control' (R, Kindle loc. 4015-6) – highlights how the constraints, both external and internalized, related to the context of joining the war effort have led the soldiers to submission and to silence, rendering them deprived of their voice in the literal sense, as well as figuratively. The combatants in *Regeneration* stifle their fears and complaints, but this leads them to develop physical symptoms and, as a result, the censored words generate pathological troubles.

Thus, through the perspective of psychosomatic disorders, Barker's officers treated during the war at Craiglockhart, question not only the effects of a culture of war that led to individual suffering as well as mass death but also, and above all, the radical inadequacy between a martial culture based on

traditional values, often chivalrous, inherited from the past and a new form of war – as it emerged in the First World War – accompanied by the tragedy we know.

The novel *Regeneration* can also be perceived from another perspective – that of offering purely clinical and therapeutic information about neurological disorders and the therapies used at the time to cure the neuroses of war. In this way, the readers come across a Pat Barker who, conscious of her role of fiction writer, is also perfectly capable to represent and counterpoint two different methods of treating speech disorders produced by the war, represented by Dr Rivers and Dr Yealland, and applicable equally to fictional as well as real characters.

Barker, throughout her novel, goes beyond the psychiatric institution and highlights the similarities that exist with other disciplinary institutions, such as the army or prison, because what all these institutions have in common is their want to control, even to subjugate, the bodies as well as the spirits. Michel Foucault goes even further when he speaks about a 'political anatomy' (138) acting as 'mechanics of power' (138) and perceived as a multiplicity of processes which converge and complete one another, having as final attempt to produce subjected and docile bodies in institutions such as schools, hospitals and military organizations (138).

From the very first pages of *Regeneration*, the similarity between the Craiglockhart Psychiatric Hospital and a prison is immediately noted by Siegfried Sassoon, not only because of the dark and massive appearance of the hospital, the 'sheer gloomy, cavernous bulk of the place' (R, Kindle loc. 221), but also because at times 'the lack of privacy was almost intolerable' (R, Kindle loc. 2540). Moreover, according to internal instructions, officers are strictly required to wear their uniforms at all times in the hospital, which is a reflection of strict dress standards in the military or prison environments. But Barker, beyond these few practical details, suggests that there is a fundamental desire contained in the very principles of war psychiatry for control and recovery of the subjects.

Various state institutions bear the clear ambition to control individuals so as to make them docile and 'useful', warns Razzaq (196). Thus, the army's goal is to transform the body of man into an obedient object and enduring target of power. The result is that it has become possible to give men a martial air as well as a warlike efficiency, and this by domestication of the body itself, which is, of course, accompanied by the inculcation of certain rules and authoritarian values in the minds of the soldiers. The prison's aim is also to transform individuals by making them submissive, coupled with surveillance of their bodies.

As Pat Barker shows in her trilogy, the same aims are at work in the psychiatric institution, which proves to be a very highly disciplinary institution,

this even more in wartime. *Regeneration* thus exposes how military psychiatry has become an implement of the army in its almost obsessive concern to control bodies and souls. On the one hand, the psychiatric hospital still has the function of straightening the bodies, seeking to remove in the traumatized fighters the physical symptoms (tics, twitches, tremors, etc.) by setting them against the expected behaviour of worthy good soldiers. On the other hand, it has to correct the mental disorders so that patients could find a martial spirit adapted to their duty to fight. In this way, as Dr Rivers himself acknowledges, war psychiatry is essentially 'the business of controlling people […] [and] fitting young men back into the role of warrior, a role they had – however unconsciously – rejected.' (R, Kindle loc.4016-7).

The 'regeneration' in the title directly refers to this process of making fit again, of restoring, rebuilding the soldiers and officers so as to make them able to populate the war zone again. In this process, when the psychiatric hospital and the army act strongly cohesively, certain patients may consider themselves prisoners of such a union of interests between these two institutions. Rivers, in fact, not seldom feels constrained by such an institution which, in the name of defending a certain culture of war, sooner controls and censures than heals. As agent of a military hospital, his technique of recovery – the talking cure –proves to be more therapeutic than disciplinary and normative, whereas Dr Yealland is the partisan of electroshocks.

Between 1915 and 1918 and at the end of the First World War, the war neurotics – men suffering from disorders such as neurosis, aphasias, paralysis, doubling, hallucinations – awaited their healing in specialized clinics in the United Kingdom whose main attempt was to render them fit and reintegrate them into normal life. Such patients did not want, found it impossible or were no longer capable to verbally reproduce the horrors lived on the battlefield and express verbally all their ideas, fears or anxieties. For many of such people the main source of conflict was the conflict of loyalties and responsibilities. The straight analysis of the nature of 'manhood' brings Barker to offer the readers an inquest into the ways of speaking and keeping silent, an investigation about the lack of speech caused by the neurosis of war, as a symptom of the transgression of the limits committed on the battlefield. According to Childs, 'they are no longer able to express their fears and frustrations because they have been taught to ignore their feelings' (76). And, above all, subjugation of their emotions, as they were trained, was the essence of manliness:

> They'd been trained to identify emotional repression as the essence of
> manliness. Men who broke down, or cried, or admitted to feeling fear,
> were sissies, weaklings, failures. Not men. (R, Kindle loc. 892-4)

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Sometimes silence can be a means of cure through which the patients will be able to forget and forgive; and forgiving those who caused them harm may lead them to forget their crisis and painful experience, is Razzaq's belief (204).But, as emphasised in Steffens, the ultimate goal of 'healing' is 'highly problematic in Rivers' case, since it implies forgetting of the event in order to return to the Front' (47).The therapeutic process can also be done by keeping silent about the past, which sometimes can be effective in the healing, reparation, and rehabilitation attempts for those who suffer more by telling their story or experience of pain or harm that they have endured:

> Notions of healing, reparation and justice to address the socio-moral aftermath of war vary between cultures and over time. Social memory, the domain of cenotaph ceremonies, truth commissions, etc plays a role, but so too does silence about the past [...]. This silence does not mean that the events are forgotten it shows reticence and a conservation of energy for the urgent task of rebuilding (Summerfeld 1106).

As previously mentioned, *Regeneration* not only reflects the events of the war but also the dissimilar strategies or medical procedures of two therapists, Dr Rivers and Dr Yealland. However, the business of both was, to a greater or lesser extent, to control and mould people:

> Each of them fitted young men back into the role of warrior, a role they had – however unconsciously – rejected. [...]Just as Yealland silenced the unconscious protest of his patients by removing the paralysis, the deafness, the blindness, the muteness that stood between them and the war, so, in an infinitely more gentle way, he silenced his patients; for the stammerings, the nightmares, the tremors, the memory lapses, of officers were just as much unwitting protest as the grosser maladies of the men. (R, Kindle loc. 4016-29).

Dr Rivers, based in Craiglockhart Psychiatric Hospital, is an unconventional and progressist thinker, as Childs sees him (75), who uses the method of dis-internalizing the conflict by applying Freudian psychoanalysis and empathising with the patients,

> [...] leading [them] to understand that breakdown was nothing to be ashamed of, that horror and fear were inevitable responses to the trauma of war and were better acknowledged than suppressed, that feelings of tenderness for other men were natural and right, that tears were an acceptable and helpful part of grieving (R, Kindle loc. 890-2).

Dr Yealland's practice is in the National Hospital in London, and, unlike Rivers, he uses physical and verbal violence against patients: 'Remember you must talk before you leave me.' (R, Kindle loc. 3882-3). This would be the case of his patient Callan to whom electric current is applied in the mouth until he screams of pain so that his ability to talk – to talk himself out of his fears and inner blockade – and, with it, his ability to face the enemy again on the battle field should be regenerated.

Dr Rivers also thinks that the patient has to talk and face his past and his fears in order to heal, but the procedure he practices is that of persuasion, as we see in the case of Prior and other officers at Craiglockhart Hospital. As Steffens suggests (38), Rivers' central thesis that Barker uses in this novel implied that the talking cure is the most successful method for treating shell-shocked soldiers. This is the same technique that was suggested by Freud, reinforced by recent medical studies that deal with such cases, according to which – as Razzaq reports (203-4) – there is the belief that therapy for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)[3] initially focuses on coping and comfort, restoring a feeling of safety, calming the nervous system, and educating the person about what he is experiencing and why and – through the process of talking – interrupting the natural cycle of avoidance (which actually perpetuates PTSD symptoms though it is initially adaptive and self-protective).

Dr Yealland also tries to make his patients talk but he uses a different approach, he tries to gain triumph by pushing his patients or forcing them to act normally despite the huge amount of pain they endure in their course of treatment under his supervision. Callan is virtually exorcised to utter the sound 'ah' with an almost superhuman effort, with the muscles of the neck in spasm and the head raised in a series of jerks. Even the torso and the arms are involved in the immense effort of producing this sound. And, in order to obtain

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[3] PTSD: Post-traumatic stress disorder (also called post-traumatic stress syndrome) is an emotional condition that sometimes follows a traumatic event, particularly an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious bodily injury to oneself or others and that creates intense feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror. The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder include the re-experiencing of the trauma either through upsetting thoughts or memories or, in extreme cases, through a flashback in which the trauma is relived at full emotional intensity. People with PTSD often report a general feeling of emotional numbness, experience increased anxiety and vigilance, and avoid reminders of the trauma, such as specific situations, thoughts, and feelings. It is normal to experience such reactions to some extent following trauma, and they are not considered symptoms of PTSD unless they last for at least one month or have a delayed onset. People with PTSD can also suffer from other psychological problems, particularly depression, anxiety, and drug abuse. (cf. Post-traumatic stress disorder, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

this, Yealland is able to go far beyond all limits, no matter how much pain may be caused to the patient, just as it happens in the case of the procedure witnessed with awe by Dr Rivers:

> Yealland inserted a tongue depressor. Callan neither co-operated nor struggled, but simply sat with his mouth wide open and his head thrown back. Then the electrode was applied to the back of his throat. He was thrown back with such force that the leads were ripped out of the battery. Yealland removed the electrode. 'Remember you must behave as becomes the hero I expect you to be,' Yealland said. 'A man who has been through so many battles should have a better control of himself.' He fastened the straps round Callan's wrists and feet. 'Remember you must talk before you leave me.' (R, Kindle loc. 3879-83)

This absence of language is, therefore, a presence with specific weight and significances at certain moments of therapy. Prior, before undergoing therapy, remains in a state of absolute silence because, the only thing he can express is to write on the wall of his room 'no more words' (R, Kindle loc. 803). Later on, upon awakening from one of his nightmares, the same Prior warns that he can speak again, and that the voices he heard inside him go out again through their anguished dreams. From that moment on, his personal history will face the real historical time and enter a new circle of verifiable effects. As a therapy, the memory of his past life can rescue his personality. However, he will refuse to participate in the creation of his own personal history and, consequently, to re-create or re-acknowledge his identity:

> Mutism seems to spring from a conflict between wanting to say something and knowing that if you do say it the consequences will be disastrous. So, you resolve it by making it physically impossible for yourself to speak. And for the private soldier the consequences of speaking his mind are always going to be far worse than they would be for an officer. What you tend to get in officers is stammering. And it's not just mutism. All the physical symptoms: paralysis, blindness, deafness. They're all common in private soldiers and rare in officers. It's almost as if for the ... the labouring classes illness has to be physical. They can't take their condition seriously unless there is a physical symptom. And there are other differences as well. Officer's dreams tend to be more elaborate. (R, Kindle loc. 1718)

Dr Rivers' relationship with his patients is recurrently paternal and dominating positively but not overwhelmingly. When he keeps silent with them most the time, he does it to encourage them to talk about their fears and

horror, in order to have them cured and make them bring themselves back to their normal mentality. In the novel, Rivers keeps silent in front of his patients not so much as to reprove them but to show them that he does not approve of their silence and thus give them the chance to go out of their fear and express themselves freely which, he believes, will help them to get cured. He must teach his patients to speak again and visualise their inner selves through introspection (Branningan 18). Through his silence and deep listening to his patients, Rivers creates a safe environment, which can be used by the patients to reveal all their fears and repressed experiences regarding the war and lead them to face their fear and help them, at the end, in their healing progress. In this context, Sassoon says:

> Rivers' silences are not manipulative. (Mine are. Always.) He's not trying to make you say more than you want, he's trying to create a safe space round what you've said already, so you can think about it without shitting yourself. White net curtains drifting in on the breeze. Pok-pok, pok-pok, from the tennis courts, until somebody misses, and the rhythm goes. (R, Kindle loc. 10225-7)

Rivers always adopts the rational behaviour, argues Branningan (15), who sees him as the agent of salvation for his patients and agent of social discipline for Sassoon and Prior. What predominates in his case is his humane attitude and real concern when facing the suffering of his patients (Ross 137).

Many times, Rivers asks himself about his feeling towards those patients that he had cured, and who returned to the front. And when Sassoon passes the Board and is about to leave the hospital, Rivers is wondering how he would feel if Sassoon were to be killed, because this was a possibility with those patients who returned to France. Another matter of doubts for Rivers is the irony of the situation when he, who was in the business of reforming patients, might himself have been reformed by one of his patients, clearly unaware of having done it.

Not only the patients have speech problems, but also Rivers himself is disturbed by fits of dyslexia – his own stammer. He knows that this stammer was caused by some kind of shock– the accident he endured when he, just a child at the time, was with his father at the barbershop. He believes that small children are not like adults and what grown-ups perceive as trivial may terrify them. He remembers that moment:

> He'd had his hair cut, he'd just been breeched, yes, that was it, his neck felt funny, and so did his legs. And he was crying. Yes, it was all coming back. He'd embarrassed his father in the barber's shop by howling his

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head off. Bits of him were being cut off, bits of him were dropping on to the floor. His father shushed him, and when that didn't work, slapped his leg. He gasped with shock, filled his lungs with air, and howled louder. So being shown the picture was a lesson? You don't behave like that, you behave like this. 'He didn't cry,' his father had said, holding him up. 'He didn't make a sound.' (R, Kindle loc. 9014-8)

And when he advances in age, the stories of the patients' war experiences and his attempt to identify with their neurological problems bring back to him his problem of nervous stammer and his incessant fight to overcome it.

Unlike Dr Rivers, Dr Yealland does not believe in the sympathetic emotion that can be shown by the therapist towards his patients. 'The last thing these patients need is a sympathetic audience' (R, Kindle loc. 3864), he says. He thinks that the patient must feel that the only way to get rid of the harmful treatment he is applying to him is by response to the order of the doctor: "You will not leave me,' he said, 'until you are talking as well as you ever did. No, not a minute before." (R, Kindle loc. 3878)

He wants his patients to surrender themselves to him completely and even abandon their voices. He tells them that what is wanted from them is: 'Attention, first and foremost; tongue, last and least; questions never.' (R, Kindle loc. 3834) In his technique of treatment, he doesn't allow his patients to make any suggestions and he suppresses their voices as well as their will. He tells his patient Callan that,

> 'Suggestions are not wanted from you; they are not needed. When the time comes for more electricity, you will be given it whether you want it or not.'
> He paused. Then added with great emphasis:
> 'You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say.' (R Kindle loc. 3906-8).

Yealland's therapeutic approach is obviously perceived as the opposite to Dr Rivers' who allows his patients to speak freely, listens to them and shows interest in all subjects they share with him, like with Prior when he suggests the use of hypnotism in his case and Rivers after a while agrees with him. Yealland is not even interested or not ready to listen to what they are saying, he just wants to gain the triumph of making them speak, as in the case of Callan, to prove that he has succeeded in his work, no matter how severe and harsh the ways of treatment that he uses. He insists on making them cure by any means and under any circumstances.

One of Dr Rivers' patients in Craiglockhart Hospital is a special case, the Second Lieutenant Billy Prior – entirely Barker's fictional creation – seen by Ross (135) as a person with fractured personality both socially and sexually. He soon moves to the front stage as an 'avatar of the period' (Bradford 85) that evolves from the lower ranks of working class to the status of decorated soldier. According to Hubbard (159-60), his role it to relieve the idea of social class differences, though, actually, he does not represent working-class consciousness. Maybe this is the reason why he fails in this role and leads the readers to believe that such differences are still unavoidable in spite of the mutual assistance generated by the war. Pacifism is not a direct topic of the trilogy, still Prior is linked with that since he sympathises and even polemises with the pacifists, openly asserting that specific campaigns are not necessary and, as no-one wanted the war, the best way to stop it is by refusing to participate.

His silence is that kind of muteness, of mental shut-off in which the patient can no more utter any sound and has to communicate with the help of a notebook. He is continually haunted by nightmares he would like to wipe out of his mind and when asked about his dream, he writes, 'scrawled in block capitals, I DON'T REMEMBER' (R, Kindle loc. 777) in his notepad. Rivers thinks that the patient is tending to muteness because he is afraid of something to talk about and his way to solve this problem is by urging him to express his mind verbally, thus un-hindering in his unconscious mind his volition to speak. In his unconsciousness, Prior actually develops a state in which he takes refuge in another mute self to escape the pain of a gruesome experience, the memories of the trenches. This mechanism he discovered in his childhood to escape the scene of violence conducted upon his mother by his father. In his case, as Childs remarks, verbal expression goes far beyond the natural feeling of revulsion against war 'to a deeper conflicted level which lurks a desire for violence and mastery' (73). Prior, just as Burns, are direct vitims of the war with neurotic (Prior) and even psychotic (Burns) tendencies (74).

Burns is one of the most psychologically affected of Dr Rivers's patients, a 'microcosm of the horrors of war' (Childs 73), after having been trown by an explosion with the head into the gas-filled belly of a dead German soldier, which caused him to swallow some of the decomposing flesh. The result is that he is doomed to be in aperpetual state of sickness, unable to eat anything, with his mind continually and obsessively perceiving dead bodies and the smell and taste of rotting corpses. This becomes materially evident when, one day, he escapes from the hospital, wanders off to a hillside and, after having placed himself under a tree which he sees filled with the hanging bodies of dead animals, takes them down and, thus, visually reconstitues with them the battlefield strewn with the corpses of the soldiers:

When all the corpses were on the ground, he arranged them in a circle round the tree and sat down within it, his back against the trunk. He felt the roughness of the bark against his knobbly spine. He pressed his hands between his knees and looked around the circle of his companions. Now they could dissolve into the earth as they were meant to do. He felt a great urge to lie down beside them, but his clothes separated him. He got up and started to get undressed. When he'd finished, he looked down at himself. His naked body was white as a root. He cupped his genitals in his hands, not because he was ashamed, but because they looked incongruous, they didn't seem to belong with the rest of him. Then he folded his clothes carefully and put them outside the circle. He sat down again with his back to the tree and looked up through the tracery of branches at grey and scudding clouds. The sky darkened, the air grew colder, but he didn't mind. It didn't occur to him to move. This was the right place. This was where he had wanted to be. (R, Kindle loc. 740-7)

By far, the most memorable of the patients in Craiglockhart Hospital is Siegfried Sassoon, based on the real war poet, whose declaration against the war, 'Finished with the War: A Soldier's Declaration' (R, Kindle loc. 109), opens the novel and in which he writes:

On behalf of those who are suffering now I make this protest against the deception which is being practised on them; also, I believe that I may help to destroy the callous complacence with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realize. (R, Kindle loc. 119-22)

This form of protest is identified by Dr Rivers as a form of neurosis (Hubbard 161) caused by his divided personality split between his own self as a pacifist – represented by his anti-war declaration and committed poetry– and his military side as company commander across the frontlines. This split triggers his neurotic double perception of the outside world, as objective reality and obsessive perception of the ghosts of dead soldiers entering his room. His sexuality is also at odds with tendencies towards homosexuality, whereas his behaviour is dominated by a strong sense of honour and comradeship that, in spite of his pacifism, makes him want to be discharged and return to the battlefield among his soldiers. His strong personality permanently perplexes Dr Rivers whose method of treatment tries to reconcile the two sides of Sassoon, the pacifist with the militarist. As Hubbard

sees it (161), the success of his attempt is illustrated, though indirectly, in the scene when Sassoon changes out of his pyjamas into his uniform:

> Rivers walked across the room, took Siegfried's tunic from the peg and threw it on to the bed.
> 'Come on, Siegfried. Put it on. You can't spend the rest of your life in pyjamas.'
> 'I can't spend the rest of my life in that either.'
> 'No, but you have to spend the rest of the war in it.'
> For a moment it looked as if Siegfried would refuse. Then, slowly, he pushed back the covers and got out of bed. He looked terrible. White. Twitching. Exhausted.
> 'We needn't go far,' Rivers said.
> Slowly, Sassoon started to put on the uniform. (R, Kindle loc. 7698-704)

The outcome of this achievement is obvious when Dr Rivers realises that, in spite of his hesitations and Sassoon's never-changed anti-war feelings, he will eventually have to send him back to the front to comply with the poet's feelings of duty and honour:

> How on earth was Siegfried going to manage in France? His opposition to the war had not changed. If anything, it had hardened. And to go back to fight, believing as he did, would be to encounter internal divisions far deeper than anything he'd experienced before. Siegfried's 'solution' was to tell himself that he was going back only to look after some men, but that formula would not survive the realities of France. However, devoted to his men's welfare a platoon commander might be, in the end he is there to kill, and to train other people to kill. Poetry and pacifism are a strange preparation for that role. Though Siegfried had performed it before, and with conspicuous success. But then his hatred of the war had not been as fully fledged, as articulate, as it was now. (R, Kindle loc. 4207-12)

In spite of Rivers' positive results, Barker does not directly proclaim the success of his talking cure, because of the underlying contradiction– you cure somebody in order to be able to send him to a place where he might get killed. A paradox that Steffens also expresses when she writes:

> On one hand, Rivers insists on its necessity to combat shell shock, and on the other, he questions the ends to which it is used since the cure returns soldiers to the Front. Moreover, although he encourages the soldiers to talk, cry, and grieve, he also silences them, particularly their protest, as in the case of Sassoon. (51)

Regeneration is a novel is about anti-war feelings and the soldiers' own form of protest, 'through their bodies': soldiers and civilians were not allowed to protest openly against the war, so they protested through their bodies in the form of different illnesses. One of the writer's main concerns is the dichotomy reality/duty vs. morality. Morality never allows any human being to kill other human being, but the duty of a soldier is to kill or else get killed. It is the duty of the nation to fight, even when there's no end or gain in sight. This paradoxical situation caused even the strongest person to breakdown.

Two challenging themes that the novel also covers are those of gender and class. The issue of gender deals with the reality that the men who took part in the war were compelled to be passive in the trenches, sufferers of emotional outbursts waiting to be killed. In parallel, what was expected from them was a martial behaviour, a model of masculinity common to Britain during this time. Bravery, endurance, dignity, honour, mental strength, and confidence were privileged 'manly' characteristics that the combatants were expected to exhibit. But it was not seldom that these requests were dramatically and tragically challenged, which led to conflictual behaviours and manifestations such as those present in the patients of Craiglockhart Hospital.

Regarding the class system, although it was thought that this class system ceased to exist on the front lines, the defining character Billy Prior reveals that this was not true, that there were still important societal divisions of class, despite it being a time of war. This shows how deeply-rooted the class system was in the hearts of men even in times as challenging as those of the Great War.

The novel also underlines the theme of homosexuality, still a taboo during the First World War. In real life, poet Siegfried Sassoon was described as a latent homosexual. Initially, he thought that it was his camaraderie that made him care for his subordinates, but later he developed more intimate relationships. Prior and even Dr Rivers are also depicted as bisexual characters. Prior's 'aggressive bisexuality' (Ross 135) as lover of Charles Manning, is gradually developed in the second sequence of the trilogy, *The Eye in the Door*.

The novel *Regeneration* wants its readers to perceive the variety and depth of the agonistic potential of the First World War, not from the context of the battlefield, but through the prism of the management of the evils of war by the psychiatric institutions of the time, such as Craiglockhart Military Psychiatric Hospital in Scotland. In the context of the war and battlefields, surviving the fighting was a simple question of luck. As a result, not only was the human psyche notoriously under severe strain, but also certain values inherent in the culture of war, traditional values such as the courage and skill of the fighter, were endangered by the new-deal conditions of the fight.

Pat Barker's novel thus invites its readers to rethink the impact of the Great War confrontation through the particular perspective of the psychiatric care of the ills experienced by the soldiers, Razzaq states (160-1). The very existence of these evils, often all the more virulent as they cannot be put into words, bears witness to intimate suffering, and also to the more general upheaval of a society whose martial values are challenged by the experience of modern warfare. Faced with these evils, whose manifestations are sometimes most disturbing, the psychiatric institution asks questions and gives answers, not without ambiguities. In fact, this institution is crossed by most contradictory forces, since it must at the same time treat suffering and take over from the army in the business of management of bodies and minds to support the war effort. The study of *Regeneration* allows the readers to consider how a contemporary novel manages to bring to light the tensions and paradoxes of a culture of a very disconcerting war such as the First World War actually was.

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SENSE OF PLACE AND BELONGING IN SORLEY MACLEAN'S POETRY

DANIELA ROGOBETE[1]

ABSTRACT. *Sense of Place and Belonging in Sorley MacLean's Poetry.* Placing himself in the wake of Hugh MacDiarmid's *Scottish Renaissance*, Sorley MacLean initiated the *Gaelic Renaissance* with the same aim in view. He turned to the Scottish impressive landscape as to a rich provider of metaphorical images that spoke of tradition, continuity and national consciousness.

Keywords: Antisyzygy, clearances, duality, Gaeldom, monolingualism, musicality, polylingualism.

REZUMAT. *Metafore ale spațiului și apartenenței în poezia lui Sorley MacLean.* Urmând exemplul lui Hugh MacDiarmid și al *Renașterii scoțiene* pe care acesta o reprezintă, Sorley MacLean a inițiat la rândul său *Renașterea Galică Scoțiană* cu același scop. El și-a îndreptat atenția către peisajul scoțian impresionant ca spre o sursă bogată de imagini metaforice care vorbesc despre tradiție, continuitate și conștiință națională.

Cuvinte cheie: Antisyzygy, Clearances, dualitate, Gaeldom, monolingvism, muzicalitate, plurilingvism.

1. Introduction

The early twentieth century witnessed the renewed efforts to assert and reassert Scottish identity, the multivocality and diversity of its cultural inheritance, even if Scotland was already in possession of a meritorious place in the European culture due to the efforts of many remarkable writers and

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artists who promoted the values and traditions of their country. Several waves of "revivals" and various Renaissances tried to make Scottish people aware of their old, cultural traditions and of the danger of letting them die under the alluring spell of a globalising and globalised culture, and at the same time to make European people more sensitive to the undeniable, historically and culturally legitimated individuality of Scotland. Within this context there has been a continuous fight for international literary recognition undertaken by remarkable personalities who tried not only to increase awareness about the tremendous loss entailed by the demise of the native languages, of their folklore and wealth of traditions but also to promote these cultural repositories by proving they might find a proper place within the European contemporary cultural context.

This study dwells on Sorley MacLean's metaphorical use of the Scottish landscape which conveys a deep sense of belonging and identity, and emphasises the continuous connection between past and present, tradition and modernity. The multitude of tropes inspired by natural elements and the overall symbolical treatment of nature prove MacLean's mastery in bringing to life old Gaelic myths and lores, projecting them into contemporaneity so that by evoking the Scottish landscape and describing its characteristic features, he could thus comment on historical events and their consequences on people's lives, he could elaborate on his political views and declare his everlasting love for his country and its culture.

2. "There's a little island in my memory" (Glen Eyre)

Born in 1911 in a numerous family, on the little island of Rasaay, located between the Isle of Skye and the mainland of Scotland, Somhairle Macgill-Eain (Sorley MacLean) grew up in a picturesque scenery which he always cherished and used in his entire poetic work; the Gaelic tradition in which he grew up made him fully appreciate his cultural heritage and inspired him (mainly due to his paternal grandmother's beautifully singing old Gaelic songs to him, as he so warmly evoked in *My Relationship with the Muse*) to play with particular rhythms, patterns and symbolism that formed the core of his poetry. Many of the themes that underlie the traditional Gaelic poetry – heroism, bravery, loyalty to a clan, to a community and to a specific place – are also present in MacLean's poems though the tragical notes of the more recent Gaelic poems and their tendency to deplore the loss of a heroic past and the inertia of an unheroic present are most of the time attenuated by a note of optimism and nationalistic pride inspired by the early Gaelic popular songs. The oral tradition proved to be a vital source of inspiration for the young

Sorley MacLean. "In my early teens," MacLean confessed later on, "that is from about 1924, I realised that I was a traditional Gaelic singer manqué, for I was born into a family of traditional singers and pipers on all sides, and that in a Free Presbyterian community, of all the most inimical to such 'vanities'" ("My Relationship with the Muse" 6).

A second major influence was that of the Free Presbyterian Church tradition in which he was raised by his family; this influence, visible in the religious terminology he frequently used and the solemn sonorities in many of his poems, speaks of three sources of inspiration: "that of the pulpit, the prayer meeting and the family worship" (MacInnes 15). It was a tradition that taught him the rhetorical power and the convincing eloquence of the Presbyterian preachers, the emotion of family prayers and the great respect for human suffering but also made him relinquish "Calvinism for Socialism at about the age of twelve" as its stern dogmatic teachings "consign all the rest of humanity, and the great majority of its own adherents, to eternal hellfire and damnation" (MacLean, *Hallaig and Other Poems* xxix). It sometimes placed him strikingly at odds with his family fondness of Gaelic songs, as the stern fatalism and determinism characteristic to the Free Presbyterians were in sharp contrast with the exuberance and joy of the Gaelic traditional songs. This tension characterises much of MacLean's poetry and comes from the dramatic opposition between the Calvinist predestination, determinism and fatalism in front of Fate, of History and Politics, might also be added, and the complete trust in the individual's capacity to transcend human limitations. MacLean never failed to express his deep admiration and respect for his Gaelic folkloric heritage and its overflowing optimism. "This popular song poetry," MacLean stated in his Talk to the Gaelic Society of Inverness delivered in 1934, "achieves the realism of joy as well as of tragedy. It is a realistic poetry because it is never far divorced from the life of the common people and, being such an expression of the joys or sorrows of the ordinary man or woman, it constitutes a very important part or perhaps the most remarkable peasant culture the world has ever seen. " (*Hallaig and Other Poems* xviii)

A speaker of Gaelic himself, MacLean advocated for the study of Gaelic and its more extensive use in institutions of education. As recorded by statistics, there has been a gradual but steady decline in the number of Gaelic speakers, from around 200.000 at the beginning of the twentieth century to 60.000, representing 23 % of the population nowadays. The survival of this language reached critical moments, especially during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, when Gaelic was banned as a consequence of the Highland Clearances. Conscious of the long, troubled history of a language and culture that define the identity of many people in Scotland, Sorley MacLean

became a promoter and advocate of Gaelic and a firm believer in the revival of this language. He was not the only writer engaged in the attempt to bring back to life an almost dying language; both he and George Campbell Hay tried to revive Gaelic, its rhythms and the subtle emotions it evoked. Their poetic works made a vivid impression on Scotland's major figure of the twentieth century Renaissance, Hugh MacDiarmid, the poet who decided to make the literary world aware of Scotland's multivocality and its complex identity that could only be rendered, in his opinion, in its native languages: Scots and Gaelic.

Mac Lean's encounter with MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve) was an important event in his life, as his admiration for this poet and MacDiarmid's influence upon his poetic work (his most important poem, *An Cuilithionn 1939*, was primarily inspired by Diarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*) were obvious with, at times indeed, occasional moments of critical coldness. Inspired by the 1920s surge of Irish nationalism, the Scottish Literary Renaissance found in Hugh MacDiramid its most fervent advocate. He tried to connect the Scottish cultural reinvigoration to the nationalistic political struggle. The emphasis was placed upon literature and its important part played in increasing national awareness, in consolidating the sense of identity and belonging and, of course, in the revival of the regional languages of Scotland. His determination to write in Scots and to promote a highly suggestive combination of Scots and English was highly important in the redefinition of Scottish identity. That is why he got interested in MacLean's and Campbell's poems written in Gaelic and invited MacLean to contribute with his translations into Gaelic to the anthology of poems he was editing at the time, entitled *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (1940).

Modernism, with its apparent simplicity and scarcity of adornments, with its concentrated metaphorical images, with its experimental treatments of language, of poetic imagery and of the self, highly appealed to MacLean. He succeeded in creating a unanimously praised synthesis of Modernism adapted to and moulded on the rhythms and musicality of old Gaelic poems. The result was an interesting combination of Gaelic and English metrical and rhythmic patterns, of original images inspired by the ancient songs of the Gaelic bardic tradition, a mixture of different dispositions of the lines that visually structure the poems into different sections with different rhythms and movements, but with an overall extreme musicality. "I could not be primarily a Gael without a very deep-seated conviction that the auditory is the primary sensuousness of poetry" ("My Relationship with the Muse" 13-14). As a firm believer in the Greek *triuna horeia*, the inseparable combination of music, dance and poetry, MacLean does not conceive poetry as separated from music and he brings once again the Gaelic tradition of old songs as the best argument:

> Very early in life I came to be obsessed with the lyric, first of all because of my unusually rich Gaelic background; with the lyric in the Greek sense of a marriage of poetry and music, and then, because I was not a musician, with the lyric in the Shelleyan and Blakeian sense of a short or shortish poem suggesting song even if it could never be sung, a concentration running or flying away from anything that could in any way be called *sermo pedestri*. (9)

The mixture of Modernist style and imagery, and the Gaelic metre and traditional forms best suited and served his preoccupation with history and contemporary politics, and their tremendous impact upon people's lives. He was deeply interested in the European political context, he adhered to Socialism and, temporarily, to the utopian principles of Communism and he expressed a strong disapproval of war, Fascism, imperialism and the all-engulfing, exacerbated form of Capitalism. His short-lived preference for Communism, which ended when the news of Stalin's atrocities committed in Russia reached Scotland, brought him various criticisms in spite of the general penchant for socialism during the 30s. He fought in WWII for the British Army though he would have also wanted to join the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War.

Sorley MacLean's poetry is based on a variety of themes ranging from nationalistic concerns related to Gaelic identity and tradition; from the political aspects connected to the status of Scotland within the European context, its traumatic history (he was particularly interested in the effects of the nineteenth century Clearances) and struggle for asserting its independence, its heroism and resilience, to love and the permanent conflict between love and duty. The general structure of his poems is a dialectical one, putting together two extremes and expounding on their significance. Everything thus acquires a conversational tone, allegedly coming from an old Gaelic poetic tradition where community and the chief of the clan established a dialogue and, through dialogue, settled all matters of dispute and debate. This confrontation between opposite elements, love and duty, heroism and cowardice, social engagement and passivity, tradition and innovation represents the dichotomy regarded as inherent to Scottish identity, generally known, since Gregory Smith coined it in his 1919 study, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, as Caledonian Antisyzygy. There is one common topic however that underlies his entire poetic work: his sense of place that translates his profound love for Scotland in general, and for Gaelic Scotland in particular, and finds its best expression in a rich landscape symbolism.

3. "From the depths of this old wisdom" (*Poems to Eihmir*)

Raised as a Gaelic speaker with a deep respect for the Gaelic culture and traditions, eternally in love with its music, songs, poems and lores, Sorley

MacLean came to be acknowledged as one of the most important Scottish authors of the twentieth century. Though deeply connected to his native island, Rasaay, and to its beautiful surroundings, though his poetry is firmly grounded in real and easily identifiable places, MacLean produced a poetical work that went far beyond the local interest and tackled universal problems, bringing him the puplic's general appreciation and critical acclaim as an international poet.

> I came to maturity at the time of the great symbolist movement in European poetry, which you've got in Yeats, Eliot, MacDiarmid, Block in Russia and Paul Valéry in France, and my symbols came mostly from my immediate environment, because in many ways my immediate physical environment was very varied. The Cuillins naturally became a symbol of difficulty, hardship and heroic qualities as against, as it were, the softness and relative luxury of the woods of Rasaay with all their own contradictions. (*An Cuilithionn 1939/ The Cuillin 1939 and Unpublished Poems* 122)

Gaelic landscapes, either picturesque and idyllic or sublimely wild and rugged, are constant elements in MacLean's poetry and acquire – as he suggests – different significances and connotations in different contexts, but they are always associated to the history of these places and of the people inhabiting them. Faithful to a long Gaelic tradition which "represents the oldest and richest continuing Scottish tradition, both written and oral" (Sassi 33), with tight connections with the Irish culture, MacLean mainly used landscape elements (mountains, woods, bogs, glens, rivers and burns) to emphasise the sense of permanence and continuity, and the strong attachment to a cultural tradition that showed a great respect to nature.

Maybe the most powerful symbolical association that the poet recurrently uses is the one between landscape and history – an occasion to comment on past courageous deeds, to compare the heroic moments of the past and the unheroic political turmoil of the present – between landscape and love, beauty and the status of Art. When used in association with history and historical events, landscape either acquires majestic, dignified dimensions that stress the heroism of the people and their identification to the natural elements of their surroundings, or it comes with sublime, frightening features that hint at the greatness of the obstacles that had and still have to be overcome; landscape is sometimes a silent witness to history or, some other times, a harsh, objective participant entitled to comment and criticise.

The poem that best syntheses MacLean's sense of place and history, together with his political commitment and social concern is *An Cuilithionn 1939*, generally considered to be a masterpiece of the twenty century Scottish

literature. Devoid of a linear narrative thread, the poem illustrates his author's engagement in social and political action, his attempt to "re-enfranchise Gaelic writing within the larger framework of European culture, winning back a centrality which it had been denied at least since the time of Renaissance," in political as well as in literary terms (6). A poem dedicated, in a traditional modesty topos, both to Christopher Grieve MacDiarmid and to Alexander MacDonald, declares its allegiance to both modernism and tradition and at the same time a profound love for Scotland.

In terms of landscape the Dedication establishes some of the key elements that will recurrently reappear as major metaphors in his poems: the mountains, their peaks, the island. The expressed goal of the poem is to give voice to all the turmoil and injustice that blighted Gaelic Scotland and at the same time to express the entire love for these lands.

> I would put the awful Cuillin
> in phosphorescence in the sky
> and I would make the island shout
> with a cry of fate in the skies. [...]
> I would keep our noble Skye
> head-on to the waves of Europe's battle. (5-8/11-12)

The beginning of the poem puts forth some of the topics that MacLean will repeatedly discuss in the poem: the metaphorical approach to landscape, whose suggestive description will most often be a comment in itself, the attempt to break the repressive silence History sometimes imposes upon certain spaces with "a cry of fate" that will assert the island's legitimate historical and cultural claims, and will affirm its identity. The pledge at the end of the dedication "I would keep our noble Skye..." is not only a promise to honour the island and keep it on the map of Europe but it is also a manner of placing himself within the Gaelic poetic tradition of Skye (he will allude to poets such as Mary MacPherson and Neil MacLeod) and a vow to keep it alive.

Cuillin, the key symbol of this poem and generally, a major symbol in MacLean's poetic universe, is the embodiment of ancient wisdom and a point of stability among the shaking grounds of History, a metaphor of heroism and bravery, a symbol of permanence and resilience. At the same time, the mountain also represents all the hardships and troubles Scotland had to overcome and the effort of climbing it is equated to the struggle for freedom and for asserting national identity. This is why the mountain sometimes appears with negative connotations, as a "mean mountain," "a wall between joy and my harsh little croft", "from which I would not see a freedom of grasslands" (*Glen Eyre*). In MacLean's description, Cuillin is the epitome of dignity, a metonymic

representation of Scottishness, as in most of his verses (*Kinloch Ainort*), of dynamism and frenzy suggested through a subtle movement of forms and shapes, a dance of silhouettes, of outlines and summits:

> A company of mountains, an upthrust of mountains
> A great garth of growing mountains,
> A concourse of summits, of knolls, of hills,
> Coming on with a fearsome roaring.

The mountain is a sublime appearance, inspiring sublime emotions and experiences, a space of historical and human grandeur, simultaneously seen as a site of heroism and self-sacrifice (generally associated to Christ, Spartacus and Prometheus, all of them offering inspiring examples of abnegation and self-immolation for the benefit of humankind, sometimes to Lenin, too). The mountain is often used as a point of observation ("It would become above every place/ to be on your shoulder blades", *An Cuilithionn 1939*), reached with great effort and determination, which gives the climber both an outward and elevated perspective, hence a higher degree of objectivity, upon places, people and events, and, most importantly, a historic perspective that places Gaelic Scotland within the European broader panorama: "then rises before me the fate of my people/ the woeful history of the lovely island". This higher point of observation at the same time enhances the sense of duty and responsibility towards one's fellows and the sense of solidarity with those suffering injustice and hardships:

> The lasting misery that has come
> and the misery that is to come,
> and the misery that is with us,
> the sore, killing, long misery.

In contrast with the mountain, as a place of sublime beauty, heroism and dignity, we find the image of the Morass of Mararàbhlainn, the bog that engulfs and obliterates both heroism and beauty in a metaphorical representation of injustice and corruption. In its turn, the bog becomes an ambiguous symbol which can acquire personal dimensions when it translates the fear of losing one's roots and identity, the fear of taking up action and standing up for one's rights; in this case it becomes the bog of fear and passivity, of resignation and hopelessness.

> The night of the morass is on my eyes,
> and has penetrated my vision,
> I have no hope of new bloom
> nor of new whiteness of sun. (53-54)

When projected on the great scale of history, the bog becomes a symbol of injustice and oppression and a metaphoric representation of Capitalism. The soul-wrecking bog can only be defeated through a bold rising up that could reconnect people with their heroic past (symbolised by the Gaelic voices of the past and through Clio, the Muse of History); this rising up is once again symbolised by the strenuous effort of climbing up the mountain peaks. The "lyrical peaks" of *An Cuilithionn* correspond not only to the summits that vanquish the bog and terminate its dominion of fear and dejection over the people's hearts and banish the "ultimate consequences of its filth;/ poverty, hunger and prostitution,/ fever, consumption and disease," but also to the obviously remarkable poetic skills displayed in this impressive poem. There is always the possibility of choosing between heroism and passive resignation ("I have a foot in Mararaulin/ and a foot on the Cuillin"), between futile nostalgia and revolt.

The Skye Stallion, the impressive cliff that stands for the human capacity to transcend its own limits, to fully achieve self-improvement and sum up the courage to act in the name of justice and humanity, is the one that can defeat the morass and restore a temporarily lost dignity; the "flawless Stallion," "great horse of the sea," "steed of the ocean," "great horse of the horizon," "stallion of the mountains," "love of Scotland," the Skye Stallion becomes the personified embodiment of the emblem of Scotland, of its endless struggle for freedom and its oscillation between the heights of heroism and the abyss of despair. Symbol of national pride, of great aspirations and patriotic exultation, the cliff stands for human dignity and pride, for the capacity to go beyond the limitations imposed either by personal weaknesses or by historical circumstances.

The way in which MacLean envisages nature and describes his native landscapes is illustrative for the exquisite combination of a Romantic revolutionary spirit, a metaphorical approach to Nature and History, and a Modernist construction of his poems, for the idiosyncratic use of traditional rhythms and innovatory forms. The result is a subtle connection between past and present, tradition and modernity with a significant emphasis placed upon the assertion of Gaelic/Scottish identity and upon the pride it engenders, which comes from "the gift of my environment and my heredity" (*Glen Eyre*). The Scottish landscape, its history and its tradition thus become the major dimensions of MacLean's poetic universe.

4. "**Putting thoughts in a dying language**" (*I Do Not See the Sense of My Toil)*

MacLean's remarkable gift of using landscape so as to inspire patriotic feelings, to evoke a heroic past, to reassert national identity, to comment on a

problematic present and expose its failures, is matched by his remarkable skill in using the same natural elements in order to evoke a Gaelic tradition and to subtly connect it to such aesthetic notions as beauty, art and love.

From this perspective, woods provide an extremely rich source of symbols and metaphors that comment on the sense of belonging to a specific place, community, tradition, and on the status of art. The woods generally offer an inward perspective that invite to self-analysis, introspection and nostalgic evocations; frequently coming back to the image of "roots", MacLean's metaphorical use of the woods renews the connection between past and present stressing the idea of ancestral heritage – the rich treasure of folk tales, myths and songs of the Gaelic cultural heritage – continuity, historical legitimacy, the sense of unity and solidarity.

A poem like *The Woods of Rasaay* makes an extensive use of metonymies and synecdoches inspired by the image of the trees which are seen as an army of "helmets", an army of faithful soldiers with proud "banners" of green foliage, valiantly defending their land. In MacLean's suggestive evocation, the forest becomes in turns a metaphor of the labyrinth of life and the complicated ways of History ("the restless intricacy"), of renewal and rejuvenation, of dynamism and exhilaration but still emblematic for an inherently divided Scottish self: torn between exuberance and despair, heroism and passivity ("the divided wood," "the wood with doubling"), at the same time a dual space where beauty and harmony on the one side coexist with the turmoils of history and death on the other side.

Vividly discussed and theorised, the Scottish "polymatic linguistic tradition" (Jack qtd. in Sassi 34) – which refers to an extreme versatility and flexibility of literary texts dating back to as far as the fourteenth century and up to the eighteenth century, when they were often written in no less than six languages including Scots, Gaelic, English, Latin, Norman French and Old Norse – has been in fact a reality that has characterised Scottish culture from early times. In the case of Scottish literature, and in the particular case of Gaelic poetry, duality is even more obvious, acquiring suggestive linguistic dimensions, as poems almost always come with double versions and translations, just in the way in which their authors use both their Gaelic names and their English transliterations. In fact, MacLean was not very fond of doubling his poems with their English versions, though he translated most of his poems for the sake of a larger circulation and a broader readership. He considered that the real measure of Gaelic poetry is given by its musicality, by the way in which images, metaphors and ideas create a harmonious entity: "Gaelic poetry that is published with English translations cannot be assessed on its translation alone even by the most honest and perceptive of critics who do not know Gaelic" ("My Relationship with the Muse" 14).

The musicality of language is emphasised by a special use of phonetic symbolism which goes together with a metaphorical use of natural elements. The apparent "silence of the woods", yet pregnant with so many stories of the past and with the inaudible voices of the ancestors, is often associated with the gradual silencing of Gaelic over the centuries, culminating with the Clearances, an event repeatedly evoked by MacLean. The close connection between the voice of the wind and of the streams, the rustling of the foliage and the murmur of the burns, and the musicality of Gaelic, a language too deeply rooted into the Scottish land to be wiped out by inimical historical and political circumstances and by people's indifference, is common in the context of twentieth century Gaelic poetry. It was professed by the most passionate supporter of the Gaelic language and literature, George Campbell Hay, together with poets such as Derick Thomas, Aonghas MacNeacail, Mary Montgomery, Iain Creitchon Smith and many others. Hay associates Gaelic with the Highlands and the rugged landscape and woods of Argyll and thus Gaelic becomes "...the ancient tongue which woke him/ from his cradle sleep; and in which he courted/ his love in the fragrant woods" (*Mokhtâr and Dougall*).

Most often, the wind is the source and carrier of the Gaelic language from a meaningful past towards a future where it runs the risk of oblivion and indifference (Hay, MacLean), where the general decay of nature and the degradation of landscape are seen as symbolical for the dying of Gaelic language and culture (Thomas, MacLean); or, contrarily, in Bateman's poetry, the soil becomes the metaphor of the resilience and the continuity of Gaelic on the Scottish land. Duality is present even in this regard, as most poets and defenders of language draw attention upon a subtle distinction that has relatively recently appeared between the "old Gaelic" of the born-Gaelic speakers who perceive it as a cultural heritage and the "new Gaelic" of the younger generation of authors who acquired it as a sign of respect for their tradition. Their joint efforts are however meritorious in the common attempt to resist *monolingualism*, an attempt which "is a key creative stand in Scottish literature" (Brown & Riach 5). This communal endeavour was officially legitimated through the 2005 Gaelic Language Act that established *Bòrà na Gàidhlig* – an executive public body of the Scottish Government in charge with implementing the Gaelic language – and ensured the preservation of Gaelic as one of the languages spoken in Scotland, both as a transmitter of a cultural heritage and as a marker of identity that simultaneous shows its allegiance to both Ireland and Scotland.

For MacLean, the woods remain a place of beauty, of music (always associated to old Gaelic traditional songs), harmony and coherence: "coille à chronain/ s' i òranach luinneagach; the humming wood/of songs and ditties"

(*Woods of Rasaay*). The tree imagery is particularly suggestive and rich in symbolism; the frequent association between people and trees sends back to the old Gaelic tradition of the medieval panegyric poetry where the dignity and strength of native trees (rowan, hazel and birch) were ascribed to important people in the clan, or where entire families or clans were symbolically represented through a specific tree. In MacLean's poems this association acquires further nuances. In *Hallaig*, for example, a poem about the effects of the Clearances on the Gaelic communities, trees completely replaced people ("she is a birch, a hazel,/ a straight, slender young rowan," "their daughters and their sons are a wood/ going up beside the stream," "the girls a wood of birches") in a landscape mutilated by History and transformed into an empty house whose "window is nailed and boarded." But it is precisely this association that dispels the poignant sense of loss and abandonment and turns it into hope of regeneration. Contrarily, in *Culloden*, even if not completely uprooted, the tree bears the marks of the indomitable historical moment: "it was a breaking/ to the race of the Gaels,/ and there grew on this slope/ only the withered tree of misfortune."

The tree becomes the perfect metaphor for Gaeldom in *The Tree of Strings* and for the qualities MacLean considers to be most representative of the Gaelic spirit: *tha Craobh nan Teud/ the Tree of Strings* stands for the old cultural heritage, the treasure of songs and poems that have offered comfort and alleviation ("a light through suffering") in front of the vicissitudes of life and preserved the identity of a people; *the craobh a' chiùil/ the tree of music*, "a flower to windward," sends once again to the association wind-music-Gaelic, an inseparable trinity which is meant to survive even if the tree itself loses its strength under the "hardships of chances and their strokes"; and *a chraobh na bàrdachd/ the tree of poetry* refers to the strength, beauty and harmony offered by art, the sense of continuity and endurance. Art/poetry, as seen by MacLean, comes from "the ordered thought" engendered by the concreteness and reliability of reality ("hardness of rocks"), from simplicity, sincerity and elevation from triviality ("the bareness of mountains") and from the author's skill ("the might of talents"). Tradition, music, language and poetry are thus placed at the core of Gaelic identity which not only offer strength against "woe and threat/ [...] and torrent of falsehood" but can also engender *the craobh àilleachd glòrmhoir/ the tree of a glorious beauty*, "the melodious, gold-yellow tree,/ high head above grief."

> MacLean did not just resurrect Gaelic poetry or reanimate what is sometimes wrongly judged to be a dead literature, ensuring that it survived into a new century – he also breathed new life into his

tradition. If we imagine his poems as trees, it is clear that he has repopulated the wood and perhaps introduced some new varieties of flora which can exist alongside the birch, the hazel and the rowan in 'coille mo ghràidh/ the wood I love'. (Dymock 84)

5. Conclusion

From his exquisite love poems to his impressive war poetry, from poems of political engagement and social commitment, to metaphorical comments on historical events, Somhairle MacGill-Eain/Sorley MacLean found a way to remain deeply rooted in the tradition in which he grew up and in the places he loved so much and yet to transcend the boundaries of his language and the borders of his country and get international recognition. Subtly putting together tradition and modernity, history and politics, exuberance and despair, the poet reasserted the divided Scottish self and its profound connection to places and landscapes. The sense of place and belonging becomes a permanent topic in his poems and the means he uses to illustrate it reveal him as a master of landscape descriptions and of a metaphorical approach to nature. What Sorley MacLean succeeded in creating was a highly suggestive combination of geographically recognisable landscapes, strongly attached to the concreteness and referentiality of place names, and landscapes of the mind and of the soul, metaphorically evoking and creating symbolical bridges between the old heroic times and the elusive future. "If a poem cannot in any way approach the quality of music, if it lacks the lyrical cry, then it is not poetry," MacLean used to say ("Old Songs and New Poetry" 118), and this "lyrical cry" is one of his greatest achievements as he managed not only to render the sense of place and to create memorable images inspired by Gaelic Scotland, but also to create a music of these places through a tender, respectful and creative coming back to the Gaelic tradition. In songs, family, love for his native places and the people inhabiting them, the interest in time, history, politics, and their tragic combination he was able to find a rich source of inspiration for his poems. "MacLean's debt to ancient Gaelic song and the physical woods of Rasaay and the prayers of the Free Presbyterian people and the inestimable sermons of the Reverend Ewan MacQueen and the love poetry of William Ross was great", Aongas Caimbeul argues, "but his dialectical conversation with the world was what turned these primary influences into art" (*Hallaig and Other Poems* xxi). This wholehearted embrace of a land, deeply shaped by history, language and culture, gave MacLean's poetry a nostalgic view of the past and an enduring sense of belonging and continuity that still sends powerful echoes into the way twenty first century Scotland is being redefined today.

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DORA D'ISTRIA: MAPPING THE CULTURAL TRANSFER OF INTIMACY AT THE "FRINGES" OF EUROPE

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ABSTRACT. *Dora D'istria: Mapping the Cultural Transfer of Intimacy at the "Fringes" of Europe.* The present paper examines two texts by Dora D'Istria dealing with women's emancipation and empowerment in the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, we shall analyze how women situated their experience against the discourses that regulated intimacy in the context of nation-building in that respective period.

Keywords: intimacy, Dora D'Istria, women's emancipation, mid-nineteen century, modernity, discourse.

REZUMAT. *Dora D'Istria: O cartografie a transferului cultural al intimității la "marginile" Europei.* Lucrarea de față analizează două texte ale Dorei D'Istria axate pe emanciparea și responsabilizarea feminină la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea. Astfel, vom examina felul în care femeile și-au raportat experiența la retorica intimității, precum și modul în care aceasta din urmă era reglementată într-o epocă preocupată de construcția identității naționale.

Cuvinte cheie: intimitate, Dora D'Istria, emancipare feminină, mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea, modernitate, discurs.

Literary and cultural critics have been fascinated with the relationship between narrative and intimacy, in particular with the relationship between romantic and fiction on the one hand, and sexual transgression and "failed" relationships on the other. From the famous research of Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) and continuing with the more recent studies of Joan Landes (1988), Joan De Jean (1991), Erica Harth (1992), Suellen Diaconoff (2005), and so on, consistent research on women's prose reading and writing

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practices in the age of sentimentality up to the late nineteenth century has virtually created a new field in contemporary literary studies at the "core" of Europe. This body of research points out to the *"transformation of Intimacy"*, a process analysed by Anthony Giddens (1992) who discusses the larger context of the changes in gender relations during the nineteenth century in Western Europe. These changes were based on the evolution of modern capitalism and democratic societies. These studies have in common the discourses which testify to the empowerment related to women's participation in the making of modern society.

What about the "*fringes*" or "*peripheries*"? What did the transformation of intimacy look like as we move away from the heart of Europe? What were women's experiences and narratives of the intimate in the context of modernization? Did the religious background make any difference in how women adopted and propagated the age of the sentiment? Moreover, what role did women writers play in the "transformation of intimacy" at the peripheries/fringes of Europe? How was the intimacy topos reflected in women's literature and what was its reception in this part of Europe? Is their contribution relevant to the making of modern societies here, as elsewhere?

In the attempt to investigate the above questions, in September 2016, together with Dr. Birgitta Johansson from the University of Gothenburg, we organized an exploratory workshop titled *Rethinking Intimacy. Representations, Scenes and Scenarios of Intimacy in Women's Reading and Writing (1700-1900)* (*http://limbi-straine.ucdc.ro/doc/intimacy.pdf).* As the title suggests – the workshop aimed at investigating the issue of intimacy, its representations, scenes, and scenarios in women's reading and writing between the 1700s and 1900s. The general objective was to highlight a body of works that has been frowned upon if not altogether neglected in the Romanian literary canon: nineteenth century Romanian women writers and their contribution to the literary tradition. Was there a particular genre these women authors translated and/or adapted, and why? Were they cultural mediators? If yes, what role did the adaptation of foreign texts play into the transfer process? And vice-versa, did their literary productions cross borders? What was the profile of their audience at home and elsewhere? Which were, at the time, the characteristics of their texts that enabled them to cross cultural borders? How is their later quasi-disappearance from canonical literary history to be explained?

Another target of the workshop was to help the research community identify possible areas of investigation of intimacy aspects related to women's reading and writing practices, as well as modes of integrating the intimacy dimension into the research content for the participants' own research areas. One major outcome of the concluding session was the idea that the intimacy

topos in women's writing and in the strategies of reading in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries **a)** can be incorporated in a cultural transformation of intimacy in the *fringes* of Europe and **b)** is relevant to genres of literature and other contemporary cultural expressions spanning both popular and highbrow circuits. Thus, the contours of a tradition started to emerge.

The present paper deals with the above-mentioned issues; it examines nineteenth century feminine authorship in Romania by means of a case study, through the framework of intimacy. My thesis is that nineteenth century Romanian women writers' marginalization is, no doubt, political and it needs to be urgently addressed[2] in order to unearth their experience of and contribution to the Romanian process of modernization.

To begin with, I am building on the assumption that women's literary contribution subversively challenged the private-feminine and public-masculine divide, namely the constraints of women's sexual agency and the heterosexual romance. I will be examining how women situated their experience against the discourses that regulated intimacy during the mid-nineteenth century period in the context of nation-building, which also constitutes my specific objective. The functioning of these earlier women authors, especially those active in-between languages – by definition on the fringes of the national literary fields – is often difficult for literary historians to study.

To better illustrate the above, as a case-study, I will refer to the prose published by Dora D'Istria (Elena Ghica) on the feminine agenda in the West and the East (Orient), in the second half of the nineteenth century: *Les femmes en Orient* (1860) and *Des femmes par une femme* (1865)*.* These are her most relevant works focusing on the female relationships and attitudes towards intimacy as well as on the discourses that policed women's intimate behavior. *Des femmes par une femme* establishes the framework of the author's discourse on the feminine issue. It also brings forth an astute analysis of the different approaches and theories to women's status in society, especially the French ones. She further pursues her analysis of the Western European women, as counterpart to the first book *Les femmes en Orient.*

Elena Ghica's life lends itself to becoming writing material: a charismatic Romanian princess, she managed to charm the entire European high society through her wit, adventurous spirit, and striking intellect. She was born in a sophisticated and erudite aristocratic family as the niece of two Princes - Grigore Ghica and Alexandru Ghica. Her father was a prominent archeologist,

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[2] For a relevant article in this respect, see: "*Ce scriitoare ar trebui să fie prezente în canonul școlar și în programa pentru bacalaureat?" ("What Women Writers Should be Present in the School Canon and in the Baccalaureate Curriculum?"),* debate in: *Observatorul Cultural* online journal, No. 917/2018, www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/ce-scriitoare-ar-trebui-sa-fie-prezente-canonul-scolar-si-programa-pentru-bacalaureat. Accessed 20th November 2018.

and her mother a writer and translator of classical French literature. A prodigal child, by the age of fourteen she was literate in nine foreign languages, and able to translate Homer's *Iliad* into German, from classical Greek. At the age of 22 she married the Russian prince Alexander Koltov Massalsky whom she followed to St. Petersburg. They had a daughter (who later died), but the marriage itself turned to be a disaster. She never divorced her husband officially; following her outspoken admiration of the British and French culture at the time of the Crimean War, their separation was definitive after she was brutally "advised" to leave the Russian Empire. Consequently, she went into exile in Switzerland, and later on moved to Italy for life.

A keen traveler and a free spirit she was undoubtedly one of the greatest women writers of her time. No wonder today she is claimed by several cultures, starting with Romania (where she was born and raised for most of her young life), and finishing with Albania which has considered Dora D'Istria their uncrowned princess. Although referring to a later phase in the modern history of Romania (beginning of the twentieth century), the issues raised by the author of the fragment below also encapsulate the final decades of the nineteenth century, and most certainly, are symptomatic for Elena Ghica's biography:

> Two historical particularities distinguish the Romanian case: the absence of a widespread feminist movement and the late modernization and urbanization, occurring concomitantly with the highly energetic nation-building processes […]. The division between public masculinity and private femininity may have acquired less ideological force than in Western Europe, given the late emergence of the Romanian bourgeoisie. In the writings of Romanian women at the time, women enjoyed remarkable mobility and access to the city, their social circle, or even international travel, as well as sexual autonomy. (Năchescu 79)

The ethnological diversity she deals with in *Les Femmes en Orient* (*Women in the Orient*) is impressive (she gives accounts on the Romanians, the Bulgarians, the Dalmatians, the Montenegrins, the Turks, the Albanians, the Greeks, the Russians, the Siberians, the Kazaks, the Polish, the Latvians, the Georgians, the Armenians, the Kurds, the Ossetians, and eventually the Finno-Mongolians, with all the respective subdivisions), given how rigorously the text was elaborated. Subsequently, in *Des Femmes par Une Femme* (*On Women by a Woman*) she dealt with the Western women, whom she divides into the "*Latin society*" (French, Italian, Spanish) and the "*Germanic society*" (Germans, Saxons, Prussians, Austrians, Scandinavians, Anglo-Saxons, Belgians, Dutch).[3]

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[3] For the account of the ethnicities of the women analysed in the two studies of Dora D'Istria, see Bordaş 702.

Besides the fact that *Les femmes en Orient* and *Des femmes par une femme* are the writings dedicated to feminine emancipation, these are also Elena Ghica's most mature works from the intellectual point of view. For instance, when referring to the situation of Turkish women in harems, she appreciates that: "[...] *sex is reduced to the most dreadful, the most degrading form of slavery",* which requires urgent *"equitable and liberal laws which could repair, at least partially, the damaging effects caused by violence and despotism*". (1876, 107)[4]

She addresses the issue of feminine emancipation in response to Jules Michelet's *Du prêtre, de la femme et de l'humanité* (1845), *Les Femmes de la Révolution* (1854) and *La femme* (1854): no doubt appreciative of Michelet's efforts to promote women in society, she objects to his positioning of women as inferior citizens. According to Michelet, the ultimate reason for women's existence was getting married and procreating; consequently, he vehemently rejects the institution of divorce, bringing arguments to support his claim from the Bible and the Christian tradition. At odds with Michelet and other liberal thinkers, Elena Ghica militates for the idea of full equality between men and women, supporting the institution of divorce as well as women's independence:

> Anybody knows that, if family has remained - in the West - a truly vivacious institution, this must be attributed not to the catholic peoples, who gladly treat it as a mockery [...], but to the protestant nations. (1876, 71)

She herself was a free spirit, claiming the sort of right to intimacy and independence. She is a keen militant for legalizing divorce, which places her at the forefront of the fight for women's emancipation in her time. In the nineteenth century divorce was still widely rejected as a private life practice; however, Elena Ghica boldly debates the issue in her writings, bringing pertinent arguments to counteract the general public opinion condemning divorce. One of the most pervasive objections was (and still is!) that the children are deeply affected by the breaking up of a family through divorce, thus losing the stability of their home. To this general belief Elena Ghica answers that the concept of family doesn't necessarily imply a mother and a father, a traditional couple; she is asking rhetorically if one can call a home such a place which is:

> [...] a place of jealousy, of disunion, of irreconcilable hatred, of the most terrible passions which torment the human heart? Do you believe that a young woman should be brought up in such a manner, or that a son

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[4] All the quotations from Dora D'Istria were translated by Carmen Duțu from the Romanian translation of Dora D'Istria's works by Peretz.

should find himself disputed by the most irreconcilable contraries [...], not knowing which of the two, his mother or his father, is more despicable? (1876, 72-73)

The majority of her writings deals with women's emancipation issues, contesting the widely spread discriminatory and humiliating practices women were subjected to throughout cultures. Consequently, her voice was definitely heard, but her opinions were regarded as dangerous by the Tsarist court in Sankt Petersburg, as well by the conservative circles in Western Europe.

Elena Ghica managed to map the intimate within the cultural particularities of the - what at the time was regarded as "oriental" societies. Recently, researchers have analyzed the content of these texts from a scientific position and concluded that:

Although she dedicated a lot of time and numerous writings to the Orient and ethnology, Dora D'Istria may not be considered an orientalist proper or an ethnologist in the academic sense of the word. (Bordaş 702)

However, for the purpose of this paper we have considered the essence of her work ethnological in spirit as it deals with the cultural particularities of the Balkan and the South-Eastern European societies, in a historical context which regarded the "Orient" as a monolithic Other. To the subjective, essentialist, and stereotypical view on the Orient, most frequently stemming from ignorance, Dora D'Istria opposes an analytic spirit, filtered through the Christian-Orthodox doctrine and her personal experiences as a traveller. She talks about the intimacy of hospitality in private spaces whereby gender becomes bound up with political emancipation. Thus she argues that the unconditioned obedience of women towards men is a mere prejudice, a misinterpretation of the Biblical text and the church doctrine also due to the historical context. In Dora D'Istria's view, women had an active role in the making of the modern South-Eastern European states.

Elena Ghica was a pan-European intellectual, an active militant for women's rights, deeply involved in the political and social agenda of her time. She left behind an impressive body of work on essential cultural issues such as individual freedom. Such issues raised by the new modern paradigm were brought to the South-Eastern Europe through cultural transfer from the French culture; an astute and profound intellectual, Elena Ghica argues that individual freedom can only exist if the entire society goes through a political and cultural metamorphosis. Moreover, this has to include, or better yet, starts from the metamorphosis of the private space, of the intimate, otherwise it is not a genuine transformation.

In view of building-up a society based on freedom, overcoming slavery, tyranny, and the subjection of the individual, all aspects of public life must address the intimate and the private as well. Elena Ghica's feminist works explored the contemporary discourses on intimacy dealing with love, motherhood, the pure *vs.* impure dichotomy, feminine hysteria, menstruation, physical inferiority and beauty stereotypes, and so on. Her studies position her undoubtedly in the line with the Romanian intellectuals who triggered the shift to the modern paradigm.

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ÉVÉNEMENT DE COMMUNICATION

MARIE OUVRARD-SERVANTON[1]

ABSTRACT. *Communication Event.* In Information and Communication Sciences, the phrase "communication event" is not clearly defined. We situate the notion of communication event in a space where the actors, whether human or non-human, equally participate in the event through the use of language. A communication event is the effect of preliminary staging. In this article we study the notion of communication event exploring three films of the same film maker, each of them creating an event within an event.

Keywords: communication anthropology, communication event, staging, meaning, actions, language

REZUMAT. *Evenimentul de comunicare*. În ştiinţele informaţiei şi comunicării, expresia "eveniment de comunicare" nu este definită foarte clar. Folosim noţiunea eveniment de comunicare într-un spaţiu în care actorii, fie ei umani sau nu, participă în egală măsură la un eveniment prin intermediul limbajului. Un eveniment de comunicare este efectul unei înscenări preliminare. În acest articol, ne ocupăm de noţiunea de eveniment de comunicare analizând trei filme ale aceluiaşi realizator, fiecare dintre ele creează un eveniment în interiorul altui eveniment.

Cuvinte cheie: Antropologia comunicării, eveniment de comunicare, înscenare, sens, acţiuni, limbaj

Définir ce qu'est un événement de communication au regard des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication (SIC) peut offrir un angle d'approche pour ce que l'on nomme *communications événementielles* ou *événements médiatiques* et ouvrir de nouvelles voies de recherche.

Dans le texte fondateur de Dell Hymes (1967) proposant une anthropologie de la communication, les *communicative events*, notion qui a été souvent traduite en langue française par événements de communication, sont considérés comme ayant une structure ou un schéma dont le langage n'est

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qu'une composante. Dell Hymes se pose alors la question de savoir ce que sont les *communicative events*, et leurs composantes, à l'intérieur d'une communauté. Pour lui, l'événement est constitué par la transmission d'un message et caractérisé par un canal, les données du contexte, une forme définie du message, un sujet et un commentaire (où le message dit quelque chose à propos de quelque chose). Une communauté ou culture va déterminer elle-même ce qu'elle estime être des exemples de tels événements. Ceci requiert d'établir une relation entre ce qui est considéré comme des événements individuels et ce qui est considéré comme un ensemble. Alors Dell Hymes suggère, dans les champs de l'anthropologie sociale et culturelle, de remplacer les anecdotes par une étude comparative détaillée des *communicative events* et des éléments qui les composent. Il situe son étude dans un espace communicationnel interpersonnel.

De son côté, Paul Ricœur (2006), dans son ouvrage, *Discours et communication*, établit le rapport entre le discours et la communication et situe l'événement dans ce rapport. Il note que la linguistique qui étudie le discours sans parleur n'est qu'une part de la communication qui, elle, représente ce qui *« a lieu effectivement entre les hommes »* (Ricœur, 2006, p.10). À cette étape, cette définition de la communication est problématisée pour deux raisons : le lieu de la communication et de l'événement se situe-t-il uniquement *entre* ou pourrait-il se situer *où* ? Étudions-nous, en SIC, ce qui se passe uniquement entre les hommes ou ce qui se passe aussi entre les humains et les non humains, comme le suggère Bruno Latour (2001) ?

Quant à nous, nous situons l'événement de communication dans un espace scénique *où* les actants (Latour, 2001), non humains et humains, ont un rôle équivalent dans leur participation à ce que nous avons admis comme axiome de la communication : *les expériences où les humains et non humains échangent à travers le langage* (Ouvrard-Servanton, 2010, p.57). Nous cherchons à cerner autant la nature de l'événement qu'à le positionner par rapport au langage, au sens, au temps, à l'espace, et comment ces quatre éléments s'enchevêtrent les uns et les autres dans les mises en forme et les mises en scène pour produire et révéler l'événement de communication.

Nous avons utilisé un matériau pour illustrer le champ d'investigation : le cinéma, en nous appuyant sur les trois films du cinéaste suisse, Jean-Stéphane Bron. Ces films ont la particularité (parmi d'autres) de mettre en scène l'événement et de créer l'événement sur l'événement. *Le génie helvétique* suit les travaux d'une commission parlementaire chargée d'une loi sur le génie génétique et a été projeté à Paris au Sénat le 2 novembre 2004. *Mon frère se marie* ou le mariage d'un frère de cœur, boat people vietnamien, recueilli par une famille suisse est une comédie à laquelle se livre une famille, décomposée, et recomposée le temps du mariage de ce fils adoptif, devant sa mère biologique. Dans *Cleveland contre Wall Street*, la crise des subprimes de 2008, un vrai-faux procès est filmé alors que les représentants de Wall Street l'ont fait annuler.

1. La nature de l'événement

Si définir l'événement est une clé fondamentale dans notre optique anthropologique de la communication, Gilles Deleuze propose un point de départ qui nous permet de renverser la perception phénoménologique de l'événement : *« Vous voyez, c'est le renversement total de la position classique du problème. Et les écrans noirs c'est nous, c'est-à-dire, nous ce que nous amenons c'est l'obscurité, et c'est seulement grâce à l'obscurité que nous pouvons dire : "ah oui...nous percevons les choses". S'il n' y avait pas l'écran noir, on ne les percevrait pas. Renversement complet, c'est les choses qui sont lumière et c'est nous l'obscurité, c'est pas nous la lumière et les choses qui sont dans l'obscurité. [...]. Bon, c'est très curieux ça, je dirais alors pour achever ma comparaison avec la phénoménologie : la phénoménologie en reste absolument à l'appareil métaphorique classique. Il change parce qu'il fait tout descendre au niveau d'une description du vécu, au niveau d'une description du sensible et de l'existant mais il en reste absolument au niveau de la lumière-conscience. C'est Bergson qui fait le renversement absolu. »* (Deleuze, 1981). Dans ce recadrage presque cinématographique, le point de vue de Gilles Deleuze est un garde-fou à l'interprétation subjective de l'événement pour ne pas ramener les actions et les mises en forme, en signe et en scène à un discours d'intentionnalité. Le renversement dont il parle est une frontière fine où *« Bergson veut dire juste le contraire, c'est les choses elles-mêmes qui sont des perceptions [...] c'est dans les choses qu'il y a la perception. »* (Deleuze, 1981).

Le renversement auquel fait allusion Gilles Deleuze où la lumière des choses vient se projeter sur notre obscurité est proche de certaines scènes marquantes des trois films que nous avons sélectionnés. Les parlementaires, filmés dans *Le génie helvétique*, inscrivent leur vote qui s'imprime en couleur sur l'écran visible par tous. Les visages filmés entre le moment où chacun des parlementaires a appuyé sur sa machine individuelle et le moment où les couleurs des Oui/vert, Non/rouge et Abstentions/rose s'affichent semblent refléter le passage entre l'obscurité de ce que leur geste va produire et la révélation du résultat projeté qui s'inscrit sur la surface du grand écran de l'hémicycle parlementaire : *« Il y a parfois des décisions qui sont prises par hasard, par des gens qui ne sont pas au courant de tout, à qui il y a des choses qui échappent... »* (Bron, 2004). Dans le film *Mon frère se marie* les choses sont en lumière et s'impriment sur l'écran noir de nos sens, de nos perceptions : le Cervin, tant envoyé en cartes postales à la mère vietnamienne, se révèle au sens visuel en émergeant des brumes lors de la visite à Zermatt après le mariage.

Dans la Logique du sens, Gilles Deleuze (1969) va démontrer la nature de l'événement en admettant comme point de départ que le sens est *« l'exprimé de la proposition, cet incorporel à la surface des choses, événement pur qui insiste ou subsiste à la proposition »* et donc *« irréductible, et aux états*

de choses individuels, et aux images particulières, et aux croyances personnelles, et aux concepts universels et généraux » (Deleuze, 1969, pp. 30-31). Ainsi dans *Le génie helvétique*, le sens est ce qui s'exprime et s'imprime sur la surface de l'écran de l'hémicycle parlementaire plus que dans les tractations derrière la porte de la salle 87 du Palais fédéral à Berne et devant les porte-manteaux de la salle des pas perdus avant les votes. Pour Gilles Deleuze, *« il n'y a que l'empirisme qui sache dépasser les dimensions expérimentale du visible sans tomber dans les Idées »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.32), un empirisme qui s'appuie sur les signes laissés dans les images des films, comme dans *Le Génie helvétique* où les conversations de couloir pour les tractations concernant le vote sur les OGM sont rapportées, inscrites sur la pellicule. Là les choses deviennent palpables, visibles, audibles et écriture filmique pour être mises dans l'Agora en dépliant l'expérience. Dans ce dépliage de l'expérience, nous devons ouvrir parfois les boites noires des mots, des signes, des traces, des formes, des images ou même en forant ou explosant la surface, non pour explorer les profondeurs mais les éclairer et rendre visible à la surface : c'est ce que nous appellerons *anthropologier la communication* (Ouvrard-Servanton, 2010, p. 49 & 76)*.

Notre ligne principale est de rester en contact avec les méthodes empiriques qui ont permis une effectuation spatio-temporelle de l'événement et dont nous avons des traces, comme le film qu'il soit documentaire (*Le génie helvétique*) ou pseudo fictif (*Mon frère se marie ou Cleveland contre Wall Street*). À partir des traces, nous pouvons déployer l'expérience de l'événement car *« l'événement, c'est le sens lui-même. L'événement appartient essentiellement au langage, il est dans un rapport essentiel avec le langage ; mais le langage est ce qui se dit des choses »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.34). Le vote de la commission parlementaire pour l'élaboration de la loi sur le génie génétique a effectivement eu lieu, le jeune boat people a été bien été recueilli par la famille de J. S. Bron et la ville de Cleveland a assigné en justice 21 banques de Wall Street.

Dans son article *Mémoires, outils et langages,* à partir du constat qu'*« à l'externalisation de l'outil répond celle de la mémoire, clairement située à la croisée de la technique et des langages »* (Souchier, 2004, p. 49), Emmanuël Souchier invite à s'intéresser aux *« modalités de mise en forme de cette mémoire collective […] car elles vont en constituer tout à la fois les supports matériels et les moyens symboliques, autrement dit les médias »* (Souchier, 2004, p. 49)*.* Notre tâche est de dégager les agencements dans les mises en forme à partir des traces qui produisent sens et événement à la fois, au-delà de la doxa (qui s'intéresse à la répartie par l'apriori) et du sens commun (qui ramène ce qui se distingue à ce qui se ressemble).

Sans prétendre redonner des lettres de noblesse à ce qui est nommé *communication événementielle* ou *événement médiatique* et qui regroupe de multiples activités allant du cocktail au festival en passant par les salons ou

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des faits divers aux grandes révélations médiatiques à spectre international, nous nous interrogeons sur ce qui lie l'événement à la communication. En convoquant le philosophe Gilles Deleuze pour nous permettre de définir l'événement de communication, nous faisons appel à la fois à l'auteur de la Logique du sens mais aussi à celui qui a analysé l'art cinématographique.

Dans la Logique du sens, nous pouvons extraire la nature de l'événement. Nous envisageons le cinéma ici comme moyen communicationnel permettant la mise en scène, l'effectuation et la mise en mémoire d'un événement. Le point d'articulation entre la question de la nature de l'événement et celle du cinéma (telle que nous venons de la définir) est la proposition de *singularité*. D'une part, l'événement est considéré comme un ensemble de singularités *« comme si les événements jouissaient d'une irréalité qui se communique au savoir et aux personnes à travers le langage »* Deleuze, 1969, p.11*.* D'autre part, le cinéma ou image-action est lié à l'idée bergsonienne du mouvement où *« l'instant quelconque peut-être régulier ou singulier, ordinaire ou remarquable »* (Deleuze, 1983, p.15). C'est dans sa nature que de mêler langage et dimension collective et d'enchevêtrer les actants, acteurs humains et non humains, de manière singulière et remarquable.

2. Situer l'événement

Une des principales difficultés dans la recherche sur l'événement est de le situer, de situer l'évaluation de ce que l'on estime être un événement ou ne pas être un événement. Comment situer l'événement ailleurs que dans l'évaluation de type sociologique (quantitative ou qualitative) et ailleurs que dans une analyse historique de l'événement ? L'angle proposé par Gilles Deleuze répond à notre recherche de regard autre pour situer l'événement.

En premier lieu, il ne détermine pas les frontières mais invite à de multiples regards et perceptions car *« l'incertitude personnelle n'est pas un doute extérieur à ce qui se passe mais une structure objective de l'événement lui-même en tant qu'il va toujours en deux sens à la fois et qu'il écartèle le sujet suivant cette double direction. Le paradoxe est d'abord ce qui détruit le bon sens comme sens unique mais ensuite ce qui détruit le sens commun comme assignation d'identités fixes. »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.15). La liberté semble sauvée deux fois, une fois dans l'intériorité du destin : le lien avec les causes de l'événement et une fois dans l'extériorité des événements : le lien avec les effets. La thématique du film *Cleveland contre Wall Street* met ceci en exergue. Il y a l'intériorité du destin, celui de ces habitants du quartier de Slavic Village de Cleveland qui doivent emprunter pour avoir un toit, à des taux variables qui vont monter en flèche. On connaît une part de l'intériorité du destin de Barbara Anderson, une des protagonistes de la réalité et de la fiction documentaire. On connaît aussi l'extériorité des événements

puisque l'on sait que le 11 janvier 2008, Josh Cohen et ses associés, avocats de la ville de Cleveland assignent en justice les 21 banques qu'ils estiment responsables des saisies immobilières dont la plupart des habitants sont victimes. *« Entre ces événements-effets et le langage ou même la possibilité du langage, il y a un rapport essentiel : il appartient aux événements d'être exprimés ou exprimables, énoncés ou énonçables par des propositions au moins possibles »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.22). Nous sommes au croisement de l'événement et de la communication en admettant qu'il y a un rapport essentiel entre l'événement et la communication par l'échange à travers le langage.

Nous supposons qu'une mise en scène préalable de l'événement a lieu. Le film *Mon frère se marie* est dans cette veine. La mise en scène de la famille suisse (qui a adopté Vinh) en vue de l'accueil de la famille d'origine vietnamienne du frère (parti à l'âge de sept ans sur un *boat people*) pour son mariage est une composition quasi tragi-comique à cause de la nécessité de la mise en scène préalable de l'événement. S'il y a une mise en scène préalable de l'événement alors l'événement est l'effet de la mise en scène et, dans la mise en scène, il y a expression de l'événement. Dans le film cité, l'événement s'exprime aussi à travers le langage d'actants non humains : le cadre où siège la photo du pape, accroché précipitamment pour la mise en scène familiale, se décroche inopinément et tombe déclenchant un fou rire de la part de la maman vietnamienne ou la table montée à la hâte, bringuebalante, bouge et doit être tenue anxieusement à tour de rôle pendant le repas familial précédant le mariage. Les effets sont des événements incorporels qui se distinguent des états de choses que sont les corps, soit *« des résultats d'actions et de passions »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.13)*.* Les actants non humains bougent tout autant que les actants humains et créent leurs effets à rebondissement. Les Stoïciens, comme Gilles Deleuze, *« opposent à l'épaisseur des corps ces événements incorporels qui se joueraient seulement à la surface »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.14)*.* Le mariage dans le film se joue à la surface. Nous sommes invités à observer les actions, les passions et ce qui se passe à la surface des événements de communication, où les actants agissent, expérimentent et échangent à travers le langage.

Autant l'événement que la communication passent par le langage. L'événement de communication est la communication dans un certain état (comme lorsque le blé prend l'état de farine dans la forme génitive : la farine de blé). L'événement dans ce qu'il a de singulier et remarquable se distingue des simples faits. Un événement n'est pas régulier et ordinaire.

Si nous *anthropologions* les formes, les signes et la mise en scène, ce n'est pas pour trouver plus de sens en profondeur mais pour dégager ce qui compose les événements en surface : *« Voilà que tout remonte à la surface. C'est le résultat de l'opération stoïcienne : l'illimité remonte. […] Les Stoïciens*

ont découvert les effets de surface. Les simulacres cessent d'être ces rebelles souterrains, ils font valoir leurs effets (ce qu'on pourrait appeler 'phantasmes', indépendamment de la terminologie stoïcienne). Le plus enfoui est devenu le plus manifeste. » (Deleuze, 1969, p.17). Notre méthodologie pour approcher l'événement a comme principale activité de faire remonter à la surface, après avoir fait craqueler la surface des formes et des signes qui parlent des actions entreprises (en les révélant à nouveau) pour produire l'effet de l'événement de communication, comme Roland Barthes le note dans *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (Barthes, 1972, p. 146).

Les textes ou les images ou les formes donnés à l'événement sont simulacres mais, sans dénigrement, lui procurent la possibilité de devenir événement ou le mettent en valeur, en reconnaissance. Si l'on délaisse l'idée que les actants humains affectent un sens subjectif, individuel à l'événement lorsqu'ils le vivent, l'événement de communication est *« éternellement ce qui vient de se passer et ce qui va se passer, mais jamais ce qui se passe »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.17).

Étymologiquement, du latin *evenire :* arriver, l'événement est ce qui arrive. Et ça arrive comment ? Vers nous ? Arriver (*du latin arripare*) c'est accéder à la rive. Un train qui arrive en gare suppose que des voyageurs l'attendent, que le chef de gare l'attende et que d'autres voyageurs et un conducteur accèdent au but : 'accéder au quai', c'est l'événement. On dira : le train arrive. L'expression confirme que l'acteur non humain qui transporte des acteurs humains et est conduit par un acteur humain a toute son importance et on lui reconnaît ce rôle. Mais si le train n'arrive pas, ça arrive aussi et donc, il y a aussi *événement*. C'est ainsi que Gilles Deleuze situe l'événement sur la tranche, comme sur la tranche d'une carte à jouer, sur la fine tranche latérale entre les deux faces de la carte, celle du sens et celle du non sens : *« l'événement n'est pas ce qui arrive (accident), il est dans ce qui arrive, le pur exprimé qui nous fait signe et nous attend. »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.175)*.* Ce que nous retenons est que l'événement troue la logique, troue le bon sens, il étonne voire il intrigue. C'est ce qui donne envie d'en parler, d'où le lien inévitable avec le langage qu'il soit discours, texte, image fixe (photo) ou image-mouvement (film).

3. Mettre en lien l'événement et le langage

Rester à la surface est la grande caractéristique de l'événement chez Gilles Deleuze. Ce n'est pas le sens en profondeur qui l'intéresse mais une forme de non sens : *« Chrysippe enseigne : 'Si tu dis quelque chose, cela passe par la bouche ; or tu dis un chariot, donc un chariot passe par ta bouche.' Il y a là un usage du paradoxe qui n'a d'équivalent que dans le bouddhisme zen d'une part, dans le non-sense anglais ou américain d'autre part. D'une part le plus profond, c'est l'immédiat ; d'autre part l'immédiat est dans le langage »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.18). C'est là que

l'œuvre de Lewis Carroll est parlante avec les figures des cartes dans *Alice au pays des merveilles*. Il emploie la métaphore pour dire que tout se passe à la surface. Les cartes ne sont que surface et non profondeur : *« Les événements sont comme des cristaux ; ils ne deviennent et ne grandissent que par les bords, sur les bords »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.19). Les liens entre l'étalement dans le temps, l'événement et le langage sont précis : *« La continuité de l'envers et de l'endroit remplace tous les paliers de profondeur ; et les effets de surface en un seul et même Événement, qui vaut pour tous les événements, font monter dans le langage tout le devenir et ses paradoxes »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.21). Dans notre définition de la communication nous avons spécifié que les humains et les non humains échangent *à travers* le langage : *« Comme si les événements jouissaient d'une irréalité qui se communique au savoir et aux personnes, à travers le langage »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.11)*.* Cet *à travers* s'apparente à l'autre traduction du titre du roman de Lewis Carol *De l'autre côté du miroir* qui est *A travers le miroir et ce qu'Alice y trouva*. Qu'allons-nous trouver en *anthropologiant* les formes, les signes et les agencements de mise en scène de l'événement de communication ? D'autres actions, d'autres outils, d'autres machines et la mémoire des faits encapsulée à l'intérieur. La mémoire pourra s'étaler en surface. Les actants s'agencent et s'articulent les uns aux autres et dans la mise en signe quelque chose se perd et quelque chose se gagne. Le passage des cartes postales à la visite du Cervin, dans le film *Mon frère se marie*, est de cet ordre. La mémoire s'est étalée sur la surface des cartes postales envoyées chaque année au Vietnam par la famille d'accueil suisse. La grandeur du pic du Cervin est perdue sur la carte mais la trace de l'histoire du jeune Vinh dans sa famille suisse est gagnée et partagée avec sa famille d'origine.

La question du sens va peut-être se poser si l'on avance que l'on reste à la surface des événements quitte à y trouver le non sens. Pour Gilles Deleuze, le sens n'existe qu'à travers la proposition qui l'exprime. Nous ne glissons pas là où la phénoménologie pourrait nous porter vers une psychosociologie de l'événement où nos déductions n'auraient pas leur place. Ainsi nous nous garderons bien de vouloir *donner* du sens à ce qui n'est pas ou à ce que nous percevons ou avons perçu comme étant. Nous ne donnons pas du sens nous le laissons jaillir des choses, des actions, des signes et des formes. La limite de cette anthropologie est établie ici. *« Le sens est l'exprimable ou l'exprimé de la proposition, et l'attribut de l'état de choses. Il tend une face vers les choses, une face vers les propositions [...] il est exactement la frontière des propositions et des choses. »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.34)*.* En *anthropologiant* les signes et les formes des films, nous tentons de rester sur cette frontière située sur la tranche de deux faces : celle de la proposition qui fait émerger en surface les notions encapsulées et celle de la révélation (au sens photographique du terme) qui montre ce à quoi les mots et les images se rapportent, en tant qu'actions et

états de choses. Nous avons effectué une mise en relief de l'effet produit par la juxtaposition des images et des mots, des signes présents en cette surface comme pour les cartes postales du film *Mon frère se marie* ou les écrans où s'affichent les votes dans *Le génie helvétique*, résultat des rapports des forces en présence pour l'élaboration de la loi sur le génie génétique.

Dans le langage, pour Gilles Deleuze les noms et adjectifs définissent l'état de choses et les verbes expriment les événements. Cependant le sens n'est pas nié, il est présupposé dès qu'il y a émission de mots. De la même façon, dès que l'on désigne un objet on en crée un nouveau qui lui-même aura un nouveau nom. C'est un processus de prolifération. La famille est prise en photo, mise en image, l'image a un nouveau nom : *Mon frère se marie.* Ce nouveau nom est inscrit sur la pochette d'un DVD et le DVD est un nouvel objet qui a un nom spécifique : comédie, par exemple. En soi, l'événement n'a pas de sens mais est le sens en appartenant au langage et dans ce *« rapport essentiel au langage [...]»* qui *« chez, Carroll, tout ce qui se passe se passe dans le langage et passe par le langage [...] c'est bien dans ce monde plat du sens-événement ou de l'exprimable-attribut, que Lewis Carroll installe toute son œuvre. »* (Deleuze, 1969, p.34). Là, le sens se distingue intrinsèquement de la signification qui, au contraire de résoudre les paradoxes, les crée. Dans les textes, les images, les films que nous auscultons, nous ne cherchons pas les significations des corpus qui sont cette mise à plat de ce qui arrive. Nous sommes attentifs au sens-événement encapsulé dans le langage. Que nous dit le langage de ce qui va se passer, de ce qui se passe ou de ce qui s'est passé en tant qu'action/réaction entre les actants dans l'espace qu'ils créent ?

A ce point, il nous semble important de revenir un instant sur le rapport entre l'action et l'image dans l'événement : *« Milieu-action, réaction sur le milieu, c'est le réalisme. Si on essaie de fonder un concept de réalisme, c'est ça le réalisme : lorsque les milieux font place à des mondes originaires. Lorsque les états de chose déterminés laissent échapper un monde originaire qui valent pour eux, ici et maintenant, qu'est-ce que c'est, ça ? Vous sentez bien qu'il y a quelque chose par quoi le réalisme les dépasse, on dirait - c'est à ça qu'on reconnaît ces hommes de cinéma-, on dirait que le monde même ne commence qu'avec le film, qu'avec les images qu'il montre. Chez les réalistes ce n'est pas comme ça. Chez les réalistes, les images qu'ils montrent renvoient à un monde précédent, c'est-à-dire que le film est censé être pris dans le courant de quelque chose qui le déborde. »* (Deleuze, 1981). Effectivement, ce réalisme auquel se réfère Gilles Deleuze apparaît primordialement pour deux raisons :
- Les expériences *brutes* comme matière *brute* sont les mondes originaires qui ont leur valeur au moment où cela se passe, où cela arrive.
- Ces expériences révélées par les images et les signes nous indiquent qu'il y a action avant et action après.

Pour notre définition de la communication : *les expériences où les humains et les non humains échangent à travers le langage*, les expériences sont plurielles (Ouvrard-Servanton, 2010, p.193). Si l'expérience intime de l'événement existe, nous ne l'établissons pas comme événement car nous savons que l'événement inclut de multiples actions et réactions. L'événement est le résultat de la matière et des passions des corps (qu'en ce sens, nous le distinguons de la notion d'événement envisagée par les phénoménologues qui ne feraient qu'exclusivement confiance au sens). Comme Gilles Deleuze, nous le considérons effet et verbe. Il se déploie à la surface des choses et des expériences. Il est *dans* ce qui arrive et, en ce sens, il est sens *pur*, Dans les événements tels que nous les étudions, nous sommes en présence d'un corpus où nous savons, comme dans le cinéma réaliste, qu'il s'est passé quelque chose avant et qu'il va se passer quelque chose après. Pour les cartes postales envoyées de Zermatt par la famille suisse de *Mon frère se marie*, la face visible est codifiée par ce qui est attendu de l'image et de sa légende, choisie avant le recouvrement de sa face cachée, libre d'expression. Pour l'écran de l'hémicycle parlementaire du *Génie helvétique* qui affiche le vote des résultats, la face visible est codifiée par les couleurs, rouge, vert et rose, et les sièges d'où proviennent les résultats dans l'hémicycle. La face cachée se situe dans ce qui se passe avant que le parlementaire actionne la commande du vote. Les images, les signes, les textes écrits, les films sont pris dans *le courant de quelque chose qui déborde*.

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DYSTOPIC RECONFIGURATIONS OF CORPORATE AMERICA: MARGARET ATWOOD'S "THE HEART GOES LAST"

MONIKA KOSA[1]

ABSTRACT. *Dystopic Reconfigurations of Corporate America: Margaret Atwood's "The Heart Goes Last".* One of Margaret Atwood's dystopic novels, *The Heart Goes Last* is an intricate examination of human nature, the precariousness of love, free will, the roots of social evil and the potential dangers of excessive institutional power. Grounded in an examination of Atwood's text, this paper aims to analyze the techniques through which the image of "corporate America" is re-configured in a nightmarish setting where the fight for power, money and control negatively re-positions the ethical limits of humanity.

Keywords: dystopia, Margaret Atwood, Canadian literature, power, control, corporate America, freedom, social experiment

REZUMAT. *Reconfigurări distopice ale Americii corporatiste în* The Heart Goes Last *de Margaret Atwood.* Una dintre cele mai recente capodopere distopice ale autoarei Margaret Atwood, *The Heart Goes Last*, este o analiză plurivalentă a naturii umane, fragilitatea iubirii, voinţa liberă, rădăcinile răului social şi potenţialele pericole ale puterii instituţionale excesive. Pornind de la textul atwoodian, lucrarea de faţă îşi propune să analizeze tehnicile prin care imaginea Americii corporatiste e reconfigurată într-un cadru de coşmar unde lupta pentru putere, bani şi control repoziţionează limitele etice ale umanităţii într-o categorie negativă.

Cuvinte cheie: distopie, Margaret Atwood, literatură canadiană, putere, control, America corporatistă, libertate, experiment social

> "Is it better for a man to have chosen evil than to have good imposed upon him? (Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*)

The winner of the Red Tentacle award, Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* is a dystopic novel which has received favourable critical attention and was praised for being a "jubilant comedy of errors, bizarre bedroom farce, SF prison-

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break thriller, psychedelic 60s crime caper (…)" (Harrison), a "visceral study of desperation and desire" which "journeys into the dark heart of greed, exploitation and brutality (…) (Anita Sethi), and "a dizzying game of betrayal and counter-betrayal involving extramarital affairs, human-organ trafficking, blackmail, espionage, identity theft and sex-bot manufacturing" (Lyall). Initially, parts of the novel appeared on the online Byliner as part of Margaret Atwood's innovative Positron series, inspired by Charles Dickens' serial novels[2]. The novel warns about the potential disasters of late capitalist and consumerist societies by repositioning the American reality in a dystopic setting and challenging vulnerable individuals' moral limits when faced with poverty and hunger.

Margaret Atwood's personal interest in social issues, cultural codifications, gender politics and the (negative) potentiality of technology has greatly influenced her fictional works. As Rigney observed, some of Atwood's novels, *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, explore "the confrontation with power and its universal forms: dictatorship, tyranny, torture and the reality of violence" (104). These novels incorporate disturbing predictions related to the dangers of extremist ideologies and oppressive dictatorships. The *MaddAddam Trilogy*, on the other hand, obsessively points to the potential dangers of biotechnology. *The Heart Goes Last*, published in 2015, raises ethical issues and tackles the idea of free will in a post-capitalist, inhospitable environment. By employing specific literary techniques and using spatial representation, the novel dismantles the notion of corporate America and proposes an altered environment after an economic collapse, much reminiscent of the post-Great Depression era.[3]

In *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, Atwood explains her preference to use the term "speculative fiction" to describe her dystopic writing because such form of literature "means plots that descend from Jules Verne's books about submarines and balloon travel and such-things that really could happen but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books" (14). The frightening part about her fiction is precisely the familiarity of the setting which transposes the reader into a (possible) future state, against infernal environs. In Katherine Snyder's words,

> Dystopian speculative fiction takes what already exists and makes an imaginative leap into the future, following current socio-cultural, political, or scientific developments to their potentially devastating

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[2] Margaret Atwood talks lengthily about her Positron series in an interview for the Los Angeles Times. The interview is available on YouTube. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=ecXMhKMKkzY. Accessed 30 October 2018.

[3] The action of the novel happens after World War II, as it is mentioned by the narrator. Thus, the novel may be read as some sort of twisted alternate timeline of a dystopian, post-war America (annihilated by severe economic crisis).

conclusions. (…) These cautionary tales of the future work by evoking an uncanny sense of the simultaneous familiarity and strangeness of these brave new worlds (470).

Atwood describes a term that she coined to delineate some of her own fiction: ustopia, which "is a word I made up by combining utopia and dystopia-the imagined perfect society and its opposite-because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other" (65). Her ustopias-for instance, *The Handmaid's Tale, the MaddAddam Trilogy* or *The Heart Goes Last*-explore different articulations of (un)ideal societies which gradually consume their own utopianism and turn into a nightmarish trap. Rather than being a harrowing future-image, some of her novels expose the flaws of seemingly ideal ideological agendas. *The Heart Goes Last,* ironically, displays an exemplary model of a society where promises of "maximum possible happiness"[4] and "A MEANINGFUL LIFE" (A Meaningful Life) are gradually corrupted by greed and power politics.[5] Ustopias like *The Heart Goes Last* are not limited to condemn the state or technology, but also explore the complex relationship between culture and economy and the devastating consequences of societies which abuse and disregard human rights. As Moylan asserts,

> gradually (…) dystopia's critical sensibility is taken up by authors who look beyond technology and the authoritarian state and turn to the especial imbrication of the economy and culture that capitalism has achieved at the cost of diminishing the complexity and potential of all humanity and the earth itself (xii)

Besides, Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* challenges "capitalist power as well as conservative rule-and refusing the false 'utopianism' of reformist promises (…)" exposes the hidden intentions behind seemingly reformatory acts of governmental institutions and individual investors. Ustopias, speculative fictions and dystopias dismantle capitalist and totalitarian regimes and are a literary manifesto of contemporary controversial practices of control and exploitation:

> the new dystopias have rekindled the cold flame of critique and have thereby become a cultural manifestation of a broad-scale yet radically diverse alliance politics that is emerging as the twenty-first century commences (Moylan xv).

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[4] Kindle version. Instead of opting for misleading device-specific numbering systems, quotations will be identified by chapter names. For more reliable and accurate references, readers should consult printed editions of the novel.

[5] The roots of Consilience can be traced back to the nineteenth-century Harmony establishment, the utilitarian mentality being one of the core-ideas behind Positron/Consilience. As greed and thirst for money grows amidst social instability, the whole idea of a perfectly self-sustaining society turns into Kafkaesque nightmare.

The Heart Goes Last tells the story of a young couple, Charmaine and Stan, as they struggle to survive in a post-capitalist America where individual property is a privilege of the rich, whereas poverty-stricken individuals live in cars and dilapidated buildings. In *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination,* Atwood asserted that "in literature, every landscape is a state of mind, but every state of mind can also be portrayed by a landscape" (72). Spatial representation is one of the most effective tools to reflect the degradation and hopelessness of a forsaken nation. America's glory and its subsequent downfall are mirrored in the ruins, abandoned buildings which are the space inhabited by a decadent society. The landscape evokes a heightened sense of forsakenness as the economic and cultural stability collapse. In other words, Atwood's construction of spatiality exhibits a tendency to convey the degrading nature of mankind. The Atwoodian America is filled with pitch-dark enclosures, closed rooms, prisons, smelly cars and inside-spaces which stand in opposition with the economic and social freedom generally associated with America.

The couple's universe is truly terrifying: the novel starts with describing their sleeping habits, "with the windows shut except for a crack at the top" so "the air gets dead and supersaturated with their own smells" (Cramped). It is an exasperating and toxic environment out of which there is no escape: "So what can he do? Where can they turn? There's no safe place, there are no instructions. It's like he's being blown by a vicious but mindless wind, aimlessly round and round in circles. No way out" (Where?) The land of dreams is turned into the land of nightmares; Stan is faced with a post-Lapsarian emptiness as he contemplates the precariousness of their existence. The economic disaster and the collapse of the system destabilize the characters' living conditions and, indirectly, interrogates the stability of contemporary economy:

> then everything went to ratshit. Overnight, it felt like. Not just in his own personal life: the whole card castle, the whole system fell to pieces, trillions of dollars wiped off the balance sheets life fog off a window. There were hordes of two-bit experts on TV pretending to explain it had happened-demographics, loss of confidence, gigantic Ponzi schemes-but that was all guesswork bullshit. (...) Not enough jobs, too many people (Where?)

Moreover, Atwood's use of irony underscores the absurdity of (existing) social and cultural practices. Such ironic instances include Stan's inability to find a job because he is overqualified, the general willingness to buy baby blood out of desperation for lasting beauty, the construction and use of sexbots instead of actual sexual intercourse or Charmaine's self-deceptive readiness to impersonate the angel of mercy and euthanize people. The altered environment alters the characters' moral thresholds as well. In a lawless context, ethical principles lose their ontological validity. Instead, desperation and poverty

determine the new moral standards. Even the idea of masculinity is reshaped: "there used to be a lot of jobs licking ass in the corporate world, but those asses are now out of reach". Again, Atwood points at the contemporary tendency to adopt a bootlicker position to please corporate superiors in hopes of a promotion; in *The Heat Goes Last,* sycophancy loses its primary significance and Stan has to adapt to the new living conditions by renouncing this part of his personality and finding other ways to make a living.

In Atwood's post-economic America, the rich egotistically rule over the poor and money becomes an instrument for social segregation. What's truly appalling about Atwood's narrative is the sense of pervading loneliness and the total erasure of community values in the post-economic framework: "if anything happens, we're on our own, Stan tells her too frequently" (Brew). The spatial representation, which denotes containment (both on a literal and figurative level), confirms the despairing conditions of this new world order.

Amidst hopelessness, the Positron Project appears as a heaven-sent gift. AS expected, Charmaine is fascinated by the Positron Project's offer which is alarmingly similar to job offers nowadays:

> We offer not only full employment but also protection from the dangerous elements that afflict so many at this time. Work with like-minded others! Help solve the nation's problems of joblessness and crime while solving your own! Accentuate the positive! (Pitch)

This is the part where Atwood's different approach is mostly visible: instead of positioning her characters in a post-apocalyptic setting or in a totalitarian state, Charmaine and Stan get to choose whether to take part in the Positron Project or not. Free will is of utmost importance in the novel. The fact that they choose to subject themselves to constant surveillance, the potential genetic experiments and the prospect of living in a prison reflects the obliteration of ethical limits due to extreme poverty and no future prospects. Spatially, Corporative America is replaced with a wasteland in the first part of the novel and adaptation implies mislaying one's moral compass. The lack of individual liberty or free speech is a personal choice. But once Charmaine and Stan accept the conditions, there is no turning back: "The Project wants serious commitment. Because after that night you were either out or you were in. In was permanent. But no one would force you. If you signed up, it would be of your own free will" (Night Out).

The main building in the town of Consilience is filled with "half a dozen young, earnest, dark-suited, zit-picking graduates of some globally funded think tank's motivational-speaking program" (Twin City), reminiscent of contemporary corporate sectors and practices. The ironical reference to motivational-speaking programs highlights the techniques employed by big corporations nowadays to boost their employees' morale and thus, maximize

profit. Typically, the project presents itself as a functional option to economic and social instability and promotes the idea of a utopian paradise by obsessively repeating the word 'success':

> If it succeeds-and it has to succeed, and it can succeed if they all work together-it could be the salvation, not only of the many regions that have been to hard-hit in recent times but eventually, if this model comes to be adopted at the highest levels, of the nation as a whole. Unemployment and crime solved in one fell swoop, with a new life for all those concerned-think about that! (Twin City)

The Positron Project promises a great future for America[6] and present themselves as trailblazers: "they're like the early pioneers, blazing a trail, clearing a way to the future: a future that will be more secure, more prosperous, and just all-round better because of them! Posterity will revere them. That's the spiel" (Twin City). Ironically, the Positron Project's moral corruption clears the way to an Orwellian age rather than the actual establishment of a utopic society. Their efforts to eradicate any form of resistance (journalists and outsiders who criticized the "regime") reminds one of the totalitarian ideologies hidden behind the mantra of well-being.

Ironically, Ed, the head of the Positron Project, falsely promotes individual liberty and prosperity in exchange for compliance:

> the spokesmen (...) have braved a lot of indignant screaming from the online radicals and malcontents who claim that Consilience/Positron is an infringement of individual liberties, an attempt at total social control, an insult to the human spirit. Nobody is more dedicated to individual liberties than Ed is, but as they all know (...) you can't eat your so-called individual liberties, and the human spirit pays no bills, and something needed to be done to relieve the pressure inside the social pressure-cook. (Twin City)

The Heart Goes Last employs both literally and figuratively Foucault's Panopticon to create tropes of entrapment and containment in which individuals are permanently surveyed and silenced.[7] Resistance is intimidated and

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[6] The Positron Project, from this perspective, is a variation on Donald Trump's catchphrase, "Make America Great (Again)". Instead of setting realistic goals for the benefit of the community, the Positron rhetoric operates on fallacies and deceptive slogans.

[7] The city of Consilience permanently monitors its inhabitants and controls every movement and act of speech. On the other hand, Positron, the twin-city, is a prison facility where the inmates are constantly surveyed and rebels euthanized. Genetic manipulation, compulsory free labor, silencing, euthanizing and brainwashing are some of the regulatory practices. From this perspective, much of the novel is a twisted variation on Michel Foucault's complex idea of Panopticon.

eradicated, much in the fashion of former communist and Nazi regimes. Ed and his company exert traditional forms of intimidation over rebels by resorting "to social surveillance, to chasing fast youth down dark alleyways, to fire-hosing and pepper-spraying suspicious-looking gatherings" (Twin City). The economic and social "looming collapse" and the "wasteland of poverty and debris" (Twin City) are the alternatives for Ed's artificial paradise. The idea to spend one month as a prisoner in Positron and one month as middle-class citizens in Consilience is terrifyingly appealing for the characters, yet quintessentially disturbing.

The slogan "CONSILIENCE=CONS+RESILIENCE. DO TIME NOW, BUY TIME FOR OUR FUTURE!", the leitmotif of the whole Twin City chapter, reinforces the idea of a prosperous future community. Like many others, Charmaine believes in their visionary insights and chooses to ignore the conspicuous warning signs. She believes in the idea of Consilience/Positron as "a nest, with a golden egg shining within it" (A Meaningful Life), but as is the case with fairy tales, there's always a giant or a witch who guards the golden eggs.

As it happens in totalitarian states, the individuals from the programme are monitored and prohibited from watching pornography or listening to violent music (hip-hop and rock); any form of protest against Management is strictly banned and has serious consequences. A form of resistance against such silencing practices is moral decay, which is embodied in Charmaine. She starts cheating on Stan with Max, the Alternate husband[8] and ironically, she attempts to trick the system. Her desperation culminates in the act of adultery and wild sexual encounters: "anything, she answers. Anything inside this non-house, inside this nothing space, a space that doesn't exist, between these two people with no real names. Oh anything. Already she's abject" (Tidy). Sexual desire can be linked to the faulty and oppressive system of Consilience/Positron. Inmates desire to have sexual intercourse with chickens, Charmaine enacts the role of the promiscuous woman, Stan imitates Charmaine's adulterous sex scenes with Jocelyn, Ed has sex with a sexbot: these are some of the representative, highly ironic manifestations of latent frustrations.

Charmaine's job is to euthanize the rebels, the unfits, the *others:* "but someone has to do it, for the good of all" (The Heart Goes Last). The Special Procedure is some sort of dark angel of mercy. As the condemned die, the narrator remarks: "then he's unconscious. Then he stops breathing. The heart goes last" (The Heart Goes Last). These faulty individuals are "relocated to a different sphere, because they were not suited to the life of Consilience" (Headgame). As the narrator comments, "Consilience was a closed system-once

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[8] In *The Heart Goes Last*, Alternates are the couple who live in houses for one month while the other couple is in prison, then they exchange places. Alternates are not allowed to meet or to be in contact under any circumstances. The whole idea behind Alternates is profit-oriented and seeks to maximize the Management's financial gain.

inside, nobody went out" (Haircut), which is reminiscent of former dictatorships, where everyone who is against or is criticizing the social machine is considered the enemy. It's a place where moral sins have no legal consequences and Charmaine remorselessly plays her role as the death angel. When outsiders attempt to uncover the horrors of Positron/Consilience, they are taken to prison because "the new order that is a beacon of hope, a beacon that risks being deliberately sabotaged" (Threat).

Surveillance is a shadowy presence in the life of the inhabitants of Consilience, similar to Orwell's Thought Police: "the odd black Surveillance car, gliding past silently as a shark" (Scooter). The whole city is under permanent surveillance: "or it seems empty: no doubt there are eyes embedded everywhere-the lamppost, the fire hydrant. Because you can't see them doesn't mean they can't see you" (Choke Collar). When Stan is asked to act as messenger and to escape from the facility by Jocelyn, one of the founders of Consilience, but also a traitor, the whole profit machinery behind the idea of Positron/Consilience is exposed. Prisons are the locus of perversion in the novel. Jocelyn explains that

> prisons used to be about punishment, and then reform and penitence, and then keeping dangerous offenders inside. Then, for quite a few decades, they were about crowd control-penning up the young, aggressive, marginalized guys to keep them off the streets. And then, when they started to be run as private businesses, they were about the profit margins for the prepackaged jail-meal suppliers, and the hired guards and so forth (Valentine's Day)

As closed spatial markers, prisons act as the perfect hideaways for organ trafficking; even the idea of harvesting babies' blood is viable for Management. As long as it makes profit, that is. Ed, the head of the organization, a "control-freak body-parts salesman, potential baby-blood vampire" (Shipped), the dictator in political terms, is an unscrupulous puppeteer, driven by an impulse to make as much money as possible, regardless of the methods. He encapsulates the new CEO from former American corporations and epitomizes human greed and selfishness. Employing free indirect discourse, the narrator points at Stan's decisions and their consequences: "He'd done it himself. So many small choices. The reduction of himself to a series of numbers, stored by others, controlled by others" (Choice)

In Atwood's Consilience/Positron universe, humans start to be gradually replaced by machines as one of the consequences of the new order, a common theme in post-humanist fiction. The fabrication of sexbots and prostibots at Possibilibots offers "the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number-that's what Possibilibots stands for, am I right?"[9]. Moreover,

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[9] This idea is clearly an intertextual reference to the Utilitarian doctrine, which was the leading ethical theory of Victorian England. Utilitarianism was founded by Jeremy Bentham. See *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.

Management creates surgical procedures whose aim is to control minds and erase data in order to induce feelings of love, which are similar to "love potions in the old fairy-tale books (…) the kind where you get imprisoned by a toad prince" (Requisition). In other words, Atwood's mind control devices are a pastiche of traditional fairy-tale potions.

Atwood playfully hints at today's tendency to overreact on social media, blogs and YouTube videos instead of actually trying to help a cause:

> Prison abuses! Organ harvesting! Sex slaves created by neurosurgery! Plans to such the blood of babies! Corruption and greed, though these in themselves are no great surprise. But the misappropriation of people's bodies, the violation of public trust, the destruction of human rights-how could such things have been allowed to happen? (Flamed)

She captures existing double standards and the sanctimoniousness and moral humbug which is a frequent phenomenon among online nonconformists. Surprisingly, the outrage is bilateral:

> there were a few rotten apples, but without them it would've worked. In response, some said that these utopian schemes always went bad and turned into dictatorships, because human nature was what it was (…) some bloggers objected, others agreed, and in no time at all 'Communist' and 'Fascist' and 'psychopathy' and 'soft on crime' and a new one, 'neuropimp,' were whizzing through the air like buckshot (Flamed)

Atwood subtly inserts contemporary references into her dystopic America. Unexpectedly, the novel ends on a rather idealistic tone: Charmaine and Stan are reunited, they have a baby and live a quiet, but happy life. Nevertheless, the reader is left to wonder whether the new world order is any better than the last. As a matter of fact, Consilience/Positron is never mentioned again.

The Heart Goes Last is indeed one of Margaret Atwood's greatest dystopic achievement. The novel is another literary variation on distorted cultural politics, regulatory regimes and social brainwashing in which, as in her other masterpieces,

> there is a recognizably Atwoodian voice, witty, self-ironical, politically and morally engaged as her worldly texts respond to what is actually going on in her own place and time, speaking her double vision of how things look on the surface and what else is happening at the same time inside, underneath or elsewhere (Howells 162).

The Heart Goes Last illustrates, like her other novels "the artifice of representation, where the real world is transformed and reinvented within the imaginative spaces of fiction" (Howells 162). By using spatial tropes of

containment (the smelly car, the prison, Consilience/Positron), Atwood creates a ustopia which challenges and negatively alters the characters' ethical limits. Moreover, Atwood urges the reader to re-evaluate the ongoing changes in social, economic and technological fields by constantly referring to familiar cultural and social practices. In the novel, as in *Oryx and Crake,* "corporations can own, patent, and commodify technologically designed species" (Bouson 93) and can even alter human behaviour and induce mind control. As seen, irony is another useful tool to pinpoint the dangers of extremism and preposterous human attitudes. Corporate America is both challenged and reinstated through irony; capitalist symbols are transposed and contested in a transgressing setting. A typically Atwoodian *magnum opus, The Heart Goes Last* transgresses the norms, unsettles notions, fascinates and shocks, and twists our perception on moral codes and cultural codifications.

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A STYLISTICS OF EXILED LIVES

ROXANA PATRAS[1]

ABSTRACT. *A Stylistics of Exiled Lives.* The article explores the correspondence between the particular stylistics of exiled lives (specific ways, manners, and forms of living developed during exile) and a specific critical method (para-biography). While all exiles can be perceived as people with underachieved destinies - exile is, in this case, comparable to premature death, lost works, imperfect style, sterility, etc. - the biographer who endeavors to "capture" the ways of the exiled should rely on a critical faculty fit to such uncompletedness, yet a faculty mostly uncommon to his own lot: *imaginativeness* or *critical imagination*. Such correspondence between the unique situation and the para-biography of the exiled has been suggested by Ilina Gregori's books on three personalities (Mihai Eminescu, Emil Cioran and Matila Ghyka) who turned their own experience of exile into particular expressions.

Keywords: exile, form of life, critical imagination, imaginativeness, para-biography, forma vitae, lieux de mémoire.

REZUMAT. *O stilistică a vieții în exil.* Articolul explorează corespondența dintre particularitățile stilului vieții în exil (i.e. feluri şi maniere de a trăi, forme de viață dezvoltate în perioada exilului) şi o metodă critică specifică (para-biografia). Dacă figurile de exilați pot fi percepute sub specia destinului neîmplinit – exilul este, într-o traiectorie obişnuită, asimilabil unor accidente precum moartea prematură, opere pierdute, stil imperfect, sterilitate etc. – atunci biograful care încearcă să surprindă un mod e viață specific existenței în exil trebuie să activeze o facultate critică potrivită destinelor incomplete, în orice caz, mai puțin utilizată şi întâlnită: *capacitatea de imaginare* sau *imaginația critică*. O astfel de corespondență între (situația) exilatului şi para-biografie mi-a fost sugerată de ultimele volume semnate de Ilina Gregori şi consacrate unor personalități care au transformat experiența exilului în expresii particulare: Mihai Eminescu, Emil Cioran şi Matila Ghyka

Cuvinte cheie: exil, formă de viață, imaginație critică, capacitate de imaginare, para-biografie, forma vitae, lieux de mémoire.

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Noble exiles

Is para-biography more suited to our current, "de-territorialized" or "dis-enclosed" definition of Life? This is the question that first came to my mind when, disposed towards a *patient* and *responsible* hermeneutic by the author herself, I finished reading Ilina Gregori's latest book, *Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul şi Verbul / Kept in Forgetfulness? Matila Ghyka – The Number and The Verb* (2018), devoted to the Romanian polymath Matila Ghyka.

But who is this Matila Ghyka and why should he be fished out from the deep and muddy waters of forgetfulness (*Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul şi Verbul* 9-19)? A Moldavian prince and a citizen of the universe, a tireless and passionate traveler journeying around the world, a famous novelist of his own times, awarded with the prize *Rester Jeunes* in 1934, and an anonymous factory worker embarked on achieving the American dream under the funny name of a marionette ("Maximilien Eulert") - all of them at the same time, to and fro, always on the move, like an electron... A close friend to Paul Valéry, Léon-Paul Fargue, Marcel Proust, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Lucien Fabre, Henri Poincaré, Claude Farrère, Salvador Dali, and Gustave le Bon - yet, friendships aside - he himself was a fascinating figure of the Romanian diaspora of the 50' and 60's. Despite these beacons of celebrity, he was a personality rather unknown to his fellow countrymen not only because of the Communist censure and a certain disregard for migrant authors, but also because of a strange fate that wiped out his traces.

Indeed, side by side with Gregori's critical focus on Matila Ghyka's posthumous oversight, disregard and, eventually, forgetfulness, all seven chapters extend the explicit aims of the book by diving into philosophical interrogations. What are the ancient grounds of (our) European-ness? Is there a common source of both recollection and forgetfulness? How can one sense the vibration and aura of absent things and absent persons? Does the vanishing human experience have a phantasmal, thus traceable, core? Are there really "invariants" to be found in both art and life, as Matila Ghyka assumed in his theoretical works?

Gregori's critical style is so suggestive and rich that the aforementioned topics could be developed - by departing from and returning to what is called "*the Matila Ghyka universe*" (34) - into quasi-autonomous *glossae*. I will not begin whatsoever by commenting on the apparent structure, arguments, thesis, and aims of this para-biography. It is enough to notice that the reader is warned that Matila Ghyka's posthumous destiny has something to do with his spectacular life, with his Life's textualized "postures" as aesthetician, as memorialist, as diplomat, and as novelist. More important than anything else is the fact that Gregori's

book delivers a method of reading, of orientation into the complexity of "the Ghyka universe." So, the critic's explicit endeavor is to encourage a reader's patient and responsible appreciation, which could bring into being nascent galaxies of meanings or, according to Nietzche's remark - quoted by Gregori several times - "the dawns that have not shined yet [upon us]" (254).

Mutatis mutandis, the intrinsic and extrinsic convertibility of *invariants* from Ghyka's "vessel-like" work - the simile belongs to Paul Morand but only with respect to the novel *Pluie d'étoiles* - drives the patient reader not only to the Prince's elegant disguises and acrobatic lunges as novelist, memorialist, diplomat, aesthetician, naval engineer, mathematician, etc., but also to Ilina Gregori's previous monographs: the poet Mihai Eminescu in *Ştim noi cine a fost Eminescu? Fapte, enigme, ipoteze / Do We Know Who Eminescu Was? Facts, Enigmas, and Hypotheses* (2008), and respectively the philosopher Emil Cioran in *Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă/ Cioran. Suggestions for an Impossible Biography* (2012).

Like Prince Matila Ghyka, Eminescu and Cioran are "exiles" - the former living in the booming, imperial Berlin of 1872-1874, the latter, in the post World War II Paris - who, as the Gospel says, *leave their homelands and go into far countries to receive for themselves their deserved kingdoms and then return home* (*Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul şi Verbul* 55, 357). But are they all "noblemen," as Luke's Gospel has prophesied? Definitely! Yet, first and foremost, they are prototypical "exiles," who challenge the critic's methods, by claiming a good balance between the thematic approach, the aesthetic appreciation of particular works, national memory, cultural translatability, cosmopolitan aspirations, on the one hand, and a *fallenness* that is inherent to the difficult concept of *identity*, on the other (Vrăjitoru-Andreasen 3-43).

This type of focus on the exiles' condition seems to require a fine reconsideration of adjacent concepts such as *hybridity*, *in-between-ness*, *de-territorialisation* (Fotache 121-35), or even of what has lately been called *exiliance*. Alexis Nouss, for instance, theorizes the concept of *exiliance*, defining it as *exile* + (articulated) *experience*. Compared to migration, which is characterized though patterns of return, *exiliance* designates a linear trajectory leading only to the final *exit*. So, *exiliance* implies not only a problem of acknowledging alterity - not only "an exit from Self" (as Said claims) - but also a tragic existential and experiential core that needs to be passed on to the others through discursive means (Nouss 53-101). I would add that this type of (exilic) experience is also recognizable in a particular stylistics of life: the exiles' typical forms of life, daily rhythms, ways of being, manners of dealing with the effects of (fallen) identity, practices, uses of languages and objects (Macé 11-54).

Lives on the brink. Primitivism and elegance

Beyond the aforementioned posture as "exiles" for a span of time, for a lifetime or forever, Eminescu-Cioran-Ghyka form a subtle lineage due to their problematized relationship with the universal Knowledge / Memory. Endowed with a Renaissance-like curiosity and with a tremendous ambition, they always keep on the brink the relationship with "the universal knowledge", negotiating between its barbarian / primitive and its refined / comprehensible acceptations. Better said, extensive knowledge represents, in all these three cases, a contrast agent for a deeper, primitive soul or for a transpersonal instance.

Ostensibly, the critic's *mise en scène* builds upon tensions, paradoxes, and aporiae. Eminescu's stay in Berlin, in particular "the information crisis" regarding his life in the capital of the German Empire, is dealt with by using *the urban unconsciousness*, "a part of unconsciousness that is implied in the perception of urban environment" (*Ştim noi cine a fost Eminescu? Fapte, enigme, ipoteze* 9). Cioran's life in Paris, in particular "the infoxication" produced by the philosopher's daily comments jotted down in his *Notebooks*, is sorted out by the critic who focuses on "the true history of one's soul" (*Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă* 236). Similarly, Ghyka's journey around the world - in particular his engagement with the ebbs and flows of the European past that led his critical posterity into treating his works as *nonexistent objects* (Parsons 10-55) - is analyzed by Gregori who searches for the Prince's transpersonal identity, that is, for his genuine, aristocratic and irreducible European-ness (*Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul şi Verbul* 331).

This is the reason why the critic must extend her area of analysis from an imaginative appreciation of Art to an in-depth - even paleontological - reflection on Life, defined both as invariant *forma vitae* and as manifold experience. In fact, the Romanian scholar defines her critical pursuits as philosophical practice as well as the experience of "inter-subjectivity" (*Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă* 134). While the former resides in delineating "the writer's most profound Self" or "the Self of Selves" whose seat is common (cultural) memory, the latter is permanently percolated by the varieties of alterity and by forgetfulness. "Who am I?" is a question explored in all of Gregori's books, a sort of musical motif, imprinted in the most personal articulations of her critical commentary.

Para-biography and critical imagination

In what follows, I will present - beyond the punctual hypotheses and the arguments from the three monographs - Ilina Gregori's most personal way

of driving to the limit, even radicalizing, the para-biographical account, through an appeal to the royal, yet most risky, way of oneiric investigation. The critic's preference for the "lives" and "figures" of exceptional personalities such as Mihai Eminescu, Emil Cioran, and Matila Ghyka, for geniuses hanging between memory and forgetfulness, for works in-between polished perfection and incompletion, for *la condition exilique* of the human being, in general, activates *imaginativeness*, the critic's most trained faculty. Following Alexandre Gefen, I notice that not only *les vie imaginaires* (as genre), but also the critical imagination (as faculty) develop against the background of uncompleted or surcharged destinies (Gefen 28-33), such as those of Eminescu-Cioran-Ghyka.

Why would a critic need "to dream", "to fancy" or "to imagine" as long as his / her most hailed faculties have been considered - starting with nineteenth-century positivist impetus and coming near to Arnold Isenberg's fans - verdict, reason, norm, objectivity, reliability, professionalism? The dream, Gregori suggests, "is a *mise en abîme* not only for the day that has passed, but also for the day that is coming" (*Păstrat în uitare? Matila Ghyka – Numărul şi Verbul* 355). Thus only a hybrid critical method, a kind of "oneiro-biography" can open the way to true visionary criticism. A still more detailed answer may be found in all the theories of *critical imagination* devised from Addison and Hume to Poe, Baudelaire, Wilde and Pater, then to, say, Roger Scruton and James Grant. Indeed, aside from rhetorical skill, *critical imagination* – in fact, "imaginativeness", as James Grant spells it out, implies a high sense of *appreciation*. In its turn, the ability to communicate one's appreciation for the Other stands on *good sense*, *delicacy*, *practice* (experience in contemplating the others' works), *comparison skills*, and, last but not least, *freedom from prejudice* (Grant 29-53, 65-67).

It is not by chance that, in all her para-biographical accounts, Gregori proves an obvious *gusto* in "staging" figures, faces, situations, and arguments. Typical *lieux de mémoire* (chiefly museums) are used in a quasi-theatrical fashion in order to publicly burn the established prejudices. In Eminescu's case, the critic enhances the importance of Lepsius' museum of Egyptology. In Cioran's case, she underlines the imaginal value of the philosopher's visits to the Gallery of Paleontology in Paris. In Matila Ghyka's case, a visit to a museum of ichthyology hosted by an ex-Jesuit church (in a fictional sequence of the novel *Again One Day / Pluie d'étoiles*) is enough to unveil the aesthetician's theory of invariants (genetic, figural, verbal). All three instances provide an intellectual pleasure in exploring the virtual openings of one's actual biography by gliding up and down on the biological ladder, from species, genus, family, order, and class - to Life, as a whole; by gliding up and down on the metaphysical ladder from Life's Matter to afterlife phantasmal appearances.

In this frame of thought, I could easily understand Gregori's preference for para-biographic information: details imported from personal circumstances, bibliographic coincidences, spontaneous constellations of meaning, etc. As Prince Matila Ghyka notices, *les voies du destin ont parfois une certaine élégance*. Paraphrasing Ghyka, *les voies d'un patient lecteur ont parfois une certaine élégance* - and, indeed, there is a certain elegance secretly underlying the discrete continuities among all of Gregori's books. Perhaps this is, but only *en creux*, the elegant outline of the critic's intellectual destiny, her experience of *la condition exilique*.

For instance, the revelation of "Tat Tvam Asi"[2] (through Schopenhauer's interpretation) is tracked in both Eminescu's and Cioran's lives. According to Gregori, the subtle relationship between Cioran's warning "*l'homme se resingera*" (*Cioran. Sugestii pentru o biografie imposibilă* 214-15) and the saddening image of the great Schopenhauer hugging an orangutan at the fair of Frankfurt (*Ştim noi cine a fost Eminescu? Fapte, enigme, ipoteze* 321) can be interpreted as a picture in the "negative" or, maybe, as a paleontological version of the Sanskrit phrase. The critic goes even further. Cioran's great passion for essential portraits and Matila Ghyka's pictures opening his two volumes of memoirs (as a young sailor and as a diplomat) are linked through their shared intuition of Life's phantasmal latencies. It seems that, as political exiles - the former, an aspirant to the glory of French letters, the latter, a former VIP of the same literary space - Cioran and Matila Ghyka intersected their ways and also their "exiled" ways of life.

Gregori's "patient readers" must take into consideration that Eminescu's figure is extremely "present" for Matila Ghyka, too. For the Moldavian prince, the poet's face should not be associated exclusively with his mortuary mask (indeed, Eminescu scholars have always been secretly fascinated by the genius' mold in plaster), but with a statue's monumental and grandiose form. According to various testimonies provided in Dim. Sturdza's tome *Familiile boiereşti din Moldova şi Ţara Românească* (251-327), it seems that the poet's bust was placed in the park of the Balş estate (where Matila used to play as a little child and relax as a young adult) in order to emphasize that Dumbrăveni and not Ipoteşti was Eminescu's real place of birth and that his spirit was still roaming there.

In one of her 2014 articles, Gregori declares herself "a biographer by necessity and *irremediably debutante* [emphasis added]" (*La biographie à*

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[2] *Tat Tvam Asi* is a Sanskrit phrase, translated as "Thou art that," (or as *That thou art*, *That art thou*, *You are that*, *That you are*, *You're it*). It appears at the end of an Upanishad section, and is repeated at the end of the subsequent sections as a refrain. The meaning of this saying is that the Self — in its original, pure, primordial state — is wholly or partially identifiable or identical with the Ultimate Reality that is the ground and origin of all phenomena.

l'épreuve : plaidoyer pour l'expérimentation 42). Is this bitter self-irony or, on the contrary, a defiant declaration of never-declining, bold, and always ingenious critical imagination? Perhaps both. Nevertheless, all her books provide evidence for her being an essentially patient reader who fights back darkness and hails the dawns of texts that have not shone upon us yet. This should be enough to bring books back from exile or, better, to save them from their *condition exilique*. Perfectly aware that today's approach to Life (as simulacrum, something non-consistent and essentially fragmented) dictates, as a reaction, "a reinvention of the individual as exception" (Gefen 17), the Romanian critic defies post-human skepticism and proves an exceptional intuition of the vital totality.

"Irremediably debutante" or not, Ilina Gregori seems to be one of the most equipped Romanian critics for the "battle" with *monstres sacres* such as Eminescu, Cioran and Matila Ghyka. Due to her outstanding *critical imagination*, the lives of Gregori's subjects emerge as essential - thus, necessary - aesthetic **forms** on the surface of our troubled sense of values.

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WITH CONSTANTIN NOICA, ON LITERATURE
AND LITERARY CRITICISM

MAGDA WÄCHTER[1]

ABSTRACT. *With Constantin Noica, On Literature and Literary Criticism.* This study analyses the views expressed by Constantin Noica in the articles he published on literature and literary criticism during the interwar period. Somewhat reserved towards the literary-artistic phenomenon in general, the philosopher proved nonetheless to be an avid critic, an excellent essayist and a brilliant polemicist. In fact, his entire work was to be appreciated, both by literary critics and by philosophers, for its literary qualities, at a time when philosophical discourse itself displayed a penchant for literariness.

Keywords: Constantin Noica, literature, literary criticism, philosophy, modernity, art, generation, negativity.

REZUMAT. *Cu Constantin Noica, despre literatură şi critică literară.* Studiul de faţă analizează opiniile exprimate de Constantin Noica în publicistica sa din perioada interbelică pe marginea literaturii şi a criticii literare. Rezervat faţă de fenomenul literar-artistic în genere, filosoful se dovedeşte totuşi a fi un critic avizat, un excelent eseist şi chiar un polemist redutabil. De altfel, întreaga sa operă va fi apreciată, atât de criticii literari, cât şi de filosofi, pentru calităţile sale literare, într-un moment când discursul filosofic însuşi tinde a-şi asuma chipul literarităţii.

Cuvinte cheie: Constantin Noica, literatură, critică literară, filosofie, modernitate, artă, generaţie, negativism.

"Alright, then, but a deep spirit must go beyond the boundaries of criticism, it must take a higher stance and regard the phenomena of literature through more abstract lenses", Constantin Noica told Eugen Simion when he was asked what his concerns were, aside from criticism (Simion, "Gâlceava

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înțeleptului" 3). This is not the only remark of this kind made by the philosopher, known for his reluctance towards criticism and literature in general. Discussing, in 1934, Mircea Eliade's novels, he wondered what literature had to do with his serious, science-focused spirit, and why the world appreciated him solely for his literary works: "But literature remains sinful in comparison with thought, however rich it may be. Eliade sinned through literature to get some respite or to have fun, or for the sheer voluptuousness of sin" (Istoricitate 203–204). He looked at the critical and essayistic endeavours of N. Steinhardt, who admired his literary qualities, like many others of his confrères, with amusement and reproach, calling them "scallywag business" (Roatiș 246–247).

From an early age, the philosopher cherished that was beyond the world and beyond "spirit with an expiration date". He loved ideas, logical schemes, and shapes, aspiring to a geometric culture, a Mathesis universalis: "Instead of the historical spirit, in which destiny, limited duration and death prevail, let's bring in the mathematical spirit, in which free creation, generality and eternity prevail. Let's replace that which is born with that which is made" (Mathesis 34). A reflex of "that which is born" might be today's humanist culture, a true failure of modern times, philosophy, an uncertain and contradictory discipline, and art - altogether devoid of transcendence. As for literature, it "belongs to fools, not to us", as young Noica claimed in the title of an article he published in the 1930s (Între suflet și spirit 135). Writers, he said, sometimes do harm to humanity, forgetting that they write for others, and they circulate ideas that may have a devastating social impact (341–343). Moreover, even when it is not altogether harmful, literature as an undertaking is almost entirely devoid of purpose, because it does not teach you anything but simply tells stories. Noica came up with this idea as he meditated on the theme of resurrection in literature and philosophy, starting from Tolstoy's novel with a homonymous title. Therefore, it is not literature, but the philosophy within literature that carries, in itself, the hope of a spiritual resurrection, attainable, in fact, only through religion: "Literature dreams, philosophy proposes, and religion alone transforms" (21 de conferințe radiofonice 55–62). Noica the philosopher, who had a penchant for logical schemes, looked down on this "dreaminess" of literature, even though, much later, in his philosophical journal, he suggested that literature might have a mystical sense, if we consider its blend of sameness and otherness; however, a few pages further, he resumed the argument, emphasising the reverse of that negation: "I admit that literature is a great waste of time. But it is one of the great wastes of time that can also be a gain. While the others..." (Jurnal 24; 85). Like Nietzsche, the philosopher who wrote We Philologists, Noica regarded the philologist's work with contempt. Our life, he said, can be spent in narrow but essential spaces; it's just that

when they are not essential, for instance, the life of a clerk, a philologist or a factory worker, you could scour that surface as long as you wished without finding the essence (72).

If philology, literature and, above all, literary criticism (a trivial species by definition) were, in his opinion, completely irrelevant, and sometimes even harmful, how come the young philosopher began by being a poet and later published literary journalism in magazines? An author of lyrics printed the magazine of "Spiru Haret" High School in Bucharest, he signed with a pseudonym, driven perhaps, as N. Steinhardt sensed, by the "cautious reticence of a man who had an early intimation that he would become a philosopher" (Roatiş 235). Not long after that, he gradually abandoned his poetic vocation in favour of his journalistic aspirations. Young Noica dreamed of becoming the polemical spirit of his generation, despite his declared aversion to the spirit with an expiration date. Indeed, few literary problems were approached by Noica in a positive way or at least leniently. The writers he truly appreciated were even fewer. If we were to reread the articles he published in his youth, we could draw a statistic of negativity, twice as consistent compared to that of his other texts, as Dorin Popescu notes (122). Under other pseudonyms, the journalist sometimes positioned himself against the very practice of journalism, against the "proverbial superficiality of the journalist" and "opportunism as artistic fuel" (Semnele Minervei 49–50). He denounced the "vitiated, cynical and sad face of professional literature", "falsified by interest and defiled by immorality", a literature whose illustrious representative was Tudor Arghezi, as he thought (95–96). Although Noica only referred to the journalistic activity of Arghezi the poet, it was enough to attract the opprobrium of G. Călinescu, a critic of the "bombastic generation" and of the adolescents' invasion of literature: "But when a young man comes to say that Mr Arghezi's writing irritates by abundance, I start to doubt the future of Mr Noica, a high school student, who will probably be glad that I have quoted his name, even though I would have liked to quote his work" (Dur 48). The impenitent journalist answered the critic, engaging other representatives of the younger generation in this polemic, such as Petru Comarnescu or Octav Şuluţiu. But Noica was far from being emblematic for the condition of anonymity. He was not at all flattered by that mention of his name, nor did he acknowledge his being a member of the "bombastic" generation. He himself believed, like Călinescu, that "young people want to surprise the audience and appear as they are in fact: jejune. This is the time of the high school student with a cigarette in his mouth, or the tantrum of one who is less than five years old but wants to ride a bicycle "(Semnele Minervei 177). The Manifesto of the White Lily awakened in him undissimulated disgust, and he found the notion of literary generations to be

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one of the most tedious issues discussed in the press in recent years. This was the case even though he was among the followers of trăirism (a trend of thought based on Lebensphilosophie), despite his omission by G. Călinescu.

According to Noica, the entire post-war generation was undergoing a process of spiritual dissolution, given the collapse of the national project. From this perspective, the ideals that deserve praise are those of sămănătorism (a literary trend alert to the peasants' grievances), "this admirable spiritual arsenal" (Semnele Minervei 202–204), but not those of the Orthodox gândirism, promoted by Nichifor Crainic. Criticising, elsewhere, the "sămănătorist danger" and "rural romanticism", he unequivocally pronounced himself in favour of intelligent, urban modernism, with its utmost liberty of expression, definitely superior to all the other literary formulas (436–438). The appraisal was nonetheless accompanied by a series of critiques: modernism as a general vision and, in particular, as a response to obsolete ruralism was commendable, but here its only manifestation consisted in the "humiliating polarisation of forces around the personal interests or ambitions of those who professed it" (401). Answering a survey conducted by Cronicarul magazine, concerning the literary trends of the time, he noticed that literature was better than a few decades before, but only from the point of view of form. In other words, "literature is written more unscrupulously, more dryly, more easily than ever before". "Many modern literary attempts are acts of maddening words, of inciting one word against another, or all words against ideas". Our modernism is sheer "libertinage" (Între suflet şi spirit 19–21). Surprisingly, Noica was not against surrealistic poetry, but only against the modernism practiced by the younger poets, whose sole concern was to compete in inventiveness. However, he would prefer religious art to secular art, and related artistic concepts, if possible, to Platonic Ideas, because "the truth of science is ugly, while the beauty of secular art is untrue. Science kills the soul, while art darkens the mind" (Semnele Minervei 115). Young Noica could not take a very modernist stance on literary phenomena. Meditating on different trends and orientations, he performed a selection of different hypostases of negativity. He liked neither obsolete traditionalism, nor hurried modernism, insufficiently assimilated in our literature, nor art for art's sake and proletarian art. When he appeared to be on the side of a trend, he did it for the sake of rejecting another. Most of the reviews he published between the two world wars evince an independent, non-conformist spirit, difficult to sum up in a formula.

For example, talking about Camil Baltazar, Noica praised and accused, at the same time, Romanian lyrical poetry of the time and the poetic works of Tudor Arghezi: "Whoever is surprised that we give so much importance to a poet's intensity will have to remember all contemporary Romanian poetry -

most of all, the poetry of Tudor Arghezi - a poetry that is external, metaphorical, substanceless, comprehensive yet uninteresting (though brilliant, almost, in Arghezi's case)" (Semnele Minervei 319). Eugen Lovinescu was deemed either to lack objectivity or to be our only critic with "complex personal views", with a "well-established critical sense" and with the necessary vigour for capturing the essence of the Romanian literary phenomenon (306). In other cases, rejection was expressed curtly, either through brief phrases or in the form of pamphlets. Adrian Maniu "writes exhaustively much, but it seems, without being favoured by the stars, like Tudor Arghezi (57); Mihail Dragomirescu was the "happy father of most literary scoundrels" (133); Nichifor Crainic was a "minor poet of the common place and expression" (168); Mihail Sadoveanu's fantasy was "nothing if not sound" (179). Gib Mihăescu suffered from excessive imagination, Sandu Tudor - from intellectual "cyclopism", Anton Holban would have a brilliant career in literature although he did not have a definite penchant for the novel. Camil Petrescu, a moderate enemy, was "this sprightly and interesting character of Romanian journalism" (Între suflet şi spirit 27), and Ion Minulescu was the protagonist of some polemical exchanges, echoing Noica's debate with Călinescu. Among the writers he admired were Lucian Blaga, Cezar Petrescu, George Bacovia, Al. Brătescu-Voineşti, Mateiu Caragiale, Ion Barbu, Al. Philippide, Tudor Vianu, Mihail Sebastian, C. Fântâneru, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Petru Comarnescu, and among the classics - of course - Mihai Eminescu, I. L. Caragiale, Titu Maiorescu, Haşdeu. Generally speaking, however, the philosopher's appreciation of the literati was permeated by a visible negating élan. Here, for example, is his review of George Topârceanu's Ballads, Merry and Sad "The reader, deafened by the metaphysical lamentations of professionals aspiring to godliness, obsessed with the stupid-modernistic technique of all pretentious minors, can only taste the simplicity, ingeniousness, the swaying, easy pace of Mr Topârceanu's poetry" (Semnele Minervei 151).

If literature was a great waste of time, a sin unto thought, things seemed to be even more serious in Romanian culture. We lived in a patriarchal country with a minor culture, obedient to the French, and barely in its infancy: in literary history, almost everything was there to be researched, critical editions and translations were almost absent, and original creations were just starting to emerge. Commercial writing, our dislike for pure art, our servility towards Western culture, and, last but not least, our neglect of Romanian language were symptoms of general artistic precariousness. Like Cioran, Noica was against so-called Mioritic culture. Unlike the nihilist philosopher, for whom negation was the very substance of discourse, young Noica oscillated between a demolition drive and an affirmative natural inclination. His dream was not universal extinction, but a school where nothing was taught... Thus,

his idiosyncrasies were confined to the sphere of contradiction rather than in the area of nihilism. Among the texts he published in periodicals, there was also a "tribute to our literature", where he noted that readers were then much more "refined" than in the past, that authors wrote more and better than a few decades before and that, finally, our culture had become respectable (Între suflet şi spirit 408).

As for literary genres, the philosopher hesitated between an affirmative spirit and the undeniable pleasure of negation. Dramatic art was a minor genre, travelogues remained, in the hand of the best writer, tedious literature, the confessional genre was falsifying by excellence, and the essay - a manifestation of "fiddling", a "weakness of great spirits" (Despre lăutărism 33). Instead, poetry was a pure act, a myth, a transfiguration of insufficient reality, which expressed what neither science nor philosophy, nor all prose, nor whole music and all the other arts put together could say (67). That is why organising a "week of poetry" was an act of unnecessary violence to the public: "Poetry cannot attack your consciousness in daylight, like any novel of adventure, like any description of 'passion' and 'luxuries' on Calea Victoriei St., for example. Poetry awaits you discreetly, far from the beaten road /.../" (Între suflet şi spirit 23). The praise of lyricism takes place in the subtext of a critique of literary trade, of Romanian readers' indifference to this genre and, last but not least, of the vulgarity of the novel. He himself was a translator of novels, which he regarded as a heavy genre, as it demanded a lot of discipline. Noica regarded reluctantly the preference of young writers for the novel, especially those who had made a name for themselves in literary criticism, prose, or essay writing. This was primarily because they lacked love for things, for the "vulgar concreteness" that novelistic creation entailed.

Noica was much more reserved towards the "easy (but, in fact, terribly difficult) genre of criticism (Despre lăutărism 33). Again, he was referring mainly to Romanian literary criticism, still at the beginning, clumsy, without objectivity. Conceding that G. Călinescu was a "genius", the philosopher expressed his belief that "a critic should provide not only assessments, however refined, but true syllogisms about the destiny of literature, if not about entire literature and culture" (68). From the work of G. Călinescu, for example, one could extract admirable quotes and judgments, but not a unitary view of culture or of the other topics under discussion. Thus, literary judgment should respect the desiderata of logic and provide a comprehensive philosophical vision in order to be truly valid. Despite these ideas, Constantin Noica the critic owed much to impressionism in his literary judgments. Here is, for example, a portrait of Liviu Rebreanu in a true Călinescian style: "Mr Liviu Rebreanu appears to possess an enormous will. His blue eyes and his perpetually laughing figure of

a satisfied child conceal the tenacity and perseverance of an Englishman. I have experienced that sense of a self-made man in relation to none of his glorified confrères. Mr Liviu Rebreanu became a writer but he could easily have become a bridge builder or an automobile manufacturer" (Semnele Minervei 432).

The philosopher's many considerations against literature and criticism could be regarded as circumspect, as mere dissociations from the spirit of that time, in keeping with the ideology of the generation to which he belonged, without necessarily liking it. But Noica did not seem to love much of foreign literature either, especially modern literature, approaching the crises afflicting contemporary man. André Maurois was "dry", "emaciated" (305); Miguel de Unamuno was a kind of Don Quixote, a mere animator, not a creator (425); Paul Valéry's "tired" writing was perhaps "the least hopeful in the world of our European culture" (Moartea omului de mâine 248). The essayist was fond of neither Aldous Huxley and Eugène Ionesco, nor of Montaigne and Voltaire.

Analysing literature as a world of surfaces, Noica seemed to explore what he himself called, in a text titled "Reconciliation with the World", "the negative consciousness of limits" (Echilibrul spiritual 93). His thought penetrated what the artistic world was not in order to acquire a taste of what it might be. If faced with a choice between the realm of the possible and the universe of the real, he went for the former, and literature itself was an ever open possibility, a profitable waste of time, at least as a negation of that spirit with an expiration date.

Constantin Noica's "literary" destiny was, ironically, that he was appreciated, from very early on, for the artistic qualities of his writing. Critics point out that his lexical range owed much to Ion Creangă, Petre Ispirescu, Mihai Eminescu, and the chroniclers (Roatiş 226), remarking the "novelistic" nature of his ideas and the literariness of his discourse (Simion, Fragmente 125). An actual critic, Şerban Cioculescu, recommended Noica, the philosopher who watched bemused the trivial literary preoccupations of Mircea Eliade, to try writing a novel (Aspecte 712). More recent studies suggest that most of Noica's oeuvre should be regarded as works of literature, noting the influence his writings have exerted on contemporary Romanian poetry and prose. Philosophers have also noticed, almost without exception, the lyricism of Noica's writing, his unmistakable artistic style, despite his repeated pleas for pure reason. "Noica", Ion Ianoşi states, "is an artist despite his own intentions. His philosophy is "artistic" even where he despises "art" (253). In contradiction with the model of his philosophy, Mathesis universalis, stand Noica the philosopher's predominantly literary devices, as Gabriel Liiceanu shows. His writing followed the romantic, widely accessible line of modern speculation, aimed at "taming the face of philosophy" as a last possible chance for his

survival in modernity (40; 48). Seeking philosophy inside literature, Constantin Noica found literature inside philosophy, in an attempt to discover essences in a world of surfaces.

(Translated into English by Carmen-Veronica Borbely)

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BOOKS

Anca Peiu, *Romantic Renderings of Selfhood in Classic American Literature*. București: C.H. Beck, 2017, 380 p.

Anca Peiu connects eleven essential American writers under the central theme of self and its expressions, seen as rejecting the anxiety of influence and constructing profoundly original, characteristic modes of expression. Peiu focuses on the theme of selfhood "in/or poetry" for five of the trademark figures and "in/or story-telling for other six in an attempt to investigate the thematic as well as the foundational pillar of the American literature. Aware of her markedly ex-centric, East European position, the author decides to reiterate her standing as an advantage which offers her the opportunity to read and interpret these canonical, widely discussed and analyzed figures from a novel point of view. Peiu insists on the highly selective and subjective nature of the process, the final products serving as a guide for both students and American literature novices eager to expand their vision of the world literature and its continuum which spans continents and centuries.

Poe is the first name to be analysed. He traces his complex works, ranging from subtle horror to the beginnings of ratiocination, both of them revelations of the clockwork mechanisms which (dis)organise human minds and our intellects. Poe is considered as novelist, short stories creator and, most importantly, as poet, a position he identified with throughout his entire career. His works are seen through their connecting lines of debt to writers contemporary with us - such as Ishiguro and the intricate issue of identity for human clones - or contemporary with him. Both Poe's William Wilson and Melville's Ishmaelare in a shared quest for the "immeasurable imaginary inner life".

Self-reliance as "the rule of survival" is the perception adopted for the investigation of Ralph Waldo Emerson who isseen as a living contradiction between his marked spiritual generosity and his insistent need of individualism. The textual analysis is meant to reconcile the apparent dissonance. The next in line is Thoreau, Emerson's disciple eager to continue developing his master's ideas in a call to "civil disobedience". This essay
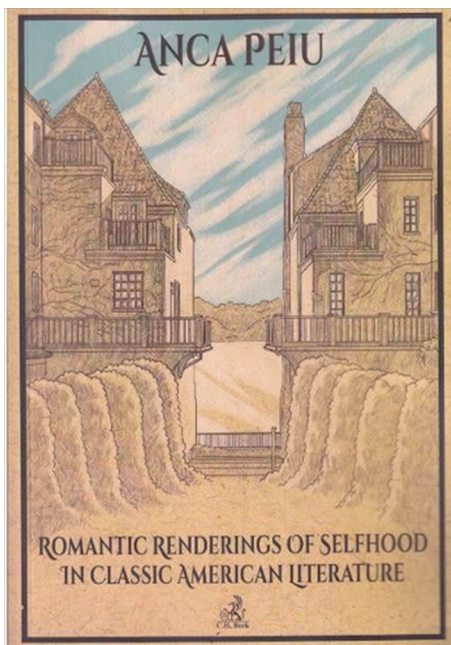
which displays its author's pledge for the necessity of self-assertion is fluidly continued in *Walden*, which could be regarded as a true *ars poetica*, with Peiu exposing his final quest for truth as "the ultimate value of human existence". Walt Whitman has a similar standing point. His famed *Song of Myself* shows the strands of collaboration and recognition existant between these figures reunited under similar preoccupations and interest. Whitman's masterpiece is essential to the definition of the American self, both individual and collective, as "the best gifted, the most talented and endowed poetically".

Emily Dickinson, this formerly forgotten figure, contemporary to Whitman, thematically connected to his works yet seen fundamentally distinct is another subject worthy of analysis. Only fully acknowledged by the middle of the twentieth century, Emily was minorised during her life in part due to her unique conception of poetry, aesthetics, and the self. Connected to the metaphysical and romantic tradition, she is similarly keen on dispensing with the tradition and adopting a new mode of artistry. In a significant *post scriptum* Peiu presents Dickinson in her kinship with our local Ana Blandiana, whose leaf of grass gracefully unites the temporal gap across the two sides of the Atlantic.

In turn, Peiu considers Irving to be indebted to the Old World fairy tale tradition, adjusted to the requirements of current American history and considered in its already marked individuality and distinction. Careful importance is given to his attempt at introducing what will later be considered the "typically American storytelling vein". Another forger of paths, James Fenimore Cooper, is recognized as the founding father of "the American Western myth, reiterating and developing the idea of the split nature of the American selftorn between its continental past anda future which should be negotiated with the already established native populations. The struggle is acknowledged and described in Peiu's analysis of "The Last of the Mohicans". The novel was well received by Cooper's immediate successors and gracefully passes the test of time, remaining a piece of resistance in the contemporary reading list

The problematic of the American double self is further tackled by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Anca Peiu investigates the intertextual links in the story of Hester Prynne, a moral tale which unveils the human hypocrisy disguised in the form of puritan ideals. To counteract such an attitude, Hawthorne argues in favour of a code of conduct which encourages the empowerment of the personal ego.

Herman Melville becomes associated with Dickinson, both as reclusive rebels whose vision of the autobiographical self is incorporated within an original form of creation. His aesthetics were seen as unsuitable for the period, which led to his downfall. Nevertheless, Peiu acknowledges that this singular vision offered him immortality on the literary scene. Through her textual study, the reader gains awareness of the image of potential optimism which pervade both *Moby Dick* and *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, this precursor of the "American tales of the absurd". For this purpose, she focuses on the profound metafictional quality of his prose in order to exhibit the image of the man in his continuous pursuit of "the ungraspable phantom of life".

In the same vein Peiu analyses Twain, this self-acclaimed realist writer whose insistent rejection of tradition only betrays a hidden romantic strain. Peiu proves that Twain's inaugurates a narrative creation meant to challenge his readership to take part in the literary game by forsaking the pursuit of any moral, motive or "true plot".

Finally, Kate Chopin, is regarded as a veritable precursor to the long strand of High Modernist American authors, her pioneering is essential in the history of American literature.

Peiu provides a refreshing analysis of eleven fundamental writers and their pervasive influence. These writers' definitions of the self remain topical and allow connections with Romanian literary evolutions.

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BOOKS

Florin Oncescu, *Jurnalul lui Sake* [*Sake's Diary*]. Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2017, 224 p.

Florin Oncescu's most recently published novel, *Jurnalul lui Sake* [*Sake's Diary*], is a delightful and humorous piece of writing that playfully thematizes contemporary issues such as the complex articulations of relocation and bicultural identities. Florin Oncescu is a prominent and idiosyncratic contemporary Romanian writer, who was born in 1960 in Constanța. He has graduated from Polytechnic University of Bucharest in 1985 and permanently moved to Canada in 1995. He has been living in Montréal ever since, with short periods spent in the United States. Nevertheless, he is a well-known and active writer in the Romanian literary landscape. Florin Oncescu has published several volumes of fiction so far: *Dispoziție depresivă* (Ramuri, Craiova, 1994), *La umbra unui enciclopedist* (Omniscop, Craiova, 1999), *Întoarcerea* (Ramuri, Craiova, 2003), *Ilustrate din America* (Limes, Cluj-Napoca, 2007). He is a member of the Romanian Writers' Union and regularly publishes in *Pagini românești*.

Jurnalul lui Sake [*Sake's Diary*] is a postmodern narrative journey which unconventionally traces the convolutions of shifting identities and cultural pluralism by focusing on the life of a Romanian couple living in Canada, Sorin, an engineer who also happens to be a writer, and his wife, Cristina. The novel displays autobiographic traces since Florin Oncescu, as well as his protagonist, Sorin, emigrated to Canada, settled in Montréal and is both an engineer and writer. Sorin and Cristina bought Sake, who had been born at a dog breeding facility in Quebec and integrated him into their family. Surprisingly, Sake experiences the process of acculturation which generally affects immigrants: he has to learn commands in Romanian. When Sake starts writing his diary, he confesses that "*When I started writing in Romania, I was born for the second time*" (17).[1] Sake's discourse

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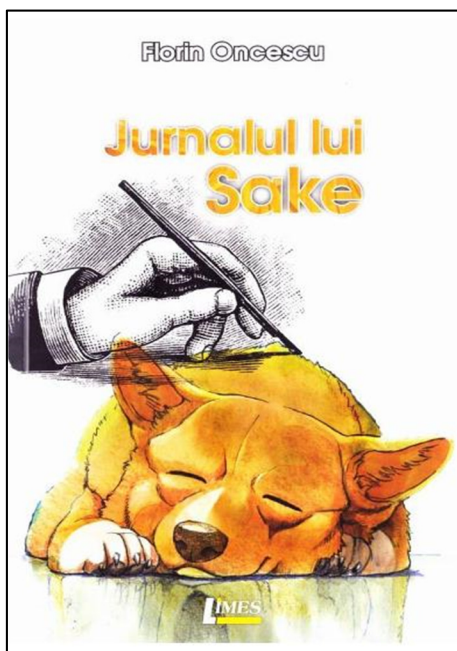
[1] "*Când am început să scriu în limba română, eu m-am născut a doua oară.*" (All quotations have been translated by Monika Koșa)

encompasses a rich profusion of characters and life situations and is pervaded by intertextual references, popular culture elements, ironical instances and pastiche.

The first part of the book is told almost entirely from the perspective of the sagacious dog-narrator, Sake. Its digressive narration covers topics ranging from Sorin's daily routine, the farcicality behind literary associations, the dog community from Montréal, household gossips to its own existential crises. The ending paragraph from Sake's diary is notable considering that Sake's final words are an artistic legacy stressing its significant role within the narrative discourse: *"Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, both on horseback-the first, on the mare named Rocinante, the other, on a donkey-, pass through a village. A small dog starts barking at them, frightening Sancho. Don Quixote reassures Sancho: "Sancho, it's good that it's barking at us. It means we're advancing!"* (104).[2]

Sake's conscious narration voices the detailed observation and interrogation of human behaviour and the Romanian community's everyday practices. Similarly to Julian Barnes' woodworm-narrator from *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, who narrates the alternative version of Noah's Ark in the first chapter of the book, Sake's stories wittily challenge the idea of a single truth and reliable narrator. Employing an animal-narrator, besides being a metafictional play, exonerates the actual author from culpability for criticizing human behav-

iour and foolish societal conventions. The anthropomorphic Sake destabilizes traditional forms of narration and heightens the perplexity effect experienced by the readers.

The novel is divided into several unnumbered chapters such as: "Jurnalul lui Sake" [Sake's Diary], "Vedere din Franţa" [Postcard from France], "Prizonier în librărie" [Prisoner in the library], "Petrecere cu vin roşu şi ciocolată Lindt" [Party with red wine and Lindt chocolate] or "Trattoria lui Antonio" [Antonio's Trattoria]. Each chapter title refers to a key-element from the narrative episodes. Thematically, the novel can be divided into two main parts. In the first part, the narratorial focus is on Romanian born intellectuals (mostly writers) and their life in Canada and on the life of the dog community from Sake's neighborhood. The second part is almost a distinct omniscient narrative in which the reader glimpses into Sorin's adventures in different parts of the world: Mexico, Montréal, Naples, America, Constanţa, Texas, Switzerland, Havana and rural Romania.

The narrative opens with glimpses into Sorin's everyday life as he struggles to fit into the writers' community in Montréal. As the stories unfold, the narrative perspective shifts from Sake's first-person narration to an omniscient third-person narrator who briefly chronicles Sake's life story employing free indirect discourse. The frequent narrative shifts are deliberately self-referential in a postmodern fashion to the extent that the overlapping voices become a permanent echo of the representational crisis which characterizes contemporary fiction. Nevertheless, Florin Oncescu opts to mark with italics fragments from Sake's diary, thus distin-

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[2] *Don Quijote şi Sancho Panza, amândoi călare-primul, pe iapa numită Rocinanta, al doilea, pe un măgar-, trec printr-un sat. Un câine mic începe să-i latre, înspăimântându-l pe Sancho. Don Quijote îl linişteşte: „Sancho, e bine că ne latră. Înseamnă că înaintăm!"*

guishing Sake's voice from the third-person narrator's comments.

Sake's trenchant remarks are, perhaps, the novel's greatest achievement in terms of content and style: Sake "bites" the Romanian writers' community in Montréal in a lucid, yet humorous manner and satirizes preposterous attitudes and situations. For instance, Sake ridicules the endless disputes on the language Romanian writers in Canada should write in, the long discussion on whether to exclude a young poet from the writers' association due to lack of academic language in his poetry, the conflictual relationship between two literary associations (The First Association of Writers and The Other Association of Writers), or "sapiential literature" (47) writers. These ones self-consciously create long, complicated, meaningless sentences in order to seem erudite. Another target of Sake's satire is the obsession to measure literary success in terms of quantity, not quality. Sake's style oscillates between mockery and humorous transpositions of popular adages and excerpts from established intellectuals or artists. A notable example is the parodic Pekingese Confucius and his aphorism: "*life goes on*" (37), "*history repeats itself, only its victims change*" (45)[3] or "*the good ones go first*" (39)[4].

Another highlight of the book is the humourous references to Romanian culture and the vivid insights into the rich linguistic and social practices of rural communities. The narration is replete with specific Romanian local specialties, such as sponge cake, meatloaf or soup made of lamb bread. Mihai Eminescu,

Romania's national poet, or Florin Piersic, one of the most popular contemporary Romanian actors, are also mentioned in Sake's narration. Political allusions are inspired from real-life events. For instance, the narrator parodies Victor Ponta, whom he refers to as "Doctor Ponta"[5].

As the focus shifts to Sorin's return to his native place, the readers enter the portals of a vibrant rustic world. The villagers' vivid gossip, reminiscent of the oral tradition, captures the authentic rural life, uncontaminated by the technological advancements of the twenty-first century. Instead of accentuating the primitivism of customs and rural traditions, Florin Oncescu's fiction reproduces and celebrates the genuine spectacle of pastoral way of life. Meanwhile, Sake disappears entirely from the narrative discourse and the focus stays entirely on Sorin's experiences in different parts of the world.

The novel ends on a cheerful note as the readers get a glimpse of Sorin at a TV show where he is expected to share his opinions on the Writers' Association. The open ending suggests that the story never ends; Sorin will eventually set out on new adventures and Sake may return to Quebec from Constanța to "bite" once again the Romanian writers' quotidian reality and (mis)adventures. Abounding in intertextual references, pastiche, metafictional tropes, ironies and fascinating storytelling modes, *Sake's Diary* is a truly idiosyncratic piece of writing which defies and resists normative forms of cate-

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[3] „*istoria se repetă, doar victimele ei se schimbă*"

[4] „*cei buni se duc primii*"

[5] A Romanian politician accused of having plagiarized his doctoral thesis. He was about to win the 2014 presidential elections against Klaus Iohannis.

gorization and is an excellent illustration of the Romanian postmodern novel. Florin Oncescu's unfamiliar, yet extraordinary fabulation, which challenges representation and transgresses narrative norms, is filled with eccentric elements and marvelous narrators who ultimately render the fluctuating figurations of nomadic identities.

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BOOKS

Cristina Chevereșan, Adina Baya. *Celuloză vs. Celuloid – Despre cărți și ecranizări*. Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest, 2015, 240 p.

Celuloză vs. Celuloid – Despre cărți și ecranizări is a collaborative effort by Cristina Chevereșan and Adina Baya. The two authors come from different backgrounds: Chevereșan's main research interests include American studies, while Baya's academic formation revolves around media studies. Both of them, however, show interest in a comparative approach. In an interview with Richard Martin for the British Association for American Studies, Chevereșan describes her own teaching method for American studies as interdisciplinary, which means she applies varied tools to understand American literature and culture. Baya focuses on the intersections of journalism, cinematography, and literature. Her article titled *"Relax and Enjoy These Disasters": News Media Consumption and Family Life in Don DeLillo's White Noise* (Neohelicon, June 2013) examines representations of media in a work of fiction. The collaboration between the two authors results in a special synthesis of different perspectives.
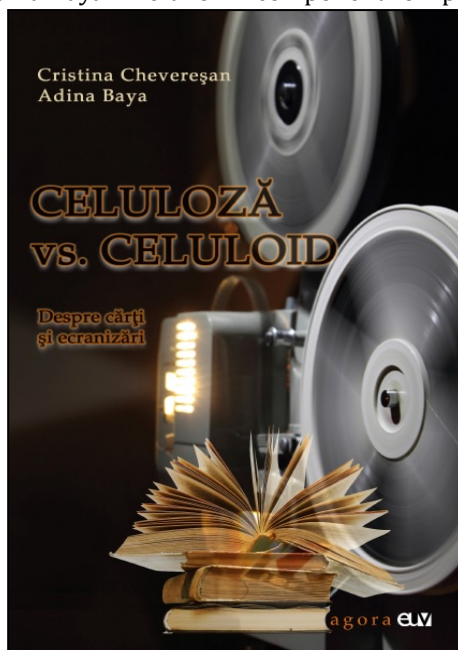
The book's title pits against each other two materials: cellulose, the main component of paper, and celluloid, a compound used to create film rolls. Similarly, the authors examine the cinematic adaptations of various works of literature. The book is divided into four chapters, each focusing on a particular style or niche of literature. With a view to an even more integral view of the source materials, Chevereșan and Baya discuss each literary piece and its adaptation separately. This arrangement is particularly interesting because the reader has the opportunity to view the authors' perspectives independently, *ergo* he may view the literary expert's opinions on film and the cinema expert's thoughts on the written text. Although film and literature are separate media, they share many common traits: telling a story, showcasing emotions, creating a coherent narrative are all prominent in both.

In the "Preface", the two Romanian scholars explain that most of the es-

says included in the volume appeared first in the *Orizont* journal. Placing them next to each other gives an even more layered view of the films and their hypotexts. As these analyses previously appeared in a cultural journal, the authors keep a more personal and affable tone. They recommend the book to both expert and amateur book and movie lovers. The reviews are, indeed, easy to read and give concise and clear opinions about the films, but they are also meticulously researched and offer refined views about the source materials. With the book's smart concept the writers also attempt to answer the ongoing debate: how should film critics review adaptations?

Anne Wollenberg suggests that adaptations should have two reviews: one which takes into consideration its hypotext and one which only focuses on the movie as a stand-alone piece of art. Chevereșan and Baya go down a different path: the two reviews of the same movie work in tandem; one offers a look at the literature, the other focuses more on the movie.

The volume is divided into four chapters which feature movies selected by theme. The first one, "Embroidery, Lace, Elegance" ("Broderii, dantele, finețuri") showcases adaptations of works by classic authors such as George Orwell, Leo Tolstoy, Ian McEwan etc, the theme shared by each movie is that of the upper-class citizens and their struggles (*Anna Karenina*, *An Education*, *Atonement*, etc.). The second chapter titled "Marginal Spaces" (Spații marginale) includes films about marginalized groups such as black Americans (*The Help*), members of the LGBTQ community (*Brokeback Mountain*)

or the lower classes (*Factotum*), etc. The third chapter includes movies such as *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, *Les Misérables*, *Lincoln* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Many of these works of fiction include either real historical events or historical figures, but the main plotline is fantastic or surreal. For this reason, the authors chose to name this chapter "Histories, Fictions, Imagination" (Istorii, ficțiuni, închipuiri). The fourth and final chapter, titled "America Through Hollywood's Spyglass" (America prin ocheanul Hollywoodian) is possibly the most specific one. It includes films which depict American culture, the original books' writers are also American. T. S. Elliot's *The Great Gatsby*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood*, etc.

The book contains discussions about forty-four films, however, in many cases, the films themselves receive less attention than their source material. Most of Chevereșan's reviews focus more on literature than on cinema, while Baya takes time to reintroduce the same work. For example, Chevereșan's *Anna Karenina*-review serves as an ode to Leo Tolstoy's masterpiece. Baya also stresses the importance of the novel before shifting her attention to the movie itself. In her *Factotum*-review, Baya also takes time to establish Charles Bukowski's ambivalent, controversial, and fetishized personality in literature, thus helping the moviegoer who is unfamiliar with the writer's life and work to understand the biopic's cultural and historical background. So, *Celuloză vs. Celuloid* does not just contain movie reviews, it showcas-

es well-researched and concise opinions about the films while underlining the important fact that these are interpretations of another art form. The book also serves as a great exercise in mediality as the authors explore the way literature can be transposed into a different media. The films tell at least partially the same story, but they rework it to fit into the two-hour frame of films. Chevereşan and Baya expertly analyze these changes and help the reader understand the two art forms and their connections

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BOOKS

William Shakespeare, *Sonnets/Sonete: O nouă versiune românească*, translated by Cristina Tătaru. Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2011, 315 p.

To translate poetry of any kind always takes a certain amount of courage on behalf of the translator. Indeed, some argue that the poetry itself is precisely what is lost in the process, yet, as Allen Tate once famously stated, translation remains "forever impossible and forever necessary."[1] This is particularly the case with Shakespeare's sonnets, a kind of poetry riddled with rhetorical devices, powerful imagery, as well as figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, and synecdoche, all of which confer to it its aesthetic quality, but are, at the same time, nearly impossible to isolate from their source language. Furthermore, while Shakespeare did write about ageless themes, including love, lust, the brevity of life, or the impermanence of beauty, his sonnets are nevertheless deeply rooted in their time by means of clever uses of intertextuality and the nuances of a sixteenth century, rural Stratfordean parlance.

Translating the sonnets is therefore a matter of translating the historical time of their production, in addition to the text itself. Such is the daunting task undertaken by Cristina Tătaru in putting forward a new bilingual edition of Shakespeare's sonnets. Currently an Associate Professor of Lexicology, Stylistics, and Translation Studies, Tătaru has written extensively on both Shakespeare's work and the issues of translation from English into Romanian. She has translated a number of Romanian poets, including Vasile Voiculescu, Ştefan Augustin Doinaş, and George Topârceanu, as well as written and published her own volumes of poetry. Tătaru's bilingual edition of the *Sonnets*, published in 2011, brings together her lifelong work in the field, her experience as a poet, as well as her studies in Shakespeare and humour, in order to provide not only a new translation of the six-

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[1] Humphries, Jefferson. *Reading emptiness: Buddhism and literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, pp. 59.

teenth century bard, but also a new interpretation of the latter.

Shakespeare's sonnets are complex poems that often disguise more connotations than they reveal, particularly due to the author's mastery of the subtleties of the English language. Any translator of the sonnets is therefore first faced with the issue of transferring meaning while maintaining an intelligible, natural use of the target language. The process implies some departure from the literal translation of the source text and a balance between the latter and the desire to preserve both message and stylistic devices. This is perhaps one of Cristina Tătaru's most significant strengths in the translation under review. Where previous translations of the sonnets, including the 1974 version by Teodor Boșca, attempt to render Shakespeare's language through an archaic, sometimes forced Romanian equivalent, Cristina Tătaru's use of the target language provides a new solution. Indeed, the new translation focuses not so much on obsolete forms of speech, but rather on the fact that Shakespeare himself grew up near the heart of a rural Warwickshire, which deeply impacted the language he later employed in his work. By preserving archaic forms, previous translations of the sonnets inadequately placed the poems in a sphere of high parlance, whereas Tătaru's choice for a natural, everyday speech successfully delivers the multi-layered flavour of the source text. For instance, in the first verses of Sonnet 7, the morning sun, a metaphor for the Fair Youth in his prime, is greeted by common people, who "Doth homage to his new-appearing sight, / Serving with looks his sacred majesty." If Boșca's version of the same verses reads

"Se-nchină celui ce-nnoit răsare, / Slujind cu ochii sacra-i majestate," Tătaru translates them as the simpler, more natural "Îi dau binețe zilei ce răsare, / Robiți privind la măreția-i, copți." Similarly, in Sonnet 11, the final couplet reads: "She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby, / Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die." Boșca renders the latter as "Pecete-i te făcu, să-ntipărești / Cu zel modelul, nu să-l nimicești," whereas Tătaru opts for "Ți-a pus pecete Firea, vrând să zică / De-o tipărești, nici copia nu se strică." Not only does the second more aptly transfer the meaning of the couplet using a Romanian manner of speech, rather than merely translating the English wording, but it also better succeeds in conveying the benevolent, yet slightly patronizing rapport between the lyrical voice and the Fair Youth.

Issues of subtlety aside, Cristina Tătaru's version of the sonnets also corrects certain translation errors previously passed unnoticed. The following lines of Sonnet 40 provide just one example: "Then if for my love, thou my love receivest, / I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest." Teodor Boșca's earlier translation of the above was "De-mi vrei iubita fiindcă-mi porți iubire, / Nu te blestem, căci tu-mi trăiești iubirea." The unnecessary insertion of the noun "iubita" had thus altered the meaning of the entire sonnet. The suggestion was that the lyrical voice had become aware of the fact that the Fair Youth desired the former's lover, the Dark Lady. Certainly, later sonnets make it obvious that the man and the woman betrayed the lyrical voice in some way, yet this is not at all the case in Sonnet 40. Tătaru's translation of the verses, "Pentru iubirea-mi deci, iubirea-mi iei, / N-ai vină că iubirea-mi folosești," rec-

tifies the matter and maintains the intended ambiguity of the original poem.

What is more, in spite of using a simpler dialect and a sentence structure that is more appropriate for the target language, the translation under review neatly transfers the metaphors and conceits upon which many of the original sonnets rely in order to function stylistically. One excellent example in this respect is Tătaru's translation of Sonnet 46, one of the notorious eyes-heart sonnets. Here, the conceit is initially built around the war-like struggle taking place between the poet's eyes and heart for possession of the Fair Youth. The innovation brought by Shakespeare lies in the poem's turn towards the judiciary, as the conflict moves from metaphors of war to the inside of a court room. This is aptly maintained in Tătaru's version of the sonnet, which employs terms such as "titlul de proprietate", "juriu", or "verdict" in order to mirror the legalese in the source text. Other conceits skilfully rendered in the new translation include Sonnet 97, with its portrayal of winter as a metaphor for the departure of the Fair Youth, as well as Sonnet 15, with its depiction of man as a plant, boasting its "youthful sap," but immediately forgotten after death. The translation of the well-known Sonnet 130 is also noteworthy, not necessarily for Tătaru's use of metaphor, but particularly for her masterful use of irony. If, for instance, Teodor Boşca's translation of verses 11 and 12, "I grant I never saw a goddess go, / My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground," is rather literal, reading "Eu n-am văzut vreo zână cum păşeşte:/Când umblă, doamna-mi calcă pe pământ," Tătaru makes fuller use of the valences of the Romanian language in order to

preserve the biting humour of the original poem: "Nu ştiu cum merg zeiţele, -când vine, / Iubita-mi calcă bine în pământ."

At times, the sonority of the sonnets is as essential to understanding their meaning as the text itself. This is, once again, a phenomenon that is particularly difficult to isolate from the source language, yet Cristina Tătaru manages to do so on several occasions. Sonnet 55, one of the rare poems where the lyrical voice overtly displays confidence in the power of their writing, is a fine example. In the original text, across the 14 lines, numerous alliterations build texture, a musical rhythm, as well as the emphasis on the grand nature of the subjects at hand – the ephemerality of life against the permanence of art: "No marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme, / But you shall shine more bright in these contents / Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time." Although Tătaru is forced to adjust the alliterative sounds, the alliteration itself is maintained in the target language: "Nu marmura, nu monumente-n aur / De prinţi, mai mult ca versu-mi vieţuiesc, / Ci tu, lucind în versul meu de faur, / Nici piatra, care vremile-o pălesc."

Finally, there can be no translation of Shakespeare's poems without an answer to the matter of Will, as it presents itself most famously in Sonnets 135 and 136. Here, the bard masterfully conflates into a single word, "Will," his own name, the idea of volition, as well as a slang reference to male and female reproductive organs. The result is a thoroughly humorous address, riddled with sexual innuendo, and intended for the Dark Lady. However, much of the above is inevitably lost in translation. The Romanian for "will," either "vrere" or "a

vrea," can never stand in for the poet's name, nor have the same erotic connotations. Cristina Tătaru's text offers an elegant solution, alternating between the use of "Will" and capitalized "Vrere" in order to draw attention to the multifaceted meaning of the original poem. She explains her choice in her own verses immediately following the sonnet, so that the reader can easily access the interpretative game proposed by Shakespeare, even when Shakespeare's language may be inaccessible.

Ultimately, Cristina Tătaru's version of the *Sonnets* finds sophisticated answers to several translation issues pertaining to Shakespearean texts. This alone renders her bilingual edition a great introduction to the bard's most popular poems. Perhaps more importantly, her adaptation is an excellent example of *transcreation*, that is, of the way in which a translation may benefit from the inspiration, the creative force, and the language mastery of a poet, all the while remaining faithful to the kernel of the source text. Through a mix of Tătaru's artistic persona and her comprehensive familiarity with Shakespeare's works and exegeses, the Romanian reader of the present bilingual edition can experience some of the subtleties of rhythm, polysemy, and figurative language that have consecrated the Renaissance writer through the ages.

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BOOKS

Vasile Muscă, *Iluminism și istorism* [*Enlightenment and Historicism*]. Cluj-Napoca: Grinta, 2008, 191 p.

"What is the Enlightenment?" is one of the most significant questions ever asked, a question that, in many ways, has shaped the world we live in. Either blaming or celebrating the movement, the answers to this question have attempted to contribute to the understanding of the modern world for more than two centuries now. The question started to infiltrate the European political and philosophical thought in the seventeenth century[1], although it received full articulation only in the late eighteenth century, when it engendered a spirited discussion about what had already been perceived as a decisive shift in Europe's sense of itself.
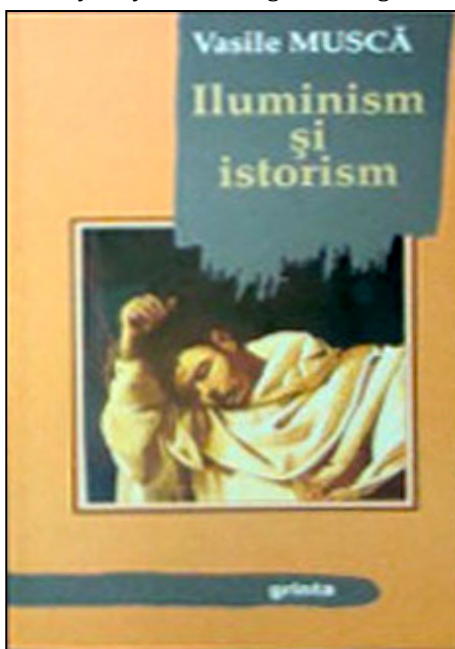
The late eighteenth-century debates on the changes brought about by the enlightened age stem from German soil and are notoriously associated with *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, the magazine that launched the challenging invitation of answering the question "What is Enlightenment?" in 1784. The question then produced two of the movement's best known descriptions, by Moses Mendelssohn and Immanuel Kant respectively, the latter being influenced by David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although Kant's essay "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" has arguably remained the most prominent and influential, the last decades of the eighteenth century benefited from the contributions of several other thinkers[2] who

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[1] I am thinking of philosophers such as Francis Bacon, Sir Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, John Locke, or, to move on the continent, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Benedict Spinoza or Gottfried Leibniz, whose approaches to God, nature, reason science, man, and contributions to the understanding of universe had already started to build the intellectual scaffold that would later support the attitudes, arguments, and practices of the Enlightenment.

[2] See, for instance, Johann Karl Möhsen's "What Is to Be Done toward the Enlightenment of the Citizenry?" (1783), Karl Leonhard Reinhold's "Thoughts on Enlightenment" (1784), Ernst Ferdinand Klein's "On Freedom of Thought and of the Press: For Princes, Ministers, and Writers" (1784), Johann Gottlieb Fichte's "Reclama-

insisted on aspects that would become the tenets of the Enlightenment, namely the public use of reason, freedom of thought and expression, education, progress, the distinctive engagement with religion and faith, political awareness and revolutionary drives, all of them meant to improve the human condition.

The discussion on the Enlightenment has not yet been exhausted. The twentieth century has reopened it with a view to understanding how the heritage of the Enlightenment has shaped the contemporary world. Most intriguing theses were thus produced, many of which come from the same tradition of German philosophy that had initially configured the debates around this movement[3]. However, this does not mean that the geography of the critical approaches to the Enlightenment should be reduced to the German space; on the contrary, the exploration of the Enlightenment and of the ways in which it has shaped the contemporary world seems to have extended its scope through contributions coming from many cultural spaces and deriving from the most challenging standpoints[4]. Therefore, the question "what is Enlightenment?" seems to have remained just as topical as it used to be for Kant and his contemporaries. It is to the understanding of the complexity of the discussions around this movement that Vasile Muscă's book

Iluminism și Istorism (Enlightenment and Historicism) is meant to contribute.

As professor at the Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeș-Bolyai University, Vasile Muscă has always been interested in the philosophy of history, the history of philosophy, and the philosophy of culture. With the many books and hundreds of articles he has authored throughout his career, he has brought important contributions to the understanding of Ancient Greek philosophy, Enlightenment philosophy, and German idealism[5], without, however, neglecting to explore the Romanian philosophical mindset, not only as shaped by the philosophers but also as reworked in Romanian literature[6]. The book under review, Iluminism și Istorism (Enlightenment and Historicism), very well reflects Vasile Muscă's main scholarly interests, as it explores the Enlightenment from a historicist perspective. The volume starts with the waning of the influences of Greek philosophy and its replacement by the Christian doctrine, moves on to explore the Enlightenment as a philosophical phenomenon, and ends with the analysis of two Romanian contributions to the interpretation of the role of the Renaissance in the formation of the modern world.

The first sections of Iluminism și Istorism (Enlightenment and Historicism) read like lectures delivered on specific occasions. For instance, the first essay in the book is based on a lecture given at a sym-

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tion of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe, Who Have Oppressed It until Now" (1793).

[3] See, for example, the works of Ernst Alfred Cassirer, Rüdiger Bittner, Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, or Jürgen Habermas.

[4] See Michel Foucault's famous engagement with the Kantian approach to the Enlightenment. For more recent contributions to the topic see "What is Enlightenment? Gayatri Spivak Conversing with Jane Gallop", Robin May Schott's readings of Kant's philosophy though the lens of gender, or Jane Kneller's criticism of Kant.

[5] See, for example: Introducere în filosofia lui Platon (1994, 2002, 2008), Filosofia în cetate. Trei fabule de filosofie politică și o introducere (1999), Leibniz - filosof al Europei baroce (2001), Vârsta rațiunii. Ipostaze filosofice ale iluminismului (2002), Permanența idealismului german. Studii și eseuri privind idealismul german (2003).

[6] See: Lumile și trecerile lui Eminescu (2004), Încercare asupra filosofiei românești. Schița unui profil istoric (2002), Filosofia ideii naționale la L. Blaga și D.D. Roșca (1996).

posium organised in 2007 in order to celebrate the complete translation of Plotinus's *Enneads* into Romanian. The essay investigates the competing doctrinarian forces of Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, and Christianity, with a view to explaining how Hellenic rationalism had to surrender to the Christian promise of atonement and salvation. The analysis ends with a brief commentary on Friedrich Nietzsche's claim that the victory of Christianity over Greece was the greatest cultural failure in history (32-34).

If the first lecture ends with Nietzsche, the second begins with the same philosopher's argument that the Renaissance is the most important moment in the formation of the modern world. Vasile Muscă distances himself from Nietzsche's claim and proves that it was the Age of the Enlightenment that has actually brought the most important contribution to the shaping of modernity. This lecture was delivered in Sibiu, in 2007, at a symposium on the Enlightenment. It represents the longest section and is also the one that gave the title to the volume. Here Vasile Muscă works towards explaining the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment, seen primarily as a philosophical movement. Philosophy as the manifestation of reason, the departure from the Cartesian model, the decay of the metaphysical construction of a universal reason, the conceptual reconfigurations resulting from the spatial and temporal emplacements of reason, or the division between an ancient and a modern reason are all briefly explored in order to pave the way for an interesting discussion of the conflictual dynamics between reason and history. Voltaire's philosophy of history and Hegel's history of philosophy are the concepts used by Vasile Muscă in order to advance the discussion towards explaining the

emergence of historicism as "a reaction against Cartesianism"[7] (48).

It is only after a rather lengthy presentation of the Enlightenment's appropriation of a particular understanding of reason that the thesis of this section becomes clear. What Vasile Muscă intends to explore here is the pair of "intellectual experiences" that refuse to subscribe to the Enlightenment's "dominant intellectual formula", namely "the irrationalism of feeling, as the opposite of reason, which led to the emergence of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy" and "individual irrationalism, as the opposite of the universal, which led to the formation of another philosophical discipline, the philosophy of history, as one of the most important and long-lasting philosophical contributions of the Age of the Enlightenment" (53).

The discussion on the emergence of the philosophy of history in the eighteenth century clarifies the link between this section and the preceding one when it brings to the discussion Karl Löwith's claim that it had already been announced by the transition from Hellenism to Christianity (58). Vasile Muscă explains the evolution of this new way of thinking about philosophy and history through a detailed and very clear analysis of the development and (re)configuration of the notions of time, progress, and humanity in their transition from classical antiquity, to Christianity, and to modernity.

This second section ends with a brief overview of Kant's famous take on the Enlightenment, with emphasis on its feature as an ongoing process. This ending very nicely announces the transition to the next section of the volume, an essay meant as a tribute to Immanuel Kant, upon the commemoration of two centu-

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[7] All of the quotes are translated from the Romanian by the reviewer.

ries since his death. This essay starts from Kant's well-known definition of the Enlightenment as "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity" (82) and then moves on to elaborate on Kant's contribution to philosophy in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The next section of the volume moves chronologically, towards the nineteenth century, and focuses on the German Romanticism. The discussion departs from Kant, as the philosopher who "humanized philosophy" (96) and whose philosophy opened the path towards the Romantic exploration of man's inner life. The essay continues as a rather factual presentation of the German Romantic movement as consolidated around *Athenäum* magazine and the Jena Romantic circle, and then extends to encompass the cultural, scientific, artistic, and philosophical reverberations of the movement, outside the circle and the magazine.

The fifth section of the volume begins with an entertaining anecdote about Hegel and Napoleon, a pretext for a challenging discussion on the hermeneutics of history. This interpretive exercise proves a very clever method of briefly explaining the Hegelian position on the philosophy of history as expressed in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

The next essay remains in the same sphere of the nineteenth-century German philosophy, but moves towards the last decades of the century and to Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical work. It is meant as an informative explanation of Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, a compilation of fragments taken from the philosopher's notes and put together by his sister. From the factual presentation of the editorial history of the volume, the essay progresses towards an analysis of the 'will to power' as a fundamental princi-

ple of Nietzschean philosophy and works towards its integration into a system.

The last section of the volume opens with Nietzsche's appreciation for the classical age and for the Renaissance as watershed moments in the evolution of mankind. Nietzsche's argument is, most likely, used mainly as a transition from the previous section, because this last essay of the volume discusses the contribution of two Romanian philosophers, P.P. Negulescu and M. Florian, to the exploration of the European Renaissance. As the author explains, the two philosophers were chosen also because their works represent snapshots of two historical moments crucial for Romanian history, namely the period before World War I (P.P. Negulescu) and that immediately following World War II (M. Florian) (179). Although from different standpoints, both philosophers insist on the centrality of humanism in Renaissance studies.

Vasile Muscă's *Iluminism și Istorism* (*Enlightenment and Historicism*) is a dense, but very accessible volume. It is, for the most part, friendly with its readers, as it engages complex philosophical questions and then successfully explains them to the understanding of readers who do not need extensive training in philosophy. However, the volume could have benefited from a preface or foreword, to guide the reader in the attempt to understand the author's general approach, the connection among the sections, and the overall design of the volume. Despite this minor inconvenience, *Iluminism și Istorism* (*Enlightenment and Historicism*) could prove a useful and informative reading, not only for scholars and students of philosophy, but also for students of philology (the first two sections of the volumes would be of great help to those who study the literature of the Enlightenment).

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BOOKS

Simona Jişa, Buata B. Malela, Sergiu Mişcoiu, *Littérature et politique en Afrique – approche transdisciplinaire*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, coll. « Patrimoines », 2018, 368 p.

L'ouvrage *Littérature et politique en Afrique – approche transdisciplinaire* paru aux Éditions du Cerf, recueille vingt-cinq articles qui proposent au lecteur des réflexions sur les réalités sociales, économiques, politiques et artistiques du continent africain.

Divisés en cinq grandes thématiques, les contributeurs se sont donné pour but d'illustrer le caractère indissociable des notions de littérature et de politique. Il résulte de leur recherche que les auteurs africains sont conscients du pouvoir que l'écriture leur offre afin que le texte devienne une plateforme pour témoigner et dénoncer. Les écrivains s'attaquent à tous les *épistémès*. Ils se sont approprié la langue française pour faire connaître aux autres les particularités du territoire politique et littéraire. Cette mission privilégiée de l'écrivain engagé favorise la réflexion politique à notre époque confrontée à des situations brûlantes. On passe de l'exotisme du continent, comme il est décrit parfois par les Européens, à une réalité caractérisée par les contrastes : à la violence, à la guerre et à la misère on oppose la richesse culturelle et le combat des écrivains africains pour affirmer leur identité.

La première sous-division intitulée *Colonialisme et postcolonialisme. Systématisations historiques* met en exergue la complexité des enjeux politiques déclenchés par la décolonisation et l'autonomisation institutionnelle dans les pays maghrébins et l'Afrique subsaharienne. Fatiha Ramdani et Rachida Sadouni s'enquièrent à la problématique du roman algérien et soulignent la volonté des écrivains de changer la réalité politique durant trois périodes clé : la colonisation française, l'indépendance et la décennie noire. Une autre périodisation historique du roman est présentée par Florence Akissi Kouassi-Aboua, cette fois-ci concernant la littérature ivoirienne depuis son début jusqu'en 2015. L'étude de Jędrzej Pawlicki porte sur la figure historique du Mahomet dans la littérature maghrébine d'expression
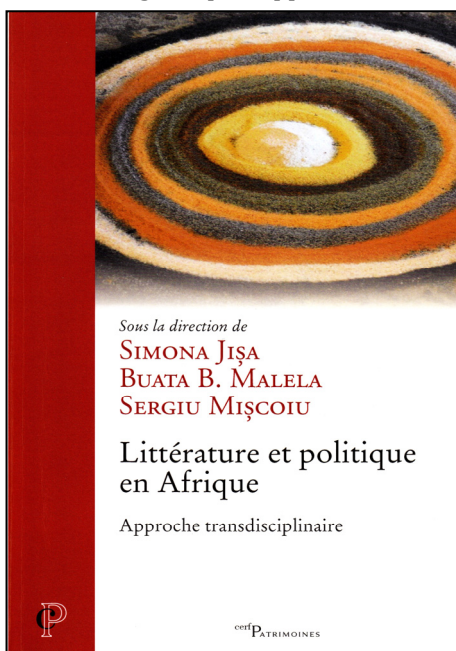
française ; le génie de l'islam, présence « hantologique », engendre des voix et des présences multiples, ayant pour but de mettre en question le discours idéologique. Augustin Denis Samnick s'interroge, quant à lui, sur la politique publique sécuritaire au Cameroun à travers la littérature criminologique.

L'écriture migrante fait l'objet du deuxième volet de l'ouvrage. À travers les romans écrits par la diaspora africaine, une nouvelle perspective sur le pays d'origine des écrivains nous est présentée. Buata B. Matela décortique l'écriture d'In Koli Jean Bofane, Mabanckou et Scholastique Mukasonga tout en révélant comment le discours de ces auteurs évoque la question de la violence. Une autre étude sur Bofane faite par Teodora Achim analyse l'engagement littéraire de l'auteur qui n'est plus synonyme du militantisme. Jyothsana Narasimhan explore le thème de l'immigration chez Fatou Diome, écrivaine qui dévoile les facettes cachées de ce phénomène à partir de son expérience d'écrivaine expatriée. Les rapports d'exclusion/inclusion dans le roman de Nathacha Appanah, *Tropique de la violence,* sont examinés par Simona Jişa ayant pour but de mettre en évidence le caractère engagé du texte qui attire l'attention sur la croissance de la violence qui peut mener à des situations tragiques.

Tyrannies et dictatures, la troisième partie, examine les rapports des écrivains avec les régimes autoritaires ou bien totalitaires de leur pays d'origine. Sandrine Joëlle Eyang Eyeyong dresse un panorama des formes diverses de la figure du dictateur tout en actualisant le problème de la démocratie en Afrique : la bonne gouvernance. La figure de l'ex-dictateur, caractérisée par l'ambigüité sera examinée par Voichiţa-Maria Sasu dans le roman *L'ex-*

père de la Nation d'Aminata Sow Fall. L'analyse de Mohamed Rafik Benaouda de *La tragédie du roi Christophe* d'Aimé Césaire réfléchit sur les mutations politiques des régimes despotiques en Afrique.

La quatrième thématique s'inscrit dans l'approche féministe et décortique le statut de la femme dans les pays africains. La femme ne reste plus le sujet d'un récit, elle devient même écrivaine engagée. Simona Corlan-Ioan analyse les récits de voyage du XIXe siècle et met en lumière les descriptions fantasmagoriques basées sur des stéréotypes et préjugés faites par les aventuriers, surtout René Caillié. Ensuite, la cause des femmes sera plaidée par Joëlle Bonnin-Ponnier à travers un des romans d'Emmanuel Dongala qui, grâce à son récit réaliste, analyse les rapports de pouvoir en Afrique. Le problème de la violence envers les femmes est abordé par Magdalena Malinowska dans son article sur trois romancières algériennes. Ces auteures mettent à nu des formes diverses de maltraitance envers les femmes, ce qui dénote la valeur politico-sociale de la littérature. Elles se donnent pour but de rendre justice aux femmes qu'on n'appellera pas victimes, mais survivantes. Le rapport homme/femme et les questions de genre sont analysés par Elena Odjo et Emmanuel Odjo en linguistes, et par Mamadou Faye focalisé sur le roman *Madame Bâ* d'Erik Orsenna.

Le dernier volet s'intéresse aux *Représentations littéraires* et aux *Questions de poétique*. Les problématiques sont assez variées : Analyse Kimpolo livre une étude sur la manière dont Sony Labou-Tansi et Mutt Lon s'appuient sur la satire et la dérision pour souligner la violence des régimes politiques postindépendance tandis qu'Abou-Bakar Ma-

mah observe l'engagement de Patrice Nganang dans la vie sociopolitique de son Cameroun natal. Anne Ouallet et Soufian Al Karjousli examinent l'influence géopolitique dans *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar, le Sage de Bandiagara* d'Amadou Hampâté Bâ, livre qui se situe à la lisière de la littérature et de la politique, grâce à la description de la figure du soufi africain. Diana Mistreanu propose une étude narratologique cognitive chez Andreï Makine. Michèle Sellès Lefranc perce l'univers mythique de Salim Bachi et Roxana Dreve celui de Le Clézio. La réécriture de *L'étranger* par Kamel Daoud fait l'objet de l'interrogation d'Alexandrina Mustăţea et de Mihaela Mitu ; le texte de Daoud propose un renversement de perspective qui joue sur le particulier et l'archétypal. En dernier, Rodrigue Homero Saturnin Barbe exa-

mine le théâtre populaire postcolonial en tant qu'art d'intervention et met l'emphase sur son pouvoir de créer un dialogue autour des problèmes les plus pressants de l'Afrique.

Cet ouvrage, qui réunit les Actes du colloque de Cluj-Napoca de 2017, réalisé sous la direction des professeurs Simona Jişa, Buata B. Malela et Sergiu Mişcoiu, met à la disposition des lecteurs et des chercheurs une manière actualisée de percevoir le rapport complexe entre littérature et politique, démontrant que la littérature africaine ne peut pas être dissociée de sa valence politique. Sans viser une totalité de prise en charge des aspects qui montrent comment l'histoire africaine conflictuelle se reflète dans le milieu littéraire, le volume ouvre aussi des pistes pour des recherches ultérieures.

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