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# Two Postmodern Perspectives on the Rosenberg Case

**Gönül Bakay**

**Abstract:** The examination of two books about the trial of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for espionage gives one the opportunity to look at the same historic event from the perspective of two postmodern authors: E. L. Doctorow and Robert Coover. I argue that Doctorow provides a more conventional narrative rendering of a historical event in order to criticize U.S. American cold war policy, whereas Coover adapts the historical trial of the Rosenbergs for the purpose of exposing and parodying U.S. politics. In my reading of the two books I will employ insights offered by new historicism and cultural materialism in order to offer a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the novels.

**Keywords:** postmodern literature, metafiction, Robert Coover, E. L.Doctorow, Rosenberg Trial

> The final existential condition is citizenship. Every man is the enemy of his own country. EVERY MAN IS THE ENEMY OF HIS OWN COUNTRY. Every country is the enemy of its own citizens.
> (*The Book of Daniel* 90)

What makes a book popular? What are the factors that help the book stay interesting for readers for an extended period of time? The examination of two books about the trial of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for espionage gives one the opportunity to look at the same historic event from the perspective of two postmodern authors: E. L. Doctorow and Robert Coover. I argue that Doctorow provides a more conventional narrative rendering of a historical event in order to criticize American cold war policy, whereas Coover adapts the historical trial of the Rosenbergs for the purpose of exposing and parodying U.S. politics. In my reading of the two books I will employ insights offered by new historicism and cultural materialism in order to offer a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the novels.

New historicists claim that history is represented and recorded in written documents and that the events and attitudes of the past now exist solely as writing. Inspired by the groundbreaking theories of Foucault, they also draw attention to the repressive power of the "panoptic" (all-seeing) State which maintains its power not only through physical force and intimidation but also through a number of "discursive practices". Contesting the mental set and ideology endorsed by the State and imposed on its citizens therefore extends to the personal sphere which becomes a possible sphere of political action (Barry 175-76). In this respect, I argue that both *The Book of Daniel* and *The Public Burning* foreground the historicity of the text and textuality of history and offer the reader alternative ways of looking at the Rosenberg Trial. In doing so, Doctorow and Coover also challenge and subvert mainstream historiography legitimized by the State.

According to Raymond A. Mazurek, Coover's novel *The Public Burning*

> is one in a wave of new historical novels, most of which appeared in [the] 1970s, which aimed to challenge the empirical concepts of history, and to conceive of history instead as a kind of discourse. Extending the metafictional critique of the realistic novel, novels like *The Public Burning* imply not only that the realistic novel is a series of conventional signs masking as reality, but history itself depends on conventions of narrative, language and ideology in order to present an account of 'what really happened' (in Currie 194).

In other words, by consciously and constantly blurring the fine line between fiction and reality, the author brings a new dimension to historical novels, emphasizing the fact that historical narrative is a form of discourse like any other. As Mazurek further suggests: "What is new in this historical novel is its treatment of history as a form of discourse" (in Currie 195). As I have suggested earlier, it is through the subversion of the dominant historical discourse that Coover alters our perception of the events he seeks to describe. He thus questions the hegemonic (and monolithic) State's claim to absolute knowledge and power. It is only through the deconstruction of the "power" represented by the State and embodied in "written history" that our minds can be "liberated", and Coover's book can be seen as an effort in that direction.

Coover's work combines both realistic and fantastic elements. The writer manages to hold together the 534 page- long book by using different stylistic devices, elements of popular culture, major political events and well known historical figures. The book comprises 28 sections with 4 ellipses. The story focuses on the two days and nights prior to the execution of the Rosenbergs. It is significant that Coover calls the execution "dream time"; a time to face truths, legends, beliefs of the tribe, and perhaps also a reference to the "surreal quality" of the event. Coover carries the Rosenbergs' execution from the Sing Sing prison to Times Square and by this fusion of fact and fiction creates a historical novel that is open to a plurality of interpretations.

It is important to note that Coover's treatment of the Rosenbergs is not very sympathetic. The author tries to prevent the reader's identification with these characters because his emphasis is on the American people and not the Rosenbergs. That is why, the Rosenbergs' presence in the novel is limited only to some letters from the Sing Sing prison and Ethel's appeals for pardon.

Apart from this socio-political context, *The Public Burning* can be seen as an attempt to study human nature in action, especially in times of crisis and under demanding conditions. As McCaffery maintains, Coover ultimately sees man as a fiction maker (25-6). Yet, at the same time, man tries to establish the view that the systems he creates in order to comprehend life have an independent existence of their own, based on factual reality. Consequently one always feels the tension in Coover's work between man's desire to believe in a coherent world based on a comprehensible factual system and the fictionalized nature of these systems.

About the formation of the *The Public Burning* Coover maintains, "[t]he book began as a play; but then I thought it was awkward in that form; so […] I played with the idea as fiction" (in Evenson 103). Coover was disappointed about the American public's willingness to forget the Rosenberg case and the events that led to it. By writing this book, he aims to bring the events described in it back into public consciousness. For the author, the Rosenberg case was a "watershed event in American history, and we'd all repressed it. So it occurred to me then to restage it – with special added attractions- in, Times Square where we could all have another look at it" (in Evenson 103). It is significant that public burning can be viewed as a symbolic purification of the social body from its impurities. As

Dainotto notes, "what proves interesting fom a narrative point of view is that Coover makes disaster,apocalypse, and holocaust part of the materials of fictions 'of the times'- which he calls 'self -reflexive fictions'"(5).

In order to have a better understanding of the novel, it is important to situate the plot within a wider socio-historical context. The McCarthy era was pervaded by the fear of Communism and devotion to Democracy. McCarthy was a Republican, a U.S. senator from Wisconsin, who had served in the Senate between the years 1947-1957. His era was marked with a pervading sense of anticommunism and the persecution of left-wing sympathizers coming from various realms of society. McCarthy and his followers claimed that there were a large number of communists and Soviet spies all around the country and that they were active in many institutions including the federal government. These so-called communists, many of whom were presented as "enemies of the state", were perceived as posing an immediate danger to the national integrity of the United States. Thus, gradually witch-hunting became a regular exercise for governmental agencies that treated left-wing and liberal sympathizers as scapegoats for all that was wrong in the country at the time.

All in all, the McCarthy era was pervaded by a terrible fright of communism. To understand what communism meant for Americans at the time, one should consider a number of interrelated factors. First there was the regime of the Soviet Union that was emerging as a superpower in the 1950s and 60s. Focusing on the Soviet example, a vast majority of Americans regarded communism as a regime which allowed no freedom to the individual and which was characterized with the lack of material progress. Maltby accurately explains the widespread perception of communism saying that "communist states have in terms of technological and economic performance, always lagged behind America" (107). In this sense, America is considered as a representative of material progress, communism as the antithesis of progress: "the truth about the Phantom was that, he was a reactionary trying to derail the train of progress" (Coover 79).

Articulated along these lines, communism was also regarded as a threat to American solidarity. Everyone could be labeled a communist. President McCarthy himself blamed anyone who did not think like him as a "card – carrying" communist. The terrible fright of communism and espionage by Soviet agents was called the Red Scare. During this era thousands of Americans were accused of being communists or communist sympathesizers. Black lists circulated in the film industry, over 300 writers and directors were denied work. In a speech made on the 9$^{th}$ of February 1950, McCarthy went as far as to claim that there was a list of 205 people known as members of the communist party still working in the state department.

Ultimately, many intellectuals were caught up in this highly tense socio-political climate. Writers including Freedman, Raymond Mazurek, and Arthur Miller who wrote *The Crucibles* comparing the Salem witch trials with the hunt of the communists, criticized the repressive policies of the State. However, McCarthy also had his supporters and the importance of the press in the rise of McCarthy to prominance should not be ignored. It was Billy Wilkerson who published the black list in 1947 thus, destroying the lives of left-wing sympathizers. Lilian Hellman, Paul Robeson, Arthu Miller, Charlie Chaplin, Elia Kazan, Leonard Bernstein were among the names mentioned in the black list. Coover casts an ironic glance over this attitude and one might be tempted to suggest that he is interested in the historians' desire to put everything in a pattern and to create relationships where none exist. The author believes that the Rosenberg case was a mythical event that united the nation on the basis of bloodshed and spiritual cleansing. He describes the aim of the novel in the following words: "It is the story of June 19, 1953. On that day, the Rosenbergs are burned in Times Square and all the members of the tribe are drawn to the scene. All that has

happened happens there, in a way, everything is condensed into one big circus event". Adding, "[o]riginally, it was the circus aspect that interested me most. Then I developed the idea of having the vice president become the first person narrator" (in Evenson 154).

In the light of these observations, it could be stated that Nixon's self- revelations may well be Coover's major fictional achievement as they throw new light on our perception of this historical figure as well as the political era that was significantly shaped by his interventions. The "circus" aspect of the events is also worthy of note, since it illustrates how the case of the Rosenbergs was elaborately "reinvented" by agencies of the state to divert, shape, and control public opinion in order to bring it into accordance with their aims. About Coover's depiction of Nixon, William H. Gass observes, "Coover's Richard Nixon is a rich and beautifully rendered fictional character. The real Richard Nixon is a caricature. This is one of the profound ironies of Coover's achievement" (in Evenson 117). In a similar vein, Evenson observes that the book "paints Nixon in a surprisingly sympatetic light, a victim of his own shortcomings and greed, struggling with the Cold War paranoia to which most of the nation succumbed. Coming at the heels of Watergate the book seemed remarkably relevant to contemporary politics despite being concerned with an historical event a few decades distant" (5). On the other hand, language and stylistic devices are effectively utilized by Coover in his metafictional rendering of the Rosenberg trial. The author uses two major tools of postmodernism to criticize American politics and social conditions: parody and pastiche. On Coover's use of pastiche MacNeill points out that

> by over stimulating the reader with a pastiche of forms and incongruity of texts, Coover creates a cohesiveness that draws the reader's attention to his manipulation of language so as to control the experience–it becomes a commentary on censorship, propaganda, and the manipulation of the media. In the United States pastiche is more than an imitation of a particular masque. By utilizing a plurality of forms an author creates layers that necessarily do not lead to one another but simply coexist. (1)

The use of pastiche not only allows the writer to show the complexity of events, but it also conveys the idea that claims to a single truth and therefore a single interpretation cannot be legitimized in the face of such complexity. Historical processes are not linear and one-dimensional –as is often proposed by the formal ideology of "the State" –but they have been fundamentally shaped by the tension engendered by the interaction of centrifugal and centripetal forces. In *The Public Burning*, Coover creates fantastic characters such as Uncle Sam representing American idealism and the Phantom representing anarchy. Occasionally he also alters some historical events, such as the affair between Ethel Rosenberg and Nixon. For Coover, Uncle Sam represents American idealism, i.e. the forces and characteristics that created America and that continue to underlie its structure. Phantom not only stands for Communism, it comprehends everything that challenges the American character, its idealism and its conventions.

Generally speaking, Uncle Sam represents American power, the American world view according to which Americans see themselves as the saviors of the world. In the words of Uncle Sam himself: "the untransacted destiny of the American people is to establish a new order in human affairs, to confirm the destiny of the human race and to pull that switch and shed a new and resplendent glory upon mankind" (*The Public Burning* 496-97). Uncle Sam aslo represents capitalism as well as democracy's strengths and weaknesses (Evenson 119). He is, in brief, the personification of American attitudes. Personification of

Uncle Sam is a way to present the myths in American culture. Uncle Sam is the incarnation of the discourse of America" (Evenson 19). Uncle Sam's temporary absence brings about chaos in the community, and leads to a prevalent feeling of impending doom. It brings about the fragmentation of speech. The crowd's reaction is clearly reflected in *The Public Burning*, shouting: "Uncle Sam is dead; who can save us now?"(486). The confusion, the crowd's shouting and running about is like a scene from a film; "[i]t's all coming together, the stamping masses, the creeping socialism an exploding waxworks" (Coover 117).

Uncle Sam and the phantom are represented by the metaphors of light and darkness. When an event can not be explained, then Nixon believes it is caused by the manipulations of the phantom: "The phantom was already onto this wasn't he. Ahead of us again. What were his dialectical machinations if not the dissolutions of the natural limits of language, the conscious invention of space, a spooky artificial no-man's land between logical alternations" (136). By using these metaphors, Coover is able to create a sacrificial rite in which the whole people of America could participate. Coover revealed in an interview: "Stories tend to appear to me, not as formal ideas, but as metaphors, and these metaphors seem to demand structures of their own" (5).

Parody is the other major tool used by Coover in his novel. It is possible to suggest that the tone of Robert Coover is more bitter compared to Doctorow's. The insensitiveness of politicians in a moment of great strain is powerfully parodied. Nixon thinks he will wake up with an empty stomach on the day of execution. Instead, he wakes up with a feeling of hunger, pointing out, "I hoped that Pat grasped the fact that I was in a major crisis and was fixing corned beef. Hash for me with an egg on it. That I'd slept in my clothes on the living room sofa, should be enough of a clue. Probably not though. She could be pretty insensitive" (186). Coover also parodies the dependency of U.S. Americans on popular culture: "Several children watch the electrocution of the Rosenbergs with interest. But after the first two or three jolts, they are quickly bored and want to go home to watch Micky Mouse" (508).

Although the issue at stake is an execution, Coover describes it as a show in order to emphasize, as suggested earlier, the circus aspect of the events. For the mob, the execution is no more than a parade, a show, or a spectacle:

> The Rosenbergs suddenly have a terrific rating- overnight they've shot past every show in the country. And up in the city their executions are already being acclaimed as the biggest thing to hit Broadway since the invention of the electrical spectacular. To be sure there is not much competition this time of year, it's the off season for theater and rerun time on TV. (212)

Soon after this observation, Coover writes that "Waiting for the court to arrive, the crowds on the Mall exchange rumors, take snapshots of each other with baby Brownies, buy pop an ice cream from passing vendors, sun themselves on the grass, listen to the newscasters on their portable radios" (213). These quotations illustrate perfectly how a very serious event is becoming trivialized and popularized by mainstream consumerist culture.

The Nixon figure of *The Public Burning* is given the double personality of a sympathizer with the Rosenberg couple and their case, and of one who at the same time identifies with the American character and system. In this respect, he is presented as a torn individual with competing inclinations and allegiances. He feels close to the system of thought that labels the Rosenbergs as guilty but also tries to examine the case objectively. He is the only one, except Justice Douglas, who has doubts about their guilt.

While examining the Rosenberg case, Nixon gradually becomes intrigued with the characters of Julius and Ethel. Who are they really behind the façade they have shown to the world? Nixon finds out that in fact he has many things in common with them. He observes: "Ethel was two years younger than I was, around Don's age, Julius was younger. We all probably went to the same movies, sang the same songs, read some of the same books. We were the generation of the great Depression. Now I was the vice president of the United States of America. They were condemned to burn as traitors" (145). Moreover, Nixon cannot help comparing himself to Julius: "Julius and I. Different from me though. We were more like mirror images of each other, familiar opposites. Left-right, believer-nonbeliever, city-country, accused-accuser, maker-unmaker. Talmud fanatic at age fourteen, manifesto zealot at fifteen, he moved to the fringe while I moved to the center" (137).

The general insensitiveness of the U.S. American people is further stressed when they are shown not to understand common issues such as love, desire, fear, and justice. Because the Rosenbergs had been separated since the trial, when they eventually meet, they cover each other's faces with kisses and they cannot take their hands off each other. Nixon observes that they were going to copulate like dogs in the playground: "They called it love but it was clearly a lot more dangerous than that. Warden Denno had issued orders that henceforth they were to be handcuffed, sit at opposite ends of a seven–foot conference table, well guarded and never be allowed to touch again" (37).

Both *The Public Burning* and *The Book of Daniel* deal with the representation of historical events. How does history differ from fiction? How can we really know about what happened? Nixon in *The Public Burning* describes history as theater and as writing: "everyone in the trial was behaving like actors in a play" (486). He asks important questions pertaining to the definition, essence and intent of history:

> Strange the impact of history, the grip it has on us, yet it was nothing but words. Accidental accretions for the most part, leaving most of the history out. We have not yet begun to explore the true power of the word. I thought what if I broke the rules, played games with the evidence, manipulated language itself, made history a partisan ally? (136)

In Coover's bitter vision there is little that is positive. In the words of Nixon: "I knew I was where I'd always been : front and center on the on the stage of human history, never mind how silly or brutilizing, a victim of my own genius and God –given resources, and nowhere to go but on and on and on" (477).

Moreover, in *The Public Burning* there is the parody of Checkers. In the speech, Nixon mentions the attacks on his reputation, also attacking Stevenson and Sparkmon by asking them to disclose their financial situation before the general public. Nixon in this book represents an American ideology gone wrong; the U.S. Americans are shocked because they feel that they are losing their power in the world. On the other hand Uncle Sam declares that America is the greatest power on earth, but it has a big enemy: communism. Everyone connected with communism is an enemy and should be destroyed at all costs. The journalists also aid Uncle Sam in this construction of a black and white world. All movements connected with the Phantom (anarchy) are bad and all acts connected with Uncle Sam are good. However, this perception of the world in terms of Manichean dichotomies is reductive and ultimately misleading.

There is confusion and chaos in the world and actually the artist chooses various events and incidents to portray a coherent set of events. Coover's effort to create a plausible

historical narrative out of the confusion of events parallels Nixon's effort to understand and solve the Rosenberg case in his own way. The Nixon parts in the novel are written in the form of a traditional first person narrative. Nixon is the man who is simultaneously identified with American idealism and with the Rosenberg case. The Rosenbergs represent for Nixon a part of himself he could not openly acknowledge; he is passionate, warm, and idealist. In this respect, the conflicts within the novel do not only take place outside the White House, but also within Nixon himself. Coover asks, how can Nixon talk about what is happening? What is truth? What he strongly criticizes is the representation of history by the media. Thus, he criticizes the orderly and the reasonable life presented by The Times. On the other hand, the author also criticizes the power mechanisms and the existing political system as a whole. If you want to achieve something or arrive at a certain position, then you must completely believe in the system. In other words, you must surrender yourself to the hegemonic power of the State. Similar to Winston in Orwell's 1984 who says "Big brother I love you", Nixon cries in the end "I, I love you Uncle Sam" (534).

A major issue that Coover examines, then, is the abuse of power. In order for the systems created by man to be successful and sustainable, one is held to believe in them completely and to destroy anything that may bring doubt to their efficacy. In fact, for the continuation of a system to exist, the sacrifice of individual lives may sometimes be necessary, as in the case of the Rosenbergs. The book examines the struggle for supremacy between Uncle Sam (American policy) and The Phantom (communism and all threats to American supremacy). Despite American supremacy in the mid1940s, early in the 1950s the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb, Mao Tse-Tung had exiled Chiang Kai-shek in Formosa, all of which had caused a recession in America. Neither NATO, nor the Truman doctrine, or the Marshall plan could prevent these events. Consequently, it was necessary for the "system" to find scapegoats for these setbacks suffered by the United Sta~~a~~tes. Coover believes the Rosenbergs served this function. In his eyes, F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover, in order to draw the attention of the public to the enemy within, had created a fictional communist spy group that could be blamed for all threats to the system.

Uncle Sam defends himself saying: "He says that death and destruction are part of the game. Power is the most important thing in the world, nations are fighting for it, individuals are fighting for it". He also declares "Remember, you shall have joy, or you shall have power. But you can't have both with the same hand" (330). In these words, Uncle Sam draws the reader's attention to the issue of "Realpolitik" and offers a rather realistic yet bleak vision concerning the state of things. His conclusion is that in this dystopian present, power leads to corruption and insensitivity. The search for power and the ambition to keep it, also eliminates the possibility of feeling joy.

*The Book of Daniel*, Doctorow's 1971 adaptation of the Rosenberg espionage affair, crosses the blurred boundary between history and fiction and aims to comment on the irrationalities of the cold war. On the other hand, Doctorow also draws attention to the process of creativity and production. Daniel, the narrator of the book, sees important parallels between the biblical Daniel and himself. Through Daniel, the prophet, the novel attempts to transcend historical limitations and reaches out to a higher moral authority. In the words of Girardin:

> Daniel's narrative reshapes the past making central what had previously been marginalized by the dominant historical discourse. The novel is hard to categorize for it draws on many traditions such as the Bildungsroman, the historical novel or the essay as it is supposedly Daniel's PhD dissertation and it springs backward and forward in time from the fifties to the sixties (1).

In the book, the names of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were convicted and executed by electrocution as spies in the early 1950s, are changed to Paul and Rochelle Isaacson. The voice of the book and the central yet at times disintegrating consciousness of the tale is the impassioned graduate student Daniel, Paul Isaacson's son. Described by one critic as "rowdy, nervous, intimate, bizarre" (Fowler 37), Daniel's voice reflects the spirit of the times he lives in. Thus, through the portrayal of the narrator and his interactions with people, the novel also evokes a rather vivid picture of the 1960s Vietnam generation characterized by dissent and upheaval. It is significant that Daniel calls into question the totalizing ideology of the fifties in America. His narrative exposes the inherent flaws of this period and ultimately shows that truth is always partial. All in all, *The Book of Daniel* reads like a political tract as much as a record of deeply subjective experience. It is significant to note that Daniel lives in a constantly degrading relationship to the society that has destroyed his mother and father, and as a historian, he makes a collage from fragments of his family life and the materials of "objective" history.

Daniel's narration is undercut by frequent digressions and switches from first person to third person points of view that accentuate the unstability of the narrator who is admittedly a deeply troubled and torn individual. In this sense, it is possible to interpret the gaps and deliberate silences in the narrative as effective stylistic devices utilized by Doctorow. According to Morris,

> [b]ecause ellipsis implies the existence of an emptiness "filled in" by the reader's verbal constructions, it is an appropriate trope for the narrator Daniel, the writer-as-orphan on a quest to fill the legal, parental, and moral voids left by the executions of his parents, in order to recover the truth as signifying presence. The Isaacsons' crime involved fraudulent manipulation of documents; in his narrative Daniel repeats the crime. (1991, 83)

By fusing his personal history with "objective" history, Daniel aims to exorcise the historical demons that have been haunting him ever, since the trial and execution of his parents. In this sense, the act of writing is therapautic for him and his effort to create a whole of his fragmented experiences possibly enables him to survive unlike his sister Susan. In real life, although the sons of the Rosenbergs were not maimed as much from the experience of their parents as Daniel, both devoted their lives to clearing the name of their parents.

The Isaacson couple must certainly have played an important role in the formation of their children's character and worldview; for instance, Paul tries to educate his son against the injustices in the American system. Daniel talks about his father and observes: "He told me about the depression, which came like a blight over capitalist America at the very same time Socialist Russia was feeding everyone of her citizens and providing each of them a fair share of the country's wealth" (35). Although Paul Isaacson is deeply committed to the ideals, principles and purposes endorsed by the American system, he is outraged to see that the people of America are betraying the very foundations on which the country is based. Daniel states that his father continued to be astonished and offended that Americans were not more free and more devoted to the ideals they espouse. Perhaps, Paul Isaacson's unflinching faith in America and what it stands for, partly explains why he refuses to believe, until the last moment, that innocent people cannot be put to death in this country. Doctorow draws attention to the fact that no one can ever be sure of obtaining justice based on concrete evidence. Paul asks: "And the same people who have put me in

here are trying me. What can I expect of a trial conducted by the same people who have tried me and put me in their jail. The wish to get out. It is a terror that makes rigid the muscles in your arms" (229).

By now, Paul has come to accept the futility of trying to defend his wife and himself since their "crime" has already been decided upon by the socio-political climate of the times. He is also aware of the fact that he and his wife are caught in a vicious circle, and that there will be no way out unless they do to others what their so-called friend Mindy has done to them, namely, they can only save themselves by confessing and giving the names of various other "accomplices" in their so-called espionage venture. Yet, given their high level of self-esteem and passion for their cause, they stay adamant in their decision to stay silent which eventually costs them their life. It is significant to note that Rochelle is stronger in character and more realistic than her husband. She questions the allegedly authentic value of evidence and knows that it can easily be manipulated. She points out:

> We are charged not with committing espionage, but with conspiring to commit espionage. Since espionage itself does not have to be proved, no evidence is required that we have done anything. All that is required is evidence that we intended to do something. And what is this evidence. Coincidentally, enough, under the law, the testimony of our so-called accomplice is considered evidence. Am I a fool that I can't see what this means? (232)

As these words indicate, Rochelle can easily see that once they put their friend Mindish on the stand, everything that he utters will be considered as evidence. However, she is also realistic enough to understand that their chances of being released are wearing thin,

> If by some strange and unforeseen mercy we were to be released, found not guilty, and released, our lives would have to begin again and I don't know if that is possible. Our children are different children. I no longer know what they look like. I no longer remember what it is to lie next to my husband. Our trial brings out in me a self- knowledge that I might never had to suffer. I am made of stone. (246)

As Jonathan Freedland, author of "Bring Home the Revolution" in 1998 and writes regularly to Jewish chronicle, remarks in his introduction to the *The Book of Daniel*, Doctorow's book allows the author to ventilate a view of America that is not very common in the country's literature: "[It is] an unabashed socialist critique which depicts the nation's most treasured myths – of liberty, of endless possibility, –as mere deceptions– designed to keep those with wealth in power, and those without in their place" (x). Freedland, who examines in his works the themes of identity and belonging, further maintains that "the characters are human beings, never spokesman. There are no ciphers here. On the contrary, the Isaacsons are not only principled, they can be bully-headed, naïve and fanatical too. Rochelle is more worldly than her husband, but her convictions can make her seem icy, a woman able to leave her children motherless, for the sake of taking a stand" (xi). In this respect, political fanaticism is portrayed in the book as dehumanizing and self-destructive. Even after Paul and Rochelle realize that they have been deserted by their comrades, they do not revise their decision to go all the way until the very end, whatever it takes. Once they are imprisoned, Paul realizes that they are completely alone: "O Rochelle, o my darling! Do you know that there is no one behind us? I have checked, not a face we know.

Neither Frieda, nor Ruth, Nor anyone from the Concourse Jefferson Club. We are completely alone" (229).

Although several critics have noted that the novel is unabashedly leftist, it is important to remember that neither the politics nor the sympathizers of the left escape the satirical eye of Daniel. Unlike his parents and his sister Isabel, Daniel harbors no illusions pertaining to the "new left" movements of his day, and his view of them is decidedly ironic. Daniel observes, "I know that within twenty- four hours of my father's arrest both he and my mother were written out of the Party. They were erased from the records. The Party did not want to be associated with anyone up on an espionage rap. Quickly and quietly, erased out of existence" (151). Daniel's revelations show that individual lives can be sacrificed in the name of the greater good of the Party. His bitterness in the face of such reality also discloses his general attitude of political scepticism, which remains constant throughout the novel. Although Daniel may be blatantly critical of the official policies of the United States, he does not fall into the trap of blindly romanticizing the policies of the Left.

Doctorow draws attention to the actual creative process of history. At the start of the book, "Daniel Isaacson is writing his history dissertation at Colombia University and we shall be watching him watching himself as he progresses" (11). Doctorow approaches the bitter tone of Coover in certain scenes, such as in the one in which he describes his parents' feeling of self importance as radicals. Another important scene is the arrest of the father by the Federal Bureau of investigation. Daniel observes in this scene: "Please alert to the scene" (67). "The American Left is in this great moment artfully reduced to the shabby conspiracies of a couple named Paul and Rochelle Isaacson" ( Bloom 16).

On another level, Doctorow elaborates on Jewish identity in order to enable Daniel, and also the reader, to understand and evaluate what has happened to the Rosenbergs. Daniel reveals: "they are guilty of being losers, guilty of being poor Jews, guilty of not being smart enough or powerful enough to escape or transcend the limitations of their environment, guilty of being used and of using others" (Bloom 17). Moreover, in his attempts to tell the story of the marriage between two cultures, Doctorow presents us with various characters both American and Jewish. Thus, he elaborates on this issue by presenting us Robert and Lisa Levin, Daniel's adoptive parents, and other Jewish characters like Mindish, the lawyer Jacob Ascher, a heartless aunt, and the Isaacsons, or their friend Ben Cohen who is fearless; ready to help them in moments of crisis without thinking of himself.

In final analysis, Doctorow questions political power and how it is enforced on people. Paul thinks about the trial and discloses:

> Law, in whatever name, protects privilege. I speak of the law of any state that has not achieved socialism. The sole authority of the law is in its capacity to enforce itself. The capacity expresses itself in trial. There could be no law without trial- you can't try someone unless you assume the power to punish him. All the corruption and hypocritical self- service of the law is brought to the point of the point in the verdict of the court. (224)

Rochelle, on the other hand, identifies herself with the martyrs in history and tries to find a valid reason for their death. Maybe, then one could accept death more easily. To think that you are dying for nothing would make everything seem meaningless, and therefore make death more difficult to accept. Is objectivity ultimately possible? Representing the same action from several points of view, enables Doctorow to achieve a more objective view. It is the narrow, single vision which ultimately condemns the Rosenbergs to death.

Finally, it is possible to suggest that both books provide in depth analyses and criticism of contemporary American policy, by providing-remarkably-vivid and challenging fictional renderings of actual historical events at the time. In the words of Debusschen "Coover invents outrageous situations for actual figures in order to portray hysteria of Cold War era, Doctorow creates his own characters and immerses them in history to suggest something larger about American radicalism in twentieth century" (182). The books examined in this article may also be read as texts that seek to call into question the monolithic structure of the State and its often repressive and brutal power structure. Perhaps, both *The Book of Daniel* and *The Public Burning* have remained popular precisely because their strong criticism of the American–power structure and its abuses are still topical subjects even today. In the globalised world of the twenty-first century, power may have become more diffused, but it still rests in the hands of privileged minorities. Art, in this context, continues to provide an important instrument by means of which repressive structures of power can be challenged and subverted. Viewed from within this perspective, liberating discourses embedded in literature play a significant role for the creation of a more just, humane and egalitarian society.

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**Özet**

**Rosenberg Davası Üzerine İki Postmodern Yaklaşım**

Ethel ve Julius Rosenberg'in casusluk suçuyla yargılandıkları süreci konu edinen iki kitap aynı tarihsel olaya iki postmodern yazarın, E.L. Doctorow ve Robert Coover'ın, gözüyle bakma fırsatını verir. Benim görüşüm Doctorow'un Amerikan soğuk savaş siyasetini eleştiren daha gelenekçi bir metin sunduğudur. Coover ise romanında Rosenberglerin yargılanma süreci üzerinden Amerikan politikalarını açığa vurmayı ve parodi etmeyi amaç edinmiştir. Bu makalede, adı geçen kitapları daha iyi anlayabilmemiz için yeni tarihçilik ve kültürel materyalizmin görüşlerinden faydalanacağım.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** postmodern edebiyat, üstkurmaca, Robert Coover, E. L.Doctorow, Rosenberg Trial

**Post-Holocaust Interactions: Means of Defamiliarising Reality in Raymond Federman's *The Voice in the Closet***

**Catalina Botez**

**Abstract:** In this article I explore Raymond Federman's Post-Holocaust narrative *The Voice in the Closet* from the perspective of Viktor Shkovsky's formalist theory of "defamiliarization of reality". I argue that the dissolution of language and syntax, along with structural disorder and issues of perspective, such as blended, almost undistinguishable narrative voices, contribute to deconstruct the trauma of survivorship and work towards comprehension and healing. These extreme formal strategies challenge the reader to actively participate in an innovative, albeit controversial type of literariness, which uses paradox, absurdity, repetition and specific symbolism as further means to defamiliarise and re-order events. Additionally, I contend that the metatextual approach involved in the process of fictionalising lived experience, fuels the debate related to the abstractisation of memory and to the legitimacy of rewriting memory into autobiographic fiction. I also maintain that the interaction of the child survivor's narrative voice with that of the adult narrator's autobiographic ruminations speaks for the post-traumatic splitting of the self, which also functions as a de-habituation of the reader from mainstream perceptions of survivorship.

**Keywords:** defamiliarisation of reality, Holocaust trauma, child-survivor, deconstruction and metatextuality, postmodern fiction, narrative dialogism

> The technique of art is to make things "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty of length and perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged
> (Victor Shklovsky, *Art as Technique* 20)

## Introduction

Formally challenging and exceedingly eloquent, Raymond Federman's postmodern prose *The Voice in the Closet* (1979) engages in a revision of the concept of literariness, by tackling the heavily traumatic issue of the Holocaust in a highly unconventional manner. Though condensed to twenty unnumbered pages, this work raises important controversial questions that strike to the roots of literature, history and psychology, enabling two voices, that of an unnamed child survivor of the Holocaust, on the one hand, and of his mature alter-ego, on the other, to enter a controversial dialogue on the nature and representability of traumatic Holocaust memory.

The narrative's ostentatious looseness of form and typos, further emphasised by frequent metatextual references and disconcerting repetitions, as well as by the conflicting dialogism of the (quasi)authorial voices convey an overall image of chaos that is bound to confuse the reader, yet keeps his/her attention alert. In dealing with this complex case of literary deconstructivism, I propose using Viktor Shklovsky's technique of "defamiliarization" of reality (Russian *ostraneniye*) to open a path of understanding and enable an interpretation of the intricate messages encrypted in the textual discourse. In

Shklovsky's view of literature, primarily expressed in his *Art as Technique* (1917), and later taken over by the Russian Formalist movement, a work of art should avoid the inertia of thinking and the so-called "habituation" of the mind acquired through repeated learning. Such a requisite involves a deliberate violation of form, which Federman pushes to extremes here. In so doing, the work of art undergoes a process of estrangement from the reader, therefore requiring maximum awareness and involvement in comprehending the intended or acquired meaning.

Shklovsky's technique brings light to Federman's text, where intentional confusion, the employment of the paradox and the absurd, as well as the deliberate avoidance of factual descriptions of horrifying personal experience serve as conspicuous attempts at defamiliarising reality. These writing strategies reflect on the difficulty of language to evoke the crisis of reason and understanding, both pointing to the daunting task in Federman's prose: that of writing about the very impossibility to write.

**Violation of Form as Main Device Involved in the Technique of "Defamiliarization"**

> Unless we constantly question what passes for reality, challenge it, defy it, we will always exist in falseness, in a system of twisted facts and glorified illusions, and we quickly become lobotomized by it. (Raymond Federman interviewed in "From Fiction to Hypertext", online)

Paradoxically conceived on norms of extreme formal looseness, yet significantly dense in meaning, Raymond Federman's *The Voice in the Closet* challenges the traditional aesthetic categories – the writer, the work of art, the reader – while trying to establish a new order based on the liberation of all constraints of time, space, conventional reality and standardised forms of writing. This results in perplexing chaos created by an avalanche of incoherent words and mixed voices, which invests the reader with a tremendous freedom of interpretation, while pointing to the confusion between fiction and reality, and mainly the illogicalness of history and the Holocaust.

There is, nevertheless, a close relationship between the structural looseness of the text (the frantic flow of language, the typographical experimentation–the lack of punctuation and of page numbers, the extra-textual motifs) and the traumatic events of the narrator's youth, which are constantly alluded to, yet always evaded and circled, through a process of narrative erasure and constant escapism. What the narrator tries to avoid and, yet, come back to, is in fact a reality on which the whole story is built, as Federman himself confesses in an interview:

> Obviously the central image in *The Voice in the Closet,* for example, comes from a real, a very visual image or snapshot—the image of the boy in that closet crouching to take a shit on a newspaper. That's the snapshot around which the entire book is constructed. Of course, I have to *imagine* (or invent) what is in that box, in that closet—the clothes, the box of sugar, the empty skins, the hats—and beyond that the fear, the apprehension, etc. [...] once I have the snapshot, it's simply a matter of looking at it as though I were looking at a painting and deciphering its meaning, its symbolism. (McCaffery 130)

The autobiographical detail hidden behind the closet snapshot is the child's tragic (albeit indirect) experience of the Holocaust: he survived by being locked up in a closet for safety by his mother, while his entire family (both parents and his two sisters) were

deported by train and killed in concentration camps. This essential information is, nevertheless, scattered throughout the text; it is only through a careful effort of reconstruction that the reader can rebuild the puzzle-like story of the "childman," as the narrator calls the two–only barely distinctive– narrative voices in the novel.

The survival episode is set during World War II in France, back in 1942, yet the prose does not provide this information, nor any coherent epical thread. It is only on page four that we find out that his mother, father and sisters have been victims of the "final solution" and later on that "trains are rolling in the night" (6). The death of his family is never mentioned directly, but through the use of metaphor and other indirect means: e.g. "soldiers burnt all the stars in the furnace" (7). The "atrocity in the furnace" (16) is ironically referred to as a "necessary alchemical fire" (16), whereas the boy's miraculous survival is acknowledged with guilty acceptance: "my survival a mistake" (70). Fairly striking is also the ironic reference to the now notorious attitude of indifference of the world towards the genocide, as summed up with compliance in "let it burn" (16).

Yet the voice of the child describing his experience as survivor of the Holocaust is insisted upon at great length. His feelings of loss and despair while locked up in the closet are emphasised through the subtle interplay of presence and absence in the novel, while the absurd nature of history is suggested by the confusing mixture of the two narrative voices who compete for dominance: that of the child who displays in dislocated sequences of language the fear of entrapment and the unknown, on the one hand, and that of the adult survivor (i.e. the child's mature self) facing the more abstract concern of not being able to write about the same experience, on the other. The result is a duo of contrapuntal voices who verbalise their experience; it is, nevertheless, hard to attribute the stream of phrases to either of the voices in the absence of punctuation or any authorial indications. Therefore, in the absence of a coherent plot, story, and characters, or any clearly distinctive narrative voices, the text resembles a jazz improvisation and a somehow unfinished, sketch-like piece of work. "What is interesting is not the story itself, but *how I tell you that story*", contends the author, who programmatically asserts his interest in rethinking form, rather than content (McCaffery 134). Because, he claims, form is the element that captures attention and makes the story believable in the first place:

> It's the only reason you want to listen to me, or read my books. Not because of the story per se but because of the way I'm going to tell you what happened to me. In a way you are more interested in the lies, the exaggerations, the disguise I'm going to use to tell you my story and which are going to make you believe in the truth of my lie. (McCaffery 134)

Federman's emphasis on form, on the author's power to reinvent new worlds and make them credible through a certain use of language, constitutes his belief, explicitly promoted in his critical studies: *Surfiction. Fiction Now and Tomorrow* (1975) and *Journey to Chaos. Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction* (1965), as well as in his articles and interviews. Inventing new worlds, paper worlds, that distrust the notion of conventional reality by offering a more authentic version of it is every author's literary mission: "Part of my work is to keep pushing that screen of illusions as far away as I can, to remind the reader or viewer that words or paint do not necessarily represent reality, but are realities themselves", says the author, pointing out the liberating nature of literature and its attempt at offering new viable alternatives to the existent world (McCaffery 142).

By aiming to reinvent a new fictional world within a closet, Raymond Federman intends to throw doubt on what we normally deem as *reality*, by questioning its validity and

logic. In so doing, he actually applies just 60 years later, the literary technique which Victor Shklovsky and the Russian Formalists dubbed "defamiliarization" of reality. In *The Art as Technique*, the literary theoretician from Petersburg points out that art is about unsettling the reader through an unusual treatment of the familiar aspects of reality, to such an extent that they become unrecognisable. This way, the artist revitalises the readers' awareness of and attention to literature, by neutralising the so-called "habituation" or "algebrization" of the readers' perception. It is then all up to the writers' skills to devise special techniques of arresting the attention we pay to the work of art. By obtruding syntax and intentionally displacing the constituents of the phrase, by using meaningful gaps and inserting metatextual references in the body of the text (for instance here, both voices negotiate how to begin the novel), Federman implicitly reasserts the Shklovskian principles. Any excerpts from his text picked up at random will testify to that:

> [n]o delays no more false starts yesterday a rock flew through the windowpane voices and all I see him from the corner of my eye no more playing dumb boys in the street laughing up and down the pages en fourire goofing my life it's a sign almost hit him in the face scared the hell out of him as he waits for me to unfold upstairs perhaps the signal of departure. (1)

This radical literary innovation is meant to liberate the text from the conventional constrictions of form and structure. Yet the reader may find himself at a loss when attempting to reconstruct a feasible textual meaning. His task is intentionally made "difficult" due to the author's *tactical*, i.e. premeditated, efforts of obliterating meaning. This strategy is reiterated by George Steiner in his theoretical article "On Difficulty" from 1978, where he classifies the difficulties in dealing with poetry into four categories: *contingent*, *modal*, *tactical* and *ontological*. By *tactical difficulties*, which also apply to prose, Steiner refers to the author's intention to avoid the linguistic clichés by renewing the literary language in any way he considers appropriate. Federman himself is an innovator in this regard. His radical perspective on the literary language, his renunciation of punctuation and his use of self-made/foreign words (*typographobia, selectricstud, selectrified eye, tioli, foutaise, en fourire, on alto, moinous, in absentia*) mixed with common words, obstruct a rapid and easy understanding of his text. Making sense of his prose is a gradual and strenuous process, rewarding only in the sense that the reader contents himself/herself with provisional understanding.

"Defamiliarization" in the Shklovskian sense could also be understood as a step aside from current reality, as a kind of distance or "farness" created between the reader and the real world, which liberates one from acquired automatism and enables him/her to grasp the seemingly estranging meaning of postmodern fiction. Accordingly, Federman's work excels in rendering strangeness by introducing the reader to a non-temporal, non-spatial "unreality scratched from words" (3), opposed as it is to realist fiction. In trying to disclose the imposture of realism, Federman legitimises the game, the experiment of storylessness, and favours the deconstruction of language and syntax. The playful accumulation of words like "lessness to endlessness" or "reverse of farness equals inverse of nearness" are frequent and intriguing components of what Federman dubs *surreality* or *surfiction* (Federman 1975, 7). As such, fiction can no longer be reality, or a representation of reality, or an imitation, or even a recreation of reality. It can only be A REALITY–an autonomous reality whose only relation with the real world is to improve that world. To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth (8). Thus, by denying any kind of mimetic function to literature, Federman traces a clear-cut borderline

between objective reality and fiction, asserting the ability of literature to both 1) question the veracity of reality, and 2) reinstate a new world in itself.

Promoting a literature of gaps and of negotiated reality, Federman writes at the borderline between the "futility of telling" (3) and the "pell mell babble" of words (13). His technique of permanent erasure and repeated attempts at beginning to tell a story is very much coherent with the issue of the Holocaust, whose atrocity and irrationality evades human understanding. The adequacy of the structure to the general theme of the novel – namely its storylessness and its minimum representational quality – is, nevertheless, the final frontier of literature, at least as far as Federman is concerned:

> For me *The Voice in the Closet* is as far as I want to go in this direction. Many contemporary writers have wanted to go as far as we could go with this erasure, the same way the painters did when they went to the limits of abstraction. But finally writers cannot do this because they're still dealing with language–unless they decide to give you the white page. (McCaffery 150)

Out of a blank page and a full story, Federman chooses a closet and two voices and launches the ultimate challenge of literariness: the meaningful void.

**Closure, Enclosure, Disclosure as Means of Defamiliarisation of Reality**

> [t]he more we scrutinize the facts, the more carefully we study details with the view to identifying causes, the greater is the tendency for them to cease to exist, and to cease to *have existed*. Confusion over the identity of things is thus a function of our very attempts to substantiate them, to fix them in memory. This indifference of memory, this indifference to history, is proportional to our efforts to achieve historical objectivity". (Baudrillard 92)

What could the reader expect from a text that begins and ends with the same words, which apparently have no connection with each other? "here now again [...] here now again at last". At first sight, one might consider the circular construction of the novel, which ends where it starts, after having gone through certain stages and levels of understanding. It also conveys the impression of (en)closure, explicitly sustained also by the paratextual motifs (e.g. the drawn motifs that suggest entrapment and the block – like aspect of the written page alluding to the image of the closet itself). At second glance, this postmodern structural device is applicable to the entire work: the "now" may stand for the moment of writing the novel or the moment of reading it, depending on the subjectivity of perception. Additionally, the "now" could represent the temporal perspective of both the author, the narrator or the reader, all three possibilities being equally valid in a postmodern approach to this prose. An equally relative understanding is provided by the case of the word "here", which could refer either to the place where the author writes the novel (the twentieth century United States), or to the place where the child-narrator hides in his closet decades earlier in the Paris of July 1942, or even to the place where the virtual reader encounters the written narrative. Similarly, the connotations of "again", a central word in Federman's text, evade pinning down, since it brings forth various notions of repetition, evasion and procrastination intrinsic to his critical view of literature:

> I'm looking for the essential–the essential of life and of my work, of course. I'm looking, for example, to write the essential of the closet experience of my childhood [...] If indeed the process of telling "the" story is an effort on my part

> to come to terms with a situation, which I have really never understood, then I want to keep telling the story so that in the process I might stumble onto the meaning of that story–the right aggregate. So there is a deliberate system of repetition in my work, a going over the same stuff, just in case I missed something. [...] the writer begins to understand only in the process of writing. *The more you write, the more you rewrite.* (McCaffery 142-3) (emphasis mine)

As a matter of fact, rewriting has a paradoxical function in this work. On the one hand, it is a form of memory and memorialising, a repeated *a posteriori* attempt to make sense of the absurdity of history. On the other, it is a way of coming to terms with a traumatising experience: "everything happens by duplication and repetition" (1) / "of course imagining that the self must be made remade caught from some retroactive present apprehended reinstated" (3). Furthermore, rewriting presupposes the erasure of the previous information and a subsequent act of writing *over* the remains of the previous text: "but it resists and recites first the displacement of its displacements" (8). In the latter case, the result is a *palimpsest*, namely a display of layers of writing which coexist within the structure of the same text; even though some of them end up being more blurred than others, they all contribute to the final revelation: "confusion foretelling subsequent enlightenment" (20).

Moreover, Federman seems to suggest that repetition also helps shun closure and forgetfulness, by facilitating the escape from the imaginary closet or the rigidity of thinking. Reiteration thus gains a cathartic, yet paradoxical, function, that of cleansing one's identity of traumatic memories, only to reinstate them again, in a constant act of emptying and refilling one's consciousness: "never getting it straight his repetitions what really happened ways to cancel my life digressively" (5). Essentially, repetition questions the idea of final and thorough comprehension, as related to the Holocaust. Therefore, repetition and reiteration reflect the crisis of *logos* and reason when faced with genocide, since the babble of words is the most appropriate metaphor of the illogicality of history.

As to Federman's personal history, intrinsically connected to the fate of the boy in his story, he recalls:

> When the Germans came to arrest my parents and sisters in July 1942, and my mother pushed me into that closet on the landing, outside our little apartment, I was in my underwear, and I had no idea what was happening to me. I just sat in there, in the dark, and waited, for almost twenty-four hours, before I dared sneak out. I was only thirteen years old, and I didn't know what the hell it all meant. I was just there. Scared. Perhaps it was a game, but I was not lucid enough to realize that. [...] But this experience meant nothing for me for years, except that it was one of those snapshots [...] that I kept looking at and trying to make sense out of. So what I finally did is to analyze this space, this closet. (McCaffery 143-4)

"The primordial closet" (9) is an oxymoron co-opting two opposite notions: "the closet" suggestive of enclosure, limitation or entrapment, on the one hand, and "primordial", indicative of origin and birth, as well as liberation, beginning and freedom, on the other hand. As openly stated, Federman opted for double, polar symbolism in the closet imagery: "Obviously *the closet becomes a womb and a tomb – the beginning of my life, but also its end – metaphorically speaking*. It is this kind of question that the book raises" (McCaffery 144) (emphasis mine). Both spaces, the womb and the tomb, deserve a closer look, due to their recurrence and striking symbolism.

First, the image of the closet as womb is eloquently intimated throughout the narrative: "my life began in a closet" (3) / "born voiceless I wait in the dark" (6) / "in his obligation to assign a beginning to my residence here" (9) / "my beginning in this strange gestation" (9). The closet as origin, as archetypal space where a new life begins triggers the idea of *regressus ad uterum*, while subtly implying the necessity to annihilate the previous identity. To some extent, this longing for rebirth occurs due to an implicit refusal of the present traumatised destiny. Not incidentally, therefore, the metaphorical regression to the womb opens a path of interpretation for the disintegration of language in this narrative, which can be correlated, on the one hand, to the pre-verbal state of the baby who still explores the possibilities of language. On the other hand, the distorted language Federman makes use of, stands for the child's natural reaction to the shock of having his family taken away. The sudden paralysis of reason induces the paralysis of speech, which degenerates into apparent ramblings and loses its cohesive force of communication. This regression to non-language or pre-language might just as well point to something less than language, i.e. abused language. The linguistic capacities themselves are crippled by the realities of the Holocaust.

At a different level, however, the paralysis of speech also alludes to the long-lived silence of the many Jews who witnessed and survived the Holocaust, of which Federman's character is an example. As Elie Wiesel maintains in *Paroles d'étranger*, it is only by looking for silence that he had discovered the danger and power of words (1982, 7). For himself, like for many other survivors, language went through a strange and momentous mutation during his Lager experience. Consequently, it can no longer mediate and express the crisis of understanding:

> Les mots me sépare de moi m*ê*me. Ils signifient absence. Et manquent. [...] Décalage et déplacement irrévocables. [...] Nous savions tous que jamais, jamais nous ne dirions ce qu'il fallait dire, jamais nous n'exprimérions en paroles cohérentes, intelligibles, notre expérience de la folie absolue. [...] Les mots me paraissent usagés, b*ê*tes, inadéquats, [...] anémiques; je les désirais br*û*lants. Ou dénicher un vocabulaire inédit, un langage premier? Le langage de la nuit n'était pas humain [...] Plutôt que lien, il devenait mur. (Wiesel 1982, 7-8)[1]

The regression of language into silence, so often encountered in relation to the Shoah, is experienced by the child in Federman's narrative as entrapment in the closet. His emergence from the hideout and insecure steps into the dark night symbolise his rebirth from a primordial womb/matrix/ chrysalis into a post-Holocaust world, a world of language, writing and speech: "curiosity drove me down the staircase but I stumbled on the twelfth step and fell and all the doors opened dumb eyes to stare at my nakedness" (7). The nakedness stands not just for loneliness and his new orphan status, but also for his impossibility to articulate words in the aftermath of his family's death.

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[1] The words separate me from myself. They signify absence. They are missing. [...] Irrevocable transfer and displacement [...] We all know that we would never be able to say what we are supposed to say, we would never be able to express through coherent, comprehensible words our experience of the absolute madness [...] The words seemed to me overused, stupid, inadequate, anemic; I wanted them (in)flaming. Where to discover the original, the primordial language? The language of the night was not human [...] Instead of being a bond, it became a wall. (my translation)

The symbolism of the closet also relates to such geometrical configurations as the rectangle and the circle, between which there is a subtle semantic difference, as highlighted in Gilbert Durand's study *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (1969). The French anthropologist mentions Gaston Bachelard, who finely differentiates between the refuge represented by the square (an artificial refuge built by man) and the refuge represented by the circular/ovoid one (a natural refuge, i.e. mother's womb) (Durand 283). The child in *The Voice in the Closet* is trapped inside both the angular and the circular geometrical spheres, depending on whether we regard the closet as a (square) box or a(n) (ovoid) womb. Not incidentally, there is, according to Durand, an inextricable relationship between the square/rectangle and the circle, which has already been signaled by reputed thinkers like Guenon, Jung and Bachelard:

> Les figures fermées carées ou rectangulaires, font porter l'accent symbolique sur les *thèmes* de la défence de l'intégrité intérieure. L'enceinte carée est celle de la ville, c'est la forteresse, la citadelle. L'espace circulaire est plutôt celui de la jardin, du fruit, de l'oeuef ou du ventre, et déplace l'accent symbolique sur les voluptés secrètes de l'intimité. Il n'y a guère que le cercle ou la sphère qui, pour la révérie geometrique, présente un centre parfait. (283-84)[2]

Thus, Gilbert Durand argues that both the angular and circular shapes have served throughout human history as protective, defensive spaces, which supports the idea that Federman's closet was instrumental as both entrapment and protective medium for the child-survivor.

The memory of the closet and its questionable rendition in writing causes surges of anger, frustration and anguish in the child-narrator. He uses a reproachful, disdainful tone against his dialogue partner, the adult narrator, referred to as federman, "homme de plume hombre della pluma", who unreliably writes about their shared destiny. The boy feels constantly betrayed by federman's treacherous depiction of their mutual memories, whom he regards, in fact, as exclusively his own: "no the trees were cut down liar" (1) / "goofing my life" (1) / "plagiarizing my life" (2) / "gambling my life away double or nothing in your verbal delirium" (4) / "in his lies nothing he says about the past but I see it from the corner of my eye even tried to protest while the outside goes in"(4) / "lies lies"(5). Through this tirade, the boy discloses, in fact, the fictional nature of every biographical writing; his apparent ramblings are essentially the author's (Federman's) own concerns about autobiography as an unreliable, problematic genre. In spite of the tension brought about by the little boy's open conflict with his adult alter ego, they are both intrinsically and irrevocably connected by their common destiny: "full circle from his fingers into my voice and back to him on the machine" (2). The two narrative voices essentially belong to the one and the same person, which stimulates intriguing questions regarding the agency and authority of autobiography writing, claimed both by the memorialistic and fictional genres.

Yet both voices in the novel act towards neutralising each other, intentionally or not, so that, in the end, the reader has to cope with a schizophrenic identity, torn between reality and fiction. While the "homme de plume" (the adult writer) undermines the notion of

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[2] The perfectly closed square or rectangular figures turn the symbolical focus to the themes of the defence of one's inner integrity. The angular space is that of the town, the fortress, the city wall. The circular space is especially that of the garden, the fruit, the egg or the womb, and it transfers the symbolical focus onto the secret pleasures of intimacy. Only the circle and the sphere, for geometry's sake, have a perfect center. (my translation)

reality (as the little boy understands it), by defamiliarising it (namely by turning it into distorted fiction), the little boy's voice undermines the purported reality he calls fiction by frequent alterations applied to it; the ensuing discourse is a mix-up of genres, voices and realities that are almost impossible to compare or put together as a whole. The tension between the two voices, their intersection and (at times) complementarity contribute to an intentional annihilation of both lived experience and the act of narration itself. In fact, Federman's observations on Samuel Beckett's early fiction, whose declared admirer he is, summarise the core meaning of his own fiction, as well:

> this novel [*Comment c'est*, by Samuel Beckett] is not a projection of reality, but an experiment in willful artistic failure: the rejection of reality. It reveals in the course of its narration the chaos and agony of its creative movement. One can read this book as a satire on fiction–a masochistic expression of the futility of the creative act or for that matter of all human actions. (1965, 7)

Thus, the futility of the act of writing ("futility of telling" 3) is many times pointed out by the child's disparaging voice. He stands for an authentic past whom the plagiarising act of writing (Federman's writing) unsuccessfully tries to retrieve. Federman's, on the other hand, stands for "imagination plagiarized" (14) and his tools–the "veiled fingers of plagiarism" (18). The issue of the creatively furtive instinct in literature was artfully addressed by Harold Bloom in his notorious book, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). In it, he refers to the necessary misreading of previous valuable literature for the great poets to be able to create their own imaginative space. Influence is explained as positive indebtedness to the literature of the past. Yet the child's voice here is severely critical of the imitative intention on Federman's part. His attempt to bring forth the past is negatively qualified as "exaggerated second-hand tale told anew" (13), "the wordshit of his fabulation" (13), "the fiasco of his fabrication" (13), "verbal vacuum" (13), "experience told in false versions" (13), "semantic fraudulence" (11), "his flow of words that counterfeit my escape" (12), "gigantic mythocosm" (18), "unqualifiable babble" (17), "verbal mud" (18). The suggestions of fraud, lie and deficiency are very straightforward; this poses the essential question of the role of (faulty) memory and imaginative recreation as erroneous duplication of the past and its legitimacy in autobiographic fiction, which points to controversial discussions regarding the role of personal memory in post-Holocaust literature. Does memory play the central, deciding role in the (memorialistic) literature of the Holocaust? Or does the act of writing memory actually contribute to a fictionalised outcome and a creative distortion of the original event? This conundrum is left unsolved by Federman, the stress falling on the unresolved conflict.

Furthermore, the child's voice raises questions regarding the danger of manipulated, silenced memory. There are innumerable instances in the narrative where the child indicts the narrator for intentional manipulation of the past/memory whose embodied exponent he is: he "injects into my eyes a functionless reflexivity" (12) with a "disabused attitude," (12) "the condition of my voicelessness", the "puppet child" (12) pulled to and fro by unseen strings. Yet the looseness of speech is played out as counterbalancing factor: it serves as indication that memory is free and that it cannot be trapped, tamed or structured by a normative discourse even for the sake of art. Art, however, may redeem a traumatic experience and memory, even if it sometimes fails to do so: "he would like it to be my fault if his words fail to save me" (12). Thus, language opens up the possibility of saving the survivor from himself, from his nightmarish memories, which suggests that language may have curative, healing powers.

## The Narrative Voices as Agents of Defamiliarisation of Reality

> The confusion is not my invention ... It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. It is not a mess you can make sense of. (Samuel Beckett cited in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 242)

Defamiliarisation in Federman's narrative is achieved not only through language, but also through a maintained confusion between real and fictionalised events; the two narrative voices, that of the little boy and his older self (the writer), sometimes amplify the confusion by sustaining that ambiguity, in that the reader is never entirely sure to whom exactly some sentences belong. But how did the two voices come into being? Their fictional birth is recounted by Federman:

> When I started it I thought of it as a novel where two voices would be speaking simultaneously, one of which would be the voice of the little boy in the closet, and the other the voice of the writer (in his own closet) relating the first voice. So first I put a piece of paper in the typewriter sideways–horizontally–to have more space for the two columns. On one side was what I called "the voice" and on the other "the closet." The voice was writing/ speaking a very incoherent, fragmented discourse without any punctuation, a kind of crazy syntax; on the other side of the paper the story of the closet was written in a nice, neat, coherent language. [...] I kept going like that for a while, with two separate voices, two columns, two forms of writing sort of coexisting on the paper until I realized that some of the lines in one column wanted to move across the page into the other column. So I started playing with the idea of allowing one of the voices to move into the other voice, or vice versa. And soon I had all sorts of criss-cross lines/ voices messing up the neatness of my system. [...] I was mixing the voices but still showing a difference. [...] After a while I realized that not even this distinction was necessary. (McCaffery 145)

Borrowing this experimental technique from Samuel Beckett, whose *Texts for Nothing* (1950) allowed words to speak while being written down the page, Raymond Federman thus deploys metatextuality as driving force of the narrative. The two voices that counterpoint each other create the overall effect of a self-reflexive, objective text, and simultaneously that of a highly subjective one. Yet the two voices are far from constructing a complementary dialogism; on the contrary, they are always divergent and subvert each other to the point of mutual exclusion. However, it is significant that the two voices negotiate the boundaries of fiction and reality and, at the same time, the dimension of their own individuality: the child's voice says "he cannot accept forces him to begin conditionally by another form of sequestration pretends to lock himself in the room with the if of my existence the story told in laughter but it resists and recites first the displacements of its displacements leaving me on the threshold staring dumbfounded at the statue of liberty" (8). The child challenges the reality of the closet where he was trapped and suggests that the closet imagery is the adult narrator's own creation, by that disputing in fact his own reality: if the closet was not real, that–by consequence–makes him less real, as well.

The ambiguity as defamiliarising technique works in such a manner that it is sometimes hard to attribute the words to either of the two voices in particular. From the third page onwards, it becomes slightly easier to identify the speaker, yet that is soon

followed by a progressive plunge in intelligibility: the clarity of the discourse starts to blur as the narrative draws nearer to its end. It is significant to observe that the child's voice becomes entirely coherent when the selectricstud (the adult narrator's typing machine) stops, which makes for enhanced clarity of discourse throughout pages 10 to 15. Once the typing machine starts again, both voices turn to a dissonant blur again.

Although a total separation of the two voices is almost impossible to make, one could agree that the adult writer's voice is more meditative and constantly in search of the ultimate form of translating experience into fiction. He adds a metatextual dimension to his discourse: "but this time is going to be serious [...] delays no more false starts [...] at last a beginning after so many detours [...] question of perspective" (1) / "something about the futility of telling" (2) / experimenting with the peripatetic search for love [...] question of changing one's perspective [...] the self from the inside from the point of view of its capacity its will power [...] of course imagining that the self must be made remade caught from some retroactive present apprehended reinstated I presume looking back how naive into the past my life began" (3). His concerns are those of hindsight, perspective and the responsibility toward written experience, which are in fact current matters of autobiography writing. Writing about one's own past is a sinuous undertaking that inherently involves false starts and new beginnings, doubt and a necessary distance from the object of narration: one's lived trauma.

In trying to isolate the adult narrator's voice from the so-called "moinous" (a made-up word combining the two voices, from French "moi/me" and "nous/we"), the reader needs to engage in a process of logical cleavages and filtration which remains incomplete: despite all attempts at clarity, one voice will always retain remnants of the other; they are twin-identities and can never be truly and completely separated from one another. At some point in the text, the writer's voice disappears altogether. His existence is only warranted by the little boy's voice, who protests against the process of fictionalisation of his own life:

> he calls me boris [...] but he erased that too in a stroke of impatience made me anonymous nameless choose for yourself he mutters a name among infinite possibilities I tried to protest gives us blank spaces instead while he hides inside his decomposition homme de plume hombre della pluma reverses his real name namderef between the lines in the corners federman sings his signs anticipating his vocation leaps over the precipice cancels the real story with exaggerations. (6)

Thus, the child finds namelessness abusive and indicative of his life being erased, replaced, deconstructed, and therefore defamiliarised. A similar process is imposed on his older alter ego: federman becomes namderef (his name spelt backwards), which–once fictionalised–becomes erased.

Although frequently erased and replaced, the boy's name (eventually reduced to a voice reminding of Beckett's characters: estranged voices in an absurd world) paradoxically becomes an object of choice: "choose for yourself […] a name among infinite possibilities" (6). Imposition and freedom, entrapment and liberation alternate, enhanced by the use of the conditional tense and conditional adverbs in combination with frequent leaps in time and space: "to begin conditionally by another form of sequestration pretends to lock himself in the room with the if of my existence" (8). The structure of the narrative itself exhibits an intentional ambiguity between looseness of form and the traps of (il)logicality and (mis)understanding. Yet Federman seems to feel at home in the world of paradoxes, in which liberation calls for sequestration, freedom for (en)closure, naming for erasure and the

(non)sequential for structural randomness, all of which rank high in achieving defamiliarisation.

Both the little boy's discourse and the adult narrator's, evade the logic of standard speech, being as fragmented and disintegrated as typical postmodern fiction, the author himself concedes:

> Perhaps it is the language, the looseness, the irrationality, the delirium of my language which will help them [readers], and perhaps even its vulgarity, its blasphemous aspect. In a way I think of my novels as disrupting a certain form of logic. Whether we like it or not, or even admit it, we are raised on logic, raised with a sense of rationality and coherence. I believe there is much value in making *non-sense* as there is in making sense. (McCaffery 137-38).

Challenging the pre-established norms of language and reason is what the postmodern stratagem of estranging the reader is about; through art, the writer attempts a "defamiliarization" of contingent reality by confronting the reader with the novelty of a twisted fictive world which paradoxically stimulates one's power of understanding, vigilance and adaptability to new horizons.

Bearing in mind Larry McCaffery's idea that "it's the way we deal with reality that makes it fictition" (136), one could better understand Federman's intriguing theory of narrative. For him, real-life objects (the closet, the statue of liberty, the mocking bird, the empty skins and dusty hats) are of less importance in themselves; what matters is the boy's perception of these objects and especially the way he connects to them at the verbal level, (ir)rationally or affectively. His vision may be shocking, it may distort the customary view, but it achieves an astounding outcome: it extracts the reader from preconceived mind patterns, defamiliarises habitual experience and disconcerts/re-accommodates the reader to a fresh new outlook.

Federman's idea that language has a remarkable potential to defamiliarise finds further echoes in McCaffery. The latter contends that between the external object and our mental image of the said object there always stands the verbalised object, i.e. the third dimension of experience and the most objective of them all (McCaffery 137). It is language that gives us power over reality and it is through language exclusively that we gain access to the voice of the memory, i.e. the child's voice in this case. It is therefore possible, according to Celine, to come up with a brand new version of written life after experiencing it: "one invents one's biography after the facts" (McCaffery 149). The echo of such statements finds its way into *The Voice in the Closet*: "memory is innocent always tells the truth while cheating the original experience [...] the first sound in this place when I said I to invent an origin for myself" (9) [...] admit that his fictions can no longer match the reality of my past [...] instead he invents me" (1). The child narrator finds it hard to come to terms with his fictionalised identity and therefore he rejects and distrusts it.

However, the little boy is no longer the chief actant of his fictional life, but a passive witness to his stolen, written memories: "I endure my survival from its implausible beginning to its unthinkable end" (10). This traps him in an indefinite, uncomfortable time and space, and an atmosphere permeated with insecurity and senselessness. He constantly manifests an aversion towards the written version of his life and feels threatened by the writer's repeated attempts at transposing that life into fiction, a fiction into another fiction, that is, if we were to assume Federman's literary *credo*:

> refusing that which negates itself while it creates itself [...] divided I who speaks both the truth and the lie of my condition at the same time from the corner of its mouth to enclose the enunciation and denunciation of what federman says in semantic fraudulence (11)
>
> but let us be honest even if it hurts it is some considerable time since he last knew what he was talking about in his flow of words that counterfeit my escape [...] he toys with my fears makes me a puppet-child whose strings are entangled rather than letting me be free and spontaneous to run under the gray canvas sky in search of my present-future then injects into my eyes a functionless reflexivity but no one is fooled by his disabused attitude […] I resist curious reversal of words whereby the rustle of his lies above my head lives me storyless". (12)

The little boy's intervention into the narrative discourse is always subversive, intentionally challenging the reader's trust in the adult narrator (treated as unreliable liar), although he concedes to the existence of a schizophrenic conscience he shares with his older alter ego. This conflicting attitude testifies to the disclosure technique, which defamiliarises reality by rendering it strange and unfamiliar. It is all part of the rhetoric of speaking/ writing about the impossibility to speak or write, by throwing everything into fragmented chaos and hoping it will reset into coherent order: "to admit unredeemed mess [...] logos draws maps of journey to chaos [19] [...] "infinite stories falling silently into abyss to be replaced retold [...] upstairs in his closet foutaise to speak no more my truth" (20).

The fragmentation of narrative sequences, the absence of a sewn plot, and a story left in pieces are further indication that defamiliarisation is at work here. The recurrent image of the rock flowing through the windowpane is very suggestive for the breaking of the singular narrative voice into two voices, as well as for the entire structural dissolution of the prose: "yesterday a rock flew through the windowpane voices and all" (1). In the absence of temporal sequencing, the events of July 1942 are mentioned randomly through the stream-of-consciousness technique:

> they pushed me into the closet on the third floor [...] sssh mother whispering in her tears (1) [...] soldiers calling our names (2) [...] already the boots (3) [...] as the door closes on me I'm beginning to see my shape from the past from the reverse of farness [...] my father too coughing his tuberculosis [...] and all the doors slammed shut [...] what about the yellow star on my chest (4) [...] I wait in the dark now down the staircase with their bundles moaning yellow stars to the furnace [...] I squat on the newspapers unfolded here by shame to defecate [...] I folded the paper into a neat package for the birds [...] still hoping for survival my father my mother and my sisters but already the trains are rolling in the night (7) [...] upstairs they grabbed me and locked me in a box dragged me a hundred times over the earth in metaphorical disgrace while the soldiers chased each other with stones in their hands and burnt all the stars in a furnace my survival a mistake (8) [...] crossed out my whole family parenthetically XXXX into typographical symbols (10)

Faced with such a dispersed narrative (the plot is scattered, dropped and picked up again through several pages), the reader is invited to actively recreate the chain of events. His task becomes more and more difficult as the text unfolds, not only because of the dislocated syntax and displaced words, but also because of the confusion of narrative voices, and the gaps growing larger as the text progresses:

> my beginning postponed by federman's absence
> now then
> I forever been where to   now   don't even say why   but you
> you ask   how   skip   never   before
> spoken yet what   for me   no   sleep selectricstud
> hassle stir again. (Federman 18)

Towards the end of the twentieth page, the narrative regains relative fluency, somewhat resembling the beginning, but, curiously enough, entire slots can be read comprehensibly from left to right and vice versa. As far as the narrative voice is concerned, the duplicated "moinous" runs "full circle from his fingers into my voice back to him on the machine," which would lead us to think of productive connectivity and co-work, if it weren't for the constant distrust and subversion. The cohesion is, thus, only superficial, and the fissure of the two conflicting voices is foreseeable: "roles reversed [...] I am speaking of us [...] I am speaking of me (1) [...] me inside his hands (5) [...] I fall for his crap to become a puppet believing he is me and vice versa (6) [...] two closets on the third floor [...] multiplying voices within voices to silence (7) [...] lifeless voice within a voice without a story to tell [...] two refugees alive yet afraid" (18). The split of "moinous" is surrealistically experienced as a free fall into chaos, an existential vortex and a proliferation of senseless, implausible voices that paradoxically lead to silence; factual experience doubles up (there are two closets now instead of one), and survival is multiplied by two. In the end, the two voices reunite as "moinous" or "manchild" (18), but the process of duplication can always reoccur.

The Shklovskian concept of defamiliarisation can be fruitfully applied to the narrative's rich symbolism, also. Such strong images as the excrement, masturbation, the yellow feather, the dark, the electricstud, the closet, etc. stun the reader by commanding his/her attention. The excrement is positively valued in the text, in that it is correlated to the idea of initial, infantile creation: "excrement of a beginning in the dark (7) [...] me blushing sphinx defecating the riddle of my birth (11) [...] victorious sphinx defecating his life to imagination plagiarized" (18). To illustrate the full spectrum of its symbolism, I suggest to deploy Gilbert Durand's unique association of the excrement to gold–the intimate substance resulting from the chemical digestion. Durand harks back to Jung's psychoanalytical view of the excrement as frequent imagery of infantile reveries of anal birth:

> Pour l'enfant la défécation est le modèle même de la production et l'excrément est valorisé parce que premier produit créé par l'homme. D'autre part, nous savons que pour l'enfant la sexualité n'est pas différenciée et se situe d'une manière diffuse dans les organes postérieurs du corps, se confondant très souvent avec la scatology. (Durand 302)[3]

In *The Voice in the Closet*, the symbolism of the excrement retains the connotation of creation first envisaged by Jung and Durand, but it also holds a strong relation to the

[3] For the child the defecation is the model itself of producing something and the excrement is valued as the first product of man. On the other hand, it is well-known that a child's sexuality is not thoroughly developed and is located roughly around the rear organs of the human body, being very often confused with scatology. (my translation)

distrust of re-created life, as thoroughly tackled above: "the virtual being federman [not capitalised] pretends to invent in his excremental packages of illusion a survivor who dissolves in verbal articulations unable to do what I had to do" (11) / "sometimes much wordshit provides single light" (16). The negative implication of excrement also hints at the repetitive nature of biographic fiction, which has lost the genuine character of the initial event.

Similarly, masturbation is positively connoted, as well. The symbol is frequently encountered in its negative form in *The Voice in the Closet*– "no more masturbating on the third floor" (1) – and it is viewed as an act of beautiful and innocent recreation when performed for the first time, in the absence of memory, as Federman explains:

> Somewhere in his work Proust raises a most interesting question about masturbation: the first time a child masturbates he/ she doesn't do it in order to *reenact* the sexual act, since he/ she doesn't know what the act is. It is therefore *a pure act, an act of discovery, of invention, or recreation*. Therefore there is something beautiful about this first masturbatory gesture when it is performed without any memory, without any mental images. Later the act of masturbation becomes a substitution for the sexual act itself. [...] *It is between these two acts that I'm working in my fiction*. (McCaffery 133) (emphasis mine)

By "no more masturbating on the third floor" (1), the little boy means his preference for memory and the lived event over the written recollection of that same event.

Another recurrent symbol in the novel is that of the feather, the ambivalence of which is treated separately for the two voices in the text. When referring to federman, it points to the "feather man" or, as it frequently appears in the novel, "homme de plume hombre della pluma." Both appellatives refer to the writer (in French and Spanish). Here, the feather symbolises the object/ tool which facilitates the creation of fictional worlds. The author's name spelled with a lowercase *f* fictionalises him entirely (Kutnik 211).

When it comes to the infant's voice, he is referred to as "featherless little boy," which is not only a mark of his being the speaker in the novel (not the writer), but also an indication of his winglessness, his lack of freedom and entrapment in the closet. While trapped in the closet, he has no wings to fly, no feathers to facilitate his escape. The feathers are, therefore, allusive to freedom and liberation in his case, especially when corroborated with the obsessive phrase "they cut little boy's hands" (3), and to the presence of the bird that flew into his head. The feather turns yellow sometimes, which alludes to David's star worn as a symbol of the Jewish stigma–the boy's only cover in the closet, his identity as an only remnant of his past. The feather also stands for protection, as in the sequence "featherless little boy", significant of the boy's fear and despair when no protective authority is around.

The rich symbolism of the narrative as a whole, along with the presence of the two voices, and the intriguing syntax contribute to a unique reading experience incessantly challenged by defamiliarising techniques. By presenting the reader with a stimulating narrative, full of contortions and contradictions, marked by apparent illogicality and paradoxes, the author offers a plausible interface to reality and launches an invitation to delve into an intriguing and rewarding fictional world. Essentially, Federman casts a vote of confidence upon the reader, whom he deems able not only to decipher his entangled world, but to potentially create his/her own. No less intriguing is the possibility that by refusing to manipulate the reader into passively witnessing a pre-conceived fictional world, and by creating the illusion of the reader's active freedom to reassemble the puzzle of his

work, Federman–in fact – paradoxically launches the greatest manipulation ever conceived in literature: that of skillfully inducing the reader to retrace his own thoughts.

**Conclusion**

The experience and memory of the Holocaust, often signaled by the one word Auschwitz, remains hard to grasp by human understanding. In Jean-Francois Lyotard's own words, "The <Auschwitz> model would designate an experience of language which brings speculative discourse to a halt" (364). Bearing in mind Adorno's statement–"Since Auschwitz fearing death means fearing worse than death" (365) –Lyotard discusses the philosophical notions of the finite and the infinite in relation to the event of death: "What can make death not yet the worse is its being not simply the end but only the end of the finite and the revelation of the infinite. Worse than this magical death would be irreversible death, or simply the end–including the end of the infinite" (365). Lyotard thus intuits that the tragedy of death consists in the possibility that it might bring eternal closure or never-ending entrapment inside a certain end, that it may be limitless, once it occurs. Lyotard's approach is significant to Federman's narrative in that it envisages the complexity of genocide as lived experience, often impossible to reiterate through words by the survivors themselves. Lyotard's ruminations may also be useful to assess the limits of literary interpretation, as well as the freedom granted to the reader to explore the realm of post-Holocaust fiction and the proximity of Auschwitz as sphere of death. Being the harrowing experience that it is, Auschwitz – as epitome of the Holocaust–can only be approached with caution for what might be discovered beyond it.

Federman chooses to treat the extreme event of the Holocaust with extreme literary means. As far as form is concerned, his narrative defies every conventional norm: he uses the unpunctuated text, the abuse of gaps, the chaotic mixture of two voices, fragmented language and no page numbers. Yet he manages to create a balance between the finite matter of literature–the words–and their infinite possibilities of meaning, that is their semantic latency. In doing so, he manages to disconcert the reader, to keep him awake and agile while transposing him into the world of his mind. Thus, he defamiliarises reality by fictionalising it, in the tradition of the American postmodern novel authored by such literary icons as Ronald Sukenik, William Gass, Steve Katz, John Barth and Kurt Vonnegut. Like them, Federman playfully and creatively exploits language via typography in order to renew literature: "I myself have tried to fragment language in my fiction through typography (a process which also taught me a great deal about how language functions–indeed, my interest in typography is as much an interest in exploring the way in which syntax can be distorted and manipulated as it is in the shape or design of words on the page)" (McCaffery 149). Thus, for Federman, stretching the possibilities of literary language is one way of dealing with the Holocaust.

Referring to the absurdity of the Shoah, Jean Baudrillard highlights the snowball effect at work in perpetrating genocide. Once a limit is crossed, many more become possible to take on, so that the whole phenomenon becomes driven by inertia:

> Once certain limits have been passed there is no relationship between cause and effect, merely viral relationship between one effect and the other, and the whole system is driven by inertia alone. [...] We must outpace events, which themselves long ago outpaced liberation. The reign of incoherence, anomaly and catastrophe must be acknowledged, as must the vitality of all those extreme phenomena which toy with extermination. (Baudrillard 108)

Federman offers one way to grasp this catastrophe through an experimental prose that touches on the crisis of the mind faced with the attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible. The chaotic, fragmented, apparently irrational discourse seems to be employed in an act of linguistic purge taken to paroxysm, whose final limit is the very dissipation of language. For literature and the writer, the blank page is the ultimate temptation–yet also the ultimate danger –, which Federman is well aware of. Therefore, instead of the blank page, he proposes the typed page full of gaps and struggling, repetitive words rushing by as if irreversibly attracted by a deathly vortex. Their inability to always connect adequately to the realities of the Holocaust speaks for the marginality of language in the face of genocide, for the lack of a significant centre:

> The typographical disruptions in the novel and the constant introversion of metacommentary are strategies for celebrating that marginality, means of playing on the margins by turning the center into a sort of marginalia. But *the Voice in the Closet,* with its perfectly flushed pages, suggests a more ambivalent attitude. (Caramello 141)

In the absence of a unifying centre, the alternative is multiple centers, floating around in a jazz-like improvisation of words, motifs and symbols. This alternative world that Federman lays before our eyes carries within itself its own destruction, its own criticism and usurpation. His instinct, like Beckett's, tells him that words need to die themselves in order to be reborn again as brand new stories in the dawn of literature. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, literature has to die in order to be reborn again:

> I'll close my ears, close my mouth, and be grave. And when they open again, it may be to hear a story, tell a story, in the true sense of the words, the word hear, the word tell, the word story, I have high hopes, a little story, with living creatures coming and going on a heritable earth crammed with the dead, a brief story, with night and day coming and going above, if they stretch that far, the words that remain, and I've high hopes, I give you my word. (Beckett, S*tories and Texts for Nothing* in McCaffery 151)

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## Özet

### Yahudi Soykırımı sonrası Etkileşimler: Raymond Federman'ın *The Voice in the Closet* Adlı Eserinde Gerçekliğin Yabancılaştırılmasının Yolları

Bu makalede, Raymond Federman'ın *The Voice in the Closet* adlı soykırım sonrası öyküsü Viktor Shkovsky'nin biçimci teorisi "gerçekliğe yabancılaştırma" açısından incelenmektedir. Dil ve söz dizimindeki çözülme ve yapısal düzensizliğin yanı sıra, içiçe geçmiş, neredeyse birbirinden ayrılamayan anlatıcı sesleri gibi perspektife dair meselelerin, hayatta kalma travmasını yapıbozumculuğa uğratmaya katkıda bulunduğu ve travmanın kavramasını ve iyileştirilmesini sağladığı öne sürülmektedir. Bu aşırı biçimsel stratejiler okuyucuyu yenilikçi fakat tartışmalı türde bir yazınsallığa aktif olarak katılmaya zorlar; ki bu yazınsallık, olayların yabancılaştırılması ve yeniden düzenlenmesi için paradoks, absürdlük, tekrarlar ve spesifik sembolizmden de yararlanır. Dahası, yaşanmış deneyimin kurgusallaştırılması sürecine dahil edilen üst-metinsel yaklaşımın, belleğin soyutlaştırılması ve belleğin biyografik kurguda yeniden yazımının meşrutiyeti ile ilgili tartışmaları tetiklediği öne sürülmektedir. Yahudi soykırımından kurtulmayı başarmış çocuk anlatıcının sesinin, yetişkin anlatıcının otobiyografik anlatısı ile etkileşiminin, kişinin travma sonrası bölünmesini de dile getirdiği, bunun da aynı zamanda okurun hayatta kalmaya yönelik alışılagelmiş ana akım algılarını bozma işlevi gördüğü savunulmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler**: Gerçekliğin yabancılaştırılması, Yahudi soykırımı travması, sağ kurtulan çocuk, yapı bozum ve yorumsal üst metinsellik, postmodern kurgu, düşsel anlatı diyalogları

# Theatre as Text:
# Brian Friel's *Translations* and Some Implications for Staging

**Burç İdem Dinçel**

**Abstract:** By concentrating on Friel's *Translations*, this article aims to develop an approach for the staging of the play in Turkey. Considering the premise that any given act of staging is on no account different from the act of translation, the present study puts the notion of "theatre as text" forward and argues that performance itself turns out to be a "text" to be read by the spectators during the course of the production. In tune with this premise and aim, the article takes particular heed of the discussions vis-à-vis such notions as "foreignization" and "domestication" within contemporary translation theories so as to dwell upon their reflections in the twentieth century theatre. Within this context, by making use of Brecht's A-effect, the paper claims that the "foreignness" of *Translations* can be rendered into the Turkish context without adopting "domesticating" staging strategies, through an employment of a prologue prior to the "actual" performance of the piece. In so doing, the article intends to demonstrate that this staging approach can assist the audience in terms of developing a critical awareness by reflecting upon a piece that treats a situation particular to Ireland, yet has strong connotations with the dynamics of the Turkish geography.

**Keywords:** Translation, language issue, Ireland, Turkey, Brian Friel

## Introduction

A brief look at the word "language" from a contemporary standpoint is indicative of a certain state of disarray. On the one hand, there is the omnipresent hegemony of the English language all around the world; and on the other, there are languages which strive to preserve their own identities under the dominance of that one particular language. A further look at the current situation of the Turkish language, in which the overt presence of the English language can decidedly be felt, fortifies this claim to a certain extent. The case holds true even in the domain of the Turkish media: the Turkish people find themselves in a rather preposterous position of learning the news of Turkey's closest geographical neighbours such as Greece, Bulgaria, Iraq, Iran, Syria, by and large, through the foreign media channels of American culture (Kaplan 270). It goes without saying that under this asymmetrical relationship between the languages, the way that these news are conveyed to Turkish society has its share of manipulation in the hands of the representatives of the hegemonic culture and language.

While the Turkish language seems to be exposed to the hegemony of English on the global scale,[1] it holds a dominant position in the geography it resides in. The repercussions of the above-sketched worldwide situation can strongly be felt in the local setting as well. There is, in a sense, a chain reaction here that it becomes almost impossible for one to overlook. The officials in Turkey are notorious in regard to the attitude they develop towards the minor languages spoken in the country. Being the official language of the country, Turkish has a certain sense of supremacy over the other languages spoken in the

[1] See Kaplan (267-73).

area such as, Romaic, Armenian, Kurdish, and so forth. As a matter of fact, these languages are pushed to the periphery – are marginalised – to such an extent that they are difficult to discuss in the political discourses concerned with the chronic language issue of Turkey since, after all, the slightest mention of the minor languages in the political discussions may give rise to heated debates among the politicians of the country. More often than not, the presence of these minor languages is acknowledged, their respective contributions to the Turkish culture are praised in the administrative political discourse with a concluding note on the significance, as well as the necessity of "initiative" movements towards the minorities in the country. Nevertheless, the superiority of the Turkish language prevails in the country.

Then again, it is startling to observe how the discussions with respect to the languages of the minority communities in Turkey chiefly revolve around the situation of Kurdish, overshadowing the presence and significance of the other languages thereof. Needless to say, all of the minor languages spoken in Turkey deserve as much attention as Kurdish does; especially in the wake of the drastic events that the country witnessed in the last decade, the most regrettable of which being the assassination of a Turkish journalist of Armenian descent Hrant Dink.

While the language issue is critical in Turkey, it is all the more so in Ireland. In this particular respect, a link can be established between the two countries. The aim of the present paper is to foster this connection by analysing Brian Friel's *Translations*; a play which depicts a situation so particular to Ireland that the question of how to represent the "foreignness" of the text on stage turns out to be the main problem that perplexes the mind of every director who sets out to stage it in a country other than Ireland.

The theoretical framework of this article will draw on the respective perspectives that Translation Studies and Theatre Studies provide. In spite of the initial impression that the previous sentence regarding the purpose of this study might give, the present article will neither offer a comprehensive textual analysis of the play from the vantage point of the act of translation inherent in the work,[2] nor offer alternative translation strategies for the rendering of the text. Against the background of this purpose lies the intention of emancipating the act of translation from the boundaries of linguistic concerns. After all, considering translation merely as a linguistic act of transfer between two languages does on no account do justice to such a complex phenomenon. Hence, by drawing on Erika Fischer-Lichte's belief in "the transformative power of performance" (11-24), this paper will place particular emphasis on the transformative function of theatre on the premise that "staging any play is itself an act of translation" (Dinçel 2012, 81-2). This paper thus argues that "theatre as a text" is "an art form which presents itself as a text to be read by the spectators"[3]. Needless to say, this conception of "theatre as text" does by no means imply a return to text-based theatre. Nor does it hint at the reduction of the performance to the dramatic text alone. On the contrary: the notion of "theatre as text" attaches importance to the performance itself. Moreover, the idea that this article seeks to promote leads to the issue of staging culture-specific texts abroad by giving priority to their "foreignness" instead of taking the easy way out and "neutralising"—or "adapting"—them according to the socio-cultural dynamics of the target culture/s.

In other words, the main question will be how to stage Friel's *Translations* in such a way that it alludes to the thoughts, rather than senses of the target culture audience by foregrounding the Irishness of the text. In line with this focus, the first part of the paper will

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[2] For a thorough examination of the play from this perspective, see Dinçel (2007, 8-14).
[3] See also Pavis (ch. 7).

discuss the essential terms of Lawrence Venuti's approach to translation (i.e. "foreignization" and "domestication"), so as to be able to lay the theoretical ground for the conception of "theatre as text", as well as the notion that "staging a given play is an act of translation". Also in this part, some sort of correspondence between Bertolt Brecht's notion of the A-effect, i.e., the alienation/estrangement/distancing effect, and that of "foreignization" will be contested. The next section of the essay will attempt to develop a staging approach to Friel's *Translations*, a text, which, in the words of Michael Cronin, "has come to haunt translation scholars" (76), but has hardly been taken into consideration in relation to the perspectives that Theatre Studies might provide.

**Theatre as Text**

The act of translation—as far as the relationship between a hegemonic culture and a marginalized culture is taken into account—can be one of the most efficient means of imposing certain values upon a peripheral culture. Thus, it is most probable for the dominant culture, by means of translated texts accompanied with various scholarly works under the guise of introductory notes, to (re)present marginalized cultures through the creation of specific "images". These purported images, as Mahasweta Sengupta puts it, "construct notions of the Other and formulate an identity of the source culture that is recognizable by the target culture as representative of the former—as 'authentic' specimens of a world that is remote as well as inaccessible in terms of the target culture's self" (159). Once these particular images are established, the translator—no matter which culture s/he comes from—finds himself or herself in somewhat a contradictory situation: under these circumstances, the translated text either conforms to these images, or resists them with the purpose of conveying the socio-cultural values of the marginalized to the dominant one.

Nowadays, to a certain extent, the fluency in almost any kind of translated work is the sole criterion which makes it acceptable in the eyes of the readers, critics, reviewers, professionals, publishing house owners, and so forth in a given target society.[4] Even so, it is surprising to witness how a fluent translation, that is to say, a translucent translation appropriated – or even naturalised – according to the tastes of domestic values, is perceived as an echo of the foreign author's own poetics and "intentions". In addition to that, for the most part it is believed that fluency in translation allows the reader of a target culture to enjoy and appreciate the merits of the original work. Fluency in a translated text, however, not only impedes the translator from reflecting his or her style, aesthetics, and world view in the translated work, but it also peels away the particularities of the source text (hereafter ST), and, by extension, the socio-cultural elements which can enrich the target culture to some degree.

The prevailing opinion regarding the fluency in translated works outlined above has been one of the most fundamental aspects that Lawrence Venuti problematises in his approach to the study and practice of translation: "The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text" (1995, 1-2). Venuti's statement also reflects how the scholar himself puts momentous emphasis on the process of the formation of the foreign text for the target culture. In so doing, he, as Susan Bassnett maintains, "calls for translator-centred translation, insisting that the translator should inscribe him/herself visibly into the text" (25).

Venuti's call for a translator-centred translation is indicative of the scholar's advocacy of the choices of the translator in a given translation project. In this respect, one

[4] See Venuti (1995).

may assume that Venuti's approach is reminiscent of earlier translation scholars who consider translation as a "decision making process".[5] Nonetheless, what distinguishes Venuti's approach from those of the other translation theorists is his (re)reading of such notions as "foreignization" and "domestication" against the backdrop of the writings of Friedrich Schleirmacher, whose translation methods are widely celebrated within the realm of Translation Studies, and are known as "reader-to-author" and "author-to-reader" approaches; with the translator as the mediator. In the first approach the translator disturbs the writer as little as possible and guides the reader in his or her direction, whereas in the second approach the translator disturbs the reader as little as possible and leads the writer in his or her direction. And among those two, Schleirmacher favours the first method: bringing the reader to the author (228). Venuti, too, advances the issue from the same direction and advocates foregnizing, resisting, and estranging translation against domestication in order to raise "an opposition to the global hegemony of English" (10). Along the same line, Venuti considers good translation as minoritizing, which "releases the remainder by cultivating a heterogeneous discourse, opening up the standard dialect and literary canons to what is foreign themselves, to the substandard and marginal" (485). From this point of view, the dual features inherent in Venuti's approach to the study and practice of translation can be deduced: favouring the ST for the sake of the target text (hereafter TT), or to put it more clearly, Venuti, while being target-oriented in theory, in practice, actually develops a source-oriented approach. What is more, Venuti discusses the utopian dimension of the translation act. He regards translation as an action that can function as a bridgehead in terms of communicating between different social groups of a community. From this perspective, it can be seen that Venuti considers translation as an act(ion) which opens up (new) channels of communication in society. In the words of Venuti, "the hope for a consensus, a communication and recognition" (485) is inherent in a translation project.

One further point that deserves attention with respect to the contemporary scholarly work on translational phenomena, is the metonymic aspect of a given translation process. Metonymy, according to the *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, is defined as "a figure of speech that consists in using the name of one thing for that of something else with which it is associated" (in Leech 152). Then again, when this definition is taken into consideration in tune with the act of translation, the borderlines of the said concept expand beyond the linguistic concerns. In the first place, there is the painstaking linguistic aspect of translation which makes it impossible to render every single feature of the ST. As a consequence, this situation compels the translator to make certain choices, which leads to the substitution of a part of the whole text, and interweaving these decisions throughout the translation process. In the second place, there is the ideological aspect of translation which stems from the choices of the translator during the translation process that engages the (re)writer of the TT in the power relationships within a given (target) culture.

As Maria Tymoczko argues in her *Translation in a Postcolonial Context*, this metonymic aspect of any given translation process becomes quite distinctive when one thinks of translations from a non-canonical literature to a canonical literature. In such cases, "while a marginalized text is a retelling or rewriting for its original audience", writes Tymoczko, "it is neither for the receiving audience of a translation of the text. The translator is in the paradoxical position of 'telling a new story' to the receptor audience, even as the translator refracts and rewrites the source text—and the more remote the source culture and literature, the more radically new the story will be for the receiving audience" (47). It is precisely at this point in which the task of translator starts in order to preserve the

[5] See, for instance, Levý (2000, 148-59); Reiss (2000a, 160-71) and Reiss (2000b, 16-46).

metonymic aspects of the ST. Even if the translator opts to translate the entire text—let alone relying on the paratextual materials—the chances are that the metonymies inherent in the ST will be (re)written in accordance with the ones of the TT. In this sense, it can be inferred that the metonymies that are characteristic of the ST play a crucial role during the translation process by compelling the translator to foreground various aspects of the text.

On the basis of what has been discussed so far, an analogy can be drawn between the act of translation and that of staging by dint of the writings of Venuti and Tymoczko. Although Venuti's main focus is the global dominance of the English language—hence the arguments he provides are confined within the limits of the said language, as well as the languages of his source texts—his ideas can be taken as a reference point for building a connection between the conceptions of "theatre as text" and "staging as an act of translation", as well as that of "foreignization". Needless to say, in building this connection Tymoczko's emphasis on the "metonymic aspects of translation" will also be made use of.

A close glance at the twentieth century drama would point to a particular theatre theoretician who spoke almost in the same terms as Venuti: Bertolt Brecht. In the course of a production the importance that Brecht attaches to the crucial role of the A-effect, that is to say, the alienation/estrangement/distancing effect, draws the attention immediately:

> The achievement of the A-effect constitutes something utterly ordinary, recurrent; it is just a widely-practised way of drawing one's own or someone else's attention to a thing, and it can be seen in education as also in business conferences of one sort or another. The A-effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected. What is obvious is in a certain sense made incomprehensible, but this is only in order that it may then be made all the easier to comprehend. Before familiarity can turn into awareness the familiar must be stripped of its inconspicuousness; we must give up assuming that the object in question needs no explanation. However frequently recurrent, modest, vulgar it may be it will now be labelled as something unusual. (Brecht in Willet, 143-44)

Even if the realisation of the A-effect depends to a certain extent on the performance of the actors,[6] the effect can at the same time be achieved through the text at issue. The fact that Brecht himself used the A-effect in most of the classical texts[7] that he staged over the course of his career, enhances its applicability to a given text which deals with historical issues. This is a vital point which helps the translator of the text—and within the parameters of the ongoing discussion, the director who will stage the play—search for various strategies to achieve the A-effect in the work that s/he deals with. In this context, it can be contested that the application of the A-effect in the text can make room for the director to convey the "foreignness" of the ST to the target audience by foregrounding the metonymic aspects of the work.

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[6] Since the art of acting, as well as the possible ways of executing the A-effect in performance entails an entirely different discussion, in what follows, the paper will, to a considerable degree, limit itself to a discussion of the prospective ways of realising the A-effect through an engagement with the text at hand.

[7] Amongst many, one recalls Brecht's adaptations of *The Life of Edward II of England*, *The Mother*, and *The Antigone of Sophocles* productions which have been based on the works by Christopher Marlowe, Maxim Gorky, and Sophocles respectively.

However, there is more to it. In his monumental work on epic theatre and Brecht, Walter Benjamin draws attention to an essential point:

> A double object is provided for the audience's interest. First, the events shown on stage; these must be of such a kind that they may, at certain decisive points, be checked by the audience against its own experience. Second, the production; this must be transparent as to its artistic armature. (Such transparency is the exact opposite of 'simplicity'; it presupposes genuine artistic intelligence and skill in the producer). (15-6).

Benjamin's observation is very much to the point in that it highlights the critical dimension that the A-effect brings to the production; thereby making the "experience of the foreign" (Berman 1992) even more appealing for the eyes of the target culture audience.

In view of these theoretical discussions, it becomes possible to reflect on the idea of engaging with a culture-specific play where the language issue in Ireland functions as the driving force: Brian Friel's *Translations*. The next section will aim to develop a staging approach to the text in the way that can both foreground the Irishness of the work and associate the situation depicted in the play with the dynamics of the target culture, raising a potential critical awareness on behalf of the spectator.

**Staging Brian Friel's *Translations***

Turkish theatregoers have some sort of acquaintance with Brian Friel's plays. Kent Oyuncuları has been quite influential in introducing the author's works to the Turkish audience in the 1965-1966 and 1966-1967 seasons through their productions of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*. Furthermore, the fact that the company keeps on showing their interest in Friel's plays by putting on Friel's *Two Lives After* in the 2004-2005 season grabs the attention.[8] In addition to these performances by Kent Oyuncuları, another remarkable troupe of the country, namely, Altıdan Sonra Tiyatro, also staged *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in the 2002-2003 season. It is worth mentioning these productions here since they demonstrate the familiarity of the Turkish audience with Friel's works, at least to some extent. Bearing these productions in mind, it would not be naive to think that *Translations* can be produced in Turkey, too. Even though the play portrays a specific picture of Ireland taken from one of the significant historical moments of the country, it can be argued that the issue that Friel treats in *Translations* has direct relevance for the socio-cultural dynamics of Turkey in the twenty-first century.

Inspired by George Steiner's comprehensive study *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1977), *Translations* is set in a hedge school in the townland of Baile Beag of County Donegal in August 1833, almost a decade after the order of the Ordnance Survey, whose sole purpose was, as Edward Said remarks, "to Anglicize the names, redraw the land boundaries to permit valuation of property (and further expropriation of land in favour of English and 'seignorial' families), and permanently subjugate the population" (273). One other historical aspect that attracts notice in the play is the introduction of the national educational system in Ireland by the English in the first half of the nineteenth century. The two English sappers being in charge of the execution of the Ordnance Survey are Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland. Naturally enough, they do not speak Gaelic and their communication between the native people is established by Owen, the son of the local hedge school master Hugh O'Donnel. While Owen is a native of Ballybeg, he has

[8] Cf. Dinçel (335).

chosen to work for the English as an interpreter. Then again, language does not hamper Lieutenant Yolland from falling for the fiancée of Manus, Owen's brother. All hell breaks loose after Lieutenant Yolland's bizarre disappearance. As a consequence of that, Captain Lancey shows the brutal face of the coloniser to the colonised at the end of the play.[9]

Notwithstanding the fact that *Translations* is written in English, seven of the ten dramatis personae talk in Gaelic. Hence the presence of an interpreter in the play and the title of the work: *Translations*. The recital of passages from *The Odyssey* and *Aeneas* at intervals makes the play even more polyglot. Even so, the colonial aspect of *Translations* manifests itself through the supremacy of English over the Irish geography, as well as their intention to Anglicise the Gaelic names. As it is, Baile Beag turns out to be an even more appealing site that shows strong correspondences with the (post)colonial situation, and as a matter of fact, the uneven correlation between the two languages comes into play. As was highlighted previously, this asymmetrical relationship and the images established thereof puts the translator—here in the play, the interpreter—in an ironic situation. The dramatic (if not tragic) irony of the play derives precisely from this situation. The interpreter of *Translations*, Owen, chooses to side with the dominant language and manipulates the words of the colonisers in more than a confident manner in the first act.[10] When things turn upside down during the course of the play, however, Owen comprehends how serious the act of translation is. Now, towards the end of the third act, when the coloniser reveals its brutal face to the colonised, Owen interprets "faithfully" the words of the dominant. His interpretation is worth quoting at length:

> LANCEY. Commencing twenty-four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg.
> [*OWEN stares at LANCEY.*]
> At once.
> OWEN. Beginning this time tomorrow they'll kill every animal in Baile Beag—unless they're told where George is.
> LANCEY. If that doesn't bear results, commencing forty-eight hours from now we will embark on a series of evictions and levelling of every abode in the following selected areas—
> OWEN. You're not—!
> LANCEY. Do your job. Translate.
> OWEN. If they still haven't found him in two days time they'll begin evicting and levelling every house starting with these townlands.
> [*LANCEY reads from his list.*]
> LANCEY. Swinefort.
> OWEN. Lis Na Muc.
> LANCEY. Burnfoot.
> OWEN. Bun na hAbhann.
> LANCEY. Dromduff.
> OWEN. Druim Dubh.
> LANCEY. Whiteplains.
> OWEN. Machaire Ban.
> LANCEY. Kings Head.
> OWEN. Choc na Ri.

[9] Dinçel (2007, 8-9).
[10] Cf. Friel (1991, 340-41).

> LANCEY. If by then the lieutenant hasn't been found, we will proceed until a complete clearance is made of this entire section.
> OWEN. If Yolland hasn't been got by then, they will ravish the whole parish. (368)

Owen resists Captain Lancey in vain by being entirely aware of the fact that he cannot defy the coloniser, and consequently follows the order and back-translates the place names that he so amusingly translated (with Yolland) into Gaelic. In vain; for the uneven relationship between the two parties leaves no room for Owen to resist.

*Translations* is a play that depicts a situation particular to Ireland. On the face of it, staging the work might seem as an issue in itself due to the multilingual nature of the play. Nevertheless, Friel's artistry removes the clutter around the sense of confusion in terms of the target language of a prospective production/translation of *Translations*. As Claire Gleitman maintains, "when the English sappers arrive and Manus's brother Owen must translate for them, we deduce that *their* English is *really* English. Friel handles his device so skilfully that there is no difficulty in discerning when the English is English and when it is Gaelic" (30) (emphasis original). With respect to the recitation of excerpts from *The Odyssey* and *Aeneas* at intervals in Ancient Greek and Latin, inaudible remarks by the actors can be adopted as markers which underscore the distance between the extinct languages and that of the "spoken" languages. In so doing, one of the metonymic aspects of the play, that is to say, the asymmetry between the languages can, in a sense, be brought to the fore.

Another metonymic feature of *Translations* is, of course, concerned with the setting of the play. Drawing attention to the English translation of "Baile Beag" in Friel's "Ballybeg" plays, and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in particular, Csilla Bertha makes an important observation:

> the fictitious village of Baile Beag that, due to British colonization, becomes Ballybeg—a metonym for, or a microcosm of, Ireland. It is Friel's Archimedic fixed point from which he can observe (if not change) the world. It is the physical and spiritual home of both the individual and the community as Friel masterfully connects the most private and secret places of individual life with the plight of the whole culture. (156)

Thus, in *Translations*, Friel provides the spectator with a specific condition through Baile Beag that is representative of Ireland in 1833.

In view of this discussion vis-à-vis *Translations*, a certain sense of "foreignness" may be seen as inherent in the work. At this juncture, it can be argued that it is likely for this specific picture emerging from the townland of Baile Beag in one of the crucial moments in the history of Ireland, to strike the chord of critical awareness on behalf of the target audience. This awareness occurs regardless of "domesticating"—or "adapting"—the situation in the text into the socio-political dynamics of the target culture to be able to demonstrate the obvious resemblances between the issues treated in *Translations* with those of the target culture. Instead, one might conceive of the A-effect and the potential way/s of applying it to the text, thereby giving priority to the "foreignness" of *Translations*. One possible application of the A-effect can be the use of a prologue prior to the actual performance of the play. John Lennon's song "The Luck of the Irish" from his *Some Time in New York City* (1972), for example, can be used to convey the irony required in the production. It is imperative, moreover, to underline the necessity of the parts belonging to Lennon to be sung by a male actor and those which pertain to Yoko Ono to be sung by a

female performer in the prologue. As such, the irony immanent to the lyrics can be highlighted all the more.

**PROLOGUE**

*(The actors who play the parts of Manus and Maire enter the stage respectively. After a short while, two other actors from the cast for the parts of Sarah and Bridget enter. While the first couple of actors start chanting the lyrics of John Lennon's "The Luck of the Irish" without showing any sign of gesticulation towards each other respectively, the second couple of actors rotate the translation of the lyrics of the song through the usage of a subtitle machine unfolding a sheet roll. Only in the last chorus the voices of the first couple of actors unite. No music. The first group of actors sing merely the words in tune with the melody of the song, whilst the second group translate the lyrics chanted by way of the mechanism.)*

If you had the luck of the Irish
You'd be sorry and wish you were dead
You should have the luck of the Irish
And you'd wish you was English instead!

A thousand years of torture and hunger
Drove the people away from their land
A land full of beauty and wonder
Was raped by the British brigands! Goddamn! Goddamn!

If you could keep voices like flowers
There'd be shamrock all over the world
If you could drink dreams like Irish streams
Then the world would be high as the mountain of morn

In the 'Pool they told us the story
How the English divided the land
Of the pain, and the death and the glory
And the poets of auld Eireland

If we could make chains with the morning dew
The world would be like Galway Bay
Let's walk over the rainbows like leprechauns
The world would be one big Blarney stone

Why the hell are the English there anyway?
As they kill with God on their side
Blame it all on the kids and the IRA
As the bastards commit genocide! Aye! Aye! Genocide!

If you had the luck of the Irish
You'd be sorry and wish you were dead
You should have the luck of the Irish
And you'd wish you was English instead!
Yes you'd wish you was English instead!

*(After the actors finish intoning and translating the lyrics of the song by means of the subtitle machine, the actor who plays the role of Owen comes to the centre of the stage and addresses the spectators, while the first couple of actors stroll aimlessly on the stage and the second group of actors stay on alert with the machine. Later on, when Owen starts to speak, the second group provides a translation of his words.)*

Soon after we will present you a historical play
Behind which the seizure of Ireland lay
All we beseech from you is
Artlessly this
Search your conscience for comparable deeds
Of the recent past that no one reads

*(The five actors leave the stage by heading to separate directions. Lights fade out. Darkness.)*

The employment of the prologue before the actual performance of *Translations* is a tactical move through which the foreignness of the text can be brought to the fore before the eyes of the target culture spectator. The simultaneous act of translation undertaken during the course of the prologue not only provides an overall idea for the audience regarding the play, but it also makes the act of translation, and, by extension, the translators visible on stage. Furthermore, the translation of the lyrics into Turkish in the prologue allows the audience to establish connections between the Irish situation and that of the Turkish. The advantage of the selection of “The Luck of the Irish”, moreover, lies in the double irony inherent in the lyrics of the song. As Ben Urish and Ken Bielen so perceptively observe,

> a listing of innocent Irish clichés and idyllic stereotypes in the chorus sung by Ono is cleverly countered with the harsh contemporary political realities and historical summations sung by Lennon in the introduction and verses. This is all set up with the sardonic irony of the opening couplets that play off the usually bromidic phrase of the ‘luck of the Irish,’ indicating that any luck the Irish have had has been bad—so bad that ‘you’d wish you was English instead.’ (41)

The sardonic irony that Urish and Bielen mention harks back to the irony, or “the crowning irony” that Gleitman considers as the crux of *Translations*: “in this play celebrating the richness of the Gaelic tongue, not a word of Irish is spoken (place-names excepted)” (29). Therefore, thanks to the simultaneous translation of the lyrics, the irony immanent to the play can be highlighted all the more.

With the inclusion of the prologue, the A-effect can thus be achieved prior to the actual performance. But the prologue serves more than the purpose of foregrounding such metonymic aspects of the work as the Irishness – its “foreignness” – the asymmetrical relationship between the languages, the postcolonial situation: it also keeps a critical distance between the play and the spectator, allowing them to link the issue that *Translations* treats with their socio-cultural dynamics.

**Conclusion**

According to Reba Gostand, “every stage and feature of the dramatic production has and/or will involve processes of translation. Everything the audience sees or hears is a

symbol of some reality being conveyed by the play" (2). The point that Gostand raises applies in the sense that staging a play itself is a form of translation undertaken by the actors and directors respectively. This was precisely the point that the present paper aspired to show. Agreeing with Michael Cronin in regard to the fact that "translation is not a simple process between languages" (1996, 4), this study aimed to tackle translational phenomena from a broader perspective through a discussion of a prospective staging of Brian Friel's *Translations*.

In other words, by considering "theatre as text", "an art form which presents itself to be read by the spectators", this study offered an examination of *Translations* in the light of the respective perspectives provided by Translation Studies and Theatre Studies. What is more, by dint of tracing the echoes of Lawrence Venuti's notions of "foreignization" and "domestication" within the realm of twentieth-century drama, this paper sought to demonstrate the correspondences between Bertolt Brecht's concept of the "A-effect", namely, the alienation/estrangement/distancing effect, and Venuti's notion of "foreignization". It has thus been argued that an inclusion of a prologue to a potential production of *Translations* could serve to convey the "foreignness" of the play to the target audience.

As a concluding remark, it is worth directing attention briefly to the postcolonial situation of Baile Beag. The fact that the site turns out to be a place, in which the coloniser and the colonised meet in such an obvious manner, calls to mind Homi Bhabha's notion of "the third-space" (218), and one alternative way of thinking about t/his concept in connection with the act of translation. "What is at issue," writes Bhabha, "is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference–be it class, gender or race" (219) (emphasis original). In Bhabha's terms, then, Baile Beag can plausibly be considered a "third-space". One potential means of representing this site on stage through the transformative function of theatre might be translating *Translations* in such a way that can bring the "foreignness" of Baile Beag to the fore for the target spectator. Note that what this paper attempted to provide was merely a preliminary sketch of foregrounding the Irishness of the text. It goes without saying that a thorough examination of the issue can be undertaken through the incorporation of a discussion of the prospective acting techniques to be executed in the performance, and diverse ways of actors' translations of *Translations*.

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## Özet

### Metin Olarak Tiyatro: Brian Friel’ın *Çeviriler*’i ve Sahneleme İçin Bazı Çağrışımlar

Bu çalışma Friel’ın *Çeviriler* adlı eserini merkeze alarak, söz konusu oyunun Türkiye’de sahnelenmesine ilişkin bir yaklaşım geliştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Herhangi bir sahnelemenin çeviri eyleminden farklı olmadığı savından hareketle makale, “metin olarak tiyatro” kavramını ortaya atarak, prodüksiyon esnasında performansın izleyiciler tarafından okunacak bir “metin” niteliği kazanacağını savunmaktadır. Bu amaç ve sav doğrultusunda çalışma, çağdaş çeviri kuramlarındaki “yabancılaştırma” ve “yerelleştirme” hususlarındaki tartışmalara kulak vererek, bahsi geçen konuların yirminci yüzyıl tiyatrosundaki yansımaları üzerinde durmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Brecht’in yabancılaştırma/yadırgatma etkisinden faydalanan çalışma, Friel’ın *Çeviriler*’ine yazılacak bir ön oyun vasıtasıyla, eserin yerelleştirilme stratejisine başvurulmadan yabancılığının Türkiye coğrafyasına taşınabileceği iddiasını savunmaktadır. Böylelikle makale, bu sahneleme anlayışının izleyicilerin eleştirel bir bilinç geliştirmesini kolaylaştıracağını ve İrlanda’ya özgü olmakla birlikte, Türkiye coğrafyasında da belirgin çağrışımları olan bir oyun üzerinde seyircilere düşünme fırsatı tanıyacağını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Çeviri, dil meselesi, İrlanda, Türkiye, Brian Friel

# “The Middle Woman” from *Nepantla*: Sameness and Difference in the Poetry of Pat Mora

**Özlem Görey**

**Abstract:** The term difference has come to be regarded as one of the major defining factors in the understanding and criticism of literary texts in today’s literary and cultural studies. Within this border term the Chicana authors have negotiated empowerment through difference. Borders, therefore have become the perfect metaphor for their quest. Although traditionally borders have always been regarded as the line of division separating two or more groups, borders can simultaneously be seen as a point of contact through which either side can relate to each other. This article explores the poetry of Pat Mora. Born in 1942 in El Paso, Texas, she is a poet who chooses to concentrate on the potential of borders to unite, heal and communicate. Ultimately, her poetry is in constant negotiation between resistance to homogenization and shared experience between women. It is a borderline standpoint between difference and sameness.

**Keywords**: Chicana Literature, Feminism, Poetry, Pat Mora

The term difference has come to be regarded as one of the major defining factors in the understanding and criticism of literary texts in today’s literary and cultural studies. This problematic term is further complicated by feminist authors and theoreticians through multiple and often contradictory identity issues. In her classic *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) Gloria Anzaldua identifies the position of feminism on the borders, an open wound for Anzaldua, and it has become a reference point for the representation of Chicana subjectivity. In this book, which is also borderline with respect to genre lays bare how the term “Chicana” in itself is already loaded with grey areas where traditional definitions do not apply. Paraphrasing Norma Alarcon, Sonia Saldivar-Hull writes: “since there is no recognized nation-state ‘Chicana’ or Chicano’, when we invoke *Chicana* as a self-identifier, we invoke race and ethnicity, class, and gender in their simultaneity and in their complexity” (Saldivar-Hull 45). Within this border term the Chicana theoretician can negotiate empowerment through difference.

Indeed, Saldivar-Hull provides a thorough survey as to how dominant literary and feminist theories obscure the relations between the dominant culture and minority cultures. Her work takes difference as the starting point for the Chicana, but she highlights what can be regarded as sameness by her identification of the Chicana alignment with the women of the Third World. As she posits, Chicana “subject position exists in the interstices of national borders. More to the point, we are aligned as women whose specific needs have largely been ignored by most of our own male theorists as well as by many Euro-American feminists. We now engage with other people whose experiences mirror our own” (Saldivar-Hull 55). Likewise, in order to be able to engage in a theory which would accommodate Chicana subjectivity Norma Alancon in “Chicana Feminism” makes use of French feminist theory with a focus on Chicana women in alliance with native American women. This alliance between women of difference with its implication of sameness, as well as the idea

that borders also unite what they are supposed to separate to begin with, are the premises of this article.

Although traditionally borders have always been regarded as the line of division separating two or more groups, borders can simultaneously be seen as a point of contact through which either side can relate to each other. In the introduction of her book *Mappings,* Susan Stanford Friedman opens up an alternative way of imagining borders. She writes:

> Borders have a way of insisting on separation at the same time as they acknowledge connection. […] Borders between individuals, genders, groups, and nations erect categorical and material walls between identities. Identity is in fact unthinkable without some sort imagined or literal boundary. But borders also specify the liminal space in between, the interstitial site of interaction, interconnection, and exchange. Borders enforce silence, miscommunication, misrecognition. They also invite transgression, dissolution, reconciliation, and mixing. (3)

Chicana author Pat Mora is a poet who chooses to concentrate on this potential of borders in her work. Born in 1942 in El Paso, Texas, Pat Mora spent most of her life there and grew up speaking Spanish. At the age of 47, after raising her three children, she moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. Today she still lives there and writes both in Spanish and English. What made Mora interesting for the writer of this article to start with is her vision and work as a teacher who works towards bilingual literacy in her community, as well as her poetry some of which is written particularly for children and young adults. She has taught at high school, community college, and university levels as well as working as an administrator at various posts and makes use of her encounters with young people to inform her poetry. She has collected her experiences in a collection of essays titled *Nepantla* which literally means "'place in the middle' in Nahuatl – one of Mexico's indigenous languages" (*Nepantla* 5). It is an apt choice on behalf of the author as it explores her Chicana heritage as well as her life in Ohio. It not only refers to the actual geographical positioning of El Paso in the borderlands but also to the metaphorical positioning of herself as a Mexican-American. She maintains: "I am in the middle of my life, and well know not only the pain but also the advantages of observing both sides, albeit my biases, of moving through two, and in fact, multiple spaces, and selecting from both what I want to make a part of me, of consciously shaping my space" (*Nepantla* 6). Borders provide pain and possibilities simultaneously. Tey Diana Rebolledo underlines this point when she points out: "I believe […] that our complexities are infinite: that we have grown up and survived along the edges, along the borders of so many languages, worlds, cultures, and social systems that we constantly fix and focus on the spaces in between" (47).

Instead of stressing difference such a standpoint implies Pat Mora opts for turning her unique position to her advantage. Her borderland position instills a sense of worth, a right to cherish and be cherished for every human being, children in particular. Mora deems this to be a vital strategy as she holds: "Pride in cultural identity, in the set of learned and shared language, symbols, and meanings, needs to be fostered not because of nostalgia or romanticism, but because it is essential to our survival. The oppressive homogenization of humanity in our era of international technological and economic interdependence endangers us all" (*Nepantla* 36). The myth of safety in uniformity is rejected outright by the author. This rejection can be identified as Martin has posited: "Metaphors for the United States turned away from the "melting pot" and instead became the "salad bowl" or the "mosaic", allowing individuals to retain their ethnic differences yet still operate together to form a

cooperative whole" (5). Likewise for Mora, the metaphor of the melting pot is not legitimate and should be questioned. Hence, she opens up ways for the reader to imagine identity as diverse, multiple and definitely not hierarchical. Ultimately, her poetry is in constant negotiation between resistance to homogenization and shared experience between women. It is a borderline standpoint between difference and sameness.

A vital component in Pat Mora's poetic journey towards multiplicity through borderlands is the importance of awareness of belonging and the immediate necessity of natural conservation. Within such a framework, her poems have the sense of having actually emanated from the earth. In the poem "A Secret" from the volume of poetry titled *My Own True Name* she identifies the roots of her poetic creation in floral terms. She is literally digging for roots. Mora writes:

> The clever twist
> is pouring the tears
> into a tall, black hat
> waving a sharp No.2 pencil
> slowly over the blue echoes
> then gently, gently
> pulling out
> a bloomin' poem. (7)

The image of the poet pulling the poem out of the tall black hat of the magician alludes to the magical and illusive powers as well as drawing the attention of the reader to the organic nature of poetry in general. Such an understanding serves as one of the foundation stones in her career and can be explained better by the Aztec term for poetry which is "in xochitl in cuicatl". The term can be translated as "flower and song" and captures the essence of Mora's poetry with its connection to nature and the joy of singing. It is also a term used by Mora herself to highlight the floral, hence feminine aspect of her work. Her poems, however, have neither roses nor lilies; instead, they are covered by flowers indigenous to the desert.

The imagery of the poem emanating from the earth is further explored in the poem "Marriage II" from the volume *Borders* when she writes:

> What do you dig
> for, dig for, dig
> for? What do you
> dig for, poet friend?
> I dig for blooms,
> still soft and fragrant.
> I dig for petals
> sweeter than wine.
> Let's dig together,
> lone one, lone one,
> scent all our rooms
> with flower and song. (67)

"Marriage II" with its musical and repetitive tone reminds the reader of a nursery rhyme for children. It is an apt starting point for the poet to establish a connection with the reader and to assume a guiding position. This is an important concern for Mora as she is aware that Chicanas are "labeled a double minority" (*Nepantla* 56). Chicanas are

marginalized *de facto* as women and also as women of Mexican origin. However, their bondage is stronger as they are shunned not only by the American culture, but also by the Mexican culture of origin. Hence, the need and support of each other in the binding dilemma in which they find themselves. In the poem "Legal Aliens", from the volume *Chants*, this space of no man's land is highlighted:

> viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
> perhaps inferior, definitely different,
> viewed by Mexicans as alien
> (their eyes say, "You may speak
> Spanish but you're not like me")
> an American to Mexicans
> a Mexican to Americans. (52)

The plight of the immigrant explored in this poem is further explored in "La Migra", but this time with a more threatening tone. The poem depicts the encounter between the border patrol and the illegal immigrant through play imagery as she writes "Let's play La Migra". The first section of the poem is written from the viewpoint of the border patrol emphasizing the material and physical power of the man. The second section, on the other hand, is through the eyes of the immigrant woman. Although she does not have the physical power of the border patrol, the man withers as he is out of his element in the desert. Moreover, her spirit and sense of community keeps her strong. We read:

> I know this desert,
> where to rest, where to drink
> Oh, I am not alone.
> You hear us singing
> And laughing with the wind. (*Agua Santa* 105)

If there is any hope for the double bind of the Chicana to be broken, it lies in centralizing their concerns and trying to instill a sense of pride and joy in their own selves. Mora describes women like herself in the poem "Desert Women" from the volume *My Own True Name*:

> Desert women know
> about survival.
> Fierce heat and cold
> have burned and thickened
> our skin. Like cactus
> we've learned to hoard, to sprout deep roots,
> to seem asleep, yet wake
> at the scent of softness
> in the air, to hide
> pain and loss by silence,
> no branches wail
> or whisper our sad songs
> safe behind our thorns.
>
> Don't be deceived,
> When we bloom, we stun. (55)

"Desert Women" was published in the volume titled *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults*. This heading clearly summarizes Mora's struggle to instill self-respect in young women of her ethnic origin. Another important way to achieve this is to strengthen the sense of community for her people. In the poem "University Avenu" from *Borders*, she exhibits the necessity of imagining a strong sense of community. She does this by invoking her ancestors through the floral and song-like pattern of poetic creation. She writes:

> We are the first
> of our people to walk this path.
> We move cautiously
> unfamiliar with the sounds,
> guides for those who follow.
> Our people prepared us
> with gifts from the land,
> fire
> herbs and song
> *hierbabuena* soothes us into morning
> rhythms hum in our blood
> *abrazos* linger round our bodies
> cuentos whisper lessons en espanol.
> We do not travel alone.
> Our people burn deep within us. (19)

Although Chicana identity is in the centre of Mora's poetry, I argue that shared experiences by women inform her writing. As Rebolledo argues "it is clear that Chicana writers are strongly motivated to expand their personal worlds of human understanding. Chicana feminism and Third World feminists can know no borders" (102). Hence, the need for a maternal genealogy is common for the feminists, Anglo-American and Chicana as we read in "Strong Women":

> They sing brave women, sisters we revere
> whose words seeds bursts of light that us unite.
> Some women hold me when I need to dream.
> Strong women, teach me courage to esteem. (Mora in Waldron xv)

The sense of worth in one's self cannot be complete with a sense of community. This is in line with one of the vital projects of feminism which has been the creation of a maternal genealogy. By looking to the worlds and words of other Latinas, young girls and women find ways in which to identify and validate their own position. This is a point which is strongly argued by Rosi Braidotti who regards maternal genealogy central to women when she contends:

> In order to make sexual difference operative within feminist theory I want to argue that one should start politically with the assertion of the need for the presence of real-life women in positions of discursive subjecthood, and theoretically with the recognition of the primacy of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting both the traditional vision of the subject as universal, neutral, or gender-free and the binary logic that sustains it. (90)

Adrienne Rich also believes in the urgency of unearthing women whose lives would be instrumental in establishing a history through which women can relate to each other. In her influential collection of essays *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* Rich maintains:

> For spiritual values and a creative tradition to continue unbroken we need concrete artifacts, the work of hands, written words to read, images to look at, a dialogue with brave and imaginative women who came before us. In the false names of love, motherhood, natural law -false because they have not been defined by us to whom they are applied- women in patriarchy have been withheld from building a common world, except in enclaves, or through coded messages. (204-5)

Pat Mora's quest in this direction starts with giving voice to the historical figure of La Malinche who plays an instrumental role in the conquest of Mexico. Given as a slave to Hernan Cortes, commander of the Spanish army, when the Spaniards came to Mexico, in time she became his interpreter and made communication between him and the indigenous people possible. At times she is loved and regarded as a woman with no control over her destiny. At other times she is a hated figure blamed for being a traitor against her own people. The choice of La Malinche works well for Mora as she can be considered to be the woman who gave birth to a son who is considered to be one of the first *Meztizos*. She is also the double-faced woman who stands on the border between two entirely different cultures. In an excerpt from her autobiography, Gloria Anzaldua discusses this hugely controversial female figure within the context of religious/spiritual borders. She argues how La Malinche, or La Chingada, found it extremely difficult to dissociate her spirit from her body as required by Christianity; instead, she becomes the woman who struggles to stand in balance on the border between body and spirit. Anzaldua holds: "She had found that she could not divorce her body from her spirit. […] And her people, the offspring of La Chingada, the india, must achieve that balance again, must acknowledge the existence of two on the same plane" (2009, 70).

Mora uses this ambiguous woman in her writing to explore the idea of simultaneous difference and sameness. In the poem "Malinche's Tips: Pique from Mexico's Mother" from the collection *Agua Santa/Holy Water*, La Malinche shares her experiences with other women across centuries. She assumes a position of authority as she instructs and warns her companions as follows:

> …
> Tip 1: In an unfriendly country,
> wear a mask.
> You will see more.
> …
> Tip 2: Write
> your own rumors
> or hire your own historians.
> …
> Tip 4:Alter
> the altared women.
> …
> Tip 7: Watch your tongues.
>
> I try to hold you,

to wrap my arms and hair
around my children to say, I am
a daughter, abused
woman, abuser,
no saint, human,
sold, slave, sexual
woman, raped
woman, invisible
translator, mother
but, no virgin,
never immaculate
enough, never
fleshless enough,
never silent
enough, my eyes-
Mexico's troubled,
buried mirror.
Tip 8: If you remove your mask,
mirror, mirror won't lie.

Look. Do you see? We.
Inseparable. (64-9)

The excerpt from the long poem "Malinche's Tips" covers the issues that need to be addressed in order to be able to move towards self-respect and joy. Not surprisingly the first step that she advocates is the necessity of wearing a mask. Masks are essential to the survival of women in patriarchal societies. Women have internalized the idea of wearing a mask and find it extremely difficult to shed it. Mora problematizes this issue in the poem "My Mask" from *Borders*:

Leave it by the bed.
I wear it everywhere.
It's just that your fingers
Stroked so slowly, so warmly
I didn't even notice when
you eased it off. My face
must be pale, frightened.
Yours is.

I'll fling the mirror you hand me
against the wall.
No, I won't look
At a woman who hides nothing. (58)

The compulsion to wear masks and mould oneself according to the prescriptions of the society is one that is close to the hearts of women. Patriarchal societies demand that women fit themselves into the traditional norms and expectations. The idea of woman catering to the imagination of man could be quite desirable with social rules, but it is equally tormenting for woman. The speaker in the poem has become used to wearing masks very successfully and the mask has almost become a part of her self. It also defines the borders of her existence. She feels scared and uncomfortable to confront her face and has

come to prefer the mask. Indeed she would, as it is much more comfortable and less problematic to exist within one, as Malinche supports. However, I think Malinche's advocating of masks is a temporary measure because when her following tips are taken into consideration it can be seen that she is aiming for deeper change. By altering the "altared women", who have been placed upon an altered to be worshipped only when dead, she talks about shedding the received notions of womanhood.

Pat Mora chooses the term Latina to describe herself, and as a Latina writer she centralizes the traditionally marginalized life and experiences of Latina women. This is a characteristic which cannot be overlooked when we read her poetry. However, there is a streak in her writing which makes it interesting for the Turkish author of this article as a reader who is separated from her as can be both geographically and culturally. This streak is her treatment of the common experiences shared by all women which is where her strength as a poet lies.

I began the exploration of Mora's poetry within the framework of borders and their potential of serving as points of contact, exchange, communication and understanding. Such a standpoint goes against the traditional definition of borders as markers of difference. Isolation of difference as the defining principle results in the loss of the collective among women. Susan Stanford Friedman argues that there has been a shift in understanding and exploration of difference from constituting *a* project to becoming *the* project of academic feminism. She posits that difference has developed into *the* privileged or the only legitimate lens through which to examine the cultural and material meanings of gender and asks: "what gets lost, forgotten or suppressed in the exclusivity of the project of difference?" (71). These ideas, of course, do not advocate a return back to a blanket term of woman advocating universal womanhood, but involve a restoration of the concept of sameness as well as shared experiences into the consideration of difference.

With these thoughts in mind, I return to Mora's poetry through which the reader can imagine and create outlets for connection regardless of her ethnic origin. The poem "Diagnosis" from *Borders* is a good example for Mora's treatment of an experience which is not defined by ethnicity but womanhood. It deals with the conflicting emotions and fears brought about by hysterectomy. In the traditionally patriarchal societies womanhood of the female is defined by and limited to her reproductive function. Therefore, the removal of the womb inevitably signals the end of womanhood for someone whose only access to creativity and respect in society has been through the production of children via her body. Although the woman in the poem has already given birth to eleven children she finds it difficult to imagine her self and her body without the womb. As her sexuality is defined solely through her reproductive function she is terrified:

> She fears her man
> will call her empty,
> fears he'll stop breathing
> hard when he hugs her
> late at night.
> …
> She slides her finger where the scar
> will be, fears her laughter
> will now sink into that vacant space.
> The doctor's blue eyes frown
> At such fuss over a useless uterus. (25)

Although the poet only highlights the blue eyes of the doctor, and therefore Anglo-Saxon, somehow this reader assumes that the doctor is a man. Even so the experience is not isolated and it deals with both the notions of difference and sameness simultaneously. The woman in the poem feels different and doubly estranged because she is Latina, but she is ultimately frowned upon as a result of her womanhood. Identification with a group and belonging to that group requires a common ground and sameness as well as being different that others at the same time.

As a Latina writer Mora advocates the understanding of borders within the perspective discussed here. She does not have reservations about regarding white women poets as her mentors. Adrienne Rich is one of these mentors as two women share a belief in female collectivity. When Rich won the National Book Award for her volume of poetry *Diving into the Wreck* in 1974, she rejected the award as an individual. However, she accepted it together with the other two women nominated who were Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. In her speech she said:

> We […] together accept this award in the name of all the women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world, and in the name of those who, like us, have been tolerated as token women in this culture, often at great cost and in great pain … We symbolically join here in refusing the terms of patriarchal competition and declaring that we will share this prize among us, to be used as best we can for women. (Gelpi 204)

The following line in this speech is quoted by Mora herself in *Nepantla*: “We believe that we can enrich ourselves more in supporting and giving to each other than by competing against each other” (136). She refers to Rich, along with Denise Levertov as her “unseen teachers” and points out: “my unseen mentors teach me not only about rearranging words: they teach me about rearranging a life” (136).

Mora is a poet acutely aware of her borderlands. In an unpublished poem Mora refers to herself as follows: “I am the middle woman,/not my mother, not my daughter” referring to her unique border position geographically and culturally (*Nepantla* 5). She, however, not only embraces her borders, but also uses them as a point of contact as she discloses “I learn from the women who border me” (6). She seems to share the vision of Audre Lorde: “The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference” (in Friedman 67). This seems to make sense for Pat Mora as she has declared: “I’m really interested in how we construct wholeness […] In a way it is an issue that incorporates ethnicity or gender or class, but it also includes the challenge of being human” (in Merman-Jozwiak 42). Mora’s work, therefore, can be explored as part of her Latina heritage and through a wider perspective such as that of the Turkish academic who is interested in women’s poetry, its potential and consequences.

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## Özet

### Nepantla Kadını: Pat Mora'nın Şiirlerinde Aynı ve Farklı Olmak Kavramları

Günümüzde edebiyat ve kültürel araştırmalar alanlarında tanımlayıcı terimler arasında en önemlilerinden biri farklılık olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Sınır kavramını da içine alan bu terim Latin Amerikalı yazarlar tarafından farklılıkları ile güçlenmek amacıyla kullanılmıştır. Bu amaç içinse “sınırlar” en uygun metafor olmuştur. Geleneksel olarak sınırlar daima iki veya daha fazla grubu ayıran çizgi olarak görülse de, bu çizgi bu grupların birbiri ile iletişime girebileceği bir kontak noktası olarak da düşünülebilir. Bu makale 1942 El Paso, Texas doğumlu yazar Pat Mora’nın şiirlerini bu çerçevede incelemektedir. Sınırları ayırıcı olarak görmek yerine, onların birleştirici, iletişime olanak sağlayıcı ve iyileştirici potansiyelini göz önüne almaktadır. Şair farklılık ve aynı olmak arasındaki sınırı incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler**: Latin Amerikan edebiyatı, Feminizm, Şiir, Pat Mora

**The Cultural Discourse of a Cholera Pandemic,**
**Misuse of Science and Hawthorne's Two Stories**

**N. Sibel Güzel**

**Abstract:** Nathaniel Hawthorne is known to have mainly dealt with moral and spiritual conflicts of his time, hence similar to the Transcendentalists of his time, he had a tendency towards seclusion. However, in the years he lived at the Old Manse (1842-45), he became a keen observer for the contemporaneous affairs such as racial discrimination, epidemics and the danger, the scientific experiments brought forth. Considering the cultural and medical contexts of the time, he had reasons to be seeking ways to move beyond the insular puritan values, and to be disillusioned. The second cholera pandemic of 1827-1835 reached the United States and contaminating freely brought quick death to many poor and the weak. The germ theory was still premature and contamination ways were a mystery. In the two stories, which will constitute the subject matter of this article, "The Birthmark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter" one can easily claim that Hawthorne recorded such daily worries through his characters.

**Keywords:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, Cholera Pandemic, parallel texts, double vision

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) is generally considered a member of the Transcendentalist movement, dealing mainly with moral and spiritual conflicts of his time. Hawthorne was one of the New Englanders of the time, "a society which is no longer religious, [which] imposes its rationality, its own categories, its problems and its type of organization upon religious formulations" points out Michel de Certeau (141). Being a New Englander and imposing the rationality of his society upon its religious formulations, Hawthorne was naturally prone to skepticism and serious erosion in his belief system is easy to trace in his works. In regard to his interest in daily issues of his time, he was an intense reader, keen recorder and interpreter of contemporaneous affairs and believed in the necessity to provide his readers with great amount of factual information. Hence, the main concern of Hawthorne critics has been to assess the influence of these affairs in his works. Janis Caldwell, commenting on the authors of romantic tradition, reveals that in the first half of the nineteenth century a number of these authors cultivated a form of double vision. She arrives to this conclusion since these writers were in the habit of reading the world through two books: "the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture" (1). They were different from traditional natural theologians because they accepted disjunctions between the two ways of knowing and called for an interpretive method. This seemingly eclectic method enabled them to stand between physical evidence and inner, imaginative understanding, which in the case of transcendentalism is called Reason. Hawthorne who used the findings of science, health, medicine, history and social sciences in order to create innovations in literary presentation, was a typical writer employing the intuitive powers of his reason.

In addition to dealing with the moral and spiritual conflicts of his time, Hawthorne's wishfulness to stay obscure both with his pen and his inspirations play a role on the conflicting interpretations of his works. Hawthorne biographers usually point out Hawthorne's ample use of allegory in his writings, which is a feature praised as well as

criticized. Allegories are handled with the help of the Book of Scripture excluding the Book of Nature, which denotes to a certain limitation. Therefore, we can say that firstly from Hawthorne's firm, unwavering stance at religious matters, which is often claimed to be only on the surface as it is exemplified above, and secondly from the lack of sufficient interpretative tools, very often his implications have not been properly understood; the social, scientific, medical contexts of his works have stayed behind a veil.

As for the biography of Hawthorne, Henry James started writing about him as early as 1879, fifteen years after his death. The material James found related to his lifestyle was so scarce that he concluded "Hawthorne's life was probably as tranquil and uneventful a one as ever fell to the lot of a man of letters" (in Taylor 185). Of the years following his graduation from Bowdoin, Hawthorne wrote "I had always a natural tendency… towards seclusion; and this I now indulged to the utmost, so that for months together, I scarcely held human intercourse outside of my own family". Again, for the same period, he wrote to Longfellow "I have made a captive myself and put me in a dungeon, and now I cannot find the key to let myself out" (in Wagenknecht 76). Following this debilitating solitude, Hawthorne secured some federal government posts and in this way obtained some financial security, which allowed him to write. Then, he married Sophia Peabody, and Sophia saved him from oblivion in his dungeon like conditions. Hawthorne was happy to go back to social life and confessed to it with the words: "For the last ten years I have not lived, but only dreamed of living" (77).

However, what this biography ignores is the fact that Hawthorne was an obsessive reader. A much keener biographer, James Keil sees Hawthorne as one "who used his reading as an archaeologist uses her digs: as a site and source of composition" (238). To Keil's mind, literary archaeology is more than creating the cultural past, but to create a cultural present by "recycling cultural documents". Keil, examining the family's borrowing list from the Salem Anthenaeum (1828-50) reveals that over eight hundred withdrawals were made between these years and Hawthorne is assumed to have read most of these books. As a result of his excessive reading, by the time Hawthorne left Salem in 1838, he was unquestionably a highly qualified authority on history, literature and on social problems. Henceforth, he was seeking ways to move beyond the insular puritan values and with an extended meditation, which is exactly what he achieved in his works.

Being a newly wedded man, and establishing close ties with Margaret Fuller, Hawthorne lived in "The Old Manse" between July 1842 and October 1845 to record the blissful moments of his life. He and his family occupied Emerson's widowed mother's home. Hawthorne's sole wish was to write for the good of society as Emerson did. Raising string beans in his garden gave him pleasure; he felt the importance of keeping in tune with nature. He collected the stories of this period in a book, under the title *Mosses from an Old Manse.* Since he was happy with young adulthood and early marriage, the narrative voice in this collection mainly highlights the tone of this contentment; however, with the exception of two stories: "The Birthmark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter". In this respect, these two stories can be thought to have been inspired by the previous traumas in his life together with his great concern for contemporary issues such as racial discrimination, epidemics and the danger the scientific experiments bring forth. With this kind of writing, Hawthorne created the cultural past of his society, but at the same time making use of other men's texts, recorded the daily worries as well. Keil's maintains that "this method of writing went on until 1850's when he left classical writing in favor of Romantic writing" (239). Therefore, these two stories, especially "Rappaccini's Daughter" deserve a more detailed, assiduous analysis.

**"The Birthmark" and Aylmer as the Mad Scientist**

In "The Birthmark" Hawthorne conceives of a most lovely woman with a birthmark on her cheek. The mark is hardly noticeable and is not a flaw in her beauty. However, the husband, a scientist who is unable to rid his memory of it, suggests eradicating it with some ichor. He is highly concerned with the secrets of chemistry, furthermore, is highly conceited. Just as the success is near, the lady dies under experiment. With her last breath, she whispers to her husband that he has aimed "loftily" and he has applied his science "nobly" and thus, he should not repent.

What forms the backbone of this simple story is the doubt cast upon the usefulness and necessity of scientific experimentation on humans. There are two groups of experiments, as it is clearly defined in the text; namely, the ones on understanding the workings of Nature without interfering with the natural processes and those attempting to change the workings of Nature. Georgiana, the wife, admires her husband for his discoveries on the elemental powers of Nature; for instance, his investigation of the secrets of the highest cloud region. He has spotted the profoundest mines on Earth or has commented on the reasons of volcano eruptions. Neveretheless, he has not yet unlocked the secrets of the masterpiece of Nature, namely, the human being. Georgiana believes that our "creative Mother" is very defensive of her secrets; Nature permits us to mar, to spoil, but she is such a jealous patentee that she seldom lets us distort her masterpiece. The husband's attempt on eradicating the mark on Georgiana's face means to meddle with the ways of Nature. That's why beautiful Georgiana hesitates to be the tested one in his experimental treatment. Aylmer, in her eyes, is not a real scientist, but a pseudoscientist misunderstanding the possibilities of human perfection.

The text drops hints on the pseudo-scientific attempts of the husband as Georgiana begins tasting the elixir. She has witnessed the dangers of interfering with the ways of Nature in the laboratory. Aylmer, the husband, plants a germ, makes it shoot upwards, and in no time at all, a perfect and lovely flower appears. It seems a perfect creation with the nicest smell and leaves its brown seeds in haste. However, this created race is so ephemeral that it appears and withers as if it were a complete illusion. This abortive experiment is expected to have discouraged Aylmer, the husband, but just the opposite happens. When the wife asks him whether he is intimidated by meddling with Nature since he produces a discord in her, he reply is negative. When the wife demands to know the dangers of the same experiment on her, although she is willing to continue with it for the sake of the love she has for her husband, should it bring her death, he keeps his secrecy and leaves the room. To the modern reader, these implications openly make Aylmer very unsympathetic; with this secrecy, not only does Aylmer lose sympathy, but also prestige as a scientist. He attempts to treat his wife's birthmark like an abnormality. He is no different from the quack doctors of his time, and his blind courage reminds us of the irresponsible experiments carried out on living bodies in our day.

Although this enthusiastic scientist appears to be sane, Donald Ringe has done what I intend to do with "Rappaccini's Daughter" and has put the text in juxtaposition with the medical texts of the time and has come to the conclusion that Hawthorne's scientist displays signs that all is not right with him (125). While creating characters like Aylmer, Hawthorne most probably was under the influence of Benjamin Rush, a leading medical authority in the United States, depicting the abnormalities of the time. In *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon the Disease of the Mind* (1812), Rush presents a number of cases and discusses that in the advanced state of mania, or general mental derangement, "the hostility of the [madman] is confined to his friends and relatives only, and this is frequently great in proportion to the nearness of the connection and the obligations he owes to them.

Its intensity cannot be conceived of by persons who have observed that passion only in ordinary life" (152). This kind of madness as is described by Rush is partial. Such persons may function perfectly well in all phases of their lives. Nevertheless, their madness is limited to one particular idea, with which they become obsessed.

Not only Rush but many other contemporary medical authorities have recognized this partial madness. Ringe counts the French physician Philippe Pinel's *A Treatise on Insanity* (1806), Thomas C.Upham's *Elements of Intellectual Philosophy* (1827) among others. The common idea these medical authorities share is that the abnormal persistence appears with "error in opinion, and conduct, upon some *one* subject" (emphasis mine) whereas the person has "soundness of mind upon all, or nearly all other subjects" (Ringe 127). This partial insanity can be attended with distress, in which case it is called "hypochondriasis" or with pleasure or absence of distress, and in this case it is called "melancholia" or "amenomania".

Hawthorne's Aylmer in "The Birthmark" falls into the second group of persistence, namely melancholia; he feels not distress, but pleasure in the idea that the mark on Georgiana's face is something erasable and he is capable of doing it. He resembles Rush's patients in this respect. He is rational with regard to other subjects: he is a calm, respectful, loving husband, but is an "enthusiastic votary" of some idea, cause, or pursuit such as the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone, perfection through human reason or some other much desired goal, all of which were commonly sought by scientists in Hawthorne's time. On the other hand, behaving like this, Aylmer is no different than the doctors or aestheticians of our day, who undergo serious operations on their patients such as a roman nose, a flabby belly or drooping eyes, claiming that these operations are too insignificant to worry about.

**"Rappaccini's Daughter"**

When compared to "The Birthmark", "Rappaccini's Daughter" is more complex and open to contradictory interpretations. It is one of Hawthorne's neglected works, since it has very often been associated with the Biblical references it contains, and these interpretations are doomed to stay quite contradictory and inefficient, since they fail to combine the social implications of the author and the text. One aspect of Hawthorne is common in this tale as well, in that, as I have noted above, Hawthorne prefers to stay invisible and contrary to his friend Edgar Allan Poe's advice, constructs a frame to his writing, which is made in the form of a preface. The preface creates a narration irrelevant to the main tale in one respect, but being interwoven with it, further distances the author from the reader and in this way serves to the wish of the author to remain obscure.

The preface to the story provides the reader with an exaggerated account of Aubépine's works; it is, Hawthorne says, his mission to translate the productions of M.de L'Aubépine, the unfortunate French writer, into English and to do him justice to find "audience". Again, in this preface he introduces this French writer with evasive, untrustworthy words. He justifies the claims made by Aubépine's biographers, while defining the traits of his imaginary Aubepine, he maintains: "As a writer, he seems to occupy an unfortunate position between Transcendentalists (who, under one name or another, have their share in all the current literature of the world) and the great body of pen-and-ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude" (271).

Hawthorne, no doubt, defines himself as a writer with these words. He confesses to his desire to stay obscure, so it is this obscurity that yields new readings of "Rappaccini's Daughter", one of which will constitute the backbone of this article. One further function of this preface can be said to foster intimacy between the writer and the reader. The rhetoric of opposition the preface employs with: "the tastes of Transcendentalists" versus "pen-and-ink

intellectuals", invites the reader to see the narrated body as both "too shadowy and remote" on one hand, and "too popular to satisfy the requisitions" of literary men, on the other. In this vein, Thomas Moore exposes that:

> Aubépine (Hawthorne) camouflages the persona who in turn camouflages Hawthorne, and a triple masking is affected. Here, as in the later prefaces, the narrative voice is both reviewer and instructor, first asserting that Aubépine's writings "are not altogether destitute of fancy and originality", and then admonishing the reader "to take them in precisely the proper point of view". (82)

Consulting the biographical facts, we find that the source of inspiration for a French mediator has come from Hawthorne's interest in French at the time. As James Mellow reports, Hawthorne spent part of summer 1837 with his friend Horatio Bridge in Augusta, Maine, and there, the two friends took French lessons from a Monsieur Schaffer who bestowed French names on his students: Bridge was Monsieur du Pont, Hawthorne was Monsieur de l'Aubépine during the class hours and apparently, Hawthorne did not hesitate to include this reality of his life in his story afterwards (Mellow 91).

This detailed preface forms an invisible wall between him and his reader, but playfully invites the reader to further question the implications and signs of it, so the story focuses on Giovanni and his love affair. The story is set in Padua, Italy, in a distant but unspecified past. From his quarters, Giovanni, a young student of letters, looks at Beatrice, the beautiful daughter of Dr. Rappaccini, a scientist working in isolation. Beatrice is confined to the lush and locked gardens filled with poisonous plants by her father. Giovanni notices Beatrice's strangely intimate relationship with the plants as well as the withering of fresh flowers and the death of an insect when exposed to her skin or breath.

Having fallen in love with Beatrice, Giovanni cannot stay away and enters the garden and meets with Beatrice a number of times in spite of the warning of his mentor, Professor Baglioni, that Rappaccini is up to no good and he and his work should be avoided. Giovanni has discovered that Beatrice, having been raised in the presence of poison, is poisonous herself, but this revelation is not an obstacle for him. In time, he begins to suffer the consequences of his encounters with the plants– and with Beatrice. To his horror, he himself has become poisonous; and after another meeting with the amiable and agreeable professor Baglioni, Giovanni brings a powerful antidote to Beatrice so that they will get rid of the malady and will be together, however, the antidote kills Beatrice rather than destroying her poisonous nature. Beatrice's death devastates Giovanni, he collapses physically and mentally, and death brings an end to the two doctors' rivalry.

**Early Interpretations on "Rappaccini's Daughter"**

When the reader deals with the Biblical references of the tale, it is possible to say that the two characters Giovanni and Beatrice suffer from the original sin of Adam and Eve. For a writer whose themes center on the inherent evil and sin of humanity with a romantic view, this inference is not unusual. Roy Male (99-109), with similar theological implications, suggests that man on Earth is expected to develop full human potential, but to achieve this he finds that the woman represents too conflicting ideals; she is an ambiguous mixture of both matter and spirit. For instance, Beatrice in this story is described with spiritual perfection, but at the same time she is fatally poisonous; she is both beautiful and damned. The males, father Rappaccini and doctor Baglioni, are evil, trying to dominate the good; nature is pure, but they corrupt it. Giovanni, on the other hand is to gain experience, being exposed to Christian values through his love affair. He is to unite with his woman to

be full and he should ask for redemption; instead, he tries to dominate her, does not accept her the way she is, and brings his own downfall. Her poisonous presence is an inseparable part of her spiritual beauty, which Giovanni fails to accept. Hawthorne in the story keeps Giovanni superficially love-struck, while allowing his deeper psychological insight to express itself covertly through symbolism.

Furthermore, in the tale that follows the preface, Hawthorne attaches himself to the venerable, male-dominated scene of European literary history by setting it in sixteenth century Italy. Giovanni becomes infatuated with a tempting lady, only to learn that she may destroy him. The particular danger of this Eve figure is her breath, which is alleged to be fatally toxic, since Beatrice has been raised from infancy among the lethal plants cultivated by her father, the God like Rappaccini. The poisonousness of Beatrice, of the flower, and eventually of Giovanni, is the literal plot of the story. However, when we focus on the social, rather than the theological implications of "Rappaccini's Daughter", we sense the real polyvalence of this text.

**Hawthorne's Social and Cultural Presence in Parallel Texts**

Detailed textual interpretation and close archival research were enough for the critics for a long time, but as it can clearly be seen after Foucault's groundbreaking work *History of Madness*, scholars in the humanities and social sciences departments have started to adopt social constructivist perspectives. By practicing interdisciplinary cultural studies such as those focusing on the intersections of literature and medicine, literature and common diseases and epidemics, literature and discoveries and inventions, literature and attire, literature and eating habits and many more, it is possible to reach multiple competing perspectives and interpretations. Having read the history of fashion by Edward Shorter, especially the devastating consequences of quite an innocent detail like "corsets" on women's bodies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as spinal deformities, tuberculosis, all kinds of internal bleeding, fainting, diarrhea, anal prolapse and so on, the readers naturally start to see a Wollstonecraft, a Bronte, and an Austen female character through new lenses. That is exactly what this article aims to do with the social implications of "Rappaccini's Daughter".

As for reconstructing what I believe a socio-cultural perspective for Hawthorne is, keeping a view to the available records of what existed in daily life in Hawthorne's time, it is possible to see that contemporary affairs were most abundant. Hawthorne mentions most of the topics which interested his contemporaries, but such factual information is so beautifully embellished with a speculative mind, with the voice heard beneath the actual events, that his texts gain a distinctive quality and open themselves to diverse interpretations.

The Mexican War, the dispute over the Northwestern boundary with Canada; travels and expeditions; the temperance movement with its attack on liquors, tobacco, coffee and tea; woman's rights, prison and asylum reform, the abolishment of the capital punishment; various attacks on social and economic injustices; ballooning, the new torpedoes for sea warfare, the search for perpetual motion, changing fashion in dress including the women's demands to wear trousers, patent medicines, diseases and popular music were only a few of his concerns (Turner 42-5). But Hawthorne's most pressing worries came from the disillusionment the impending Civil War created, and epidemics.

With these opinions in mind, we may turn our attention to his great interest in daily issues of both his time period and those of the sixteenth century. In fact, not the daily issues, but taking the story time of the tale into consideration, Carol Bensick's study on "Rappaccini's Daughter" places special emphasis on the time period within the story and

examines the scientists of the tale in the light of the sixteenth century non-literary texts. Bensick discusses the implications of the two scientists of the time. The tale describes us Italy of the sixteenth century and the Renaissance scholars' commonplace position within the society. She concludes that both Rappaccini and Baglioni represent the two contradictory approaches to Renaissance science. Rappaccini, in Bensick's words, is a Paracelsian and Baglioni is a Galenist because Rappaccini learns from nature, relies on observational evidence and does experiments. A close analysis on the text brings us to the following excerpt, which proves how right Bensick is in her calculations:

> Nothing could exceed the intentness with which this scientific gardener examined every shrub which grew in his path: it seemed as if he was looking into their inmost nature, making observations in regard to their creative essence, and discovering why one leaf grew in this shape and another in that, and wherefore such and such flowers differed among themselves in hue and perfume. (273)

On the other hand, Baglioni does not distinguish the body from its sickness. Rappaccini is "emaciated, sallow and sickly looking" (276), because he cares more for science than for mankind: "His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment. He would sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge" (276). Baglioni associates himself with traditional academia; he is a physician of eminent reputation, he has "genial nature" and his habits are "jovial". However, he is the defender of good old rules and believes that there should be limitations to Rappaccini's curiosity to reveal the secrets of nature. He expresses himself with the words: "let us confess the truth of him, he is a wonderful man- a wonderful man indeed; a vile empiric, however, in practice, and therefore not to be tolerated by those who respect the good old rules of the medical profession" (276).

What makes Baglioni a Galenist also comes from the fact that he is in the habit of using contraries to cure (Bensick 67). He gives Giovanni a little silver vase with invaluable contents. This is the antidote prepared by Cellini, and one sip of it is capable of rendering "the most virulent poisons of the Borgias innocuous". Galenists in Bensick's words were content with offering the body what it lacked; dehydration- hydration, natural- artificial and the like.

Bensick, having associated these two scientists with the stereotypes of Renaissance ones, also puts a name to the malady. In her opinion, Rappaccini, Beatrice, and Giovanni all suffer from syphilis. The strange outbursts of energy of Beatrice are the symptoms of her illness. Furthermore, syphilis being a venereal disease, Beatrice is infected with it at birth and she has developed immunity, so Giovanni is the unconscious carrier in this scene. After this observation, Bensick leaves the social implications of the text aside and continues with the moral implications of the disease. She chooses a venereal illness because she intends to relate it to the incestuous moral motto of the story: Is there hidden incest between Rappaccini and Beatrice? Is Giovanni a victim of his lust?

My interpretation will differ from Bensick's, in the way that she takes the time of production essential to be explored, instead of the discourse time lived by Hawthorne, in the text. It is my contention that Hawthorne carries the time of the tale some centuries backwards in order to open himself and his text to more diverse interpretations, aiming to stay obscure at the same time. However, to take the scholars' commonplace position in the discourse time, the nineteenth century, is no less interesting than the Renaissance.

"Rappaccini's Daughter" appears for the first time in a journal called *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, which Hawthorne calls *La Revue Anti-Aristocratique* in the preface to "Rappaccini's Daughter". In the same journal, in February 1843, Fanny Caldron's article appears. Caldron has found out that all along the Mexican coast the people are in the habit of inoculating themselves with the poison of the rattlesnakes, and so they become safe from the bite of all venomous animals. In an entry from *The American Notebooks*, Hawthorne paraphrases Caldron:

> Madame Caldron de la B (in *Life in Mexico*) speaks of persons who have been inoculated with the venom of rattlesnakes, by pricking them in various places with the tooth. These persons are thus secured forever after against the bite of any venomous reptile. They have the power of calling snakes, and feel great pleasure in playing with and handling them. Their own bites becomes poisonous to people not inoculated in the same manner. Thus, a part of the serpent's nature appears to be transfused into them. (Brickhouse 230)

Hawthorne's interest in inoculations and their consequences is considered to be a possible source while writing the contamination of the flower's poisonousness in "Rappaccini's Daughter". In fact vaccination originated in Oriental medicine in this century. In China, Africa, and India, people had long been taking jabs in the arm to guard themselves against diseases. In these countries healthy folk were inoculated with mild doses of the full human smallpox. If the process worked, they did not develop a severe case; they suffered a slight infection but, afterwards, had lifelong immunity. The extension of these applications was seen in England in the first half of the eighteenth century. In 1713 and 1715 the Royal Society published reports on the practice by European medics living in Greece and Turkey. In 1716, Cotton Mather's slave Onesimus informed his master about the inoculations in Africa so that the scientific elite of America became aware of the possible immunisation process (Fulford, Lee & Kitson 198-227).

It was almost seventy years later that Edward Jenner noticed the pearly skin of a dairy maid and prepared a report of seventy pages claiming the pastoral activities of dairymaids, paupers, manservants brought them in touch with cows and cowpox, and thus made them immune to smallpox. Compared to the broken pustules oozing bodily fluids in smallpox cases, the beautiful dairymaid, Nelmes, was only slightly affected by smallpox. Nelmes became the subject of Jenner's experiment. Jenner inserted Nelmes's cowpox into the arm of an eight-year-old healthy boy and managed to prevent a possible smallpox case (1798). As it turned out, it was possible to protect people against one disease, by infecting them with another. Smallpox was the deadliest scourge in existence at that time, killing vast numbers in Europe (including six European monarchs) and wiping out whole indigenous peoples in America. And to think, the cure was coming from cows! The fact was quite revolutionary at the time. This fact also explains the knowledge Hawthorne has while creating Beatrice and the purple shrub intimacy. She calls for protection, while placing the flower into her bosom. She has seen the father's precautions, his thick gloves and the mask over his mouth and nostrils, while approaching this flower. She, on the other hand, with her innocence is a typical Nelmes of Edward Jenner:

> Approaching the shrub, she threw open her arms, as with a passionate ardor, and drew its branches into an intimate embrace- so intimate that her features were hidden in its leafy bosom and her glistening ringlets all intermingled with the flowers.

> 'Give me thy breath, my sister,' exclaimed Beatrice; for I am faint with common air. And give me this flower of thine, which I separate with gentlest fingers from the stem and place it close my heart'. (277).

When Giovanni asks her "whence came this shrub?" she simply answers that her father created it. This plant sprang from the soil as the offspring of his science, of his intellect, and she herself grew up and blossomed with the plant and was nourished with its breath. In this explanation, she is so docile and without questioning, accepts the conditions prepared for her by the scientist father.

As for Giovanni, he becomes immune to the poisonous shrub in time. He is the eight- year-old boy, in whose arm Nelmes's cowpox is inserted. His first encounter with the poison is reminiscent of an inoculation: "I remember, signora," said Giovanni, "that you once promised to reward me with one of these living gems for the bouquet which I had the happy boldness to fling to your feet. Permit me now to pluck it as a memorial of this interview" (284). Although he does not pluck the flower and draws his hand back, from Beatrice's touch on his hand, he feels a thrill transmitted through his body. That night he wakes up with a burning and tingling agony in his hand – "in his right hand- the very hand which Beatrice had grasped in her own when he was on the point of plucking one of the gemlike flowers" (285). With this touch, it seems, the likelihood that his body will be susceptible to this disease is lessened, since his body has started to develop the necessary reaction and antidote. This is described with the words: "on the back of that hand there was now a purple- print like that of four small fingers, and the likeness of a slender thumb upon his wrist" (285). Again similar to the vaccination process, Giovanni wraps a handkerchief around his hand and soon gets rid of the pain and becomes immune.

The long nineteenth century saw the rise of professional public health officers who first counted and later plotted cases of epidemic disease. They started with epidemics, such as yellow fever and cholera, paying special attention to public water supplies, waste disposal, and the management of public thoroughfares. Scabies and favus were widespread and particularly bothersome and they both became important public health targets in time.

In the background of this environmental epiphany we see the Hippocratic idea that claims "the seeds of disease lie both within and outside the body- that disease, especially when large numbers of people are affected, finds its origins in man's habitat". This Hippocratic wisdom gave inspiration to the scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for a revised explanation of endemic and epidemic diseases of the time since Hippocrates would point out three sources from the environment: Airs, Waters, and Places (Dobson 2-29).

Dermatology was still a relatively unexplored subject and was confined to epidemic diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis and smallpox. Physicians produced texts on color plates to guide their fellow physicians and so dermatological atlases were formed on copper plates first, then on chromolithograph and much later the photographs filled the gap (Serlin 85-6).

There is one more point not to be missed that, in this era, bathing, using soap, changing one's clothes were rare and among some social classes they were almost unknown. Naturally people's skin "blossomed with bumps, crusts, crevices, and lesions in a palette of colors that rivaled the works of Vincent Van Gogh and Jasper Johns" (Serlin 88). Most of these eruptions are rare in our day, but throughout the nineteenth century they were so common that Serlin compares the study of the skin to a journey around the world and finds it a more exciting and adventuresome journey.

Hawthorne himself made adventuresome journeys with his characters in his texts but with the literal meaning of the word, he was in the habit of visiting places, too. Hawthorne's chronological documents pinpoint two of such travels, which were cancelled for the same reason, a cholera epidemic. The first excursion he made was due to his need to find settings for his sketches or tales. Thomas Moore (64) notes that he intended to go to Niagara in the summer of 1832, but a cholera outbreak delayed this trip. The second instance was in 1837, when he hoped to join an expedition to the South Seas, but was again compelled to cancel it due to the cholera epidemic. It was this recurrence in Hawthorne's life that led me to further investigate on this malady and identify parallels with it and the depictions in the text.

This cholera outbreak is reported by J. N. Hay in detail. New Orleans, not a very large city with 75.000 people in 1840, had 5.000 tragic deaths in this pandemic (212). This second cholera pandemic was in fact the first one to reach Europe and North America. It spread more rapidly than quarantines could handle and the possibility of contamination through goods and through air also gained much public approval.

Perhaps the most comprehensive of the books published on cholera at the time is by David Meredith Reese, as the name *A Plain and Practical Treatise on The Epidemic Cholera: As It Prevailed in the City of New York in the Summer of 1832*, suggests. Reese sees cholera as an undue flow of bile; for this reason, it is supposed to cause "a retirement of the circulatory mass of the blood from the external surface of the body" (17). The absence of the blood from the capillary vessels causes paleness. This explains why Dr. Rappaccini is continuously described as so pale and why Giovanni gets pale each time he thinks he is infected.

Furthermore, in Reeses's words, this loss of balance between the external and internal circulation soon results in an inverted excitement, during which the insensible perspiration from the skin ceases, and in bad cases the exhalations from the lungs are partially or altogether suppressed and hence the voice is strangely altered. Amazingly, all these symptoms find their place in the narration. Giovanni is described having "ardent southern temperament" sometimes he "endeavored to assuage the fever of his spirit by a rapid walk through the streets of Padua or beyond its gates: his footsteps kept time with the throbbings of his brain, so that the walk was apt to accelerate itself to a race" (279). On such a day he meets Baglioni once more. Giovanni is so restless inside, as is indicated in the symptoms of cholera, that he does not stop to greet the old gentleman. When Baglioni asks him to have a word or two he says, "Speedily, then, most worshipful professor, speedily", "Does not your worship see that I am in haste?" (280).

As for the exhalations, Giovanni notices Beatrice's poisonousness when she gazes at the insect fluttering about her head. This beautiful insect, attracted by the atmosphere of her breath, grows faint first, shivers and falls dead. Some time later, Baglioni warns Giovanni against the same danger with the words: "the fair and learned Signora Beatrice would minister to her patients with draughts as sweet as a maiden's breath" (287). Giovanni soon experiences the same power in him. He watches a spider vigorous and active dangling from the ceiling. He bends and emits a deep, long breath towards it. The spider suddenly ceases its toil, vibrates with tremor, convulses and hangs dead across the window. These are again the symptoms of cholera cases as they are described by Reese. Cholera was known by a disturbance of the digestive organs, a sense of heat, fullness and uneasiness or pain in the abdomen, which the victims of exhalations openly display before they fall dead. "If the symptoms are not relieved by art" says Reese, "the patient will soon fall into a state of collapse with a total loss of pulse at the wrist, impeded or obstructed breathing, a profuse morbid perspiration over the whole body, with a thirst that is intolerable" (25). With a

Hippocratic tendency, Reese discusses the possible ways of cholera contamination. He considers the air, the waters, the soil, bodily contact, but concludes that it can be contagious "only under some peculiar atmospheric circumstance". He says "It must be apparent that the predisposition to cholera was superinduced from atmospheric causes, as in our other American epidemics. And hence, more or less of premonitory symptoms were felt by nearly all of those who inhaled the vitiated air of such localities" (31). This fact further confirms Hawthorne's source of inspiration to create the contamination scenes in the text.

The pun used in the tale add certain richness to it, and display once more the dexterity Hawthorne had while turning his narration into a puzzle for his readers. Towards the end of the narration, Giovanni blames Beatrice for poisoning him and dooming him into isolation. Their love is described with the words "such deep love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice's love by Giovanni's blighting words" (292). "Blighting" with the dictionary definition is "any disease, symptom of disease, or injury of plants characterized by or resulting in withering, cessation of growth, and a more or less death of parts (as leaves, flowers and stems) without rotting and caused by fungi or bacteria, viruses, unfavorable climatic conditions or insect attack" (Webster 233). In this case, Giovanni turns to be the source of evil for Beatrice; he becomes the one to spoil her immunity before he offers him the antidote.

**Conclusive Remarks**

What may have laid the foundations for this Hawthorne story? This is a question not to be answered in an age when we believe that there are no facts but interpretations. It is my contention that the medical and scientific arguments of his time played vital parts. It was the time when literary figures like Hawthorne saw it their responsibility to encourage their readership to become aware and educate themselves. Hawthorne, being an expansive and an alert reader, saw things through the eyes of medical and scientific researchers. Furthermore ,he questioned the present material and possible ideologies behind them. His mental processes were analogous to the processes that are inherent in nature itself. My study, which juxtaposes the medical and social texts of the time with "Rappaccini's Daughter", simply adds a new complex interpretation to those already existing. On the other hand, the word choice of Hawthorne, when adding puns to his text appears deliberate. In my mind, he was well aware of the complicated moral and philosophical questions raised by the epidemics at his time and included them in his narration, leaving the reader at a loss when he or she tries to form an incontestable opinion of Giovanni's love or Beatrice's innocence in his mind. Of course in the minds of today's readers, further deductions can be made. Did Hawthorne foresee a biological warfare which would make immune certain races and wipe out the rest of the world as in the case of Beatrice and Giovanni? Were the things he read in science books at the time the prototypical studies on gene technologies, and thus intensified his interest in cross-fertilization of plants? Why did Hawthorne allow one contaminated character to survive in this story? Did Hawthorne sense the dangers of eugenics? The readers' answers to these questions can make them see the text in a new and surprising light.

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## Özet

### Kolera Salgınının Kültürel Söylemi, Bilimin Kötüye Kullanılması ve Hawthorne'un İki Öyküsü

Nathaniel Hawthorne özellikle yaşadığı dönemin ahlaki ve manevi sorunlarıyla ilgilenen bir yazar olduğu için diğer "Transandantalist" yazarlar gibi o da toplumdan uzak yaşamayı seçmiştir. Ancak Old Manse bölgesinde yaşadığı (1842–45) yıllar içinde günün sorunlarıyla yakından ilgilenmiş ırk ayrımcılığı, salgın hastalıklar, bilimsel araştırmaların yarattığı tehlikeler gibi konuları yorumlamıştır. Bu yılların kültürel ve tıbbi ortamını göz önüne aldığımızda bağlı olduğu püriten değerlerin dışında da çıkış yolları aramasının, gerçeklerle yüzleşmenin gereğini duymasının haklı olduğunu anlarız. 1827–1835 yılları arasında ikinci kolera salgını Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ne ulaşmış ve hızla yayılarak pek çok yoksul ve bünyesi zayıf kişiye ölüm getirmiştir. Hücre kuramı hala gelişmemiş durumdadır, hastalık yayılma yolları bilinmemektedir. Paralel metinler eşliğinde okunduğunda bu makalenin konusunu oluşturan iki öyküde, "The Birthmark" ve "Rappaccini's Daughter"da Hawthorne'un karakterleri aracılığı ile böylesi günlük endişeleri anlatmakta olduğu söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kolera Salgını, paralel metinler, çift yönlülük

**"Dissolved by Rhetoric":**
**James Merrill's Istanbul and the Pursuit of Authenticity**

**Elif Kelebek**

**Abstract:** Partly set in Istanbul, James Merrill's "The Thousand and Second Night" traces the American poet's footsteps around the city. Merrill frequently traveled to Istanbul after a first visit in 1952, as part of his quest for an authentic city not defiled by a "deadly, vulgar, egocentric", and expansionist Western culture. He was disappointed, however, in discovering that Istanbul was already transforming into what he had escaped. In this sprawling poem Merrill diagnoses an irreconcilable duality in Istanbul, which is caught in an everlasting tug-of-war between the East and the West. Drawing an analogy between Istanbul and the half-paralyzed face of his speaker, the poet meditates gloomily on these opposing forces that deform the essence of the city as well as on those that cripple his own soul.

**Keywords:** James Merrill, American transnational poetry, Istanbul, Turkey

An acknowledged globetrotter, American poet James Merrill first visited Istanbul in 1952 and afterwards returned to the city six more times during the following three decades (*Collected Prose* 662). Based in Athens, where he settled in 1964, Merrill was attracted in Istanbul to the charm of an entirely different, Oriental world at a convenient distance whenever he needed a change. In "The Thousand and Second Night", one of Merrill's most popular poems, the city serves as the locale to larger preoccupations, such as aging and deterioration, which plagued the American poet at the time. The poem, dominated by a consistently gloomy tone, proffers disenchantment, anxiety, and deprivation, which contradicts the more enthusiastic tone Merrill adopts toward Istanbul in his unpublished poetry and prose. "The Thousand and Second Night" offers a bleak representation of Istanbul from the perspective of a Western poet who was trying to fly modernity in favor of authenticity and was ultimately disappointed.

Among American poets, Merrill may have visited this coveted gateway to the East most frequently, but he was hardly the first American literary figure to set foot there and afterwards write about the experience. In *American Writers in Istanbul* (2009), Kim Fortuny reveals that the city has figured importantly on the itinerary of American writers since the nineteenth century. Fortuny explores in the light of Edward Said's Orientalist discourse how these writers, including Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Ernest Hemingway, among others, saw Istanbul and how they interpreted the complexities of the city's culture and topography.

By the 1950s, when Merrill paid his first visit to Istanbul, the city had greatly changed as a result of the abolition of the monarchy and the eventual launch of a modernization drive. Sweeping reforms such as the romanization of the alphabet and regulation of the dress code as well as systematic nationalization of the Republic were also transforming the face of Istanbul, a city once characterized by diversity and multiculturality. Migration from rural outbacks was beginning to show its mark in traditionally wealthy and European neighborhoods, such as Pera (İlkuçar 55, 8). It was in one of the hotels of Pera that Merrill took abode during his stays (*Collected Prose* 653); he also translated "Pola Diva" (1969), a poem by Christian Ayoub set in the same

neighborhood, which expresses nostalgia for a bygone era. Turkey was to be a modern republic, not unlike the Western nation from which Merrill first hailed, the United States.

The drastic social and cultural transformation that resulted from reform and nationalization efforts naturally made an impact on western authors' impressions of the city. In *American Writers in Istanbul*, Fortuny reveals how Paul Bowles criticized Atatürk's reforms for their rejection of the East and all Eastern concepts, hence of the country's pure, unmixed native roots. According to Bowles, modern Turkey had turned its back on its natural allies in the East first by rejecting their language, and become incapable of establishing or maintaining a meaningful culture. Everywhere Bowles looked he saw signs of the corruption of an original, premodern culture, Fortuny observes. The politically motivated Nelson Algren, who is also featured in Fortuny's book, criticizes Turkey's modernization bid and mocks Atatürk's ambitions to democratize the country along "White Western" lines, not out of primitivist motives but because he sees the process as part of a latent American imperial project (Fortuny 144-8, 173-6).

Politics were anathema to Merrill. Yet, this change in Istanbul's character is also relevant in "The Thousand and Second Night", despite the fact that he prefers to remain brazenly apolitical. Merrill finds everyday politics not only vulgar and offensive but also frustrating. "The lobbies? The candidates' rhetoric –our commitment abroad? The shah as Helen of Troy launching a thousand missile carriers? One whiff of all that, and I turn purple and I start kicking my cradle" (*Collected Prose* 112). However, he is concerned in broad terms about western expansionism and its transforming effect on the rest of the world, because he likes the differences that distinguish the nations. "[T]hose are being emptied, turned inside out, made to conform –in the interest of what? The friendly smile we're told to wear in our passport photos?" he demands (*Collected Prose* 113). Merrill is annoyed by the fact that he finds himself traveling in an increasingly homogenized and Americanized world where differences between countries and people are disappearing at a rapid rate and rendering his travels less surprising, less exciting and less inspirational. Contrary to Robert von Hallberg's arguments (1985) categorizing the poet as part of the cultural vein of American expansionism, Merrill similarly expresses frustration that the "deadly, vulgar, egocentric" West he escaped is polluting the East, where he has been looking for a sanctuary (*Papers*).

"The Thousand and Second Night", where the poet subtly articulates this exasperation, is made up of five sections that at first seem to have little connection in thematic and formal terms. Merrill began working on these sections as unrelated poems, "then suddenly an afternoon of patchwork saw them all stitched together" (*Collected Prose* 54). Of the five sections, the first section of the poem, entitled "Rigor Vitae", is set in Istanbul. After what seems to be a short stay in Istanbul, Merrill's speaker travels to Greece and back to the U.S. as the poem proceeds. Shifts in form and tone accompany the steady change of scenery in the poem. "The Thousand and Second Night" is partially a gloomy contemplation of the past represented through a metaphorical search for the authentic; that is the bundle of eastern fairy tales entitled *One Thousand and One Nights* to which Merrill's title obviously refers.

In *James Merrill: Essays in Criticism,* David Lehman suggests that Merrill's poems became more frankly autobiographical after 1966 with the publication of *Nights and Days*, which includes "The Thousand and Second Night" (15). But Merrill's poetry is hardly an outright transcription of real-life events and experiences; not only does he obscure facts, he also imagines them, displaces and reconstructs instances in a way that, according to Don Adams, constantly challenges the reader's predispositions and prior knowledge. Adams notes that Merrill doubts the moral rightness of the poet's relationship to experience: "The

famed difficulty of Merrill's poetry is an indication of the lengths to which this poet will go in his struggle to outdistance the knowing mind" (9-11). For instance, of "Yannina" (1973) – a poem he wrote after visiting the Greek town of the same name, Merrill said he had wanted to let the succession of scenes, convey not so much meaning as much as a sense of it:

> We've all written poems that imitate a plausible sequence of events. "I go out" for a walk and find these beautiful daffodils or this dead songbird and have the following feelings. But for better or worse, that walk is in fact taken – or Yannina is visited – by a writer in hopes of finding something to write about, Then you have not simply imitated or recollected experience, but experience in the light of a projected emotion, like a beam into which what you encounter will seem to have strayed. The poem and its occasion will have created one another. (*Collected Prose* 83-4)

To what degree, then, does Merrill use autobiography in "The Thousand and Second Night" and how is this relevant to our understanding of the way in which Merrill constructed his poems? To be sure, my interest here is not strictly speaking biographical. I am less interested in exposing details about Merrill's life than in arguing how his construction of Istanbul reflects how an American poet saw this city as the last Western city and gateway to the East.

Contrary to the bleak picture the poem paints of the city, Merrill's stays in Istanbul were not dreary affairs marked solely by disappointment. From other sources than his poetry, it becomes clear that he had refreshing experiences and even jolly encounters with locals, as he discloses in an unpublished diary entry about Istanbul. He is taken aback by the unfeigned friendliness of people and narrates the anecdotes about his Turkish friends in uplifting tones. He was aware of the fact that Istanbul did not fully conform to the image of the exotic oriental city that prevailed in the Western imagination at the time, but had a cosmopolitan character enabling a diversity of experiences that would not be possible in the Orient. Yet he consciously chooses to obscure these details in "The Thousand and Second Night", as I will argue, in favor of constructing a certain poetic ego as well as a stereotypical identity for Istanbul.

Rather than giving a more or less faithful transcription of his many visits, Merrill twists his experiences in the city in such a way as to project feelings about ageing and change. Echoing the inner conflicts and concerns of the poem's speaker, the tableau of "The Thousand and Second Night" depicts Istanbul as a one-time authentic city that is polluted by westernization, and whose monuments have aged beyond the point of revitalization. Istanbul serves as a meaningful metaphor for Merrill; he is maudlin about what he perceives as deterioration that results from the city's interaction with the west and decay that results from the city's losing touch with its origins, while he meditates on his own anxieties about aging and on the tug of war between his mind and body.

**Unsettling the conventional travel trope**

The first section of the poem, "Rigor Vitae" is in itself made up of five parts. It opens with a liberally composed sonnet, followed by an irregularly rhymed verse paragraph, two pentameter quatrains, another sonnet and four more pentameter quatrains interrupted by a prose paragraph. The variety of the forms used solely in this first section of the poem diffuses a sense of disorder. The changes in the rhyme scheme of stanzas and line width mimic the speaker's movement from one part of the city to the other, or from indoors to outdoors. In a sense, the irregularity of "Rigor Vitae" mirrors the cultural and

topographical diversity of Istanbul. In formal terms, “Rigor Vitae” starkly contrasts with the second section of “The Thousand and Second Night”, entitled “The Cure” and set in Greece. Succeeding the visual cacophony of “Rigor Vitae”, the regularity of the form of “The Cure” has an almost soothing quality with its ten abba rhyming, roughly pentameter quatrains.

When gauging its rhyme scheme and stanzaic form, the first part of the first section is a loosely written sonnet and composed of lines of varying width. When assessing its content, however, “Rigor Vitae”, which translates as “rigidity in life”, opens like a mundane journal entry. It positions the speaker in Istanbul not insignificantly on the day of the “spring equinox”, Yenser observes (126), a moment that divides winter and spring. The speaker, an American man, wakes up with a partial paralysis on his face:

> Istanbul. 21 March. I woke today
> With an absurd complaint. The whole right half
> Of my face refused to move. I have to laugh
> Watching the rest of it reel about in dismay. (*Collected Poems* 176)

From the very outset, the poem diverts the reader's attention toward duality – a theme that frequently occupied the poet’s mind and informed his poetry (Yenser 9). In this case, the speaker finds himself in the grips of a strange condition in a foreign land, and he is alone. Or not entirely, as he muses, in the second stanza, with faint irony when he spots an American airliner outside of his window: “I am here alone. Not quite – through fog outside/Loom winged letters. PAN AMERICAN” (*Collected Poems* 176).

This is a subtle but significant sign and site in Merrill’s poem. It may initially seem as if he is reassuring himself with the possible arrival of a planeload of fellow countrymen. Yet, the introduction of the plane is neither followed by a sigh of relief nor associated with any other sign of emotion, which leaves these two lines open to ambiguous interpretation. It is uncertain that the speaker is worried about being alone in the first place or grateful for not being too far off his homeland. Merrill, thus, chooses not to directly relate how he feels about spotting an American plane so casually in a relatively remote corner of the world, but makes an observation, which gradually unfolds into a critique of Turkey’s westernization.

In the first extensive evaluation of postwar American poets traveling in Europe, von Hallberg has proposed a correlation between the economic and military expansionism of the U.S. in the postwar era and what he interpreted as the cultural vein of this process: “The question in the early 1950s was no longer whether American culture was fecund enough to produce a world-class literature; that challenge had been plainly met. But could Americans assume the custodianship of European cultural traditions as adroitly as military and economic responsibility was being shouldered?” (71). von Hallberg lists a number of poems that rise to the challenge of establishing America’s cultural claim to global hegemony, among which are “The Charioteer of Delphi” and “In the Hall of Mirrors” by James Merrill (75). However, rather than promoting America’s cultural interests, Merrill indicates that he is inherently troubled by the deformation that comes with the interaction of opposing principles, by the effacing influence of the West on the East. This becomes clearer when we look at the drafts of this poem and how Merrill constructed certain details, as he worked by steadily obscuring and altering facts in order to convey what has actually occupied his mind.

In an early draft of this second quatrain, the speaker spots a Goodyear sign outside the window, instead of the Pan American flight and wonders if this could really be Istanbul and not a western city such as Lausanne, implying how minor the differences have become between the two. By changing the reference to Pan American in the final version of the

poem, the poet assumes a position vis-à-vis America's postwar efforts towards establishing global hegemony. Merrill does not simply use the commonly known abbreviation Pan Am to refer to the then primary international carrier of the U.S.; instead, he emphasizes the name by capitalizing it, thereby alluding to the expansionist connotation of the phrase and to the transforming effect of travel on the object, in this case, into American.

In *Mastery's End*, Jeffrey Gray observes that travel has mainly been associated with agency and power in the last three decades of the twentieth century. He proposes an alternative model that implies "a return to 'travel's unsavory roots: a view of travel not as mastery, hegemony, acquisition, penetration, pollution, rapine, and centripetal force, but, instead, as vulnerability, diminution, incoherence, disorientation, and centrifugal force" (3). Gray notes that the traveler seeks to immerse oneself in the unfamiliar and unsupportive, in the hope of achieving a heightened awareness, a perspective, or a release not available at home (4). If travel is a quest for difference, then it loses some of its meaning and value when the contrast between the point of departure and destination is not sharp enough. Similarly, the traveler's experience of a new place becomes stale, as one becomes more familiar with the destination in time.

Merrill experienced this dilemma first hand during his prolonged residence in Greece, where he started travelling "very much in the spirit of one who embarks on a double life. The life I lived there seemed I can't tell you how different from life in America […] How we delude ourselves!" (*Collected Prose* 80). The search for another life and a new identity took Merrill to such diverse destinations as Iran, India and Japan–places whose novelty from the perspective of a well-to-do westerner suggests that the poet was trying to get as far away from the familiar as possible. In fact, Merrill writes in one of his manuscripts that the voyage has become a metaphor–presumably for an escape from the familiar or for the quest for the unfamiliar, rather than referring to the physical act of movement that leads to a specific destination. Merrill travelled to Istanbul hoping for the defamiliarization one would feel amid a foreign culture and topography, but he was not sufficiently shaken into unfamiliarity, because traces of the west have been oozing into a world that he hoped would turn out to be loaded with exotic charm.

**A city caught in a tug of war**

In his classic *Orientalism*, Edward Said observes that a series of tropes such as strangeness, difference and exotic sensuousness have in the last three centuries become identified with the Orient in the western mind (72). The Near Orient in particular has been defined as the west's great complimentary opposite, characterized as being irrational, depraved and childlike (Said 40, 58). It is this promise of "difference" that attracts Merrill to Istanbul in the first place. "This was our first oriental city, and we meant to drink in as much *orientalisme* [sic] as we could", Merrill writes in his memoir upon his first arrival with a friend (*Collected Prose* 653). Merrill's use of the French term for an etymologically English word implies a degree of self-mockery, but also echoes the disenchantment of the western traveler upon encountering the actual, modern Orient, after having studied it solely in the textual universe (Said 52, 103). His disenchantment is caused by the ugliness of rapid industrialization as its transformation gradually erases the marks that distinguish it from other western cities: "Seen close, Istanbul illustrated all the evils of the industrial revolution. Forges roared. The air tasted of coal" (*Collected Prose* 653).

"The Thousand and Second Night" thus portrays Merrill's argument about Istanbul as an entity that is irreconcilably dual; he draws an analogy with the paralyzed face of his speaker in order to illustrate the divided nature of the city: "Twenty-five hundred years this city has stood between/The passive Orient and our frantic West" (*Collected Poems* 176).

One can hear the very subject of Said's criticis –the fallacy of defining and categorizing the bulk of Orientals as "devoid of energy and initiative" (Said 38). Yet, Merrill tries to understand Istanbul in a context that is freed of purely Orientalist prejudice where Oriental is synonymous with exotic, mysterious, profound and seminal (Said 51). Upon one of his arrivals, he comments disapprovingly on how Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey, is depicted in a portrait: "He is wearing evening clothes, and does not seem to have just discarded some crippling native garment in favor of them". Merrill's definition of the West is not particularly flattering: "Western culture, deadly, vulgar, egocentric, –yet it does fit well; dressed in it one can go about looking reasonably smart" (*Papers*). His reference to the West in the poem repeats this feeling of dread albeit in a more coded fashion.

Located at the intersection of the Orient and the Occident, Merrill understands that Istanbul is infused with elements from both civilizations. Nevertheless, he observes with unease that the distortion from the everlasting pull of these opposing forces have transformed it into an epitome of asymmetry. The "passive", "sentient, stupefied" right half of his face shares its attributes with the immobile east embodied by the old town of Istanbul. It is separated by the Golden Horn from the new town, which corresponds to the healthy and active half of the face. Stepping in to complicate a standard orientalist reading of the poem, Merrill inserts an ambivalent modifier for the West. The word "frantic", which, by its dictionary definition, marks "fast and nervous, disordered, or anxiety-driven activity", offers a critique rather than privileging West over East. This quality seems also to be mimicked in the structure of "Rigor Vitae".

Merrill's themes are often built upon this ambivalence of notions, objects and places. For example, he muses similarly on duality in "Yannina" about the powerful tyrant Ali Pasha, who is both gentle and cruel. "Isn't it odd?", Merrill says in an interview, "I mean, how one tries–not just in writing– to escape from these opposites, from there being two sides to every question!" (*Collected Prose* 81). Unable to avoid them, Merrill accepts the opposites into his poetry and subtly deconstructs them, so that he is able to capture the ambivalence of life and the physical world and represent it in the textual universe.

The sonnet closes with a somewhat forced enthusiasm on the part of the speaker, as he decides to fulfill the self-appointed role of the tourist, hoping to be consoled by the sights of the city "Like Hagia Sophia. Tea drunk, shaved and dressed…/*Dahin! Dahin!*" (*Collected Poems* 176). The speaker's excitement fails him, however, as he enters the former Byzantine church. A sudden and drastic change in form and tone takes over. In his depiction Merrill shatters the image of Hagia Sophia as it is pictured in the western mind– the glorious symbol of a golden age. Merrill's treatment of this primary landmark evokes what Kim Fortuny has described as the west's longing and resentment that comes with unfulfilled desire when Istanbul is concerned (xxii). Due to the absence of stanzas, varying line widths and the erratic rhyme scheme, this is the most irregular passage of "The Thousand and Second Night", mimicking the content. An irritable tone echoes off the enjambed and brusque lines and off antagonistic adjectives like "militantly", "wild", "glowering", and similarly aggressive nouns like "whips" and "slogans". The western, Christian visitor feels unwelcome in what he perceives to be a hostile space. He resents the indelicacy with which "the house of Heavenly Wisdom" has been treated in the aftermath of the Byzantine rule and this he views as a threat to his being and identity. However, Merrill is in fact twisting some details to make his case: The apse of Hagia Sophia was never dislocated; it was the nearby Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, or the Little Hagia Sophia Mosque as it is popularly known, whose apse was repositioned after it was rededicated as a mosque in the Ottoman period. Merrill himself makes this observation in

his memoir, *A Different Person* (*Collected Prose* 655).

By means of voicing his resentment, Merrill pays tribute to his western, Christian ancestry. By the same token, he is expressing his loyalty to Greece, which, in the second part of the poem, offers the modern medicine that cures his affliction, albeit superficially:

> It worked. These months in Athens, no one's guessed
> My little drama; I appear my own
>
> Master again. However, once you've cracked
> That so-called mirror of the soul,
> It is not readily, if at all, made wholeç (*Collected Poems* 178-9)

Greece had been Merrill's second home for more than ten years and has occupied the poet's life even before he settled there. In "Losing the Marbles: James Merrill on Greece", Helen Vendler notes that the Greek influence on Merrill began when he studied Greek and absorbed Greek myths at school and college. Greece's infiltration into Merrill's life continued with Kimon Friar, his first lover, who, as a son of Greek immigrants and translator of Greek poetry, "made modern Greece a permanent part of the young poet's consciousness" (Vendler 2010, 51). Vendler observes that every volume of Merrill's verse had a Greek component for two decades after he settled in that country.

A given alignment with Greece positions Merrill by default on one side of the scales considering the everlasting tensions between this country and Turkey, even though his body of work does not betray any personal acrimony towards the latter country. Yet, in his memoir Merrill observes that the years following his first visit to Istanbul in 1952 saw a rapid dispersal of the Greek community. Indeed the population of non-Muslim minorities in Istanbul as well as in other parts of the country took a hit as the nationalization of the young republic went forward. Three years after Merrill's first trip, non-Muslim residents of the city and particularly the Greek minority, were exposed to mob attacks in what is recorded in history as the events of 6-7 September 1955. This final and major blow prompted Greeks to flee Turkey in large numbers. Politically savvy, Merrill was surely aware of this. Nonetheless, he notes, Greeks have never admitted the fact that Istanbul is lost for good. Merrill writes, "in the popular imagination it is simply a matter of time before the city [Istanbul] is theirs again" (*Collected Prose* 660).

Merrill's unfavorable treatment of Hagia Sophia and of Istanbul in the poem appears to owe something to the Greek cause that may have occupied the back of his mind. However, his depiction also subtly challenges W.B. Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium", where the Irish poet eulogizes Istanbul's "monuments of unageing intellect" (163), for inspiring his old soul into singing a new song. Instead, Merrill chooses to rant about Hagia Sophia with overflowing disappointment and rage. What used to be "the house of Heavenly Wisdom" before it was converted to a mosque, has now become a mere shell robbed of its former glory. Merrill observes not a single piece of mastery that impresses him, nothing of the glory of the structure that actually attracts flocks of western visitors, but only the destruction brought upon Hagia Sophia. Not only does he bemoan subsequent Muslim interventions, but he also laments the signs of decay caused by time and neglect on the decaying dome as "bald of mosaic, senile, floated/In a gilt wash". Merrill's depiction culminates into bitter sarcasm when he speculates that the glory ethereal gold mosaic must have been lost long before Yeats' poem, as "the last of numberless handfuls" of its "hypnotic shimmer […] had been picked up from the floor […] by the last 18th-century visitor" (*Collected Poems* 176).

This anger towards change and temporality also takes an aim at Hagia Sophia's current museum status. It was in fact Atatürk who enforced the conversion from mosque into museum in 1934. When Merrill looks at the monument, he sees a lifeless space that has been stripped of its purpose despite its long history of service as a spiritual haven. Through an elaborate conceit Merrill compares the absence of spirituality in Hagia Sophia to his own barren soul. Hagia Sophia becomes a metaphor for the speaker's and the world's spiritual emptiness:

> [...] You'd let go
> Learning and faith as well, you too had wrecked
> Your precious sensibility. What else did you expect? (*Collected Poems* 177)

Merrill's bleak depiction of Istanbul as a contaminated city and of its primary landmark as a soulless space evokes the unreal city in "The Waste Land" where T.S. Eliot describes the mechanization and commerciality of modern day London, the barren and fruitless lives of working masses where the church of "Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours/With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine" (Greenblatt et al. 2298). In both instances there is an evil modernity at work that is draining the spiritual content of a sacred place.

The gloom in the air thickens with the subsequent two embracing-rhymed, pentameter quatrains accompanying the speaker's tour of the garden, where he confronts laid-out tombstones. In his imagination the void surrounded by "acres of ocher plaster" that is Hagia Sophia, transforms into the gruesome image of a person that, in desperately trying to look young, wears a plaster mask made of ground human bones. The repulsion of this image is especially strong, because he sees a similarity to himself. These lines also distantly echo Merrill's anxiety about aging and his preoccupation with his appearance, which he tried to improve through hormone therapy when he was living in Italy (*Collected Prose* 530).

von Hallberg notes that "The Thousand and Second Night" is a poem about a buried subject, in which Merrill explores the split between thought and feeling, Eros and Psyche, mind and body. According to von Hallberg, this is a morning-after poem in which Merrill surveys his past promiscuity in hung-over disgust and resents the rift between erotic experience and the idea of love (97-8). This becomes apparent in the third section entitled "Carnivals", where Merrill alludes to the erotic quality of Scheherazade's story while he regretfully describes being taken over by blind lust:

> A thousand and one nights! They were grotesque.
> Stripping the blubber from my catch, I lit
> The oil-soaked wick, then could not see by it.
> Mornings, a black film lay upon the desk. (*Collected Poems* 181)

The paralysis, then, is the result of lust without love or the rift between mind and body. It is brought upon by a superficial, worldly existence that lacks spirituality, similar to the one in "The Waste Land" and echoing the impersonal, unfeeling copulation of the typist and the clerk. Still in Istanbul and desperate to get better, the speaker takes the advice of a pharmacist and goes to the hamam, the Turkish variant of a steam bath.

"The Hamam" sequence is told in what appears to be a sonnet in terms of stanzas in tetrameter. After the intense anxiety in the quatrains about Hagia Sophia's garden, this part is written in a subdued, almost dreary monotone and echoes the depression that follows an intense bout of anger and anxiety. The octave describes the hamam ritual with explicit allusions to the post-mortem preparations for burial, instead of depicting it as an exotic and

erotic experience Merrill repeated frequently (*Collected Prose* 661). The overwhelming use of passive voice consolidates the feeling of death. "One is […] thrown/On marble, there to be scrubbed clean/Is wrapped in towels and a sheet/And led upstairs to this lean tomb" (177). It is not surprising then the session in the hamam does not heal the paralysis.

"The Hamam" sequence is followed by four other abba-rhymed pentameter quatrains that are interrupted by a prose paragraph. The speaker is on his way back to the modern part of the city and is crossing the bridge when "an infantile/Memory promises to uncramp my style" (*Collected Poems* 178). He jots down a childhood memory in which he remembers himself half asleep in his grandmother's lap and compares the serenity of this image to what he assumes "is felt by someone fallen asleep on the deck of his moored caïque" with the rise and fall of the mosque of Suleiman the Magnificent in the foreground (178). The cherished childhood memory is a thing of the past, just like the sense of harmony that belonged to the city's oriental history. Merrill thus prepares to confront us with the contrasts between the past and present state of the city, the old and the new towns, and express his discontent about what he perceives to be a farcical effort to westernize. This passage reinforces the intentionality of his reference to Pan American airlines in the beginning of the poem.

In *American Writers in Istanbul*, Kim Fortuny observes that countries who appear too eager to adopt "Western" forms in a national attempt to forge a "better life" out of the ruins of exhausted monarchies have often been criticized by Western sources: "Westernization is seen as a weakness by those whose own wars of independence based on distant Enlightenment theories of self-determination now seem the stuff of legend" (141). Merrill's definition of Istanbul echoes this critical tendency: "An entire city/Dissolved by rhetoric" (*Collected Poems* 178), where "rhetoric" alludes to the reforms of Atatürk. Merrill indicates that he finds these changes irreconcilable with and detrimental to the origins and authenticity of the city. He raises a more specific critique of the language reform in *A Different Person* and mocks the signs of phoneticized European words around Istanbul: "Thanks to Atatürk's reforms, the street signs were laughably intelligible. POLIS, TUVALET, KREDI (a bank)" (*Collected Prose* 653).

Merrill does not appear much enamored with Atatürk's goal to steer the country towards more democratic forms of government, nor with the fact that the layman did not understand the high form of the Ottoman language used by intellectuals and scholars in Istanbul. Fascinated by the form of the Arabic script, the poet criticizes the Romanization of the alphabet. "After seeing the intricate gold-and-black squid-shaped tugras and firmans on display in the calligraphy rooms at Topkapi, I can't approve Atatürk's decision to romanize the written language. Inflammatory as Beethoven, hieratic as Mallarme, the Arabic script gives a thrilling, godlike primacy to the most banal slogan", Merrill writes decisively (*Collected Prose* 656). Merrill's interest in the form of the written language seems to arise purely from aesthetic subjectivity and his thirst for the esoteric and exotic; he does not linger on the social and historical background for reform.

In yet other earlier drafts of the quatrains at hand, Merrill's aversion to change and to westernization in particular surfaces, as he defines Istanbul, not as a city dissolved by rhetoric, but as a paltry imitation of the west:

> This only made me sad: An entire city
> Given over to resemblances. Across
> The gray glass of the Bosphorus
> The eye discerned an immobility. (*Papers*)

Merrill characterizes the old part of the city with immobility, but the liveliness he finds in the new part is overshadowed by ugly industrialization and the deterioration of Istanbul's exotic qualities. Thus, the Yeatsian paradox "death-in-life and life-in-death" (Yeats 211) assumes a new layer of meaning in "The Thousand and Second Night". Merrill values the traditional and spiritual aspect that is associated with death, over the modern that stirs with life at the expense of the demise of the other. He is in pursuit of authenticity instead of a replica of modernity, eternity instead of temporality. He is looking for Constantinople, or better yet, Byzantium, but has to settle for the modern Istanbul. He resents change and the effects of time in his surrounding as well as in himself.

**Autobiography versus construction**

Merrill's drafts indicate that "The Thousand and Second Night" was composed some time after 12 April 1962, at which time a temporary paralysis struck his face. The poem was published in the 13 June 1964 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine. By the time Merrill decided to make his condition into a poem on 16 April, he had had it for four days and already received injections and X-ray treatments, contrary to what the poem leads us to believe. Contemplating about the underlying cause of his condition, Merrill jokes about the multitude of guests who "cramp their style" and notes in a graver tone: "Or else: The face is the mirror of the soul. My soul…" (*Papers*). A friend tells him he had the same complaint and that it went away after an hour in a steam room. The association with the hamam must have come to him shortly after that. He soon decides to set the poem in Istanbul instead of Xian.

This information hints that when the paralysis occurred, Merrill may not have been in Istanbul at all; furthermore, he was probably working on a poem about Xian. Indeed, in a separate 35-line manuscript among his papers, Merrill describes in a somewhat elated tone the side streets of a "city that was built on the Chinese gridiron" and an encounter with a [local] family (*Papers*). "The Thousand and Second Night" is thus not so much a factual transcription of the poet's visits to Istanbul, as Istanbul is an Oriental Wasteland he is trying to conjure through the poem. Yet, the city is used as a disorienting and –or should we also say– Oriental mirror from which a sense of this emotional state bounces back to the reader. To this effect, Merrill constructs a poetic identity that is riddled with personal drama, as well as an identity for Istanbul through which he distorts the image of the city.

Contrary to what his published work suggests, gloom is not the only sensation that awaited Merrill in Istanbul. In his unpublished poem "Byzantium Revisited", the poet creates a trope for permanence in the multitudes of wild birds populating the city. The great numbers and diversity of birds that have survived in the urban landscape beside their representations in artifice over the millennia rule out the connotations of avian fragility. For Merrill, it is not the monuments, hence artifice, that symbolize continuity in Istanbul, but the birds that are perennially reproducing themselves and at the same time making their imprints on artifice. Merrill further pits this trope of nature against artifice in "Flying from Byzantium" (1969), where he explores the possibility of regeneration and permanence through nature. Dedicated to finding authenticity resilient enough to endure time, the traveler flies from the artifice of Byzantium toward what proves to be another piece of fabrication. Merrill knows his destination will forever elude him, but he follows his quest nevertheless.

In *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980*, von Hallberg discusses a number of post-war travelling American poets, including James Merrill, who, he argues, have shown marked curiosity about the dominant American culture and written poetry with an eye on the center (8-9). In von Hallberg's view, by writing about their travels outside the United States and mainly to Europe, these poets were, in their own distinctive ways, shouldering

the custodianship of the old world's cultural heritage–an effort that went hand in hand with the United States' political and economic expansion. von Hallberg's discussion allows for flexibility in terms of what the individual poets take to be the center of the culture, which in Merrill's case is associated with his upper-class background. According to von Hallberg, Merrill's frequent use of stylistic tools such as mannerism, euphemism, periphrasis is expressive of his class loyalty. von Hallberg defines Merrill as a poet "who, rather than unify style and content in post-Romantic fashion, prefers to set style at odds with content. His style often throttles content" (106).

In *Mastery's End* where an alternative model for postwar American travel poetry is proposed, Jeffrey Gray entertains the possibility of inverting the relationship where home is the norm and travel is the figure or aberration. Rather than concentrating on travel's associations with agency and power, in which the traveler establishes a hierarchical relationship with the destination by defining and describing it, Gray presents travel as a condition that is associated with vulnerability and disorientation. According to the critic, this vulnerability may present itself as a bewildered, instable speaker who interacts with an equally instable host culture as in Elizabeth Bishop, or a strained, introspective speaker who is increasingly vulnerable to the duress of travel as in the case of Robert Lowell, or as a childish speaker who seeks an infantile release from duty and the law of the father as in the case of John Ashbery (Gray 3, 67, 109-10).

von Hallberg and Gray suggest models that are on the two opposite ends of one scale, thereby not really anticipating what James Merrill has in store for us in "The Thousand and Second Night". For Merrill is neither a handmaiden to American culture, nor is he an irredeemable escapist aimlessly tagging along a child's fantasy. When he left the United States for Europe, Merrill intended to escape modernity, trivialities of an upper-class urban life, his sterile, and a white American background as well as the stifling heterosexual norms of the time. He desired to become a different person, as the title of his memoir stands to witness, believing that the further away he traveled from the United States, the further away he would be traveling from himself towards a non-fabricated, stable and permanent body of culture that would have transfixed time and pacify his fears of change and aging. Elaborate figures of speech and elevated diction have occasionally led to the poet's being misunderstood by critics. However, these were Merrill's tools to consolidate timeless art. In fact, they show Merrill's desire to go beyond time and elude its destructive effect on matter.

At first sight, Merrill seems to arrive in Istanbul in a similar spirit, that is, to discover Yeats' monuments of unageing intellect that would endorse art and justify its permanence. "The Thousand and Second Night" imparts a pursuit of authenticity and wisdom that has challenged centuries, aesthetics and magnificence that has endured time. Instead, the poem characterizes Istanbul with a mismatched modernism that seeks to imitate the deadly and vulgar western culture that is being forced top-down onto the city in a way that cuts off its lifelines, or connections with the past. Given the constantly changing cultural and demographic structure of this unique geography through time, authenticity as far as Istanbul is concerned is nothing more than a fallacy. What had once been Byzantium became Constantinople, and then Istanbul, the change bearing its weight on the predecessor each time. Merrill was surely aware of this when he conceived "The Thousand and Second Night". He handpicked the city as a metaphor embodying the death of an authentic culture through western hands, which was not only happening in Istanbul but also elsewhere, and molded his experience into a mournful poem about a forever changing city that is hard to capture in words.

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## Özet

### Söylemle Çözülen Şehir: Sahicinin Peşindeki Amerikalı Şairin Gözünden İstanbul

James Merrill'in kısmen İstanbul'da geçen "The Thousand and Second Night/Bin İkinci Gece" adlı şiiri, Amerikalı şairin kentteki gezisine tanıklık ediyor. "Ölümcül, hoyrat, benmerkezci" gibi sıfatlarla tanımladığı yayılmacı batı kültürü tarafından kirletilmemiş, özgün kültürünü koruyabilmiş bir şehir arayan Merrill, 1952 yılındaki ilk ziyaretinin ardından İstanbul'a defalarca gelir. Ancak İstanbul'un, kaçmakta olduğu batıya öykünerek hızla değişiyor olması şairi hayalkırıklığına uğratacaktır. Merrill bu uzun ve kasvetli şiirde doğu ve batı arasında çekiştirilip duran İstanbul'un muzdarip olduğu uzlaşmaz ikiliğe ve bu ikiliğin şehrin dokusunda sebep olduğu çarpıklığa işaret ediyor.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** James Merrill, Amerikan transnasyonel şiiri, İstanbul, Türkiye

# Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* in the Context of Myth-Making in Jungian Perspective

**Zennure Köseman**

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to highlight the reasons for the presentation of archetypal myth in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1917) in respect to the modern world in Jungian perspective. Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* and Eliot in *The Waste Land* expound the feelings of disillusionment of moral demise, disgust, hopelessness, confusion of purpose, meaninglessness, alienation, and isolation in the urbanizing modern period. Fundamentally influenced mainly from the complexities of the modern period, these two distinguished writers reflect the significance of social and psychological changes through the use of mythic elements in their masterpieces. Conrad uses Marlow's solitary journey and spiritual change as a setting for his subject matter. Likewise, Eliot has a profound appreciation for the use of the myth of the Holy Grail in *The Waste Land*. Through Eliot's appreciation of medieval Grail romance and Conrad's emphasis on the journey from the safety of the known into the world of mystery, it will be possible to reveal the reasons for the extreme disappointment of the modern period. Since myth-making is central to the arts of twentieth century, new paths of insight in the sense of its relativism can be suggested to evaluate the issues in the new era. These writers yearn for a measure of nostalgia while choosing mythopoeia as the main subject of their masterpieces to emphasize the themes of restfulness, peace, tranquility, comfort and happiness.

**Keywords**: myth-making, Modernist Literary Movement, Holy Grail, mysterious journey, disillusionment

> I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by the narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips.
> (*Hear of Darkness* 1910)

The literary works of Joseph Conrad and T. S. Eliot can strongly be identified with each other in thematic basis of myth-making and psychoanalytic appreciation as they emphasize the dark side of human nature in inner journey. They reflect the relationship between mind and the body and imply how feelings and prejudices influence the nature of human development in social life. The inner world has unconscious energies, fears, and instincts that manifest psychic reality far beyond the limitations of the modern world. Conrad and Eliot's literary works depict a comprehensive sense of the vital engagement of the modern novelist and poet. They focus on the conflicts of the modern life, lacking vitality and spirituality and, thereby, recapture and use myths as a measure of contemporary events and personal emotions (Spiller 282). By psychoanalytic perspectives on myth, Freud's successor Carl Jung will be the core of this article.

Myths are the traditional stories that embody the course of collective history and conscience and assign ideological meanings to the history of that period. They describe the

substantial characteristics of human cultures. Applying mythological figures of traditional narratives, influential authors exemplify and historicize ideologies of the period. Since myths are stories drawn from history, they symbolize many attitudes, behaviours and psychological attributes of the people living in that culture, i.e., they are structural metaphors that symbolize function central to the culture of the society in which they emerge. They represent the fundementals of culture's world view (Slotkin 1986). Conrad and Eliot define their cultural and social elements by focusing on psychological thematic basis of meaninglessness, barrenness, isolation and estrangement. They reflect how all humanity overview life in pessimist world appreciation. In mythic acquiescence, writers are in a search for mingling past and present and create a unity to interpret the psychological changes in social life as an outcome. They comment on the social and psychological changes extensively when the mythic figures are taken into account in respect to psychoanalytic perspective.

Psychoanalytic concepts are used as mere metaphors: the Freudian *id* or the Jungian shadow (Dobrinsky 3). Freud explains three phases or stages of human psyche as the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*. The *id* embodies "the irrational, instinctual, unknown, and unconscious state of human psyche where the repressed hungers, images, thoughts, and desires of human nature dwell. It is the storehouse of hidden desires, fears, passions and irrational thoughts that collects and maintains memories" (Bressler 144-46). While approaching these two well-known literary works in a psychoanalytic basis, Carl Jung exposes more on what Freud defines previously. This implies that in this article, Jung's interpretations on psychoanalysis will be much more effective in the correlation of myth-making in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Waste Land*.

In forming his model of human psyche, Carl Jung sustains psychoanalytic analysis of Freud's *id* stage. Jung accepts that the unconscious comprises a major role in conscious decisions, yet, he rejects Freudian analysis of the contents of the unconscious:

> For Jung, the human psyche consists of three parts: the personal conscious, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious The personal conscious and personal unconscious comprise the individual psyche. The personal conscious or waking state is that image or thought of which we are aware at any given moment. Similar to a slide show, every moment of our lives provides us with a new slide. As we view one slide, the pervious slide vanishes from our personal consciousness, they are stored and remembered by the personal unconscious. Jung asserts that all conscious thoughts begin in the personal unconscious. [...] The collective unconscious [is] the part of the psyche that is more impersonal and universal than the personal conscious and the personal unconscious. This part of the psyche houses the cumulative knowledge, experiences, and images of the entire human species. According to Jung, people from all over the world respond to certain myths or stories in the same way, not because everyone knows and appreciates the same story but because lying deep in our collective unconscious are the species' memories of humanity's past. (Bressler 150)

Since humanity's past is reflected in the memories, then "collective unconscious" will be significant to deal with. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad focuses on psychoanalytic appraisal as observed in Marlow who copes with more than what he whispers. He voices what all human beings yearn for: "But I have a voice too and, for good and evil, mine is the speech that cannot be silenced" (1916). Here, Conrad implies a Jungian "collective unconscious": men are in a quest for finding new places to inhabit because of being bored of experiencing a state of loneliness, isolation and alienation. This implies that not physical

but rather psychological matters are the reasons for the search of a new settlement. When *Heart of Darkness* and *Waste Land* are analyzed in this context, all human fears, desires and passions compose why Marlow is in a quest for finding another location: being disturbed of the previous living circumstances. L. James Hammond expounds that by means of the usage of archetypal myth, Conrad appreciates a Jungian psychoanalytic perspective in which he is in a desire for separation from the material world, initiation of spirituality, return to selfhood in his subconscious (2005). Hammond can be supported in this argument because of commenting on Conrad's retrospective attitude of living in the moral world rather than the material and using mythic figures to comment on the present circumstances via the past experiences.

*Heart of Darkness* goes beyond being a short frontier literary work in interdisciplinary evaluations. Joseph Conrad's interest in the exploration and travelling to different locations ends up the beginning of a mysterious journey abroad on an English ship formed of a group of four individuals: a lawyer, an accountant, a company director/captain, and a man, Marlow, without a profession. As the voyage begins, Marlow begins to criticize Europe and London as some of the darkest regions of the world which signifies that there are some other mysterious places to see in the world, i.e., he is on the conquest of the earth's undiscovered districts (Bennett 76).

Conrad develops an intense interest in exploring the darkness of the new location and the human psyche by retelling the story of Marlow's job of narration of the voyage in the interior of the Congo River. Jungian psychoanalytic considerations become significant in this aspect. Conrad's Congo experience in his early childhood impairs his health and haunts his imagination. The nightmarish milieu of *Heart of Darkness* is the reflection of his response to his previous traumatic experience (Greenblatt 1890). He recounts what the memories of the past marked on his psyche.[1] Conrad emphasizes how the journey from the known to the unknown districts reveals the issues of being in a state of desperation, loneliness and isolation in the current living circumstances. Marlow's night journey in the novella is a journey into the "unconscious, a mythic descent into the underworld, a meditation on transgression, an allegory of narrative representation, and a key text in both modernism and colonial fiction" (Parry 39).[2] The unconscious journey in the mythic context of the underworld notes the interest in the depths of human psyche in which there are the hidden fears, anxieties, desires, passions, and memories. Conrad clearly expresses his response via Marlow who states: "I confounded the beat of the drum with the beating of my heart" (1938). With his beating heart, he approaches mysterious reality hidden in the depths of Africa:

> Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the whites of their

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[1] He is a deeply pessimist fictional writer who does not find recovery out of his self-knowledge and loneliness, and thus reflects destruction by going down in the heart of darkness (Daiches 155).

[2] His journey into the unknown places recalls an eighteenth century writer, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in the context of the central theme of imperialism underneath. Exploration of the new hidden places and the recognition of other human beings just reflect what Conrad pinpoints in his journey to the inmost parts of Africa: imperialism. While reflecting an imperial activity in his voyage, he is in a state of nostalgia for anti-imperialism. This means that one should account for the conflicts of several issues such as skepticism, idealism, imperialism and anti-imperialism while analyzing Conrad's literary masterpieces (Eagleton 232).

> eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks–these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. (Conrad 1899)

Having no excuse for inhabiting in the newly explored places imply that those people are content with breathing in the uncorrupted happy living environment. Marlow's quest in *Heart of Darkness* is substantially related to mythic and psychoanalytic readings. At the end of his journey, which is essentially in his own psyche, the heart of darkness of Africa becomes visible. As Burden emphasizes, the modern quest is "a journey into the depths of self" (13). Essentially, the journey reflects the dark side of personality in which most events unconsciously dwell; hence, the story of *Heart of Darkness* can be analyzed as an archetypal journey of initiation in the primitive life of the world.

In literary history, there is a long list of writers who are inspired by Joseph Conrad as that of T. S. Eliot, Oscar Wilde, and Henry James whose literary criticism, poetry, prose, and drama also influenced others such as Claudio Guillen, Harry Levin, Henri Pyere, Rene Wellek, and Ihab Hasan (Sultan 227; Eagleton 232). Joseph Conrad has been influential on Eliot's themes, subjects, and writing style. Basically established on a sign of pessimism, in *The Waste Land*, Eliot also underlies the plot of the two influential contemporary texts, Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and Sir James Frazier's *The Golden Bough*[3]. The title of Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* refers to a myth from *Ritual to Romance* in which Weston describes a Fisher King whose genital organs have been wounded. These two authors' particular interest has been the persistence of ancient fertility rituals in contemporary thought and religion through the story of the Fisher King who has been wounded in the genitals and whose lack of potency has become a significant problem for the whole nation. Such a discrepancy causes the country to become a "waste land" which can only be healed on the account of the healing of the Fisher King from his impotency. The problem will be solved when a Knight appears and asks the question to find the meaning of the Grail and the Lance (Drew 85). Such a problem indicates that a hero is required to restore the kingdom of which Eliot adapts the story of the Fisher King to the state of modern society in which there is no way to heal the Fisher King at all. Here, there lies a deadlock in Fisher King's life and personal matters, indicating that Eliot reflects the reality of the deadlocks via the mythopoeia.

As Dyphna Erdinast-Vulcan emphasizes "Marlow sets out on a journey in search of that lost vitality, the essential wholeness man has lost in the course of his material progress" (1991, 92). In this sense, Marlow's quest is a search for a spiritual initiation to consider the world individuals live, as the heart of darkness which can reach light on the account of an escape from the material possessions. C. B. Cox expounds in detail the significance of Conrad's journey:

> He is in search of self-understanding and perhaps trying to exercise psychological conflicts by which he was still possessed. In this short novel he dramatizes his own conflicting attitudes to passion and reason, savagery and civilization. *Heart of Darkness* is a truly great parable because these personal crises attain universal significance. The events of the story reflect ambiguities and tensions of central

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[3] In his notes at the end of *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot expresses that he referred to external sources of Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* and Sir James Frazier's *The Golden Bough.*

> importance to Western culture. It is not surprising that T. S. Eliot was so much influenced by *Heart of Darkness* when he was writing *The Waste Land*.[4] (13)

In order to signify how influential *Heart of Darkness* is on the other literary masters, it will be significant to express its abundance of various themes such as passion, reasoning, innocence, corruption, imperialism, anti-imperialism, alienation, and isolation.[5] A gloomy and pessimist mood dominates the wonder journey of *Heart of Darkness*. The night-sea journey represents a journey into Hades in which there are evil and damned creatures. Through the representation of a quest into Hades where evil and horror exist, Shane Bombardieri explains that Conrad intends to challenge some of the social values of his society such as that of patriarchy, materialism, and secularism. Going into the underground leaves behind all the current repressions and complications backwards. The values represented by Marlow predominantly signify Conrad himself (Bombardieri). The existence of both good and evil in the same content also reflects how hypocrisy dwells in social relations. The illusionary and dreamlike journey into Hades also stand for a visit to the depths of the human psyche that embodies fear, disgust, innocence, darkness, evil, and goodness at the same time. This night journey also represents that Conrad is in a state of "escape, departure, and the negation of his entire life", i.e., it is a case of the dispossession and the loss of old social values (Harpham 18).

In defining Marlow's voyage as a pilgrimage, his state of mind can be associated with that of a pilgrim to achieve a spiritual salvation in the material world (Vulcan 1991, 94). In other words, Marlow's journey is a search for a discovery of moral and spiritual perfection away from the remnants of material world. Jacques Berthoud explains the journey in *Heart of Darkness* as "a journey into the jungle [...] into man's history, a return to his primordial origins. The darkness into which Marlow ventures has a heart which can be found within his own breast" (Berthoud 44).

The dominant theme of *Heart of Darkness* is that his journey is actually into his ancestral past and what Kurtz discovers at the end is what Marlow assesses about life in general. This implies how individuals away from all material progressions live in peace and ease in the previous times. For Marlow, as for Conrad, the ideals of European life to explore other places form the heart of darkness, that is, heart of darkness is in the social life of the European community (Berthoud 60).[6] Marlow expresses that he came to see reality clearly by the time he encountered Kurtz:

> It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me– and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough too–and pitiful–not extraordinary in

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[4] C. B. Cox would emphasize that T. S. Eliot, similar to Joseph Conrad, expounds the dark side of human psyche while writing *The Waste Land*. This indicates that Eliot's journey is also into the heart of darkness of the modern world in which there aren't any reasonable relations, love, respect, aspiration, and honesty. Hence, Eliot's journey is into the inadequacies of the civilized world.

[5] T. S. Eliot explains as "Mistah Kurtz – he dead" (Eliot, "The Hollow Man" 2309) and reflects how Joseph Conrad is influential on his literary life. This is an allusion to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1941). Kurtz is defined as a soulless "hollow man", "stuffed man", representing physical and spiritual emptiness that goes to Africa for his business of slave trading.

[6] What is meant is the interest of imperialism. Conrad becomes a social critic while implying the nostalgia of anti-imperialism.

> any way–not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light. (1894).

Marlow implies that he has a self-recognition, an awakening and an inner journey in his psyche when he meets Kurtz in the process of navigation. He notes that that is the time when he just experiences the real essence in his beirg.

Plato's allegorical story of cave can also be interpreted to assess the usage of myth in *Heart of Darkness*. Being chained to the wall of a cave all of their lives, a group of prisoners only face a blank wall and see the shadows of the things. Plato emphasizes the contradictions of light and dark, and reality and illusion. Such contradictions also exist in Conrad's masterpiece especially when Marlow arrives at the mouth of the river and hikes up the hill to the company station. There he sees six black men carrying baskets of dirt up the path with an iron collar on each individual's neck. They were all connected together with a chain. In this case, *Heart of Darkness* reflects a representational work of myth-making in which discourse of ethics is also hidden (Gibson 113). The cave, here, can be explained as the unconscious state of the human psyche where memories, shadows, and illusions are collected. In Freudian terminology, it is the *id* and in Jungian, it is the "collective unconscious". Marlow describes this case better:

> We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares. (1899)

This indicates that none of them can see the reality in front of them but the shadows of the things because of looking only at one direction as a result of the iron collar on their neck. They can only see the shadows of shapes. In *Heart of Darkness*, in this case, making a comparison with Plato's myth of cave becomes unavoidable especially because of hinting at shadows, light, illusion, and reality. Somebody experiences reality when there is nothing else to see around, i.e., reality comes out of the taste of nothing according to Plato's myth of cave. Kurtz's closing moods in the novella makes the case of the recognition of reality and truth clearer:

> 'The horror!' [...] After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth–the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it is not my own extremity I remember best–a vision of grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things–even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps! (1942)

The voyage into Africa makes reality much more apparent so that the main characters could differ between what is real and what is illusion, better. This indicates that the voyage also becomes a means of self recognition of reality. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan indicates that there is an emphasis on the longing for nostalgia throughout the novel. The nostalgia becomes significant especially when they evaluate "the horror" in their voyage as a means of understanding the horrors in their personal lives (2005, 62). The voyage represents an awakening and an epiphany to recognize the case of reality of their corrupted and meaningless backgrounds. In his journey, Marlow states:

> It was unearthly, and the men were–No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it–this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity–like yours–the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in your just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you–you so remote from the night of the first ages- could comprehend. And, why not? The mind of man is capable of anything– because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, truth, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage–who can tell? but truth–truth stripped of his cloak of time. (1916)

This is the self discovery in the heart of darkness in which men encounter real life of happiness away from all fear and sorrow. That is the happiness men experience in innocent circumstances where there is no sign of rage, horror and frightful circumstances. When Marlow begins his tale, he describes his journey up the Congo saying, "it was the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me- and into my thoughts" (1894). Moreover, Marlow's description of Kurtz himself, after he has experienced him, is that he was "a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night" (1944).

Thus*, Heart of Darkness* is concerned with a psychoanalytic journey within which belongs to the mythic literature.[7] Since the quest is a journey into darkness, then it can also be accepted as a voyage to Hades, the Underworld made of darkness. The journey also reflects the profound spiritual changes in the voyager: Marlow at the end of his journey of Congo never forgot the corruption of humanity in the deep heart of Africa. He became obsessed with the images of wilderness in the darkness of the forests embracing the existence of horror and evil (Cox 10). This dreamlike nightmarish horror is reflected in the novella in order to signify the dark side of human nature. For him reality is kept under the surface and, therefore, it is hidden, inside and within. Conrad's myth-making is to find this invisible reality through a journey into the heart of darkness. There are shadows in the darkness causing horror and fear. Marlow encounters Kurtz in the heart of darkness in which he shouts as "Horror! Horror". This is a sign of repressed human nature revealing itself at the moment of self-discovery. Through Freudian *id* and Jungian "collective unconscious", men will experience the same feelings and attitudes Marlow has, afterwards. Marlow is a representation for "everyman" and symbolizes all the collective attitudes and behaviours of people.

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[7] Although *Heart of Darkness* reflects many of the cultural myths of his time, it can also be evaluated as a powerful critique of imperialism.

T. S. Eliot can also be regarded as one of the milestones of twentieth century in the modernist literary canon due to his extensive contributions to poetry, criticism, prose and drama. Eliot produced *The Waste Land* with the abundance of reference to history, religion, mythology, and other disciplines. The poem is basically constituted of five main sections: *The Burial of the Dead*[8], *A Game of Chess*[9], *The Fire Sermon*[10], *Death by Water*[11], and *What the Thunder Said*[12]. Despite its obscurity, it can be assessed that several sources have inspired the production of *The Waste Land*. The poem basically reflects with great power the disillusionment, hopelessness and confusion of purpose in life in the secularized city, and the disgust of the moral decay of post-World War I. This sense of disillusionment, social emptiness is manifested through a legend, the quest for the Holy Grail which makes the poem universal more than anything. Such a usage of the archetypal myth also maintains a unity throughout the poem (Wilson 24). By the usage of the themes of complexities and contradictions in civilization, fragmentation in social life, decay and death, Eliot creates a complete view of civilization, of human history and of human failure. Eliot achieves focusing on these themes via his dependence on the myth of the Holy Grail (Daiches 1133-34). He reflects the necessity of resurrection via the fertility myth. Healing the Fisher King, the land will regain its fertility. For a fertile land, Eliot considers the requirement of four elements of earth, air, fire and water (Spiller 283). They are all the life forces and try to give meaning to the sterility of the modern world. Eliot's focus on the myth of fertility is a search for healing the damaged psyche of humanity in the afterschocks of World War I. This implies that he is in a quest for regeneration and manifests his attitude of retrospection by following the myth of the Holy Grail. Eliot also analyzes men psychoanalytically in Jungian perspective. He defines how humanity turned out to be psychologically destructed. In Jungian "collective unconscious", he comments on men who are influenced from their living circumstances and become infertile. There can be regeneration when they acquire their selfhood far from the conflicts of the modern world as well as social disorders, spiritual emptiness and desolation.

At the beginning of his poem, Eliot directly refers to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in order to express how even the seasons, especially spring, is affected from the coexistent changes in life. Eliot grieves the passing of his world by emphasizing the main theme of his poem as the longing for the good old days. Whereas Chaucer reflects April as a month of sweet showers, Eliot describes it as the "cruelest month":

> April is the cruelest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring

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[8] The title is of the Anglican burial service (Eliot 2295)

[9] *A Game of Chess* goes back to Middleton's play, *Women Beware Women*, the game of chess is used as a device to keep the widow entangled while her daughter-in-law is being seduced (Eliot 2298). There is mythological reference to the door of Hades–the Underworld.

[10] *The Fire Sermon* was preached by the Buddha to be against the fires of lust and passions that destruct people and prevent regeneration in them (Eliot 2300).

[11] In this section, the cause of death is by water without resurrection. That is the sacrificial rebirth preciding regeneration (Eliot 2305).

[12] There are three themes in this part: the first one is a journey to Emmaus, the second is approaching to the chapel perilous as in Miss Weston's book, the third is the present state of Eastern Europe. Again, mythical references are employed to emphasize regeneration after sacrificial death (Eliot 2305).

> Dull roots with spring rain.
> Winter kept us warm, covering
> Earth in forgotten snow, feeding
> A little life with dried tubers. (Eliot 1-7)[13]

April which is generally described as a month of regeneration and rebirth is not a month of revival in Eliot's *Waste Land*. Pessimist outlook towards life dominates his influential poem. As indicated above, April is cruel by contrast to Chaucer's, Shakespeare's, Browning's, and Brooke's writing style; it is not sweet and lovely but emphasizes the dead land –modern waste land– of the modern era (Frank 40). It is not anymore the happy month of Chaucer's pilgrims and storytelling. As the opening of the poem indicates, *The Waste Land* is much concerned with the life, death, and the possibility of resurrection. Eliot, in his poem, refers to the blind poet Tiresias in order to emphasize how modern life has become ambiguous and how a saver is needed to give an order to all the mess and disorder in life:

> I Tiresias[14], old man with wringkled dugs
> Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
> I too awaited the expected guest.
> He, the young man cabuncular, arrives. (Eliot 228-31)

Here, through Tiresias, Eliot again benefits from mythology in order to emphasize the significance of the past in life and implies that *The Waste Land* is predominantly about what it declares –waste. The seer Tiresias is blind and represents "a universal contemplative consciousness". He sees the inner reality through uniting past and present, men and women, the characters in the poem and "I" who is the mouthpiece (Drew 92). Hence, Tiresias's consciousness is the consciousness of all individuals living on earth. Through Tiresias, it may be that, the concept of insecurity is dealt with the relation to "ancient grandeurs" and the problem of present sickness, destruction, and conflagration in urban life is handled (Reeves 37). Eliot applies dramatic monologue in which "I" professes that he is blind and is unable to see reality in *Waste Land*. Again the emphasis is on the disorder in the modern world. Maud Ellmann also indicates that "the 'waste land' could be seen as the thunderous desert where the hooded hordes are swarming towards apocalypse. But it also means the 'waste ground'. [...] The poem teems with urban waste, but-ends of the city's days and ways" (92). Eliot also indicates in the poem that "one of the elements is the blindness and numbness of the external contemporary consciousness; its sterility, impotence, emptiness and aridity" (Drew 88). Eliot assessed that "the city was a maternal symbol to the ancients, but it is now utterly barren. It is 'unreal' because it is cut off from both natural and spiritual sources of life, and because it no longer has anything in its old sense of 'community'" (Drew 98). Lack of a whole community refers the sense of meaninglessness, isolation and alienation in social living. Hence, the central theme of the poem is the presence of sterile degeneration and the requirement of regeneration and change. Eliot's retrospective attitude to regain the moral values and the physical traits of the past can clearly be assessed in *The Waste Land*. In other words, the order of the past is destructed by the chaos of the modern

[13] Eliot's *The Waste Land* will be quoted with respect to lines.
[14] In Greek mythology, Tiresias was a blind prophet of Thebes who was famous for being disguised into a woman for seven years. There is a message, here, throughout Tiresias's state of blindness: the community became blind to see the reality of corruption in life.

world in Eliot's criticism. This indicates that order and chaos are in conflict with each other in his poem.[15]

As Cleanth Brooks also expresses, *The Waste Land* is built on a specific contrast device. The general theme of the poem is the antimony between two kinds of life and two kinds of death: "Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even the sacrificial death, may be life-giving, an awakening to life. The poem occupies itself to a great extent with this paradox, and with a number of variations upon it" (137). This life in death theme is developed in the first part of the "Burial of the Dead". As Brooks also indicates, this section "develops the theme of the attractiveness of death, or of the difficulty in rousing oneself from the death in life in which the people of the waste land live" (138). This hints at the reality of the poem that April, which is regarded as the month of rebirth, is not the month of joyfulness and happiness anymore, but that of cruelty. This contrasting imagery is advanced in the latter part of "A Game of Chess". We are given a picture of spiritual emptiness in accordance with social scale by expanding the theme of sterility and waste land. "Spiritual dryness", "drought", "desolation" are inevitable in this dead land in which fertility cults and rituals such as the original Grail myth, can be employed for emphasizing the regeneration and the aspiration for healing "loneliness, emptiness, and irrational apprehensions" (Abrams 2180).

At the end of his poem, Eliot re-emphasizes the Grail myth in order to imply how an arid, dry, and destructed waste land they live on:

> I sat upon the shore
> Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
> Shall I at least set my lands in order?
> London Bridge is falling down falling down and falling down. (Eliot 424-27)

Eliot copes with the idea of pessimism in detail in "A Game of Chess" in *The Waste Land* because of emphasizing the presence of deficiency of love and unity in life. In a sense, as Gareth Reeves also argues,

> as in the passages of cityscape and urban apocalypse, the effect is phantasmagoric and nightmarish, and what is being enacted as a state of mind. 'A Game of Chess' is a modern psychological Hades, that typically eliotesque living hell, whose chief characteristics is disconnectedness. (46)

Here the emphasis is on how destructed all humanity is because of the conflicts of the modern world. Man is psychologically corrupted and Eliot reflects this by referring to the myth of Hades in his *A Game of Chess*. Here, it is possible to have a Jungian psychoanalytic perspective: man is in his heart of darkness, in the deepest phase of his "collective unconscious" where he is unable for survival from social and mental destruction.

Finally, similar to *Heart of Darkness*, *The Waste Land* deals with the "collective unconscious" state of his natural human psyche. Social and spiritual barrenness is reflected towards applying to mythic voyage into Hades and the fertility of the Holy Grail. Appreciation of universality becomes evident when Eliot's emphasis on the myth of the Holy Grail and Conrad's on the myth of the journey from known, common, and outer

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[15] Throughout *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot uses many natural images such as "water, rain, roots, dry stone, desert, thunder" to define the state of the modern waste land. Hence, Eliot emphasizes with these images that order is destructed by the chaos of the modern world.

reality into unknown, within, inside and hidden parts. In both literary works, myth-making reveals the disillusionment, hopelessness, meaninglessness, alienation, and isolation in the secularized world of the Modern period. There is retrospection for the good old days in both of the influential masterpieces. Hence, there is a retrospection for past via myth-making to maintain life meaningful, hopeful, and to acquire regeneration in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Waste Land*.

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## Özet

### Jung Bakış Açısıyla Mitleştirme Bağlamında Joseph Conrad'ın *Karanlığın Yüreği* ve T. S. Eliot'ın *Çorak Ülke* Adlı Eserleri

Bu makale, Joseph Conrad'ın *Karanlığın Yüreği* (1899) ve T. S. Eliot'ın *Çorak Ülke* (1917) adlı eserlerinde mitleştirmenin modern dünya bağlamında ortaya konuluşunun sebeplerini Jung'un bakış açısıyla vurglumaktadır. Yirminci yüzyılın etkin yazarlarından kabul edilen Conrad ve Eliot, bu yüzyılın erken dönemlerindeki sosyal ve manevi değişiklikleri çalışmak için mitleştirmeye başvurmaktadırlar. Conrad *Karanlığın Yüreği* ve Eliot *Çorak Ülke*'de ahlaki çöküntüye duyulan şaşkınlığı, nefreti, ümitsizliği, amaç karmaşasını ve anlamsız yaşamayı, yabancılaşmayı ve yalnızlaşmayı kentleşmenin olduğu modern dönemde dile getirmektedir. Bu yazarlar modernleşmenin kargaşasından ortaya çıkan sosyal ve psikolojik değişiklikleri eserlerindeki mitlere başvurarak göstermektedirler. Conrad Marlow'un yalnız başına seyahatini ve ruhsal değişikliğini esas konu olarak ele alır. Eliot ise *Çorak Ülke* adlı eserinde Kutsal Kase (Holy Grail) efsanesini konu edinir. Eliot'ın Ortaçağ Kutsal Kase efsanesini değerlendirmesi ve Conrad'ın bilinenden bilinmeyen gizemliye yolculuğu çağdaş dönemdeki hayal kırıklığına uğrayışın sebeplerini ortaya koymaktadır. Mitleştirme, daha çok yirminci yüzyılın çalışma alanlarından olduğu için bu dönemde eserlerde yeni yöntemlerlerle görecelik ortaya konulmuştur. Bu yazarlar, mitleştirmeyi eserlerinde konu edinirlerken aslında geçmişe duydukları özlemi dile getirmekte olup, barış içerisinde yaşamaya, sukunete, mutluluğa ve huzurlu yaşantıya duyulan özlemi vurgulamaktadırlar

**Anahtar Sözcükler**: mitleştirme, Modern Edebiyat Kavramı, Kutsal Kase, gizemli yolculuk, hayal/düş kırıklığı

**An "Ideological Servant"?:**
**A Study of the Servant Figure**
**in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day***

**Elif Öztabak-Avcı**

**Abstract:** In "I Can't Love You Unless I Give You Up", Renata Salecl holds that the butler Stevens in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* "is the prototype of an 'ideological servant': he never questions his role in the machinery, he never opposes his boss even when he makes obvious mistakes, that is, he does not think but obeys" (180). Stevens does gain an insight, however, into Lord Darlington's "mistakes" and his own "role in the machinery" at the end of the novel; in that respect, he seems to be a counterpoint to earlier fictional English butlers such as Sam Weller in Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* and Jeeves in P. G. Wodehouse's Bertie-and-Jeeves series. In *The Remains of the Day,* Ishiguro sets out to re-define the figure of the faithful and resourceful or simply "good" servant that appeared in English fiction as a figure that is agential in the empowerment of the master and thereby, complicit in his "crimes".

**Keywords**: servants in English fiction, butlers, *The Remains of the Day,* Sam Weller, Jeeves, Stevens, Englishness

The aim of this paper is to compare the portrayal of the butler Stevens in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* with those of two well-known "good" men servants/butlers in English fiction–Sam Weller in Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* and Jeeves in P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie-and-Jeeves series–in order to complicate the claims that Stevens is an "ideological servant" (Salecl 180) and that unlike his predecessors Stevens "relinquishes independent agency" (Ekelund 88). In *The Remains of the Day,* Ishiguro sets out to render problematic the traditional aesthetic functions of the literary servant and disclose the paternalistic ideology informing the figure of the "good" servant.

Perhaps, there is no occupation other than that of the butler that is more representative of "Englishness". Even today, "a perfectly trained English butler […] is a status symbol for employers both in Britain and abroad" (Cox 137); they work in "large formal households" and are highly paid (137).[1] According to Cox, the image of "the unflappable English butler […] trades on characteristics that are thought to be typically English, such as discretion, calmness and a respect for hierarchy" (137). Butlers have always been status symbols: men servants have been employed largely by the upper classes from the late eighteenth century on. By the end of the nineteenth century, men were "only employed as footmen and butlers by very rich households" (Davidoff and Hawthorn 74). Butlers themselves, however, from the eighteenth century onwards, have been largely from lower social classes (Hill 30).[2] It was not uncommon, Hecht notes, for a lower-level man

[1] Cox notes that butlers earn "£ 45, 000 per year in the United Kingdom, and over $100, 000 per year in the United States" (137).
[2] The eighteenth century, Hill holds, "saw a great change in the status of men servants who were now mostly drawn from a lower social class than formerly. Even upper servants might be the sons of labourers and artisans. This was in marked contrast to earlier periods: from medieval

servant to rise in service and eventually occupy the position of the butler.[3] It seems that it is the butler's relationship with the master of the house that makes this figure an embodiment of hierarchy. The butler was representative of the master: he was dressed in his master's cast-off clothes (which were, however, "distinguished by some deliberate solecism –the wrong tie for the coat, or the wrong trousers–to prevent his being mistaken for a gentleman"); he "was expected to be deferential to his [master's] superiors and haughty towards his [master's] inferiors"; and, particularly in households employing a large numbers of servants, "he was necessary for maintenance of discipline among the servants". He was always addressed by his last name, even by the very young members of the family; and, "the lower servants, over whom he had the power of dismissal, were careful to call him 'Mister'" (Turner 158-60). The butler is a servant employed for "ostentation" and "intimidation" (Turner 158). He is the master's eyes policing the goings-on of the house "below stairs". The butler is a replica of the master governing the "lowly" inhabitants of the house; yet, he lives and works in close contact with them, which is something those "above stairs" do not condescend to do.

The butler Stevens in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* is devoted to his master, Lord Darlington (whose cast-offs he proudly wears), and believes wholeheartedly in the British Empire as a civilizing force in the world; in his eyes, serving a "great" household such as Darlington Hall is equal to serving Great Britain. Stevens, in that sense, is a figure who embodies hegemonic "Englishness"; furthermore, given his lower-class background, it can be argued that he is also emblematic of the incorporation of the lower classes in Britain into the imperial/national identity, particularly from the late nineteenth century on. Stevens is not immune to his employer Lord Darlington's influence, in that he sees his master in the way in which the latter wants to be seen. In keeping with Hayden White's definition of "ideology" in *The Content of the Form,* as "the treatment of the form of a thing as a content, or essence" (30), it can be held that Stevens reads neither Lord Darlington, Darlington Hall nor his own position as a "great" English butler as "forms", but instead, considers them embodiments of essential values that make Britain "Great". Renata Salecl, in "I Can't Love You Unless I Give You Up", holds that "Stevens is the prototype of an 'ideological servant': he never questions his role in the machinery, he never opposes his boss even when he makes obvious mistakes, that is, he does not think but obeys" (180). Stevens does gain an insight, however, into Lord Darlington's "mistakes" and his own "role in the machinery" at the end of the novel; in that respect, he seems to be a counterpoint to earlier fictional English butlers created particularly by writers such as P.G. Wodehouse. In his selfless devotion to Lord Darlington, Stevens is also reminiscent of, perhaps, the most faithful literary manservant ever, Sam Weller, who wholeheartedly loves his master, Mr. Pickwick, in Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers.*

In "Misrecognizing History", Bo G. Ekelund argues that Ishiguro's novel "performs a pessimistic reversal of a great many predecessors" and "breaks the pattern" in English fiction according to which servants play "active" roles. According to Ekelund, in

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times to as late as the sixteenth century the upper-level servants were usually 'persons of gentle blood and slender fortune'" (30).

[3] Hecht mentions, for instance, "the ascent of a boy" in an upper-class establishment: "Beginning his rise as a helper in the stables, he was next made under-groom, then 'taken to town to wait on the upper servants', 'afterwards made a footman', and eventually promoted to the post of valet" (184). Similarly, "a news item published in 1757 [in *London Chronicle*] mentions yet another case of the same order: the rise of a stable boy 'in a certain Nobleman's Service' to the office of butler" (184).

Wodehouse's Jeeves series, for example, "we see a servant who diligently manipulates his inept master so as to maintain their mutually defining positions to the best advantage of the servant as dominant servant" (88). In *The Remains of the Day,* however, Ekelund states, "the servant holds a central place, but he does so at the price of relinquishing independent agency. Apart from the master's rule, then, there is no room for maneuver" (88). Yet, I think Ekelund's acclamation of servants such as Jeeves, who is capable of "manipulat[ing]" his master and his critique of Stevens as devoid of "independent agency" needs to be reworked by asking another question: why does Jeeves manipulate his master, Bertie; or, in other words, who does his "agency" serve? In *The Remains of the Day,* Ishiguro sets out to re-define the figure of the faithful and resourceful or simply "good" servant (such as Sam Weller and Jeeves) that appeared in English fiction over the colonial period, as a figure agential in the empowerment of the master, and thereby, complicit in his "crimes". This entails an undermining of the supposition that in the case of Jeeves there is room for maneuver "apart from the master's rule".

Jeeves appears as the valet (i.e. "gentleman's personal gentleman") of Bertie Wooster, a young bachelor aristocrat, first in one of Wodehouse's early short stories, "Extricating Young Gussie" (1917), and then became perhaps the most popular Wodehouse character until the writer's death in 1975. He is characterized by his intelligence, problem-solving skills and linguistic proficiency, in terms of which he is superior to his young master, Bertie, whose "foolishness" is foregrounded in every Bertie-and-Jeeves story. A Wodehouse reader knows that Bertie will definitely fail in his attempts to solve his own problems or those of his relatives and friends, which will eventually be solved, very easily, by Jeeves. Furthermore, Jeeves has always got the upper hand in that if he wants something in connection with Bertie–a piece of clothing or a girlfriend he thinks Bertie should abandon, for example–he ensures that it happens. He makes Bertie pay the price of his foolishnesses; yet, at the same time, he formulates Bertie's "forfeits" (Usborne 201) as an unavoidable part of the plan he makes to solve his problems. Jeeves always manages to gain his master's consent, in other words, even in situations that will put the master at a disadvantage.

Aside from fiascos resulting from Bertie's unsound plans to help people around him, his foolishness also manifests itself in his nonconformity in terms of his choices of clothing, furniture, girlfriends and so on. In *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934), for instance, Bertie brings back a white evening mess jacket from Cannes, which, he says "had […] been all the rage– tout ce qu'il y a de chic–on the Cote d'Azur", yet, as he expects, Jeeves finds the jacket "quite unsuitable" (16) because, Bertie lets the reader know, "in the matter of evening costume […] Jeeves is hidebound and reactionary" (15). What is particularly unacceptable for Jeeves about the mess jacket is Bertie's determination to wear it in England: "But surely you are not proposing to wear it in England, sir?" he asks Bertie hoping to change his mind (15). The struggle over the jacket continues until the end of the novel, and is eventually won by Jeeves, who while ironing it "was careless enough to leave the hot instrument upon it" (200). In terms of likes and dislikes and his authority over Bertie, Jeeves is like one of Bertie's aunts. Bertie himself thinks so, too: in one of the short stories, "Jeeves and the Kid Clementina" in *Very Good, Jeeves* (1930). Bertie complains that "the man's tone was cold and soupy; and, scanning his face, I observe on it an If-you-would-only-be-guided-by-me expression which annoyed me intensely. There are moments when Jeeves looks just like an aunt" (187). As M. Smith points out in "Very Irreverent P. G. Wodehouse", in Bertie-and-Jeeves stories, aunts represent the highest authority: "Aunts are supposed to inspire respect. We must treat them seriously" (205). The consensus between Jeeves and Bertie's aunts on matters related to Bertie is remarkable as in the case

of the mess jacket in *Right Ho, Jeeves,* for instance. Despite Jeeves's protests, Bertie insists on wearing the jacket during a visit to his Aunt Dahlia's country house:

> Dahlia was in the drawing-room. She glanced up at my entrance.
> 'Hullo, eyesore,' she said. 'What do you think you are made up as?'
> I did not get the purport.
> 'The jacket, you mean?' I queried, groping.
> 'I do. You look like one of the chorus of male guests at Abernethy Towers in Act 2 of a touring musical comedy.'
> 'You do not admire this jacket?'
> 'I do not.'
> 'You did at Cannes.'
> 'Well, *this isn't Cannes*' (63-4) (emphasis mine)

Like the aunts, Jeeves, is the voice and the guarantor of the status-quo. He keeps Bertie in line so that he can "conduct [himself] in a manner befitting an English gentleman" ("Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit" 64). Jeeves knows much better than his master what these manners are. It is not unsurprising therefore for Bertie to feel like a child in Jeeves's presence most of the time. "The trouble with Jeeves is that he tends occasionally to get above himself. Just because he has surged around and […] done the young master a bit of good in one or two crises, he has a nasty way of conveying the impression that he looks on Bertram Wooster as a sort of idiot child who, but for him, would conk in the first chukker", Bertie whines in "Jeeves and the Kid Clementina" (184). The domestic peace, temporarily disrupted due to minor quarrels, jealousy between partners, or simply misunderstandings is also skillfully restored by Jeeves. In *Right Ho, Jeeves,* for example, Bertie's attempts to solve problems on his own only make things much worse. Making his master ride a bicycle for eighteen miles in the middle of the night as a part of his plan, Jeeves manages to make everybody at Aunt Dahlia's house happy in Bertie's absence: a pair of young lovers are reunited, Aunt Dahlia gets from her husband the money she needs to pay the bills of her magazine, and her preeminent French cook gives up his decision to quit his job.

Richard Usborne, in his *Wodehouse Companion,* draws attention to the feeling of "genuine fondness" between Bertie and Jeeves: the valet "enjoys helping […] [his master] and his friends. He likes them to appeal to him and is not annoyed to be summoned by telegram back from the middle of his summer seaside holiday to rescue them from their idiocies. He takes their side calmly" (199). Another literary manservant, whose devotion to his master is deeply informed by "fondness" or rather love for his master, is Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7). Sam takes Mr. Pickwick's side "calmly", too, which entails, as in the case of Jeeves, not only helping his master and his friends solve their problems but also guarding the values they cherish. It is often pointed out that Mr. Pickwick's "innocence" or his portrayal as "a newly born old man" (Rogers 28) is indicative of Dickens's early world view shaped by the eighteenth-century sentimental philosophy stressing "man's innate moral goodness, […] the possibility for social and familial harmony evolving from human interaction guided by honesty, friendship and benevolence" (Herzog 56). By the end of the novel, Mr. Pickwick emerges as a benevolent paternalist, an embodiment of a "pre-industrial age, the world of stage-coaches" (Goetsch 156). Dickens's employment of a servant figure as the most ardent guardian of a paternalist world-view can be located in the revival of a strong paternalist ideology in England between the late eighteenth and the mid nineteenth centuries. The "new" paternalism, which had originated in the Middle Ages (Nash 15), was deeply entangled with Britain's project of empire

building. The colonized, in addition to the poor at home, were located in a parent-and-child relationship in colonial discourses. Articulated to the "civilizing mission", which was pursued by all European powers in their colonies from the late eighteenth century onwards (Mann 4), paternalist ideology assumed and re-produced the superiority of the English and the idea that "colonial subjects [and the urban poor] were too backward to govern themselves and that they had to be 'uplifted'" (Mann 4). In *Servants and Paternalism in the Works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell,* Julie Nash holds that Jane Austen "view[s] social paternalism as the best solution for confronting the destabilizing forces of change. […] In the world of many nineteenth-century novels such as *Pride and Prejudice,* social equality is not a desired objective" (12). What Nash points out about Austen's novels seems to hold true for Dickens's first novel,[4] too, which concludes as follows:

> He [Mr. Pickwick] is known by all the poor people about, who never fail to take their hats off as he passes with great respect; the children idolize him, and so indeed does the whole neighbourhood. Every year he repairs to a large merry-making at Mr. Wardle's; on this, as on all other occasions, he is invariably attended by the faithful Sam, between whom and his master there exists a steady and reciprocal attachment, which nothing but death will sever. (753-4)

The paternalist world view founded on the preservation of class distinctions and the notion of "reciprocal obligations between classes" (Nash 15) is endorsed in the novel not only by Sam's siding with his master but also by his refusal to side with his fellow "insolent" servants. He meets a group of footmen at Bath, who gossip about the ladies of the house. When one footman tells the other that the mistress "leans very heavy on your shoulder when she gets in and out of the carriage", the other footman agrees and responds that she has "refused one or two offers without any hobvus cause […] as if there were more behind, which he could say if he liked, but was bound in honour to suppress" (613). Their speech is undermined, however, by Sam's ironic remark which indicates that he thinks the footmen are simply being pretentious: "I don't think I can do with anythin' under a female markis. I might take up a young ooman o' large property as hadn't a title, if she made wery fierce love to me. Not else" (614). As Brian W. McCuskey notes in "'Your Love-Sick Pickwick'", "Sam's erotic urges never threaten the stolid middle-class community because the novel limits his desire to lower-class female subjects; his nods and winks are never directed at the Pickwickians' ladyfriends" (259). As a working-class character, Sam does not "threaten" the status-quo at all. Perhaps, that is why one of the earliest reviews of the novel published in 1838 in *The New York Star* praises Sam as "at once the most amusing and the most amiable character in low-life that has ever been presented to the reader by any author of whatever time or country" ( in Williams 99). In the novel, class difference is not presented as a source of tension, but rather of social harmony. As McCuskey argues, "working-class politics have no place in Pickwickian England" (263).

The similarities between Sam Weller and Jeeves, the servants employed in two non-coterminous texts written in dissimilar modes of employment–the Jeeves series is a comedy whereas *The Pickwick Papers* is a sentimental "comedy played against a somber background" (Miller 27) –attest to Bruce Robbins's argument in *The Servant's Hand* regarding the "literariness"/(inter)textuality of the servant figure: "Rather than take up the

[4] Sally Ledger holds that paternalism, which is "much in evidence" in Dickens's earlier fiction such as *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7) and *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) was "renounced" by Dickens in his fiction from 1844 onward (107).

life of the domestic as a subject in its own right, the novel turned back to literary tradition: to Roman, Elizabethan, and Restoration comedy, to the much-repeated master-servant tropes and devices that earlier novelists had already borrowed from Shakespeare and Moliere" (Robbins xi). Both Weller and Jeeves participate in some of the traditional "aesthetic functions" of the servant figure that Robbins delineates such as "the use of master-servant dialogue to provoke laughter"; "the transmission of the story"; and "intervention in the story: […] the fate of the masters is placed in the hands of their servants" (41). Stevens, on the other hand, fails to function as a traditional literary servant throughout *The Remains of the Day*. It is often pointed out that Sam's "Wellerisms"[5] and Jeeves's witty responses to Bertie, demonstrative of the butler's "erudition and ingenuity" (Smith 214), contribute significantly to the creation of the comic effect in these texts. Stevens, however, cannot manage to "banter", disappointing the expectations of his American employer, Mr. Farraday: "I came to learn not to be surprised by such remarks from my employer, and would smile in the correct manner whenever I detected the bantering tone in his voice. Nevertheless, I could never be sure exactly what was required of me on these occasions. Perhaps, I was expected to laugh heartily; or indeed reciprocate with some remark of my own", complains Stevens (15). The second possibility preoccupies him so much that he "devoted much time to developing […] [his] bantering skills" (245); yet, he fails in his attempts, as the following dialogue between Stevens and Mr. Farraday illustrates:

> I was serving Mr. Farraday morning coffee in the breakfast room when he had said to me: 'I suppose it wasn't you making that crowing noise this morning, Stevens?' My employer was referring, I realized to a pair of gypsies gathering unwanted iron who had passed by earlier making their customary calls. […] After a moment or two, I said: 'More like swallows than crows, I would have said, sir. From the migratory aspect.' […] Mr. Farraday, however, simply looked up at me and said: 'I beg your pardon, Stevens?' Only then did it occur to me that, of course, my witticism would not be easily appreciated by someone who was not aware that it was gypsies who had passed by. […] I decided it best to call a halt to the matter and, pretending to remember something I had urgently to attend to, excused myself, leaving my employer looking rather bemused. (16-7)

What creates the humour in this scene is Steven's inability to come up with the witty response expected by his employer. So, it can be held that in Ishiguro's novel, the master-servant dialogue still functions to evoke laughter, but here it is precisely the failure of the servant's "witticism" that produces the comic effect. This failure may also alienate the reader who has any expectations for Weller- or Jeeves-type of jocularity on the part of Stevens. Remarkably, Mr.Farraday's "not [being] satisfied with […] [the butler's] responses to his various banterings" (17) is indicative of his confusion of the literary servant with actual servants. As Anne Luyat puts it in "Myth and Metafiction", "the bantering butler sought after with assiduity by […] Mr. Farraday is a reflection of the Jeeves myth, of the verbal comedy between butler and master described in P.G. Wodehouse" (194). *The Remains of the Day* foregrounds the artificiality of the traditional literary servant also by problematizing his/her other "aesthetic functions" such as transmission of and intervention in the story. Stevens does "transmit" the story about his

[5] "Wellerisms" are "brief comic comments which link a simple description of a concrete situation to a far-fetched, often grotesque and macabre idea" (Goetsch 152).

previous employer, Lord Darlington; but, he does not do it willingly at all. He rather attempts to hide his story from the reader. Furthermore, he fails in his attempts to "intervene" in the story and "save" Lord Darlington.

Ishiguro's reworking of the master-servant relationship as it was represented in novels such as the Jeeves series and *The Pickwick Papers* is not limited to his efforts to problematize the *functional* employments of the literary servant; the novel also takes issue with the ideologies informing the "good" servant. In an interview with Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, Ishiguro states that in *The Remains of the Day*, "I've deliberately created a world which at first resembles that of those writers such as P. G. Wodehouse. I then start to undermine this myth and use it in a slightly twisted and different way" (140). Like Jeeves and Sam Weller, Stevens is devoted to his master, Lord Darlington, to whose world views he subscribes wholeheartedly, and his narrative is actually an effort on his part to legitimize his master's opinions and actions. Since he has spent his life in Darlington Hall "trusting" his master, the narrative is at the same time his attempt to legitimize his own life as a butler in a "great" household. Yet, despite all his efforts, he fails. At the end of the novel, he yields to the painful truth: "You see, I *trusted.* I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?" (243).

What Stevens has thought "worthwhile" was to serve a "great" household, which he considers equal to serving Great Britain and thereby "humanity":

> Let us establish this quite clearly: a butler's duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation. The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what *is* within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies. (199)

Stevens's positioning of himself as a service provider to those who, unlike an "ordinary" man such as himself (194), know how to manage the "great affairs of the nation", is one example of the paternalist discourse he subscribes to. Stevens's account of Lord Darlington's political affiliations during the interwar years reveals that his master was a major proponent of the Nazis. Herr Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador during World War II, frequents Darlington Hall (136); he receives "hospitality from the Nazis on the several trips he made to Germany" during the thirties (136); and Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, "was a visitor at Darlington Hall" (137). Stevens also lets the reader know that Lord Darlington did not allow any Jewish staff to be employed in the 1930s (137) and that the butler himself dutifully followed his master's order that two Jewish maids should be dismissed during the summer of 1932 when the house was visited regularly by Mrs. Barnet, a member of Mosley's "blackshirts" organization. Although Stevens thinks that "the maids had been perfectly satisfactory employees and–I may as well say this since the Jewish issue has become so sensitive of late –my every instinct opposed the idea of their dismissal", he still obeys his master because it is his "duty" and decides to carry it out "with dignity" (148). Stevens's complicity in his master's Nazism is the outcome of his adoption of the paternalist view that "the man in the street can't be expected to know enough about politics, economics, world commerce and what have you. And why should he?" (199). As Susie O'Brien points out, "in the background of this picture of filial devotion [of Stevens to his master] […] lurks the figure

of the Fuhrer, in whom the idea of political paternalism is taken to its logical and menacing conclusions" (791).

Throughout his narrative, Stevens uses the word "dignity" interchangeably with "emotional restraint" and considers it an essential characteristic of the English, embodied in butlers in England:

> It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants. I tend to believe this is true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of […] In a word, 'dignity' is beyond such persons. We English have an important advantage over foreigners in this respect and it is for this reason that when you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman. (43)

To illustrate what he means by "dignity", Stevens narrates a story about an English butler in India told to him by his father, who like Stevens was a butler. According to the story, "a certain butler who had travelled with his employer to India and served there for many years maintaining amongst the native staff the same high standards he had commanded in England" notices a tiger, one afternoon, beneath the dining room table. The butler proceeds calmly to the drawing room to let his master know of the situation and asks for permission to use the gun to shoot the tiger. A few minutes later, the employer and his guests hear three gun shots.

> When the butler reappeared in the drawing room some time afterwards to refresh the teapots, the employer inquired if all was well. 'Perfectly fine, thank you, sir,' had come the reply. 'Dinner will be served at the usual time and I am pleased to say there will be no discernible traces left of the recent occurrence by that time'. (36)

In this story, the butler appears as a fearless guardian of his employers against any "native" threat or insurgence. The English, represented by the butler, kill the tiger, which is emblematic of Indians, the moment the tiger violates the boundaries between the colonizers and the colonized. This story circulating among butlers from generation to generation can also be interpreted as a manifestation of the British working-class complicity in imperialism. Furthermore, in the story the butler's "dignity"/"Englishness" emerges as a quality performed before an audience of native servants. Particularly in nineteenth-century India, it was of utmost significance for the English employers and their representatives, such as butlers, to perform such acts of "dignity" in the household before their native servants since it was assumed that "an Indian household can no more be governed peacefully, without dignity and prestige, than an Indian Empire" (Steel and Gardiner 9). Therefore, the "dignity"/"emotional restraint" Stevens praises as an "English" quality is actually a strategy, rather than an essential characteristic, acquired in a colonial context from which British political authority derived. It is also remarkable that the word "dignity", which is used throughout by Stevens to define what he means by "Englishness", re-appears at the end of the novel in the moment of his self-confrontation. This time, however, he asks rhetorically "what dignity is there" in spending his life by serving his master in total obedience? His questioning of the meaning of "dignity" as he has defined it up to then undermines his conceptualization of "Englishness", too, which rests on the model of filial devotion between "masters" and "servants".

After World War II, Stevens's idealization of "service" to "those great gentlemen" is merely the "remains" of the valued paternalistic relationship between the master and the servant, as well as the colonizer and the colonized. Stevens is emblematic of "Englishness" as it was defined before World War II. He is a dated signifier in the mid twentieth century, a museum piece or an object of nostalgia. The English butler and the "great" country house are *things* that can now be imitated. "[Y]ou're a genuine old-fashioned English butler, not just some waiter pretending to be one. You're the real thing, aren't you?" asks Farraday, the current American owner of Darlington Hall, to make sure he has purchased the "real thing" (124). The fact that it is possible to imitate "Englishness" foregrounds its artificiality/constructedness. Actually, the fact that Kazuo Ishiguro *could* write *The Remains of the Day* is by itself an indicator of the textuality of national identities. Or, one can even go further and claim that in Ishiguro's novel "Englishness", or national identities, in general, emerge as "simulacra" in the Baudrillardian sense in that it is "the simulacrum [that] is true" (1). There is no "true"/"real" "Englishness" other than its constructions. "It's not obvious why a Japanese immigrant born long after the apex of the country house would revisit such a quintessentially English form", comments one critic (Su 554). I think, Ishiguro's following remarks may indicate a reason for his writing such a "very English" novel:

> Sometimes it looks like or has the tone of a very English book, but actually I'm using that as a kind of shock tactic of this relatively young person with a Japanese name and a Japanese face who produces this extra-English novel, or, perhaps, I should say, a super English novel. It's more English than the English. […] [but] in my case there is an ironic distance. (in Suter 241)

It seems that for Ishiguro not only "Englishness" but all national identities are devoid of an essence. His description of his relationship with the Japanese identity, for instance, foregrounds an understanding of national subjectivity as an imitable text, constructed in his case by "a Japanese name and Japanese face" instead of a Japanese self.

In *The Remains of the Day* Ishiguro revisits the figure of the faithful servant in English fiction. Through his portrayal of the butler Stevens, who fails to function as a traditional literary servant, Ishiguro renders problematic, both aesthetic and ideological functions of the "good" servant. Making use of the association between "Englishness" and the figure of the butler, the novel draws attention to the class-based and colonial hierarchies informing the unflappable English butler and the works of fiction that unproblematically employ this figure.

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## Özet

### "İdeolojik Uşak"? Kazuo Ishiguro'nun *The Remains of the Day* Adlı Romanındaki Hizmetçi Figürü Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Renata Salecl, "I Can't Love You Unless I Give You Up" adlı makalesinde, Kazuo Ishiguro'nun *The Remains of the Day* adlı romanındaki kahya Stevens karakteri için "'ideolojik uşak' tipinin en güzel örneklerinden biridir: sistemdeki rolünü asla sorgulamaz, patronuna–açıkça hata yaptığında bile – asla karşı çıkmaz; yani, düşünmez ama itaat eder" der (180). Ancak, roman sonlandığında Stevens hem Lord Darlington'ın yaptığı hatalara hem de sistemdeki kendi rolüne dair ciddi bir farkındalık kazanmış durumdadır. Bu nedenle, Stevens, İngiliz romanındaki kendinden önce gelen belli başlı kahya figürlerine– Charles Dickens'ın *The Pickwick Papers* romanındaki Sam Weller ya da P.G. Wodehouse'un Bertie-Jeeves serisindeki Jeeves gibi–karşıt bir alternatif olarak görülebilir. Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*'de, İngiliz romanındaki itaatkar ve becerikli ya da kısaca "iyi" uşak tiplemesini yeniden tanımlayarak bu figürün efendisinin güç kazanımında ve dolayısıyla "suç"larında oynadığı etkin rolün altını çizer.

**Anahtar sözcükler**: İngiliz romanında hizmetçiler, uşaklar, *The Remains of the Day,* Sam Weller, Jeeves, Stevens, İngilizlik

**Imagining Others' Worlds by Dint of Her Trade:**
**Maggie Gee's *My Cleaner* and *My Driver***

**Mine Özyurt Kılıç**

**Abstract:** This article argues that Maggie Gee's sequential novels *My Cleaner* (2005) and *My Driver* (2009) employ the antagonism between the Ugandan Mary Tendo and the English Vanessa Henman as a narrative device to represent both everyday racism and territorial anxiety in contemporary Britain. Giving voice to both Mary and Vanessa and presenting them objectively, they investigate the reasons behind age-old racial tensions and the possible ways of reducing them. The article also claims that Mary's criticism of post-imperial Britain earns her an equal status with those of Gee's earlier white English characters who present a satirical commentary on the recession, unemployment, decay, racism and loss of shared values in their society. Thus, I suggest that while responding to the question of legitimacy of a white British novelist to write about, and through black characters, they highlight that the potential literature has to stimulate thought for imagining difference and creating convivial spaces, characterised by inclusiveness, openness and solidarity.

**Keywords:** Maggie Gee, *My Cleaner*, *My Driver*, everyday racism, black characters

In her William Matthews Lecture "How May I Speak in my Own Voice?: Language and the Forbidden" delivered at Birkbeck College in 1996, Maggie Gee articulates some of her worries about her trade and wonders if she is encouraged to imagine difference and write about racism in Britain from the perspective of black characters. She asks: "Could I write as a white writer about black people, or through black characters? Are there some taboos which it is wrong to break?" As a white writer, Gee creates a wide range of black characters in her *oeuvre* as early as her debut *Dying, in Other Words* (1981) and *The Burning Book* (1983). *The Ice People* (1998) and *The Flood* (2004) dealing with the antagonism between black and white people more centrally. In these novels, Gee writes mostly about white people, and through white characters. Her black characters do not speak. Although she treats them with empathy, Gee does not assign her early black characters an independent voice. They often feature as minor characters- friends or neighbours to the central white ones- who help Gee to critique racism and fascism. However, written soon after the murder of black Stephen Lawrence by a gang of white hooligans in 1994, Gee's *The White Family* (2002) employs major black characters who now "speak in their own powerful voices" (Özyurt Kılıç 51). In this challenging portrayal of the antagonism between a white family "that might have nurtured racist thugs", and the black characters they interact with, Gee provides answers to the questions she posed in her 1996 lecture as to writing *about* and *through* black characters (2009b, 16).

Yet, Gee's representation of racial antagonism through black characters raises the question of legitimacy: Having no experience of blackness, can a white novelist give her black characters a unique voice? As a writer concerned about these issues for a long time, Gee clearly sees that this question might come from her white readers as well as the black ones and states that in each case she would defend herself against the accusation that she is

'appropriating' the voice of black characters" (Jaggi 304). In her interview with Maya Jaggi on *The White Family*, Gee gives a prompt reply to the question and asserts that:

> My initial, instinctive response would be, 'Sod off. I'll write about what I want to.' A more intelligent response would be to acknowledge that if people feel their voice is not represented enough, the last thing they want is for somebody else to nick it; that seems to me quite logical. I think a challenge like this might well have come from black writers who felt under-appreciated or suppressed, and I would respect that. But in fact it didn't. I do think in the end imagining is all about trying to live other lives and create other selves who are superficially unlike us but at a deep level just like us. If white liberals were to tell me I shouldn't be writing through black characters I wouldn't take much notice, whereas I would have taken notice if I had got that reaction from my black readers. (Jaggi 304-5)

*The White Family* received very positive feedback from her black readers and was soon shortlisted for the Orange and IMPAC prizes after a publishing process Gee describes as "very rocky, very stony, very hard" (Jaggi 301). At first, the manuscript was turned down by five English publishers: they found it "dark", and "they weren't sure whether [Gee] was writing correctly about black people" (Jaggi 303). The book was finally accepted and published by Saqi Press, the main people of which come from the Lebanon, "in that sense outside mainstream British culture" (Jaggi 303). It is interesting that contemporary British fiction has many key figures who both give different representations of Britain through black characters and depict the interaction between black and white subjects, and many of these leading figures are themselves black British writers. Sam Selvon, Hanif Kureishi, Bernardine Evaristo, Zadie Smith, Mike Phillips, Monica Ali and Andrea Levy are among these writers whose works give British fiction its celebrated multicultural character. That Maggie Gee could not easily receive the critical attention she deserves seems to have something to do with her writing about the racial divide in Britain. As she states in the William Matthew Lecture that racism is one of the taboo subjects in England, which Hanif Kureishi also argues in his famous essay "The Rainbow Sign" (1986), Gee tells in her interview that "The English way of dealing with issues about colour is often to say nothing at all [...]" (Jaggi 303). Apparently, this taboo works in the literary market too. Describing the literary climate in contemporary Britain in her article "Literary Apartheid in the post-war London Novel: Finding the Middle Ground", Susie Thomas observes a big divide between black British and white British writers and says that while white novelists write about and are read by whites, black (and Asian British) writers write about and read by their communities (309). Thomas also notes that "Literary magazines such as *Wasafari,* on one side, and *The Times Literary Supplement* on the other, discuss almost wholly different writers and do so as if A.S. Byatt and Aamer Hussein lived on different planets rather than both in London" (310). This exclusive attitude with which authors feature characters marginal to them as mere stereotypes culminates in a change in mainstream publisher's criteria: they publish what they think will sell best. Thereby, they might be reluctant to publish novels by white British novelists writing about and through black characters.

In her most recent novels *My Cleaner* (2005) and *My Driver* (2009), Maggie Gee takes a step further and employs two alternating first-person narrators. Writing through both her Ugandan character Mary Tendo, a black ex-cleaning lady and her English character Vanessa Henman, a white professor of creative writing, Gee delineates the racial

conflicts in contemporary British society. By exploring the internal world of a black character, she contests the almost established literary norm and imagines how it feels to be a black subject. Set partly in Uganda, one of the ex-colonies of the British Empire, and partly in England, these novels show Maggie Gee shifting her imaginative centre. Considered in this light, I suggest, *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* offer fresh answers to the vital questions Gee asks about writing about and through black characters. Giving voice to both Mary and Vanessa and presenting them objectively, Gee offers a reading experience for us to identify with both of them and go beyond a boundary category of colour and race.

However, representing the sense of otherness that racial prejudices induce through black and white narrative voices, these novels, like *The White Family*, provoke questions of legitimacy. As a writer identified with the apparently stronger group, Gee reflects on her "awkward" position, imagining the inner experience of someone from the "underdog" group, and shares her anxiety, which surface in the form of questions: "Was I still a coloniser, taking over a Ugandan internal world as once Britain entered their physical territory? Was I stealing Ugandan stories?" (2009b, 16). Yet, once again, she rightly proclaims that, as Virginia Woolf suggests in *Between the Acts*, writing is a way of allowing ourselves to enjoy our "unacted parts", and not doing it for fear of being misunderstood can in fact be a kind of silencing, or of "self-censorship" (2009b, 16). In her essay "A Different View", Gee writes that by speaking through Mary Tendo, a black character, in fact she explores others' worlds "by dint of [her] trade" (2009b, 16). This paper will argue that shifting her imaginative centre and enjoying her unacted parts, Gee portrays in *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* the possible ways of understanding and reducing age-old racial antagonisms.

In *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*, Gee represents "everyday racism", a concept Philomena Essed introduced in 1985 to mark the link between ideological dimensions of racism and daily attitudes, and to understand "the reproduction of racism in terms of the experience of it in everyday life" (2). While describing the tension between the English and the black migrant subjects, Gee neither fully aligns herself with, nor completely silences any of the parties. Instead, by writing through both, she explores why and how Mary Tendo and Vanessa Henman cannot understand each other. In other words, as she already acknowledges, Gee "imagine[s] difference" to delineate the intersecting parts of different worlds where biases and prejudices can be erased, and shows that there is no such thing as "awkward" if people are willing to interact and see things from different perspectives (2009b, 16).

Mary Tendo's criticism of Britain in these novels coincides with many of Maggie Gee's earlier white characters who give a grim and grey portrayal of England. Both in *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*, Gee assigns the conventionally white satirical voice of the condition-of-England novels to her black character. Similar to such satirical narrative voices in her earlier novels such as *Grace* (1988), *Lost Children* (1994), *The White Family* (2002) and *The Flood* (2004), Mary Tendo of *My Cleaner* describes the social and cultural decay in England, but does this as an outsider, a Ugandan woman. Coming to London for the second time as an invited guest, eleven years after her first visit when she worked as a cleaner to fund her MA in English, Mary now owns a critical distance to observe the different lives and comment on them. That she is now invited to England to provide emotional support for Vanessa's depressed son Justin, also endows her with the morally superior position rendering her satire more plausible.

Obviously then, by giving Mary a satirising voice, Gee includes her in the repertoire of her sensible and observant characters. Namely, Mary's criticism of England and the English earns her an equal status with those of Gee's earlier white English characters in

*Grace*, *Lost Children*, *The White Family* and *The Flood*, who present a satirical commentary on the recession, unemployment, decay, racism and loss of shared values in their society. A typical comment appears in Mary's arrival scene in which she notices the decaying teeth of the "limp, pale immigration officer". As Mary stares at the officer's grey and uneven lower teeth, she wittily asserts that: "British teeth have seen better days" (*My Cleaner* 56). Almost imitating the nostalgia of Gee's white characters' brooding over decay in their society, she defines England as "the smooth chill world" where everything is going to the dogs (59).

Gee skilfully blends this suggested nostalgic voice with a sharp criticism of racial hegemony by the same black voice, in a scene where Mary remembers the days when she had to clean empty English offices "before the sun came up". Her perception of England is so negative that the shining lights of London nights bring to her mind "a hundred dusty bulbs, in dusty houses" waiting to be cleaned by some domestic servants (*My Cleaner* 23). A metaphor for the fall of the British Empire, Vanessa's lifeless house is one of these dusty English houses and Gee uses its domestic interior as a space where conflicts have long settled in waiting to be resolved.

Both *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* employ the antagonism between Mary and Vanessa as a narrative device to develop Gee's representation of overt racism in contemporary British society. Vanessa's recurrent use of the linguistic binary "us/them" evidences the conflicts that arise from cultural and racial differences very early in the novel. Feeling as if she were under the siege of her Ugandan guest, Vanessa constantly thinks in terms of possessive pronouns and when Mary starts cooking for them she thinks *her* space is invaded and explodes: "the house doesn't feel my own" (*MC* 85). But Mary's dry and matter-of-fact musings about the presence of black people in Britain provide a smart challenge to Vanessa's hostile remarks: "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 and thousands of people from the empire" (17). As a Ugandan who has travelled extensively in Europe and observed people when she worked as a cleaner, Mary concludes that English people are too lazy to clean their own places and pronounces that she has "never met English people cleaning, except a man compulsively obsessed with cleaning" (265). This hyperbolic statement is justified in the case of Vanessa, who never does her own cleaning. As Vanessa claims defensively that cleaning "isn't brain surgery", Mary briskly retorts: "Cleaning is hard work" and suggests that that is why she does not want to do it. Here, Mary's black voice gains a corrective and reformative tone, which is one of the defining qualities of good satire.

Through this simmering dispute over cleaning, Gee satirises racist tendencies in contemporary Britain. To contribute to its critical tone, she ends the scene with an ironic touch, which brings poetic justice through humour: As Vanessa and Mary look for a cleaner (since in her second visit, she is invited just to help Justin feel better, thus refuses to clean the house), Mary ironically employs "a very blonde" Polish girl, Anya, who looks very much like Vanessa. A symbolic revenge against the white race that enslaved the black for ages, Mary's comment about her choice adds a light-hearted sarcasm. It obviously reveals the strong link between hiring a cleaner and colonial drives. Empowered by the emotional help she offers in return for money and by her experience in England, Mary owns an assertive voice to ruminate: "I am surprised that I chose a white-skinned cleaner, but it is good for them to learn a new skill" (117).

Gee extends her critique of racial hegemony to consumer culture through Mary when Mary's comparison of the English and Ugandan domestic space evolves into a harsh criticism of urban life in contemporary Britain. She compares her flat in Kampala to

Vanessa's "enormous" house with five bedrooms; "greatly in need of fresh air" (70) and Vanessa's house looks "dark" to her:

> These English houses are like lost worlds, detached from each other, buried in trees, 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 in the open, though sometimes people are beaten in secret. But here in London, *everything* is secret. (60-1) (emphasis original)

While comparing Vanessa's English house to Ugandan ones, Mary also criticises the materialist mindset defining power and success in terms of owning property. As opposed to the "clean and airy" Ugandan houses, English ones are "full of little objects. They get dusty and dirty, they break and they fall, they fade and get old, there are more and more of them" (126). Mary feels sorry for the English as she observes that: "Here people have things instead of children" ( 283). More importantly, Vanessa herself is gradually awakened to the fact that, her house, like many English houses, has "[f]ar too much stuff" and finally decides to get rid of a lot of it (265). Similarly, Gee's depiction of Vanessa in a shopping spree in Kampala in *My Driver* demonstrates the deep-seated drive to possess in middle-class English people. Prior to her visit, Vanessa's image of Uganda is a land of "nothingness"; a "place without shops, lights, artefacts" (190). However, when she finds the opportunity to go shopping, she feels better, although only briefly; soon after feeling satisfied, her anxiety overwhelms her again and she starts asking herself neurotically: "[D]id you buy enough? Did you buy too much? Or perhaps the wrong thing? Back to the shops for more buying" (190).

Gee makes this critique of money-oriented, materialist culture much more centrally in her *Where Are the Snows* (1991) and *The Flood* , but making it also through a black voice brings black and white voices to the same narrative level: Mary's complaints about life in London are not only shared by Vanessa but also by her friend, Fifi. Representative of white middle class women, Fifi makes a similar comment about the suffocating presence of objects and asks Vanessa: "So tell me, what is the point of all this? All the books and pictures and music and photos? All the objects chosen with such exquisite taste? Just to end up in some wretched almshouse" (*MC* 261-2). However, it is mostly Mary who perceives middle-class habits as signs of lifelessness; after just ten days in London, Mary is "suffocated, stogged with pale England" (79). As she observes, Vanessa, like many other Londoners "never "bother[s] to make soup or stew" and "has never cooked properly" (70, 80). After having Vanessa's "wonderfully easy" dinners with precooked rice and chicken, Mary suffers from constipation and concludes that what makes all the English ill is mainly their consumption of processed food. Interestingly, just like the white middle-class Alex, the protagonist of *Where Are the Snows*, who calls England "a waste of planet", "a waste of life" (1991, 62), Mary observes that London is full of people who have "forgotten how to grow things" (*My Cleaner* 222). Through Mary, Gee describes Britain as a barren field that fails to nourish its people, both physically and spiritually. No matter how often she eats, Mary feels hungry: "It's the weather", she says, "I am always hungry here" (133).

Description of the English people in London by Mary's black voice reveals an ailing society which corresponds to the image of Britain as a decaying country in Gee's earlier novels. Mary thinks that children in England are always sick "with all kinds of problems: eczema, asthma, dyslexia, dyspraxia" (45). And those "lost children" like Justin, "wonderfully lexic and praxic", but "sick in his soul", suffer from depression" (73). Through Justin, a depressed teenager, Gee expands on the theme of alienation and decay in

the novel. Seeing him as grown soft and weak, Mary reckons Justin has become one of those miserable white people. Following this line of thought, she defines the English almost as a new species completely alien to her:

> Frankly I think he is ill in the head. But this is harder for me to judge, for in some ways, all the English seem ill in the head, as I found out when I lived here before. They stand in queues, frowning and worrying, touching all their bags to be sure they are still there, and when they talk, it is almost a whisper. They keep saying 'Sorry' or 'Excuse me', and if you look at them, their eyes dart away. And they usually look sad, or in a hurry. They stream into the underground, eyes down, like ants. (69)

Presented as alienated figures, the Londoners of *My Cleaner* are all pale and sullen; she observes that English people lack "[t]hat African sweetness" and they smile much less than [Ugandans] do " (*My Cleaner* 212). Mary's remarks also disclose lack of communication as part of the modern urban landscape. She says that sometimes one sits on the underground "opposite a curtain of papers" severed from all human contact and finds those commuters absorbed in books and papers rather bizarre (165). In a public space that almost bars communication, Mary senses that the English people remain immature. She thinks that "In many ways, [they] are like children", and Vanessa's toy bear sitting on her bed provides visible evidence for her observation (68). After having spent a couple of weeks in London, Mary starts feeling peculiar too, and concludes that it is England that makes her ill: "I suppose the sickness comes from my heart, because recently I am too sad to go dancing, even in church I am sometimes lonely" (206). Later in the novel, many of these comments offered by the central black voice are shared by Vanessa, which comes as an endorsement of these critical remarks.

In *My Cleaner*, Gee depicts modern-day London as the most expensive European city by making Mary complain that in this "hideously expensive" place "even breathing cost money" (44, 37). Unfriendliness almost increases in the currency of the country which makes life unbearably difficult for the majority. Again Mary compares the dark city to her native land and reckons that "Life is so much barer and simpler in Kampala" (63). In the last instance, deeming herself an outcast, she feels "trapped, in a hostile country" (321). To develop the description of the divide between the English and the black migrants, Gee shows Mary readily reclaiming her national identity: "I am an African woman, thanks be to God" (49). Mary's pride functions as an antidote to the hostility and discrimination she suffers as a "Ugandan woman" in England, thus as a plot device, it helps Gee to exercise and promote a different view (49).

Both *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* portray London as a place gaining a multicultural identity and changing into an English capital with many diasporic communities. As they describe the problems that the black people face, they also represent the English having trouble adapting to the change in their society. Doing this, both novels employ Ugandan Mary, with a proud voice as a foil to Vanessa, who shows signs of territorial anxiety. *My Cleaner* represents the state of Britain through the scrutiny of different subjects coming from different worlds. For instance, Vanessa cannot see where Mary finds all these "African things" she uses in the kitchen, and when Mary reminds her that there are many Africans living in London, thus many African things, she does not like what she hears (84). Vanessa complains that "London is full of Africans" and peevishly voices her exclusive stance insisting that: "this is [her] land", "It is [their] country" and "it is [her] house" (84, 91, 93). Strangely, she categorises all the non-English as "Ugandans" and feels that these

Ugandans–Mary, Zakira (Mary's Moroccan friend), Soraya (Vanessa's ex-husband Trevor's girlfriend who is in fact Persian) and Anya (the Polish cleaner) –threaten her domestic peace. Evoking a metaphorical reading of the house as Britain, Gee caricaturises Vanessa's anxiety that her *house* will be "full of Ugandans" (*My Cleaner* 183). From Vanessa's point of view, London is becoming infested with black people, which brings to mind Paul Gilroy's argument in his *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Emphasizing the link between a sense of loss and the resistance to accept the black as makers and owners of British society, Gilroy maintains that the English have not come to terms with the loss of Empire and create convivial spaces characterised by inclusiveness, openness and solidarity like Alfred, the park keeper, and his wife May in *The White Family*, English people in these two novels are portrayed as suffering from melancholia, namely brooding over the loss of their glorious past. To illustrate this post-imperial psychology, Gee inserts a scene from daily life in London; as Mary carelessly plays ringtones on her mobile phone, a "drunkard" turns to Mary and shouts at her saying: "This is a British bus and you can't do that" (89).

Gee extends the discussion to include different black and white voices that comment on the post-imperial state of London. It is ironic that Mary's Spanish friend Juanita, who she meets at a café in East London, "half-disapprovingly", notes that: "You Africans are taking over, in London" (*My Cleaner* 138). Her Ugandan friend, Abdu, also adds, a bit defensively, that there are "lots of Nigerians, Ghanaians" too (132). Observing the café in Dalston, Mary wisely asks: "Can this be London?" when only ten percent of people are *bazungu* (133). It seems that *My Driver*'s third person narrator provides an answer to this question to suggest Gee's affirmative "Yes":

> This is London, after all; the city of plaiting and twining, throwing new ropes of life, in the instant of conception, across thousands of miles of the surface of the planet, across mountains and oceans that were once uncrossable, threading the blue air to their amazing destinations. Zakira is Moroccan, but born in England: Delorice is British, but her parents were Jamaicans and her distant ancestors were stolen from Ghana, […] They have the world in common- Africa, Europe. (*MD* 152)

In *My Cleaner*, Gee figures Mary naively questioning how *civilised* people can be racist; she denounces racism by way of comparing the Ugandan to the English and states that: "I myself am not prejudiced. I learned this at Makerere [University] where everyone teaches that racism is bad. And the Bible says we are all God's children" (121). Putting it in such basic terms, Mary ironically implies that the "superior" English like Vanessa, who obtain academic degrees and have access to rich sources of knowledge, could not learn this plain truth any better than poor Ugandans. Zakira's remarks about white people also contribute to Gee's bitter critique of racism through a black voice; articulating the lack of convivial spaces where the black and white can live together as equals, she says: "People like [Vanessa] know nothing about us. They do not want to get to know us. […] I think they are afraid of us" (*MC* 184). Since she knows that the terms of their relation to the English is by no means even, Mary believes that "the British will keep all the things that they have", but send her away (203).

*My Driver* reveals this racial tension through turning the tables on Vanessa and her ex-husband Trevor. Many years after her first stay in England, Mary is now the successful Executive Housekeeper of Kampala's Sheraton Hotel. Vanessa is invited to Uganda for an African writers' conference meaning to visit Mary as well, while Mary secretly summons

Trevor, a plumber, to build a new well in her home village. As they try hard to acclimatise, Mary ruminates on the treatment she received England as a Ugandan woman. She remembers the sense of displacement she experienced there and feels very angry. Her deep-seated feelings of resentment surface when the villagers sing songs to thank Trevor for the well; she feels frustrated as she thinks that no one ever thanked her in England for any of the things she did as a cleaner:

> Still it was good for Trevor to feel like me, when I was in my twenties, and first came to London, and cleaned their toilets and their offices. The English made me feel like an ignorant Ugandan. They thought I knew nothing, and understood nothing. No-one saw me, or valued me. The English did not value me, just because I was not born in their country. (*My Driver* 281)

Shedding light on forms of hostility between black and white, both *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* bring Mary's voice to the fore not only to comment on everyday racism in modern-day London, but also to criticise the colonial past and its remnants in the present post-imperial Britain and post-colonial Uganda. In *My Cleaner*, Mary reflects on the term "protectorate" the Empire used to justify its colonial rule in Uganda and reveals her bitterness about the fraudulent policies of the British as she questions, "Protecting us from what?" (17). As a response to this possessive behaviour of the English, Gee juxtaposes Mary's complaint that in Uganda it is only the *bazungu*, the white tourists, who can go on safari, and implies that they are not protected but simply colonised (*MC*, 90). She knows that Ugandans can go on safari only if they have a lot of money and free time for a holiday (91). Condemning the English tourists as lovers of animals more than people, Mary feels resentful and speaks in a possessive idiom similar to that of Vanessa:

> It is our country; it does not belong to them, […] They go on safari with polite black drivers. Without the drivers they would be too frightened (yet they think they own them: they always say 'my driver', 'Could you go and see if my driver is waiting?') (*My Cleaner* 91)

To develop Mary's critique of domineering white culture in Uganda, Maggie Gee also makes use of intertextuality in both *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*, and introduces more occasions for her black character to comment on. References to Winston Churchill's book *My African Journey* (1908), which describes Uganda as "the Pearl of Africa" function as a device to help Gee comment on colonialism through Mary's voice (*MC* 153). As Mary reads this English book, she finds Churchill's behaviour very funny because he is always saying "sorry"; she thinks that saying sorry all the time, "like most English people […] makes it impossible to know what they mean" (MC 285). Ironically, like most English people, Trevor who lends the book to Mary feels a bit shy and "sorry" about it because he understands that Churchill's description of the native people is too narrow. Re-reading it with mixed feelings, of pride and embarrassment, he sees colonialism with a critical eye: "Let us be sure that order and science will conquer, and that in the end John Bull will be really master in his curious garden of sunshine and deadly nightshade" (*MC* 169). As if to prepare the ground for the symbolic scene of reconciliation in *My Driver* in which Mary's ex-husband Trevor goes to Uganda to repair the well in Mary's village, Gee portrays Trevor pondering the idea of colonial pride. Considering some of Uganda's grave problems, he holds John Bull, the emblem of the English, in contempt and resents the fact Churchill failed in his aim to "master", let alone "civilise" Uganda through "order and science" (*MC*

169). Trevor's disillusionment about the influence of the English in Uganda contributes to the overall impact of Gee's criticism of colonial pride via her black character; he sourly notes that: "They've got AIDS, apparently, and old John Bull didn't even sort them out with clean water" (*MC* 170). As in *The White Family*, Gee seems to remind the melancholic mourners among her readers that today, the post-imperial and multicultural Britain does not offer any ground for the sort of patriotism that had fostered colonial fantasies.

*My Driver* makes a similar critique of ethnocentrism through a series of scenes in which Vanessa and Trevor confront some cultural challenges; as they explore Uganda and its culture, they gradually understand their misconceptions about it. Being English, they first see themselves as naturally superior. For instance, when the waiter brings her tea, not the English style black tea with cold milk, Vanessa explodes: "Why can't they ever get tea right?" (*My Driver* 131). Similarly, Trevor exposes his Eurocentric perspective as he thinks of his entry into Uganda as a fall from grace: "Bloody hell, I'm on the other side of the world. No, I've fallen off the edge of the world" (175).

Both to show and refute the inbuilt prejudices about the black people, Gee centrally employs the perspective of her black characters in *My Driver*. The opening scene, in which Vanessa converses with a Ugandan taxi driver on her way from the airport to the Sheraton, sets the novel's critical tone by the voice of the driver, Isaac. When Vanessa makes a comment on some Ugandan children off the road and says "I love your school uniforms, so smart," Isaac wittily responds: "Of course you like them, they are British," and starts telling Vanessa about life in Uganda (49). Though Isaac remains a minor character (unlike Mary, the ex-cleaner of *My Cleaner*, who has the claim to the title), the strong narrative voice endows him with the antagonistic position that the plot needs. It is mainly Mary who provides insight into how Uganda has been economically and culturally colonised, and how the Eurocentric worldview feeds white people's ignorance about life in Uganda. Referring to Churchill's opinion that "the black man did not like to work", Mary explains Trevor that "In fact [Ugandans] are working in the field all day. The people you see are waiting for lifts because their journey is too far to walk" (*My Driver* 147-8). As Vanessa thinks Uganda is a world of nothingness, Trevor mistakenly believes smoking to be a Ugandan habit. As in *My Cleaner*, Mary's corrective voice explains that the habit comes from the empire and, as the owner of all those tobacco companies, "the British manufacturers are killing Ugandans" (*MD* 143). In its criticism of the Eurocentric worldview through a scene in a Protestant school in a Ugandan village, the novel shows that all the students here are expected to speak English, and "the exams they must pass to go into their future" are in English too (164). Making Trevor find this natural, Gee, in fact, uses a strategy to condemn the deep-seated colonial impulse of the English. Symptomatic of his ethnocentrism, the first question he thinks of asking the Ugandan class is: "Where is London?" And later, as one of the pupils writes in reply the Ugandan word for England "Bungereza", Trevor takes it as an error and corrects by writing "ENGLAND" on the board. As if to illustrate that the English still have a sense of superiority, Gee figures Trevor musing: "Why don't they teach them English? Otherwise they can't communicate" (166). Showing how irrelevant his questions are, Gee implies that it is in fact the English Trevor who fails to communicate because he does not know even a word of Ugandan and does not bother to learn. It is again Mary's critical voice that strengthens Gee's exposition of Trevor's ignorance.

Both of the novels problematise the ignorance of Vanessa and Trevor about the Ugandan people, and I suggest that leaving some gaps and silences in her texts, Gee plays a trick and tests her reader's capacity to think beyond racial as well as sexual biases. For instance, *My Cleaner* exposes a different bias against the black people by suggesting that white people ignorantly equate blackness with sexual potency. Namely, Gee's use of the

phrase “some strange Ugandan habit” exposes a double joke about sexual stereotyping and racial prejudice. Vanessa uses this term to refer to the curious sound she hears from Mary’s room. Since Vanessa’s white imagination refuses a figure of the Ugandan Mary in the habit of writing, she cannot associate the sound with typing, thus failing to spot it, she links it to a “strange habit”. Interestingly, the “strange Ugandan habit” calls to mind the newspaper jargon “Ugandan affairs”[1].

Associating the term “Ugandan affair” with Vanessa’s remark about the curious sound from Mary’s room, which she thinks can be the result of “some strange Ugandan habit”, the reader can ask if Mary is having sex with Justin or it is just the table shaking as she types. Maggie Gee seems to allow this strange noise to arouse in the reader suspicions, which adds to a sense of ambiguity in the novel. Allowing for an investigation of the prejudices about the black, the novel shows Mary playing many different roles, which makes her more genuine and convincing. She is both a mere helping hand and a surrogate mother. She is a soother as well as an abuser. She focuses a bit too much on the money she will earn and makes the best of her time in London. However, at times, she sincerely worries about Justin’s health and offers her love generously. She is presented as the x-cleaner as well as a promising writer. She is both a fierce rival and a reliable friend to Vanessa.

Part of the pleasure in reading these two novels relies on the richness of Gee’s portrayal of Mary and the freedom she allows her reader/s to see Mary as a full-fledged character. The strength of Gee’s *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* also lies in their stimulation of thought for imagining difference and envisioning a space for dialogue and understanding. Going beyond the established ways of thinking about differences, Mary becomes a model for this dialogue. Gee’s representation of a black character interacting with a white one demonstrates that out of the conflict between two different cultures, a unifying perspective can still emerge. What Mary says about Vanessa near the end of *My Cleaner* underlines this potential. Reflecting upon her feelings about Vanessa, Mary observes that racial prejudices hinder love, and muses: “When we do not think, we like each other. And maybe thinking

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[1] “Ugandan affairs” or “a Ugandan discussion” is a term which is used as a humorous synonym for illicit sex after an incident involving a Ugandan, namely Princess Elizabeth of Toro. She is a Ugandan politician, diplomat, model and actress, regarded as a living fairy tale princess. She was the first female East African to be admitted to the English Bar. She was also, the first female lawyer of Uganda, and the third African woman to graduate from Cambridge University. Elizabeth is not only a beautiful and intelligent princess but also a strong woman who tried to survive the endless political turmoil in Uganda. Being a celebrity and a public figure, she has also become a target of satirical magazines. *Private Eye,* the British satirical magazine, has used the term “Ugandan affairs” since she was said to be caught having sex in an airport toilet at London Heathrow Airport and claimed they were “discussing Ugandan affairs”. During the time period in which she served as Idi Amin’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, she rejected Amin’s marriage proposal and showed too independent a line as ambassador to the United Nations. Thus, it is ambiguous if this “Ugandan affair” was a mere accusation by Idi Amin who wanted to denigrate her or she really had such an affair. There is one thing for sure: a Cambridge-educated lawyer, Elizabeth actually sued successfully and cleared her name. More about Elizabeth of Toro, Elizabeth Nyabongo, can be found in her two books, *African Princess: The Story of Elizabeth of Toro* (London: 1983) and *Elizabeth of Toro: The Odyssey of an African Princess* (Touchstone: 1989). Henry Kyemba also wrote about her in his *A State of Blood: The Inside Story of Idi Amin* (1977). “Meet H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth Bagaaya”. <http://www.torokingdom.org/Bagaaya.htm>. 13 May 2010.

does not always matter" (333). Much as she remembers that the English made her "feel like an ignorant Ugandan" and did not value her "just because [she] was not born in their country" (*My Driver* 281), she can still be objective and confess that she can be racist too (*My Cleaner* 274).

To align her reader with Mary's viewpoint, Gee depicts her as objective enough to see her native land with a critical eye. She admits that many Ugandans in the village use cousins and aunts as slaves (*My Cleaner* 122). Her impartiality enables Mary to go beyond a skewed vision and relate to others with her fresh and unique observations. For instance, despite criticising Trevor's ethnocentric discourse, Mary can see him as a product of a colonial culture and says: "I cannot blame Trevor. He is a good man" (*My Driver* 281). It is this understanding voice that brings a reconciliation of the two antagonistic sides: Mary and Trevor. Gee creates a final scene in *My Driver*, in which Trevor is redeemed as he becomes a really good man in Uganda. While *My Cleaner* figures Trevor as Vanessa's weak ex-husband who cannot do anything other than fix sinks, *My Driver* crowns him as a hero, "The Fountain of Life" repairing the well in the village. To show their gratitude, the villagers celebrate him and even compose a song, "The Bringer of Water" (*MD* 199). Juxtaposed with the cold and unwelcoming Londoners of the two novels, the generous and appreciative villagers of Uganda here offer a more friendly space which can erase age-old prejudices.

Through portraying transnational encounters from a black critical perspective, *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* offer exercise in creating convivial spaces, or new grounds to see, understand, empathise and connect to the other. The final image of *My Cleaner* similarly describes a convivial space where conflicts of everyday racism are resolved; the scene that shows the antagonists, this time Mary and Vanessa, reflected in a fish-eye mirror becomes an emblem of the state of connectedness the whole body of Gee's writing suggests:

> They are there, minute, in the bottom right corner, at the end of a road that slopes away into the distance, at one precise vortex of time and space, and the world is enormous, and they are tiny, and their ant-like bodies
> vibrate with the traffic, two small living things on an enormous planet, and Mary has crossed the earth to this place, and when she turns again, ten feet down the turning, the two of them merge into the same bright dot. (*MC* 254)

Gee proposes that poisoned by prejudice, thus often lacking in agency, both the white Vanessa and the black Mary, like many other people from different cultures, become victims of social incomprehension and that such antagonisms are merely signs of, to quote Fanon, "epidermalization of the binary thinking terms" (13). However, more significantly, the scenes of reconciliation in *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*, namely the resolution of conflicts between the novels' antagonistic forces, suggest that by not being blind to the stories told and sharing insight, we can go beyond the rigid categories of culture and race. Mary and Vanessa learn to love each other; Vanessa and Trevor unite, live and die together; Mary finds her lost son Jamil, thanks to Vanessa; Justin recovers and learns to see beyond himself; Vanessa understands and accepts her black daughter-in-law, Zakira who gives her a black grandson, Abdul Trevor. Both of the novels end on a note of optimism about future, the first with the news of a baby, Abdul Trevor and the latter with the idea of eternity: "And the stars shine on. The stars shine on" (*My Driver* 321). In his preface to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon maintains that: "The future should be an edifice supported by living men. This structure is connected to the present to the extent that I consider the present in terms of something to be exceeded" (13). Representing black people interacting fully with the white

and assigning voice to them, Gee's novels can be regarded as attempts to mirror the problems of the present to exceed it and to build a better future. Thus, I argue that through giving voice to the black, Gee's *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* address transnational encounters and migration, in line with Ponzanesi's perspective, as sites "of transition and transformation between received and appropriated categories" that plays important roles in reshaping identities (219, 205). In these transnational novels, Gee as a white writer shifts her imaginative centre to represent and speak through the perspective of received and appropriated categories. As Mary becomes an agent for cultivating the ethical values which correspond to the egalitarian ideals of multicultural Britain, we receive a call to shift our imaginative centre too.

In conclusion, as she maintains in her essay "The Contemporary Writer: Gender and Genre", Gee sees herself as a writer using her dint of trade to go beyond boundary categories and give voice to different perspectives. With reference to Woolf, she defines her profession as a "woman novelist" and suggests that her trade makes new demands in our new times:

> I hope we are slowly daring to emerge from the room of one's own that half a century ago was our boldest dream, and filling bigger, more populated spaces with our visions and voices. I hope some of those visions will show women and men able to realize all their different selves, crossing borders, shape lifting, blissfully transgressing, plural and playful. And I speculate that that kind of playfulness, that kind of manifold expression, is also a dissolving of the rigid, repetitive categories of hatred and violence. (1998, 178)

It is clear that by imagining convivial spaces with a more inclusive sense of belonging, Gee emerges from the room of her own and raises our hopes about the enormous potential that fiction has, to dissolve "the rigid, repetitive categories of hatred and violence". As a white British writer who is willing to imagine how it feels to be black in Britain, Gee makes a significant contribution to contemporary British fiction. If this paves the way for a new trend in British fiction to defeat the literary apartheid, it is not easy to assess until we have gained the distance of time. Let's hope and speculate that it does.

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## Özet

### "Yazar Olmanın Bir Gereği Olarak Başkalarının Dünyalarını Hayal Etmek: Maggie Gee'nin My Cleaner ve My Driver Romanları

Bu makale Maggie Gee'nin birbirinin devamı niteliğinde yazılmış *My Cleaner* (2005) (*Temizlikçim*, Versus Kitap, 2007) ve *My Driver* (2009) adlı iki romanında da, başkarakterler Ugandalı Mary Tendo ve İngiliz Vanessa Henman arasındaki çelişkinin çağdaş Britanya'da gündelik yaşam alışkanlıklarına ve davranışlara sinmiş ırkçılığı ve ülke topraklarının gerçek sahibinin kim olduğuna ilişkin kaygıları betimleyen bir anlatı unsuru olarak kullanıldığını tartışmaktadır. Hem Mary'yi hem de Vanessa'yi okura nesnel bir biçimde sunan ve onları neredeyse eşit miktarda konuşturan bu iki roman, bir yandan siyahlar ve beyazlar arasında yaşanan ırksal gerilimlerin nedenlerini ortaya koyarken bir yandan da bu gerilimleri azaltmanın yollarını aramaktadır. Bu açıdan, makale Maggie Gee'nin beyaz bir yazar olarak siyah karakterler aracılığıyla ve onlar hakkında yazarken, edebiyatın farklılıkları anlayabilme ve daha kapsayıcı, açık ve dayanışmaya dayalı ortak yaşam alanları yaratma konusundaki potansiyeline vurgu yaptığını da ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Maggie Gee, *My Cleaner, My Driver*, gündelik yaşama sinmiş ırkçılık, siyah karakterler

# An Analysis of the Power Relations Between White and Black Women in the Slave Narratives

**Seda Pekşen**

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the relationship between white women and female slaves as portrayed in the slave narratives by Kate Drumgoold, Mattie J. Jackson, Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs. The purpose is to reveal the causes of the power relations between these women and their lack of unity as a sex, despite their analogous subordination by men. The argument is initially based on Michéle Foucault's theories on power relations to explore the relations between white and black women–the former, the oppressor, and the latter, the oppressed, as dictated by the racist ideology. Then, Foucault's theories are adapted for a feminist standpoint to explain the patriarchal system's role in the similar, though not identical, enslavement of these two groups of women, whose separation caused by racism, as well as the patriarchy, would in the following centuries result in their division into two separate groups even in their struggle for emancipation.

**Keywords:** slavery, power, discrimination, racism, feminism, women

> As far back as slavery, white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal to black men, who are ranked third, and black women last. (hooks 1992, 52-3)

According to Foucault, all human relationships include exertion of power. He sees social relations basically as power struggles between the dominant class and their subordinates: "in human relationships, whether they involve verbal communication [...] or amorous, institutional, or economic relationships, power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other" (1994, 291-92). Foucault argues that there is no existence without power relations; whenever there are more than one person, struggle for power is inevitable: "to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible- and in fact ongoing. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction" (1982, 222-23). Therefore, power exists everywhere, so much so that it "is as present in the most apparently trivial details and relations of everyday life as it is in corporate suites, industrial assembly lines, parliamentary chambers, and military installations" (Burke 226). However, taking human relations solely as struggles for domination would be an overgeneralisation because those struggles include a great many subtle methods that one group employs on another.

One of these methods is racism: "Since there are no genetic grounds for any one human sub-species to claim natural superiority over others, racism is integrated into other historically specific struggles for power and domination" (Ramazanoğlu 133). Thus, in the absence of any natural explanation for their discrimination of a people with a different color and religion, white people integrated racism into their society and passed laws to claim superiority over the blacks. In other words, racism was a means of legitimizing slavery: "A compact, volatile, and ultimately isolated society, the slaveholder's estate represented in

microcosm a larger drama in which physical force, the hallmark of the region's political economy, sustained power of whites over black, men over women, rich over poor" (Jones 9). At first, slavery was a matter of economic exploitation which started when merchants imported the first slaves from West Africa in the seventeenth century (Degler 29). Black slaves were much more valuable than white bond servants: "in an inventory in Virginia in 1643 a twenty-two-year-old white servant, with eight years to serve, was valued at 1,000 pounds of tobacco, while a "Negro boy" was rated at 3,000 pounds" (Degler 33). Blacks were permanent, hence valuable commodities, whereas the white servants were prospective landowners who would be free once they had served their time. As a result, slavery was established as "a labor system which had become indispensable to the economy" (Degler 38). Since the slaves were an indispensable part of the economy and were treated as commodity, the white slaveholders considered them as part of their estate; white man's law declared them to be property and consequently they were deprived of all human rights (Degler 33-7). However, in time, this labor system turned into a total display of power, since underneath it all lay discrimination, based on differences, especially of color and religion: "discrimination preceeded slavery and by so doing helped to reinforce it" (Degler 30). Treating the black slave in a cruel manner was a sign of authority on the part of the white master.

Foucault does not consider slavery a kind of power relationship since according to him "[p]ower is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (1982, 221). Therefore, a retrospective look at the era of slavery to investigate the power relations between the women of the period from a feminist standpoint, requires a transformed use of Foucault's theories as Hartsock and Deveaux suggest. Nancy Hartsock argues that women as a marginalized group, including women of color, need to transform the theories on power relations and reconstruct them, rather than accepting them as they are or abandoning them altogether, just because they are not fit to explain women's discrimination in a patriarchal society (552). Similarly, Monique Deveaux suggests that "Foucault's metaphoric slave in chains" should not dissuade women from applying his theory of power relations to feminist issues:

> This does not mean feminists must jettison Foucault's framework of power relations altogether but suggests that if we *do* wish to employ this part of the tool kit, we must amend the thesis drastically to include inquiry into subjective aspects of power and, in particular, to reconceptualize the relationship between social and personal power and privilege, on one hand, and violence, on the other. This requires that we recognize that there are significant connections between the two, connections that are not always immediately obvious to us. (235-36)

Both Hartsock and Deveaux argue that despite Foucault's insistence on resistance as an indispensable factor in power relations, feminists should keep on searching for the possibilities of resistance in women's experiences. Furthermore, the slaves that this paper refers to were not physically restrained, on the contrary, their relation of power contained a potential for resistance which eventually took place, as in the cases of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, and led to the abolishment of slavery.

In terms of the similarities that can be observed in the power relations between the masters and the slaves on one hand, and the husbands and wives on the other, it might be suggested that both the slaves and the white wives belonged to a group of oppressed minority, as female abolitionists argued:

> In comparison with the Caucasian race, I have often said that they [the Africans] are what woman is in comparison with man. The comparison between women and the colored race *as classes* is striking. Both are exceedingly adhesive in their attachments; both, comparatively speaking, have a tendency to submission; and hence, both have been kept in subjection by physical force, and considered rather in the light of property, than individuals. (Child 187) (emphasis original)

Thus, the patriarchal instituion of marriage was not considered any different than the institution of slavery: "Many inexperienced white women surely turned to household slaves for assistance and guidance, which often resulted in a complex relationship that combined affection and domination, made more complex by the fact that all real authority rested with the master" (Lewis and Lewis xxiii). After all, both were relations of power and in both cases the white male was the authority or the oppressor. As Newman also argues, "[b]oth 'women' and 'slave' were treated as property rather than individuals; both had been denied personal and political rights; both experienced conditions of subjection, sustained through physical coercion" (60). Degler points at the same issue as a paradox, suggesting that white women acquired equality with men with regard to their power over the minority groups through the very institution-that is, marriage-that subjugated them:

> Although it is perfectly true that women have been subordinate to men during most of history, it is equally true that they have shared in the rewards and perquisites of power, prestige, and wealth as no other "oppressed" group ever has. Women as wives and mistresses, rulers and leaders, as intellectuals and saloniéres, have always been a "force in history," to use Mary Beard's phrase. In contrast to minorities like Negroes, Jews, and Indians, women have been included in the innermost circles of the ruling males, enjoying advantages, protection, and succor usually ruthlessly denied a subject class […] In substance, just because women are a sex, they have been vouchsafed a measure of equality customarily withheld from an inferior class-namely, marriage with the master class. (389)

Hartsock also refers to the fact that racism is a factor which brings white women and men to equal grounds, and she suggests that theories of power relations should be transformed in order to include the marginalized minorities in the argument:

> Issues of difference remind us as well that many of the factors which divide women also unite some women with men-factors such as racial or cultural differences. Perhaps theories of power for women will also be theories of power for other groups as well. We need to develop our understanding of difference by creating a situation in which hitherto marginalized groups can name themselves, speak for themselves, and participate in defining the terms of interaction, a situation in which we can construct an understanding of the world that is sensitive to difference. (545)

When the relation between the white mistress and the female slave as presented in the slave narratives is considered with such a transformed perspective on power relations, it may be suggested that the reason for the white woman to oppress the female slave was simply to compensate for her lack of authority in her relationship to the white males in her life:

> Although they were white and members of the planter class, they were-by necessity, in this rigidly hierarchical society-subjugated to male rule. Only men might serve effectively as masters of black slaves. The mistress could struggle to impose order and discipline, but slaves clearly recognized the division of authority along gender as well as color lines. Even if an unusual woman overcame these obstacles and managed her own affairs and slaves within the boundaries of her estate, society curtailed her participation by means of legislative restrictions that essentially prevented women's independent administration of plantations. (Clinton xv)

White women even had to compete with black men in the suffragist movement, since the fifteenth amendment included black men in the franchise, but not white women. That is why female suffragists in the nineteenth century ignored black women, but identified themselves with the male slaves: "The exclusion of enslaved black women from the categories of both "slaves" and "woman" was a common feature of white abolitionist-suffragist discourse" (Newman 60-1). Thus, it may be argued that the white woman imitated the white male oppressor so as to attain the superiority which was impossible for her in any other relationship because of her status as a woman. Their exertion of power over black women in order to achieve this sense of superiority and authority is obvious in the slave narratives written by women. Even though they cannot be seen as objective presentations of white women from black women's point of view, since they are political documents, it can be argued that the oppressed often have a clear and detailed view of the oppressor whom they must observe closely in order to survive. This paper aims at discussing the attitude of white women towards the female slaves as portrayed in the slave narratives written by Kate Drumgoold, Mattie J. Jackson, Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs in order to portray the prevailing power relations between these women of different races. The significance of such an analysis of women's power relations lies in the fact that the lack of solidarity among women beginning around the seventeenth century due to racist ideologies gave way to a further separation of women enhanced by the patriarchal system in the following centuries up until the twentieth century. Unlike white women, black women's struggle was not just against the patriarchy, but against racism as well.

White women's idea of black women was determined in their childhood, since it was a common practice among slaveholders to give infant slaves to the master's little daughters as their pet slaves, as in the case of Mary Prince: "She had only one daughter, Miss Betsey, for whom I was purchased, and who was about my own age. I was made quite a pet of by Miss Betsey, and loved her very much. She used to lead me about by the hand, and call me her little nigger" (Prince 1). So, at the beginning, it is a sort of children's play. They play together seemingly like sisters. Yet, even then the concept of ownership is present in the white child's mind; hence "her little nigger". Miss Betsey, on learning that her father is going to sell Mary, cries out: "Oh, Mary! My father is going to sell you all to raise money to marry that wicked woman. You are *my* slaves, and he has no right to sell you" (Prince 3). Even though they are not sisters or equals, the fact that Miss Betsey, a little child, sees Mary as property indicates how deeply the idea of racial superiority is ingrained in her mind at that early age. That is the reason she does not question at all whether Mary, her playmate, should be bought or sold in the first place. Her only concern is that she herself will be deprived of her plaything.

Together with the sense of ownership comes the idea of dominance and since the child takes her parents as role models, when she grows up to be a woman her behaviour toward slave women will have been determined by those childhood experiences. Mary

Prince says that "slavery hardens white people's hearts towards the blacks" (4) and that hardening process begins as early as childhood days. A time comes when one of the playmates realizes that she is different from her friend and that there is an enormous gap between the two of them. This moment of realization is very well put by Jacobs:

> I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight. I foresaw the inevitable blight that would fall on the little slave's heart. I knew how soon her laughter would be changed into sighs. The fair child grew up to be a still fairer woman [...] How had those years dealt with her slave sister, the little playmate of her childhood? She also, was very beautiful; but the flowers and sunshine of love were not for her. She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery, whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink. (Jacobs 28)

Power relations are ingrained in white women's minds by the patriarchal ideology and those women play an active part in the oppression of the subordinate female: "Women from dominant nations, racial, and ethnic groups not only play a part in the oppression of women of subordinate groups, but also benefit from the continuation of such subordination" (Ramazanoğlu 117). However, as will be seen in the following examples from the slave narratives, not all white women would oppress the female slaves. Yet, a great majority of them chose the advantages of the exploitation of black women. Thereby, any hope for sisterhood was abandoned: "Far from being sisters, white women, women of the imperial nations, and women generally in advanced capitalist societies benefited from, or engaged in, the exploitation of black women, ethnic-minority women, third-world women [...] exploitation and advantage cut across sisterhood" (Ramazanoğlu 125-26). With reference to the analogous subordinate position of both white and black women in society, Degler argues that other than in situations where the white woman marries into the ruling class, she shared the inferior status of a black woman due to her so-called inferior gender: "In other ways, however, the social position of women was analogous to that of Negroes. Thus, women were denied the vote, kept from holding office, from filling certain jobs, and from participation in certain kinds of activities, all on the grounds that they were incapable of performing these roles" (389). Since both white and black women have been excluded from the authorial positions in society, they were expected to take part in the same subordinate group and to share common interests. However, black women were once more subordinated, this time by white women as a result of racism (Lewis 46).

Therefore, women were divided; power relations were established between white and black women due to racism, patriarchy and white women's urge to exert authority. In the slave narratives it can be observed that jealousy and the desire to replace male authority were the two main reasons for white women's maltreatment of black women. In both cases, their treatment of the female slaves was incredibly hostile: "Historically, many black women experienced white women as the white supremacist group who most directly exercised power over them, often in a manner far more brutal and dehumanizing than that of racist white men" (hooks 1984, 49). A jealous woman can be quite dangerous and brutal as can be seen in cases of rape or sexual harassment of a female slave whereby the mistress would put the blame on the black woman:

> These were real horrors, experienced daily by enslaved women, and white people often denied responsibility for them, refusing, for example, to acknowledge that

> white men routinely raped black women. Instead whites often held slave women accountable for their own victimization by attributing to them wanton and excessive sexual desire for intercourse with white men. (Newman 61)

In cases of rape, in fact it would be the husband the white mistress was angry at, yet she would not be able to accuse him because she would not be powerful enough to question his authority or his actions; after all, she was only a woman. Therefore, she would accuse the one who was less powerful than herself: the black woman. In regard to this issue, bell hooks makes the following comment:

> Though the white female might condemn the actions of a white male who chose to interact sexually with black female slaves, she was unable to dictate to him proper behavior. Nor could she retaliate by engaging in sexual relationships with enslaved or free black men. Not surprisingly, she directed her anger and rage at the enslaved black women. (1982, 154)

An example can be given from Harriet Jacobs' narrative: "I once saw a young slave girl dying soon after the birth of a child nearly white. In her agony she cried out, 'O Lord, come and take me!' Her mistress stood by, and mocked at her like an incarnate fiend. 'You suffer, do you?' she exclaimed. 'I am glad of it. You deserve it all, and more too'" (15). She blames the black woman for having been raped by her husband. She is jealous and angry, but incapable of saying anything to her husband on the subject. Therefore, she projects her anger on the victim of the rape. Another such example is the experience of Linda Brent [Jacobs] herself. Her mistress is so jealous of her husband's affection for Linda that "[her] presence was intolerable to Mrs Flint" (Jacobs 30). Mrs Flint can neither prevent Mr Flint's actions nor can she make anyone pay for them. Since the man is too powerful for her to fight against, she chooses as her target the slave girl, yet she is prevented from punishing the girl as well. Thus, her anger and hatred for Linda grows day by day, although she should have felt those for her husband.

Newman points to the fact that abolitionist literature aimed at encouraging white women to sympathize with their exploited sisters in cases of sexual exploitation. However, Newman argues that such an act did not create equality between these two groups of women; on the contrary, it further emphasized black women's degradation "depicting her as fallen and deserving of pity, not respect" (61-2). Thereby, even in the struggles of the abolitionists the prevailing power relations between white and black women were preserved.

Foucault sees slavery as the opposite of the abuse of power and claims that "in the abuse of power, one exceeds the legitimate exercise of one's power and imposes one's fantasies, appetites, and desires on others" (1994, 288). In that sense, the fantasy of the white mistress was to exert her power over the female slave, just as the white male exerted his power over her. Thus, through mimicry she relieved herself from the sense of inferiority and felt superior, at least to a woman. These white women fulfilled their desire for authority, which they would in no other way be able to fulfil, by oppressing the female slaves. As Eve Fesl suggests, "if one were to measure oppression [...] we would see white women being greater oppressors of black women than black men ever have been" (in Ramazanoğlu 127). They would do anything only to show that they were more powerful. For instance Mrs I--- whips Mary just because of a broken jar even though Mary is not the one to break it: " 'You have broken it, have you?' she replied; 'come directly here to me'. I came trembling: she stripped and flogged me long and severely with the cowskin" (Prince

8). Another example would be Mrs Lewis in “The Story of Mattie Jackson”. She makes her husband beat Mattie for no reason whatsoever:

> One evening, after I had attended to my usual duties, and I supposed all was complete, she, in a terrible rage, declared I should be punished that night. I did not know the cause, neither did she. She went immediately and selected a switch. She placed it in the corner of the room to await the return of her husband at night for him to whip me. (Jackson 15)

Mrs Lewis, in this case, just wants to show Mattie that she has the power to punish her, even though she has to rely on her husband for the execution of that punishment.

Not all white women were cruel and evil though; some of them were kind enough to sympathize with the enslaved. The narratives are full of praises and blessings of such kind mistresses. Yet, these women are also divided among themselves: Some of them are genuinely kind because they consider everyone as human beings regardless of their color. Others, however, have hidden agendas beneath their kind behaviour. Linda Brent is able to perceive this double sidedness of the situation. Her mother’s mistress is a really kind woman who has grown up together with Linda’s mother. She has always treated her slaves well and on Linda’s mother’s deathbed she promises her that her children would never suffer. Yet, still she acts as a white slaveholder and does not free the slave children before she dies; instead, she bequeaths them to her sister’s daughter. Linda is grateful to her mistress for teaching her to read the Bible, however, she says: “But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor. I would give much to blot out from my memory that one great wrong. As a child, I loved my mistress; and, looking back on the happy days I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of injustice” (Jacobs 11). As the quote indicates, the female slave is so thankful for a little kindness that she forces herself to ignore the injustice.

White women sometimes act kindly only to cover up for their husbands’ embarrassing behaviour. For instance, two Southern ladies in Jacobs’ narrative, push their husbands to free the slaves whom they have fathered (40). They do not do this out of charity, but only to get rid of the disgrace caused by the presence of those slaves. Yet, it is also worth consideration that they might have pushed their husbands to sell them instead of freeing them. Jacobs implies that what they achieve in the end is a sense of superiority: “These husbands blushed before the superior nobleness of their wives’ natures. Though they had only counselled them to do that which it was their duty to do, it commanded their respect, and rendered their conduct more exemplary” (Jacobs 40).

Although the narrators of these slave narratives have gone through a lot of sufferings, they give the genuinely good people their due. They are quite objective and reliable for that matter. For instance, Mrs Williams and Mrs Greene in Mary Prince’s narrative are portrayed in very good terms and with respect, because of their kindness. Mrs Williams is depicted as “a kind-hearted good woman, [who] treated all her slaves well,” and Mrs Greene “was kind, and used to send an old slave woman to help” Mary Prince hearing her “cries and groans” from next door (Prince 1, 14). Furthermore, Kate Drumgoold in “A Slave Girl’s Story” talks of the white women she has come across in such a way that it is often quite difficult to distinguish whether the persons she is talking of are white or black. She has always encountered good-hearted white women and been treated in a humane way. Consequently, she sees everyone only as human beings and not as colored or white. Another example from Jacobs’ narrative portrays the immense power of patriarchy over all womankind. Linda describes a young lady who owns a woman and her

six children as slaves. She is so kind towards them that they almost live like a family. Moreover when the eldest child is to marry a free man, the lady emancipates her. However, this kind and pious mistress marries a cruel man who exemplifies white male authority. When the slaves react to this change of treatment, the kind mistress replies as follows: "I can do nothing for you now, Harry [...] I no longer have the power I had a week ago" (Jacobs 45). This situation, quite pathetically, conveys the position of white women in relation to their husbands. They were not permitted to behave towards their slaves as they wished; they could not even free them even if they wanted to.

The writers of the slave narratives were capable of presenting their mistresses in such a fair way because, unlike the white woman, the female slave was able to regard her mistress as 'human' first. No matter how they were treated, they almost always saw the white ladies as "women" or as "sisters" and had pity on them. That alone makes the black woman superior. For instance, Mrs Williams in Mary Prince's narrative is equally exploited by her husband. The slave women empathize with her because she is almost one of them, when considered in terms of her relation to white men. However, a white woman would not be expected to feel the same way as a slave woman, since most white women did not consider female slaves as women, not even as human, but only as slaves. Therefore, empathy or sympathy on their part was out of the question. Even though Mary Prince has some horrible experiences with Mrs I---, yet she does not hate white women altogether. She saves Miss D--- from her father when he gets drunk and beats the girl (13). She does this out of humanity, although she knows very well that she will pay for it later. The same kind of behaviour can be observed in Linda Brent. Though Linda hates Mrs Flint for her cruel behaviour, she is still capable of loving little Miss Flint. Moreover, she knows that the little child will grow up to be a slaveholder like her parents:

> My young mistress was still a child, and I could look for no protection from her. I loved her, and she returned my affection. I once heard her father allude to her attachment to me; and his wife promptly replied that it proceeded from fear. This put unpleasant doubts into my mind. Did the child feign what she did not feel? Or was her mother jealous of the mite of love she bestowed on me? I concluded it must be the latter. I said to myself, 'Surely, little children are true'. (Jacobs 20)

Mrs Flint hates Linda and she always shows her anger through vile remarks, however, Linda is able to empathize with her, and to see her as a hurt and helpless woman: "Yet I, whom she detested so bitterly, had far more pity for her than he had, whose duty it was to make her life happy. I never wronged her, or wished to wrong her; and one word of kindness from her would have brought me to her feet" (Jacobs 30). Unlike Mrs Flint, Linda is aware of the reality of the situation that it is Mr Flint whom she detests and is angry at. Linda pities her mistress for her pains and she is ready to mend the bond of sisterhood no matter how she has been treated so far. On the other hand, she is also aware of Mrs Flint's narrow-minded vision blinded by racism. The following excerpt from her narrative portrays the difference of perception between a white woman and a black woman:

> She spoke in tones so sad, that I was touched by her grief. The tears came to my eyes; but I was soon convinced that her emotions arose from anger and wounded pride. She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed. (Jacobs 31)

To conclude, the observations of the female slaves on the white mistresses in their narratives indicate that the obstacle before the union of white and black women, despite their common subordination as a sex, was not only racism but also, and to a greater extent, the patriarchal structure of their society. When their relationships are considered from a feminist perspective on power relations, it can be argued that even if the black woman was a slave, because of their analogous subordination and treatment as property, Foucault's exclusion of the slave in chains from the theory of power relations, loses its validity. As discussed in the paper, the white woman's superiority to the female slave becomes ironic due to her own inferior status in society, since she was also enslaved through the patriarchal institution of marriage. In that sense, both the white and black woman were slaves to the white, male masters. White women's need for authority and autonomy in a society, where they were placed below the white men and above the slaves, seems to have led them towards a need to exert power on the female slaves, rather than sympathizing with them acknowledging their similar subjugation to men. Many sources on the subject refer to the cause of the white mistresses' exertion of power over the female slaves mostly as their perception of the black woman as a sex object, which also contributes to the irony of the division of these women, since such a perception is an imposition of male ideology. Therefore, both racism and patriarchal ideologies were contributors to the power relations between white and black women, thereby causing a lack of unity among them as a sex. It was not only a question of the injustices of slavery, but racism at the same time stood as a barrier to the cooperation of all women against gender inequality, the repercussions of which were felt even in the second half of the twentieth century and caused the emergence of Black Feminism, since black women's struggle was not solely against the oppression of men.

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## Özet

### Köle Anlatılarında Beyaz ve Zenci Kadınlar Arasındaki Güç İlişkileri

Bu makale Kate Drumgoold, Mattie J. Jackson, Mary Prince ve Harriet Jacobs'ın köle anlatılarında ele alındığı şekliyle beyaz kadınlarla köle kadınlar arasındaki ilişkiler üzerinde durmaktadır. Amaç bu iki farklı kadın grubu arasındaki güç ilişkilerinin ve her iki gruba mensup kadınların da erkeklerin egemenliği altında tutulmalarına rağmen aralarında bir birlik olmamasının nedenlerini ortaya koymaktır. Tartışma önce ezen beyaz kadınlarla ezilen siyah kadınlar arasındaki ilişkileri incelemek üzere Michéle Foucault'nun güç ilişkileri konusundaki kuramlarına dayandırılmaktadır. Ardından Foucault'nun kuramları, ayrılıkları ırkçılık kadar ataerkil düzenden de kaynaklanan ve daha sonraki yüzyıllarda özgürleşme mücadelelerinde dahi iki ayrı gruba bölünmelerine neden olan bu kadınların, aynı olmasa da benzer biçimde köleleştirilmelerinde ataerkil düzenin rolünü açıklamak için feminist bakış açısına uyarlanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** kölelik, güç, ayrımcılık, ırkçılık, feminizm, kadınlar

**Relocating Chinese-Jewish-British Identity in**
***The Autograph Man* by Zadie Smith***

**Şebnem Toplu & Mati Turyel**

**Abstract:** Considering the complexity and indeterminacy of the question of hybrid identity the multicultural personae faces in the postcolonial era, although not a Jewish-British or an Asian-British author, Zadie Smith revolves around this rare topic, the Chinese-Jewish-British experience, humorously in *The Autograph Man* (2002). Smith's Chinese-Jewish-British protagonist Alex is partially Jewish (as he manages to become very rich in one act) and definitely Chinese with his eyes, and contextually British; belonging and not belonging to any society or culture as a whole. This essay contends that the boundaries of identity, oscillating between Jewish, British and Chinese identities should be considered as the route to an elevated sense of self-knowledge and worth in a globalized world. Alex will always have his Chinese eyes, but not a Kitty Alexander obsession anymore and maybe he will continue performing Jewish rituals when it is a must, but not really believing in them. With Smith's humorous conclusion, the text does supply a positive attitude towards the future, whilst not providing a clue for incoming cultural clashes.

**Key words:** Zadie Smith, *The Autograph Man*, hybridity, hyphenated identities, Chinese-Jewish-British identities, African-American-Jewish identities, multiculturalism

Since 1980s, a growing body of theoretical discourse has tried to develop further our understanding of many issues such as identity, power and history, while raising debates on features like hybridity, syncreticism, cultural ambivalence, diasporic identities and such. Bill Ashcroft argues in *The Empire Writes Back* that we "must" recognize that hybridity will "inevitably continue" since this is a "prerequisite of a radical appropriation which can achieve a genuinely transformative and interventionist" criticism of postcolonial reality (178). Along with hybridity, ambivalence is also of particular relevance both in the postcolonial world and in the "metropolitan centers", since for Ashcroft, these concepts have "sparked a continuous argument among critics because of their apparent failure to take into account the material status of the operation of power" (205-6) in conjunction with hegemony and neo-colonial power relations. Nevertheless, he also claims that ambivalence and hybridity have continued to be useful among postcolonial critics because they provide a "subtler and more nuanced view" of colonial subjectivity and colonial relationships than the usual "us" and "them" distinctions (206).

On the other hand, placing authenticity against hybridity for national culture, Fanon argues that "to ensure his salvation and to escape from the supremacy of the white man's

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culture the native feels the need to turn backwards towards his unknown roots and lose himself at whatever cost in his barbarous people" (375). However, multicultural writers do not prefer going back to their national culture, and claiming Britishness, they hold their stance in a more complex position. Consequently, postcolonial hybridity and ambivalence is employed by the second generation of immigrants and bicultural writers strongly in contemporary fiction as subject matter. In that respect, Lane maintains that hybridity is not simply an issue of migration, but of plural cultural identities (143). Thus, multiculturalism in Britain brings about questioning of geography, nationality and identity within the scope of what is Britishness. Furthermore, the contemporary writer Zadie Smith, of Jamaican and English parentage, contrary to Fanon, exclusively dares to narrate other cultures' hybridity in both of her works, *White Teeth* and *The Autograph Man*, by handling the triple ethnic position of a Chinese-Jewish-British protagonist in the latter.

On Britishness, Baumann argues that despite the phrase "hyphenated identities" each and everyone is British in their own way, except "perhaps" the English whose Englishness and Britishness remain indistinguishable to most. Subsequently, what is ingenious in this "political-cultural gestalt" is that British identity is not about equality, but instead, it is about "differentiated access and differential participation" (70). This is the British "consensus that fairness is achievable while equality is not, and that fairness must be achieved by pragmatic manipulations of inequality" (70). Baumann also points out that both Houses of Parliament "have seen to it that Muslims are legally defined as a religion, while Jews and Sikhs are ethnic groups (69). On the other hand, contemporary Asian-British novelist Hanif Kureishi asserts that "it is major adjustments to British society that have to be made […] I stress that it is the British who have to make these adjustments. It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn't what it was (37-38). If we include the Chinese within this debate, it is not only the white British who have to make adjustments, but the several varieties of non-white British may also have to extend their notion of complexity.

Considering the complexity and indeterminacy of the question of hybrid identity the multicultural personae faces in the postcolonial era, apart from the physical features, there is the function of religion as well. The neglect of Jewish writers, who are sometimes thought "not to exist" in Britain indicates a cultural, as well as a social "process of marginalization" and produces an "oppositional stance" in the Jewish-British experience (Head 158) as well as "a felt need 'to write against the dominance of an oppressive Englishness (Cheyette xi)'"(in Head 158). On the other hand, Pope asserts that ethnicity is a term which is "positively" valued, since it offers the possibility of cultural change and variation (142). Nonetheless, whether the Jewish are considered as an ethnic group and it may be valued positively, Head asserts that the antagonism and "non-recognition" is responsible for "the split stance" in much Jewish-British writing; that is, "the feeling of simultaneously belonging and not belonging" that can prove to be "disabling" (158). Cheyette also claims that one manifestation of this "imprisoning schizophrenia" is a "culture of apology" in which the "essential attributes of Jewishness are diluted, made to conform to the dominant norms of respectability" (xxvi, xxxv).

Consequently, although not a Jewish-British or an Asian-British author, Zadie Smith revolves around this rare topic, the Chinese-Jewish-British experience, humorously in *The Autograph Man* (2002). Smith's focusing on a topic more hyphenated than her own bicultural background finds an ironic defense in Rushdie: "Literature is self-validating. That is to say, a book is not justified by its author's worthiness to write it, but by the quality of what has been written. There are terrible books that arise directly out of experience and extraordinary imaginative feats dealing with themes which the author has been obliged to

approach from outside" (227). Since among her characters she also includes African-American-Jewish-British characters as well, one should note that instead of obligation, Smith's position seems to that of a dissent; weaving cultures into further complexity.

Smith's complicated framework portrays Alex-Li Tandem who has a Chinese-British father, Li-Jin, and a Jewish-British mother, Sarah. Alex-Li's name suggests Chinese and English at the same time, a hyphenated name designating to a hyphenated identity. Tandem, on the other hand, is a bicycle built for two riders, which also ironically reinforces Alex's split personality. From the textual point of view, the purpose of this essay is to suggest that Smith enables her Chinese-Jewish-British protagonist to overcome his identity crisis of simultaneously belonging and not belonging to Jewishness and Chinese; in other words, the ambivalence may be the newly emerging Britishness itself. As from the contextual point of view, Smith employs two devices simultaneously: primarily, she alienates the reader with quite an unfamiliar script (Hebrew) and Jewish rituals, thus forcing the reader to identify basically with the protagonist and his father's alienation from the society. Secondly, while doing that, she forces the reader to recognize Jewishness and even Hebrew by constantly employing both: Jewishness with its specific rituals and Hebrew in its original and Latin transcripts. Hence Smith challenges the reader to further inquire the notions of Kabbalah, Kaddish, Zohar and Bar Mitzvah, along with the inscriptions YHWH and יהוה which reappear frequently and make the text impossible to understand at a deeper level.

In the expository section of the novel, Alex-Li is twelve years old and his father Dr. Li-Jin dies of brain tumor at the age of 36. Fifteen years after this episode, Alex-Li is reintroduced as a successful autograph trader, but "emotionally undeveloped […] like most Western kids" (*TAM*[1] 63), using drugs occasionally, having a girl friend, and obsessed with the idea of attaining Kitty Alexander's autograph. In fact, Kitty Alexander is not a celebrity, but a forgotten star who acted as a Chinese girl in the 1940s film *The Girl from Peking*, which Alex-Li has been watching since he was fifteen. On the other hand, his mother Sarah and his Jewish friends coerce him to say a Kaddish[2] prayer for his dead father, Li-Jin, to which Alex resists by postponing the performance. In order to attend an autograph fair, Alex seizes the opportunity to fly to New York where he is also liable to find Kitty Alexander. Alex does succeed in meeting the enigmatic Kitty as a result of a thorough quest. Hence, getting familiar with her, Alex convinces Kitty to leave New York and go to Mountjoy with him, and takes her consent to sell her autograph and profit from it. The day after their arrival in London, news of Kitty's death appears on the papers with a demonic act by Alex so, he makes a fortune with Kitty's autograph, Kitty leaves for the Continent, and finally Alex relents to say Kaddish for Li-Jin.

Smith's dividing *The Autograph Man* in two books is another signifier for Alex-Li's hybrid identity, since the sections are named after Jewish and Zen theosophies successively.

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[1] *The Autograph Man*

[2] Kaddish: "The final period of formal mourning is avelut, which is observed only for a parent. This period lasts for twelve months after the burial. During that time, mourners avoid parties, celebrations, theatre and concerts. For eleven months of that period, starting at the time of burial, the son of the deceased recites the mourner's Kaddish every day. After the avelut period is complete, the family of the deceased is not permitted to continue formal mourning; however, there are a few continuing acknowledgements of the decedent. Every year, on the anniversary of the death, the family members observe the decedent's Yahrzeit (Yiddish, lit. 'anniversary'). On the Yahrzeit, sons recite Kaddish" (Rich "Life, Death and Mourning") (online).

"Book One" is titled as "Mountjoy The Kabbalah[3] of Alex-Li Tandem" and likewise "Book Two": "Roebling Heights The Zen of Alex-Li Tandem". Utilizing England and Jewishness in the first book, and New York and Zen in the second, Smith reflects Alex's split personality by the duality of religions and two major multicultural metropolises. Moreover, the source book of Kabbalah, "Zohar"[4], is the subtitle of the Prologue which narrates the most important element in Alex-Li Tandem's life; the short history of the father and son relationship, which forms the foundation of his identity in adulthood. Alex's escape from Cabbalistic experience, which symbolizes his Jewish identity, is the main theme of Book One, where some crucial points about Kabbalah are similarly introduced. Each part reflects the names in the diagram of Kabbalah in Hebrew, creating the Kabbalah of Alex: Shechinah ("Malkut" sovereignty)[5], Yesod (foundation), Netsah ("Netzach" victory), Hod (majesty), Tif'eret (glory), Hesed ("Chesed" mercy), Gevurah (strength), Hochmah ("Chokmah" wisdom), Binah (intuition, understanding) and Keter (the crown). For Alex's reaching the Zen, Smith employs the "bull" metaphor for Kitty, such as: The Search for the Bull, Catching the Bull, Both Bull and Self Transcended, etc. because for Alex[*], Kitty is "awkward and invisible as Jehovah" (*TAM* 66), signifying mystic attraction.

The Prologue instantaneously alienates the non-Jewish reader with the double heading: "Zohar The Wrestling Match" which have no meaningful connection between them at first sight. Nevertheless, the title foreshadows Alex-Li's and his father Li-Jin's split identities along with Alex-Li's future profession. In addition, if the reader is not well informed about Judaism, the frequent mysterious appearance of YHWH, further alienates the reader, since Smith equally employs Hebrew: יהוה . Consequently, ironically maintaining Jehovah (God) both in Hebrew and Latin scripts, Smith emphasizes the duality in Alex-Li's name, along with the father and son's alienation from the society, while likewise alienating the reader. Yet, as mentioned before, paradoxically, it forces the reader to inquire and learn about these features. On the other hand, Alex-Li is described as an associable child of twelve who spends all his spare time at his father's surgery as if he senses Li-Jin's imminent death. Nonetheless, his father "doesn't want Alex standing out from the crowd" and "knows that soon the boy's life will become difficult and hopes conformity [with the English society] might be his savior. And so, he wants him to be

[3] The mystical school of thought came to be known as Kabbalah, from the Hebrew root Qof-Bet-Lamed, meaning "to receive, to accept". The word is usually translated as "tradition" (Rich "Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism") (online).

[4] Zohar is a Hebrew word that means *splendor*. In its simplest form, the Zohar is a commentary on the Bible, structured as conversations among group of friends, scholars and spiritual masters…[T]he text of Zohar was composed approximately 2000 years ago […] The Zohar deals very directly with concepts of reincarnation, visionary experiences, and the presence of unseen influences ("The Zohar") (online).

[5] According to Kabbalah, the true essence of G-d [sic.] is so transcendent that it cannot be described, except to what it is not. The true essence of G-d is known as Ein Sof, which literally means "without end" […] The Ein Sof interacts with the universe through ten emanations from this essence, known as the Ten Sefirot. These Sefirot correspond to qualities of G-d in descending order, Keter, Chokmah, Binah, Chesed, or Gedulah, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malkut […] The Sefirot are commonly represented as a diagram which is commonly known as the Tree of the Sefirot or the Kabbalistic Tree of Life (Rich "Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism") (online).

[*] It should be noted here that after the Prologue, Smith ironically chooses to call her protagonist "Alex" or occasionally Tandem, dropping the hyphen for the Chinese suffix.

ready, normal. He wants him to be part of this *everybody*" (*TAM* 6) (emphasis original). For that reason, he takes his son and his Jewish friends, Mark Rubenfine and Adam Jacobs, to a wrestling match believing it to be a popular English activity. Li-Jin worries about his son for two disparate motives equally: firstly, because of his approaching death and secondly, for religious purposes. Li-Jin does not want his son to have a Bar Mitzvah[6], secretly objecting to his wife's insistence on it: he "tr[ies] to influence Alex-Li in this certain way he promised Sarah he would never do" (6). However, Alex shows signs of not rendering particular significance to the ceremony, saying "I just do it. And then it's done" (7). Ironically, Li-Jin's opposition to Bar Mitzvah seems to focus especially on the ritualistic outfit, Tefillin, more than the spiritual side; therefore, his argument sounds absurd. Li-Jin is "allergic to the idea of those straps [Tefillin]" (7) which are strapped on the head and arms. He thinks they are "too violent and strange a lurch from the normal, peaceful, almost *imperceptible* Judaism he married into. What is this stuff? […] And how tight will they be, these straps?" (7)[7] (emphasis original). Although Smith does not mention the circumcision ceremony that must have taken place at Alex's birth, Bar Mitzvah crisis ends by Li-Jin's death.

Li-Jin's brief encounter in the text enables Smith to keep the Chinese-British, Western-educated doctor Li-Jin's conflict with his Eastern-European Jewish-English wife, Sarah Hoffman, and the English society at a minimal degree. In this case, it may be said that Smith prefers to concentrate more on Jewishness since Alex-Li does not have any Chinese friends and the Chinese culture is represented by two characters: Dr. Li-Jin and the Chinese doctor he goes to visit in Soho. While Li-Jin represents the Western-educated Chinese of the post-revolution time, conversely, the doctor in Soho represents the old Chinese who preserved his national culture and education. Li-Jin relies on his Chinese background only once, when he visits this traditional Chinese doctor in Soho about his frequent and painful headaches. The doctor diagnoses the symptoms as the influence of Alex-Li's "obstructing his father's *qi*", for Li-Jin loves his son too much: "like the widower

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[6] "Bar Mitzvah" literally means "son of the commandment". Under Jewish Law, children are not obligated to observe the commandments, although they are encouraged to do so as much as possible to learn the obligations they will have as adults. At the age of 13 (12 for girls), children become obligated to observe the commandments. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony formally marks the assumption of that obligation, along with the corresponding right to take part in leading religious services, to form binding contracts, to testify before religious courts and to marry. A Jewish boy automatically becomes a Bar Mitzvah upon reaching the age of 13 years. No ceremony needed to confer these rights and obligations (*Bar Mitzvah* Ahavat Israel) (online).

[7] "Tefillin is one of the most important Mitzvah (precepts) of the Torah. Tefillin consists of two small leather boxes attached to leather straps. The two boxes each contain four sections of the Torah inscribed on parchment […] One of the boxes (the Hand Tefillin) is placed upon the left arm so that it rests against the heart, and the suspended leather strap is wound around the left hand, and around the middle finger of that hand. The other box (the Head Tefillin) is placed upon the head, above the forehead, so as to rest upon the cerebrum. In this manner our attention is directed to the head, heart and hand. It teaches us to dedicate ourselves to the service of G-d in all that we think, feel and do. The Mitzvah of Tefillin and its practice facilitates the attainment by the individual of unity of mind and heart, intellect and emotion […] A Jewish boy, upon reaching his thirteenth birthday, is regarded as a full fledged Jew. He then becomes a "Bar Mitzvah", meaning that he is obliged to keep and perform all the laws and customs of the Jewish people. One of these laws commanded us in the Torah is Tefillin. It is customary to initiate the boy into the practice of doning the Tefillin two or three months before the actual date of his Bar Mitzvah". (*Tefillin* Ahavat Israel) (online)

whose child is the last remnant of his wife. Li-Jin was loving Alex in a feminine way instead of a masculine one. His *mu qi* (maternal air) was excessive, blocking his *qi men* (air gates). This has caused the disturbance. *Nonsense*" (12) (emphasis original). In fact, the doctor in Soho diagnoses the psychological side of Li-Jin's trouble. However, refusing "the superstitions of his Beijing childhood, he never went to see this man or any other Chinese doctor again" (12). The source of Li-Jin's total alienation with his own culture is deliberately left obscure by Smith, supposedly because handling two diverse cultures would be too complex for the Western reader, and may be even for Smith herself.

The absence of a representative of Chinese culture and identity, except Li-Jin who dies at a young age, creates a major crisis point in Alex's identity, since his knowledge of the Chinese part of his identity is scanted. As a result, Alex-Li has to hold on to what is nothing more than a remnant from his late father. Furthermore, the only instance where Li-Jin uses his cultural manners negatively to revenge a stranger, is when an Englishman wants to bet with him on the wrestlers: he rejects giving a "short, inadvertent, unmistakably Chinese bow in his seat, which ordinarily would make his son wince" (22-3). By the end of the prologue, Li-Jin's expected, yet unpredictable, death takes place among the crowd, while he is trying to get an autograph from the wrestlers: "The light shrinks. He sees people. Many, many people. Nobody famous, though. No one familiar or friendly. No one to help. No one he knows" (41). Consequently, Li-Jin, a Chinese-English atheist, dies alienated forever among strangers and "Zohar The Wrestling Match" ends with the ironical God inscription in Hebrew: יהוה.

When Alex is reintroduced at the age of twenty-seven, Smith implies that the Bar Mitzvah has been performed. Nevertheless, ironically, the next religious conflict is revealed in Li-Jin's belated death ceremony. Sarah asserts that it must be done in the Jewish way by Alex's saying Caddish for his father and Alex cannot bring himself to perform it. Additionally, this conflict has been going on for fifteen years, and thus, it forms the main conflict of the novel and Alex's identity crisis. His childhood Jewish friends likewise coerce him into performing it, so Caddish becomes the signifier of Alex's Jewishness and his hesitation and avoidance of fulfilling it, represents the crises that arise because of his hyphenated identity. The prologue also maintains its importance for Alex in terms of his profession; an autograph man. Subsequent to meeting another Jewish boy, Joseph Klein, at the wrestling match he has been to with his father, Alex becomes fascinated by the idea of his collecting autographs. Hence, both the title of the fiction and Alex's profession form the signifiers of Li-Jin's memory, since he dies whilst trying to get an autograph from the wrestlers. Hitherto, Alex is reintroduced in Book One as a young man who is neither biased towards Jewishness nor Chinese, but oscillating in between. His childhood friends, African-American-Jewish-British, Adam Jacobs; Jewish-British Mark Rubenfine, now a rabbi; and Jewish-British Joseph Klein who retains keeping autographs as hobby, preserve their closeness to him and Alex has a love affair with Adam's beautiful African-American-Jewish-British sister, Esther.

Mother and son relationship basically relies on religion, in contrast to the psychological bond between father and son. Smith implies that Sarah uses religion also as a means of having a connection with Alex for "there has not always been enough space for Sarah in this adoring duo of father and son" (*TAM* 3). On the other hand, Smith keeps Sarah's feelings concealed to a large extent; she lives away from her son after her husband's death and the deficiency in their relation is explicated through Alex's point of view:

> He called his mother, who stopped making things out of clay in Cornwall with Derek (the boyfriend) and returned to London to stay in his flat for a few weeks, to keep an eye. But for Sarah it did not come naturally, this mothering role. That had been Li-Jin's thing. Her gift was friendship, and Alex, for his part, did not know how to lie back and have soup brought and temperatures taken. Their progress together was awkward, somewhat comic, like the days of two crook-backed adults living in a Wendy house. And all without Li-Jin. The terrible, undimmed sadness of it. Every time they met, they felt it afresh, as if they had planned a picnic, Alex arriving with all the cutlery, Sarah with the mackintosh squares- where was the food? (*TAM* 91)

Nonetheless, Sarah's insistence on Caddish also reveals her strong Jewish identity; and reflects the fact that Jewishness is conveyed from mother to children. Morris states that Jews, like other groups, have been historically much exercised by the need for a mechanics of continuity. Communal affiliation among Jews is usually by birth to a Jewish mother: "matrilineal descent" (238). Consequently, Sarah's determination on her son's performing Caddish for his father, implies a strong determination on making Alex a faithful Jew while desiring Caddish for her atheist husband implies a final ironic attempt to convert Li-Jin's soul. On the contrary, for the conversion of Jews themselves, an anti-Semite told the German-Jewish writer Jacob Wassermann during the 1920s that "whether, after conversion, they cease to be Jews in the deeper sense we do not know, and have no way of finding out. I believe that the ancient influences continue to operate. Jewishness is like a concentrated dye: a minute quantity suffices to give a specific character–or, at least, some traces of it-to an incomparably greater mass" (72). This strengthens the paradox in the text by Sarah's marrying first an atheist, then leading a non-Jewish life with her English boyfriend, but still being very assertive on Caddish, insisting on it for fifteen years.

Alex frequently calls Sarah while he tries to write a book on "Jewishness and Goyishness"[*] which symbolizes his identity crisis, since the book never finishes, like the crisis he feels never seem to end. Through Alex's questions, the reader is also informed that Sarah comes from an Estonian ascendant family and she, like Li-Jin has an immigrant past. Jewish history is based on immigration, thus in literature as Felsenstein points out "[o]f all Christian legends concerning the Jews, that of the Wandering Jew is perhaps the most persistent and one of the most extraordinary" (58). Sennet also claims that becoming a foreigner means displacement from one's roots. Such uprooting has a positive moral value and central to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The people of the Old Testament thought of themselves as "uprooted wanderers". The Yahweh of the Old Testament was himself a wandering god, his Ark of the "Covenant portable", (186) and "[w]hen the Ark was finally captured by the Philistines, the Hebrews began to realize that Yahweh was not localized even in it […] He traveled with his people and elsewhere" (Cox, 49). Besides immigration, Sarah is a post-Holocaust child who learned to be silent, and thus, invisible. For Seidler, the learned silence and invisibility, even after the Holocaust, is an important feature for the Jews at their apolitical approach. Furthermore, in the post-Holocaust period "Jewishness became a matter of private concern" (1). Seidler also narrates that he learned safety through silence from his step-father:

> for to be English was to be 'safe.' It was this safety that the parents were ready to sacrifice for […] My step-father, Leo, had learned from his experience at the

[*] Goyish is the name for non-Jewish in Hebrew.

> hands of Nazi's in Germany that Jews should not be involved in politics. As a Jew you had to learn to keep your head down. You were to learn to become invisible. As far as he was concerned you had to learn from the English to behave properly, 'to be seen and not heard'." (4)

This is relevant to all the Jewish characters of the *The Autograph Man*, considering the fact that there is a considerable presence of Jewish community at Mountjoy which is located at a thirty-minute drive from the City, "on the northernmost tip of the city of London" (8). The location suggests invisibility from the majority of the English. Furthermore, Sarah's relation with her son relies on this silence yet, in order to find a solution to his ambivalence, she brings a box to Alex which contains remnants like pictures and foreign currency that belonged to her family:

> Before she left, she gave him a box of papers and stuff relating to the relations […] Sarah Hoffman's family. Trinkets and photographs and facts. Here was great-grand father Hoffman as a young man in European pose, looking cocky, clutching two other young man by the shoulders, the three of them with their ties and legs apart, standing in front of some building, some new enterprise, never to be finished. In another, four pretty sisters stand in the snow. Their heads are pitched at various melancholy angels. Only their Afghan hound looks at the camera, as if he knows the future secret of their terrible deaths, the location and the order [...] But let somebody else make a mournful list, thought Alex. The same people who keep boxes like these are the types who follow ominous noises in the dark cellar, who build their very homes on top of Indian burial grounds. People from movies. Everyone on these photographs is dead, thought Alex wearily. (92-3)

Hirsch elaborates on what she calls the photograph's "posthumous irony". Describing pictures of the vanished world of Eastern European Jewish life which are particularly affecting, Hirsch argues that as we look at them we know how soon these people are going to die (19-21). Moreover, although Alex seems to condemn the people who keep the remnants of their elderly, paradoxically, his profession requires collecting personal belongings and the most valuable thing in his life is half of a banknote that a few minutes prior to his death, Li-Jin had given to Alex, Adam, Mark and Joseph. It has holiness and should be mentioned with great care among them:

> Promise? On your note?
> Alex grunted. He resented these promises. Their unbreakablity was restrictive. As a rule among them all, his father's notes were to be invoked only with great caution. You had to earn your right to speak of them. Joseph very rarely mentioned them. Rubinfine knew not to refer to them at all. (61)

The remnants of Sarah's family, illustrated in pictures or money, barely covers the undeniable fact of NAZI concentration camps, specifically of Auschwitz, so Alex's visit of Oświęcim is significant as a metaphor, since he looks for himself through his mother's past. He questions himself about who he would be and what his expectations would be, as Sarah's and thus, his own relatives had died at those camps. Additionally, by visiting those places Alex pays tribute to those relatives. He visits Oświęcim to find a voice from his Jewish past, so during his visit it is remarkable that Alex responds to his shock by a strong Jewish identity; desiring to "impregnate everyone in the country" (*TAM* 64), since

Oświęcim witnessed the deaths of many people. Consequently, visiting Oświęcim enables Alex to recognize his Jewish ancestry while Smith leaves his father's past in obscurity.

The other particular signifier of the paralysis Alex feels is location. Though richer than his parents, he chooses to continue living in the Jewish ghetto Mountjoy which was established after the World War II in the flight path of an international airport. During his childhood the people of Mountjoy "have based their lives on the principle of compromise, and each night they quietly embraced the earplugs and migraines and stress-related muscular discomfort they receive in exchange for cheap houses" (*TAM* 8). It suited Li-Jin because "parking [was] not a problem and his surgery has always been [t]here" and "[t]here [was] a considerable Jewish presence and this please[d] Sarah" (8). From Alex's point of view "[i]t suit[ed] Alex-Li because anywhere would. Adam, the only black kid for miles – *possibly the only black Jew in the ugging world*- he hate[d] it" (8-9) (emphasis original) and for Rubenfine, "if Mountjoy were a person he would rip off its head, piss in its eyeballs and shit down its throat" (9). The portrayal of Mountjoy with detailed negative connotations signifies the polarity of Alex's disinterestedness to the outside world, and his attachment to his childhood home and environment for twenty-seven years, apart from the desire of invisibility mentioned earlier. Sennet, commenting on the Forest Hills, the Jewish section of New York, agrees with Smith's view of location. For Sennet, at the point of immigration an ethnic group becomes conscious of itself anew. The customs may be revived, but the "heart [religion]" may be missing (306). The shell of custom around the faith is renewed in order to define a sense of particular and warm association with others. People feel close to each other as Jews, as Italians, as Japanese in America; they share "the same outlook- religious faith- from which mores and customs of the past originated" (306). Therefore, when Mountjoy is re-presented after fifteen years, it includes more ethnic groups besides Jews.

Smith chooses two diverse and uncommon Jews in terms of appearance: Alex has Chinese eyes and Adam and his sister Esther are African-Americans. Smith's presentation of African-American Jews is ironic to the assumption of nineteenth century ethnology that the Jewish prognathism was the result of the Jew's close racial relationship to or intermixing with blacks in Africa (Gilman 155). On the other hand, apart from his hyphenated name, significance of Alex-Li's fragmented identity begins with his physical appearance. Li-Jin foreshadows this feature with a rhetorical question at the very beginning: "He [Alex-Li] has grown and filled, he's now soft bellied, woman-hipped and sallow. His new glasses magnify the crescents of his eyes- does he look like more Chinese?" (*TAM* 2-3). Alex-Li's Far-Eastern appearance, which displays an important role in Alex-Li's Chinese half of identity, is stressed as a crucial point: he is not like "the sporty, red-cheeked boys of some godforsaken distant era" (3). Additionally, Rubinfine mocks Alex's Chinese eyes: "He opened his Accidental eyes (Rubinfine's term: halfway between Oriental and Occidental) wide as they would go" (46). Apart from his eyes, Alex has to face another discrimination regarding his general body form: he is considered as effeminate, emphasized especially by the black milkman Marvin Kepps: "'Will do.' 'Will do,' echoed Marvin in the effeminate voice he often used to impersonate Alex. In the past this has made Alex wonder whether he seems effeminate to black men or just to Marvin in particular" (52). On the other hand, Smith's deliberately using "in the past" implies reconciliation on Alex's side, while the teasing continues for a considerable span of time. Nevertheless, the self-consciousness and doubt forces Alex to consult his friend Adam: "'No … I [Adam] don't see that, I don't find you particularly effeminate. You're too bulky for one. And hairy. And he does that to me too, anyway. And I'm the black guy'". In which Alex finds consolation: "'Yes,' said Alex happily … 'You're *the* black guy'" (53) (emphasis original). However,

Adam introduces class distinction as well: "'Yes, *I'm* the black guy. No doubt I die halfway through. So. I don't know. I think it's probably more of a class thing'" (53) (emphasis original). About multiple, identities Calhoun argues that underlying much of the pressure towards repressive sameness and essentialist identities is a tendency to think in terms of categorical identities. Hence, most identity politics involve claims about categories of individuals who putatively share a given identity. Thereby, this allows a kind of abstraction from the concrete interactions and social relationships, within which identities are constantly renegotiated. As a result, individuals present one identity as more salient than another, achieving some personal sense of continuity and balance among their various sorts of identities (26). These identities are what Bhabha refers to as "hybrid agencies" that find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of "historic memory", that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; "the outside of the inside: the part in the whole" (58).

As for his character traits, Alex-Li reflects his father's "ready tears" and can cry very easily. Nonetheless, the reconstructed Western identities of both father and son hinder them from crying freely before people. Li- Jin wants to cry every time he remembers the tumor in his brain: "He stands in the middle of the kitchen half naked (bottom half) and manages three minutes of the BBC test card […] Then he weeps, the sandwich over his mouth to suppress the noise, gulping from his throat like an animal. The death-punch, the infinity-slap, strikes him so hard he falls on to a stool and has to grip the edge of the breakfast bar just to stay upright. He is thirty-six years old" (34). To Li-Jin's tragedy, Smith adds the unexpected feature of "bottom-half" naked Li-Jin to lighten her fiction, because it claims to be humorous, but the element of comedy also reflects Li-Jin's effeminate appearance. However, Alex-Li's "ready tears" appear whenever he thinks of death due to Li-Jin's death at an early age.

Alex mostly wants to be left alone, while paradoxically desiring his friends' attention to his irresponsible way of life. Although he is quite selfish, he is popular among his friends because when Alex gets into company, Adam remarks, he turns everything "into a Tandem road show" (61). Alex-Li's relationship with Adam is different from his relationships with Joseph and Mark; Adam is his best friend. He reminds Alex that he is Jewish and has a place among the Jewish community. Moreover, besides Alex's relationship with Adam's sister Esther, Adam and Esther were the only children similar to Alex, who did not have "the sporty, red-cheeked" complexion (3). Li-Jin was Alex's best friend and after his death he is replaced by Adam. He is the only one who can talk about Li-Jin's sacred banknote freely. Although Adam is black, he places himself in the Jewish identity, and his black identity is not as strong as his sister Esther's. Adam is fascinated with Kabbalah as a vehicle to construct a world of his own and reach a unified self. Nevertheless, Adam also has some identity problems and his dealing with Kabbalah, instead of theosophy, demonstrates his commitment to Judaism and the mystic structure of his identity. Like Alex, Adam wants to become invisible and keep to himself in the English society he lives in. Through Kabbalah, Adam wants to experience reaching God and in order to do this, he ironically uses drugs. On the other hand, their friend Mark Rubinfine who becomes a rabbi naturally objects to Adam's means of reaching God. Adam lives in an apartment in which Indians run a chicken business. As mentioned before, the apartment signifies that Mountjoy is not solely occupied with Jews any more. It has reached a multicultural structure and the Jewish community of Mountjoy feels threatened. Thus, Alex chooses to discriminate the Indians living in Adam's apartment, while he likes the Chinese neighbor Anita Chang. As for Adam, he likes the Indians and tolerates their business

choosing not to complain about the scent. Adam's tolerance and Alex's intolerance makes Adam Zen master and Alex the Jew, since Alex wants things at the measure for measure base. Unlike Adam, he forgets about his immigrant past:

> '*Adam.* Huge bloody submarine-style *periscope* pumping smell of fried chicken *into your flat*. That's no *good*.'
> 'No I *know* that.'
> 'Then what are you *doing* about it?
> 'Well, it's *done* now, isn't it?
> […] 'No, Ads, no- this isn't a Zen issue. I mean, this is not an issue to which Zen should be applied. This is a private-property issue. This is an eye for an eye, tooth, etc., issue. This is a time for the application of Judaic law. You've got rights. You were here *before* them.' (123) (emphasis original)

On the other hand, the status of Mark Rubinfine and Joseph Klein is different from Adam's. Mark as a rabbi tries to form a unified community by his folks, ironically feeling superior to the others, for he has a "patio and a wife, curtains and carpets, a power shower and twelve-seater dinner table" (100). Joseph Klein comes from a European Jewish family and while Alex becomes a professional autograph man, Joseph continues dealing with the autograph business as hobby. Joseph always reminds Alex the ethics of the autograph business. Thus, Joseph eschews Alex from the stereotypical features of "the Jew" in social life as well as in literature, because Alex reflects some stereotypical features when he convinces Kitty Alexander to sell her personal belongings. The symbolic usage of the concepts of forged and real autographs signifies Alex-Li's forged and real identity because within the Jewish society, he lives like a forged autograph; and the real autograph is the autograph man Alex-Li Tandem, who is neither Jewish nor Chinese:

> Who would ever choose this life? Alex stepped out into the centre of town. In the curved black glass of superior clothes store he dropped his shoulders, placed his hands by his sides, itemized himself. No love, no transportation, no ambitions, no faith, no community, no expectation of forgiveness or reward, one bag, one thermos, one acid hangover, one alcohol hangover, one Kitty Alexander autograph, in pristine condition, written in dark ink, centrally placed on a postcard. Look at this. If this is a man. Look at him. *Never have I been more perfectly Jewish. I have embraced a perfect contradiction like Job. I have nothing and at the same time, everything. And if I am out of my mind,* thought Alex-Li Tandem, *it's all right by me.* […] Maybe it s fatuous to think of steps, stages, *moves* between me and Duchamp, thought Alex. Maybe I am already there.
>
> For I am an Autograph Man. (119) (emphasis original)

Although his Far-Eastern particularities are dominant, Alex-Li never feels offended with some jokes about Far-Eastern people made by some of his ignorant friends who cannot distinguish a Chinese from Japanese and who do not know that he is half Chinese, but consider him as "Oriental". Thereby, his attitude demonstrates his confrontation with his Chinese identity as well as his holding on his identity at a racist attack. The dialogue with Lovelear points out to this fact:

> 'I'll tell you and I don't want you to take offence. The truth is, it's like, oh, I just had some *sushi* […] I'm like this Jap businessman loser *asshole* and I haven't

> even seen *High Noon.* I'm like this little yellow *nip* who can't even pronounce Cooper's *name*. No offence.'
> 'I'm Chinese.'
> 'Right, no offence meant.'
> 'None taken, Lovelear, because I'm *Chinese.*'
> 'Right, no offence.' (107) (emphasis original)

A dialogue with Brian Duchamp, on the other hand, exemplifies that Alex-Li has to handle not only his Chinese identity, but also his Jewish identity. When Honey asks "What the hell are you?" Alex replies: 'Er … nothing, really. Jewish. I mean, by birth'" (243). However, his Jewish identity is as vulnerable as the Chinese one in some cases:

> Alex signed his name. As soon as he was finished, Duchamp whipped the paper away from him.
> 'Call that a signature? Looks like a bloody scrawl to me. Never trust an Israelite. In Hebrew, is it? Eh? Ha! Ha Ha! Ha!
> Alex felt a heave of disgust. He stood up. (174)

Moreover, when he presents his business card to Rabbi Darvick:

> 'Alex-Li Tandem? *Tandem Autographs: More Stars than the Solar System.* Huh? What kind of a name is that, anyway? Tandem? You converted?'
> 'The father, Li-Jin Tandem- *may his memory be a blessing*- was Chinese,' explained Rubinfine, and with so much phoney solemnity Alex wanted to reach over and stab him in the eye with his house keys. 'Tan, originally. Someone thought Tandem sounded better. Odd-clearly doesn't. Mother, Sarah. Live in the country now. Lovely lady.'
> 'Is that a fact,' said Darvick, 'Chinese. Is that a fact.'
> 'Those are the facts, yes' said Alex-Li. (75)

Alex has many girl friends: Adam's sister, Esther, his Chinese neighbor Anita, and Boot, the English girl. However, Alex-Li ironically spends most of his youth by adoring Kitty, not only on professional grounds, but because of her leading role as a Chinese girl from Peking although it reflects a stereotypical Chinese character. When fourteen, Alex starts sending letters to her, although she never writes back. His first letter is significant since Alex-Li introduces himself "*[a]s an avid autograph man, who is himself half Chinese and interested in the cinema*" (150) (emphasis original). He does not mention his Jewishness, since his Chinese half attains a crucial importance right after Li-Jin's death. While watching the movie *The Girl from Peking* Alex observes Kitty's every single movement and writes the pieces that he attaches importance, creating the ideal Chinese woman in his mind. Smith depicts the metropolitan, New York, with its coffee shops, hotels and yellow cabs, stereotyped as in the movies, yet implying multiculturalism and the immigrant pasts of many people, drawing a parallel between London and New York. Alex-Li finds Kitty in New York, also searching for his true self in another multicultural society, while trying to decide what to do about saying Li-Jin's Caddish. He unwillingly tries to memorize the prayer there, although he decides not to say Caddish and between the dichotomy of the cities he thinks England is his "true self", his "Buddha-nature".

Apart from his obsession with Kitty, Esther is the second important woman in Alex-Li's life, although they live many break ups. Though Alex's best friend Adam's sister, she plays a more important role in Alex's life than Adam because unlike Adam, Esther

manages to balance her black and Jewish identities by being black in culture, and Jewish in religion. The significance of the love affair between Alex and Esther is in Esther's choosing Alex as a partner. Initially, Esther tries to be with a black man at the university which ends in disillusionment, like Alex's trial with Anita Chang, yet unlike Alex, she overcomes her identity crisis.

After Alex's return from New York, Adam finds a rabbi called Rabbi Burston for the Caddish ceremony. However, despite Rabbi Burston's attempt to convince him, Alex does not realize the significance of the ritual that as a Jewish man, he should honor his father. Nevertheless, this does not solve the crisis he is experiencing, since it is revealed that Alex-Li copied his Chinese identity so, he never felt himself truly Chinese, either. When Adam compares Alex's signature with Li-Jin's, Adam sees the similarity which turns out as a metaphor for the reason of Alex's identity crisis:

> 'What's…? You dropped-oh it's your note,' said Adam picking it up. He came over and sat down on the sofa. ' It's all scrunched,' he said giving it to Alex […] He took it from Adam and straightened it out with his fist against the table.
>
> 'They're *similar* aren't they?' Said Adam earnestly.' I mean, you really write alike.'
>
> Alex frowned. Picked up a pen and neighbouring TV Guide and wrote his own signature perfectly on the back of the magazine.
>
> 'Look how similar,' murmured Adam. His *T* is exactly the same as yours- and that funny *M*.'
>
> 'I used to copy his' said Alex, touching the note, remembering. […] 'I'd make him write it over and over again, so I could watch the way his hand moved. Small hands. They were weirdly small' (410-11) (emphasis original)

Li-Jin's death leads Alex to copy his father's habits, which he sees as the parts of Li-Jin's Chinese culture. The absence of another Chinese limits his knowledge about the Chinese culture, and Alex through copying his father's identity, in other words, using mimicry, tries to create his own Chinese identity and a Chinese stereotype in his own personality. Thus, since his Chinese side is scanted and created as a stereotype, he could never unify the Chinese and Jewish identities. Bhabha argues about the question of ambivalence of mimicry as the problematic of colonial subjection if one takes the concept in general. For Bhabha the mimic man who occupies the impossible space between cultures is the "effect of a flawed colonial mimesis in which to be Anglicized, is emphatically not to be English" (228-9).

It should also be pointed out that what Smith lacks in *The Autograph Man* is Jewish and Chinese traditions, of which the Jewish traditions have more significance, since they are the basis of the Jewish identity. The importance of the Jewish traditions arises from the idea that the Jews remained and survived from the Biblical times auspicious of their traditions, for Judaism is based on traditions. Yet, the novel gives theological and mystic clues about Judaism excluding most of the traditions. Smith may be deliberately signifying the dominance of the Western world, marginalizing or excluding the non-Western traditions and forms of cultural life and expression. Nonetheless, when the novel is considered as a whole, the conformity with the English society Li-Jin attempts to form for Alex-Li fails in the end; he keeps with his childhood Jewish friends, but is not truly Jewish although he performs Caddish for Li-Jin in the end. The Epilogue is "Kaddish" where Smith inscribes the full prayer in English with ironic humorous intersections, ending with Alex's doubt:

*May He who makes peace in His High places*
Eleanor Loescher held her small
Belly with both hands.
(And Alex wondered what this meant)
*Make peace upon us and upon all Israel,*
Jonathan Verne yawned shamelessly.
(And Alex wondered what this meant)
*And all say Amen!* (419)

Consequently, Alex performs the Caddish in the end, performing it physically, while wondering about the spiritual meaning. Except his eyes, he is not truly Chinese, either. Alex is partially Jewish (as he manages to become very rich in one act) and definitely Chinese with his eyes and contextually British; belonging and not belonging to any society or culture as a whole. However, the boundaries of identity, oscillating between Jewish, British and Chinese identities should be considered as the route to an elevated sense of self-knowledge and worth in a globalized world. Alex will always have his Chinese eyes but not a Kitty Alexander obsession anymore, and maybe he will continue performing Jewish rituals when it is a must, but not really believing in them. With Smith's humorous conclusion, the text does supply a positive attitude towards the future, whilst not providing a clue for incoming cultural clashes. Hence, Smith may be implying that there is indeed a cultural identity in hyphenated Britishness- and that this type of identity will be forcing England to redefine its own sense of national identity in an increasingly globalized cultural environment.

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## Özet

### Zadie Smith'in *The Autograph Man* adlı romanında Çinli-Yahudi-Britanyalı Kimliği Yeniden Yerleştirmek

Sömürgecilik dönemi sonrası çokkültürlülerin içinde bulunduğu karmaşık ve belirsizlik içeren melez kişilikler sorunsalını ele aldığımızda, Yahudi-Britanyalı ya da Asyalı-Britanyalı olmadığı halde, Zadie Smith'in 2002 yılında yazdığı *The Autograph Man* adlı romanında çok ender rastlanan Çinli-Yahudi-Britanyalı bir karakteri mizahi yollu ele aldığını görüyoruz. Smith'in Çinli-Yahudi-Britanyalı roman kahramanı Alex, kısmen Yahudi'dir, çünkü tek bir hareketle çok para kazanmıştır ve gözlerinin çekikliğinden ötürü kesinlikle Çinli'dir ve mekansal olarak Britanyalı'dır, ancak hiç bir toplum ya da kültüre

bütünüyle ait değildir. Bu makalede, kişiliğin sınırlarının çizilirken Yahudi, Britanyalı ya da Çinli kimlikler arasında gidip gelmenin, kişinin globalleşen dünyada kendini tanımasının ve değerlendirmesinin bir yolu olduğu idda edilmektedir. Alex'in gözleri daima Çinli olacaksa da artık Kitty Alexander saplantısı olmayacak ve belki zorunlu kaldığında İbrani dininin geleneklerini yerine getirse de yeteri kadar inançlı olmayacaktır. Smith'in romanı mizahi bir şekilde bitirmesiyle metin, gelecekteki kültürlerarası çatışmalara ışık tutmasa da, kimlik karmaşasına karşı olumlu bir tavır sergilemektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Zadie Smith, *The Autograph Man*, melezlik, tireli kimlikler, Çinli-Yahudi-İngiliz kimlikler, Afrika kökenli-Amerikalı-Yahudi kimlikler, çokkültürlülük

# *Hamlet:* The Tragedy of A Renaissance Mind

**Himmet Umunç**

**Abstract:** Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has always intrigued critics and scholars by its unfathomable meaning(s) and controversial discourse. Although a great deal of extremely diverse and wholesomely useful interpretations have been made so far of the play, there is still a need to revisit and discuss it. This is especially true as regards the play's Renaissance cultural and intellectual context as well as hermeneutics. Therefore, this article is an attempt to read the play by situating it in the context of Renaissance Neoplatonism and occultism. In fact, by using a wide range of occult effects in the play and associating Hamlet with the university of Wittenberg, Shakespeare creates a situation whereby not only his hero's mind can be probed, but also metaphorically the play becomes a dramatic representation of the learned Renaissance mind fragmented and overcome by enigmas, conflicts, confusions, strong doubts and metaphysical obsessions. In this regard, epistemologically and allegorically *Hamlet* turns into a tragedy of this fragmented Renaissance mind.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare and the occult, *Hamlet* and hermetism, Renaissance occultism, Shakespeare and the Renaissance

Shakespeare was a Renaissance man–learned, but not scholastic, steeped in the classical tradition as well as in the contemporary humanistic pursuits, fundamentally concerned with man's enigmatic subjectivity and unfathomable intellectual capacity, and fully familiar with, and also sensitive to, the culture and socio-political issues of his own time. Clearly, more down to earth than most of his contemporaries, who, somewhat surrealistically, privileged in their works through the benefits of allegory and euphemisms, illusion and idealism rather than subjective reality and the human condition, Shakespeare displayed through his plays, especially through his histories and tragedies, a polysemic representation or, to recall Aristotle, a multilayered *mimesis* of life[1] and man as experienced and observed universally by generations after generations. It is this polysemic representation with its mosaic of intertexts that has been problematized in all exegetical and critical writings about his plays and still continues to challenge any new critical theory and practice. In other words, throughout the centuries down to our own time, from Dryden and Johnson to Hazlitt and Coleridge, from Bradley, Freud, Frye and Jan Kott to postmodernists, Derridians, Foucaultians, New Historicists, and Cultural Materialists, Shakespeare's texts have been the subject of an unimaginable range and variety of exegetical and critical writings, and still they have not been exhausted. For instance, as Jan Kott stated humourously back in the early 1960s, concerning *Hamlet* alone, "the bibliography of dissertations and studies devoted to *Hamlet* is twice the size of Warsaw telephone directory" (47). Moreover, it has been shown statistically that, within the three decades from 1960 to 1990, 1200 books were published (Lee 95). Indeed, the enormous bulk of the secondary material that we have today on Shakespeare is proof of the fact that,

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[1] In the western history of ideas, it was Aristotle in *The Poetics,* who first referred to various forms of art, including literature, as "representations of life" (*mimesis*) (5 [1447a]).

to put it in the words of the eighteenth-century commentator Henry Mackenzie, "no author, perhaps, ever existed of whom opinion has been so various as *Shakespeare*" (in Lee 95).

This has been particularly so with regard to *Hamlet.* Indeed, among Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* has always been academically the most controversial, hermeneutically the most complex, and epistemologically the most challenging. Although attention has been drawn to "its astonishing power to haunt every generation" (Edwards 84), it has been rated on the other hand as "Shakespeare's most problematic play" (Leverenz 132), and critics have always encountered in it what has been termed "problems of interpretation" (Coyle 2); in other words, as Harold Jenkins has also confirmed, "in the interpretation of *Hamlet* criticism has found many problems" (142). However, for Catharine Belsey, since "criticism is always in practice a reading of texts" (1), Shakespeare criticism on *Hamlet* has so far produced "a range of interpretations" (1), which in fact, one may add, not only demonstrate the play's polysemic nature but also bring home in the Derridian manner, the point that the play as a sign gestures forward not to one but many signifieds. In Belsey's words, "in the case of *Hamlet* the 'document', the written text, is not one but several" (1). In theoretical terms, for her, this is because "signifying practice is never static, and meanings are neither single nor fixed. Meaning is perpetually deferred by its existence as difference within a specific discourse" (6).

So, bearing in mind all these various critical and exegetical readings and re-readings, I shall attempt in this article to present another re-reading of *Hamlet*, which is somewhat intertextual, as the tragedy of an inquiring, sceptical, and epistemologically confused Renaissance mind. Thus, I shall argue that, as a Renaissance man, Shakespeare depicted in *Hamlet* the complexities, doubts, questions, obsessions and preoccupations that clouded the Renaissance man's mind and subverted its dialectic capacity. Rossiter has remarked that *Hamlet* depicts "the mind's experiences of itself as a mind" (172), and has further pointed out that

> [i]n Hamlet, Shakespeare presents a keen and philosophic mind innately inclined to believe in unchanging standards of good and evil, but placed in circumstances which result in his behaving as if nothing was absolute, everything relative, conditioned, and accidental. (179)

Indeed, one may add that the mind depicted as such is actually the Renaissance man's mind. Hamlet's intellectual posture is not unusual, since, as a young university student, his mind has been shaped and informed at the university of Wittenberg in Germany (*Hamlet,* I.i.113 and 119),[2] where also his friend and confidant Horatio is a student (*Hamlet*, I.ii.168). Interestingly, this is the same university, referred to by Marlowe as "Wertenberg" (*Dr. Faustus* 120),[3] where his protagonist Dr Faustus has studied divinity (*Dr. Faustus* 120-1) and, after being "grac'd with doctor's name" (120), become a professor, blasphemously involved in "cursed necromancy" (121). Historically, the University of Wittenberg, founded in 1502, soon became a major centre of humanistic, theological, philosophical and moral studies; it was here that the great humanist scholars and theologians of the time, such as Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon, taught and started the Reformation. Consequently, the University of Wittenberg emerged as the main centre of the Protestant movement and doctrine (Pfeiffer 90-4, and Atkinson 61-2, 67-8, 147-56 and 218-26). Moreover, especially

[2] The edition of *Hamlet,* used for quotation and textual reference, is that of the Arden Shakespeare.
[3] Hereafter, this edition is used for quotation and textual reference.

in the second half of the sixteenth century, it also became a popular venue for the study and practice of hermeticism and occultism, including alchemical activities. The Elizabethan mystic, mathematician, magician and alchemist Dr John Dee, who was closely associated with Queen Elizabeth and taught Sir Philip Sidney, played an influential role in the spread in Germany of hermeticism and occultism when in 1589 he travelled through Germany on his way back from an official visit to Bohemia (Yates 1975, 22-3, 65-70 *et passim*). Also Giordano Bruno, who taught for two years (1586-1588) at Wittenberg what is termed "his philosophical religion" and "his religious philosophy" (Yates 1969, 281), contributed greatly to the spread of occultism and hermeticism in Germany (Yates 1971, 306-13). In fact, the prevailing popularity of hermeticism and occult studies, further promoted as such by Bruno at Wittenberg, and also carried out at Germany's other universities such as Tübingen and Heidelberg, led in the early seventeenth century to a major occult and mystical movement, called "the Rosicrucian enlightenment" or "the Rosicrucian movement".[4] The followers of the movement were called the Rosicrucians. As a kind of secret brotherhood, they essentially aimed at a mystical reconciliation of Lutheranism, Renaissance hermeticism, Egyptian mythology, Cabalistic teachings, magic, and alchemy (Yates 1971, especially 407-12, and 1975, especially 264-78). Hence, they used a highly mythological and figurative discourse and carried out their activities under a veil of mysticism.

Hence, it is with this culturally, epistemologically and humanistically vibrant intellectual setting of Wittenberg that both Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Shakespeare's Hamlet are connected. While in his portrayal of Dr Faustus as a fully accomplished Renaissance magus, practising black magic, Marlowe explicitly privileges Wittenberg's occult and hermetic significance, Shakespeare seems to do it graphically through his use of occult effects in the play, such as the ghost, darkness, the foreboding cold night, the scared sentinels in the castle's battlements, the ominous atmosphere of Elsinore, murders, funerals, graveyards, and, among others, symbolicly Hamlet's black outfit. However, it is through the enigmas, conflicts, confusions, strong doubts and metaphysical obsessions of Hamlet's mind that the occultism of the play is implicitly but more effectively revealed. Contrary to Laertes, who studies at the university of Paris and acts far more realistically and determinedly to fulfil his aims (*Hamlet,* IV.vii.53-147), Hamlet's mind is fragmented, indetermined, and torn apart because of the many philosophical, moral, and metaphysical questions to which he futilely seeks plausible answers. Therefore, his tragedy is fundamentally the tragedy of a typical Renaissance mind, imbued, like Dr Faustus's mind, with a wide range of learning and, therefore, grown sceptical and indeterminate.

Perhaps the most fundamental philosophical question Hamlet is seriously concerned with in the play is the dichotomy between man's unexplored interior and apparent exterior; in other words, like any humanist of the Renaissance, he was intrigued by the mystery of man. Puzzled by what he considers to be the spiritual and physical duality of man as a subject or individual, he sees an unbridgeable gap between man's interiority and exteriority, and this leads him into what Katharine Maus has aptly called "epistemological anxieties" (2):

> What piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in

[4] For a historical and in-depth study of this movement, see Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment,* especially 58-196 and 264-78. Also see her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition,* 407-14.

> apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? (*Hamlet,* II.ii.303-308)

Hamlet's epistemological anxiety as such about the human nature is further re-emphasized when he deplores his lack of will to take action against Claudius (*Hamlet,* IV.iv.32-66), after observing, "to [his] shame" (*Hamlet,* IV.iv.59), how the "delicate and tender prince" of Norway, who is Fortinbras (*Hamlet,* IV.iv.48), is resolved and committed with his "twenty thousand men" (*Hamlet,* IV.iv.60) to fight a war against Poland for "a patch of ground/ That hath in it no profit but the name" (*Hamlet,* IV.iv.18-19) because it is a matter of honour rather than a territorial gain; for Hamlet, man's rational capacity is what makes him distinguished from other beings:

> What is a man
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
> Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unus'd. (*Hamlet,* IV.iv.33-39)

In fact, in problematizing man as such in the person of Hamlet, Shakespeare problematizes the Renaissance man whose mind, due to what Hamlet calls "some craven scruple/Of thinking too precisely" (*Hamlet,* IV.iv.40-41), is laden with doubts, paradoxes, metaphysical obsessions, moral complexities and confused perceptions, and has therefore lost its ability to take action resolutely. Of course, Shakespeare was not the first and only writer to focus on the problem of man. During the Renaissance, one of the recurrent topics under discussion in humanistic writings had been man as a godlike being because of his rationality and also at the same time an earthly being characterized by his carnality and bestiality. Among the humanistic writings the most memorable and influential one was Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man,* written about 1486 (Kristeller 216-22). For Pico, man is "a creature of indeterminate nature" (224), who, by the exercise of his free will, can fashion himself "in whatever shape" he chooses (225). As Pico further elaborates,

> Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear in him their own fruit. If they be vegetative, he will be like a plant. If sensitive, he will become brutish. If rational, he will grow into a havenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God.
> […] Who would not admire this our chameleon? (225).

Similar views were also expressed by Pico's close friend and colleague Marsilio Ficino, who was the founder of the Neoplatonic Academy in 1462 in Florence, and whose translation, with extensive and impeccably learned commentaries added, of Plato's dialogues into Latin initiated the Renaissance revival of Neoplatonism (Burroughs, especially 185-88; Kristeller 215-16, and also Wind 39 *et passim*). For instance, in a letter he wrote to his friend Francesco Tedaldi, he referred to the dichotomic nature of man by pointing out that

> [The soul] often resists the inclination of the body, and is not at rest there. Moreover, the more it draws itself from the body, the more effectively it

> understands and the better and happier it is. The soul, therefore, is an incorporeal rational substance, fitted to direct the body (149 [Letter 96]).

Obviously, it is this dichotomy of the body and the soul that brings about what Ficino elsewhere calls "uncertainty of intellect and unsteadiness of will" (173 [Letter 115]. As he further maintains,

> it is the nature of our intellect to look for the cause of things, and then the cause beyond this cause. For this reason, the search of the intellect never ceases, except it discovers the cause behind which there is no cause, but is itself the cause of causes, and that is God alone (173 [Letter 115]).

Although Ficino links up the intellect's search for the cause of things with the idea of God, which clearly indicates his effort to reconcile the Christian and Platonic metaphysics, he in fact implies that an ultimate knowledge of things is never attainable and that our mind is always puzzled by our paradoxical, metaphysical or confused perception of things.

Now when we revisit Shakespeare's representation of Hamlet in the context of these humanistic arguments and commentaries, it becomes clear that Hamlet's procrastination is fundamentally related to his epistemological uncertainty and metaphysical obsessions. As a typical Renaissance mind, he probes things, but his attempt, like that of Dr Faustus', to understand the mysteries of being and, thus, go beyond the limits of human capacity is subverted by his fear and intellectual uncertainty. This is most explicitly indicated when his mind wavers on the questions of life and death:

> To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or take arms against a sea of troubles
> And by opposing end them. To die — to sleep,
> No more; and by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
> To sleep, perchance to dream — ay, there is the rub:
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause — there's the respect
> That makes calamity of so long life.
> For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
> Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
> When he himself might his quietus make
> With a bare bodkin? Who would fadels bear,
> To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
> But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of?

> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied ov'r with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pitch and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry
> And lose the name of action. (*Hamlet,* III. i. 56-88)

Through this long soliloquy, Hamlet fully reveals the uncertainty of the Renaissance man's intellect and the unsteadiness of his will. Things in life are so variable and unpredictable that nothing is absolute or certain. It is this paralysing sense of uncertainty and unpredictability that, throughtout the play, shapes and controls not only Hamlet's conduct, but also his relations with the other characters. He becomes a cynic as well as a sceptic. So, to camouflage his probing mind, already immersed in metaphysics, and also to survive in a dangerous environment that is under a constant surveillance of Claudius's henchmen Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he puts on what he calls "an antic disposition" (*Hamlet,* I.v.180), which he acts out as madness. In other words, he decides to display, if we may borrow Maus's phrase, "a theatricalized exterior" (2), which veils his true self. Consequently, except Horatio and the sentinels, all the other characters, from Claudius and Gertrude to Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, fail to read Hamlet's mind and, instead, judge him only through the veneer of his madness. Indeed, Hamlet emphasizes the deceptiveness of a theatricalized exterior and the inaccessibility of an unrevealed interior, when he rejects his mother's advice to give up his mourning and be good:

> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> *But I have that within which passes show,*
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (*Hamlet,* I. ii.77-86) (emphasis mine)

So, nothing of Hamlet's interiority is perceptible for the other characters, and this creates a tragic hiatus between him and the others, especially between him and Ophelia. Interpreted in Neoplatonic terms, Hamlet lives by his mind, but the others by their bodies, and it is this unbridgeable gap that gives the play its tragic momentum.

To conclude, in his extraordinary rationality and inquiring intellect, Hamlet becomes an emblematic representation of the Renaissance mind and gestures forward to the making of the modern man. He may be regarded as the prototype of the Cartesian man who considers the inquiring intellect to be the essence of true being and declares "that within" when he says "*cogito ergo sum*".

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## Özet

### *Hamlet:* Rönesans Aklının Trajedisi

Shakespeare'in *Hamlet* adlı oyunu, çözümlemesi zor anlam(lar)ı ve tartışmalı söylemi nedeniyle eleştirmenlerin ve alimlerin her zaman ilgisini çekmiştir. Oyunla ilgili şimdiye dek oldukça çeşitli ve faydalı yorumlar yapılmış olsa da, oyunun tekrar ele alınıp tartılmasına hâlâ ihtiyaç vardır, özellikle de oyunun Rönesans dönemine ait kültürel ve

entelektüel bağlamı ve hermenötik açısından. Bu nedenle, bu makalenin amacı, oyunu Rönesans Neoplatonizmi ve okültizm bağlamına oturtarak okumaktır. Aslına bakılırsa, Shakespeare, oyunda pek çok okült öğe kullanarak ve Hamlet'i Wittenberg Üniversitesi ile ilişkilendirerek, hem karakterin aklını irdelememize olanak sağlar, hem de böylece oyun, mecazi olarak, muammalar, çelişkiler, karmaşalar, güçlü şüpheler ve metafizik saplantılar tarafından parçalanan ve mağlup edilen Rönesans aklının dramatik bir temsili haline gelir. Bu bağlamda, *Hamlet*, epistemolojik ve alegorik olarak, parçalanmış Rönesans aklının trajedisine dönüşür.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare ve okült, *Hamlet* ve hermetizm, Rönesans okültizmi, Shakespeare ve Rönesans

**Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Geetha Ganapathy-Doré. Eds. *Projections of Paradise Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature.* Cross Cultures 132. Amsterdam-New York, NY: Rodopi, 2011. 277 pp. ISBN: 978-90-420-3333-7**

**Şebnem Toplu**

The postcolonial and migrant studies have been going on for a long time and there have been numerous debates and publications on the topic and will still be, yet the book Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Geetha Ganapathy-Doré have both edited and contributed covers a very striking concept within the context of postcolonialism: "projections of paradise". The editors maintain in the introduction that "even if it is true that the greatest lure of paradise resides in its proverbial evasiveness" (1) the articles in their book have been inspired by the "intriguing ambiguity of the concept", in the sense that paradise "implies inclusion and exclusion, bliss and discontent, innocence and guilt, ignorance and knowledge, harmony and conflict, life and death, transience and permanence, materiality and transcendence, beginning and end" (1-2), since its polarities invite mobility. Hence, this ample conception is projected in the book by thirteen articles that analyze a substantial amount of literary works.

*Projections of Paradise*'s introduction also provides a detailed and significant historical analysis of the shifting conception of P/paradise starting in Old Persian in the first millennium BC. Ramsey-Kurz and Ganapathy-Doré conclude that postcolonial writing enables the question of paradise "being asked" (xviii), because the postcolonial writing has made extensive use of the ancient paradise myth in the sense that paradise "now stands for visions of ultimate fulfillment and happiness, not necessarily of Judeo-Christian origin" (xviii). It has become "a hybrid concept, a dream shared across cultural, political, and religious barriers" (xviii). Not relying solely on Judeo-Christian conception though, quoting Homi Bhabha's "the realm of the *beyond*" Ramsey-Kurz and Ganapathy-Doré also state that the Islamic notion of Jannah and the Hindu notion of Goloka likewise fulfill similar functions to that of the Garden of Eden (*The Location of Culture* 1) (emphasis original).

Paradise is projected from thirteen different lenses covering many writers; thereby, it creates a powerful kaleidoscopic image of individual paradises. Vera Alexander, for instance, analyses portrayals of "Paradise" in Penelope Lively's childhood stories and concludes that human beings displaced Paradise from its position as a spatial ideal, but it can also mean a return to an open state of mind free of limiting preconceptions. Ganapathy-Doré, compares Agha Shahid Ali's poetry with Salman Rushdie's prose in the sense that although disparate in genre and style, both writers conceptualize representations of Kashmir as paradise on earth. Yet, she concludes, in writing, they realize that it is unrealistic to expect that earthly paradises will remain stable in the postmodern era, so the images of paradise is the only way left to envision a new and better future. Gerd Bayer investigates a number of postcolonial texts focusing on Sri Lanka and questioning the role of Western ideas of paradisiacal spaces, claims that for these writers, the search for paradise begun by the Europeans, has continued as a process which turns its success into catastrophes because it is based on flawed assumptions. Evelyne Hanquart-Turner discusses Amitav Gosh's fiction complementing Bayer's discussion, yet Suzanne Pichler's analysis of Gunesekera reveals that we carry paradise "within ourselves-if we were only more often aware of this" (102) which is also revealed by Sofía Muñoz Valdivieso's contention of Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*. Petra Tournay-Theodotou, on the other hand, discussing Bernardine

Evaristo's *Soul Tourists*, a novel I should say had the least critical analysis among Evaristo's other novels, concludes that the male protagonist Stanley's search for home, "unlike the mythic, idealized place of no-return […] is nevertheless a place that remains forever out of reach, deferred-an unattainable paradise" (120). Contributing the discussion with the intriguing topic "harem", Marta Mamet-Michalkiewicz reveals that in Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, the harem has been misread and misrepresented as a paradise for men, since the women reclaim the harem they inhabit as their very own dreamland. Ulla Ratheiser explores Michael Ondaatje's poem "The Cinnamon Peeler" basing her main contention on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's statement that "Smell is the sense of memory or desire". Ratheiser claims that our own projection of paradise relies on a multiplicity of cultural, religious and personal encounters. Ursula Kluwick, also analyzing Ondaatje, suggests that in *The English Patient*, the message of the writer resides in the notion that though paradise is utopia, redemption might be achieved. Derek Coyle believes Derek Walcott's poem "The Schooner *Flight*" is a prophetic call to recognize the ability of humans to live together, while considering Canadian novelist Rudy Wiebe's Mennonite novels, Janne Korkka's essay focuses on the idea that in the author's view, the mandate of an eternally nomadic existence has not always brought individual Mennonites closer to paradise but, on the opposite have prevented them from realizing their own personal notions of happiness.

The book concludes with Ramsey-Kurz's essay "Glimpses of Paradise" which includes short stories of migration by M.G. Vassanji, Cyril Dabydeen and Janette Turner Hospital, concludes the book with the contention: "each of the characters is at home not only in a different place but also in a different world. Each of their worlds is smaller than the 'actual' world, but it is *their world*- inalienably and uniquely so because, while containing the individual migrant bodies, this world is itself contained in their minds and, therefore, capable of being paradise and home in one" (256).

Therefore, based on these projections, the postcolonial and migrant writing covered for this aim, reveal that among fluid notions of paradise, there is also an expression of human desire for home and that, paradise is unique for individual minds. As the concept is intriguing in itself, and the book constitutes very powerful academic articles, it is a highly significant resource for all scholars interested in the notions of paradise and postcolonial/migrant or multicultural writing.

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