

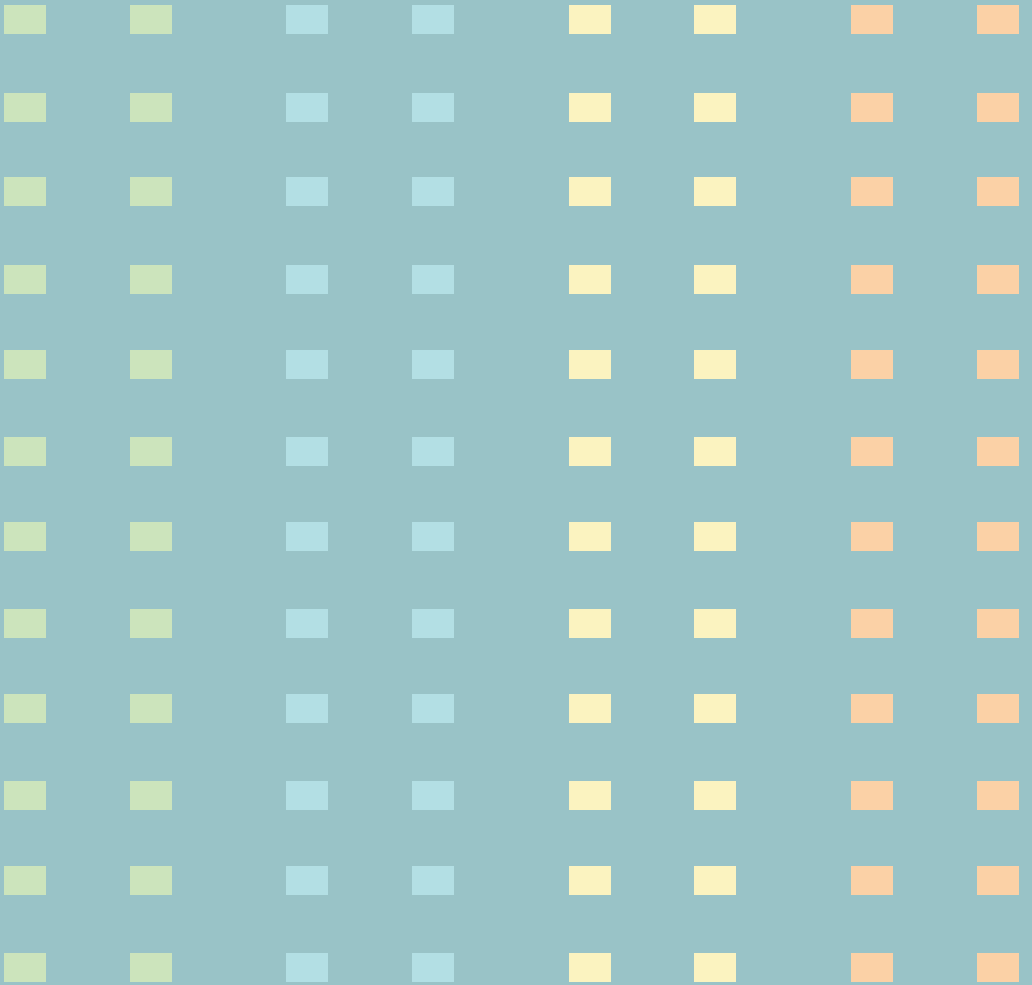


ISSN 1300-574-X

VOLUME 23.1-2

SPRING-FALL 2014

# INTERACTIONS



EGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları

Ege İngiliz ve Amerikan İncelemeleri Dergisi  
Ege Journal of British and American Studies

# INTERACTIONS

Spring/Fall

**Volume/*Cilt*: 23.1-2**

**Year/*Yıl*: 2014**

EGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Bornova-İZMİR  
2014

**Publisher** **Yayın Sahibi**  
On behalf of Ege University, Ege Üniversitesi adına,  
Dean of the Faculty of Letters, Ersin Doğer Edebiyat Fakültesi Dekanı, Ersin Doğer

**Managing Editor** **Sorumlu Yazı İşleri Müdürü**  
Dilek Direnç Dilek Direnç

**INTERACTIONS address** **Yayın İdare Adresi**  
Ege University, Faculty of Letters, Ege Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi,  
Departments of English Language & Literature İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı ile  
and American Culture & Literature, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Bölümleri,  
Bornova 35100 Izmir, TURKEY Bornova 35100 İzmir, TÜRKİYE

**Printed by** **Basıldığı Yer ve Matbaa**  
Ege University Press Ege Üniversitesi Basımevi

**Copies and Date** **Baskı Adeti ve Basım Tarihi**  
100 copies, 06 March 2014 100 adet, 06 Mart 2014

**T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı**  
**Sertifika No: 18679**

*Interactions* is published annually.  
Contents indexed in *MLA International Bibliography*  
and *GALE CENGAGE Learning* database Academic OneFile  
© 2014 Ege University, Faculty of Letters

ISSN 1300-574-X

### **Editors**

Şebnem Toplu  
Atilla Silkü

### **Assistant Editor**

Gülden Hatipoğlu

### **Advisory Board**

Silvia Albertazzi, University of Bologna  
Aylin Atilla, Ege University  
Işıl Baş, Boğaziçi University  
Mackie Blanton, Southeastern Louisiana University  
Deniz Bozer, Hacettepe University  
Giovanna Buonanno, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia  
Gülşen Canlı, Atılım University  
Anita P. Chirco, Keuka College  
Jan Chovanec, Masaryk University  
Anna Izabella Cichon, University of Wrocław  
Carla Comellini, University of Bologna  
Catherine Coussens, Çankaya University  
Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş, Hacettepe University  
Dilek Direnç, Ege University  
Dilek Doltaş, Doğuş University  
Nilsen Gökçen, Dokuz Eylül University  
Trevor Hope, Yaşar University  
Klára Kolinská, Prague Metropolitan University  
Nevin Koyuncu, Ege University  
Ivar Kvistad, Deakin University  
Ewa Kębłowska-Lawniczak, University of Wrocław  
Teresa Gibert Maceda, Madrid UNED  
Gordon Marshall, Istanbul Aydın University  
Kevin McNamara, University of Houston-Clear Lake  
Lütfiye Oktar, Izmir University of Economics  
Andrew Radford, University of Glasgow  
Laurence Raw, Başkent University  
Aribert Schroeder, University of Duesseldorf  
Atilla Silkü, Ege University  
Rezzan Kocaöner Silkü, Ege University  
Christiane Schlote, University of Zurich  
Silvia Schultermandl, University of Graz  
Miriam Shivan, University of Haifa  
Günseli Sönmez İşçi, Yeni Yüzyıl University  
Meldan Tanrısal, Hacettepe University  
Himmat Umunç, Başkent University  
Semiramis Yağcıoğlu, Dokuz Eylül University  
Neslihan Kansu Yetkiner, Izmir University of Economics  
Ayşegül Yüksel, Ankara University  
Hubert Zapf, University of Augsburg

### **Editorial Assistant**

Begüm Tuğlu

## **Note for Contributors**

Annual submission deadline is October 15.

Articles (between 4,000 and 8,000 words) and reviews (between 1,000 and 2,000 words) on any aspect of British and American literature and culture are accepted for publication provided that they are approved by referees. Manuscripts should be in accordance with the parenthetical format in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (5<sup>th</sup> Edition).

*Interactions, Ege Journal of British and American Studies* is a peer-reviewed, refereed journal. Strict anonymity is accorded to both authors and referees.

The views expressed in the journal are those of the authors, and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Editors or the Advisory Board.

Articles and reviews accepted become the copyright of the journal unless otherwise specifically agreed.

Manuscripts should be sent as word file attachments to the editor:  
Prof. Dr. Şebnem Toplu: [sebnemtoplu@hotmail.com](mailto:sebnemtoplu@hotmail.com)

## CONTENTS

### ARTICLES

- |                                     |     |   |
|-------------------------------------|-----|---|
| Ingy Aboelazm                       | 1   | A Poised Crown: Rival Monarchs in <i>Richard II</i>   |
| Gillian Alban                       | 13  | The Irrepressible Lilith in Angela Carter and Toni Morrison   |
| Mohamad Almostafa & Ahmad Abu Baker | 29  | Towards An Anodynic Concept of Death: A Comparative Study of a Selection of English & Arabic Poetry                     |
| Sihem Arfaoui Abidi                 | 45  | Private Knowledge in Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman" Situated Between Coercion and (Trans)formation              |
| Charles Campbell                    | 53  | Margins, Mirrors and Breasts: Pearl's Place in <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>  |
| Carla Commellini                    | 69  | The Influence of Dante, Italy and the Mediterranean Myth in Malcolm Lowry's Fiction                                     |
| Francisco Costa                     | 77  | "There was something different about the boy": Queer Subversion in Tennessee Williams's <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> |
| Wojciech Drag                       | 87  | Modernism—An Abandoned Legacy?: Gabriel Josipovici's Critique of the Contemporary British Novel                         |
| Nina Ravnholdt Enemark              | 95  | Poetry as Preservation Ritual: Jane Harrison, Antiquarianism and Hope Mirrlees's <i>Paris</i>                           |
| Fulya İçöz                          | 113 | Regaining the Power to Say "No": Imprisonment, Resistance and Freedom in <i>Avatar the Last Airbender</i>               |
| Dilek Kantar                        | 123 | Virgins, Wives and Whores in the Eighteenth Century Ironic Myths  |
| Ewa Kęłłowska-Lawniczak             | 133 | Forms of Togetherness in Contemporary Urban Drama and a Return of Direct Address  |
| Matthew Koch                        | 145 | Wealth and Women: The Expatriate Performance of Affluence   |

Klara Kolinska	161	“Borders to Freedom”: Sitting Bull’s Precarious Canadian Refuge in Sharon Pollock’s Play <i>Walsh</i>
Ferma Lekesizalın	169	Manipulation and Venturing Spirit in Edith Wharton’s <i>The House of Mirth</i>
Anja Mrak	179	The Intersections of Magical Realism and Transnational Feminism in Cristina García’s <i>Dreaming in Cuban</i>
Adamu Pangmeshi	191	Postcolonialism, Female Portrayal and Self Understanding in Selected Novels of Doris Lessing and Bessie Head
Regina Rosenthal	207	Performing Identity: Intersectionality in Three Autobiographical Texts by Women
Gamze Sabancı	219	From Sissy to Man: Performance as a Process of Becoming in <i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>
Silvia Schultermandl	231	Aestheticizing Absence: Representations of the Twin Towers’ Shadow in 9/11 Literature and Film
Libby Bagno Simon	243	A Home on the Threshold: Family, Community and Identity in the Liminal Landscape of Toni Morrison’s <i>A Mercy</i>
Klara Szmanko	251	White Devils and Demons in Maxine Hong Kingston’s <i>China Men</i>
Petra Tournay-Theodotou	263	Racial and Gender-Cross-Dressing in Caryl Phillips’s <i>Dancing in the Dark</i>
Violetta Trofimova	273	Aphra Behn in the Novels of Our Time: Adventuress, She-Spy, Detective
Zümre Gizem Yılmaz	281	Epic Theatre on British Stage: The Alienation Strategies in Caryl Churchill’s <i>Lives of Great Poisoners</i>
<b>REVIEWS</b>		
Hivren Demir-Atay	291	Kevin Ohi <i>Henry James and the Queerness of Style</i>
Laurence Raw	293	Terry Eagleton <i>The Event of Literature</i>

Laurence Raw	295	Helen Fielding <i>Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy</i>
Antonio Sanna	297	Conflictual Familial Relationship and Fear of Death in <i>Wrath of the Titans</i>
Nevena Stojanovic	303	Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes <i>Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy</i>
Şebnem Toplu	307	Berkem Güreñci Sağlam <i>Representations of London in Peter Ackroyd's Fiction</i>
Şebnem Toplu	309	Zeynep Zeren Atayurt <i>Excess and Embodiment in Contemporary Women's Writing</i>
	313	<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>





## **A Poised Crown: Rival Monarchs in *Richard II***

**Ingy Aboelazm**

**Abstract:** *Richard II* portrays the dethronement of an unsuitable anointed monarch by an illegitimate but more able one. The central paradox at the heart of the play is that, of the two claimants to the throne, one possesses legitimacy yet shows himself to be unfit to rule, while the other, lacking legitimacy, demonstrates the political skills, self-control and kingly qualities that his opponent lacks. The play presents the abuse of the freedom of the crown at the hands of an unjust but lawful heir. The concepts of law and divine order that define king and body politic in *Richard II* are the same standards that many of Shakespeare's contemporaries applied to assess their own monarch. Hence, he employs King Richard II as the accepted pattern of a deposed king to set forth the political ethics of the Tudors regarding the rights and duties of a king.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, kingship, divine order, legitimacy, hereditary right, deposition

*Richard II* marks an exciting advance in the development of Shakespeare's artistry. Its unusual formality of structure, tone and the impressive eloquence of its style express the mystique of kingship more emphatically than any of the earlier histories. The play portrays the dethronement of an unsuitable anointed monarch by an illegitimate but more able one (Forker 2002, 1). As the first play in a tetralogy, the play is central to the "Tudor myth of sacramental kingship and divinely ordained order in the state and the universe" (Chernaik 91).

In his plays on the Wars of the Roses Shakespeare has already shown the chaotic horrors of civil war and the displacement of weak kings by stronger ones. What is unique and fresh about *Richard II* is the stress on the divinity that was thought to hedge kings, the abandonment of historical diffuseness and the probing not merely of divine right as a concept but of the unstable personality of a king who puts his whole trust in its theoretical protections (Forker 2002, 1).

Henry Bolingbroke is a complete contrast to Richard II. He possesses the kingly qualities that Richard lacks whereas Richard possesses those that lead to certain failure. While Richard has been described as imaginative and theatrical with a poetic sensitivity to language, Bolingbroke has been seen as ambitious, calculative and brave. He is a good politician and diplomat; a king by nature. Where Bolingbroke is adequately competent and strong, Richard is appallingly incompetent; "where Bolingbroke earns our rational admiration and at times our moral approval, Richard commands our deepest emotions" (Rabkin 1967, 90). Shakespeare displays Richard's weakness and unfitness for the throne by indicating his preference for words over action. Whilst Richard employs speech to relieve his feelings and pours all his thoughts in poetic language, Bolingbroke either avoids speech altogether or uses it to conceal his emotions.

Bolingbroke's political wisdom and practical common sense are contrasted with Richard's folly and recklessness. He is a politician who subordinates everything to his ambition. He possesses none of Richard's sentimentalism for he is cool, calculative and wise. This contrast between the two characters is maintained throughout the play. *Richard*

*II* provides many illustrations of Bolingbroke's discretion, foresight and political diplomacy. First, he shakes Richard's position by putting himself forward as the avenger of Gloucester. In his accusation of Mowbray as the play begins, Bolingbroke is covertly attacking the government of Richard since he knows that Richard is as responsible for the murder of Gloucester as Mowbray and "all his passionate speeches are merely the rhetoric of a politician assuming a pose" (Newlin 97). Moreover, Bolingbroke "enlists the good will of the common people upon his side" (Ribner 180). Richard describes his behaviour towards the common people as he seems, "to dive into their hearts", wooing their favour "with the craft of smiles":

With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends',  
As were our England in reversion his,  
And he our subjects' next degree in hope. (*Richard II* 41)

Bolingbroke turns his banishment to account in winning the hearts of the people since before leaving England; he obtains the good graces of the common people as well as the sympathy of most of the nobles. Richard on the other hand, lives a life of pleasure and self-indulgence. He is surrounded by flatterers who misguide him. The question that *Richard II* poses is what to do about a king whose continuance on the throne is essential to the continued order of a state of government by hereditary monarchy, but who is obviously unfit personally for what is required of him as a king. Richard shows disrespect to his royal blood. He is indifferent and callous to the dying John of Gaunt. Followed by the disgraceful dishonouring of the dead Gaunt, whose whole concern was the preservation of England, Richard's behaviour at the beginning of the play confirms our sense of his unfitness for his kingly office as well as his misgovernment of the kingdom. Richard's shortcomings make him unpopular amongst his own people and leads to his downfall. He is involved in Gloucester's murder; takes a wrong decision when he banishes Bolingbroke without a fair trial; and confiscates Bolingbroke's inheritance, denying him his hereditary right. Hence Bolingbroke does not return from his banishment as a traitor but as a man who suffers from the king's injustice. York tries to warn Richard of the consequences of his chaotic rupture of divine and human laws:

Take Herford's rights away, and take from time  
His charters and his customary rights.  
Let not tomorrow then ensue today.  
Be not thyself. For how art thou a king  
But by fair sequence and succession? (*Richard II* 57)

In this fashion, York warns the king that failing to heed the laws of inheritance is similar to undermining the very laws upon which his right to the throne depends. Through this reminder that the law is what makes Richard king, York emphasizes that royal disregard for the law also gives license for subjects to disobey the law. Richard H. Jones comments:

How could the king [...] insist on the untouchable sanctity of his own inherent rights and not, at the same time, adhere to the obligation to respect, indeed to defend, the unquestioned inherent rights of others? How could the fountainhead of justice itself frequently violate the most cherished and widely recognized principles of justice without undermining the very foundation upon which it presumed to stand? (7)

Richard does not realize that his injustice has served to mobilize various strata of the commonwealth against him. He demands recognition of his right to rule while denying his subjects their rights; he wants to be recognized as king despite his unkingly conduct. Bolingbroke contrary to Richard finds overwhelming support from the nobility, whereas on his return from Ireland Richard finds that all his forces have deserted him. Therefore, there was no battle, no bloodshed and Bolingbroke did not have to seize the crown by force (Knowles 64).

On the other hand, the play is full of allusions to sacred kingship, “the sanctity of monarchy and the enormity of rebellion” (Chernaik 91). Nevertheless, by disregarding the law, Richard destroys his own authority as Donna Hamilton puts it; “a king who ruled by divine right was also, in theory and in practice, subject to the law; he was to rule according to the law, and his power derived from the law” (6). Nonetheless, John of Gaunt is not the only advocate of order and tradition who stresses the sacred position of the king and that any attempt to rebel against God’s deputy on earth is a sin:

God’s is the quarrel, for God’s substitute,  
His deputy anointed in His sight,  
Hath caused his death, the which if wrongfully  
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift  
An angry arm against His minister. (*Richard II* 21)

The Bishop of Carlisle also supports the ideology of Divine right and the sanctity of tradition is prominent in his reaction to Bolingbroke’s decision to “ascend the regal throne”:

What subject can give sentence on his king,  
And who sits here that is not Richard’s subject?  
[...]  
And shall the figure of God’s majesty,  
His captain, steward, deputy, elect,  
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,  
Be judged by subject and inferior breath [...] (133)

Not only does the Bishop of Carlisle condemn Bolingbroke’s action, but he also predicts the sequence of events that would advance the Wars of the Roses that are the result of Bolingbroke’s deposition of Richard:

The blood of English shall manure the ground  
And future ages groan for this foul act.  
Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,  
And, in this seat of peace tumultuous wars  
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound.  
Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny  
Shall here inhabit, and this land be called  
The field of Golgotha and dead men’s skulls. (135)

Richard is deposed for abuse of office. In the eyes of his enemies, he has demonstrated his unfitness for the title of king. Nevertheless, Richard resists the idea that a distinction can be drawn between the office of king and the man who holds it. As far as he is concerned, kingship has the merit of Divine Right, which means that Richard conceives

of himself not as the right king, but the king. For him the name “Richard” and the title “king” are one entity since the king is the “deputy elected by the Lord” and “God’s substitute”. Hence, at issue is whether King and Richard are one word and whether the metaphors so royally taken for granted are true (Calderwood 127). Shakespeare charts Richard’s dramatic experience by the coordinates of name and person, thrusting him from a belief in the monistic divinity of name:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
 Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.  
 The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
 The deputy elected by the Lord.  
 For every man that Bolingbroke hath pressed  
 To lift shrewd steel against our garden crown  
 God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay  
 A glorious angel. Then if angels fight  
 Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right. (*Richard II* 93)

– to a recognition of dualistic separability–:

What must the king do now? Must he submit?  
 The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?  
 The king shall be contented. Must he lose  
 The name of king? A God’s name let it go. (111)

– to an ultimate loss of name and a consequent dissolution of personal identity and meaning:

I have no name, no title,  
 No, not that name was given me at the font,  
 But ‘tis usurped. Alack the heavy day  
 That I have worn so many winters out  
 And know not now what name to call myself. (141)

Richard lives only so long as his royal name is honoured; once he loses that, he becomes according to his own words “nothing”, even before his actual death. That is to say, Richard’s hereditary title as a king defines who he is. As long as he keeps his name associated with and inseparable from the title “king”, his identity rests firmly. The moment he realizes he has lost his title, this consequently leads to a loss of name and eventually to a loss of identity. In Pomfret Castle, however, he realizes that “the name of king is merely arbitrary”, that he has an identity apart from the name. Yet, this realization is more likely to destroy than sustain him (Calderwood 128). The tragedy of Richard’s reduction to nothing becomes associated with the loss of title for “Richard assumes that his title is indistinguishable from his identity” (Forker 2001, 205).

Moreover, Shakespeare’s Richard reviles himself, not for betraying the people’s trust while king, but for betraying his own majesty in surrendering the crown:

Mine eyes are full of tears; I cannot see.  
 And yet salt water blinds them not so much  
 But they can see a sort of traitors here.  
 Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,

I find myself a traitor with the rest,  
 For I have given here my soul's consent  
 T'undeck the pompous body of a king,  
 Made glory base, and sovereignty a slave,  
 Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant. (*Richard II* 141)

A king who abdicates, who draws a distinction between his person and the office of his kingship and between his weakness and its duties thus compromises the sanctity of kingship. Richard discovers that "his kingship is but a word and he simultaneously becomes a king of words, voluble in his distress". His laments confess the change in his fortunes; they constitute the domain to which he withdraws and from which he is no longer willing to try reversing the course of events, for the sanctity of the crown no longer saves him (Philips 170-1).

On the other hand, Bolingbroke who has no hereditary right to the throne wants to paint himself to the crowd as a man of virtue, coming in submission to kingly authority, merely to plead a just cause. Bolingbroke's dilemma is that he must be seen not as a usurper but as responding to the consensus of the body politic (Knowles 65).

Henry Bolingbroke  
 On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand  
 And sends allegiance and true faith of heart  
 To his most royal person; hither come  
 Even at his feet to lay my arms and power.  
 Provided that my banishment repeal'd  
 And lands restored again be freely granted. (*Richard II* 105)

Unlike Richard, Bolingbroke regards words as mere vocal conveniences whose substance lies not in themselves but in what they designate. Thus, he "employs words as promissory notes in gathering followers in his venture of kingship, and reinforces the few words he utters in material force". At Flint Castle, where Richard descends to the base court with many words and few soldiers, Bolingbroke listens politely and says little: his twenty thousand soldiers are all the eloquence he requires. Hence, if Richard is a regal name that is gradually divested of its meaning, Bolingbroke is a kind of material force in search of the name that will give him public expression (Calderwood 130). Consequently, the Richard who has played at being king suddenly finds himself stripped of his royal robes. Prior to his deposition, Richard yields his royal right to Bolingbroke:

Cousin, I am too young to be your father,  
 Though you are old enough to be my heir.  
 What you will have, I'll give, and willing too;  
 For do we must what force will have us do. (*Richard II* 115)

Hence, the fracturing of royal identity which continues in the Flint Castle episode where the figure of "controlling majesty" who reminds his beholders that "no hand of blood and bone/Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre/Unless he do profane, steal or usurp" (107), nevertheless descends from his royal eminence into "the base court" (113) indulging into unkingly self-pity:

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,  
 My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,

My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,  
 My figured goblets for a dish of wood,  
 My sceptre for a palmer's walking staff,  
 My subjects for a pair of carved saints,  
 And my large kingdom for a little grave,  
 A little, little grave, an obscure grave.  
 Or I'll be buried in the king's highway,  
 Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet  
 May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;  
 For on my heart they tread now whilst I live,  
 And buried once, why not upon my head? (111)

Richard's transformation here is from "king" to "pilgrim". Since Pilgrimage assumes a renunciation of earthly interests, including kingship as earthly power, the crown "jewels" are replaced by the beads of the holy rosary and the "sceptre" replaced by the pilgrim's walking staff. Richard aspires for living an ascetic form of life characterized by abstinence from various worldly pleasures. Subsequently, his transformation from king to pilgrim, leads to the erasure of kingship. Moreover, by asserting his own agency in stripping himself of the visible symbols of monarchical power, Richard retains the upper hand psychologically; denying Bolingbroke centre stage. Yet, the effect as he fully realizes is to reduce himself to "nothing" once he stops talking, with little to look forward to:

With mine own tears I wash away my balm;  
 With mine own hands I give away my crown;  
 With mine own tongue deny my sacred state;  
 With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.  
 All pomp and majesty I do forswear;  
 My manors, rents, revenues I forgo;  
 My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny. (139)

Richard, who had previously claimed that the king's name was more powerful than an army of twenty thousand, is now coming to see the name of king as a burden. In the deposition episode, he characterizes himself as nameless, losing all identity once he has been stripped of his hereditary title, and calls for a mirror, to find out what shreds of identity are left of him now that his face has been "bankrupt of his majesty":

Oh that I were a mockery king of snow  
 Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,  
 To melt myself away in water-drops.  
 Good king, great king, and yet not greatly good,  
 And if my word be sterling yet in England  
 Let it command a mirror hither straight  
 That it may show me what a face I have,  
 Since it is bankrupt of his majesty. (141)

Bolingbroke's restraint and silence is very much noticeable while Richard resigns his crown to the extent that after Richard smashes his mirror, he tells him, "Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport,/How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face" (143). The contrast between words and deeds, the expression of emotion and the control of emotion, could hardly be more marked. Each line that Bolingbroke speaks suggests self-discipline,

practicality and a desire to maintain control over the situation, “I thought you had been willing to resign [...] /Are you contented to resign the crown? (137) and finally, “The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed / The shadow of your face” (143).

The central paradox at the heart of *Richard II* is that, of the two claimants to the throne, one possesses legitimacy yet shows himself to be unfit to rule, while the other, lacking legitimacy, demonstrates the political skills and self-control his opponent lacks. Hence, the audience is called upon to respond not only to the fall of an anointed king but also to the possibility that hereditary monarchy may itself be unviable. In the deposition scene, the opening lines of Richard’s speech addressed to Bolingbroke indicate the dramatization, with the two men, centre stage, and the crown poised between them:

Give me the crown. Here, cousin, seize the crown,  
On this side my hand and on that side thine.  
Now is this golden crown like a deep well  
That owes two buckets, filling one another,  
The emptier ever dancing in the air,  
The other down, unseen and full of water.  
That bucket, down and full of tears, am I,  
Drinking my griefs whilst you mount up on high. (137)

Richard compares the crown to a deep well and himself and Bolingbroke to two buckets. Richard is the bucket descending to the bottom of the well full of tears, whereas Bolingbroke is the empty one dancing in the air. Richard’s “metaphor of the two buckets implies reciprocity and mutual dependency, while at the same time denying agency to either man. He sees himself here as a passive victim of Fortune, while his adversary is the happy recipient of Fortune’s gifts” (Chernaik 98). Worth mentioning here is the *vita activa/vita contemplativa* juxtaposition of life concepts. We are clearly dealing here with a system of opposites: the wheel of fortune surrounded by the Fates which signifies the world of mutability and change. Such an opposition provides allusions to the human condition and life itself. Furthermore, another illustration is presented in the gardeners’ scene where Shakespeare uses a similar metaphor of weight and balance, but this time scales are employed as an allegory of justice:

Their fortunes both are weighed.  
In your lord’s scale is nothing but himself  
And some few vanities that make him light,  
But in the balance of great Bolingbroke  
Besides himself are all the English peers,  
And with that odds he weighs King Richard down. (*Richard II* 121)

Despite the allegorical language, the Gardener conveys a practical point of view. Richard has failed because of his faults of character and his alienation of the powerful nobles who might have aided and supported him instead of Bolingbroke. Thus Richard is characterized as light because of his vanity and frivolity while Bolingbroke outweighs Richard by the support he has as well as his personal qualities that make him fit to rule. Hence, the garden scene in which the gardeners discuss the state as a garden and Richard as an incompetent caretaker sheds light on Richard’s unfitness for his kingly duties. “The well-tended garden, in which natural process properly controlled brings forth flower and fruit in their appointed season and the community of the whole lives in wholesome balance”, is the ideal to which



the disorder and disease rampant in the England of *Richard II* should be contrasted (Rabkin 1984, 365).

Moreover, in his deathbed speech, John of Gaunt presents Richard as a destructive force, endangering the traditions and the very life of “this royal throne of kings” and “the dear, dear land” of England (*Richard II* 49). He calls him “landlord of England” (53) in an attempt to refer to practices of tax-farming, devices of dubious legality by which Richard, encouraged by his parasitic courtiers, is attempting to raise money. The essence of Gaunt’s rebuke is that Richard has brought shame on the kingdom and has been an unworthy guardian of his legacy, “That England that was wont to conquer others/Hath made a shameful conquest of itself” (49). Richard’s consuming rule poses a grave threat to all that England is and represents both at home and abroad. Gaunt also directly accuses Richard of the crime of spilling royal blood and warns him that he may eventually be deposed, in the sense that Richard by his own conduct is deposing himself:

That blood already, like the pelican,  
Hast thou tapped out and drunkenly caroused.  
My brother Gloucester, plain well-meaning soul,  
Whom fair befall in heaven 'mongst happy souls,  
May be a precedent and witness good  
That thou respect'st not spilling Edward's blood. (53)

Yet, irrespective of all his shortcomings and failure in fulfilling his kingly duties, Richard regards his deposition as “dangerous treason” and prophesies a legacy of disaster, “bleeding war” and a deluge of blood overwhelming England (109). In fact, what Richard prophesies here is the subject of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* and is also the first foreshadowing of the punishment that God will bestow upon the usurper:

Yet know: my master, God omnipotent,  
Is mustering in his clouds on our behalf  
Armies of pestilence, and they shall strike  
Your children yet unborn and unbegot  
That lift your vassal hands against my head  
And threat the glory of my precious crown. (*Richard II* 107)

The belief that future generations would suffer the consequences of God’s righteous anger if his anointed deputy were deposed was universally accepted in Elizabethan England and the Tudor Myth was widely accepted as the key to Shakespeare’s view of politics (Wells 391). Shakespeare was acquainted with the “Tudor Myth” whereby the Wars of the Roses were taken to signify a divine judgment upon England in retribution for the deposition and murder of Richard II (396). Accordingly, the question that poses itself now is whether the king is to be seen as a frivolous tyrant or a martyr, a trial sent by God upon the English to purge their sins, or a victim of a treacherous rebellion for which the nation must undergo a bloody penance (Friedman 280).

The political fortunes of Richard so “mirrored in the cosmos are likewise paralleled in the microcosm of his soul” (Reiman 39). Richard’s longest and most complex speech is his soliloquy in prison where his self-knowledge and his elevation to tragic stature occur. He debates with himself the tragic irony of his situation:

I have been studying how I may compare  
This prison where I live unto the world,

And for because the world is populous  
 And here is not a creature but myself  
 I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer't out. (*Richard II* 173)

When Richard studies how he may compare his prison cell “unto the world”, it occurs to him that his own mind contains the entire attributes and humours of humanity. Deprived of an audience to play to and comforting illusions to deter his pain, the only companion that populates his solitude is “a generation of still breeding thoughts”. Richard contrasts “thoughts tending to ambition” with “thoughts tending to content” but finds neither satisfying for they both “flatter themselves” (173). The stage metaphor prevalent throughout the play reaches its culmination here; Richard is an actor, with no choice over the roles he is asked to play:

Thus play I in one person many people,  
 And none contented. Sometimes am I king,  
 Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,  
 And so I am. Then crushing penury  
 Persuades me I was better when a king,  
 Then am I kinged again, and by and by  
 Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke,  
 And straight am nothing. (175)

There is “a dreamlike quality here, as everything seems to flash by, yet all is illusion: no role in the stage of the world, high or low, is lasting, and none brings contentment” (Chernaik115). Richard talks about the difference between kings and beggars and realizes that he is nothing. He concludes that the desire to be reduced to “nothing” facing the oblivion of death, is the ultimate end of vain human hopes and ambition. The bareness of the language suggests a truth learned through suffering. At this point, Richard hears music in the distance and regrets that he has not kept its concord between himself and his subjects while he was king. His failure to act positively causes him to become the victim of his own recklessness;

I wasted time, and now doth time waste me,  
 For now hath time made me his numbering clock.  
 My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar  
 Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,  
 Whereto my finger, like a dial's point  
 Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears. (*Richard II* 175)

The intrusion of music awakens Richard to the disharmony and disproportion that have defined his reign. He acknowledges his self-indulgence as a cause for his fall. Richard has wasted time in the sense that he failed to take advantage of his opportunities and thus suffers from the consequences of not maintaining true order. Time on the other hand wastes him to the opportunism of Bolingbroke who has become the master of time while he, humiliated, has been reduced to a mechanical “Jack of the clock” (175);

So sighs and tears and groans  
 Show minutes, times runs and hours. But my time  
 Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy  
 While I stand fooling here, his Jack of the clock.

This music mads me. Let it sound no more,  
For though it have help madmen to their wits  
In me it seems it will make wise men mad. (175)

Hence, grief, folly, faults and defeat are all acknowledged, which suggests that Richard has gained an insight and self-awareness that make him admit, for the first time in the play, that he has been the cause of discord and disorder in the state. He does not perceive himself as an innocent victim or an object to be pitied, but rather as the author of his own misfortunes, responsible for the predicament he now finds himself in. As Richard speaks his last words while facing assassination, “[m]ount, mount, my soul. Thy seat is up on high/Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die” (179), he hopes for a world beyond death, whereas Bolingbroke who has supposedly reached the height of his ambition, makes a vow of pilgrimage to Jerusalem to wash Richard’s blood off “from my guilty hand” (183). Hence, both Bolingbroke’s and Richard’s last words are either about their souls, Heaven or the Holy Land.

In his staging of Richard’s downfall, Shakespeare depicted the tragic slippage from a unified world order in which kings, bishops, peers and commoners theoretically cohered in a cosmic harmony of linked dependencies ordained by and presided over by God. From Richard’s perspective, the deposition of a monarch signaled the irreparable violation of this order with the implication of terrible consequences to ensue, both to individuals and to the body politic. Nevertheless, Bolingbroke’s practical success as a usurper, despite the guilt and skepticism about future stability that accompany it, seems also to signify the inevitability of flux and mutation in political affairs (Forker 2001, 18).

The monarch is expected to be just in terms of the application of the laws. Richard is unable to carry the body politic along with him because he is unable to establish the identity of his acts with his subjects’ feeling for the irreducibility of justice to positive law, thus he is deposed in the name of a higher justice (Philips 173). The play thus presents the abuse of the freedom of the crown at the hands of an unjust but lawful heir, “[t]he concepts of law that define king and commonwealth in *Richard II* and guide the audience’s assessment of Richard’s reign are the same standards that many of Shakespeare’s contemporaries used to assess their own monarch and society” (Hamilton 16). The presence of such concepts in the play would seem, then, to be incompatible with interpretations that consider the play to be about the passing of a period with a less modern kingship than that of the Renaissance, or interpretations that consider the play to be about the destruction of an era characterized by a kind of order that could never be recreated. On the contrary, “the presence of these ideas about law and commonwealth” in *Richard II* suggests that the dramatist saw in Richard’s story an example of incidents that had taken place in England and that might happen again over time. Shakespeare has enacted Richard’s story “in a manner that allowed it to reflect the social and political ideals” that were revered at his time (16).

Conclusively, the lawlessness of a tyrannical but legitimate successor, one who disregards all reminders of the duties of kingship, is the price that a body politic should be prepared to pay for the sake of a simple procedure for the transfer of power. Both Richard and Bolingbroke are kings whose right to rule comes under question, that is to say; Richard’s lust and disregard for law gives license for his subjects to rebel against him whereas despite Bolingbroke’s kingly qualities, his succession to the throne is unlawful and he was promised no happiness throughout his reign. In *Richard II*, “Shakespeare sets forth a political problem that was engaging the interest of the nation” (Campbell 212). He did not pose the question of “whether a good king might be deposed, but whether a king might be deposed for any cause” (212). Hence, Richard II not only carved out his own calamities, but

was also responsible for most of the disasters that befell England during the reigns of his Plantagenet successors. All the civil disorders that followed were the result of his reckless behaviour and his dethronement by Henry IV.

For many years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign, there was certainly talk of the lessons to be learned from the time of King Richard II, since she was constantly accused of the same follies. The first charge that Elizabeth I was dominated by her favourites and gave them undue power over her kingdom was a focal point of the attack against her. As to the second charge, Elizabeth I too was censured for spilling royal blood in permitting Mary Stuart to die, and there were many who believed she had pointed the way to her own destruction. The third charge made against the Queen, besides alienating her subjects by heavy financial burdens imposed upon them, was that she leased out her kingdom. The Queen's favourites became rich through her grants of lands and special privileges. In addition to this, aiding the French and the Dutch, fighting in Ireland, arming against the Spaniards cost Elizabeth much treasure. Hence, these are the three sins which represent the antecedent action of the play of *Richard II*; they are the sins which posed the question repeatedly asked: whether Richard II was justly deposed or not. Nevertheless, they are also the sins which were brought up time after time when the fate of Richard II was pointed out to Elizabeth I as a warning. Hence, Shakespeare used Richard II as the accepted pattern of a deposed king. He used his pattern to set forth the political ethics of the Tudors regarding the rights and duties of a king. It might equally well have served as a warning to Queen Elizabeth I and to anyone who desired to usurp her throne. In the play Shakespeare, "reiterated the charges against Richard that had been so often laid at Queen Elizabeth's door" (Campbell 211). He has portrayed Richard as guilty of sinful folly, yet no happiness was promised to the one who tried to execute God's vengeance or depose the deputy elected by the Lord. In *Richard II* Shakespeare thus offered the follies of Richard as a background for the presentation of the problem that was often discussed during Elizabeth's reign, the problem of the deposition of a king.

### Works Cited

- Calderwood, James. "Richard II: Metadrama and the Fall of Speech". In: *Shakespeare's History Plays: Richard II to Henry V*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. 121-135.
- Campbell, Lily Bess. *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy*. London: Methuen, 1964.
- Chernaik, Warren. *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's History Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Forker, Charles R. (ed.) *The Arden Shakespeare: King Richard II*. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002.
- . "Unstable Identity in Shakespeare's *Richard II*". *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*. 54.1 (2001): 3-21.
- Friedman, Donald M. "John of Gaunt and the Rhetoric of Frustration". *ELH*. 43 (1976): 279-299.
- Hamilton, Donna. "The State of Law in *Richard II*". *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 34.1 (1983): 5-17.

- Jones, Richard H. *The Royal Policy of Richard II: Absolutism in the Later Middle Ages*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968.
- Knowles, Ronald. *Shakespeare's Arguments with History*. Basingstoke; Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Newlin, Jeanne T. *Richard II: Critical Essays*. New York: Garland Publications, 1984.
- Philips, James. "The Practicalities of the Absolute: Justice and Kingship in Shakespeare's *Richard II*". *ELH*. 79.1 (2012): 161-177.
- Rabkin, Norman. In: *Shakespearean Criticism Vol. 6: Excerpts from the Criticism of William Shakespeare's Plays and Poetry, from the First Published Appraisals to Current Evaluations*. Mark W. Scott and Sandra L. eds. Williams. Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co, 1984. 364-367.
- . *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding*. New York: Free Press, 1967.
- Reiman, Donald H. "Appearance, Reality and Moral Order in *Richard II*". *Modern Language Quarterly*. 25.1 (1964): 34-45.
- Ribner, Irving. "Bolingbroke, a True Machiavellian". *Modern Language Quarterly*. 9.2 (1948): 177-184.
- Shakespeare, William. *King Richard II*. ed. Michael Clamp. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Wells, Robin Headlam. "The Fortunes of Tillyard: Twentieth-Century Critical Debate on Shakespeare's History Plays". *English Studies*. 66.5 (1985): 391-403.

## **The Irrepressible Lilith in Angela Carter and Toni Morrison**

**Gillian Alban**

**Abstract:** Lilith is the first insubordinate wife of Adam, a powerfully seductive woman and destructive mother who asserted her equality with men. Feared and castigated by nineteenth century men, contemporary women rather find this defiant succubus or witch an inspiration in today's world. Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* (1969) shows Marianne as a powerful Lilith, defying her captors and leading the Barbarians into the future world. In *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), Carter shows Lilith fighting to bring about a society offering women a significant role. Toni Morrison alludes to Lilith in her novel *Sula* (1973) through the behaviour of a trinity of succubii and destructive mothers within the serpent imagery of Eden, strengthening the doubly disinherited, those born neither white nor male. This paper presents Lilith as an inspiring exemplar for modern women in the three contemporary novels analysed.

**Keywords:** Lilith, Medusa, power, death, life, goddess, demon, witch, sexual, snake

In C. S. Lewis' introduction to George MacDonald's nineteenth century fantasy *Lilith* (1895, 1946), Lewis states: "From his own father, [MacDonald] said, he first learned that Fatherhood must be at the core of the universe. He was thus prepared in an unusual way to teach that religion in which the relation of the Father and Son is of all relations the most central" (MacDonald v). How partisan is Lewis' reflection of Christianity, which, after Judaism, took over from pagan mother goddess worship. Julia Kristeva describes "the harsh combat Judaism, in order to constitute itself, must wage against paganism and its maternal cults" (94), in which creative prominence had been ascribed to birth-giving females. Luce Irigaray talks about the "archaic murder, that of the mother" (36) that occurred under patriarchy. So Judaism suppressed pagan goddess myths and "emphasized an omnipotent, omniscient male deity; to worship any other deity was forbidden" (Dexter 47) on the one hand, yet surprisingly at the same time initiated the tale of Lilith. Judaism created a primal woman, Lilith, in a pious attempt to rationalize the existence of the original creation story of male and female both made in the image of God (Stuckrad 10-11), proving their original equality, together with God's androgyny. But as we know, the second unnatural creation story of woman emerging from Adam's rib, rather than him being born of woman, gained preeminence, crushing female primacy. Men's dread of yet fascination with female strength and sexuality were then projected onto the nefarious scapegoat Lilith. Male writers often reflect both awe and repulsion towards the Lilith figure, but contemporary women rather embrace her power. Angela Carter uses the names Lilith alongside Eve amongst her boisterously irrepressible women in two of her novels, with Marianne of *Heroes and Villains* (1969) and Leilah/Lilith and Eve/lyn in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). She creates a double dialectic by contrasting Leilah/Lilith with the eponymous Eve carved out from Evelyn by Mother in this novel of feisty women. Toni Morrison suggests the Lilith archetype in her mythologically rich fiction, without mentioning her name. This independent realization of mine was confirmed by Shirley Stave's analysis of Lilith in relation to *Beloved* (1987), and Kathryn Lee Seidel's regarding

*Sula* (1973), analysing *Sula* as Lilith and Nel as a more submissive Eve.<sup>1</sup> This latter brief discussion of *Sula* is developed independently here. bell hooks considers the Sapphire trope of black women as “evil, treacherous, bitchy, stubborn and hateful” (85), connecting this with the scapegoating of the vilified Eve, although Lilith’s notoriety far surpasses that of Eve.



Illustration I.<sup>2</sup>

Lilith is mentioned in the Sumerian king list from 2,500 BCE, the Talmud of around 400 CE, and described in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* of between the eighth and tenth centuries CE, as the original wife of Adam. Like him she was created from the earth in God’s image, before his second wife, Eve, called in Genesis 3, 20 “the mother of all living”, was putatively made from Adam’s rib. Adam and Lilith fought immediately, as she

<sup>1</sup> Stave’s evaluation of Lilith in *Beloved* is a fascinating account drawing out varied allusions to the myth and related Biblical elements; my reading of *Sula* is more precisely focused on the archetype of the Lilith character.

<sup>2</sup> The cover illustration by Alev Ersan is an imaginative representation of this same bird woman image, with her creatures, lion and owl.

insisted: “Why should I lie beneath you [...] when I am your equal, since both of us were created from dust” (Patai 223). Lilith then called on the Ineffable Name of God, like Isis who controlled the name of the Egyptian god Ra in curing him. In thus “snatching liberty” (2004, xv), Lilith flew from this diminishing position to the Red Sea. Adam begged God to restore her, and He sent three angels after her, threatening drowning if she didn’t return. In retaliation, she threatened to use her force over infant mortality, for the first eight days for a boy, and twenty days for girls, only desisting if they wore a protective amulet inscribed with her name. Consenting to the death of a hundred of her demon children every day, she was finally left in peace. This primeval outrageous female demon who became an “undoubted goddess in Sumer and the very consort of God in Kabbalism” (Patai 250), leaves the disobedience of Eve in eating the apple and curiously initiating the discoveries of subsequent history far behind her, morally in the shade.

Thus Lilith, the first rebellious wife of Adam, is a transgressive woman and destructive mother. Her real or putative crimes as scapegoat are castigated, while her powers as succubus or witch are lauded, the imaginative existence of such a woman positing an amazingly ancient equality between men and women. She became connected with the snake of paradise, as the “serpent and Lilith were equated” (Baring and Cashford 512), also with Eve, and became demonic with the fall. Pagan myths reflect the snake and the tree of life as divine female sources of fertility within the garden of Eden; such beliefs, together with the sacred groves of the goddess Asherah or Ashtoreth, were crushed under Judaism. The image of the Sumerian Ninhursag or Inanna, also called Queen of the Night or Lady of Heaven, has been commonly viewed as Lilith, while the snake woman with Adam and Eve on the Sistine Chapel ceiling by Michaelangelo is undisputedly Lillith.<sup>3</sup>

Judaism traditionally suppressed such images, in monotheistic abhorrence of a goddess sharing God’s role. In the Old Testament, Lilith is dubiously mentioned in Isaiah 34, 14, appearing as a screech owl or night hag. For Augustine, Eve was the universal scapegoat, her guilt tainting all women. Yet the more pernicious Lilith survived, as seen in various winged or snake tailed creatures beside Eve in the garden, an avatar of the devil, tempting a look-alike Eve to eat from the tree (Baring and Cashford 523). Such theriomorphic metaphors proliferated in the nineteenth century, with Lilith as a projection of men’s psychic fears and sexual desires, seen in writers and artists like Dante Gabriel Rossetti and George MacDonald.

Contemporary women increasingly turn to the defiantly presumptuous Lilith as one who “has become a chiffre for a certain aspect of female power” (Stuckrad 5). The Lilith myth is what Cynthia Davis calls in Morrison a “search for a myth adequate to experience” (323). Judith Plaskow, in her version of this myth, describes the male bonding of Adam and God, as Lilith rejects her ascribed helpmate function and leaves Eden, whereupon this role is turned over to Eve. From outside the garden, Lilith’s demonic reputation grows through her struggle against Adam. Meanwhile, from within, Eve comes to appreciate what a “beautiful and strong”, brave woman she appears (Plaskow 32). Finally escaping from the garden through the branches of an apple tree, Eve finds outside a sister in Lilith with whom she can relate, leaving Eden polarized between male and female forces. Cinda Thompson in

---

<sup>3</sup> The plaque which both Patai and Neumann call Lilith shows a beautiful bird woman with talons and wings; Baring and Cashford call her Inanna-Ishtar, and Collon considers she may also be Ereshkigal. Uncertain of Lilith’s goddess status, although Patai asserts “she became an undoubted goddess in Sumer and the consort of God in Kabbalism” (252), while the rod-and-ring of this icon clearly indicate its goddess status, the British Museum displays it as “Queen of the Night” (Collon 40).



her poem “The Tree” turns the tables against putative male creativity in an amazingly suggestive few lines, conferring God’s creativity onto Eve, “the mother of all living:”

my belly swells, the moon rises  
 genesis-full  
 Cursed, he swore, I say  
 I am  
 Eve. Be aware. I am  
 Your mother. (in Cornell 7)

These lines forcefully restore God’s creativity to the original female life-force or mother goddess, as understood before being crushed by monotheism (Dexter 47). Female divinity, and Lilith’s claim to equality, with her insubordination and relationship issues, make her an inspirational role model today, her disruptive influence enabling women to discard stultifying female roles. Central to Lilith lore is her independent sexuality, making her an houri and a temptation to men. She posits a primal equality of women and men, giving women a sovereignty which dangles a Damoclean sword between them and their mates. Breaking free of authority and imposed wifely and motherly roles, she exercises a dubiously amoral force over mortality, implying the regenerative life and death force of the triple goddess.

Angela Carter, whose works were published between 1966 and 1991, explicitly rejects other-worldly goddess charters, calling herself an old-fashioned feminist and materialist, asserting: “I’m a socialist, damn it! How can you expect me to be interested in fairies?” (in Day 11). Nevertheless, her writing remains super-saturated with symbols and archetypes, including those of Eve, Lilith, Mary and Nike, amongst others. She suggests that while writing *Heroes and Villains*, “she did indeed regard myth as potentially liberating” (in Gamble 2001, 66), although she became increasingly wary of myths and symbols. One of Donally’s aphorisms in *Heroes and Villains* is the Barthean: “MISTRUST APPEARANCES, THEY NEVER CONCEAL ANYTHING” (60); everything has mythic significance for those who can read it. Carter incorporates a plethora of symbolic allusions in *The Passion of New Eve*, where she affirms that “our external symbols must always express the life within us with absolute precision; how could they do otherwise, since that life has generated them?” (6). She conceived this novel “as a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity” (in Tucker 25), using it to expose the inconsistent and unrealistic extremes of the “consolatory nonsense” (Carter 1979, 5) of goddess myth, while still retaining its elaborate mythic allusions. Gina Wisker suggests that Carter and others “use the forms and images of myth and magic in order to both expose their hitherto constrictive nature, and, to revitalise positive myths and images for women” (Wisker 118). She is “rewriting the old myths and reclaiming the women of power, devalued and demoted in a patriarchal world, and [...] asserting as real, valid and celebratory the powers of alternative vision” (126).

Notorious for her non-conformist feminism, Carter rejects any polemic role or straightjacket in her works. Her characters flex their muscles, or with Fevvers, the New Woman of *Nights of the Circus*, their wings, regardless of moral ambiguity or the discomfort of those around them. They demonstrate the binaries of de Sade’s passive Justine and outrageous Juliette of Carter’s *The Sadeian Woman* (1979). Justine is a naive Eve figure, whose repressive morality prevents her from initiating any action for fear of its consequences, while her moribund passivity actually becomes a death trap for those around her, victimizing herself and others. However, Juliette is a Lilith-like libertine who masters

the current situation to her own advantage through whatever means available to her, whether ruthlessly exploiting her sexual allure, or savagely murdering her father and child. Carter states that “her work of destruction complete, she will, with her own death, have removed a repressive and authoritarian superstructure” which hinders change (1979, 111).

The Nobel prize winning writer Morrison, whose first novel appeared in 1970, creates an African American world with its own rich symbolism. Grieving the absence of parents telling “their children those classical, mythological archetypal stories that we heard years ago” (2008, 58), while investigating the limits of female power, she suggests that “archetypes created by women about themselves are rare” (22). Yet her works suggest several mythic archetypes; she states concerning Sula that the wildness in such characters is “pre-Christ in the best sense. It’s Eve” (in Taylor-Guthrie 165). She insists on her readers interpreting her novels in teasing out their significances personally. Barbara Hill Rigney states that “[i]t is clear that Morrison’s protagonist, significantly named Sula Peace, is a composite of archetypal scapegoats: Christ, Cain, even Lilith” (17). Jacqueline Fulmer develops her view of Lilith in Morrison through the angel and monster or witch/goddess binary tropes as developed by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Fulmer 3). Cedric Gael Bryant also starts from Gilbert and Gubar’s Lilith ideas in finding Sula “linked to the tradition of female monsters who, in the act of defining—that is, “authoring” —themselves, usurp male power” (737). In Patricia Hunt’s words, Sula is “witch or a devil, a supernatural being”, rejecting all categorizations (448). Morrison’s characters achieve experimental status as “outlaw women” (2004, xiv). All women, especially those of colour, need to stretch the boundaries of possibility in fighting the restraints of patriarchal society, where so many know that they are “neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them” (2004, 52). Clearly the Lilith figure has significance in Morrison’s writings.

Lilith is a universal figure, however rooted in Jewish tradition; she has been connected with the African Queen of Sheba, whose reputation as demonic is implied in her hairy goatish legs or “ass’s hooves” (Warner 1994, 112). The African or Middle Eastern aspect of such diasporic peoples of colour is affirmed in both these writers as Carter, like Morrison, describes her Leilah/Lilith as black. This paper combines these two amazing writers’ independently unorthodox feminist use of the Lilith myth, from different sides of the Atlantic, as reflecting women’s need for freedom and self-definition against social repressions. Their women combine in breaking all the rules and surviving against the odds. Lilith uses her powers of body and mind to her own advantage, whether, as H el ene Cixous says in using the word “voler”, (in DeShazer 400-1), “flying” from perils on her wings, or “stealing” her own advantage from her oppressors, while worming out of her troubles with a snake’s cunning or wisdom. Bryant describes Sula’s “evilness” as deriving from her role as thief; an outsider who robs the community of its sense of identity, she also robs men of masculinity while giving them pleasure. He then picks up on the French homonym of flight, which for Sula is temporary, since she returns home. This writing demonstrates Lilith’s sexual and personal self-assertion, her pariah, morally dubious, witchlike or Medusan qualities, and her life and death qualities as embodied in the primeval snake symbolism of Eden, as both goddess and devil. Both Carter and Morrison illuminate Lilith’s outrageous qualities while creating a powerful model for contemporary women in these works.

The controversial Lilith figure of these current women writers contrasts strongly with MacDonald’s eponymous fantasy of a century ago. He describes Lilith as an alluring succubus who enthralls Mr Vane even after he learns about her murdering children, including her own daughter, since she had been warned her child would cause her own downfall. In this novel a simplistic struggle between good and evil shows Adam and Eve as

entirely good and aligned with God, while Lilith intransigently insists on her independent right to commit evil while maintaining her integrity. She is only offered redemption through the childbearing under which Eve in Genesis was condemned to suffer (MacDonald 148). Adam says that in spite of her angelic splendour: “her first thought was *power*; she counted it slavery to be one with me, and bear children for Him who gave her being” (147), thus stating the insufferable affront against patriarchy as her claim to power. After her child is born and Adam agrees only to “love and honour, never obey and worship her, she poured out her blood to escape me” (148); he asserts women’s duty to obey, which is assumed unsuitable for men. When captured, she is subjected to a barrage of persistent persuasion to force her to repent of her wickedness. Her assertion is that she will be herself “and not another! [...] I am what I am; no one can take from me myself! [...] No one ever made me. I defy that Power to unmake me from a free woman!” (199-200). Regardless of any evil deeds she has committed, she here claims her very integrity. Subjected to considerable pressure to reform, the change in her which is insisted on and finally achieved occurs against her own volition. Thus, this nineteenth century example of the undoubtedly destructive and insubordinate succubus Lilith is blamed above all else for daring to be her own person, castigated as an intolerable presumption against patriarchy.

“I’ll take the top [...] Lilith refused to take the inferior position. So Adam sent her away and she roamed the Arabian deserts and the dark beyond the pale” (Byatt 332-333)

In both her Lilith/Eve figures, Carter embodies them in defiantly strong or highly sensual women. Sarah Gamble suggests that Lilith, as a figure on the margins of Biblical myth, potentially offers a “more potent symbol of female transgression” (1997, 81), enabling Marianne of *Heroes and Villains* to rewrite her own story. These novels show Lilith as on top sexually and psychologically, asserting her qualities as powerful succubus.

In Carter’s apocalyptic *Heroes and Villains*, Marianne has been warned that rape will be inevitable if she leaves her secluded tower with the Barbarian Jewel. Sure enough, after her attempt to escape from him, he rapes her after a struggle which she actually initiates by throwing herself defiantly on top of him. She watches him coldly and berates him while maintaining “her superior status” throughout this scene (1969, 55). Marianne never surrenders her independence or self-assertion, in her fury against Jewel as he follows this brutal rape with the social legitimization of marriage. A tough sixteen-year-old girl, even when physically overwhelmed, she shows great defiance in forging her own personality against the oppression of her primitive captors. She had previously escaped rape by Jewel’s brothers, her fury increasing as they close in on her, but she pre-empts their thrill of the hunt by closing her eyes in self-oblivion. This tactic effectively succeeds, and Doctor Donally explains the men’s fear of Professor women’s vagina dentata, rumoured to “sprout sharp teeth in their private parts” (49). She enjoys the sexual jubilation of Lilith in their love making, as the gliding “planes of flesh within her” bring unexpected and extreme intimations of “pleasure or despair” (83). Thus, while her relationship with Jewel remains hostile, they share an electric “river of fire” in their love making (88), without this erotic intensity bringing psychic empathy. Outsiders gather the false impression that she will be subject to him; however, even as she creams for him, she declares she’ll leave him, while he on the contrary claims he’ll cut his “heart out for [his daughter] to play with” (125).

In Carter’s anti-mythic novel, *The Passion of New Eve*, which Natalie Rosinsky describes as “a lampooning of feminist gynocentric essentialism” (in Gamble 2001, 124), it is the black goddess Mother who rapes Evelyn. She overcomes him like a female mantis,

her gaping vagina appearing like an erupting volcano, as he is thrown onto her heaving flesh. He ends up helplessly ejaculating the sperm with which she intends “him” to fertilize “herself” when physically carved into the New Eve, in this dystopia through which Carter parodies extreme feminism. Meanwhile the playgirl or “Tigerish Leilah” (Gamble 2001, 123) starts off as an exaggeratedly seductive warbling canary, mermaid or lorelei to Evelyn’s bird of prey or cock. She reminds him of “the succubus, the devils in female form who come by night to seduce the saints” (1977, 27). While she appears to him as sexually voracious, she is in fact “driven by a drier, more cerebral need” (18), implied in the graffiti: “INTROITE ET HIC DII SUNT”: “ENTER, FOR HERE THE GODS ARE” (25, 48). He misses this clue to the cult of Mothers that will later transform him into a woman; while he seems to be a bird of prey, it is she who plays the hunter throughout their chase. Demonstrating a total difference from Evelyn, as Heather Johnson states, in embodying “maternity, blackness and the feminine” (Bristow and Broughton 171), this bird-like ghetto nymph appears entirely subsumed by her sexual style as woman dressed as meat. Apparently a visitor in her own flesh, dancing naked for her reflection in the mirror and for Evelyn, she masturbates and tears his orgasm from him like a Lily-in-the-mirror in his domestic brothel. Both seem trapped in the solipsistic world of the woman watching herself being watched in the mirror, in the infinite regress of an image where she only reflects his essential lack or hollowness. Carter describes her as the “perfect woman; like the moon, she only gave reflected light” (1977, 34) in a sharp indictment of female slavery to physical appearance. Yet, this black Leilah, Lilith, mud Lily, is deceiving Evelyn utterly while bewitching him nightly. He rapidly bores of the palpitations of the flesh as an irritation only to be scratched, and loses all desire for her as she announces her pregnancy, abandoning her to the city after a botched and bloody abortion. She later effects a Lilith revenge on him in his sexual metamorphosis into Eve in Beulah.

Morrison’s triple deity of Eva, Hannah and Sula in *Sula* are all succubii, personifying irresponsible sexuality, whether enjoying or spoiling men. The Peace women love all men, bequeathing each other “manlove” (2004, 41). Eva has her own flock of gentleman callers, engaging in a good amount of “teasing and pecking and laughter” (41) even without making love. Rippling with sex, Hannah needs some sensual touching every day, which leaves her daughter Sula a legacy of sexual irresponsibility more common in men, learning from her mother that sex was “pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable” (44). Sula is assumed by her neighbours to be guilty of the outrage of sleeping with white men, which is presumed only to occur in rape, yet men frequently make love across race. Made pariah by the community, she loses her earlier sense of lawlessness and joy in lovemaking, retaining only its lonely sorrow. After sleeping with her best friend’s husband, she is saddened to learn that Jude was assumed off limits for her, although they had always shared their affections before, and her home had taught her no such possessiveness. She defiantly asserts while dying that she took him since “he just filled up the space” (144). This extreme insouciance exemplifies her defiant lack of empathy, even regarding her best friend.

While lying on top of Ajax, Sula becomes Lilith, towering over and through him in her blissful “jouissance”, prolonging the orgasm that would break through her, considering scraping him down to his constituent elements, lazily rocking above his body. Ajax had spotted the two friends in puberty as “pig meat” (50), but later saw Nel as the cliché female victim or Eve: “Ax em to die for you and they yours for life” (83). Ajax later returns to enjoy Sula, drawn by his maternal concept of an independent and lawless woman. While his free conjure mother loves her sons and leaves them alone, she teaches them to evade amorous commitment. Thus when Sula herself experiences the feeling of possession she

had been oblivious to and destroyed in Nel and Jude's marriage, she remains selfishly wrapped in her own perceptions, unable to appreciate how dangerous she would appear to Ajax, as her love making turns to nest making. Lacking empathy with Ajax' susceptibilities, she is unaware even of his name, A. Jacks, it being Adam who had named the creatures in Eden. He responds according to his carefree upbringing, and shies away from Sula like a sensitive untamed horse. Her domestic behaviour spells death to his freedom; this culture cannot keep the man in the home, or as Johnson says, home "is where the phallus isn't" (79). He treats her in the masculine fashion she had treated all her previous lovers, simply there for the ride. Jerking against the implied bridle of cloth on the table or ribbon in her hair, he flies from all attachments, whether to woman's heart strings or apron strings. Pulling her beneath him into the missionary position of Eve, he thus ends her Lilith supremacy. Meanwhile he fantasizes his next carefree trip to the airfield, where imagination is unbound by reality. This leaves no outlet for Sula but self-destruction.

"So they laid broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkled salt on porch steps".

(*Sula* 113)

These novels present life-threatening, petrifying and witchlike Lilith behaviour. In *Heroes and Villains* it is emphasized throughout that Jewel fears Marianne even as he bullies her, convinced that she will be the death of him (79, 80), although she saves his life three times. Their first encounter is when she objectifyingly looks out from the tower of the effete Professors, survivors of a civilized world, onto a world under chaotic attack by the Barbarians, who have reverted to a primitive life style after nuclear destruction. She watches her brother, the preferred male of her mother, being killed by Jewel on his first attack. Neither she nor Jewel ever forget his "expression of blind terror" and "vague, terrified gestures with his hands" (6).<sup>4</sup> Carter emphasizes his fear of her icy eyes and her cool surveillance of her brother's death on that first encounter, with her looking down as if it were "all an entertainment laid on for her benefit" (80). Throughout this novel the destructive Medusan evil eye of Marianne is iterated. She only later realizes that the enemy killing her brother who turns out to be Jewel had been attempting to ward off her own penetrating evil eye even while murdering her brother. This action demonstrates a curious interplay of power, with the aggressor fearful of his young observer. Jewel is a prince of darkness, a devil incarnate and "created, not begotten, a fantastic dandy of the void" (72), suggesting an inverse divinity parallel to hers, and yet he greatly fears her, calling her the firing squad (120). On their wedding night he reminds her of that old encounter, sharing his insight "that this child who looked so severe would be the death of me" (79), saying he hates her, and baring his chest for her to kill him then as well as subsequently.

Meanwhile, she holds the tribe under the aura of her evil eye, from which dubious magic they attempt to protect themselves with what turns out to be the gesture of the old Christian cross, always occurring in response to her petrifying Medusan gaze. The Barbarians think of Professor women as "terrible angels with fiery swords to keep them out" of their civilized Eden (107); children scatter before Marianne's glare, and Jewel's brothers complain that she is bewitching him. When she laughs in the presence of a mother

---

<sup>4</sup> Carter's "vague terrified gestures with his hands" echoes the "terrified vague fingers push" of Yeats' poem "Leda and the Swan", which myth Carter exemplifies in *The Magic Toyshop*, with Melanie as a timid Eve figure pitted against her rapacious uncle. Yeats' poem has Leda respond sensitively to rape, while Carter uses this action to show the rapist, Jewel's, response to his future victim, who will ultimately be "the death of" him (*Heroes and Villains* 79-80).

and her sick child, this laughter is interpreted as deadly, and the child dies that night. Terrifying to the entire tribe, who fear her enigmatic otherness, she is particularly fearful to Jewel, in spite of his savage ability to whip one brother and take another's death in his stride. Alone and physically powerless as she is, they superstitiously fear her uncanny eyes, as she becomes aware of the strength in her glare. While Jewel is already dying of consumption, he actually squanders his life by ousting his mentor Donally and then renegeing on this decision and attempting to recover him the next day, thereby falling into a posse of soldiers. His fatal indecisiveness weakens him in the eyes of his brothers and proves him unequal to Marianne's calculating, spiteful nature. This teenage girl proves her strength while rejecting the wifely role they assign her, developing her indomitable psyche in spite of her youth and straightened conditions, through her sharp cultivation of practical and mental acumen. Whether she actually causes Jewel's or others' deaths is dubious; she certainly threatens and appears to cause death, like Lilith.

Carter mockingly deconstructs the machinations of the surgeon Mother of Beulah in *The Passion of New Eve*, with her Medusan "hair like a nest of petrified snakes" (190). She recreates Evelyn's body into a beautiful Eve, a "Playboy center fold" dream of a woman" (75), intended to be used in the creation of parthenogenetic births. Carter also transforms the seductive Leilah, left haemorrhaging after an abortion, who later shrugs off all her Leilah passivity. She becomes Mother's monomamiliary assistant Sophia, and then transforms into the storm trooper Lilith, directing the reformed Women's forces, just as Marianne emerges to lead the Barbarians. Rather than indulging in goddess myths and archetypes, these women become engaged in the chaotic struggle to gain control of this world torn between ethnic, gender, religious and political forces. Thus, emerging from the training ground of sexual liberation to embrace the more strident realities of history, Lilith metamorphoses into a gunslinging Amazon guerilla, fighting to enable women a more significant identity than forced sex changes and goddess pipe dreams. While abhorring the consolations of goddess belief, Carter cannot resist using its apt symbols. She describes the succubus Leilah becoming Lilith as one of the Priestesses of Cybele, self-healing, with rape refreshing her virginity, in a parody of the goddesses Hera and Mary with their perpetual virginity. Thus, Carter states that the once useful "Divine Virgins, Sacred Harlots and Virgin Mothers" are now all dead (175), or as she affirms elsewhere: "The goddess is dead" (1979, 110). Meanwhile, these Women struggle for the birth of a new world in apocalyptic America.

In *Sula*, Eva expresses "benevolent tyranny" (Munro 150) towards her children whom she nurtures without expressing emotional attachment. She saves Plum by "unplugging" him to prevent internal poisoning, and then deserts all three children, leaving them to a neighbour for eighteen months, returning with her left leg metonymously replaced by the pocket book of an insurance policy. This traumatic act removes them forever from the fear of hunger, but scarcely justifies her autocratic rule, as in her decision to terminate her son Plum's life. Defending this action to Hannah, she implies the terrible choice of a mother faced with such a ruthless decision, asserting a Lilith force of destiny over her own child, refusing him the infantization brought about by his helpless drug dependency. Projecting onto him her fears of his threatened return to the womb, she decides he will "die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man" (2004, 72). At what point may one decide that a son trapped in a cycle of thieving to maintain a narcotic fix has a life so undignified and unworthy of living that he must be incinerated? Eva plays God by giving him an irrevocable, hot death. Morrison is an expert on the terrible Medean choice of infanticide, as seen in Sethe's decision to kill her children rather than have them suffer slavery in *Beloved*. Nonetheless, Morrison does assert that Eva's love may

have been destructively closer to owning, as she states: “Too frequently love has to do with owning that other person” (in Taylor-Guthrie 42). In placing Plum’s helplessness alongside Shadrack’s shell-shocked madness, Morrison shows the latter veteran emerging from his drunken lunacy to begin missing people, starting with Sula, and to appreciate his own life which he has independently if outrageously maintained throughout. Eva casts off her emotional bonding with Plum after a last embrace, convinced that her duty is to swiftly free him from dependency. But when Hannah’s conflagration follows this savage act, “Eva mused over the perfection of the judgment against her” (2004, 78), in questioning whether she had acted rightly to her son. In addition, her maternal irresponsibility in fostering and then utterly confusing the personalities of the three Deweys, keeping them in a state of permanent childhood until they die in the tunnel accident, is also autocratic. This contrasts with her behavior towards Plum; while she removes him from endless infantization, they are encouraged to remain in such a state. Eva is actually a loving mother, throwing herself from her window in attempting to save Hannah when she catches fire, but she is undoubtedly destructive with Plum and the Deweys.

The behaviour of both grandmother and granddaughter in this novel is dubiously amoral. Whether perceived as witches or devils, murderers or mean, they wound others and carry the wounds of their self-assertion in this tough society. Jacqueline de Weever evaluates the three generations as “fierce and independent grandmother, compliant daughter, rebellious granddaughter” (141). After Hannah is burned to death over a yard fire under Sula’s fascinated eyes, Eva and Sula remain matched as sparring partners. Sula incarcerates Eva in a nursing home, lying to Nel about her motive, and Eva endlessly survives there after Sula’s early death. These Lilith avatars are assertive and destructive toward both their own and other’s children, necessarily savage in the world Morrison describes where the doubly disinherited, “neither white nor male”, require super strength for sheer survival (2004, 52).

Hannah is impaled on the imperfections of motherhood facing both generations. She challenges her mother as to why she didn’t play with them, with Eva asserting there was never time for play in the struggle to survive, her duty to keep them alive absorbing all her energies. Then Hannah is caught reflecting on maternity with her friends, unaware that her daughter Sula is eavesdropping. She states that children are a qualified blessing whom you love but may not like, which all mothers know is simply the truth; while you love your child, he’s a pain, these mothers agree. Hannah’s Lilith-like shedding of the emotional bonds of mothering leaves her free to enjoy her own sexual pleasures, and Sula’s immediate shock at her mother’s flippant statement she would probably soon learn to take in her stride. However, coming as it does immediately before her drowning of Chicken Little, it causes a traumatic maturation in one day, as she becomes an accidental murderer at the age of thirteen. Initially terrified of the consequences, this termination of life causes her to exorcise her morality and frees her from moral restraints, indeed empties her of ego, making her dangerously unaccountable in her actions (118-19).

This action beyond the pale gives her an odd unity with the other demon of this society, Shadrack, who greets her reassuringly with the open promise of “always”, and years later tips his hat to her on the street. Dessie, a big Daughter Elk who knew things, witnesses the greeting of these “two devils” (117) as proof positive of their complicit ability to exercise their evil eye over townspeople. While Sula escapes from him, Dessie gains a sty over one eye, reflecting Sula’s birthmark, further proof of Sula and Shadrack’s devilish influence. As the narrator states, the neighbors’ “evidence against Sula was contrived, but their conclusions about her were not” (118). They certainly regard Sula as a witch, able to harm or kill any of them, in addition to her ability to lure men of whatever colour to her bed

as succubus, walking about as she does without underwear and a cruelly mocking attitude. It is scarcely surprising that her petrifying gaze can break Teapot's bones and choke Mr. Finley to death; she has hardly arrived back in town wearing black crepe and foxtails before mothers are grabbing their sons away from her pernicious proximity. So the town joins forces against her, making her pariah and scapegoat for their own sins in activating their righteousness through her while they "laid broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkle salt on porch steps" (113) for this Medusan witch.

Sula maintains utter indifference to relationships within the social order or assumed gender roles, and is too busy making herself to make children (92). "Flout[ing] convention and received morality" (Matus 60), she bypasses the helpmeet Eve role which Nel embraces with Jude, although this very role impales Sula in the end. Her early uncanny charisma had made her fend off the attack of Irish boys by slicing off the end of her own finger to defend Nel under attack, the closest she gets to Eva's leg amputation. This proves her courageous ruthlessness, giving her the only scar she carries to her death. Sula eventually finds herself deserted, defiantly going to death in her own intransigent way. Left alone since she had been careless of others, she is destroyed by receiving a taste of her own indifferent medicine. Sula, the "artist with no art form" (2004, 121), had been tough enough to watch her mother's death throes with thrill rather than pain. She wanted her "to keep on jerking like that, to keep on dancing" (147). But she lives to suffer that pain in dreams that pursue her to death, as the Baking Powder Lady disintegrates into the dust and ashes her own birthmark suggests. Finally falling victim to possessive emotions for Ajax, she is destroyed without appreciating how she lost both friend and lover. While dying she longs to share her thoughts on death with Nel, with whom she had shared girlhood, and whether djinns, demons or angels, Lilith or Eve, the pure experience of being two hearty sexy girls together was a text they were never able to better. Morrison thus exemplifies such courageous "outlaw women" (xiv). In a complex interplay of power and its lack she shows Lilith using her witchlike savage force to punish others, while often being punished as scapegoat herself, in a frequently lose-lose situation.

"The snake on his back flicked its tongue in and out with the play of muscle [...] and the tattooed Adam appeared to flinch again and again from the apple which Eve again and again leaned forward to offer him [...] the moving picture of an endless temptation".  
(*Heroes and Villains* 113)

The snake theme of Eden appears in Sula's birthmark as a stemmed rose of sexual love, readily available in her household. This then incriminatingly becomes the ashes of her mother Hannah's burning, when Sula had curiously watched her body twitching in agony, simply asserting that her indifferent voyeurism had intended no harm (147). Finally to Jude who, together with his marriage, falls prey to her, it becomes a copperhead or rattlesnake, the snake of Lilith, offering the apple to Adam in the garden, implying temptation and death. Its association for Shadrack with the tadpole also suggests the snake's life force. Thus, the snake viewed as evil is juxtaposed with the flower of innocence in this intertwined image, illustrated on the Penguin cover of Carter's *Heroes and Villains* by James Marsh. Shakespeare juxtaposes these same contrasting images of love and evil in *Macbeth* 1, 5, 65-66: "look like th' innocent flower,/But be the serpent under't". Just as Marianne exercises the destructive Medusan evil eye, so Sula's odd birthmark stares out from above her eye with its similarly demonic and alluring power. She woos Jude with her defiantly insouciant attitude to his problems, stating that all the world is after "a nigger's privates" (103). While dying, she suggests that Nel is wrong to stigmatize her, claiming to



be better. Sula knows that “[y]ou don’t get nothing for being good to somebody” (144-5). She anticipates an outrageous carnival when all the world will come to love and vindicate her as every possible expectation is reversed.

Meanwhile Nel as the wronged wife rejecting Sula turns her eyes from the ball of fur which persistently sticks in the corner of her sight. She is sucked up as a spider clinging onto her own spittle of rights against the victimizing snake’s breath below, her child love dried out like syrup and her thighs left empty. She only finally comes to understand her own imperfections and her friend’s value at the very end, as the ball of fur bursts epiphanously into dandelion spores. Sula lives with her own dangerously experimental life without heeding the worth of others, freely falling as the snake beneath in her “surrender to the downward flight” (120), cre(m)ating herself defiantly even to death rather than allowing Eva to cre(m)ate her. She smiles while planning to share her painless release into death with Nel, while Nel is finally left with a reverberating lonely cry of longing for her old friend: “girl, girl, girlgirlgirl” (174).

*Heroes and Villains* is narrated through the cold eyes of Mari/anne, whose name combines that of Jesus’ mother Mary, also called the second Eve, as well as Mary’s mother Anne. Thus combined, this becomes the name of the allegorical figure of the French Republic, Marianne, sculpted by Aimé Dalou and “representative of Liberty” in post-revolutionary France (Warner 1985, 27). While Marianne takes her wedding dress from its “Pandora box”, she recalls the French Revolution “where they had briefly worshipped the goddess Reason” (1969, 68). After the death of her father, Marianne cuts off her hair in an attempt at uglification and then proceeds to burn his books. Refusing marriage within the community since it would offer her no significant role, she risks leaving with Jewel, but defiantly resists him to the end. The novel opens with the frozen clock of civilization in the hands of Marianne’s professor father. This symbol recurs at the end as a clock on the breast of an ecstatically erotic female plaster figure rising out of the sea next to a lighthouse resembling the tower Marianne had left long before. She is reminded by these symbols to “abhor shipwreck [...] go in fear of unreason. Use your wits” (139) just before her ultimate struggle with Jewel, and however isolated, she maintains her reasoning powers against Jewel throughout.

This novel is saturated with the founding myth of Adam and Eve’s fall, which Donally tattooed onto Jewel’s back and from which the snake’s tongue flickers throughout, as the Barbarians re-live the fall of humanity after atomic destruction. Marianne and Jewel are a lost Adam and Eve or Lilith; he is also an illiterate Yahoo, while Marianne is more Laputian in her savagery, as well as being an untouchable angel or demon with Medusan power in her evil eye. A snake bite bloodily anticipates her rape, but she survives both initiations and learns serpent wisdom, directing Jewel as the snake’s tongue on his back flickers through the “perfect circle” of the uroborus (30) as he finally accepts “the tattooed apple” from her (146). Jewel struggles against her superior intelligence, while himself at home in his own tribe, submerged as prince of darkness in a murky night of ignorance, as she flexes her Lilith muscles in calling on the name of her own goddess of the republic, Reason.

Marianne is called Lilith while indulging in erotic tenderness towards Jewel, describing her demon lover as “the furious invention of my virgin nights” (137). He suggests that she embrace her destiny with style and pretend to be “Eve at the end of the world”; as Day suggests, “at the end of the patriarchal world” (54). Donally prefers the name Lilith for her. When Jewel quibbles whether it may imply a negative heritage, they agree that she is at least a little Lilith (1969, 124). Feistily defiant, she is deeply concerned for her own and her unborn child’s future, sunk in the tribe’s abject poverty-stricken

conditions. However, Jewel remains in the grip of a death-wish and obsession that she will cause his death, and already coughing blood, he strips himself of his jewelled talismans before attempting to drown himself after a lion yawns over him. He is furious when she insists on rescuing and reviving him by lying on top of him as the Lilith she is, hitting her with fury at her appropriation of his life. His brothers believe she has bewitched and unmanned him as they try to make him resist her influence. They fight over his decision first to reject Donally and then foolishly to attempt his old mentor's rescue. She threatens to leave Jewel while returning his savage blows, telling him that his mask has slipped so far she can no longer respect him, and urging him to survive in order to father his own child. He leaves nonetheless, after nihilistically hoping the brothers will "all together make a beautiful dive into nothing" (144). She scorns his senseless walking into his own death trap, bowed under both his death wish and her verbal curse, reiterating his persistent "fatal, fear of death" through her (29). She demonstrates her power over him by capriciously recalling him only to callously assert her lack of affection for the brother whom he had killed and long since replaced in her mind in an incestuous interchangeability. As Day states, "in Marianne's case reason may order, like an iron rod, the inchoate energies of the id, while the energies of the id—the energies of the 'tiger lady'—may enrich reason" (53), combining both her erotic and cerebral Lilith power. As husband and wife circle each other suspiciously from their alien worlds, she proves her ruthlessness to the tribe while outflanking him at every step. He dies, as Gerardine Meaney implies, as "Messiah, Arthur or hero, [his] blood sacrifice demanded by the Mother Goddess and the socio-symbolic contract" (100). Upon his death she inherits his mantle, using the tribe's fear and her own powers of self-assertion. Thus with Jewel's death the young Marianne comes into her own power, affirming she will be Queen, "tiger lady and rule them with a rod of iron" (1969, 150); MacDonald's *Lilith* teams Lilith with a spotted leopard; big cats frequently accompany goddesses. With the words "No more" uttered by Donally's son at the end of the novel, a reverberating silence similar to that at the end of *Hamlet* descends. As their prince, Jewel, dies, Marianne at the tender age of sixteen assumes his rule. This defiant Lilith exercises her witchy, snakelike force against her oppressors as she "absolutely refused to be party to the contract and whom the Law of the Father turned into a most Medusa-like monster instead. Lilith with a little knowledge would be a dangerous woman indeed" (Meaney 120). Marianne as Lilith is an early exemplar of Carter's various super women bestriding their small worlds defiantly.

The insubordinate force of the irresistible demon or goddess Lilith clearly lives on in these works of Carter and Morrison. This sexually independent woman who leapt from the hand of God in Her image fully formed is ancient proof of the strength of women despite her restricted circumstances. She is defiantly indifferent to divine or male requests of her, whether concerning her freedom, behaviour, or her sexual position. She obdurately forges her personality against the expectations of those around her, using all her resources in tempting others while realizing her own desires, whether calling on the name of God or sweeping aside the rights or the very lives of those around her. She resists the restraints of relationship and community, and even causes the death of children. Not a comfortable woman to live with, these ultimate actions may need to be called on in extremity, since such outrageous women blaze open a trail for those who are to follow.

## Works Cited

- Baring, Anne and Jules Cashford. *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*. London: Arkana, 1991.
- Bristow, Joseph and Trev Lynn Broughton. eds. *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*. London and New York: Longman, 1997.
- Bryant, Cedric Gael. "The Orderliness of Disorder: Madness and Evil in Toni Morrison's *Sula*". *Black American Literature Forum* 24. 4. Women Writers Issue. (Winter, 1990): 731-745.
- Byatt, A. S. *Possession: A Romance*. London: Vintage, 1990.
- Carter, Angela. *Heroes and Villains*. London: Penguin, 1969.
- . *The Passion of New Eve*. London: Virago, 1977.
- . *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. London: Virago, 1979.
- Collon, Dominique. *The Queen of the Night*. London: The British Museum P, 2005.
- Cornell, Doretta. "Mother of All the Living: Reinterpretations of Eve in Contemporary Literature". *Crosscurrents* 54. 4 (Winter 2004): 1-10.
- Davis, Cynthia A. "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction". *Contemporary Literature* XXIII. 3. (1982): 323-42.
- Day, Aidan. *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998.
- DeShazer, Mary K, Hélène Cixous. ed. "The Laugh of the Medusa". in *Longman's Anthology of Women's Literature*. New York: Longman, 2001. 391-405.
- Dexter, Miriam Robbins. *Whence the Goddesses: A Source Book*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1990.
- Fulmer, Jacqueline. *Folk Women and Indirection in Morrison, Ni Dhuibhne, Hurston, and Lavin*. Aldershot: Aldershot, 2007.
- Gamble, Sarah. *Angela Carter: Writing from the Front Line*. Edinburgh: Edingburgh UP, 1997.
- Gamble, Sarah. ed. *The Fiction of Angela Carter: A reader's guide to essential criticism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2001.
- Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a woman? black women and feminism*. Boston MA: South End P, 1981.
- Hunt, Patricia. "War and Peace: Transfigured Categories and the Politics of *Sula*". *African American Review* 27.3. Women's Culture Issue (Autumn, 1993): 443-459.
- Irigaray, Luce. *The Irigaray Reader*. Margaret Whitford. ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Johnson, Barbara. *Feminist Difference in Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race and Gender*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- MacDonald, George, 1895. *Lilith*. Intro. C. S. Lewis, 1946. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000.
- Matus, Jill. *Contemporary World Writers*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998.
- Meaney, Gerardine. *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. London: Vintage, 1973, 2004.
- . *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2008.
- Munro, Lynn, C. "The Tattooed Heart and the Serpentine Eye: Morrison's choice of an Epigraph for *Sula*". *African American Review* 18.4 (Winter, 1984): 150-54.
- Patai, Raphael. *The Hebrew Goddess*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990.
- Plaskow, Judith. *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003*. Boston: Beacon P, 2005.

- Rigney, Barbara Hill. *Lilith's Daughters: Women and Religion in Contemporary Fiction*. Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1982.
- Seidel, Kathryn Lee. "The Lilith Figure in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*". [Weberstudies.weber.edu/archive/](http://Weberstudies.weber.edu/archive/): 1-6.
- Stave, Shirley A. "Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Vindication of Lilith". *South Atlantic Review* 58. 1 (Jan, 1993): 49-66.
- Stuckrad, Kocku von. "Constructing Femininity: the Lilith Case". *Citeseer* (1999): 1-14.
- Taylor-Guthrie, Danielle. ed. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994.
- Tucker, Lindsey. ed. "Angela Carter, Notes from the Front Line" in *Critical Essays on Angela Carter*. London: Prentice Hall International, 1998.
- Warner, Marina. *Monuments and Maidens: the Allegory of the Female Form*. London: Vintage, 1985.
- . *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*. London: Vintage, 1994.
- Weever, Jacqueline de. *Mythmaking and Metaphor in Black Women's Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1991.
- Wisker, Gina, ed. *It's My Party: Reading Twentieth-century Womenssexual's Writing*. London: Pluto P, 1994.



## **Towards An Anodynic Concept of Death: A Comparative Study of a Selection of English & Arabic Poetry**

**Mohamad Almostafa & Ahmad Abu Baker**

**Abstract:** This study examines the phenomenon of 'Death' in a sample of English and Arabic poetry in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The poets in question present mostly a positive view of death that helps them come to terms with it by neutralizing its fears. In the sample of poems, death is viewed as a gateway to a better life in the hereafter and as a welcomed visitor that will put an end to one's miseries in this life. In light of such view, death loses its fearful image and its destructive power.

**Keywords:** *Thanatos, Thanatophobia*, death, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century English and Sufi Arabic Poetry

Although death is typically considered an anxious concern that triggers fear of terminating one's aspirations, dreams, hopes, and, of course, life, English and Arabic poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth century era about death vividly evokes an anodyne philosophy. The poets of this period by and large dramatize death to be integrated with peace, serenity, release, and, significantly, everlasting life. Many of them conceptualize death, in Françoise Dastur's terms, as "a passage rather than an end, as is suggested by the French term *trepas*, which means passing away [...], and by the term 'decease,' which conveys the idea of departure and separation" (Dastur 10). Death is viewed as a caesura between this life and the hereafter, a subject of an appealing spiritual transformation and an object of literary conquerability and challenge.

The importance of examining such an attitude towards death in these particular sixteenth and seventeenth century poets, although well recognized and discussed by theologians as far as the English poets are concerned, has gone as far as the Arabic poets are concerned insufficiently noticed in the literature of this era. Then, our aims in this article are, first, to examine the various attitudes and positions prominent to English and Arab sixteenth and seventeenth century poets adapted to debating and conceptualizing death; and, second, to offer an explanation of how and why these literary facts were so. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, such an analysis of the phenomenon of death in English poetry in relation to Arabic poetry has not been attempted before now—a fact that makes our particular examination a valuable contribution to the literature discussing death.

Perhaps John Donne's Holy Sonnet VI, a meditation on the transitory break between the body and soul, is a good example of the nature of Death. Donne dramatizes his emotional interaction with the imaginary event of death associated with sanctity. Donne's persona reflects on his anxiety of death by recognizing his vulnerability before it. The persona construes death as an inescapable divine judgment that is carried out by an insatiable and devouring monster: "[H]ere heavens appoint. [...] my minutes latest point" (1-4, Dwivedi 98). According to Donne, the Lord's ordaining of death, albeit conducted by a formidable or undesirable agent, is to be rejoiced. Describing death as a heavenly ordeal is precisely intended to display the good end behind this judgment—a point that crystallizes an evolutionary sanctifying attitude towards death.

Donne's intellectual response to social tradition substantiates a sort of break and change. R. G. Cox (1956) maintains the presence of a revolutionary trend in Donne's mental structure and poetry: "Donne chose to do something different from his predecessors and contemporaries" (98). In this context, the poem emphatically functions as a tranquilizing and oppositional antithesis of the dominant pessimistic and unsettling attitude toward death; especially after the outbreak of the Great Plague, which killed an estimated 100,000 people of London's population, and which, according to Helen Wilcox, was regarded by "[s]cientists and theologians, as well as poets" as a sign of "the end of the world" (3). The poem allows for an enactment of a tranquil and an assuaging vision of the dead's departure. Donne's poem lessens people's anxiety about this epidemic by reminding them of the divine wisdom behind death.

Further, Donne maintains, "[a]nd gluttonous Death will instantly unjoynt/My body and soul" (5-6, Dwivedi 98). Death separates the body from the soul, thereby resolving the internal war between the body (desires of the flesh) and the soul (desires of the spirit) and reaching a state of internal peace since the mind and the heart can finally live in harmony. This internal war is best evident in Andrew Marvell's "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body". The body and the soul are depicted as a plaintiff and a defendant in a court. The soul complains of being imprisoned inside the body and of being distracted by the external senses of the body (eyes, ears) from fulfilling its spiritual needs. The soul also complains of being "[t]ortured, besides each other part,/In a vain head and double heart" (9-10, Abrams 1370).<sup>1</sup>

To Donne, Death is a sacred journey leading to the Lord's grace of purification. It is a "pilgrimage" (2, Dwivedi 98), the transcendental justification to redeem the deceased of his sins:

Then, as my soule to heaven her first seat takes flight,  
And earth-borne body in the earth shall dwell,  
So fall my sinnes, that all may have their right  
To where they're bred and would presse me to hell. (9-12, Dwivedi 98)

This purification-based vision of death, the embodiment of the traditional Christian idea that the body is the prison of the soul, permeates Donne's poetry. Abram Steen, for example, comments, "[i]n his response to death, then, Donne appears to have largely conformed to the religious and literary orthodoxies of his day" (Steen 95). The social tradition of viewing death at Donne's time was negative; whereas the religious view was positive.

Donne's perception of death bears remarkable features of the Christian tradition as evident in "Of the Progress of the Soul", and it praises death as a spiritual emancipation from the corruption of the body. This elegy on the death of his patron's daughter, Elizabeth Drury, despite revealing Donne's grief over her loss, beautifies death and collectively celebrates its purifying end. Death, here, forges an access to redemption from sins and a return to purity. Hence, Donne's Drury is enabled to dust off the garment of her legacy of sins:

---

<sup>1</sup> The internal war between the body and the soul appears in Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man*, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle "Of the Nature and State of Man With Respect to Himself, as an Individual". He depicts man as being always "in doubt his mind or body to prefer" (9), and of being a "[c]haos of thought and passion, all confused" (13, Abrams 2250). Death puts an end to the internal war between the body and the soul which Pope, Marvell and Donne refer to.

Think Satan's sergeants round about thee be,  
 And think that but for legacies they thrust;  
 Give one thy pride, to'another give thy lust;  
 Give them those sins which they gave thee before. (102-05, Dwivedi 114)

Donne authenticates his view of Drury's emancipation from sins via death on a Christian basis, thereby substantiating the notion of the impact of religion (Christianity in Donne's case) on eliminating apprehension, fear, and anxiety of death from the individual's self. By all means, Christianity has removed the severe fear of death by engraving the sublime divine end of this inevitable event for the devoted.

The Christian theology, as Daniel Migliore puts it, depicts death as "the inescapable reminder of God's judgement on sin that has been freely borne by Christ for us all [at] the moment of reception into the *gracious* hands of God" (Migliore 159) (emphasis mine). Identification of God with grace, His sacrificial love of Christ for humankind's salvation, and the assured hope of the break of sin by death for an everlasting companionship with God are the general core determiners of understanding the Christian view of death, and the divine plan for its occurrence. Donne, to a great extent, remains such an accomplished perpetuator of this Christian philosophy of death in "Of the Progress of the Soul".

The aforementioned Christian view constitutes Donne's fundamental stance of this event, and gives rise to Donne's certain calmness regarding the fate to be faced by Drury, whose redemption is founded on the twin Biblical bases of "sacrifice" and "love": God, out of love, has enacted Christ to sacrifice himself for the salvation of humankind. All that Drury, accordingly, needs to secure her position of purity after death is to "trust th' immaculate blood to wash [her] score" (106, Dwivedi 114). This religious understanding of Drury's departure helps Donne envision her death with contentment and alleviates his private anxieties towards her fate.

Since the divine end of death entails purification, the persona rejoices in "shrouding" Drury's body in "white innocence" (113-4, 114), and regards her death a catalyst for her dear people who "weepe" since "they goe not yet thy way"(107-8, 114), and hence, had not gone through her purifying experience yet. In fact, Donne's exaltation of envisioning death as emancipation is not even thwarted by the horror images of rotteness, and of the "insensibly" devouring "wormes" (118, 114) that haunt Donne's fancy while contemplating the damage they will do to Drury's "so even"(123, Dwivedi 115) body. He abruptly mentions these images, and effectively compares them to the precious gains of the soul, a technique he follows, in Ramie Targoff's terms, "to vanquish any attachment to the earth" (Targoff 1504). Donne's rejoicing in the gains of the soul upon death is due to his attachment to the Protestant tradition, wherein the joys of the soul by death are uncontested and regarded as the pivotal point in this sect's discourse about death.

To Targoff, "[t]he tragedy for the soul of separating from the body does not conform to any standard account of death in English Protestantism, whose official liturgy celebrates with no ambivalence the ascent of the soul" (Targoff 1504). As such, horror evoked by the chilling images of the grave is replaced by hope and exaltation by what the soul gains by death. The swift grisly images of the decomposition of Drury's body are contrasted with and followed by the images of her soul's comfort, peace, freedom, and triumph. When the harsh rotteness of Drury's body is described, it is immediately neutralised by the blessed peace the soul enjoys after death. The verses "Thinke that thy body rots and (if so low,/Thy soul exalted so, thy thoughts can go)" (115-16, Dwivedi 114) form an initiative proposition of renouncing/accepting fear pertinent to the decomposition of Drury's dead body in return for the rewards awaiting her soul.



Following these lines, a strong sense of the anticipated hope of death, indeed, surges in the depth of the persona that renders these macabre images a mere phantom fear that conceals the rewards awaiting Drury's purified soul. Since Drury's soul leaves the body to "sleepe a Saint Lucies night" (120, 115), to dwell in a state of absolute serenity, where "Fear [...] Art [...] So far were all removed/[...] [and] no one presumes/To govern, or to triumph on the rest" (125-29, 115); hence, the dissolution of Drury's body must be considered "cheerfully" (121, 115).

Donne's interest in devoting a large portion of his poem to a ceremonious illustration of the soul's gains is a result of his traditional religious belief in the superiority of the soul to the body, and the inconsequentiality of the body, even though his perspective of this issue, according to Blain Greteman, "never became a fixed and consistent position". To Greteman, "Donne's poems try out the relationship from every angle, *often arguing for the unequivocal superiority of the soul and its independence from the physical*" Greteman 32) (emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup>

Donne's "Of the Progress of the Soul" authenticates the soul's joyful release and autonomy from a body that is mortal, vulnerable to the obstacle of the soul's growth to perfection, and is a corruption that stains the pure soul with the guilt of Original Sin. To Donne, the flesh is a reprehensible "sinke" (158, Dwivedi 115) that is depicted as an "obnoxious [...] small lump of flesh [...] [that] could [i]nfect [us] with Original Sin" (159-67, 115), and yet it is the pain-producing "poor prison [...] poor Inn [...] that usurped or threatened with the rage/Of sicknesses, or their true mother, Age" (172-77, 116). Hence, death, here, is the appealing centripetal force to the soul's comfort and liberty from such agonies and corruptions of the vulnerable limits of body: "But thinke that Death hath now enfranchised thee" (178, 116). Death becomes an obligation or a prerequisite for the soul's rebirth to heavenly delights. "Thinke thy shell broke, think thy soule hatched but now" (184, 115). This rebirth becomes only possible when the soul breaks free from the body.

Donne elevates death to the status of equating it to God's grace in The Bible: "For when our soule enjoyes this her third birth,/(Creation gave her one, a second, grace)" (114-15, Dwivedi 114). This sublimated equation enables the soul's perfect growth, preparing it for experiencing the ideal heavenly joys in the Kingdom. As Barbra Lewalski notes, Donne's poem represents "a sequence of topics concerning the soul's benefits by death, ordered as a logical progression according to an ascending order" (Lewalski 300).

Indeed, Drury's soul should "Returne not [...] from this extasie" (222, Dwivedi 120), but rather is urged to continue her joyful ascension to Heaven, to listen to the absolute harmonious "Angels songs" (241: 120); and to sit with Jesus "Christ" (245: 120), and with virgins and to enjoy "all royalties which any state employ'ed" (259: 120). Thus, death empowers the soul to an eternity of happiness. The soul does not need the functions of the body to enjoy the delights of heaven. Drury's soul has a "new eare" so that it savors "the Angel's songs" (240-41, Dwivedi 120). The speaker is confident that the soul is able to enjoy "[a]ll [heavenly] royalties" (258-59, 120).

---

<sup>2</sup>This idea is evident, for instance, in Edward Taylor's "Meditation 8 (First Series)" published in *Preparatory Meditations*. In "Meditation 8", Taylor describes how the "bird of paradise" (7) became imprisoned in human body "a corpse" (8) depicted as a "wicker cage" (8) as a result of having "pecked the fruit forbade" (9). Having violated the covenant of works, the soul was driven out of paradise. Consequently, it "lost its golden dayes" (10) and "fell into Celestial Famine sore" (11, Perkins 157). The soul is tormented as a result of the Original Sin and is made to suffer by losing its heavenly food and its happy days in heaven.

Donne's belief in the soul's independence invokes Aristotle's belief that the soul is what gives the body the power of sensation and life to perform its functions. Aristotle states, "[t]he soul is the first grade of actuality of a natural body [...] [I]t is the essential whatness' of a body" (McKeon 172). Presumed as the actual essence of the body, the soul in Donne does not lose the body-animating attributes to act pleasurably after death. Aristotle's conceptualization of the soul is exactly what Donne draws on in his definition of the soul in "Satire III". He states, it is "thy fair goodly soul, which doth/Give this flesh power to taste joy" (41-2, Appelbraum 46).

Donne demonstrates a normalized and challenging attitude towards death and devotes a large scope of his writings for this purpose. Steen highlights the prominent defying stance of death that haunts Donne's poetry. To Steen, "death is rarely [...] a terminal or hopeless condition". Donne "treats death as a more manageable challenge, and his speakers are surprisingly well trained and well equipped for it" (Steen 105). "Death Be Not Proud", for example, neutralizes the long-established conquering image of death and depicts it as weakness and incapacity. Death is not really "[m]ighty and dreadful" (2, Dwivedi 98) but rather a "slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men" (9: 99). For Donne, death is a paradoxical image/event; the appearance of which does not signify its actuality. Donne attempts to deflect death's image of "pride" by highlighting death's submissiveness in all its operations.

Donne pushes his assault on Death's pride forward as he chastises the passive mechanisms of its circumstances. Donne mars death's pride by plunging it into a vortex of perniciousness and repugnance. Death occurs in company with "poyson, warre, and sicknesse" (11, Dwivedi 99). Donne further strips death off pride by dismantling the assumption that it really extinguishes life, displaying the action of death as akin to non-action: "For, those, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow. / Die not"(3-4: 98-9). Donne views resurrection as the inaction of death: "From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,/Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow/[...] One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally" (5-13: 99). Describing death as "sleep" and "rest" presents it as a temporary inaction of body functions until its resurrection and/or a prelude to its occurrence. Such imagery of death evokes the senses of tranquility and serenity in the poet's mind.

Apparently, death, as a phenomenon, to English poets generates a positive agreeable feeling; and many of them, like George Herbert for instance, gaily eulogize death. Herbert's inclination for death is associated with acute optimism and fair representation. To Virginia Brackett, "George Herbert demystifies man's mortality by converting death's threat into a promise [...] [M]an needs not fear his mortality but should embrace [it] as not only a necessary, but a welcome, transformation" (Brackett 396). As such, Herbert stands unique in remarkably inscribing the notion of 'the ardent love for death'.

Herbert appears to be attracted to death, blending his thoughts about it with a religious consciousness that decentralizes the traditional negative perception of death as a gruesome being or an extinction event. Herbert's "A Dialogue-Anthem", for example, dramatizes death's lack of supremacy, and dwells on the lightheartedness with which one approaches it. The rhetorical questions at the start of the poem are a flagrant refusal to the long established image of death's power: "ALAS, poor death! Where is thy glory!/Where is thy famous force, thy ancient / sting" (1-3, Drudentum 178).

Being drawn to the disempowering actuality that underestimates the magnificence of death, Herbert does not show any indecision to approach it without fear/tension. Herbert exacts a frank request of death: "Spare not, do thy worst./I shall be one day better than before" (10-11, Drudentum 178). At this point, he gains the religious comprehension of the

dual nature of death needed to extricate himself from its traditional apprehension as a finality. For him, one needs to die in order to acquire a better eternal life. Death is the indissoluble link between transience and eternity. The poem's conclusion emphasizes this relationship by addressing death: "Thou so much worse, that thou shalt be no more" (12, 178). In effect, death shall die.

Further, in "Life", Herbert expresses a quiet gratification towards death. The poem suggests that despite Herbert's awareness of the shortness of his life and the inevitability of death, his attitude towards death certainly remains tension-free. The poem reflects death with mild metaphors, and endows them with spiritual meaning that ultimately leads to an acceptance of death with grace. Herbert compares the swift decay of the mild, sweet-smelling "posie" (1, Lall 129) to the brevity of his life: "But time did beckon to the flowers, and they/By noon [...] wither'd in my hand/[...] Making my minde to smell my fatal day" (6-11, 129). The poet receives the reminder of death in a sweet manner, regarding it as a gentle *memento mori*. He takes "without more thinking [...] Times gentle admonition" that conveyed "so sweetly deaths sad taste" (8-9, Lall 129).

The identification with flowers is highly religious. It is noted on the beautiful and useful functions these flowers serve alike, alive or dead. It specifically exemplifies man's need to adopt this perspective so that both his life and death become attractively valuable matters. Alive, these flowers serve as a source of sweet fragrances and decoration; dead, they are used as medicine for treating diseases: "while ye liv'd, for smell or ornament./And after death for cures" (13-15, 129). For Herbert, like flowers, man's life should be dedicated to valuable and useful deeds, and since he is certain that he follows the flowers' example, he sees his imminent death a welcomed event to be embraced without grief.

Herbert concludes, "I follow straight without complaints or grief./Since if my scent be good, I care not if/It be as short as yours" (17-19: 130). Herbert accepts the brevity of his life as long as he can have it exude goodness exactly as flowers produce sweet scents. Additionally, Herbert's "Death" moves from the traditional repugnant image of death as "an uncouth hideous thing" (1 Lall 202), or a reduction of the body to "dust, and bones to sticks" (8: 202), to an image of death as "fair", "graceful" (15), "good" (16), "gay", and "glad" (17; 202)—a depiction that makes it much requested and longed for. To him, this euphoric attitude towards death is an act of faith.

There is a manifest correspondence between Herbert's euphoria about death and his love for Jesus Christ. Herbert is enamored of death because of the beauty that is imparted on it by Christ's blood, thereby making it a desired identification. Herbert argues: "[S]ince our Saviour's death did put some bloud/Into thy face/Thou art grown fair and full of grace,/much in request, much sought for" (13-15, Lall, 202). Jesus' blood spatter represents baptism leading to spiritual transformation and communion with Christ. As a consequence, it leads also to the loss of the fear of death as a process of spiritual transformation or initiation triggered by the blood of Jesus, and accompanied by *thanatos* to join Jesus in Heaven.

Herbert's faith-oriented enamor of death is evident in his belief in Christ's Resurrection, which is seen as a pledge to all Christians' resurrection on The End of Days (The Eschaton). The fifth stanza offers a buoyant expectation of a renewed life on that day:

For we do now behold thee gay and glad,  
A sat dooms-day  
When souls shall wear their new aray,  
And all thy bones with beautie shall be clad. (17-20, Lall, 202)

The foundation Herbert posits for this positive Resurrection is Christ's Death and the fortune his Resurrection offers to human beings.

The aforementioned lines effectively recapitulate the emergent hope secured for the dead by Christ's Crucifixion, and Resurrection starting "But since Our Savior's death" (13, Lall 202). Belief in Christ's Resurrection and its religious aftermath give Herbert that sense of optimism and elation about death, which should call forth his soothing imagery of death with the poem's closure:

Therefore we can go die as sleep, and trust  
Half that we have  
Unto an honest faithful grave;  
Making our pillows either down, or dust. (21-24: 202)

Here Herbert considers death an easy experience, like sleep, and as an event to be encountered without remorse. The image of the grave as "an honest faithful" house, that keeps the dead safe till they rise on Doomsday definitely re-emphasizes the same happy attitude Herbert has held about death.<sup>3</sup>

Death, in Arabic poetry, on the other hand, has a conspicuous presence. A constellation of sixteenth and seventeenth century Arab poets express various emotional and intellectual attitudes towards this enigmatic, inevitable phenomenon. While some correlate death with negativity, for this inevitable event embodies their fears; others take a positive stance, confronting and tackling death with a sense of triumph and ease. To start with, the Sufi<sup>4</sup> poetry of Al Nabulsi (1641-1731) focuses on the unity with God as the key to achieving infinite spiritual happiness and regards "death" as the positive transformer that leads the soul to a life of eternal happiness. In his poem "Autumn Is the Other Spring", he encourages would-be Sufis to make the best of their lives before time wastes them. He enthusiastically states: "Get up for the joy of youth before old age comes dressed in sadness" (3, 1853, 177-8). Old age will only bring sadness and inevitable death; hence, one has to use well the short duration of one's life.

Al Nabulsi maintains the superiority of the soul over the body due to its divine origin. He declares in his poem "The Unity of Existence to Us Is":

He is the purity for the souls from the impurity caused by the thickness [of the body]  
Which stained the soul when it mixed with it. The soul did not know the body and it did not accept it.

---

<sup>3</sup> Herbert's positive attitude towards death invokes "The Dream of The Rood". In the poem, the persona witnesses the transformation of the Cross from being "wet and stained with the Blood outwelling" (25, Trapp 116) into "a tree of glory" (99, 117) that is "blazing in splendor" (8: 115), "beset with gems" (17: 115) and "gilded with gold" (16: 115). The death of Jesus Christ and his subsequent burial becomes the gateway to his Resurrection and Ascension into heaven. Hence, positive changes are brought to Jesus Christ through death. The suffering of the Cross and his subsequent burial similarly brings positive effects for the Cross which is resurrected like Christ through its discovery and is celebrated and decorated with gems and jewels.

<sup>4</sup> Sufism can be defined as "Islamic 'mysticism,' comprising a set of techniques by which Muslims have sought a direct personal encounter with the divine". It can also be defined as a "powerful tradition of Muslim knowledge and practice bringing proximity to or mediation with God and believed to have been handed down from the Prophet Muhammad through the saintly successors who followed him" (Green 1, 8).

Impurities [i.e., of the body such as stool, urination, etc.] prevent the worshipper from praying and achieving unity with God. One has to lift up his soul using divine sciences to achieve unity with God. (7-11, 1853, 44)

To him, the body is polluting the soul with its impurities and preventing unity with God, the source from where it originated. Further, Al Nabulsi praises the soul, which is divine. In his poem "Serve Us The Wine of Anderine", he states, "[i]t is the soul by which the dead are brought to life and they all arise in submission;/It is the ancient legacy because of which we won and which is bequeathed to us from the age of Adam by our father" (8-9, 1853, 172) Here, the soul is a trophy passed down to us by God, from whose soul, the human soul came to existence. Hence, the soul is superior to the body because of its divine origin.

Furthermore, to Al Nabulsi the presence of the soul in the body is a sin that requires repentance. In his poem "I Ask God's Forgiveness for My Secret And Public Sins" he declares, "I ask God's forgiveness from my soul which was blown by its Creator's order in its weak body" (2, 1853, 173). Again, the superiority of the soul over the body is highlighted because it was a segment blown from God's soul. The soul's superiority is also found in his poem "You Are An Imaginary Human". He claims, "You are a body from dirt, inside of which is a soul sparkling,/You in you are dense in the gentleness of the soul' sublime" (2-3: 56). Notice that the body is viewed negatively as "dirt" and "dense" whereas the soul is "sparkling" like pearls, light and "sublime" because of its divine origin to which the poet's Sufi soul yearns to unite. Clearly, the body is an impediment towards achieving ever-lasting unity with God. It contaminates the divine soul, preventing it from achieving eternal unity with God. Hence, Death is viewed positively, because it will free the soul from the body and allow it to achieve unity with God, through eternal bliss and happiness in the infiniteness of God's soul.

The unity with God becomes the key to achieving a god-like status. In his poem "Did You Forget Your Worth, Man", Al Nabulsi explains: "Suffice it that The Righteous [i.e., God] has become your hearing, your hand, your legs, and your eyes./The whole universe is your servant and you are its owner and Sultan" (3-4, 1853, 119).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in his poem "I Exist For Who Says [I]", he states, "I exist for who says [I], May Allah forbid it is I/And [I] am the Living and the Hearer [by Him], [...] And [I] am the Omniscient and the Discerning [by Him]" (1-3, 1853, 162). Being one with God, the source of everything, makes one Lord of the Universe and makes one's senses godly.

To Al Nabulsi, there is only one God. He states in his poem "Say Allah Is One":

Say, Allah is One.  
There is no one else in the universe.  
Everything is doomed  
Except God. The person who loses himself in Him  
Becomes one with God./How blessed is he who knows Him,  
How miserable who denies Him. (1-8, Al Nabulsi 241)

To him, losing the self into God's Self is the key to spiritual happiness. Indeed, to the Sufis, the unity with God generates an euphoric Nirvana state of ecstasy which he compares to a state of spiritual drunkenness as evident in his poem "Hand Me A Cup of Divine Wine", in

---

<sup>5</sup> The idea here is similar to Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendental idea, which can be found in his article entitled "Self-Reliance" that when one listens to the inner voice of God inside him, i.e. to "intuition" (Perkins 927), he achieves god-like characteristics (Perkins 930).

which he maintains, “[I]et me drink from the heavenly wine of God which is the fill of jars and cups” (1, 354).

Likewise, in Al Nabulsi’s poem “Oh How I Yearn For The Pleasure of Death When”, the poet yearns for death and considers it a pleasurable sensation, as it is the prologue to the unity between the lover and his beloved; i.e., the unity between the Soul and its Creator as revealed in the lines: “Oh How I yearn for the pleasure of Death, when/Lovers meet” (1-2, Al Nabulsi 57). To him, Death is only a “birth and pleasure” that he would “delight and have pleasure in” (3-4: 57). To him, the body was only a vessel for the soul who was “Attached to God and never losing him” (7-8: 57). Further, the poet considers death as the way to achieve “salvation/from the thickness”; i.e., the body, which “blocks” the soul from the chances of unity with God (9-10: 57). In his poem “The Loneliness of The Grave Is The Most Honorable Loneliness”, Death is a positive force and a path to getting rid of the impurities or “the dirt of tools”, as he describes them, and “habits” of the body, and wearing the “Purest Clothes”. When one “lives this life with God”, then “he truly lives with the life of God in times” (18-24, Al Nabulsi 112). Moreover, in his poem “A Branch Above Which The Moon Was Seen”, he claims: “And if you die in His love you’ll live after death the life of the happy blessed ones” (68: 167).

Similarly, the Arab poet Monjik Basha El-Yusif (1598-1669) adopts a positive optimistic view of death that is founded on Islamic thought. Mohammad Al-Zubayer argues, “[i]f Death is certainly a realistic truth, Islam came to open the door of hope large by promising resurrection of the dead, and, then, hereafter, where he/she enjoys the long-awaited prospect of joyful eternity” (Al-Zubayer 12). Allah in Islam is coupled with blessing, grace, and forgiveness. Allah is “the absolute compassionate, whose Grace”, as Al-Jibouri asserts, “encompassed everything in existence [...] His benevolence encompasses all His creation” (Al-Jibouri 124). With an absolute trust in Allah’s grace, El-Yusif positively surpasses the problematic of his inevitable impending death.

Before his death, El-Yusif recites: “And these days are but mere phases at the end of which there is heaven and hell/If fates freely run their courses, let me know: What is the use of anything that I do? And where shall I march?!/But good faith soothes my fear, and informs me that God is merciful and generous” (3-5, El-Yusif 120). Here, hope accumulates against the sense of fate, and the horror of death’s aftermath fades away. The poet’s passing confusion of the limited odds of his end—namely, hell or heaven—soon vanishes as a certain sense of God’s mercy is deeply awakened inside him. The repeated questions in the previous lines reveal his anxiety about his actions and his end, which is neutralized by a strong sense of tranquility emanating from the poet’s trust in God, the Merciful and Generous.

El-Yusif’s positive stance of death is further evident in his “A Eulogy of Abdel-Rahmman Al-Emmadi”, in which he complains of life’s hardships. He announces: “The hardships of fate fought against me till I found out the actualities of my doom/And I perceived death more pleasant than life, and the glorious days a mere darkness of nights” (5-6, El-Yusif 32). Death is a release from worldly pains. The poet’s use of the plural form to express the succession of ferocious calamities, suggested by the word “fought”, manifests the cyclically tiring effort he displays to confront them until the subsequent sense of pain imposes a gloomy vision of life on him. The overriding feelings of sadness and despair in El-Yusif make of him a person of blurred vision, unable to draw a distinction

between good and bad days.<sup>6</sup> In the sixth line quoted above, the severity of despair in himself intensifies to the desire for death, preferring it to life.

El-Yusifi's preference of death to life is an emotional issue, too. These lines, for example, unfold the poet's suffering from the agonies of love: "Death is the best gain, being kept away from home and love/The Prince of Love does not enter hell for those destined for hell do not get to see heaven" (3-4, El-Yusifi 32). The torments of longing for his beloved render death sweet. As Tala'at Abu El Azim argues, "[t]he poets who feel a discrepancy between their aspirations and reality suffer from having their emotions and their ambitious selves collide with harsh cruel reality" and are "always living tormented in their entire lives, thus seeking salvation through death" (74). In addition, El-Yusifi tends to seek refuge into what is irrational and illogical, which results in an individualistic self-styled contemplation that leads to a comforting meaning of the sense of life after death. To him, the torments of love in this life are a protection from hellfire.

Nevertheless, *thanatophobia* or *thanatos* as an emotional situation is a long established phenomenon in Arabic poetry. As Abu El-Azim suggests, the experience of love, which is usually correlated with tension occasioned by a denial of love or a failure of reunion with the beloved, entails in some poets a desire for death as a way to escape the agonies of love; or it entails a terror of untimely death before they quench their thirst for love. Being in love torments the poet with the feelings of being and termination, a desire for love fulfillment and a resentment or failure/rejection of love, and makes of him/her sensitive to time (Abu El-Azim 74).

Accordingly, in the poem "Who Can Help the Ardent Lover", by Al-Demashgi Al-Kewani (n.d.–1759), the anxiety of death permeates the entire poem. The poet feels pain and terror as he recognizes that death approaches him, threatening his reunion with the beloved; he therefore explodes with feelings of hope to meet the beloved before death,

Who can help the ardent lover, who goes mad for the beloved's soft, well-formed body?

Who can help an expatriate who wails as pigeons' weeps of sorrow?

[...]

I am longing to Eden gardens in Damascus

In Jol'ag El-Feha I have a darling, whose beauty far surpasses the charm of the full moon

From her cheeks, water of comfort flows and in her mouth teeth glitter like hailstones

The signs of flame-like passions show whenever she smiles and speaks

And they are on the increase just as ailment in my ill body multiplies

Would God I had met her before death as a specter in sleep. (1-9, Al-Kewani 100-101)

---

<sup>6</sup> In fact, El-Yusifi lived a miserable life; financially, he was broke after losing his father's properties, and, socially, he lived like an outcast as his former friends, whom he was endearing in the glorious days, rejected him. Then he had to go into what was called back then "Roman Lands" in an unsuccessful attempt to sustain his family, only to return later to receive the news of the death of his eldest son, Ahmad, and spend his last days in isolation and poverty. Omar Mossa, a historian and a critic, documents El-Yusifi's suffering: "El-Yusifi did not find rest but in sleep as his awakening was misery, loneliness, and destitution" (Mossa 211). As such, death, for El-Yusifi, becomes a salvation.

Here, it seems that the poet's sense of life and thanatophobia are closely connected with the beloved. Al-Kewani, for example, uses his beloved as a means to express his craving and desire for life. His yearning for Edenic gardens, especially "Jol'ag El-Feha" (i.e., the beloved's dwelling in Damascus), is a sign of the lost pleasant life away from the beloved, which he misses. Also, the "water of comfort" on the beloved's cheek emblematically reflects water as a symbol of life and restoration, emphasizing how his desire for what is related to life is conditioned by the presence of his beloved.

Simultaneously, the poet's separation from his beloved engenders a sense of death. The recollection of the past life with the beloved invokes fear of death before their reunion. The element of death, suggested by the reference to the wailing pigeons (2, Al-Kewani 100), is a sign of the growth of this fear in the poet's self. Due to his sense of the emptiness of love, being away from the beloved, Al-Kewani cannot see nature in its normal state; he projects his own wails and the painful sense of death on pigeons' cooing, which he perceives as weeping. To him, death is a threat to his reunion with the beloved, as evident in his wish to have "met her before death"; yet the phrase "a specter in sleep" (9: 101), suggests the impossibility of meeting his beloved in actual life. Thus, the poet painfully restricts his wish to a dream through which the beloved shows up as a phantom for him, thereby intensifying his apprehension of death.

In fact, Al-Kewani's position of death associated with love is inconsistent. If the anxiety of death results from the fear of failure being in reunion with the beloved in "Who Can Help the Ardent Lover", he in other poems, like the poems of El-Yusifî, seeks death as salvation from the agonies of love. In "Oh Resident of My Heart You Owned It Though I Had No Control Over It", he associates *thanatos* with frustrated love. Here, the poet is overwhelmed by a terrible sense of despair and pain due to his beloved's harshness and rejection. He feels tormented by the fire of love, and sheds tears: "Do not you see, she unjustly inflames me with the fire of love to drown me in the flood of lamenting tears spilling from my eyes!/I sacrifice myself to you of whom I make a complaint in spite of my knowledge of your harshness and cruelty" (13-14, Al-Kewani 38). Then, the poet feels his beloved's rejection and cruelty, a pain he cannot bear, and, hence, death becomes an escape from his sufferings, "Since it is inevitable to die for this love, O God, gently take my soul out of my body" (15, 38). The poet's self is filled, out of frustrated love, with confidence in rest through death. It is noticeable here that the poet's *thanatos* is enacted by his thirst for love. The sense of love is an essential part meme of a positivist psychology. As Tala'at Abu El Azim argues, "[f]eeling in love fosters the individual's psyche. When the poet loses his beloved and feels the impossibility of quenching his aching thirst for love, his/her spiritual and emotional entity is shaken. He feels deep grief and strong disappointment to see the only cure for such pain exists through death" (183).

In fact, the Poet Al-Kewani lived his life scared, worried, and emotionally unstable because of his obsession with death. Sometimes the level of his pain is very high and consequently prompts either a desire for death or a fear of it; and at other times, Al-Kewani revolts against the norms of life, and is enflamed with anger at the injustice of God and Fate that determined him to live as a wretched wanderer. When senses of exile, homesickness, and longing for the beloved prevail over him in "Thunder Drove Away Rain Clouds", Al-Kewani grows to be dissatisfied with his fate, and protests: "I am faithful to her, I am longing for her pleasant neighborhood, I am thirsty for her love/I did not leave her by choice but by fate, and fate is the most tyrannical commander" (10-11, 174). These lines feature marks of psychological revolution against God in Al-Kewani. Opposed to Islamic



principles, he identifies fate with a derogatory epithet, calling it “the most tyrannical commander”. This statement needs to be interpreted as a break with Islamic decrees.<sup>7</sup>

This theme of opposition to Divine injustice runs throughout the poem. The lines, “Fate wronged me once it took me a target of its arrows/Expulsion of free men is nothing but shame on countries and days” (12-13, Al-Kewani 174), come to emphasize the permanence of the revolutionary wave in the poet’s self. Al-Kewani sees that fate’s calamities (i.e., God’s) were so unfairly patterned that he perceives himself as a mere target of their ferocious “arrows”. Al-Kewani’s conceptualization of fate acquires the quality of violence. The revolutionary tone returns when the poet realizes the utter degradation and shame in which he has fallen because of the injustice of fate, and then embarks on disgracing days that forced him to leave home for his freedom of thought. Such a fiery tone remains evident in expressing his disapproval of the vicissitudes of fate and ends with the poem’s final line: “O, my life, I see you a mere disgrace with remoteness and exile. Go away peacefully” (18, 174). With a desire for death and a sense of dignity against the power of fate, Al-Kewani imbues his attitude towards death with a dignified defiance. The imperative verb “Go away” expresses his *thanatos* defiantly. He neither minds nor fears death. Rather he seems to be willing to face it with dignity; especially after he recognizes that fate and its enactment of misfortunes are not merely unfair, but also disgraceful.

Similarly, the poet Fatah Allah Ibn Nahhas (n.d.–1642) in his rejection of Death and the blows of destiny reveals a defiant attitude. He makes of his will power and his individual achievements an existentialist formula in his defiance and struggle against destiny and death. He believes that by writing about his achievements in his poetry, he immortalizes them and is thus able to fight against destiny. His poem, “Let Your Heart Relax, Oh Free Man” is a mutiny against destiny and its catastrophes. Ibn Nahas defiantly faces destiny. He maintains,

O Destiny, a person of my caliber is never short of arrows of glory  
I don’t care if I was shot at and my womenfolk were cursed by anyone  
The sword is effective against the vulnerable and becomes blunt of striking with a  
solid  
And the eye bleeds because of flies and even the lions fail to keep the flies away.  
(8-11, Ibn Nahas 64)

The defiance is revealed by the vocative particle with which the poet addresses Destiny and challenges him to break his will of achieving glory. To him, destiny is weak and incapable of shaking his well-fortified achievements.

The poet’s success in realizing these achievements exceed the natural span of time. He compares his achievements with the “arrow” suggesting their speed. The ninth line is a psychological representation of the poet’s fight against the forces of destiny; i.e., the wicked people, who try to defame his womenfolk. These wicked people are obedient tools in the hands of destiny, and the line “I don’t care if I was shot at and my womenfolk were cursed by anyone” reveals the poet’s fortitude and resilience, which frustrates the attempts of others to overcome him. The tenth line embodies his conflict with fate and its forces with

---

<sup>7</sup> In *Sahih Muslim with Al-Newawi Illustartion*, the Prophet Muhammad exhorts reviling fate: “Never curse fate, God is fate” (Al-Newawi 3). By this, Prophet means that one is to never curse fate. If one does so, the revilement befalls on God who has absolute control over our life. In spite of such forewarning, stricken by inner angst of divine injustice, Al-Kewani reviles fate as he imagines that God abandoned him to become prey to separation from the beloved and exile.

dignity and defiance. The sword becomes a symbol of the wicked people's ferocity, whereas "a solid" is a symbol of the state of stability, power, and resistance, which the poet had in fighting them. The expression, "The sword [...] becomes blunt of striking with a solid" emphasizes fate's inability to destroy him. His triumph over fate's tyranny and the force by which the poet asserts his identity and immortality is evident in the line, "[t]hey know so well that my star's meteors pierce through my assailants" (14, Ibn Nahas 65). If fate is conventionally immortal, then the poet, through his achievements, is like an immortal star.

The sense of the inevitability of death and the desire for immortality escalate in Ibn Nahas' self when he realizes that his death is imminent, as he recites: "And I am similar to patience when Fate jumps like a dog to bite me/If my people abandoned me then Death does not taste so well" (15-16, 65). The tone of defiance softens in the fifteenth line in which the poet surrenders, as suggested by "And I am similar to patience" which is a sign of having zero resistance against fate, as it utilizes its unstoppable destructive agent (i.e., death) against the poet's life. It is as if the poet is certain about his weakness in the face of death, and he is left with nothing except his self-soothing and entertainment with patience. However, Ibn Nahas does not give in to death willingly as he rejects it saying, "Death does not taste so well". To him, death is a termination and a finality. Hence, he justifies to himself—due to his social and psychological sufferings—that defiance against death is a difference between carrying out an order willingly, being forced to carry it out, and having no choice but to surrender to it.

### Conclusion

Death is a natural phenomenon that can be regarded as a termination of human life or as a gateway to a new beginning in another life. If the former, it is viewed as a warning that life is short and a person needs to do what he/she has to before death, the ultimate terminator, puts an end to his/her life. If the latter, it is viewed as a gateway to a new world that is far better than the one a person lives in. Hence, the need to yearn, to wait for, and to dream about it. In either case, death gains extreme significance in human life—a significance that is reflected in the preoccupation with death in the sixteenth and seventeenth century poems (English and Arabic) explored here.

In light of this study, one notices that some poets like Donne viewed death as a pilgrimage that frees the soul from the prison of the body as well as a purifier for the soul from the impurities of the body. One finds the same view in the poetry of Al Nabulsi to whom death is a purifier for the soul from the thickness and impurities of the body. Both Al Nabulsi and Donne, regard death a necessary step towards eternal happiness. For them, the soul is superior to the body because of its divine origin. Freeing the soul from the prison of the body can only result, according to them, in the soul's enjoyment of heavenly joys and bliss. Hence, death is not a scary experience, but rather, a positive and welcomed experience that the poets yearn for.

The religious belief in an after-life is a pre-requisite to viewing death as a gateway. Thus, the religious discourse of Christianity, as in Herbert, warrants the presence of an afterlife since the resurrection of Christ, according to him, guarantees the resurrection of all Christians. The religious discourse of Islam, for the Muslim Sufi Arab poets in question, also serves to warrant the presence of an afterlife, and, consequently, the consideration of death as a welcome visitor who is the way to achieve unity with God, the true beloved as evident in Al Nabulsi's poetry. Likewise, in El-Yusifi's poetry, faith in God's mercy results in alleviating any fear one has of death. In effect, the religious views both in Islam and

Christianity towards death are highly positive and help the poets studied here adopt an optimistic view of death as the beginning of a truly happy and everlasting life.

Death is further regarded by the selected Arab poets as a way of ending one's miseries in this world, especially if they are caused by unrequited love. Both Al Kewani and El-Yusif, for instance, deem death a relief from the torments of one-sided love. El-Yusif, as well, regards death as a way to end one's suffering in this world, as he refers to "The hardships of fate" that he faced that made him regard death "more pleasant than life" (5-6, 32).

One can also notice a positive view that shatters the image of Death as a powerful ravaging monster and replaces it with an image that depicts the weakness of death in Donne's "Death Be Not Proud" in which death is depicted as being simply a "slave to Fate, Chance, kings and desperate men" (11, Dwivedi 99) and in Herbert's "A dialogue-Anthem" in which death is to be pitied for losing its "glory", "famous force", "ancient / sting" (1-3, Drudentum 178) and for being mortal and will be one day "no more" (12: 178).

Death's weakness invites the poet to challenge it. Herbert, for instance, defies death to do its "worst" (11, in Drudentum 178), and Ibn Nahhas Al-Halabi realizes that death is inevitable but incapable of affecting his accomplishments, nonetheless well-founded. Hence, death awakens in the poet a feeling of the need to achieve a kind of immortality through his achievements as death is inevitable. Consequently, gaining immortality through self-achievement is a way of cheating and undermining the power of death.

As evident in the poems in this study, the preoccupation with death permeates the selected sample of English and Arabic poems. Religion (Christianity and Islam) helps the person to view death positively since it makes one realize that death is simply a gateway to an after-life of happiness and joy. Without this view, death can only be regarded as gloomy, depressing, and destructive. The selected sample of English and Arabic poetry in this study is by no means representative, as it is beyond the scope of the study to be inclusive. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this study will trigger and influence future studies into the phenomenon of death in English and Arabic poetry as this area is still fertile, virgin territory that needs to be explored.

### Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H., Donaldson, E. Talbot, et al. eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. vol.1. 14<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 1979.
- Abu El-Azim, Tala'at. *El-Ro'eya Al- Romanseyah lel Masir El-Ansani Lida Al-Sha'ir Al-Arabi Al-Hadith*. Alexandria: Al- Hayah Almasreyah Lel Kitab, 1981.
- Al-Jibouri, Yasin T. *Allah: The Concept of God in Islam*. vol.1. Bloomington: Author House, 2012.
- Al-Kewani, Ahmed, *Dewan Ahmad Bin Al- Kewani Al-Demashgi*. Cairo: Al-Matba Al-Hanafeyah, 1883.
- Al Nabulsi, Abdel Gani. Online Dewan. <<http://www.alhakawati.net/arabic/civilizations/diwanindex4a55.pdf>>
- . *Dewan Al-Haga'eg Wa Majmo' Al Rage'g*. Cairo: Matba'ay Bulag, 1853.
- Al-Newawi, *Sahih Muslim with Al-Newawi Illustrations*. Vol.15. Cairo: Al Matba'a Al-Massreyah, 1930.
- Al- Zubayer, Mohammad Bin Hasan. *Al-Hayah Wa Elmawt Fe Al-Sha'ir El-Omawai*. Al-Riyadh: Dar Omayeh, 1989.

- Appelbraum, Stanley. ed. *John Donne: Selected Poems*. Mineola: Dover, 1993.
- Brackett, Virginia. *The Facts on File Companion to British Poetry: 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: An Imprint of InfoBase Publishing, 2008.
- Cox, R. G. "The Poems of John Donne". *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*. vol. 3. Boris Ford. ed. Harmondsworth; Baltimore: Penguin, 1956. 98-115.
- Dastur, Françoise. *Death: An Essay on Finitude*. trans. John Llewelyn. London: The Athlone Pr, 1996.
- Dwivedi, A. N. ed. *John Donne (Selected Poems)*. Para Bazar: Prakash Book Depot, 1985.
- Drudentum, Jacular. ed. *The English Poems of George Herbert Together with His Collection of Proverbs*. London: Rivingtons, 1871.
- El-Yusifi, Monjik Basha. *Dewan ElAmir Monjik Basha*. Cairo: Al-Matba Al-Hanafeyah, 1883.
- Green, Nile. *Sufism: A Global History*. West Sussex: Blackwell, 2012.
- Greteman, Blaine. "'All this Seed Pearl': John Donne and Bodily Presence". *College Literature*. 37.3 (2010): 26- 42.
- Ibn Nahas, Fatah Allah. *Dewan Ibn Nahas*. Beirut: Matba'it Al-Onseyah, 1895.
- Lall, Ramji. ed. *Selected Poems of George Herbert and Henry Vaughan*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers India Pvt., 2001.
- Lewalski Barbra. *Donne's Anniversaries and the Poetry of Praise: The Creation of a Symbolic Mode*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.
- McKeon, Richard. ed. *An Introduction to Aristotle*. New York: Random House, 1947.
- Migliore, L. Daniel. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Cambridge: Wm.B. Erdmans, 2004.
- Mossa, Omar Basha. *Tarikh El-Adab Al-Arabi Fi Al-Assir Al-Othmani*. Beirut: Dar El-Fekir Al-Moa'sir, 1989.
- Perkins, George, Perkins Barbara. eds. *The American Tradition in Literature*. vol.1. Ninth Edition. Boston: McGraw Hill, 1999.
- Steen, Abram. "'Remembering Right': Remembering the Dead in Jihn Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*". *Renaissance and Reformation* 33. 2 (2010): 93- 124.
- Targoff, Ramie. "Traducing the Soul: Donne's 'Second Anniversarie'" *PMLA* 121.5 (2006): 1493-1508.
- Trapp, J. B. ed. *Medieval English Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.
- Wilcox, Helen. "'Is This the End of This glorious World?': 'Paradise Lost' and the Beginning of the End". *The Endings of Epochs*. vol.48. Laurel Brake. ed. Suffolk: The English Association, 1995, 1-15.



## Private Knowledge in Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman"<sup>1</sup> Situated Between Coercion and (Trans)formation

Sihem Arfaoui Abidi

**Abstract:** In Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1975), private/domestic knowledge acquires the meaning of what the memoirist and her mother have gathered in relation to the taboo story in the Hong family. The two characters' knowledge and dissemination of the aunt's account is embedded within a power context. The disclosure of highly personal information takes on multilayered functions or effects. On the one hand, it can be grounded in a formative preparation of womanhood for adulthood, hence, leading to further exclusion and banishment of the dead woman relative. On the other hand, the recently-acquired information is re-shaped as a vengeful means to a challenging commemoration of female outcasts. In this twofold process, the reciprocal awareness of what is disgraceful turns out an oppressive instrument which is likely to invert on itself and become an impetus for further transgression and empowerment.

**Keywords:** private/domestic knowledge, power, banishment versus commemoration

Transformation requires a certain freedom to modify, appropriate, and re-appropriate without being trapped in imitation (Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red* 161).<sup>2</sup>

A newly-canonized feminist-informed text, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1975) comprises five seemingly disconnected stories, respectively, entitled "No Name Woman", "White Tigers", "Shaman", "At the Western Palace" and "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe". Of these five chapters, the present article limits its focus to "No Name Woman", that is, the opening tale in Kingston's book. Broadly speaking, much of the essential plotline in the considered tale seems indebted to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, given the intertwined narrative of female perversion and its encroachment in the conflict between the individual and the community. Although both texts are set in two different socio-cultural environments, they essentially converge on reinforcing the issue of adultery and its negative impact on the status of women in every patriarchal milieu.

The tale of "No Name Woman", also referred to as a short story, is not chosen randomly, but for its encompassed entailment of what this article terms as private/domestic

---

<sup>1</sup> "No Name Woman" is the title of the opening short story in Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1975, New York: Random House, Vintage, 1989): 3-16; on the other hand, the article uses No Name Woman as the name of the adulterous aunt, since this character goes nameless throughout the narrative.

<sup>2</sup> Further parenthetical references to *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1991) will be limited to the first two words *When the Moon*.

knowledge. Knowledge here is used and understood neither as a mere “body of truth, information, and principles acquired by [learning]” (*Webster’s*) nor implies “the progress of enlightenment, the struggle of knowledge against ignorance, of reason against chimeras, of experience against prejudices, of reason against error”, as it is the case in an eighteenth-century context (Foucault 178-79). Rather, once preceded by the attribute domestic—in turn used in exchange with private—the term knowledge simply describes one’s consciousness and/or discovery of the very intimate aspects or secrets about one’s personal life. In this sense, the reference to domestic knowledge has no connection whatsoever to, for instance, Michel Foucault’s analysis of the knowledge concept in terms of scholarly “historical, meticulous, precise, technical expertise” (8). Thus inflected by the adjective private/domestic, knowledge turns out a condition of awareness, understanding or also disclosure of one’s ins and outs to others, including the wider reading public.

In the context of the considered short story, private/domestic knowledge acquires the meaning of what the memoirist and her mother have gathered in relation to the taboo story in the Hong family. The secret is about the sexual aberration of a woman relative in China who kills herself and her illegitimate baby after disgracing her family. As it is intimated, “[i]n China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born” (*Woman* 3). The very overture of *The Woman Warrior* on a Chinese immigrant mother imparting to her teenage daughter her privileged knowledge of what I might metaphorically term the Hong’s “dirty laundry” is, actually, what endows the core of this article.

In view of knowledge in the sense of realizing an intimate mishap in a domestic context, the sharing of a family secret about female adultery shall be examined from the perspective of what the two women characters make out of their discovery of such hidden information. The current piece places the two characters’ knowledge of what is kept confidential and, therefore, veiled within a power context. Being disseminated, the aunt’s account raises—amid other issues—the following questions: In what ways do the mother and daughter benefit from their knowledge of the considered account? How do these benefits relate to or involve power? What purposes does the knowledge of the once-buried private serve? Do these two characters make the same uses of what they have come to know in common? What do these uses reveal about the essence of knowledge and the definite/authentic status of any acquired truth?

On the basis of these queries about the parameters of private knowledge in Kingston’s selected narrative, the following discussion shall attempt to build up the argument that the disclosure of highly personal information in the hands of the Chinese immigrant and American-born generations takes on multilayered functions or effects. In one obvious reading, the two characters’ consciousness of the taboo story can be used as a ground for a formative preparation of womanhood for adulthood, hence, leading to further exclusion and banishment of the dead woman relative. In another sense, the recently-acquired information is re-shaped as a vengeful means to a challenging commemoration of female outcasts. The inference which shall follow from this latter argument enfolds, at least, a twofold process whereby the uncovered intimate turns out an oppressive instrument which is likely to invert on itself and become an impetus for further transgression and empowerment. In both cases, however, the characters’ reciprocal awareness of what is disgraceful for the Hong family begets a broader fact, the notion that knowledge is not authentic truth.

To a certain extent, the act of sharing private information—wherein the narrative pivot is on adultery and its aftermath on the image of the Hong lineage—appears to carry out a purely formative/informative end. In fact, at a first glance, it seems that *Brave Orchid*, the

narrator's mother, plays out her knowledge of No Name Woman's disaster just for didactic purposes. Thus, in Brave Orchid's warning, "[y]ou must not tell" (*Woman* 3), there is a stark emphasis on herself as the filterer and executioner of the patriarchal order. What is also at stake here is the notion that the mother is among very few people with access to the aunt's story, something which gives her the entitlement to manipulate her knowledge of this secret in breeding and socializing her daughter to the law of the father. Only at this level can we categorize the mother as the mouthpiece of "the power of the patriarchy to command [...] the silence of daughters" (Smith 1063). As I shall point out later, this description does not account fully for the mother's shifting voices and fluid roles.

Textual evidence which supports further the perspective about formative/informative knowledge is of abundance. In this context, it should be pointed out that Brave Orchid does not favor Maxine with the Hong family's secret tale until she sets out her own rules of the game of power. "'You must not tell anyone,' my mother said, 'what I am about to tell you'" (*Woman* 3). In the process of attempting to trap Maxine in what critic Paul John Eakin calls a perplexing network of linguistic prohibitions (269), as it is indicated through the explicit caution against re-telling and its recurrence in different shapes throughout the remainder of the narrative, the mother-teller spells down silence as a pre-condition to passing on her knowledge and the powers it could encompass. This same strategy, in turn, elevates the mother as the only source of enlightenment for Maxine, as long as the outcast aunt is utterly non-existent for everybody else, i.e., there is no other way for Maxine to learn the story, but from the tongue of her mother.

Likewise, it is crucial to note that the choice of the timing of telling the buried story is not at random in the skeleton of the mother's strategic formative agenda. The daughter-protagonist reports her mother's words as follows: "'Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you'" (*Woman* 5). This suggests that Brave Orchid has seized the onset of Maxine's menstruation to make the non-said known to the latter. What is at stake here is not just the notion that menstruation is connected to "the initiation of a girl to womanhood", as critic Sami Ludwig underlines (56). Rather, the mother's venture, at this particular stage, to communicate what she knows seems to be mainly spurred by her interest in having her daughter preserve her purity, hence, the family's honor. This is the reason why she, swiftly but also tactically, slides from hinting and making allusions into a more direct warning; "[do]n't humiliate us" (*Woman* 5). Hence, Brave Orchid's forewarnings "[y]ou wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful" lay down her conviction that a girl on the verge of sexual maturity is required to abide by the laws of obedience, chastity and modesty (*Woman* 5). This message congers a deeper importance upon the reference to the deliberate censorship of the mother's sister-in-law from the kingdom of language. The more it takes the form of a persistent reminder the more potential of feminine training it confers on Maxine.

Brave Orchid serves of the unmentionable narrative about communal ostracism in an attempt to warn her pubescent daughter not only against illegitimate pregnancy, but more broadly against following any of her selfish desires as an individual and jeopardizing whatever local boundaries. That is why her retelling emphasizes the tragic vindictiveness inflicted on women who give birth out of marriage, especially if we scrutinize passages where the aunt is called "ghost" and "pig"—with animalism as a metaphor for seclusion from the realm of collectivity (*Woman* 5). The account in the mother's tongue also depicts the aunt as always "hungry, always needing [...] begging food from other ghosts, snatch[ing] and steal[ing] it from those whose living descendants give them gifts" (*Woman* 16). Punishment through the deprivation from food, critic Esther Mikyung Ghymn reminds us, stands out as an exclusion of the aunt from traditional memorial days, in certain



cultures, on which bereaved families reunite to pay homage to the dead (149-50). While some might read into this scene just caution “against breaching the solidarity of the immigrant community by violating its mores” there is more to it (Rusk 58). Indeed, more important than the idea that the mother demonstrates her vigor in re-shaping her knowledge of the illegitimate as a didactic tool—instilling in her young daughter the necessary maintenance of a proper image of the Chinese immigrant—is the equal suggestion of the use of all the edifying means available to the mother to preserve broader traditional patriarchal norms.

Consequently, it should be indicated that the edifying ends of the mother’s admonitions put in evidence the oppressive powers of knowledge. Oppression emanates from the notion that Brave Orchid leaves out all discussion about how and why her sister-in-law becomes pregnant and their consequential connotations. The gaps in the details and circumstances of her unreliable version of the account that she has learnt turn out of service only to the patriarchal structure enforcing the silence around the aunt’s name and existence. As it is echoed through the repetition of the name of the father, masculine authority is the most prominent message that emerges out of the mother’s disclosure of the family taboo: “We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born” (*Woman* 3). In the process of bringing the second-person plural pronoun to the front of the picture, Brave Orchid’s bare account of felony points out her alignment with a collective banishment of the outcast aunt. To a certain extent, this might suggest that Brave Orchid misuses her knowledge about the banished aunt in overlooking the possibility of violation and repudiating women’s right to an autonomous identity (Chu 103). Further on, the fact that the mother’s report alludes to the aunt’s suffering and death only in one sentence while reserving greater importance to the violent reaction of the villagers could even lead to her depiction as a conspiring female teller (*Woman* 4).

In the same vein, even the mother’s re-telling strategies unravel the abusive essence of her knowledge of the family taboo. First, the mother shares with her daughter what she knows about the family secret of female adultery only after coercing her into silence. Indeed, she compels Maxine to mute the voice of this nameless aunt by burying her name and story as part of what Kingston calls “reverse ancestor worship” (*Woman* 16). There is more than one meaning to this particular gesture, among them the fact that the aunt has been cast out from the realm of language, since even her name is not to be mentioned. Besides, she is left out or also taken out from the family lineage as long as her brothers claim to have no sisters. Thus, knowledge can turn into an apparatus of suppression the moment it buries certain facts to the detriment of others in the name of serving formation and didacticism.

At this level, the challenge about the uses of private knowledge in the examined tale remains whether the purpose is exclusively supportive of the *status quo* and, therefore, barely educative. In fact, what still looms large is the question about whether didacticism is the ultimate objective of the mother’s sharing what she knows with her daughter, especially that we are dealing with a feminist text. Thus, if Brave Orchid’s purpose is just to educate her daughter and participate in a gesture of communal ostracism, then, how do we explain certain contradictions in her version of the aunt’s narrative? Such a query might suggest that there is more to the retelling than what has been said so far.

It is ironic that the kind of knowledge this article deals with can be used against female outcasts as much as it becomes endowed with the stamina of amounting to a covert subversive site of empowerment and commemoration. In fact, one should be alert to the notion that neither mother nor daughter pass on their knowledge of the family secret to the reader without attempting “to undermine existing institutions or value systems”, as third

world feminist Trinh T. Minh-ha puts it (2005, 318).<sup>3</sup> From the perspective that “the subversive attacks something ‘in control’ and wishes to replace it by what does not yet exist and has as yet no power”, Brave Orchid and Maxine do not take what they know about the forgotten aunt at face value (318). By contrast, both play out their rebellion against the very masculine order which maintains what we know so far about the aunt’s tale, albeit through implicit strategies.

Seen in depth, the germs of a subversive knowledge are traced back to the very mother figure who also educates Maxine to invert this punitive tale on itself in ways that allow in the re-emergence of truths which “have in a way been left to lie fallow, or even kept in the margins” (Foucault 8). As a result, when Brave Orchid persists on counseling Maxine “[d]on’t let your father know what I told you” she sends out a veiled message inciting Maxine to use her imagination in order to find out a common denominator that resolves the riddles and ambiguities around No Name Woman’s story (*Woman* 5). In view of the dictum that what is illicit becomes what is desired most, there is a stimulation to dig deeper in the available account for alternative truths. Similarly, the fact that the mother herself acknowledges that the Chinese “like to say the opposite” (*Woman* 203) and ventures into disobeying her husband’s wish that the existence of his sister be erased entirely from memory—by bringing the forgotten back from oblivion in the form of an apparent teaching—all this underscores the double meaning of her words “not to tell” (*Woman* 5). The mother does not seem to care for deferring her own reliability and denying the authenticity of what she says as much as she cares for preparing her daughter to have her own voice and opinion relative to the claims surrounding the aunt’s story.

The mother is likely to have inserted certain details that expand the original tale. For instance, the villagers’ raid of the nameless aunt’s family house seems more of an invention. Maxine confides in to the reader that her “mother spoke about the raid as if she had seen it when she and my aunt, a daughter-in-law to a different household, should not have been living together at all” (*Woman* 7). Here, Maxine reveals two important inferences. First, her mother might not have eye-witnessed what really happened, since she is a daughter-in-law to another family. Second, there is a strong probability that she is pretending to have learnt of the adultery story from first-hand experience, essentially because there is something on her mind which she wants to unravel for her daughter and which is also different from what she seems to say overtly. Besides, the detail that should not be stepped out is that, so far, Brave Orchid has not uncovered the whole truth, particularly that we know quite well that she “will add nothing unless powered by Necessity, a riverbank that guides her life” (*Woman* 6). In all cases, what is of more interest is the notion that all these indications entail that Brave Orchid’s endeavor is to reach a message beyond any admonition against sexual awakening.

Rather, her purpose is dual in targeting the cycle of female banishment and triggering the resurgence of alternative truths. It also reinforces the ironical involvement of a knowledge based on repression in sowing the seeds of its own destruction. In other words, even if the mother’s ultimate objective, in sharing this knowledge, is to enhance her daughter to join her in perpetuating a whole cycle of female ostracism, she seems to have achieved the opposite.

Accordingly, the mother’s reluctant failure to keep an immoral tale privately hidden, as she has been instructed by her husband and elders, represents a poetic license for Maxine

---

<sup>3</sup> Given the length of the title *Film as a Subversive Art: Amos Vogel* (D.a.p.: c.t.editions, 2005), future references will appear simply as *Film*.

to explore the transgressive/transformative powers of the knowledge she has recently acquired. It is as if the mother finds no other way to break down her conspiracy against the aunt, but to fail both her engagement to her family-in-law and responsibility as a mother. Her comfort in all this is laying the ground to forging a daughter who is willing to turn things upside down against similar conspiracies.

The text abounds with multifarious indicators of the transformative stamina embedded in the mother's exposure of what she knows. The most outspoken indicator of this reading is closely connected to Maxine's transgression of repressive rules via the provocative name she allocates to her outcast aunt i.e., No Name Woman. In depth, such a choice renders some sort of retaliation in favour of the aunt. Indeed, although the latter has been denied a proper personal name like everybody else, Maxine gives her one not only against the will of the community, but also a suggestive name. In parallel to this, by positioning No Name Woman's story at the onset of *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine grows into "an outlaw knot-maker" *par excellence* (*Woman* 163). This particular placement afresh brings in the protagonist's strong rebellious sensibility and involves her in a misdemeanor probably starkly illegitimate, if this is considered from the conventional perspective of the character's community. For the shameful story is most likely to reach a great deal of listeners and readers (Minh-ha 1989, 134). In such a way, it becomes impossible to be overlooked or go un-noticed. Eventually, Maxine adjoins her outcast aunt in crossing the boundaries delineated for both as second-class citizens (*Woman* 8).

Actually, the trespassing niece does not publish just her reticent knowledge of a shameful tale, but alternative narratives which question the official version. She hypothesizes about the non-said encompassing the aunt's adultery by oscillating between the most conventional reinterpretations to the most shocking ones. In a subversive act, she uses her imagination to complete the gaps in the little she knows of her aunt's story. Through her description of the pressure that the family exerted on the aunt, Maxine ends up legitimating the kind of truth which could flow out of fiction (*Woman* 13-4). In another challenging example, she assumes that the nameless "aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex", thus, advancing a hypothesis of coercion to which the aunt might have been subjugated (6). According to Maxine, the deduction that this woman could have been raped is reinforced by the powerless status of women in old China (7).

At other times when the probability of sexual inhibition does not appeal to Maxine, Maxine makes up a sub-plot of a provocative feminist vigor. For one thing, she advances a premise rather symptomatic of the aunt as a seductress of an emancipated mind (*Woman* 10). For another, she includes an interesting passage that completely sets apart the announced explanations for ostracizing No Name Woman (14-5). On the basis of a scanty background, she draws an elaborate visual picture of the aunt's final demise after the chilling labour pains. This particular scene is the one which brings the nameless aunt more to life and concrete history, given the dominant sensuality with which it is described, as if we are facing an immediate birth. However, when one gets to the fictional recreation of the nameless aunt drowning the new-born baby in the family well one starts to have a solid view of this character as one who does not give up her fight for individualism, emancipation and justice even until the last minute. Furthermore, Maxine claims kinship with a genealogically-effaced female rebel, referring to the latter as "my forerunner" (16). Here, she evinces "a disobedience equally unforgivable as her mother's covert betrayal" in a restless quest for subverting official knowledge as it comes out from the local representatives of power (Arfaoui 40).

In inference, these counter-stories do not simply bring about the fictional resurrection of a Hesterian aunt after years of silent fear, but additionally belie knowledge as truth, as an authentic value. The notion that Maxine imaginatively reconstructs the life of an aunt whose name she does not even know, consciously interprets and openly admits to tailoring things stands out as an argument against knowledge as a foundational reality (*Woman* 6). On the ground of the impossibility to authenticate a single form of knowledge as truth, Maxine opposes her mother's version to other forms of truth which could be no less authentic and have the same illusion of reality. This way, the shameful secret grows into a range of momentous hypotheses wherein each could be as valid as the other, a site where different versions of reality vie with each other, thus, speaking to a form of resistance to the rationalization and standardization of one single form of knowledge.

At the same time, the whole discussion demonstrates the fragile boundaries which try to come between knowledge, formation, censorship and subversion. It pushes to the front of the picture these apparently separate practices as an inter-related mesh. Once commonly known by the mother and her daughter, albeit in restrained ways, what is supposed to be a clandestine affair is transformed into a multi-layered source of power. The exposure of the no-longer illicit is power in the sense of oppression and subversion. "No Name Woman" unravels, in several ways, the repressive structures within which this knowledge is controlled and censored.

In the context of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, outstanding is the depiction of knowledge as a disempowering tool which coerces women into serving as perpetrators of silence and female ostracism, but also as a tool encompassing a formative/transformative momentum. On the one hand, private knowledge takes on the useful meaning of a formative means, un-veiling, in the process, its abusive darker sides. On the other hand, it is, to a certain extent, within the hands of the individual to make the best out of this knowledge by elevating this body into a mode of resistance, through circulation and propagation, and its consumers from mere accomplices into trespassers.

Finally, from the perspective that "the elimination of taboos is the order of the day in all fields of human endeavour" (Minh-ha 2005, 321), Kingston challenges the silence in certain cultures and writings when it comes to issues of sexuality. What is at stake in her short story is that there should be no such thing as private knowledge. Above all, this happens when she makes a pointer to the fact that "[i]t is not enough to know the personal but to know—to speak it in a different way" (1991, 164). In turn, this begets a certain challenge to the modern false split between private and public in any hierarchical or disciplinary distribution of knowledge.

### Works Cited

- Arfaoui, Sihem. "Feeding the Memory with Culinary Resistance: *The Woman Warrior*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*". *Interactions* 15.2 (Fall 2006): 37-48.
- Chu, Patricia. "The Invisible World the Immigrants Built: Cultural Self-Inscription and the Anti-romantic Plots of *The Woman Warrior*". *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 2.1 (1992): 95-116.
- Eakin, Paul John. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.

- Foucault, Michel. *Society Must Be Defended: Lecture at the College de France, 1975-76*. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. eds. David Macey. trans. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Ghymn, Esther Mikyung. *Images of Asian American Women by Asian American Women Writers*. New York: Peter Lang, 1995.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1906.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. "No Name Woman". *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. 1975. New York: Random House, Vintage, 1989. 3-7.
- Ludwig, Sami. *Concrete Language: Intercultural Communication in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. *Film as a Subversive Art: Amos Vogel*. D.a.p.: c.t.editions, 2005.
- . *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- . *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.
- Rusk, Lauren. *The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston and Winterson*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Smith, Sidonie. "Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*: Filiality and Woman's Autobiographical Storytelling". *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. eds. New Jersey: Rutgers U P, 1991. 1058-78.
- Webster's Universal Encyclopedic Dictionary*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2002.

## **Margins, Mirrors and Breasts: Pearl's Place in *The Scarlet Letter***

**Charles Campbell**

**Abstract:** Using Kofman, Cixous and Kristeva, I read Pearl as the semiotic disposition within the psychoanalytic discourse of *The Scarlet Letter*. She enacts a feminine writing which disrupts phallogentric systems, including those of Freud, Lacan, the Puritans and Hawthorne's own text. Pearl embodies Hawthorne's sense of the mystery of femininity as well as the mystery of his own writing. As the embodiment of Hawthorne's indeterminate style, she plays in the margins and the mirrors of the text, transgressing the boundaries of the fiction she inhabits. An agent of metaphor and of pre-Oedipal desire, opposed to the Symbolic and opposed to the Law of the Father, she laughs and dances in the face of the threat of castration/alienation, tracing a pattern of feminine pleasure in the erotics of the text; and she remains to the end unassimilable.

**Keywords:** Imaginary, Symbolic, feminine writing, margins, mirrors, breasts.

The "elsewhere" of feminine pleasure can be found only at the price of *crossing back through the mirror that subtends all speculation.*  
(Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* 77)

### **Introduction: The Needle, the Letter and the Mirror**

For Sigmund Freud feminine pleasure is a great mystery, "the riddle of the nature of femininity" ("Femininity" 113), which leaves women's erotic life "veiled in an impenetrable obscurity" ("Three Essays" 151). To go beneath the veil would be tantamount to penetrating the mother whose horrible sex, like Medusa's head, can be viewed only in reflection ("Medusa's Head" 273-4). The fear of Medusa represents the fear of seeing women's genitals, and so Freud attributes the development of textiles ("plaiting and weaving") to women who, unconsciously following the model of the pubic hair, cover and decorate their fearsome sexuality and so "by this artifice they can excite and charm men, who would otherwise recoil in horror before that gaping wound" of castration (in Kofman 48-9). Hawthorne is also interested in feminine pleasure, also sees a connection of femininity to fabrics and finds in that connection the mystery of female pleasure, "[w]omen derive a pleasure, incomprehensible to the other sex, from the delicate toil of the needle"; it is "a mode of expressing [...] the passion of her life" (59). Pearl expresses the mystery of femininity because she is at once "a forcible type [...] of the moral agony which Hester Prynne had borne" (50), "the living hieroglyphic" of Hester's secret love affair (140) and an expression by means of needlecraft of her incomprehensible pleasure, "[s]he seemed the unpremeditated offshoot of a passionate moment. Her mother, in contriving the child's garb, had allowed the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play" (70).

Hawthorne often places this child that embodies her mother's shame and pleasure in front of mirrors. For Jacques Lacan the mirror stage is the beginning of the process of subjectivity under the Law of the Father. The child, seeing her image in a mirror, believes in an illusory unity of self, and her identity splits. The identity arrived at, by specular logic, is alien and illusory, "[a]lienation is this lack of being by which [her] realization lies in another

actual or imaginary space” (Benvenuto and Kennedy 55). The next phase of development will be entrance into the Symbolic through language, “that later intervention of the Other (Lacan’s capital A, the parents) which ratifies the assumption of the subject into the realm of language or the Symbolic Order” (Jameson 356-7). Thus the child enters into alienation determined by an image of the self exterior to the self, and this split is compounded when the threat of castration enforces the Law of the Father under the sign of the letter.

Hawthorne seems to pre-design this Lacanian process in his account of Pearl’s encounters with mirrors in *The Scarlet Letter*, but simultaneously he has her mock and parody its orthodoxy while complicating and problematizing the paradigm. What happens when the “letter endowed with life” (70) encounters its image in the mirror? One expects some reflection on the nature of subjection to language. Thus, in “The Governor’s Hall” Hawthorne images the “iron framework” of Puritan ideology (111) as a suit of armor which is also a mirror, anticipating Lacan: “The *mirror stage* is a drama [...] which manufactures for the subject [...] the succession of phantasies that extends [...] to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development” (*Ecrits* 4). Hawthorne’s Lacanian mirror is made up of the body armor of the fathers of the culture and, by its structure, reveals the splitting of the subject and highlights the way the letter will cover and obscure the reality of a woman. This is the case with the scene when Hester takes Pearl into the Governor’s mansion and Pearl is “greatly pleased with the gleaming armour”:

Little Pearl [...] spent some time looking into the polished mirror of the breastplate.

“Mother,” cried she, “I see you here. Look! Look!”

Hester looked, by way of humoring the child; and she saw that, owing to the peculiar effect of this convex mirror, the scarlet letter was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it. Pearl pointed upward, also, at a similar picture in the headpiece; smiling at her mother, with the elfish intelligence that was so familiar an expression on her small physiognomy. That look of naughty merriment was likewise reflected in the mirror, with so much breadth and intensity of effect, that it made Hester Prynne feel as if it could not be the image of her own child, but of an imp who was seeking to mould itself into Pearl’s shape. (73)

Rather than becoming subject to the mirror, Pearl subverts the specular process of subjectivity by commenting on its alienating effects, for women especially, under the Law of the (Puritan) Father(s). Pearl herself does not become one with her image in the mirror; rather she becomes other to herself as an “imp” full of “elfish intelligence”. Therefore this essay will examine the nature of Pearl’s psychoanalytical intelligence and will follow, as Hester does in the above scene, the directions of her pointing and follow her behavior as she indicates the workings of a feminine writing that exceeds the iron framework of Freud’s, Lacan’s and even Hawthorne’s orthodoxy.

*The Scarlet Letter* is a psychoanalytic text but one that pointedly exceeds the authority of Freud and Lacan. The weird subjectivity of Pearl can be read psychoanalytically, however, with the help of the feminist revisionists of psychoanalysis, such as Kofman, Cixous and Kristeva. This essay will show how the character of Pearl subverts and reverses the mirror stage to evoke a feminine identity not subject to the Law of the Father which acts as one of those “border runners never subjugated by any authority”

(Cixous 1989, 109). This process will be observed in the novel's three mirror scenes and in the elaborate, pervasive and bisexual emphasis on breasts in the novel. Even the American eagle at the entrance to the Custom House (like Hester) has "a shield before her breast" that conceals a "bosom [with] the softness and snugness of an eider-down pillow", although she rejects her children by wounding them with her claws, beak or arrows (6). Split between love and aggression, between the Custom-House story of the Surveyor's "decapitated state" (31-4) and Hester's story of the branded breast and, within the main narrative, between Hester's point of view and Pearl's, the radical alterity of Hawthorne's text presents not the workings of the Lacanian system but "precisely working [in] the in between" with a kind of "vatic bisexuality which doesn't annul differences but stirs them up" (Cixous 1991, 340-1). Pearl's story foresees the approach of feminist psychoanalysis to the alienated subject. The Freudian process of alienation is seen by John Irwin's linking of the figurative guillotining of the surveyor/author with castration (280). This ties to the setting of the scaffold, "a penal machine" where Hester first appears wearing the scarlet letter, since it is likened to "the guillotine among the terrorists of France" (41). Alienation by decapitation thus makes "the mark of shame upon her bosom" (45) similar to Medusa's head, "the symbol of horror worn [...] upon her dress by the virgin goddess Athene" (Freud, "Medusa's Head" 273). Thus, Joel Pfister reads Medusa's head in *The Scarlet Letter* with reference to Hawthorne's story of the Jason legend, "The Gorgon's Head" (134-5).

The story of "the political guillotine" is part of the grim humor of "The Custom-House". In *The Scarlet Letter*, Anthony Trollope notes "a weird, mocking spirit" by which Hawthorne seems to be "always laughing at something" and to "ridicule the very woes which he expends himself in depicting" (174). Pearl personifies this satirical spirit and, as such, represents a feminine writing which can "laugh at castration" (Kristeva 182) as it is inflicted by the armor and the penal machines of the Puritans. At once "the scarlet letter endowed with life" (70) and "*The Scarlet Letter* 'endowed with life'" (Porte 105), she is textuality reflecting on itself to reveal what symbolic language conceals; she is the "laughter" of "feminine disorder, [...] its inability to take the drumbeats seriously" that mocks "the threat of castration" (Cixous 1981, 43). Pearl takes the writing in *The Scarlet Letter* beyond the rigid structure of Puritan morality, which Hester basically accepts in her "conversion to the letter" (Bercovich 3), and even beyond Hawthorne's personal "anti-feminist gender politics" (Onderdonk 77) that we see in Mitchell's account of his relationship with Margaret Fuller and Herbert's account of his married life (1993, 9-11). Following Pearl's gaze and pointing finger we discover a marginal feminine writing in the book that "surpass[es] the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system" (Cixous 1991, 340). She serves as an agent in Hawthorne's text of the "semiotic", that operates "on the borderline of the symbolic order" as "a process *within* our conventional sign systems, which questions and transgresses their limits" (Eagleton 190). We will examine how she operates on the borderlines of Hawthorne's novel.

### **Playing with the Mirror: A Daughter's Transgressions**

[As translanguaging] writing thus posits another subject, for the first time a definitively antipsychological one. (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 98)

The armor scene raises several psychoanalytic questions. What happens if the candidate for subjectivity demonstrates an awareness of the operation of the mirror stage and turns the power of the symbol into a joke? What if the pre-Oedipal self can see itself in the mirror of subjectivity and chooses to remain a figurative self? If the mirror of the armour is metaphorically the agency of the letter itself and the subject-to-be is the letter



come to life regarding its own reflection, can language turn against itself by reflecting (on) its own representation? Can the reader, in his “relation with the book (i.e. with the Image) [...] fastened to it, like the child fastened to the mother” (Barthes 39) and aware of the text rereading itself as it rewrites itself” (Kristeva 87), read the semiotic disposition operating within the Symbolic? Pearl is such a self-reading text; she is a figure of writing on the boundaries of language. She points to and dwells in the borders of narrative self-reflection; she hovers “between naming [...] and *polynomial*, that is, the pluralization of meaning by different means [...] traversing nonsense and indicating a suppression of the subject” (Kristeva 111). She is writing outside of the subjectivity of language. As Rudolph Von Abele points out, Pearl embodies Hawthorne’s theory of art (53); she is the living expression of the indeterminacy of his style, “the formula of alternative possibilities” (Winters 18), “the effect of breaking, tearing, destroying continuous meaning which is the writing’s aim” (Bryson 82) and the “theme [of] the obliquity or indeterminacy of signs” in *The Scarlet Letter* (Bell 9, Onderdonk 73-4). Pearl’s perspective is “fluid and plural, a kind of pleasurable creative excess over precise meaning” which “takes sadistic delight in destroying or negating [fixed and transcendental] signs” (Eagleton 188). She is style in Barthes’ sense of that which “represents this heteronomia included in writing”, “a *sublanguage* elaborated where flesh and external reality come together” (in Kristeva 111). Pearl never comes to rest under the patriarchal law of the Puritans, nor does she become a character within the framework of *The Scarlet Letter*. She leads the reader into an elsewhere of the text—opposing the figurative to the Symbolic, interposing metaphoric disruptions within the language of truth and reality; she enacts and embodies the fusion of “semiotic bodily drives [...] with symbols (or other ‘signifying materials’)” (Oliver 76). She “weaves into language [...] the complex relations of a subject caught between ‘nature’ and ‘culture,’ [...] between desire and the law” (Kristeva 97).

Nina Baym describes Pearl “as representing Hester’s ‘id’” (1976, 138); as such, she is the “id [...] ambiguously uttered”, rather than singularly characterized, who speaks “the language of 1,000 tongues”; she traces a feminine writing in which there is “the wonder of being several” and the “pleasure from this gift of alterability” (Cixous 1991, 345). We see this in Hawthorne’s description of her:

Pearl’s aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety; in this one child there were many children [...]. This outward mutability indicated [...] the various properties of her inner life. Her nature [...] lacked reference and adaption to the world in which she was born. The child could not be made amenable to rules. (63)

[...]

The spell of life went forth from her ever creative spirit, and communicated itself to a thousand objects [...]. The unlikeliest materials, a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower, were the puppets of Pearl’s witchcraft. [...] Her one baby voice served a multitude of imaginary personages, old and young, to talk withal [...] It was wonderful, the vast variety of forms into which she threw her intellect, with no continuity, [...] so rapid and feverish a tide of life. (66)

Pearl is the disruptive female supplement to the phallogocentric economy; she “disturbs the relationship to ‘reality,’ produces an uncertainty that gets in the way of the subject’s socialization” (Cixous 1989, 105). Like Hester’s embroidery of the scarlet letter which “gives evidence of a now forgotten art, not to be recovered even by the process of picking out the threads” (25), the “elements” of Pearl’s character have “an order peculiar to

themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered" (63). Pearl is the child not made by God the Father (the word as law) but as made by mother as artist (the word as image): "The child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door" (77). This passage alerts the reader to the in-between, reflexive role of Pearl, for it echoes the author's earlier plucking of a marginal rose from that same bush growing "on the threshold of our narrative" to offer to the reader as a "sweet moral blossom" to temper the solemnity of his tale (36). Pearl, the rose, is a creature of metaphor considered as "the reduplication in language of the primary transference that takes place through the structure of the primary narcissism" (Oliver 75).

Operating in the margins of the text, Pearl insists on the boundaries and mirrors in the story as sites of marginality which subvert or circumvent all frameworks. Thus, she works to "shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (Cixous 1991, 344). When Hester speaks with Chillingworth about his harassment of Dimmesdale, she sends Pearl to play by "the margin of the water" (115). The word "margin" reappears in the next sentence. In this marginal space on the beach a tidal pool serves as a "mirror for Pearl" with which she re-enacts the Narcissus legend:

Forth peeped at her [...] the image of a little maid, whom Pearl [...] invited to take her hand and run a race with her. But the visionary little maid, on her part, beckoned likewise, as if to say,—"This is a better place! Come thou into the pool!"— And Pearl, stepping in, mid-leg deep, beheld her own white feet at the bottom; while, out of a still lower depth, came the gleam of a kind of fragmentary smile, floating to and fro in the agitated water. (115)

Entering the mirror of the pool, Pearl figuratively transgresses the novel's borderline of representation, "seeking a passage for herself into its sphere of impalpable earth and unattainable sky" (121). She also re-imagines the mirror stage. Self-aware border-dweller that she is, she does not find bodily unity in her mirror image and so avoids that alienating illusion; rather, "finding [...] that either she or the image was unreal, she turned elsewhere for better pastime" (121). This is the Narcissus story rendered as comic rather than tragic, a mirror stage that reveals a fragmentation of the self in reflection rather than enforcing an illusory unity.

Part of her "better pastime" after turning away from the mirror image is to make fun of the law of the letter. Using seaweed, she decorates "her own bosom" with "the letter A" in eel-grass, for "she inherited her mother's gift for devising drapery and costume" (121). When she shows this to her mother, she calls attention to the scarlet letter as a type of language: "It is the great letter A. Thou hast taught it me in the horn-book" (122). She also suggests that Hester wears the letter for the same reason that "the minister keep[s] his hand over his heart" (repeated three times) (122-24), suggesting a reading of Hester's situation (and of *The Scarlet Letter*) as an account of the effects of language and guilt focusing on the border region where body and language (dis)join. Pearl is the reader within the text as well as the symbol as metaphor; she is also "the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved" (78). Although she protests that "the green letter, and on thy childish bosom, has no purport" (121), Hester does see the implications of Pearl's reading lesson: "The thought occurred to Hester, that the child might really be seeking to approach her with childlike confidence, and doing what she could, and as intelligently as she knew how, to establish a meeting-point of sympathy" (122)—all "to help [Hester] to overcome the passion, once so wild, [...] imprisoned within [her] heart" (123).

Pearl invites her mother to share the burden of the letter, like an analyst offering therapy (see Kristeva on the child as the mother's "analyzer", 279-280). She asks three questions three times: "What does the letter mean, mother? –and why dost thou wear it?– and why does the minister keep his hand over his heart?" (123). She invites Hester to bring together the head and the heart, the hand and the letter, the body and the symbol. Hester sees this appeal as a possible means to "soothe away the sorrow", but she cannot confide in the child and speak of her sexual pleasure. "With her precocity and acuteness", Pearl would be Hester's therapist and friend: "She took her mother's hand in both her own, and gazed into her eyes" (122), asking her to lift the veil from her feminine pleasure; but Hester, self alienated, seeing her own art as sin, rejects the offer: "No! If this be the price of the child's sympathy, I cannot pay it" (123).

Pearl's thrice-repeated three questions parallel the narrative structure of three scaffold scenes and three mirror scenes. She will again insist on the letter three times in the third mirror scene. This triply-marked passage brings the margins of the tale into the foreground, realizing in the narrative the metaphorical "neutral territory" that Hawthorne identifies as the site of his art in "The Custom-House" (28). If in the second mirror scene Pearl made light of the myth of Narcissus, in the third she (p)rewrites what Freud calls the primal scene. However, first she (p)rereads the novel she is in.

In the first mirror scene (and throughout the novel) Pearl laughs at the whole Symbolic framework; in the second she bypasses the mirror stage to become her mother's other. The third mirror scene takes place again in "the margin of the brook" which here figures the margin of the book, for what escapes the "dark necessity" of the story is Pearl's reflexive play in and on the text. The critical description of the narrative supplied by the author in "The Custom-House" as wearing "a stern and sombre aspect; too much ungladdened by genial sunshine" and being written "while straying through the gloom of these sunless fantasies" (33) takes shape on the narrative landscape in the "melancholy brook" (144) flowing through the midst of "the darksome shade" (127) of a forest that "imaged not amiss the moral wilderness in which [Hester] had so long been wandering" (125). Exceeding this frame of reference, Pearl, sent to play by herself by the water, plays with/in this mirror of the text.

The brook has "black depths" and "mystery" as well as "livelier passages"; "its never-ceasing loquacity" can "whisper tales out of the heart of the old forest whence it flowed, or mirror its revelations on the smooth surface of a pool" (127). The brook is an image of the narrative in which it appears complete with a reflection of this mirror effect; and, like the narrative, finds its own reflection in Pearl:

The streamlet kept up a babble, kind, quiet, soothing, but melancholy, like the voice of a young child that was spending its infancy without playfulness [...]. Pearl resembled the brook, inasmuch as the current of her life gushed from a well-spring as mysterious, and had flowed through scenes shaded as heavily with gloom. But, unlike the little stream, she danced and sparkled, and prattled airily along her course. (127)

Pearl is similar to and in the b(r)ook but not one with it. While the brook confirms and represents the author's description of his work, Pearl reverses it. Pearl, who has offered to mediate her mother's sorrows, here mediates the sorrow of the tale; she reflects on the author's reflection of his "tale of human frailty and sorrow" (36) as represented by this mirror in the text: "'O brook! O foolish and tiresome little brook!' cried Pearl, after

listening awhile to its talk. ‘Why art thou so sad? Pluck up a spirit, and do not be all the time sighing and murmuring!’” (127).

Reader and critic of the book she is in, Pearl is an outside force loose inside the novel and able, symbolically, to walk away from it. Just as she had chosen to leave behind the image of herself in the tidal pool, “so Pearl [...] chose to break off all acquaintance with this repining brook” (128). She sets off to pick wildflowers which, “growing in the crevices of a high rock” (128), recall the “wall-flowers” of “The Custom-House” which grow “in the chinks and crevices” of Fort Ticonderoga and critically figure the “characteristics” that escape narrative depiction (18). Here she is, virtually, beyond narrative bounds, beyond the dark necessity of the tale of the letter. Here the forest is not a moral wilderness but “the mother-forest” (139) and “stern as it showed itself to those who brought the guilt and troubles of the world into its *bosom*—became the playmate of the lonely infant” (139) (emphasis mine). Pearl goes beyond the story to a point where “the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable” which is also “the truth” (139). There the flowers whisper to Pearl, “adorn thyself with me”, and she decorates herself with them to “become a nymph-child, or an infant-dryad, or whatever else was closest in sympathy with the antique wood” (139-40). From this hither narrative of myth and folklore Pearl returns to the verge of *The Scarlet Letter*, as the brook now is since Hester has removed her letter and thrown it to “the hither verge of the stream” (137); and the mystery of the brook has become momentarily “a mystery of joy” (138). She returns to enact the confrontation of “The Child at the Brook-Side”, after which “the melancholy brook would add this other tale to the mystery with which its little heart was already overburdened” (144-5). The “hither verge of the stream” with its mirror effects recalls the “haunted verge” of “the looking-glass” in “The Custom-House” which reflects the scene in a child’s room as a place “somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other” (28). The mirror of the text includes its theory. We are in the self-reflexive margins of the text.

The “Child at the Brook-Side” is a narrative miniature which represents the confrontation of the letter of the law and its dark necessity with the figurative self of the letter beyond the law (Pearl) and its image in the play of the text (the brook). This occurs in the primal scene, when the daughter discovers her parents in an embrace. On one “margin of the brook” (141) is Pearl in her fantastic costume; on the other shore “lay the scarlet letter, so close upon the margin of the stream, that the gold embroidery was reflected in it” (143) —a dramatization of the in-between of the mood of the story and of male and female, character and figure, law and letter, prohibition and desire. To Hester, Pearl “had strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together”; to Dimmesdale, “this brook is the boundary between two worlds” (141).

To the reader, Pearl is the letter escaped from the prison-house of language, the “living hieroglyphic” (140). In her the alphabet becomes “the synesthetic metaphor, where the subject’s bodily passions are put into the place of language” (Oliver 75). She is the letter capable of gesture and passion; and, as such, she returns to the narrative of the letter of the law from its beyond and, seeing the primal scene of sexual union between her mother and father, does not admit to castration and weakness but asserts her power to have the letter returned to the breast: “Seen in the brook, once more, was the shadowy wrath of Pearl’s image, crowned and girdled with flowers, but stamping its foot, wildly gesticulating, and, in the midst of all, still pointing its small forefinger at Hester’s bosom!” (142). She manipulates the Symbolic to her own Imaginary ends with a gesture “which is not reducible to the word” (Oliver 76) and which is rendered as a visual incantation, with a threefold repetition:

At length, assuming a singular air of authority, Pearl stretched out her hand, with the small forefinger extended, and pointing evidently towards her mother's breast. And beneath, in the mirror of the brook, there was the flower-girdled and sunny image of little Pearl, pointing her small forefinger too. [...]

Pearl still pointed with her forefinger; and a frown gathered on her brow [...] In the brook, again, was the fantastic beauty of the image, with its reflected frown, its pointed finger, and imperious gesture, giving emphasis to the aspect of little Pearl. (142)

With authority Pearl's gestures insist that the letter be connected to the body. She stands at the limit of the text as a symbolic construct, as the "written [...] symbol" of "the secret" of sexual love (140) –the adultery that is never named or described in the narrative but is indicated here at the point of exchange of actual and imaginary, where "each imbue[s] itself with the nature of the other":

Pearl had reached the margin of the brook [...] Just where she had paused the brook chanced to form a pool, so smooth and quiet that it reflected a perfect image of her little figure, with all the brilliant picturesqueness of her beauty, in its adornment of flowers and wreathed foliage, but more refined and spiritualized than the reality. This image, so nearly identical with the living Pearl, seemed to communicate somewhat of its own shadowy and intangible quality to the child herself. (141)

Across the narrative stream Pearl looks at her parents "through the dim medium of the forest-gloom" while she appears "all glorified with a ray of sunshine"; and "in the brook beneath stood another child, –another and the same" (141). This creates a dizzying abyss for the reader, of the text reflecting (on) its own reflection; the outside of narrative appears within the narrative stream and creates a fold in which representation loses itself. Reflecting on the story she is in, Pearl "exteriorizes the structure of reflective literary productivity" (Kristeva 78), revealing literary space as "the scene of [the law's] other" (80). Pearl, as "the subject on the basis of literary practice rather than on the basis of neurosis or psychosis", is an ego "neither objective nor subjective but both at the same time, and consequently their 'other'" (Kristeva 97).

At this point of lost bearings in reading the text, Dimmesdale has his own uncanny experience which derives from the fearsomeness of femininity. Returning from beyond the gender and genre restrictions of the narrative proper, Pearl "return[s] from afar, from always: from 'without', from the heath where witches are kept alive" (Cixous 1991, 335), and, for Dimmesdale, repressed feminine sexuality returns with the uncanny force of Medusa's head: "Save it were the cankered wrath of an old witch, like Mistress Hibbins, [...] I know nothing that I would not sooner encounter than this passion in a child. In Pearl's young beauty, as in the wrinkled witch, it has a preternatural effect. Pacify her, if thou lovest me!" (143). Pearl's scene upstages and usurps the authority of the primal scene; she breaks up this scene of "tenderness".

Pearl's passion is not for the father but for the letter as a cover for the breast, as a love letter for the pre-Oedipal bond between mother and daughter. For Pearl the letter symbolizes the breast, not the phallus or its lack: "that first object of which Pearl seemed to become aware was [...] the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom!" (67). In viewing the primal scene, she does not yield to the father but insists on the primacy of her love for Hester through the transitional object she has chosen to enforce her semiotic identification with the

mother's breast. She insists not on the symbolic letter of the law but on the metaphoric letter as breast, as female sexuality.

Both Pearl and "the image of her little figure" in the reflexive brook point to the conjunction of breast and letter in the mirror, to the metaphoric, which they embody ("another, and the same"), over the Symbolic. The living letter, reflecting (on) itself, insists on the breast "in a fit of passion" (142). Not Pearl but her parents are subjected to the image in the mirror. At Dimmesdale's fearful urging, Hester takes up the letter and fastens "it again into her bosom" (143). With this, her "bosom" no more the pillow of "tenderness" on which Dimmesdale has been reclining his head (132), Hester loses her femininity as defined by male pleasure: "her beauty, the warmth and richness of her womanhood, departed" (143). Pearl vanquishes her rival in the primal scene and reclaims the breast as her place: "Now thou art my mother indeed!" (143). This gesticulating literal image forces the narrative to fold back into the pre-Symbolic where the law of the father is subverted by pre-Oedipal identification with the mother's body. Before and underlying the metonymy of desire is the metaphor of narcissistic identification, and metaphor is "the economy that modifies language when subject and object of the utterance act muddle their borders" (in Oliver 74-5), as they do in "The Child at the Brook-Side".

In this (p)re-writing of the primal scene the child displaces the father and insists on the letter as breastwork, as the locus of (her) reading's desire. Pearl thus embodies a feminine writing by insisting on and extending "the letter A, in scarlet, fantastically embroidered with gold thread, upon [Hester's] bosom" (43) by "tracing out the golden and crimson images" (75) to multiply the decorations of the breast. She insists on a weaving of words that celebrates rather than hides women's sexuality. She insists on the pre-Oedipal bonds of mother and daughter and on pleasure that exceeds the castration complex. Not only is she the "effluence of her mother's lawless passion" (113), but she has a lawless passion for her mother. Her obsession with the letter is a metonymical attachment to the breast; and the letter is the place of pleasure for the "lovely child, whose place was on that same dishonored bosom" (62).

### A Proliferation of Breasts

This self-sufficiency [...] is what makes woman enigmatic, inaccessible, impenetrable. Especially since she neither simulates nor dissimulates anything, she exhibits her platitude, or rather the beauty of her breasts.

(Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman* 62)

The "preternatural effect" of Pearl's return to the brook "imparted a tremor to [Dimmesdale's] nerves" (141) that may be compared to Freud's description of the uncanny feeling in men when they see in women and children the ghost-like return of their own abandoned narcissism which, like any double, creates a "feeling of uncanniness, *Unheimlichkeit*" (Kofman 56; see "On Narcissism" 89 and "The Uncanny" 142, 157-58). Dimmesdale is disturbed by "this passion in a child" and by "Pearl's young beauty" (143); she is the threat of childhood sexuality and the appeal of incest. Pearl represents female sexuality not as a tender appeal to the male but as a threatening otherness to phallic sexuality based in what Freud calls "the pre-Oedipus phase" of "exclusive attachment to her mother" when "a little girl's father is not much else for her than a troublesome rival" ("Female Sexuality" 225-26). Vanquishing her "dangerous rival" Dimmesdale (144), Pearl enacts pre-Oedipal desire by her constant focus on the breast, an emphasis which the text as a whole shares, beginning with the "breast" and "bosom" of the eagle "in "The Custom-House" (6), including the "well-developed busts" of the Puritan women in the first scaffold

scene (37) and even the “breastplate” of the armor scene (73). The words “breast” and “bosom” appear 107 times in the narrative (Byers, Owen 82-3, 187). Pearl’s pointing finger adds the reader’s gaze to the “thousand unrelenting eyes, all fastened upon [Hester] and centered at her bosom” (42) in the first scaffold scene. In “The Interior of a Heart”, the reader is asked to picture the “white bosoms” of Dimmesdale’s young female parishioners as a site of “a passion” for him “that they imagined [...] to be all religion” (98); and these “young virgins[’] ... white bosoms” appear again in the second scaffold scene, revealing Dimmesdale’s own desires (which D.H. Lawrence describes as masturbatory [90]), when he imagines “they would scantily have given themselves time to cover [them] with their kerchiefs” as they rush to see him on the scaffold at midnight (104). Breasts are the site of sex in the text.

The semiotic “stems from the pre-Oedipal phase” and so “is bound up with the child’s contact with the mother’s body” (Eagleton 188). Breasts, as the site of mother-daughter love, are physically set forth as the figurative reason why Pearl is a kind of double for Hester when Pearl first appears as the “baby, at Hester’s bosom” which, “drawing its sustenance from the maternal bosom, seemed to have drunk in with it all the turmoil, the anguish, and despair, which pervaded the mother’s system” (50). This nutritive image begins a motif of sensuality connected with the breast—of taste, touch, sight and pain. For the reader, as for Hester and Dimmesdale, there is a masochistic erotics of the breast in which pain is the common pattern. Hester’s “defenseless breast” (60) is stitched (40), weighed down (42), “branded” (60, 112), “seared” (62, 79, 167), struck “like a rough blow upon an ulcerated wound” (60), chilled (125), “burned” (116, 133 and 168) and scorched (167). Visually, tangibly, tactually, Hester’s breasts are the site of a painful figurative synesthesia.

Pearl, “*The Scarlet Letter* ‘endowed with life’”, reiterates in action the sadism of the text’s figurative language, but tenderly and in comic counterpoint. She gathers “handfuls of wild-flowers” and flings them “one by one, at her mother’s bosom; dancing up and down” —“the battery of flowers, almost invariably hitting the mark, and covering the mother’s breast with hurts for which she could find no balm in this world” (67-8). However, Pearl seeks not to hurt but to glorify the breast. She makes fun of the text’s figurative sadism, transforming its harsh images of pain into lingering, sensual pricklings and rubbings of language on the swelling maternal bosom: “Little Pearl paused to gather the prickly burrs from a tall burdock, which grew beside the tomb. Taking a handful of these, she arranged them along the lines of the scarlet letter that decorated the maternal bosom, to which the burrs, as their nature was, tenaciously adhered. Hester did not pluck them off” (92). Chillingworth and Dimmesdale watch this design take shape as voyeurs behind a window, receiving visually the effect the reader gets from the tactile verb and its clinging adverb touching upon the desired breast. Pearl miniaturizes and renders comic and natural her mother’s and her author’s embroidery of the letter. She also mocks her father’s pusillanimity by including him in the motif:

She threw one of the prickly burrs at the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. The sensitive clergyman shrunk, with nervous dread, from the light missile. Detecting his emotion, Pearl clapped her little hands in the most extravagant ecstasy [. . .] All these four persons, old and young, regarded one another in silence, till the child laughed aloud. (93)

The novel’s omnipresent breasts are often curiously bisexual, as when the author places the letter “on my breast” and feels “a sensation [...] of burning heat” (25). The big-

bosomed matrons of the first scaffold scene resemble “the man-like Elizabeth” (37); and a man’s breast is often the focus of the text. The second and third scaffold scenes both turn on the exposure by the minister of “a scarlet token on his naked breast” (102); and the most explicit scene of sexual seduction is homosexual and occurs when Chillingworth, who has been delving “deep into his patient’s bosom” (86), sneaks into Dimmesdale’s bedroom like “a thief entering a chamber ... to steal the very treasure which this man guards as the apple of his eye” (89-90). Imaged as a daughter seducer, Chillingworth “laid his hand upon [Dimmesdale’s] bosom, and thrust aside the vestment that, hitherto, had always covered it”; he sees something that gives him “joy”, “rapture” and “ecstasy” (95-6). Herbert sees Dimmesdale as Chillingworth’s “feminine double” and notes how this scene “invokes the rhythms of sexual climax” (2001, 118). Another figurative sex act, suggesting pedophilia, occurs when Dimmesdale imagines himself corrupting “the youngest sister of them all”, a “poor young girl away from her mother’s side”, by dropping “into her tender bosom a germ of evil that would be sure to blossom darkly soon, and bear black fruit betimes” (148-9).

Following the clue of the breast which Pearl insistently points at, the reader does not find normative sexuality or gender roles but various forms of “perverse sexuality [which] is nothing else than a magnified infantile sexuality split into its separate impulses” (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 311). Sadism, masochism, masturbation, homosexuality, scopophilia and pedophilia are among the component parts of the text’s breast-centered sex. To embroider and illuminate the letter of the breast is “to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates”, says one woman in the first scaffold scene (40). The extensive embroidery on the breast is the text’s Medusan laughter, chiefly evoked by Pearl as she represents the “rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic” of Hester’s nature (59) while mocking the law of the fathers and the pusillanimity of her father.

Pearl’s name designates the revision of a Christian text on the pearl of great price, the price being Hester’s shame. As the embodiment of that “pleasure incomprehensible to the other sex” (84), she is the pearl of clitoral sexuality which precedes the change of love object from mother to father and of erotic zone from clitoris to vagina (Freud, “Femininity” 117-120). Out of reach of the authority that enforces that sacrifice, Pearl authors her own life—that unframed, unconfined, uncastrated female sexuality that so disturbs Freud and Dimmesdale. She is the narcissistic female without the need of man, and Dimmesdale trembles before her. She returns from afar in the place of the double—uncanny like any return of the suppressed, as an abandoned libido position made fearsome by the castration complex.

#### “Where Was Little Pearl?”

We are led to pose the woman question to history in quite elementary terms like,  
 “Where is she?”  
 (Cixous, “Castration or Decapitation” 43)

The climactic scene in the breast motif occurs in the last scaffold scene when Dimmesdale, “with a convulsive motion, [...] tore away the ministerial band from before his breast. It was revealed! But it were irreverent to describe that revelation” (172). The masochism of self-mutilation lies hidden under the narrator’s reverence. Immediately after, “Hester partly raised him, and supported his head against her bosom” (172). Hester again acts the maternal role, after Dimmesdale’s fatal unveiling reveals him as her lover, father of Pearl and (perhaps) wearer, in the flesh, of the wound of the scarlet letter.

At this point in the story, most critics agree, Pearl is normalized in relation to her father. In Mellard’s Lacanian reading, she learns to receive her own value “from others,



from the father, from the sociocultural system” and takes on “womanhood as defined within her culture” (78-9): “Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken [...] and as her tears fell upon her father’s cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it” (173). Seizing on this as the climax of the family romance, Mellard calls this scene “critical in Pearl’s assumption of post-Oedipal subjectivity” and her “assumption of gender” as she “gains identity under the Law of the Father” (79). The trouble with this reading is that Pearl actually *loses* identity in the story from this point. Given the evidence already presented of Pearl’s subversion of frameworks, including Lacan’s, my reading opposes such a normative account of Pearl being imposed in the last pages of the novel and sees her continuing to refuse gender and characterization under the Law of the Father. She kisses the feminized father, the father with breasts.

Pearl’s actions in the last scaffold scene are not unique; she has already given the minister “a caress so tender” at their first meeting (80). To read “a spell was broken” as Pearl falling in line would stand out as an oddly single-minded interpretation in light of the “formula of alternative possibilities” needed to read Hawthorne (Winters 18) and overlooks the duplicity of Pearl’s making peace with the world and becoming a woman in it. What actually happens is Pearl disappears from the text, refusing characterization; as Baym argues, “she ceases to be a character in the story” (1986, 58). She never becomes a woman in this world, but rather remains what she has always been, a figurative self in and of the text, made manifest in the margins of the textual design. To see this, consider her presence in the narrative before and after the scene of the kiss.

In “The New England Holiday” and “The Procession”, Pearl is a “bright and sunny apparition” whose “garb was all of one idea with her nature” (154). She figures, “by the very dance of her spirits, the emotions which none could detect in the marble passiveness of Hester’s brow” (154) “at the moment when she was about to win her freedom” (153). She is still the love letter of the breast, here transformed by metaphor into an infinitely varied play of light, “resembling nothing so much as the shimmer of a diamond, that sparkles and flashes with the varied throbbings of the breast on which it is displayed” (154). Here is the direct metaphorical transfer of drives through the breast by “Pearl, who was the gem on her mother’s unquiet bosom” (154). Pearl’s performance dramatizes the meaning and operation of the embroidered letter as female pleasure; her dance weaves the “throbbings of the breast” into the social fabric. Mocking, as usual, her mother’s self-policed confinement within the Symbolic Order, Pearl plays between word and image, letter and glitter, costume and identity, masculine and feminine, breast and vestment. In her “continual effervescence” (159) she attracts the attention of the pirate captain whose “gold lace on his hat [...] encircled by a gold chain”, like Pearl’s own dress, “was looked upon as pertaining to the character, as to a fish his glistening scales” (158). He tosses her the golden chain that refigures the golden thread on the letter, and Pearl “immediately twined it around her neck and waist, with such happy skill, that, once seen there, it became a part of her” (166). The “indescribable charm [...] that shone through her little figure” appears successively as butterfly, gem, light, bird, flight” (154, 162, 165); “a flake of the sea-foam”, “a soul of the sea-fire, that flashes beneath the prow in the night-time” and “a humming-bird in the air” (165-66). “She broke continually into shouts of a wild, inarticulate, and sometimes piercing music” (154); she “seemed to be borne upward, like a floating sea-bird, on the long heaves and swells of sound” (159). She is the play of metaphor in the text, a continual leaping from one image to another.

Pearl’s “fluttering” image (162) represents “the forgotten art of gayety” in the procession (157) as an emotional equivalent to the “forgotten art” of the needlework on the

scarlet letter (25). She traces on the social body a “grotesque and brilliant embroidery”, (156) like the “brilliantly embroidered badge”, “on Hester’s bosom” (166). In her figurative arabesque she miniaturizes her supplementary and reflexive borderline presence in the novel as a whole:

She made the sombre crowd cheerful by her erratic and glistening ray; even as a bird of bright plumage illuminates a whole tree of dusky foliage by darting to and fro, half seen and half concealed amid the twilight of the clustering leaves. She had an undulating, but, oftentimes, a sharp and irregular movement. (165)

Pearl’s dance figures figuration, actuates and enacts the play of metaphorical language. Partaking “of bird and bandit” (or pirate). She “steal[s] into language to make it fly” (Cixous 1989, 115). Refusing to give up the Imaginary for the Symbolic, Pearl’s metaphoric dance represents “the semiotic disposition that makes its way into language [through] the rhythm, intonation and echolalias of the mother-child symbiosis” (Oliver 34): “It indicated the restless vivacity of her spirit, which to-day was doubly indefatigable in its tiptoe dance, because it was played upon and vibrated with her mother’s disquietude” (165).

This is the narrative presence of Pearl before the scene of the kiss. Afterwards, Pearl disappears as a character of any sort—like the narrator at the end of “The Custom-House”, for whom Salem “ceases to be a reality”, she becomes “a citizen of somewhere else” (34), finding her “home” in an “unknown region” (177).

“But where was little Pearl?” the narrator asks (176). Typically he gives an equivocal answer: “None knew—nor ever learned, with the fullness of perfect certainty—whether” Pearl had died young or become “capable of a woman’s gentle happiness” (176). He believes, following what “the gossips of that day believed”, that she is “not only alive, but married, and happy” (177). However, that sentimental ending depends on the tale lapsing again into the improbability of a fairy tale: “The elf-child [...] became the richest heiress of her day, in the New World” (176) and married a nobleman with “armorial [...] bearings unknown to English heraldry” to become an “inhabitant of another land” (176). This ending to the family romance is, according to Freud, a return by the parents to “the primary narcissism of the child”; they create “his Majesty the Baby” to act out their own pre-Oedipal wishes, “to become a great man and a hero in his father’s place, and the girl shall marry a prince as a tardy compensation for her mother” (“On Narcissism” 115).

Pearl appears in the end only as gender-ambivalent “indications” that her mother has a lover, “that the recluse of the scarlet letter was the object of love [...] with some inhabitant of another land” (176); she returns as desire for the mother. As such she continues in her role as figurative reflection of/on the text’s concern with the elements of representation: “Letters came, with armorial seals upon them” and “beautiful tokens [...] wrought by delicate fingers” (176-77). Pearl is still one with needlecraft and with letters and other semiotic forms. In its last chapter *The Scarlet Letter*, more than ever, concerns the indeterminacy of signs and the disruption of continuous meaning. While Hester returns to Boston to take up the scarlet letter, Pearl crosses the water for the third time and returns only as semiotic markers. The narrative discourse is reduced to “a vague report [which] would now and then find its way across the sea, —like a shapeless piece of driftwood tost ashore, with the initials of a name upon it” (176).

The language of narrative reflexivity dominates the ending of the novel, as plot and character fade out. Pearl comes back again from elsewhere, in her third crossing of the waters of narrative reflection, as fragmented mirrors of textuality, a skeletal image of the text: tokens, epistles, a coat of arms, symbolic fesswork and carved initials. What comes

back across the water is Pearl as semiotic—as mysterious, ungrammatical signs; and the text turns in on itself by returning to the needlecraft of women’s shame and unknown pleasure: “And, once, Hester was seen embroidering a baby-garment, with such a lavish richness of golden fancy as would have raised a public tumult, had any infant, thus apparelled, been shown to our sobre-hued community” (177). The narrative circles back to its beginning, as its time elides with the author’s and the reader’s in “*our* sobre-hued community” (emphasis mine), to the birth of a baby that must be exiled from the community because of its fantastic dress and irregular origins. Like Pearl’s decorations, “the novel [...] conform[s] to the shape of the letter” so that “the novel’s title, in retrospect, doubles as Hester’s epitaph” (Nudelman 280).

The gravestone that closes the story is a particularly obscure mirror in the text. As in the mirror scenes, the tombstone composition involves the play of the text with its own parameters and components, here on an elemental level. “On a field, sable, the letter A, gules” is described as “the *semblance* of an engraved escutcheon” which “bore a *device*” in “a herald’s wording” to serve at once as a “motto and brief *description* of our now concluded legend” (178) (emphasis mine). Legend, motto, wording, heraldic device, engraved escutcheon and narrative self-description form a multiply framed mirror of the text as mere inscrutable words—another re-reading of the author’s reading of his text. This final fesspoint of *The Letter* within the letter is Pearl’s pointing finger returning again as the living hieroglyphic, the unfixed sign that proliferates, but does not characterize, as the margins centered in the reflexivity of the text. The run-around of letter as image of and in the novel, the conclusion as motto, the fluttering from one mysterious sign to another and the paradox of the “ever glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow” (178) are pure Pearl.

### Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*. trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986.
- Baym, Nina. *The Scarlet Letter: A Reading*. Boston: Twayne, 1986.
- . *The Shape of Hawthorne’s Career*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1976.
- Bell, Millicent. “The Obliquity of Signs: *The Scarlet Letter*”. *Massachusetts Review* 23 (Spring 1982): 9-26.
- Benvenuto, Bice, Roger Kennedy. *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction*. London: Free Association Books, 1986.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Office of “The Scarlet Letter*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991.
- Bryson, Norman. “Hawthorne’s Illegible Letter”. *Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter*. Harold Bloom. ed. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. 81-95.
- Byers, John R., Jr., James J. Owen. *A Concordance to the Five Novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. New York: Garland, 1979.
- Cixous, Helene. “Castration or Decapitation?” trans. Annette Kuhn. *Signs* 7.1 (Autumn 1981): 41-55.
- . “The Laugh of the Medusa”. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. ed. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1991. 334-349.

- . “Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays”. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. ed. London: Macmillan, 1989. 101-116.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983.
- Freud, Sigmund. “Female Sexuality”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. vol. 21. trans. James Strachey. ed. London: The Hogarth P, 1981. 225-243.
- . “Femininity”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. vol. 22. trans. James Strachey. ed. London: The Hogarth P, 1981. 112-135.
- . “Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Part 3)”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. vol. 16. trans. James Strachey. ed. London: The Hogarth P, 1981.
- . “Medusa’s Head”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. vol. 18. trans. James Strachey. ed. London: The Hogarth P, 1981. 273-274.
- . “On Narcissism: An Introduction”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. Vol. 14. trans. James Strachey. ed. London: The Hogarth P, 69-102.
- . “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. Vol. 7. trans. James Strachey. ed. London: The Hogarth P, 1981. 135-245.
- . “The Uncanny”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. Vol. 17. trans. James Strachey. ed. London: The Hogarth Press, 1981. 217-252.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Seymour Gross et al. ed. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Norton, 1988.
- Herbert, T. Walter. *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-Class Family*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- . “Pornographic Manhood in *The Scarlet Letter*”. *Studies in American Fiction* 29 (2001): 113-120.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Irwin, John. *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.
- Jameson, Fredric. “Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject”. *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977): 338-395.
- Kofman, Sarah. *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud’s Writings*. trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Leon S. Roudiez. ed. trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: A Selection*. trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Lawrence, D. H. *Studies in Classical American Literature*. New York: The Viking P, 1961.
- Mellard, James M. *Using Lacan, Reading Fiction*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991.
- Mitchell, Thomas R. *Hawthorne’s Fuller Mystery*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998.
- Nudelman, Franny. “‘Ghosts Might Enter Here’: Towards a Reader’s History”. *Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*. John L. Idol Jr. and Melinda M. Ponder. ed. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1999.
- Oliver, Kelly. *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Onderdonk, Todd. “The Marble Mother: Hawthorne’s Iconographies of the Feminine”. *Studies in American Fiction* 31 (2003): 73-100.

- Pfister, Joel. *The Production of Personal Life: Class, Gender and the Psychological in Hawthorne's Fiction*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991.
- Porte, Joel. *The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan UP, 1969.
- Trollope, Anthony. "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne". 1879. "*The Scarlet Letter: Text, Sources and Criticism*". Kenneth S. Lynn. ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961. 166-174.
- Von Abele, Rudolph. *The Death of the Artist: A Study of Hawthorne's Disintegration*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955.
- Winters, Yvor. *Maule's Curse: Seven Studies in the History of American Obscurantism*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1938.

## The Influence of Dante, Italy and the Mediterranean Myth in Malcolm Lowry's Fiction

Carla Comellini

**Abstract:** In Malcolm Lowry's fiction, it is worth underlining the deep influence not only of the Mediterranean Myth and of Italy, but also of the main Italian Poet Dante Alighieri and of his pattern of life-death-rebirth, which is developed in his long poem *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy). Dante's poetry, Italian culture and the correlated Mediterranean myth offer the most explicit metaphors of the life/death/rebirth pattern. In fact, Lowry's fiction, which is built on the interweaving of several metaphorical and symbolic strata, suggests the dynamic process of self-discovery through recurrent references to the life-death-rebirth pattern. Lowry's two visits to Italy, respectively in 1948-49 and in 1954-55, were somehow fictionalized, but what is really worth focusing here is how the Italian poet Dante and the related Mediterranean myth are at work in Lowry's fiction, considering the great abundance of Lowry's associations and references.

**Keywords:** Italian influence, Dante's poetry, myth, English Literature, narrative, twentieth century

In a critical approach to the narrative of the English writer Malcolm Lowry, it is worth underlining the deep influence not only of the Mediterranean Myth and consequently of Italy, but also of the main Italian Poet Dante Alighieri and of his pattern of life-death-rebirth, which is developed in his long poem *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy). As is revealed by the recurring quotations scattered all over in Lowry's fiction, Dante's poetry, Italian culture and the correlated Mediterranean Myth offer the most explicit metaphors of the life/death/rebirth pattern. In fact, Lowry's fiction, which is built on the interweaving of several metaphorical and symbolic strata, suggests the dynamic process of self-discovery through recurrent references to the life-death-rebirth pattern. The symbolism of Italy and of the Mediterranean myth without forgetting Dante's echoes are wide-spread in Lowry's entire fiction both by means of clear and manifest references and through subtle, indirect, or elusive suggestions related to Italy's archaic, or mythical roots, which were still alive at the time of Lowry's visits. Here, more than dealing with Lowry's two visits to Italy respectively in 1948-49 and in 1954-55, or with his fictionalizing of his Italian sojourns, it is worth focusing on how the related Mediterranean Myth and the Italian poet Dante Alighieri are at work in Lowry's fiction, just selecting only a few examples from the great abundance of Lowry's associations.

First of all, Italy represents both a real and metaphorical place linking the past and the present, with Egyptian, Etruscan, Phoenician, Greek and Roman legacies still visible in the twentieth century. Moreover, some vital Italian concepts of life are in line with the archaic, mythical magic of drinking in connection with Pan, Bacchus and the Moon Goddess, as Lowry suggests in his story "Elephant and Colosseum" where his protagonist requests in Italian: "Vino rosso, per favore" (1986, 114), a sentence meaning "Red wine, please" in English. The link between past and present emerges clearly in the three central stories of Lowry's *Hear us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*: "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession", "Elephant and Colosseum" and "Present Estate of Pompeii"

are three stories with Italian settings where Italy is evoked both in its twentieth century reality and in its subtle links with ancient culture and mythology. An example is offered by one on the most appealing symbols used by Lowry: “the volcano”. The volcano dominates the story “Present Estate of Pompeii”, by connecting the antinomies of air and earth, of water and fire in its image of a huge mountain penetrating the subsoil and rising towards the sky, and thus symbolizing both the descent and the ascent, in connection with the Mediterranean Myth. The volcano is a mountain which can also mingle other two symbolic images, that is: the white snow and the red erupting fire and magma. Thus, as in archaic times, the symbol of the volcano alludes to the dynamic rhythm of life, in the endless process of balancing the four basic elements: air, earth, water and fire, as D.H. Lawrence’s literary production had already expressed: a lesson which Lowry assimilated deeply (Comellini 2009). At the same time, the volcano represents the process of renewal after destruction; in fact, no land is more fertile than those previously wasted by the volcanic magma, as testified by Italian lands in volcanic areas and as D.H. Lawrence has masterly shown in his works (Comellini 2009). Volcanoes are a basic part of the Italian landscape and life with Vesuvius in Pompeii and Stromboli and Etna in Sicily. All three allude, subtly, to ancient mythology. Vesuvius, brilliantly used by Lowry in “Present Estate of Pompeii”, by hinting at its catastrophic eruption in Roman times, indirectly suggests the process of renewal after destruction, a process strictly linked to the symbolism of the volcano. Allusive references to archaic Sicilian mythology are subtly evoked in “Elephant and Colosseum” through parodic connections such as the main character’s “grandmother born in Sicily” (Lowry 1986, 114), or “Via Sicilia!” (115), a street in Rome. It is worth underlining here that on D.H. Lawrence’s steps Lowry visited Naples and lived in Sicily (Comellini 2009).

Moreover, “Eridanus”, which is evoked metaphorically by Lowry both in his novel *Under the Volcano* and in his stories of *Hear us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, refers to the archaic name of the Italian river Po, as Lowry himself explains in the story “The Forest Path to the Spring” (*HL* 227). In line with the Mediterranean Myth, Eridanus is not only reminiscent of that mythical river which watered the Elysian Fields of the Earthly Paradise, but also of the river which, according to Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, Phaethon had fallen into after his mythical adventure, in an attempt to drive the chariot of the Sun (Markson 179). However, to stress Lowry’s ability in interweaving multiple symbolic meanings, it is worth adding that Phaethon’s cosmic fall into the river Eridanus has always been related to an archaic, catastrophic volcanic eruption (Comellini 2004). In addition, like other rivers of archaic times, Eridanus used to be represented with the head of a Bull/Taurus, a mythological figure which has always been associated with the fertile lunar powers of the Moon Goddess (Durand 74), as is subtly evoked by Lowry in *Under the Volcano*. This confrontation between man and bull is one of the most revelatory vestiges of the archaic rituals in honour of the God Mithra/Taurus. In ancient times, in Italy and in the Mediterranean area, the Taurus’ fertile powers also used to be associated with the fertile properties of fire—those concealed in wood (Durand 333). The positive properties of fire were usually fused and confused with the revitalizing powers of water, or of the Moon Goddess who is the Ruler of waters. However, as Lowry ironically wonders in “The Forest Path to the Spring” “was not Eridanus also the Styx?” (*HL* 231). Is not by chance, then, that Lowry frequently cites Eridanus together with Orion both in *Under the Volcano* and in *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*. In addition, Lowry’s insistence on Orion stresses another connection with the Mediterranean Myth. Orion is known both as a Cretan hero and a constellation (Graves 135-8): as a hero he is a hunter who—according to the myth, or at least to one of its three versions—was one of Poseidon’s sons and used to

hunt with the Moon Goddess Artemis, or Diana to the Romans. Killed by a scorpion, Orion was transformed into the constellation, eternally chased by the constellation of Scorpio. Moreover, just as Artemis is often metamorphosed as a dog or represented with a hunting dog at her side, both Orion and Taurus/Mithra used to be depicted together with a hunting dog. All this also creates an immediate association with Cerberus, the dreadful dog of the Underworld in pagan times. In relation to this topic, it is worth adding here that the Romans used to bury their dead at home, considering them to be protecting Gods (Frazer 13): they were called the Lares, as Lowry knew very well. In fact, he cites “the Lares”, “forest” and a “dog”: these images are all connected to the Consul’s death and to his fall into a “ravine”. Like the cantinas in the opening page of *Under the Volcano*, these images—the “burning bodies”, the “forest”, the “fall” and the “dog”—symbolize the descent into Hell:

[...] falling, into a forest, falling—  
Suddenly he screamed, and it was as though this scream were being tossed from one tree to another, as its returned, then, as though the trees themselves were crowding nearer, huddled together, closing over him, pitying. Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine. (376)

Moreover, as Lowry himself reveals in “The Forest Path to the Spring”, “Jupiter in remembrance of Phaethon” had placed “beneath blazing Orion [...] the starry constellation Eridanus, known both as the River of Death and the River of Life” (227). Besides, just to point out the eternal, dynamic process of life-death-rebirth or the scheme of the eternal return, which is correlated to Eridanus as the River of Life, Lowry refers to Eridanus with these words from “The Forest Path to the Spring”:

But here in the inlet there was neither sea nor river, but something compounded of both, in eternal movement, and eternal flux and change, as mysterious and multiform in its motion and being, and in the mind as the mind flowed with it as was that other Eridanus, the constellation in the heavens, the starry river in the sky [...] something so still, so changeless, and yet reaching everywhere, and in no danger of being exhausted: like “that which is so still and yet passes on in constant flow, and in passing on, becomes remote, and having become remote, returns”. (HL 236)

This idea of a constant “flow” or “change” in an eternal return reveals a deep connection with the Mediterranean myth and, consequently, with the correlated mythical process of eternal change expressed by the Moon Goddess as well as by the Magna Mater, as D.H. Lawrence had already brilliantly shown in his entire works. In fact, both Goddesses have always been associated with the process of life/death/rebirth, which is visibly expressed by the Moon’s transformation, recurring every 28 days, and by the Magna Mater’s transformation, re-proposed by the change of seasons every year.

Not differently from the image of the “dog”, usually associated with Mithra/Taurus, the metaphorical and mythical elements of the “forest”, the “ravine”, the “cantina” refer to the process of self-discovery, which implies a metaphorical death of the old self as a necessary step towards renewal. In addition, this metaphorical pattern leads to the image of the circle or the wheel, which is another recurring image in Lowry’s fiction, or to the idea of the eternal return as is subtly suggested by the allusive elements which are present both in the opening and in the last page of the novel. It is also reinforced by the fact that the story begins and ends on the Day of the Dead. At this point, the link with the Mediterranean myth which presents the idea of change and transformation in an everlasting process is



obvious. In this symbolism, death is represented by the disappearance of the Moon—with the Moon Goddess concealed in the Underworld—and rebirth is seen as the image of the new, or a renewed Moon, which subtly indicates a new beginning. Thus, to start a process of self-discovery, or renewal, it is necessary to face fear; that is to say, to face death, or to descend into the Underworld. This entire process is elusively proposed from the opening page of *Under the Volcano*, where, first of all, Lowry deals with the four cardinal points: North, South, West, and East. They allude not only to the four primary elements, but also to the everlasting movement of the sun from east to west and east again the next day which is a clear metaphor of the process of life-death-rebirth. Moreover, Lowry's quotation of the word *cantinas* suggests not only an immediate reference to wine—the magic of drinking—but also, indirectly, to the Underworld. And this metaphorical allusion to a descent, implying the idea of death, is confirmed by the words in the opening page: “sunset on the Day of the Dead in November 1939” (*UV* 9). However, there are also other allusions to the Underworld: for instance “ghosts”, or the Italian word “Selva” which means forest. “Selva” is introduced through the reference to “The Hotel Casino de la Selva”. On the other hand, just three lines further down, “Selva” is balanced by its antinomian image—“gardens”—in an implicit allusion to Eden, or Paradise (Comellini 1985). All these images recur throughout the novel revealing its metaphorical pattern: The descent into the Underworld, which is the first step in the process of self-discovery, indicates a state of chaos or of individual confusion, metaphorically represented by the selva, or the forest, or the labyrinth. This status of individual confusion has to be transformed into a sublime self-consciousness, referring to the ultimate phase of the process of renewal and metaphorically depicted in the paradisiacal image of the garden.

As well known by Lowry's readers, *Under the Volcano* was to represent Dante's *Inferno* in Lowry's aim at reproducing Dante's pattern of *Divina Commedia*, divided into three parts. Lowry's narrative project, entitled *The Voyage that Never Ends*, was never completed. In fact, in Lowry's original plan, *Under the Volcano* was supposed to represent the *Inferno*, *Lunar Caustic* the *Purgatorio*, and *In Ballast to the White Sea* the *Paradiso* (McCarthy 117). In fact, if one keeps in mind Dante's *Inferno*, subtle references to it can be easily detected in *Under the Volcano*. These allusions are conveyed through recurring quotations from Dante's opening lines of *Inferno*, such as:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura  
ché la diritta via era smarrita.  
Ahi quanto, a dir qual era, e cosa dura  
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte,  
che nel pensier rinnova la paura! (*Inferno* I: 1-6)

For instance, Lowry opens the sixth chapter of *Under the Volcano* with the following quotation: “Nel mezzo del bloody cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai in”. He quotes Dante's two opening lines of *Inferno*, but not entirely: he omits the words “selva oscura” (dark forest) substituting an ellipsis and adds the English word “bloody”. He also substitutes “in” for the Italian “per”. Thus, while he manipulates Dante's lines, Lowry also manipulates the reader who is forced to become interactive and to add meanings to Lowry's dots, or to fill them with the words “selva oscura”. Simultaneously, thanks to the word “bloody”, the reader can perceive the parodic use of Dante's lines in Lowry's interpretation of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy) and, typically, some lines further down, Lowry offers the interpretative key to Dante's lines, thanks to the re-petition of the word “bloody” and to

the English translation of the Italian lines: “In the middle of our life, in the middle of the bloody road of our life”. Again, the reader is subtly forced to connect these lines in the English translation, which seem to allude to the ritual of descent, with the previous passage which, on the same page, describes the sky and which, indirectly, proposes an idea of ascent. Thus, allusively, once again, Lowry suggests the everlasting cycle of descent-ascent, or of death-renewal, which ends up constituting the image of the circle recurring also in the image of the wheel in *Under the Volcano*.

It is worth noting here that in “Elephant and Colosseum” (one of his tree Italian stories), there is a similar image of wholeness. Again, in the opening page of the story (*HL* 114), Lowry quotes Dante’s lines: “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai in”. In Lowry’s typical parodic way, the quotation is followed by an allusion to Cosnahan’s poor knowledge of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: “which was about all the other ‘Italian’ he knew (and certainly all the Dante)” (*HL* 114). However, Lowry quotes “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita ml ritrovai in” again in the middle of “Elephant and Colosseum”, adding what was lacking in the previous quotation: “And here was the bosca oscura, the obscure boskage. It was the Borghese Gardens” (*HL* 159). Again, there is a reference to the process of self-discovery, which leads from darkness to light, as suggested by the reference to Dante’s “bosca oscura” that “oscurer boskage” indicating Hell in juxtaposition to “gardens”, the Borghese Gardens” (*HL* 159), which symbolize Paradise. In another passage from *Under the Volcano*, Lowry quotes Dante’s lines again, but in a very elusive way. There, Dante’s lines are re-proposed starting from the last words of the usual quotation: “Mi ritrovai in una bosca oscura—or selva” (*HL* 228) Here, the ellipsis is at the beginning and not at the end of the quotation. In this page the reference to Dante’s lines follows the name of a cantina, allusively denominated “The Terminal Cantina El Bosque” (Comellini 1983) and it is followed by the words: “The Cantina was well named, ‘The Boskage’” (*HL* 228).

Thanks to the recurring references to these lines of Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, another subtle connection must be underlined: in fact, there is no doubt that Dante’s poetry is permeated by those esoteric meanings which appealed so much to Lowry too, and which are deeply rooted in the Mediterranean myth. Significant examples are: “selva” as a synonym for a maze or a labyrinth which immediately recalls the Cretan Minotaur, and all the correlated meanings rooted in the Mediterranean myth such as: the labyrinth as an equivalent of the image of the cave; the idea of death strictly connected to life; the labyrinthine journey of the soul representing the descent into the underworld (Santarcangeli 98,105); the images of the circle and of the serpentine which are metaphors of the human journey towards death and renewal (Santarcangeli 113). Among these, the image of the centre, corresponding to a place of life and rebirth, is often represented as a Garden, or the tree of life, or a Spring (Santarcangeli 130), as well as the centre of the labyrinth; these images imply a passage, or a “flow”, or a “change” or a transformation from the physical, symbolized by the Minotaur and called life, to the spiritual, called death (Santarcangeli 133). The Garden echoes the Pagan Garden of the Hesperides, or the Biblical Eden, later transformed into our Christian Paradise (Comellini 1985). The garden recurs in *Under the Volcano* in a multiplicity of references, and it recurs obsessively in the refrain, “¿Le Gusta Este Jardin? ¿Que Es Suyo?/Evite Que Sus Hijos Lo Destruvan!” (Comellini 2004) The refrain even returns as a sort of appendix at the end of the novel, stressing once again the idea of Eden and of the correlated image of its destruction.

The archetype of a journey, suggesting a quest or a process of self discovery, permeates both Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Lowry’s fiction. This archetype is rooted again in the Mediterranean myth as is testified by a multiplicity of examples, such as, to quote just a few: Jason and the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece, Isis in Search of Osiris’

body, Ulysses' wanderings in the Mediterranean basin. As has already been noted, the pattern of a journey suggests the idea of the circle, or the wheel, producing an eternal return. Thus, if Dante's *Divine Comedy* is built on the pattern of several circles, suggesting the process of eternal return, Lowry's *Under the Volcano* creates the same idea, through the story which begins and ends on the second of November, the Day of the Dead. *Hear us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* leads from Vancouver to Italy and back to Vancouver, thus offering again the image of the circle, while Italy, the setting of the three central stories, suggests the idea of the centre from which multiple convergent circles depart (Comellini 1996). "A miniature reproduction of *The Voyage That Never Ends, Hear us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, follows Dante's stages, stopping on the threshold of earthly paradise [...] the journey moves through the hell of 'Through the Panama', 'the purgatory of 'Strange Comfort', 'Elephant and Colosseum', and 'Present Estate', towards paradise in 'Forest Path'" (in Grace 216-7).

In addition to the above-mentioned references, numerological also permeates both Dante's and Lowry's literary works and is rooted in the Hebrew Cabala as well as in the triadic pattern of both the Moon Goddess and the Magna Mater. As is manifest, the Moon Goddess is one and three at the same time, or better one and four at the same time with different deities representing the phases of the Moon. This leads to the image of unity or wholeness or of the One, merging from multiple manifestations. This concept of the One, combining multiple elements in itself, is exemplified by symbols used by Lowry in his fiction, such as the Cosmic Egg (*UV 71*) or the tree of life, or the centre, or the image of the circle which can be visualized in the wheel and the volcano. In the Mediterranean myth, archaic esoteric concepts permeated not only in the religious structure, built on the basis of the number three and its multiples, but also the political-social and cultural systems. The structure of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is built on the number three and its multiples with *Purgatorio* (Purgatory) and *Paradiso* (Paradise) having thirty-three cantos each, and *Inferno* (Hell) 34, for a total amount of a hundred cantos. One hundred, which is reducible to ten and then to one, stresses once more the archaic cosmic idea of unity, of wholeness, or of the One, emerging from the multiple aspects of reality and leading to the idea of the centre (Cirlot 508). Moreover, the archaic philosopher, Pythagoras from Sicily, built his theories on the One, which is at the basis of Mediterranean thought and which symbolizes the beginning of everything. Pythagoras' theories are based on the Tetractis, that is the perfect triangle built from one to four and reaching the sum of ten (Vinassa De Regny 19). It is also worth adding that the thirty-four cantos of Dante's *Inferno* recall the union of three with four whose total is seven. Three symbolizes the sky, the ascent, the inner-self and the dynamic transformation, while four indicates the earth, the descent, the outer self and the static status (Cirlot 197). Seven, which is the most magic number (Vinassa De Regny 93), reproduces the union of the number three and the number four. Like the Moon, which changes every seven days, seven symbolizes wholeness, transformation and a new beginning.

Malcolm Lowry reproduces a pattern built on the number twelve in *Under the Volcano*, the novel made of twelve chapters. Twelve is a multiple of three and, at the same time, a multiple of four connecting three and four, thus also giving the implicit idea of seven. Nevertheless, there is also an allusion to the image of the circle, because twelve is usually connected to the twelve months in a year, which are divided into four seasons of three months each. But, twelve, written as the figure 12, is made up of one and two, whose total gives three which can be reduced to one plus one plus one. The same figure of one and two reflects that two is a double of one. The novel is built in a sort of round way, meaning that, after the end, it is necessary to start again from the first chapter, or to begin again from

the beginning, the One. Similarly, *Hear us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* with its seven stories—with the last one returning to Vancouver, where the first story was set—offers the idea of a new beginning through the archetype of a journey, as well as through the symbolic meaning of the number seven which refers to the union of three-sky—with four-earth—as well as to the idea of transformation and of life. It is worth remembering that seven are the mysteries of Mithra and seven are the grades of Dante's ascent to Paradise (Santarcangeli 130-31). Similarly, it is worth underlining that the first Canto of Dante's *Paradiso* (Paradise) refers to seven as the union of four ("quattro cerchi"—four circles) with three ("tre croci"—three crosses), as the following lines from Dante's *Paradiso* reveal:

Surge ai mortali per diverse foci  
la lucerna del mondo; ma da quella  
che quattro cerchi ghigne con tre croci,  
con miglior corso e con miglior stella  
esce congiunta, e la mondana cera  
più a suo modo tempera e suggella. (*Paradiso* I: 37-42)

Moreover, the number seven is also connected with the constellation of the Pleiads (Cirlot 389) – a recurring image in Lowry's fiction (*UV* 35; *HL* 11). In the constellation of the Pleiads, reflecting the Mediterranean myth of Atlas' daughters, six stars are visible and one is invisible (Cirlot 445-47). Again, the number seven and its idea of a new beginning is re-proposed by Lowry who knew that seven is also created by six, a multiple of the perfect number three plus one which symbolizes the beginning of everything, as remarked by Dante in his *Divine Comedy*. Then, it is not by chance that Lowry frequently cites the number seven in his story "Through the Panama" (*HL* 27).

Thus, one can conclude that the references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* as well as the multiple references to the Mediterranean Myth can offer a key to penetrate the deep and interweaving metaphorical meanings of Lowry's fiction. Then, it must be added that innumerable elements, references and even influences are at work in the complex structure of Lowry's narrative: among these, the ancient Italian and Mediterranean symbolism, the esoteric concepts together with Dante's *Divine Comedy* can be seen as strong influences, as stressed by the recurrent repetition of Dante's most famous line either in Italian or in a sort of English translation, that is: Nel mezzo del Cammin di nostra vita/mi ritrovai per una selva oscura. Thus, again, Lowry indirectly evokes the basic theme of his narrative; the life/death/rebirth pattern.

### Works Cited

- Cirlot, Jean-Eduardo. *Dizionario dei simboli*. Milano: Siad Edizioni, 1985.
- Comellini, Carla. "Simbologia della scena messicana in D.H. Lawrence and Malcolm Lowry". *Canada: testi e contesti*. Alfredo Rizzardi. ed. Abano Terme: Piovani Editore, 1983. 115-123.
- . "Elementi mitici in *Under the Volcano* di Malcolm Lowry". *The Verbal Creation/La Creazione Verbale*. Alfredo Rizzardi. ed. Editore, 1985. 183-316.
- . "La quest utopica nel viaggio in Italia di Malcolm Lowry" in *Utopia*. R. Baccolini, V. Fortunati, and N. Minerva. ed. Ravenna: Longo, 1996. 293-301.

- . “Il Messico di Graham Greene e di Malcolm Lowry”. *Quaderni del Premio Letterario Giuseppe Acerbi* 12. Edizione: Letteratura del Messico. Negarine di S.Pietro in Cariano (Vr): Il Segno dei Gabrielli Editori, 2004. 119-124.
- . *D.H. Lawrence, a Study on Mutual and Cross References and Interferences*. Bologna: Clueb, 2009.
- Durand, Gilbert. *Le strutture antropologiche dell'immaginario*. Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 1987.
- Frazer, James George. *La paura dei morti nelle religioni primitive*. Milano: Mondadori, 1985.
- Grace, Sherrill. ed. *Swinging the Maelstrom: New Perspectives on Malcolm Lowry*. Montreal & Kingston, London: McGill-Queen's P, 1992.
- Graves, Robert. *I miti greci*. Milano: Longanesi, 1989.
- Lowry, Malcolm. *Hear us O Lord from Heaven thy Dwelling Place (HL)*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1986.
- . *Selected Letters*. Harvey Breit, Margerie Bonner Lowry. eds. Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1965.
- . *Under the Volcano*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.
- Markson, David. *Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning*. New York: Times Books, 1978.
- McCarthy, Patrick A. *Forests of Symbols: World, Text and Self in Malcolm Lowry's Fiction*. Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1994.
- Santarcangeli, Paolo. *Il libro dei labirinti*. Varese: Frassinella 1984.
- Vinassa De Regny, Paolo. *Dante e il simbolismo pitagorico*. Genova: Fratelli Mdità Editori, 1988.

**“There was something different about the boy”:  
Queer Subversion in Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire***

**Francisco Costa**

**Abstract:** Although queer drama is commonly regarded as “product” of an essentially nineties discourse of postmodern revisionism, this paper examines how Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) queerly subverts and implodes heteronormative ideology. Intrinsic and elusive traces of a “queer philosophy” can be located as a foundational context and motivating factor in Williams’s play. To this effect, the critical approach to this text aims to reflect on issues of sexuality and identity in the historical, cultural, and social context of mid-twentieth-century America. A further aim is to isolate specificities concerning the construction and representation of masculine dynamics through a queer-inflected approach.

**Keywords:** Tennessee Williams, American Drama, queer, sociosexual dynamics, hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity

**Queer Defiance and Tennessee Williams**

In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), Tennessee Williams employs a double performance: a highly visible heterosexual performance, and a homosexual one, the richer of the two in terms of possible readings and interpretations, but which occupies a place in the subtext—hidden behind the doors of the white straight America of the 1950s. However, in spite of the fact that the gay character is almost always physically absent in *Streetcar*, an economy of homoerotic desire is present throughout the text. Williams manages to ally his homosexual economy of desire to a heterosexual one imposed by heteronormativity. Simultaneously, the playwright also exposes the violence that is part of the exercise of an authoritarian masculinity and enhances women’s power and sexual desire (Savran 81).

Even though in *Streetcar* homosexuality remains “unsaid”, the visibly marked “persona” and “sensibility” that characterized cultural understandings and stereotypes of the homosexual are glaringly abundant. Thus, in this particular play, homosexuality is conveyed through “the eyes of the beholder” and, therefore, opens to audience interpretation (Clum 84). Despite the fact that *Streetcar* is problematic due to its influential stereotyping of homosexuality, its dual textuality and refusal of conventional narrative resolution also allows it a queer potency that is commonly underestimated. Whereas the homophobic elements of the audience can find pleasure and satisfaction in the gay character’s tragic fate, more sympathetic (or identifying) audience members can also find equal pleasure and satisfaction in these characters’ “deviant lifestyles”, thereby epitomising homosexual “resilience” and “perseverance” despite social oppression and violence. Thus, the chameleon-like identity of the homosexual in Williams’s play and the “danger” of being subversively encoded can be regarded as having much more in common with a radical queer theatre than the more fixed attempt at assimilation in such mainstream works of later gay theatre: a theatre based more upon the affirmation of an essential identity that is safely distanced from the normative.

Accordingly, theatre historians, gay critics, and queer theorists who have written key texts in the field contribute to the queer-inflected examination of the play offered in this

paper through their leading readings of gay male sexualities in American drama.<sup>1</sup> The main conclusion that emerges from a review of this literature is that this scholarship has been offering numerous examinations of gay individuals as continuously victimized and passive and consequently, it has been lacking a focused examination of gay individuals as active and victor, who when represented on stage confront the dominant ideology. Thus, this essay offers a reading of *Streetcar* as a challenging text. The play is here examined not as plea for acceptance, but as a text that confronts heteronormativity.

The queer subversiveness of *Streetcar* resides namely to a great extent in its social, political and historical context. The representation of homosexuality in American theatre was outlawed until the end of the 1950s for fear that it would lead to “the corruption of youth or others”, or that such productions would attract homosexuals to the audience “thus creating a visible presence and, therefore, a threat to the enforcement of invisibility” (Clum 74). As a result, “closet dramas” of this period saw sexual deviance as a tempting lure of the forbidden, wherein homosexuality was fluidly invoked and yet simultaneously disavowed actual articulation. Homosexual characters and relationships were commonly inferred through stereotype and an encoded structure of signs through which homosexuality could be deciphered. As John M. Clum proposes, a performative homosexuality was embodied through a “catalogue” or “combination of selections”:

Table 1  
“Combination of selections”

Effeminacy (mincing, limp wrists, lispings, flamboyant dress)
Sensitivity (moodiness, a devotion to his mother, a tendency to show emotion in an unmanly way)
Artistic talent or sensibility
Misogyny
Pederasty (as we shall see, this became the stereotypical formula for homosexual relationships, with its connotations of arrested development and pernicious influence)
Foppishness
Isolation (the homosexual’s fate, if he or she remained alive at the final curtain)

John M. Clum, *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2000. 77.

The aim of such “combination” was, of course, to attempt to universalize a system by which the invisible “danger” of homosexuality could be exposed. Heterosexist culture could thereby seem to be given privileged and empowered access to the identification and marginalization of its deviant other, but ironically the establishment of such a system also

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Duberman’s *Stonewall*; Chauncy’s *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*; Curtin’s *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians: The Emergence of Lesbians and Gay Men on the American Stage*; De Jongh’s *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage*; Senelick’s *The American Stage: Writing on Theater from Washington Irving to Tony Kushner*; Sinfield’s *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century*; Clum’s *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*; Savran’s *Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism and Contemporary American Culture*; Dolan’s *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance*; Vorlicky’s *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama*; Román’s *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and Aids*.

provided a means by which the homosexual could “pass” in heteronormative society by refusing to enact such a performative system: “[t]he homosexual character is often trapped in a ritual of purgation—of identifying and eliminating. Visual stereotypes allow the playwright and performers to enact this ritual without ever naming what is considered unspeakable” (Clum 78). Williams’s *Streetcar* is here argued to be an example of this “ambiguity”.

Williams (1911-1983), one of the most important and influential American playwrights of the twentieth century, was responsible, together with his contemporary Arthur Miller, for the creation of an American drama independent of the European models. Both Williams and Miller were part of those marginalized groups of the domestic revival: Williams was homosexual and Miller was associated with the American communist party. Producing their most important works during the mid-forties and the beginning of the 1960s, their theatre apparently corresponds to the models of the ruling ideology. However, the subversion is held inside, or from these models.

Surveillance, arrest, police harassment, gay men imprisoned in violent wards, a government-sanctioned, organized drive to single out homosexuals in the workplace: this was the atmosphere in which Williams wrote *Streetcar* (D’Emilio 32).<sup>2</sup> In this context, Williams’s play depicts a weak and unadjusted masculinity, where the homoerotic menace appears close to being materialized. The gay character is usually constructed as physically absent, being only materialized through the characters’ memories. Alternatively, the female characters are strong and dominating, constructed with an authoritative sense of presence. Williams gives voice to the marginalized minority that did not fit in the ideological structure of the Cold War period and his work is revealing of the anguish of men and women who would not find, in this structure, any kind of personal identification (Savran 6).

### **Visibility and Masculine Performativity in *A Streetcar Named Desire***

*A Streetcar Named Desire* had its Broadway opening on 3 December 1947 at the Barrymore Theatre. It was directed by Elia Kazan, with Stanley played by Marlon Brando, Jessica Tandy as Blanche, and Kim Hunter as Stella.<sup>3</sup> John M. Clum describes the rupture that the hyper-masculine character Stanley meant in the history of American theatre:

In 1947, Tennessee Williams wrought a revolution in American Drama by making a male character, Stanley Kowalski as played by Marlon Brando, the object of gaze and of desire. A man was placed in the spectacular position heretofore held by women. A man was looked at, admired, lusted after. (25)

*Streetcar* not only placed men as “object of gaze and of desire”, but also represented women as sexually active (Sinfield 189). Furthermore, by embodying desire in Blanche and Stella, Williams represents a heteronormative system that represses and condemns this kind of sexual desire, but does not, however, condemn physical violence against women.

In Scene Ten of *Streetcar*, Stanley rapes Blanche, whilst his wife is in the hospital giving birth to their first child. Stella’s reaction when returning home and hearing about the rape through Blanche is to institutionalize her into a psychiatric facility. Stella wishes to

---

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed historical account on homosexuality in the 1950s see, for example, John D’Emilio’s *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*.

<sup>3</sup> In 1951, after directing the play on Broadway, Kazan directed the film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh, playing Stanley and Blanche.



erase these memories from Blanche's mind, and, thus, protect her family. Stella, in a conversation with her neighbour Eunice, who, like Stella, lives with a violent partner, justifies her decision:

STELLA: I don't know if I did the right thing.

EUNICE: What else could you do?

STELLA: I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley.

EUNICE: Don't ever believe it. Life has to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going. (217)

Within the heteronormative system represented in the play, both Stella and Eunice depend economically on their husbands, and possibly for this reason, privilege a relation of submission in relation to their partners to any other familiar or affective bonds. Conversely, Stanley places homosocial relations above marriage. Heteronormativity is embodied in all male characters of the play, and in particular in Stanley's heteronormative model of masculinity. Stanley is constructed as the real American "macho":

Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and the pride of a richly feathered bird among hens. (128)

Blanche also describes Stanley within a primitive model of masculinity: "Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is—Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the Stone Age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle!" (163). Stanley also defines himself as a prime example of the postwar ideological model of the American man, even rejecting his Polish origins: "what I am is a one hundred per cent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack" (197).

In a context in which the woman is usually the object of the erotic gaze, Stanley competes with Blanche for this position, and this is where the heteronormative system begins to be subverted in *Streetcar*. In a clear mutual sexual provocation, Stanley and Blanche confront each other, repeatedly throughout the play, with the minimal amount of clothing. On first encountering each other, Stanley takes his shirt off: "My clothes're stickin' to me. Do you mind if I make myself comfortable?" (129). Blanche is unnerved by, but cannot help gazing at, Stanley's torso, just like the audience.

Laura Mulvey argues that audiences identify with the male protagonist:

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (426)

Mulvey focuses on the general placing of male subjectivities at the centre of Hollywood cinema and on the male's gaze on the female body. On the other hand, Kaja Silverman focuses on the lack of representation of the female voice:

To allow her to be heard without being seen would [...] disrupt the spectacular regime upon which mainstream cinema relies; it would put her beyond control of

the male gaze, and release her voice from the signifying obligations which that gaze sustains. (135)

Both authors ignore, however, the possibility of the gay male gaze in their arguments and are only centred on the heterosexual paradigms male/female and active/passive. Thus, both Mulvey and Silverman present heterosexual-oriented arguments, ignoring gay or lesbian subjectivities that might change conventional views of the gaze. Nevertheless, considering Mulvey's and Silverman's theories on filmic representations, which consider that heterosexual-oriented cinema places the male subject at his centre, it is possible to argue that in *Streetcar* Williams places himself and his own gaze at the centre by clearly perceiving Stanley as "sexy" and presenting him as such. This gay male gaze redirects the heterosexual male/female dichotomy to the male body, distorting the distinction heterosexual/homosexual, man/woman and active/passive. Williams constructs Stanley's hyper-masculinity against the implicit homoeroticism of homosocial bonds and frames him within the heteronormative system, but, however, by constructing him as "a richly feathered bird among hens" (128), Williams places Stanley as object of gaze and desire, both straight and gay. This erotization of Stanley's male body, if only paratextually, has a subversively queer force that undermines the play's heteronormative model.

Mitch, however, is totally different from Stanley, even in the way he describes how sweaty he is: "I am ashamed of the way I perspire. My shirt is sticking to me" (178). Mitch is not "sexy". However, as Blanche states, there is a quality that opposes him with the other men in the play: "[A] sort of sensitive look" (146). Blanche knows through her sister, Stella, that Mitch is single, that he takes care of his sick mother and that he has a precarious job at the same place where Stanley works. According to Stella, Stanley is the only man in the group with a better job, which also positions him above the other men. Mitch and Blanche have a relationship in the play, but their relationship is of pure self-interest: Mitch wants to get married and Blanche is a poor and ageing Southern belle looking for economic support and affection.

Mitch is tolerant at first of Blanche's idiosyncrasies: he agrees to see her only in poor lighting; he respects her, satisfying himself with small displays of affection and kindly hoping for more. However, when Stanley tells him about her past, he rejects her, and the last shred of hope Blanche might have clung to thus disappears, as Mitch is "Stanleyized" (207). Furthermore, at the end of the play, when Blanche is being taken to a psychiatric institution, Mitch only says to Stanley: "You! You done this, all o' your God damn interfering with things you—" (224), being quickly restrained by Pablo and Steve. Mitch, as well as Eunice, Steve, Pablo, and Stella became Stanley's accomplices, upholders of the patriarchy that has imposed violence and silence on minorities for millennia, all reinforcing the visible heteronormative structure of the play.

Yet, Blanche's dead husband is present throughout the play to destabilize this same structure. Allan only appears through Blanche's memories and although he may be a dead homosexual, out of sight to the audience and symbolic of a closeted existence, Williams insists on his continuing influence through the "Varsouviana", which Judith J. Tompson calls "an aural symbol of her guilt", and through the sound of the gunshot and of the locomotive (34). In many ways Allan's death is the cause of Blanche's destruction, and it is one of the most crucial elements of the play as well as of Blanche's personal, cultural and social background. Although the homosexual character does not appear in the play, he exerts a tremendous influence on its development as well as on various levels of its interpretation.

In fact, *Streetcar's* queerest passage is Blanche's description of Allan Grey, placed "at almost the exact center of *Streetcar's* eleven scene structure, as if all dramatic action prior to it radiates backward and all after it projects forward, further emphasizing its often neglected importance" (Potet 30):

He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery—love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky. Deluded. There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking—still—that thing was there... He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I didn't find out anything till after our marriage when we'd run away and come back and all I knew was I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me—but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn't know that. I didn't know anything except I loved him unendurably but without being able to help him or help myself. (182-183)

Like Stanley, Blanche describes Allan in terms of his masculinity: he was not "effeminate looking", referring to the reassuring cliché for the dominant culture of the time that all gay men were feminine, but, on the other hand, she says that "there was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's". In this part of Blanche's description she partakes in the general enforcement of gender roles in the heteronormative system of the play, which constrain men to repress their feelings and hide their fragility. Further into Blanche's description she says that Allan came to her for help, which could have happened if Allan saw himself as "ill" and sought a "cure" in Blanche, but was too terrified to confide in her.

Blanche then describes how she found out about Allan's homosexuality: "In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty—which wasn't empty, but had two people in it" (183). Allan was caught in the act and as a result Blanche told him: "I know! I know! You disgust me" (183). A western heteronormative society expresses its homophobia in various ways, but one of the most common learned notions is that of disgust. The homosexual as cultural "other" is he who does things with his body that homophobic society refuses to envisage and is shocked when compelled to visualize. Hence, Blanche finding out "in the worst of all possible ways". As Antony Easthope puts it:

the dominant myth of masculinity demands that homosexual desire, if it cannot be sublimated, must be expelled. And this governs the prevailing attitude towards male homosexuals. It accounts for homophobia, the fear of homosexuality, and for the way that gay individuals are made into scapegoats [...]. Homophobia strives manfully to eliminate its opposite, the thing which causes it. It does this mainly through three operations which are understood by psychoanalysis as projection, hysteria and paranoia. (105)

Many critics argue that Blanche remains homophobic after the death of her husband, but I believe she in fact evolves considerably in this respect. Her initial homophobia is

diminished by her feelings of guilt and her subsequent identification with Allan, as they are both victims of heteronormativity.<sup>4</sup>

Blanche's and Allan's guilt, and the guilt and homophobia of many other characters in Williams's theatre, led to the characterization of Williams as a self-hating homosexual, namely by Gore Vidal and John M. Clum.<sup>5</sup> The guilt which Williams's characters feel may echo the guilt of the homosexual writer "born in the Episcopal rectory" and raised "in the shadow of the Episcopal church" (Devlin 58). Guilt may have been unavoidable for Williams in the repressive political atmosphere of the 1940s and 1950s which "were extremely turbulent and trying decades for gay men and lesbians in America" (Savran 84). However, sketching Williams as a self-hating homosexual would ignore the deeply homophobic culture of the 1940s and 1950s and its internalization in the author (Savran 84).

After all, it is this homophobic culture and reigning heteronormativity that drove Allan to neurosis, and then to suicide. Through him, it drove Blanche to neurosis, and then to a psychiatric institution. Blanche's tragedy is above all the result of a severe hegemonic masculine dramatic structure, which at the same time allows for gay pleasure to be derived from the play. As William Mark Poteet argues "psychic theatres, infused into the play, allow gay men, especially gay men of the day, a way to derive pleasure from the homosexual representation of Allan and his friend", in addition to the pleasure of gazing at Stanley, which ultimately leads to subliminally subvert the ruling hegemonic system (33).

### Queer Ghosts

In *Streetcar*'s final line, Steve says "[t]he game is a seven-card stud" (219). Indeed, and in particular in 1947, it is the heteronormative masculinity that controls the game. However, it is through these same games of power between the characters of the play that a gay identity is presented subliminally, while what is visible to the public is Stanley hegemonic masculinity and his dominion over the remaining characters. Thus, and although the homosexual character in Williams's *Streetcar* appears as a memory of the past, Alan's sexual identity pervades the entire text.

The theme of homosexuality in *Streetcar* is indeed more crucial to that play than most critics recognize. Although the references to it are fleeting, it has a subterranean presence throughout. It demonstrates Williams's consummate skill in describing the homosexual figure in elaborate, refined, and sympathetic terms, in presenting homosexuality in a subtle, elusive, and profound manner. At the same time, in this play, Williams demonstrates the estrangement of the homosexual and the extent of the social pressure operating against him, as Allan, unable to endure the pressure of the sudden public revelation of his homosexuality, killed himself with a gunshot to the head.

To conclude, I do not intend to claim here that Tennessee Williams was a gay militant, whose only aim was to discuss things queer, but instead that he certainly had an interest in letting the silenced be allowed to speak. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as demonstrated in the examination offered in this essay, Williams allowed the silenced to speak by queering "before", "after" and "besides" the text.

---

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, John M. Clum's "'Something Cloudy, Something Clear:' Homophobic Discourse in Tennessee Williams".

<sup>5</sup> See Gore Vidal's "Introduction" to *Tennessee Williams: Collected Stories*, and Clum's *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*.

## Works Cited

- Babuscio, Jack. "The Cinema of Camp (Aka Camp and the Gay Sensibility)". in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Fabio Cleto. ed. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1999. 117-35.
- Chauncy, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- Clum, John M. *Something for the Boys: Musical Theater and Gay Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999.
- . *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000.
- . "'Something Cloudy, Something Clear: Homophobic Discourse in Tennessee Williams'" in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Tennessee Williams's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Harold Bloom. ed. New York: Chelsea House, 2002. 20-43.
- Curtin, Kaier. *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians: The Emergence of Lesbians and Gay Men on the American Stage*. Boston: Alyson Publications, 1987.
- De Jongh, Nicholas. *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- D'Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*. London and Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.
- Devlin, Albert J. ed. *Conversations with Tennessee Williams*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1986.
- Dolan, Jill. *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993.
- Duberman, Martin. *Stonewall*. New York: Plume, 1994.
- Easthope, Antony. *What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Kolin, Philip C. "Reflections on/of a Streetcar Named Desire" in *Confronting Tennessee Williams's a Streetcar Named Desire: Essays in Critical Pluralism*. Philip C. Kolin. ed. Westport: Greenwood P, 1993. 1-17.
- Loughery, John. *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities. A Twentieth-Century History*. New York: Henry Holt, 1998.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, [1975] 1988.
- Paller, Michael. *Gentlemen Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Drama*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Poteet, William Mark. *Gay Men in Modern Southern Literature: Ritual, Initiation, and the Construction of Masculinity*. New York: Peter Lang, 2006.
- Román, David. *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and Aids*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1998.
- Savran, David. *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams*. London and Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992.
- . *Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism and Contemporary American Culture*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.
- Senelick, Lawrence. *The American Stage: Writing on Theater from Washington Irving to Tony Kushner*. New York: Library of America, 2010.

- Silverman, Kaja. "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice" in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams. eds. Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1984. 131-49.
- Sinfield, Alan. *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. London and New Haven: Yale UP, 1999.
- Thompson, Judith J. *Tennessee Williams' Plays: Memory, Myth, and Symbol*. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.
- Vidal, Gore. "Introduction" in *Tennessee Williams: Collected Stories*, xix-xxv. London: Vintage Classics, 1999.
- Vorlicky, Robert. *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995.
- Williams, Tennessee. "A Streetcar Named Desire". In *A Streetcar Named Desire and Other Plays*, 113-226. London: Penguin, [1947] 2000.
- Wilson, Ann. "The Politics of Sexual Anxiety in *Sweet Bird of Youth*" in *Tennessee Williams: A Casebook*. Robert F. Gross. ed. New York: Routledge, 2002. 79-90.



## **Modernism—An Abandoned Legacy?: Gabriel Josipovici’s Critique of the Contemporary British Novel**

**Wojciech Drag**

**Abstract:** The release of Gabriel Josipovici’s *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* (2010) caused a considerable stir in the British literary world. What aroused most controversy was the chapter entitled “It Takes Talent to Lead Art That Far Astray”, in which the critic takes a swipe at some of the most acclaimed contemporary English novelists, including Julian Barnes, Martin Amis and Ian McEwan. This article surveys the reasons for Josipovici’s dissatisfaction with contemporary British fiction, which he sees as squandering the legacy of Modernism, and examines the validity of his criticism with regard to Julian Barnes’s Booker-Prize winning novella *The Sense of an Ending* (2011). It argues that Josipovici’s denunciation of Barnes prompted a critical re-examination of his fiction, which gave rise to a series of ambivalent reviews of his latest book, whose major reservations chime in with the objections previously voiced in *What Ever Happened to Modernism?*

**Keywords:** Julian Barnes, Gabriel Josipovici, Man Booker Prize, modernism

On or about July 2010 British fiction changed. This statement, a jocular travesty of Virginia Woolf’s much-quoted announcement in her essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”, is admittedly a patent exaggeration. However, this date does, as I will argue, mark an important moment for contemporary English fiction. *The Guardian*’s publication of an article entitled “Feted British Authors Are Limited, Arrogant and Self-Satisfied, Says Leading Academic” on 28th July 2010 sparked a considerable controversy and generated enormous interest in Gabriel Josipovici’s *What Ever Happened to Modernism?*, the book whose upcoming release it was meant to signal. The subsequent publication of the study, containing a section denouncing the meagre achievements of the contemporary English novel, ignited a critical debate about its condition and initiated a discussion about the literary value of the output of several critically acclaimed authors, including Julian Barnes, Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Blake Morrison and Salman Rushdie. This article will first survey the reasons for Josipovici’s dissatisfaction with the English post-war novel and then assert the impact of his book by arguing that the charges the critic levelled against Barnes have provoked a partial reassessment of his fiction in a series of reviews accompanying the release of his Booker Prize winning novella *The Sense of an Ending*.

The main trigger for the controversy aroused by Dalya Alberge’s short feature in *The Guardian* was a selection of quotations from the last but one chapter of Josipovici’s book entitled “It Takes Talent to Lead Art That Far Astray”, in which the critic takes a sideswipe at the earlier mentioned giants of British literary fiction. The scathing passages were accompanied by Josipovici’s recent remark that the phenomenon of their popularity can be explained by the media forcing upon the “ill-educated public” the notion that “this is what great art is”. Six weeks later *The New Statesman*’s reviewer Michael Sayeau summed up the media response to *The Guardian* article, pointing out that “it’s been a long time since a work of academic literary criticism has generated the buzz of newsarticle-driven controversy”. Eliot Weinberger in *The New York Review of Books*, likewise, described the entire affair as “a small scandal in the British press”.



Before passing on to discuss Josipovici's major charges against the earlier mentioned novelists, I shall briefly situate his critique in the context of the entire book. *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* takes the form of a collection of part academic and part autobiographical essays arranged into three sections: "The Disenchantment of the World", where the author locates the seeds of Modernism in the work of Dürer, Cervantes, Kierkegaard and Wordsworth; "Modernism", where he celebrates the insights of Mallarmé, Cezanne, Duchamps, as well as Beckett and Virginia Woolf; and, finally, "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", which surveys the legacy of Modernism in the latter part of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Throughout his study, Josipovici asserts his understanding of Modernism as a movement that is not restricted to any period but that should rather be viewed as an attitude towards art which transcends historical boundaries. He defines the Modernist project as "the effort, through art, to recognise that which will fit into no system, no story, that which resolutely refuses to be turned into art" (113). Josipovici agrees with Roland Barthes' announcement that "to be modern is to know that which is not possible any more" (in Josipovici 139) and paraphrases Wittgenstein by stating that "the old language game cannot be played any more because the circumstances have changed, and those who are not aware of this are the enemies of true thought" (142). This remark prepares the ground for the criticism of much of contemporary literature: He announces that Modernists such as him "look with horror at the proliferation [...] of both fantasy and realism [...] not out of a Puritan disdain for the imagination or the craft of letters, but out of respect for the world" (75). With the possible exception of individual works by William Golding, Muriel Spark and several French authors, Josipovici recognises a dearth of post-war novels that nurture Modernist ambitions, instead of injecting "spurious meaning into the world and so muddy[ing] the waters of genuine understanding of the human condition" (70). Josipovici misses the audacity and unflinching honesty of the likes of Woolf and Beckett—of works that, in John Sutherland's words, would be "despairing but brave" and therefore true to the spirit of the disenchanted (post)modernity.

In the contentious penultimate chapter, Josipovici offers a trenchant critique of what he sees as an act of squandering or, at the very least, ignoring the legacy of Modernism by the post-war English novel. He begins by quoting three passages from the works of Anthony Powell, Iris Murdoch and Angus Wilson, which he sees as illustrative of the conventional fiction where the narrator's words stand for the truth and tell a coherent story situated in a world that makes sense and can be smoothly conveyed through language. These novels, argues Josipovici, reassure the reader but "cannot really satisfy" them—they are "thin, illustrative", and so fail to meet the Barthesian definition of "modern" (163-65). He then goes on to dispute the perception of Philip Roth as an experimental novelist, arguing that, despite his "playfulness", his fiction lacks any self-doubt or the sense of the inadequacy of language. Therefore any comedy or intellectual stimulation which it occasionally achieves is of the kind that can be found in good journalism (167). Roth's example demonstrates that the problem diagnosed by Josipovici does not only concern English fiction; still, the critic argues, "there is a greater resistance to or lack of awareness of Modernism right across the board in England" than anywhere else (171). Modernism appears to have no devoted adherents there, only what he calls "false friends"—authors like Craig Raine, Adam Thirlwell and a few others who "for all their waving of Modernist credentials, seem as confident as Jane Austen that the ground they stand on is solid" (173). Josipovici takes issue with the idea that through a meticulous attention to detail, however fresh, novels are capable of truthfully representing a slice of reality. For him, attention to

detail is insufficient since what it can, at best, achieve is “the reality-effect” masquerading as reality (172).<sup>1</sup> The outcome of the English pseudo-Modernists’ efforts is a realism that boasts of a world-wise rejection of the pretensions and illusions of Romanticism. That self-avowed maturity manifests itself in a representation of love as being more about “the itch of sex” than a reflection of stars in the lover’s eyes, and of death as a “dingy and degrading experience”, rather than a piously awaited “consummation” of the earthly journey (173). These literary efforts, often skilfully orchestrated, remind Josipovici of Clement Greenberg’s commentary on nineteenth century academic painting: “It took talent [...] to lead art that far astray. Bourgeois society gave these talents a prescription, and they filled it –with talent” (172).

*Nothing to Be Frightened Of* (2008), Julian Barnes’ memoir of a lifelong struggle with the fear of death, is invoked as an excellent example of a clever and well-written book which is, however, grounded in a realism that “yields an impoverished view of life” (174). It is at this point that Josipovici delivers his much-quoted verdict:

Reading Barnes, like reading so many of the other English writers of his generation, Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Blake Morrison [...] leaves me feeling that I and the world have been made smaller and meaner. Ah, they will say, but that is just what we wanted, to free you of your illusions. But I don’t believe them. I don’t buy into their view of life. The irony which at first made one smile, the precision of language, which was at first so satisfying, the cynicism, which at first was used only to puncture pretension, in the end come to seem like a terrible constriction, a fear of opening oneself up to the world. (174)

Josipovici goes on to wonder about the origins of what he perceives as the above writers’ “petty-bourgeois uptightness”, their “terror of not being in control” and their “schoolboy desire to boast and shock” (174). He appears to attribute the irony and sentimentality to their Englishness, and he closes the chapter by mourning the fact so many contemporary English writers declare that their ambition is to write like Dickens, instead of re-establishing the arrested dialogue with the rich and still unsung legacy of Wordsworth, James, Eliot and Woolf.

Such was the impact of *The Guardian* article that when Josipovici’s book came out several weeks later, most reviewers concentrated on the controversial accusations made in Chapter Fourteen. The critical response was tremendously varied—from lavish praise to strong disapproval. *The Guardian*’s Nicholas Lezard described *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* as “consistently eye-opening”, “honest” and “never dull”. In the review “Wake Up, England!”, John Sutherland called it “a genteel shriek of pain” and a “book which denounces us, but which—despite that—one can’t help rather enjoying”. Michael Sayeau praised Josipovici’s study in *The New Statesman* for “a sense of purpose and a pertinence sorely missing from most of the other books produced by academic presses in the literary field”. He noted, however, that the readers who, intrigued by the press controversy, expected a book-length attack on the feted English novelists were in for a disappointment since the discussion of the crisis of contemporary fiction is dealt with in “a tiny subsection of the work”. Michael Aspden from *The Financial Times* agreed that the

---

<sup>1</sup> Josipovici elaborates: “describing the smell of sweat and semen during the act of sex no more anchors the novel to ‘reality’ than writing about stars in the eyes of the beloved. The novel is still made up of words, is still the product of a solitary individual inventing [...] smells or stars” (172).

book does not live up to the promise of providing a thorough assessment of the state of the novel; rather, it “suddenly turns into a polemic, as if an impatient publisher had exhorted the author to provide some juicy Sunday supplement fodder”. The reviewer also challenges Josipovici’s repudiation of realism, arguing that it can be “refreshing”, perhaps even more so than the “self-conscious expressions of impotence” and “disenchantment”, which the author would rather see in its place. Aspden ends his article by suggesting an alternative answer to the question “What ever happened to Modernism?”: “Why, it found its dancing shoes and lightened up”.

Among the most negative critical responses to Josipovici’s book was Philip Hensher’s review in *The Daily Telegraph*, which described it as “blotted [...] by his noisy conviction that much of what preceded modernism and almost all of what followed its high period was awful rubbish”. Hensher counters Josipovici’s announcement of the demise of Modernism in the English novel by citing the example of David Mitchell and Tom McCarthy, whose latest novels had just been longlisted for the Man Booker Prize.<sup>2</sup> He also lists a variety of experimental devices employed by recent novels which have attracted a broader readership.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Eliot Weinberger in *The New York Review of Books* disputes the validity of the title of Josipovici’s book since the current (apparently poor) condition of Modernism is “dispatched in only a few pages”. He believes that the author’s impassioned critique is predicated on a profound misunderstanding of the modern realist novel, which Josipovici “seems to confuse with a surveillance camera” and perceives as a hallmark of “a regression to the old order, offering the comfortable illusion of a portrayal of life as it truly is”. Weinberg concludes that Josipovici’s Modernism is “entirely interior”, and that, as a result, the book is marred by a “ruminative, learned, and elegant agoraphobia”.

Surveying the critical response elicited by Josipovici, one may notice the recurrent charge that the author fails to provide a satisfactory justification for his attack on Barnes, McEwan and Amis. So established are their literary reputations that a radical critique, if not a dismissal, should state its case more convincingly and perhaps would warrant another book. Despite this accusation, Josipovici chose not to clarify what exactly he felt was amiss in the English novel today. When offered a space in *The New Statesman* for a polemic with his many critics, which turned into a brief article called “This Is Bigger Than Martin Amis”, he decided to restate his understanding of what Modernism is and refused to elaborate on the charges against the above novelists. What I wish to demonstrate in the remaining part of the article is that in the absence of Josipovici’s elaboration, his diagnosis about the shortcomings of Barnes’s fiction was expanded on and supported by other critics following the release of his first (and still most recent) longer work of fiction after the controversy surrounding *What Ever Happened to Modernism?*.

*The Sense of an Ending* (2011) is a 150-page novella featuring the first-person narrator, Tony Webster, who looks back on the defining events of his life from the perspective of late adulthood. A significant part of the narrative is devoted to Tony’s high school years and his friendship with a prodigy and later philosophy student Adrian, whose subsequent suicide, coupled with an unexpected bequest, inspire the narrator to confront and reassess his past while ruminating on mortality, history and the utter unreliability of

---

<sup>2</sup> McCarthy’s *C* (2010) subsequently made it onto the shortlist whereas Mitchell’s *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010) did not.

<sup>3</sup> Hensher further undermines Josipovici’s critique by mocking his own efforts in writing fiction. He quotes a passage from a short story entitled “A Glass of Water” (“The house does not feel empty. She fills it with her presence”), which, he notes ironically, “will not give [Josipovici] a place among the immortals”.

memory. With this novella Barnes explores the familiar territory of themes which have been present in his fiction since his debut novel *Metroland* (1980), and which have been more exhaustively and adeptly investigated in *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989) and *England, England* (1998). The critical reception of the novella was nonetheless generally positive: reviewers described it as “fertile and memorable” (Justine Jordan), “skilfully plotted, boldly conceived [...] something of universal importance” (Justin Cartwright), “artful [...] deeply intelligent [...] and oddly powerful” (Colm Toibin). *The Independent's* Christian House deems it an “adroit” testimony to Barnes’s “keen intellect”. However, without explicitly invoking Josipovici, he classifies Barnes, alongside McEwan, Amis and Rushdie, as a “gin-and- tonic novelist”, whose books “are crisp, cool and provide a kick to the head, but [...] seldom [...] touch the heart”. House ends his review by noting that whether *The Sense of an Ending* is good enough to proceed from the longlist on to the shortlist for the Booker is “open to debate”. In the end, the novella won the prize in what turned out to be one of the most controversial competitions in the history of the award. The head judge Stella Rimington’s announcement that the jury’s main criterion was “readability” was heavily lambasted by a number of critics and writers, who saw it as a symptom of the Man Booker’s shift towards favouring middle-brow fiction. Barnes’s victory was eventually received by the literary world with a sense of relief as being the desired coda to an acrimonious dispute about the prize’s compromised credentials.<sup>4</sup> The ex-Poet Laureate and former chair of the Man Booker jury, Andrew Motion commented on the shortlisted novels shortly before the announcement of the winner, “I have read them all. I am very glad the Julian Barnes is there and I very much hope it wins. By a long way, it is the best book on the list” (in Flood).

Barnes’s first Booker victory for a novella published only a year after Josipovici’s attack may appear to contradict my claim about the ensuing critical reassessment of his work. In order to substantiate my argument, I now wish to survey several dissenting critical voices whose charges overlap with those formulated in *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* Leo Robson in *The New Statesman* classifies Barnes’s novella as a testimony to his sustained predilection for essayism. He argues that his fictional works “purr with the same contented ease” as the many essays he has written throughout his career. Although this does not appear to Robson to be a weakness in itself, it does, in his view, account for some of this novella’s shortcomings. The critic finds fault with its predominant, and increasingly enervating, tone of “smartness” and “knowingness”, which manifests itself in numerous sententious remarks, such as: “[time] holds us and moulds us [...] first grounds us and then confounds us” (Barnes 102), or “when we are young, we invent different futures for ourselves; when we are old, we invent different pasts for others” (80). Robson also criticises Barnes for frequently commenting and elaborating—through the voice of the narrator—on the themes addressed by the novella and thus leaving the reader “with nothing to do”.<sup>5</sup> Although not raised in the context of Barnes’s fiction, a similar charge has been articulated by Josipovici in the earlier mentioned reference to Philip Roth’s novels, which—

---

<sup>4</sup> The Man Booker Prize controversy inspired a comment on *The Guardian's* literary forum, which suggests the coinage of a new phrase “to Barnes it”: “When a team or individual wins a prize or award, just because the quality of the competition is so poor, they could be said to have Barnesed it”.

<sup>5</sup> Robson quotes the following examples: “[T]o be true to my memory, as far as that’s ever possible”, “[a]gain, I must stress that this is my reading now of what happened then” (Barnes 41), “At least that’s how I remember it now. Though if you put me in a court of law, I doubt I’d stand up to cross-examination very well” (119).

he contends—"may be funny [...] [and] thought-provoking, but only as good journalism can be funny and thought-provoking" (167). Towards the end of his review, Robson states, "I never thought I would have cause to say this, but Gabriel Josipovici may have been on to something in *What Ever Happened to Modernism?*", and indicates the limitations of Barnes's (as well as Amis's) "ironic" and "almost post-novelistic sensibility", marked by "a strain of sentimentalism" and dry intellectual as well as formal sophistication.

In his review entitled "Julian Barnes: Literary Loner", David Sexton also recognises the novella's "sophistication", which, he notes, appears to have "enthused" most reviewers. The critic, however, complains about its reliance on a contrived narrative involving a series of rather plotty, melodramatic devices (such as suicide, birth of a disabled child, a mysterious bequest, a revelatory letter about a distant past, etc.). The shortcomings of the "humanly false" plot are counterbalanced by an undercurrent of "cleverness and irony", which is as amusing as it is limiting. Here, in support of his argument, Sexton cites Josipovici's contentious passage about Barnes's "precision of language" and "cynicism" masking an underlying "constriction" and terror of engaging directly with the world.

The third and most influential of the negative reviews of *The Sense of an Ending*, by Geoff Dyer, opens with the statement, "I didn't get the book when I first read it". Upon rereading, which according to the chairwoman of the Booker committee is meant to greatly enhance one's appreciation of it, Dyer declares he "didn't get it even more", or rather realised there was simply "less to get". Among his major charges is the earlier invoked contrivance of plot, particularly the episode of Adrian's suicide, which becomes the trigger for the narrator's meditations on mortality and can solely be motivated by "authorial convenience". Dyer also challenges the intellectual dimension of the book by dismissing one of its central ideas—that of the inherent unreliability and manipulative capacity of memory—as a "commonplace". In the end, he denies that the Booker was awarded to a "laughably bad" novel: "It isn't terrible, it is just so [...] average. It is averagely compelling (I finished it), involves an average amount of concentration and, if such a thing makes sense, is averagely well written: excellent in its averageness!"

Dyer's review went on to be nominated for the first edition of The Hatchet Job of the Year, a literary prize established to honour the best scathing book reviews, which granted it a great deal of publicity. In a subsequent interview, Dyer admitted to having received a number of emails from other readers expressing their disappointment with Barnes's novella in very similar terms ("Hatchet Man"). Although at first rejected, Josipovici's attack on Barnes appears to have been gradually recognised as not entirely unfounded. Sketchy as it was, his critique managed to signal certain limitations of Barnes' approach and alert other critics to its deficiencies. It may seem paradoxical that this partial critical reassessment of Barnes' output almost precisely coincided with his receipt of two of Britain's most prestigious literary awards: the 2011 David Cohen Prize for the entire body of work and the earlier mentioned 2011 Man Booker Prize. However, I would argue that the shift manifest in the reviews of Robson, Sexton and Dyer is likely to reflect more than a short-lived critical trend. Although it is true that Barnes has never been the darling of British critics and that even his most successful novels received mixed (often baffled) reviews upon publication, this time the tenor of the disapproving voices is far more balanced, and the charges—more considered. In very general terms, it could be said that whereas in the 1980s and 90s Barnes was criticised (by some) for falling into the pitfalls of formal ingenuity and postmodern experimentation, the weaknesses pointed out by Robson and others are rooted in the lack of narrative ambition and in settling for what Dyer terms as "excellent averageness". If one surveys the timeline of Barnes's admittedly rich and varied novelistic output, it becomes readily visible that experimentation has long ceased to be a

major goal of his literary project. The unbridled generic hybridity of *Flaubert's Parrot* (an audacious mixture of the novel, essay and biography written in 1984), *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* (a postmodernist take on historiography, featuring a blend of fact and fiction from 1989) and *Talking It Over* (a narrator-less 1991 novel made up exclusively of dramatic monologues) has given way to a rather conventional narrative structure of *Arthur and George* (2005) and *The Sense of an Ending*. Even though Barnes's fiction is a merely peripheral concern for Josipovici, *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* appears to have prompted certain critics to register that unwelcome—in their opinion—development of his novelistic sensibility.

The title of Geoff Dyer's review—"Julian Barnes and the Diminishing of the English Novel"—suggests that Barnes's novella may be seen as symptomatic of a wider problem. The absence of the latest works of Amis, McEwan and Rushdie from the shortlists for the major British literary prizes in the recent years may be perceived as subtle evidence for a broader sense of disappointment with the literary celebrities, which thirty years ago Granta famously hailed as the most promising British novelists. Josipovici's angry verdict could thus be seen as an expression of a wider dissatisfaction. Leaving the Barnes controversy aside and returning to the broader scope of Josipovici's critique, it should be noted that he was not the first critic to voice his objections to the general course taken by contemporary British fiction in relation to the legacy of modernism. His denunciation of realism as a mode of writing injecting a "spurious meaning" to the world and sustaining the illusion of a stable correspondence between language and external reality can be seen as an elaboration of Catherine Belsey's indictment of realist fiction in her seminal work *Critical Practice* (1980). Josipovici's mourning of the massive imbalance between audacious, formally experimental literary projects and the novels that—underneath a thin veneer of shocking novelty—essentially "play it safe" is, in turn, a reaffirmation of the tenor of Zadie Smith's argument in her widely-commented article in *The New York Review of Books* entitled "Two Paths for the Novel" (2008). Whereas in 1969 David Lodge famously described the situation of the contemporary novelist as being at the crossroads of four modes of writing, Smith speaks of two principal routes—those exemplified by Graham Greene, on the one hand, and by Jean Genet, on the other. "In healthy times", she argues, "we cut multiple roads [...] [but] these aren't particularly healthy times. A breed of lyrical Realism has had the freedom of the highway for some time now, with most other exits blocked". Metafictional experiment, she continues, "has been relegated to a safe corner of literary history, to be studied in postmodernity modules, and dismissed, by our most famous public critics, as a fascinating failure, intellectual brinkmanship". The author who Smith hails as a commendable example of a contemporary British novelist brave enough to take the road less travelled by is the earlier mentioned Tom McCarthy, whose experimental novel *Remainder* (2006) she sees as pointing out the direction for British fiction to follow. The fact that McCarthy's latest novel *C*, as well as—more recently—Will Self's *Umbrella* (2012), garnered widespread critical acclaim and secured places on the shortlists for the Man Booker Prize may be considered an indication that Josipovici and Smith are not alone in their nostalgia for a literature aiming to live up to the Modernist principle of making it new.

## Works Cited

- Alberge, Dalya. "Feted British Authors Are Limited, Arrogant and Self-Satisfied, Says Leading Academic". *Guardian.co.uk*. 28 July 2010.
- Aspden, Michael. "The Sense of an Ending". [Review]. *FT.com*. 13 Aug. 2010.
- Barnes, Julian. *The Sense of an Ending*. London: Cape, 2011.
- Cartwright, Justin. "The Sense of an Ending". [Review]. *Guardian.co.uk*. 31 July 2011.
- Dyer, Geoff. "Julian Barnes and the Diminishing of the English Novel". [Review]. *The Sense of an Ending. NYTimes.com*. 16 Dec. 2011.
- . "The Hatchet Man". Interview with Bryan Appleyard. *BryanAppleyard.com*. 22 Jan. 2012.
- Flood, Alison. "Booker Prize Divides Quality from Readability, Says Andrew Motion". *Guardian.co.uk*. 16 Oct. 2011.
- Hensher, Philip. "What Ever Happened to Modernism?" [Review]. *Telegraph.co.uk*. 5 Aug. 2010.
- House, Christian. "The Sense of an Ending". [Review]. *Independent.co.uk*. 7 Aug. 2011.
- Jordan, Justine. "The Sense of an Ending". [Review]. *Guardian.co.uk*. 26 July 2011.
- Josipovici, Gabriel. *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.
- Lezard, Nicholas. "What Ever Happened to Modernism?" [Review]. *Guardian.co.uk*. 8 Nov. 2011.
- Robson, Leo. "The Sense of an Ending". [Review]. *NewStatesman.com*. 8 Aug. 2011.
- Sayeau, Michael. "What Ever Happened to Modernism?". [Review]. *NewStatesman.com*. 13 Sep. 2010.
- Sexton, David. "Julian Barnes: Literary Loner". [Review] *The Sense of an Ending. Standard.co.uk*. 13 Oct. 2011.
- Smith, Zadie. "Two Paths for the Novel". *NYBooks.com*. 20 Nov. 2008.
- Sutherland, John. "England, Wake Up!" Rev. of *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* *LiteraryReview.co.uk*. n.d.
- Toibin, Colm. "Going Beyond the Limits". [Review] *The Sense of an Ending. NYBooks.com*. 10 May 2012.
- Weinberger, Eliot. "Who Made It New?". [Review] *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* *NYBooks.com*. 23 June 2011.

**Poetry as Preservation Ritual:  
Jane Harrison, Antiquarianism and Hope Mirrlees's *Paris***

**Nina Ravnholdt Enemark**

**Abstract:** This article considers the way Hope Mirrlees's long experimental poem *Paris* (1920) realises her wish for poetry to “preserve the present, *tangibly*”, a wish arising from her deep antiquarian interests. Mirrlees's antiquarianism highlights the ability of antiquaries to physically preserve the present through their collections, which contrasts with the narratives produced by historians and is bound up, for Mirrlees, with an appreciation of texts as palpable historical artefacts. This formulation of antiquarianism reveals the profound influence on Mirrlees of her mentor Jane Harrison, renowned classicist and theorist on ritual. Harrison's ritual theory, which emphasises the concrete and performative, is absorbed in Mirrlees's conceptualisation of antiquarianism and in *Paris*, which enacts, through its emphasis on its own materiality, a tangible preservation of the moment in which it was written. Mirrlees thus participates in an overlooked textual tradition concerned with signifying a historical context through material bibliographical properties, as well as in the modernist aesthetic shift towards a stronger engagement with materiality.

**Keywords:** Modernism, typography, ritual, Antiquarianism, book history, materiality

A swift, fleeting sense of the past is as near as I have ever got to a mystical experience [...] a sudden *physical* conviction (like fingering for the first time the antiquity one had so often gazed at through the glass case in the museum), that Horace and Virgil did *really once* travel together to Brandusium, and that Horace was kept awake by mosquitos and the love-songs of tipsy boatmen [...] or, that at a definite point of time the larks were singing and there were milestones on the Dover road, as Chaucer jogged on his way to Canterbury.  
—Hope Mirrlees, “Listening to the Past”

If poets could only be antiquaries! For antiquaries alone among mortals can restore the past and preserve the present, *tangibly*—and it is touch that matters most.  
—Hope Mirrlees, *A Fly in Amber: Being an Extravagant Biography of the Romantic Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton*

Taken together, these two extracts by Hope Mirrlees appeal for a poetry that could create for readers an experience of the past physically intruding into the material present. A poem capable of doing this would not only speak of the past, it would approach the condition of a prized physical artefact. Such an aspiration resonates with an attitude toward graphic art that flourished in the early decades of the twentieth century, namely that pictorial expression should move away from strictly mimetic representation and towards a greater emphasis on its material qualities.<sup>1</sup>

A now well-known literary strand of this general aesthetic shift was epitomised by

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example Craig G. Staff's *Modernist Painting and Materiality* for an overview of this development in the visual arts.



European authors whose works celebrated the physicality of the written word, the most prominent examples including Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrammes, the Surrealist *livre d'artiste* and typographical experiments by the Futurists and poets published in magazines such as *Nord-Sud*.<sup>2</sup> Julia Briggs, who rediscovered Mirrlees's long, experimental poem *Paris* in 2007, assesses the poem's typographical innovations in relation to continental aesthetic credos and trends in her essay "Hope Mirrlees and Continental Modernism". This article, however, complements Brigg's research by drawing attention to the way in which Mirrlees' experimentation with materiality in poetry betrays the influence of Mirrlees' mentor and companion, the eminent classicist Jane Harrison, the central figure in the group of classical scholars known as the Cambridge Ritualists who harnessed modern theories of the "primitive" in their study of the ancients (see Ackerman). This grounding in Harrison's ethnographic theories points to Mirrlees's association with a different sub-strand of the modernist shift towards a greater emphasis on materiality in art, one chiefly concerned with poetry's ability to speak for, and about, its historical moment of composition. Following the lead of pioneering book historian D.F. McKenzie, textual theorists such as Jerome McGann and George Bornstein have uncovered a largely overlooked British tradition reaching back to William Blake's illuminated manuscripts and continuing with the work of William Morris and the pre-Raphaelites through to W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. This recent academic research canvasses how these writers, from Blake to Pound, harness the materiality of texts to signify a historical context.<sup>3</sup> Mirrlees's *Paris* invites a reading within this contextual frame.

This paper gauges how *Paris* lends shape, urgency and rhetorical force to Mirrlees' wish for poetry to articulate a historical moment *tangibly*, beyond the level of verbal representation. This modernist gesture is, I propose, anchored in her, perhaps surprising for her time, deep antiquarian interests. Mirrlees's imaginative approach to the art of antiquarianism highlights the crafted-tangible and visual-nature of texts and art more broadly, and their status as historical curios, contrasting strongly with what Mirrlees describes as the essentially verbal and logical art of historians. This distinctive brand of antiquarianism can be seen as having its roots in the profound influence of her companion Jane Harrison, a prominent academic voice within the late nineteenth and early twentieth century web of scholarly and popular debate and artistic experimentation around the notion of "primitive" ritual. Mirrlees echoes the dichotomy in Harrison's theory between ritual and art, which foregrounds the importance of embodiment, materiality and process, and a tactile, archaeological approach to history, questioning the authority of the purely verbal and rational. *Paris* emerges out of this framework, demonstrating a grasp of antiquarianism as what Harrison would call a ritual undertaking.

The close relationship between Harrison and Mirrlees, beginning as mentor and student at Newnham College in Cambridge, and continuing as cohabiting companions in

---

<sup>2</sup> For leading research on this trend see for example Marjorie Perloff, William Bohn and Johanna Drucker.

<sup>3</sup> For McKenzie's seminal work emphasising the importance of material "accidentals" in relation to the "substantives" comprising linguistic meaning, see his *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays*. McGann's *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* presents his argument that William Morris's experimentation with typography and book-making constitutes the origin of literary modernism in its self-reflexive use of form to signify a historical context, and considers the impact of this tradition on Ezra Pound. Similarly, Bornstein's *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* includes an analysis of Yeats' use of bibliographic materials to signify historically.

Paris and later London, has been remarked on and debated by a number of writers (Beard 152-5, 134-8; Parmar xv–xix; Robinson 235-242, 295). The deep dedication of Mirrlees to Harrison is evident, possibly the clearest indication of this being the decades that Mirrlees spent after Harrison’s death trying to assemble a biography. A line standing out from this jumble of notes and essays—which however never developed into a full memoir—distills Mirrlees’ debt to Harrison, the driving force behind the years of work spent on the biography: “I [...] owe my whole picture of the universe to her” (in Robinson 295).

Harrison’s ritual thesis, with its echoes of Bergson’s theory of *durée*, Nietzsche’s writings on Dionysus and Apollo, William James’ concepts of “monarchical deism” and enquiries into mystical experience, as well as Freud and Jung’s notions of the unconscious and “dream or phantasy thinking”, participates in a cultural and intellectual shift that Sanford Schwartz associates with technological modernity in *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth-Century Thought*.<sup>4</sup> Schwartz describes this shift as a turn, among these thinkers away from the progressivist paradigms of the nineteenth century towards conceptual frameworks that highlight the opposition between immediacy, sensation, process and unconscious “depths” on one hand, and rational “surface” abstractions on the other (3-49). Harrison’s research resonates with this thinking as she draws on ethnological theories of “the primitive” to posit ritual as the forgotten origins of Classical art, as an arcane performance that can shape modern life and art. Her theory establishes a dichotomy between ritual as an embodied, emotional, open-ended collective process and its twin products, art and theology, as static, abstract and intellectualised representations marked by closure and a removal of the living, acting body of the participant. Art, for Harrison, is a representation abstracted from the performance from which it originated, and her vision of modern art “recrossing the ritual bridge to life” implies a greater emphasis on the concrete and immediate, on process and embodiment (Harrison 1947, 207).

*Paris*, I argue, is a sophisticated attempt to enact this turn back to ritual in the realm of poetry,<sup>5</sup> a gesture which takes place on both the thematic and physical, material level. While it is the latter that situates the text in the historical framework of a heightened poetic

---

<sup>4</sup> Harrison openly credits Henri Bergson with providing a framework for her understanding of pre-Olympian religion. William James’s notion of “monarchical deism” is also mapped onto her understanding of the more reflective, analytical religion of Olympian Greece (*Themis: a Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* 542). She acknowledges Nietzsche with having divined the crucial difference between Apollo and Dionysus (476). See her *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* for an alignment of her description of the “primitive” ritual mentality with Freudian and Jungian concepts (xLvii-xLix).

<sup>5</sup> In this, *Paris* takes its place within a constellation of modernist works seeking to use ritual as a structural and thematic device, including most notably Nijinsky and Stravinsky’s *Sacre du Printemps* and the work of other innovators in dance (such as Isadora Duncan, Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman), and theatre (such as Antonin Artaud and W.B. Yeats and Vsevolod Meyerhold), as well a number of contemporary poets and novelists who drew on concepts of ritual, the occult and mystical mainly for thematic content (see for example Surette, Sword, Materer). The period’s aesthetic engagement with ritual emerged from a number of contexts, including discoveries in archaeology, ethnological studies, psychoanalysis, late nineteenth and early twentieth century spiritualism and interests in magic and the occult, all of which would have influenced Mirrlees independently of her connection to Harrison; however, it is Mirrlees’s original crafting of poetry grounded in Harrison’s particular articulation of these concerns with ritual that this paper seeks to analyse and understand.

engagement with materiality and performativity, this gesture is also underpinned by a stress on ceremonial through a dense network of literary tropes and thematic motifs, which will be explored in the following section.

**“The central rite de passage, the death and the new birth”:<sup>6</sup>**

**Key elements of ritual in *Paris***

Ritual is noticeable as a theme of the poem from the very start. A key notion of Harrison’s thesis is that ritual is in essence an expression of desire; desire is what triggers ceremonial enactment (1962b, 43-5, 83-4; 1947, 26, 33-4). This articulation of desire informs the opening gambit of *Paris*: “I want a holophrase”. The term “holophrase” is a direct reference to Harrison’s description of a “primitive” word (drawing on contemporary studies in linguistics) encompassing a whole situation (1962b, 473-4). The speaker seeks a power of utterance that will encapsulate the situation at hand, the end of the War. However, while the metro journey filling up the first page ends with the arrival at the station ‘CONCORDE’ (‘peace’), this is followed by lines “I can’t/I must go slowly”. Here the speaker conveys that is not possible simply to arrive at peace; this one word, peace, does not, for her, epitomise the moment at hand. Instead a process of transition into a new, undefined state of affairs must be undergone. The basic function of ritual, Harrison notes, is to create such a transition, especially at moments of crisis (1962b, 20, 507; 1962a, xxx). Four years earlier, in 1915, Harrison made the observation that “we live now just at the transition moment; we have broken with the old, we have not quite adjusted ourselves to the new” (1915, 35-6). If that was the case just following the outbreak of the War, this break with the past, after the bloodiest war the western world had ever seen, would be immeasurably stronger, and the adjustment to the new a far greater and more exacting challenge.

The basic transition that Harrison argues characterises primitive ritual, the transition from death to life, is clearly expressed through the poem’s imagery: “Etruscan tombs” and “going under the Seine”, together with the line “brekekekek coax coax”, convey the idea of travelling down the river Styx into the netherworld. The context of the War pervades the poem, as widows all in black cry “le pouvre grand”, “the stage is thick with corpses” and the cemetery of Pere Lechaise is personified, walking the streets like a ritual May King dressed in wreaths and a cape. Again directly invoking Harrison’s ritual thesis, death appears in the guise of “the lovely Spirit of the Year” –Harrison’s theorised archetype of mystical pre-Olympian gods—which lies “stiff and stark/Laid out in acres of brown fields”, awaiting the ritual resurrection. Death gives way to life at the end of the poem as “babies are being born” and “the white violets of the moon” are made fertile–“manured”–by the scene of nightlife revelry depicted in the final phase of the text. This scene is reminiscent of the festivals that Harrison records as rites of passage, involving a “complete upset of the old order, a period of licence and mutual hilarity” (1962b, 507). Mirrlees creates a quintessentially modern version of this anthropological phenomenon, as Freud dredges the river and “waves his garbage in a glare of electricity”, and the night life of Montmartre is depicted, with allusions to open homosexuality, night clubs, the “obscene syncopation” of jazz music and screeching late night taxis.

The poem is pervaded by a sense of anticipation that Harrison insists is essential to ritual. It is “desire and will and longing”, Harrison argues, “not certainty and satisfaction” that is uttered by the “savage” ritual participant (1947, 65). A sense of something about to happen builds up in lines such as “The Ballet of green Butterflies/Will soon begin’, ‘soon/

---

<sup>6</sup> Harrison, *Themis*, 513.

dog-roses will stare at gypsies, wanes and pilgrimages". The extract "[w]hatever happens, some day it will look beautiful: /Clio is a great French painter" highlights the fact that the poem is something in progress, unpredictable, amorphous; contrasting with how this process can thereafter be fixed, framed or frozen as history or art, helping to foster the atmosphere of liminality, or in-betweenness, central to ritual.

This liminal state, Harrison writes, foregrounds the role of fantasy and the unconscious, which Mirrlees uses as a main motif in the poem. Drawing on anthropological tropes of the time, Harrison describes the "supersensuous" world of the savage, a "secondary reality" that includes dreams, trance, visions, ghosts of dead ancestors and portents of the future (1962b, 512; 1915, 155-6). This description is then echoed in Harrison's vision of art as trance-like absorption and of the artist as a sleep-walker (1915, 215-6). In *Paris*, the sleep-walking artist wades "knee-deep in dreams" and phantoms of the famous dead of Paris walk the streets.<sup>7</sup> Anticipating the association of rivers with the unconscious often made by the Surrealists, ghostly dreams emerge from the "sluggish watery sleep" of the Seine, and the river is later "dredged" by Freud himself.

In *Alpha and Omega*, Harrison contends that this element of a ritual trance is what is missing from the experimental works of the Futurists, who she otherwise praises as realising a form of art that re-crosses the ritual bridge to engage with modern, everyday life. Here, she hopes that "there will one day come a futurist [...] who will cast the spell, and set the motors and aeroplanes sleep-walking. It is, perhaps, a not very hard thing to give form and silence to a rough-hewn figure. To throw the modern whirlpool into a trance is another matter, and needs, perhaps, a bigger man" (218). In the dreamlike vision she presents of the modern city, Mirrlees takes on this challenge and realises Harrison's wish.

The trance into which the city is thrown mirrors the speaker's psychological state. Seated and entranced in her hotel, she relives and recreates the experience of the journey through the metropolis. Harrison argues that ritual is both a pre-doing-oriented towards the future—and a re-doing, wishing to recreate an emotion by reliving and representing it. What situates the poem in the context of poetic engagement with materiality is the way Mirrlees effects this representation in vivid, concrete and performative terms.

*Paris* is a poem written for the eye as much as for the ear. The irregular margins, fonts, lineation and space between words, the colourful book covers and the shapes that words make on the page are its most immediately and strikingly noticeable features. Given Harrison's importance to Mirrlees as an intellectual mentor, it can be argued this emphasis on the materiality of the poem, its performative use of typography and other bibliographic materials, can also be traced back to Harrison's ritual theory.

### **Materiality and performativity in Harrison's ritual theory: sources and context**

Harrison's signal contribution to aesthetic modernism has been acknowledged by myriad academic scholars, but she has yet to be considered in relation to the shift in this literary period towards a more marked engagement with the palpable materiality of texts. This focus on the tangible and embodied in Harrison's work is rooted in very strong early influences in her life predating her anthropological fascination with mapping so-called "savage" states of being and her Bergsonian emphasis on felt sensation over controlled intellection. These early influences, I will argue, have direct relevance to Mirrlees' poem.

---

<sup>7</sup> This presence of ghosts is also one of several parallels the poems shows with Harrison's description of the Anthesteria, an ancient Greek spring fertility festival dedicated to Dionysus during which the dead rose up and went about the city (Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* 76; *Themis* 289).

Firstly, while biographies of Harrison all note how in her college days she became caught up in the pre-Raphaelite fashion of the 1870s, this aesthetic phase, and how it contributed to her later work on ritual, has not been explored in depth. Scorned by contemporary critics as a “fleshy school of poetry” and painting, the passion of the Pre-Raphaelites for craft, illustration, iconic depiction and use of the body in creating works of art, imbued Harrison’s analysis of illustrations found on ancient vases.

This line of argument has been pursued recently by Rita Wright and Margaret Armstrong, who connect Harrison’s enthusiasm for pre-Raphaelitism with her early engagement with late Victorian High Church ritualism. Wright’s study on Harrison and Victorian ritualism charts how the Oxford Movement, at the centre of this cultural development, construed the Reformation as having robbed Christianity of its materiality “—its icons, liturgical objects, intense color, transcending smells, dramatic performances, and mysticism”. She notes that “[a]lthough some Protestants and Evangelicals had addressed the concept of spiritual ‘feelings’ it was a model that separated feelings from the physical senses” (Harrison 46). It was this revival of the sacramental—the performative and iconic—by the Oxford Movement that, she avers, appealed to the pre-Raphaelites, who adopted the “southern Italian liturgical aesthetic of bright color, and dramatic mystical intent promoted by members of the Oxford Movement” (85). The result, Wright argues, was “a sort of ‘ritual aesthetic’” composed of “the imaginative use of traditional symbolism, hard-edged realism, gold leaf, white ground on canvas, and theatrical colors” (85-6). Armstrong’s biographical study of Harrison’s early development notes her teenage encounter with pre-Raphaelitism at St Martin-on-the-Hill in Scarborough, “a hotbed of ritualism” decorated by the PRB, where Harrison attended controversially High Church services (‘Sacraments, Sacrifice, and Ritual: High Church Mysticism in the Letters of Jane Ellen Harrison 1922, 89-98). Later, Harrison’s pre-Raphaelitism took the form of consistently carrying around Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *The Stream’s Secret* and decorating her room at Newnham in the style of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, eventually becoming a personal friend of Burne-Jones, who, Wright notes, encouraged her to write her book on the Greek vases at the British Museum (86).

The emphasis on the iconic and material that Harrison took from the pre-Raphaelites was consolidated in her archaeological approach to classical narratives, standards and motifs. Harrison’s approach to classicism took the paintings on excavated vases as a starting point for understanding ancient Greek religion and art. “All my archaeology”, Harrison proclaims in her *Reminiscences of a Student’s Life*, “was taught me by Germans”, particularly Dörpfeld (‘my most honoured master’, who she accompanied on his *Peloponnesos Reise* and his *Insel Reise*), and who Hugh Kenner notes was particularly important in resurrecting real historical landscapes and objects from “the vortex of mere lexicography”, “the din of words” that defined the nineteenth century classicism of Arnold, Samuel Henry Butcher and Andrew Lang (Harrison 1925, 64-5; Kenner 43). This materialist archaeological approach to the past paralleled the craft-based, iconic aesthetic of the pre-Raphaelites, William Morris’ Kelmscott Press having been founded roughly a decade after Schliemann (Dörpfeld’s predecessor) had begun the excavation of Troy, the two late Victorian projects sharing a similar basis in their concern with the visual and concrete and together contributing to this focus in Harrison’s work.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is likely that

---

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, just as archaeologists of the period returned the distant, hazily mythologised past to the material present, the pre-Raphaelites, too, can be seen to have resurrected the past physically for their readers in the sense that, as McGann notes, “for those swept up in this phase the

Harrison's early fondness for the pre-Raphaelites led in no small way to her immersion in archaeological discourses. As Wright points out, "Harrison's attention to iconographic detail and the sacramental implications of religious rites depicted on the vases, were characteristic of perceptions influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites" (86).

Echoes of Harrison's iconic and tactile approach to the historical past resound in the sudden sense of the past as a concrete and potent force that Mirrlees describes in the quotation at the start of this essay. This sense is something that pervades her writing on antiquarianism, throughout which Harrison's influence can be keenly felt. After *Paris*, and her interwar novels, Mirrlees wrote a biography about Sir Robert Cotton, one of the founders of the Society of Antiquaries in the sixteenth century and one of the first collectors of manuscripts at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. The aim of the book, entitled *A Fly in Amber: Being an Extravagant Biography of the Romantic Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton*, Mirrlees avers, is to show "what constitutes an antiquary" which she regrets not having space for as "this book is not the Baltic Sea" (88). The biography is not a slight one and took her three decades to draft, and notes for a never-completed second volume fill up copious scrapbooks now contained in her archive at Newnham College Cambridge. Despite the decades of patient and punctilious research, there was not enough space because the subject matter was too personal. Mirrlees overtly reveals her deep affinity with her subject matter by openly declaring that "If I am anything at all, it is a romantic antiquarian". The rest of this paper considers how Harrison's emphasis on materiality finds its way into Mirrlees' antiquarianism, and how Mirrlees connects her antiquarian leanings and her role as a poet, and ultimately, how this results in so formally ambitious a text as *Paris*.

### **Mirrlees's antiquarianism: rituals of craft and collection**

In the Cotton biography, Mirrlees identifies two types of "magic" that antiquaries perform. One is restoring the past. The other is preserving the present, which she contends is made possible by the way in which "the present is painted for antiquaries in the colours and perspective of the past". This is a disposition she ascribes to poets as well. "Indeed", she reflects, "when poets preserve the present by turning it into poetry, in a sense they too are antiquaries. The greatest antiquary among them is Horace. Did he not say *Carpe Diem*, seize the present?" Quoting from an ode by Horace which depicts a bustling house preparing for a feast, she asks "does it not catch and eternalize the glints and gleams, the tinkle and tinsel, the workaday dust and smoke of what we call the Present?" (Mirrlees 1962, 92). The difference between the two disciplines is of course that antiquarianism preserves things tangibly, and poetry is made of words. And so Mirrlees interjects—typically, as this narrative is neither a straightforward addition to antiquarian scholarship nor a literary treatise, but rather a blend of the two—"Ah, if poets could only be antiquaries! For antiquaries alone among mortals can restore the past and preserve the present, *tangibly* and it is touch that matters most" (92-3) (emphasis original).

Here we hit on the crux of Mirrlees concern with the relevance of antiquarianism to poetry. There is the idea in Mirrlees writing that poetry can be, magically, a tangible relic of a specific historical moment, much in the same way that images on excavated shards of pottery enabled Harrison to interpret the ceremonial practices of ancient Greece. In 1926, before Mirrlees began work on the biography, she expressed a similar attitude towards literature and appears to have been enthralled by another romantic antiquary. In her essay

---

material form in which a book was read was as important as the story inside' because of 'the historical meanings that could be carried by a book's 'ornamental' features" (77).

“Some Aspects of the Art of Alexej Michailovich Remizov”, Mirrlees discusses how her friend, the folklore-inspired Russian fantasy author Alexej Remizov, relates to the category of what she calls “decorative” or “rococo” writers. This grouping, for Mirrlees, is for writers who see life as a collection of beautiful objects that they can rearrange, like a painter creating a still life, naming William Morris, Alexander Pope and Oscar Wilde as examples (Parmar 79). Unlike these authors who she thinks of as using life as a “plastic and docile and malleable” material simply for the sheer love of decoration, Remizov goes about employing his materials, Russian folklore, which is on the brink of extinction, in a way that has ‘more of the antiquary than the decorator’ about it (79). She argues that it is the antiquary’s consciousness of something becoming part of the past which produces the delusion that it is the past and “hence, static and solid—a thing that one can turn round in one’s hand and examine at one’s leisure [...] He treats the present with the reverend accuracy of the antiquary, handling it delicately and lovingly, as if it were a rare and very fragile object”—and so the writer becomes an antiquary for Mirrlees, handling the present in a way that creates of it an historical artefact (80).

Artefacts are things that have been made, and what makes them special is the way in which they point to the circumstances in which they were produced. In the Cotton biography, Mirrlees harks back to the Elizabethan era for her model of antiquarianism, Cotton, as a leading antiquary of the period, providing a focal point. Cotton was among the first to value writings themselves as valuable iconic artefacts, and his close interest in manuscripts primarily as palpable relics is a feature that Mirrlees makes central to her exploration of antiquarian lore. She points out that “for those of us who are children of either the aesthetic ‘nineties’ or of the aesthetic ‘twenties’ it is difficult to remember that works of art originally merely meant works of human skill”; “Nature altered or wrought”, she adds, “is Bacon’s definition” (Mirrlees 1962, 77). She refers to the “revolutionary fusion” of the liberal and mechanical arts in the 16th century—“a fusion that endured for the greater part of Cotton’s life”—and notes how within this aesthetic paradigm painting was grouped with various crafts, such as carving, engraving, architecture, making engines for water-works, horsemanship and navigation—even something as mundane as a clockwork mouse (78). “And what, after all”, she comments, “was the difference aesthetically between Greek statues and clockwork mice? Nature has to be ‘altered’ and ‘wrought’ for the fashioning of the one quite as much as for the other” (78).

This conceptualisation of art as craft, drawing on an Elizabethan context, recalls the medievalism of the pre-Raphaelite movement, showing one of Harrison’s main sources for her materialist aesthetic at work in Mirrlees’s antiquarianism. Morris, following the example of William Blake whose illuminated manuscripts the Pre-Raphaelites sought to save from neglect, harked back to a medieval, image-oriented Catholic context of book-making. Thus, both Morris’s and Mirrlees’s historical focal points involve a heightened sense of texts as tangible, visual objects, poised on an aesthetic fault-line dividing a manuscript culture from a print culture.<sup>9</sup> Reminiscent of the way iconicity and materiality

---

<sup>9</sup> The fifteenth century (the period to which Morris’s experiments allude) is the actual turning point where printing begins but retains the iconic visual imagery of manuscripts, while Cotton’s age saw the dissolution of the monasteries which for people averse to their contents generally meant manuscripts were without value, but for Cotton and other antiquaries these were deemed valuable as physical artefacts.

are harnessed in Morris's texts to signify alongside or even beyond their verbal content<sup>10</sup>, Mirrlees presents Robert Cotton as a collector of manuscripts for whom the words contained therein were significant relics in themselves, evincing visual and tangible properties with significance beyond the verbal meaning carried by them. The two chapters describing his library of manuscripts are titled "A Magazine of History", magazines, like illuminated manuscripts, typically being highly visual publications, and "The Famous Jewel House", a house and jewels being objects in space, not conveyors of verbal meaning. Of the library she avers, "it belongs to the class of precious things of which the beauty never fades or diminishes, but waxes with the passage of the years" (Mirrlees 1962, 59). This description of Cotton's collection points to a tendency, reminiscent of the "curious" Elizabethan antiquaries, to blur the boundaries of the verbal and visual, physically crafted elements of text.

Her affectionate commentary on Cotton's picture, which forms the frontispiece of the book, conveys a preference in art for craft and physical creation, above articulation, revealing a suspicion of linguistic embellishment and a commitment to the physical that echoes Harrison's preference for ritual over theology and art. Here Mirrlees records that Cotton looks somewhat helpless, comparing him to a child and a dog (Mirrlees adored dogs later in her life) showing "his principle treasures, his Genesis [one of the most famous manuscripts in his collection], his pedigree, and his hands" (his hands are unusually prominent in this painting). She mentions in this section that Cotton had a stammer, and ends the description with "let us remember his hands", indicating a sympathy for the aesthetics of making and doing rather than speaking. An indication of this aesthetic also imbues her depiction of Alexej Remizov, "a sincere and talented writer", she avers, who is difficult to read let alone critique "because he leaves so much unsaid" (Parmar 84). The essay concludes with her suggestion that "[p]erhaps the measure of a writer's greatness is just the disparity between the things he says and the things he knows" (84). She makes a similar comment about another artist she knew and admired greatly, the painter Maria Blanchard, about whom she wrote to her mother "[s]he is so different from literary people. I mean, although she is intensely intellectual & imaginative one feels that to her language is an unsatisfactory medium" (Mirrlees 1922). She also observes a sense of concreteness about Remizov's oeuvre, noting how the romantic antiquary "tracks an old tune to a shepherd whistling it in the hidden valley where it was born, chases winged words with his net, listens to old wives' tales, and hastens to catch the last faltered words of the dying gods" (Parmar 79). This passage gives the impression of the antiquary/writer doing something very physical with words, as if they were objects to be collected, arranged and handled with care. In fact, Mirrlees continues her portrait of Remizov as a romantic antiquary by commenting that, in their exuberant use of detail, Remizov's books are a "depository of [his] collection—the small blue and white and freckled eggs that [he] so gleefully rifled from the visible world" (81).

It is puzzling that, given Mirrlees' extensive knowledge of the craft tradition of Elizabethan times, and her remark regarding Morris' painterly, decorative tendencies, she does not mention the arts and crafts movement of the later decades of the nineteenth century and Morris' resurrection of hand-printing. This omission is indeed odd as the Woolfs' Hogarth Press, where *Paris* was printed, was an extension of this tradition, and *Paris* displays the same emphasis on the visual effects of typography, layout, iconicity as

---

<sup>10</sup> McGann talks in detail about the important role given to spatial arrangement—mise en page—in Morris's writing (49-67), noting how he sometimes even filled up parts of pages with poetry simply for the visual effect (71).



well as tangible aspects—the materials used, and the importance of everything being done by hand—as texts printed within this movement. The late Julia Briggs, who brought *Paris* to critical attention in 2007, records in her article “Printing Hope: Virginia Woolf, Hope Mirrlees, and the Iconic Imagery of *Paris*” that *Paris* was the single most difficult project Woolf ever undertook as a printer (32). With the erratic margins and use of white space, different sizes of type, Roman and Italic, it is not difficult to see why. As Donna Rhein notes, it was also only the sixth book the Woolfs printed themselves, the year before they acquired a larger, easier to work press and hired professional assistants, and they were very much still amateurs in the trade (Rhein 151-56). Three proofs of *Paris* have survived and include Mirrlees meticulous corrections for layout (Briggs 2005, 32). More toil is evident in that a few typos have had to be corrected by hand after the poem was printed and bound, and Woolf recalls in her journal spending a tiresome afternoon making the corrections in each of the 175 copies (32). The extended physical labour and scrupulous craft that went into producing this poem suggest themselves in its hand-printed appearance. An imprint including the names and address of the printers on the title page of *Paris* also shows its embeddedness in the private press tradition started by Morris which generally included this information, demonstrating the prominence of the crafting process. The small run of 175 copies is also in keeping with the tradition of the “cabinets of rarities” tended by Elizabethan antiquaries as well as with the modern private press techniques, highlighting the impossibility of reproducing the text, and consequently foregrounding the historical context of its making and its status as a prized relic from that time.

#### **Poetry as preservation: *Paris* as self-consciously crafted artefact**

Just as the title of Mirrlees’ Cotton biography, *A Fly in Amber*, epitomises tangible, visual preservation, *Paris*, too, represents a similar case of preservation. While the two texts are separated by many years, Mirrlees’ insistence on the precocious nature of the antiquarian passion implies that she too had possessed this tendency from a young age: “They must spring early who would sprout high in that knowledge”, she says quoting the antiquary Thomas Fuller, and lists John Aubrey, Anthony a Wood, the Warton brothers, William Camden, Stukeley and the Provost of Eton Dr M R James as examples of this precocity (Mirrlees 1962, 23-4).

Artefacts are often more valuable when they are (roughly) datable and their provenance is known. They are vestiges of a certain time and place, a tangible, visual portal for the imagination into an era now gone. The spatial and temporal origins of *Paris* are not only indicated in the toponymous title and the poem’s last line—“Spring 1919, Rue de Boune”—but also in that it consists largely of detailed observations of the French capital at this time. These observations are delivered with such a sense of immediacy that it is as if this moment in history were frozen and preserved—much like a fly in amber. It is a record of posters, advertising slogans, snippets of news and conversation all distinctly belonging to a specific cultural period. It encapsulates a transitional phase from the devastation of the war to whatever lay ahead, alluding to the Peace Conference, the general strike, the artistic and cultural ferment in Russia, Freud’s psychoanalytical enquiries and increasing openness about homosexuality in the liberal Montmartre quarter. The idea that this preservation is what she had in mind is supported by a comment she makes in the biography regarding the intended fruits of antiquarianism. She invokes Peirescius’ defence of this cultural pursuit: “That the *circumstances* of Histories may be more perfectly understood” and adds “what an admirable definition of the true purpose of antiquarianism!” (91) (emphasis original). In conveying immediate impressions of sights, sounds and the associations they invoke, *Paris*, indeed, captures the essence of life as it was experienced in the culture capital of 1919.

Its typography also plays a crucial role in communicating a sense of the time in which it was composed. While the pre-Raphaelites employed ornamental bibliographical features to tangibly resurrect the medieval past for readers, thus performing the first sort of “antiquarian magic” described by Mirrlees—that is, restoring the past—Mirrlees too uses “ornamental features”, but in this case the radically irregular, fragmentary typography in vogue among the literary vanguard, to perform the second form of antiquarian magic, which is preserving the present.

The fragmentary, collagistic arrangement of typography in the poem visually reflects the process of antiquarian collection. It recalls on a formal level the distinction Mirrlees makes between providing a historical narrative and the antiquarian project of “conveying circumstances”. “A history”, she declares in her biography of Cotton, “was a prose poem” in Cotton’s day, a time in which antiquaries were largely ridiculed (143, 89-90). Similarly, *Paris* can be construed as a prose poem split into fragments, preventing it from conveying a fluent, logical narrative. Mirrlees notes that even when an antiquary succeeded in being an author they paled in comparison to historians who were masters of the fine art which history was then considered. It was a fine art, we could add, of articulation, of explaining, or telling a story. This understanding of history as an art that refashions the fragments of lived moments in time is glimpsed in the lines

Whatever happens, some day it will look beautiful:  
Clio is a great French painter.

Antiquaries, on the other hand, she conveys, were notoriously bad at telling a story, some not even being able to turn their discoveries into published volumes, just leaving behind an “abundance of collections [...] put into no methodical order” (143).<sup>11</sup> “How can one build a well-knit fabric from materials as broken, fragmentary, and defaced as are antiquities?”, she asks (148). The fragments and snapshots that constitute *Paris* give a visual impression of such a collection of individual items—antiquities for future readers—not yet diluted or domesticated by narrative practices.

Mirrlees’ habit of measuring antiquarians against historians strongly echoes Harrison’s Bergsonian dichotomy of ritual and art/mythology. Just as Harrison opposes the embodied, magical act of ritual to the cerebral logic of mythology, Mirrlees notes how logic, a manifestation of ‘The Logos’ in the Jungian sense, is repugnant to antiquarians, as, in contrast to verbalising historians, “it is the solid core of history that focuses their attention” (143, 93). Harrison’s influence is particularly evident in the way Mirrlees refers to antiquarianism as ‘the least “Apolline” of disciplines. “The least Apolline” implies a closer affinity with the Dionysian, which Harrison associates with primitive, pre-Olympian, ritualistic religion. The physical immediacy of collecting material objects for no other reason than to perform the antiquarian magic of restoring the past and preserving the present shares with ritual a focus on the palpable, on desire, and on doing. This contrasts with the Apollonian nature of historicising, which makes sense of the material circumstances of events, imposing a logical order on them, reducing them to an intellectually pleasing, coherent narrative.

This preference for fragmented collections of historical “circumstances” by

---

<sup>11</sup> This antithesis between antiquarians and historians has been discussed by other scholars on antiquaries. See for example Kelly Eileen Battles’ *The Antiquarian Impulse: History, Affect, and Material Culture in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century British Literature*, Chapter 1, “The Figure of the Antiquary”.

antiquaries over neat historical narratives appears as well in an essay entitled “Listening to the Past”. Here Mirrlees describes a hypothetical device that would transmit snippets of speech from the past. Mirrlees is fascinated by the kaleidoscopic possibilities of such a device, given that the unwieldy splinters of speech would not be organised into a coherent “lesson in history”, as she phrases it; rather, in her “aural kaleidoscope” would be snippets of everything from famous lines by Goethe to “the hoarse shriek of an English newspaper boy shouting out last year’s Derby winner” (Mirrlees 1926, 670). *Paris*, with its shards of famous literary lines alongside newspapers being hawked on the street, can be seen to perform this kaleidoscopic function for the present-day reader. The distinction between antiquarian collections and the “prose poem” of historians is mirrored again as the article seeks to compare literature to the law, arguing that the law constitutes the better window into the past because of the way it tells us of old, homely customs and “details of everyday doings” (670). Again, the “solid core of history” with which antiquaries are concerned, and the snapshots in *Paris* of everyday phenomena such as little boys riding round and round on wooden horses, snippets of cafe and nightlife conversation, advertising posters and homely “hidden courts” away from the main tourist attractions of the city spring to mind.

Artefacts do not speak; they simply exist as material objects in space, the solid but also silent core of history. *Paris* highlights its own silent “thingness” and materiality in a number of ways. Not only does its physical form convey its physical, amateur crafting process; visual, concrete elements in the poem also frequently encroach on, impede or inform the reading voice. This spatial emphasis shows Mirrlees taking poetry out of the purely verbal realm and showing it to belong equally to the visual, tangible realm of material culture. *Paris* highlights the nature of the poem as a spatial object, marking an enormous distance from the voice-centred poem in its use of conventions specific to print. One way it achieves this is through ellipses, used frequently, which limit speech and even point to the unsayable. Asterisks and borders are similarly impossible to convey verbally. Its variable margins give no clue as to their verbal translation. Endnotes (two years before Eliot’s famous use of footnotes) are a purely visual convention belonging to print. They are in all likelihood not meant to be read aloud, and in any case cannot be integrated into the points of the poem which they explicate during the reading process. As renowned historian of literacy Walter Ong argues, “orally presented sequences are always occurrences in time, impossible to ‘examine’, because they are not presented visually but rather are utterances which are heard”. “Texts, on the other hand, being ‘thing-like, immobilized in visual space’”, are, Ong notes, “subject to what [Jack] Goody calls ‘backward scanning’” (113). Endnotes are an especially apt example of texts calling for “backward scanning”; that is, jumping around in a text to re-examine overlooked or missed points. These bibliographic elements move the poem out of the purely oral-aural context and make vision equally important to experiencing the poem.

*Paris* contains, throughout, a tension, even a conflict, between being a poem that is meant to be read aloud, concentrated on a verbal message, and one that subverts the instinct to declaim—one in which words can only be taken in by the reader in conjunction with, and inseparable from, their concrete arrangement and appearance on the page. Rather, an integrated spatial-temporal experience of non-linear seeing and speaking/hearing must be undergone.

This tension is evident immediately upon opening the book. The first lines of *Paris* are set in a frame:

A  
**NOTRE DAME DE PARIS  
 EN RECONNAISSANCE  
 DES GRACES ACCORDEES**

The frame may, as Julia Briggs points out, bring to mind a votive plaque, such as one found outside churches (Briggs 2007, 287). It should also be noted that votive reliefs and inscriptions feature widely in Harrison’s analysis of Greek tombs and other antiquities (1962b, 148, 298, 304-6). The frame thus signifies a historical context that words cannot, connecting with the way historical meanings are carried by ornamental features in pre-Raphaelite works (McGann 77). The frame is a palimpsest in itself, being at once a “primitive” sacred ornamental feature and a more recent religious decoration—a plaque outside a Catholic church—and finally a secular tribute to the city of Paris, filling the old ritual mould with new content from everyday life—from which Harrison insists that ritual must spring.

On the next page, we notice the zig zagging of the margins, the jolts of the changes in typeface, before we read lines like “NORD-SUD”, the name of the Paris metro line (and possibly a copy of the famous poetry magazine sat on the speaker’s lap) and words from advertising posters, indicating that the speaker is riding the metro describing sights on the way. Similarly, the line “ZIG ZAG” refers to an advertising poster (for tobacco), but also verbally confirms the movement we already sensed visually from merely looking at the passage. The jolts in typography enact what the meanings of words convey, as well as the jolting ride in the metro, creating an integrated performance of speech and act which the reader grasps through an integrated seeing and speaking/hearing process.

Continuing this performative use of typography, the visually frantic first page ends with the line “I can’t/I must go slowly”, which is followed by this slow, deliberate movement of the words across the page:

The	Tuilleries	are	in	a	trance
because	the		painters		have
stared	at	them	so		long

Again, we notice this sluggish pace (the “eye” really does go slowly) as or even before we read words like “trance” and “stared at them so long” which convey this sense verbally. References to painting and staring here also work to highlight the visuality of the passage.

The next stanza again displays visually what we also read and process verbally:

Little boys in black overalls whose hands, sticky with  
 play, are like the newly furled leaves of the horse-  
 hestnuts ride round and round on wooden horses till  
 their heads turn.

This tightly wound, quickly moving passage contrasts with the preceding lines, heightened by the presence of a hyphen which speeds up the transition even more from one line to the next, melding the lines together as if they comprised a folded linked chain. This movement

is also reinforced through the verbal masonry of the stanza: the phrases ‘ride round and round’, ‘till their heads turn’; words like ‘furled’ and ‘sticky’, suggesting being wound up, folded, closing tightly around itself, sticking together, the way the stanza is concretely arranged. The speaker’s (and possibly the reader’s) head is turned, anticipating the wandering typography that mirrors the speaker’s meandering route through the city in the rest of the poem. Other ways in which space signifies beyond the power of the verbal include how advertising slogans and snippets of conversation are set apart from the rest of the text by typography, anticipating Louis Aragon’s skilfully collaged advertisements in *Le Paysan de Paris* (1924). Here again the visual speaks as loudly as the verbal.

This emphasis on the visual makes reading aloud difficult because it is a new way of determining pace—how slowly or quickly would you read these stanzas aloud? Some lines take this difficulty much further, to where it interferes with the ability to read aloud at all:

	Secrets	
exquisite		significant
fade		plastic

How is this meant to be scanned? Left to right or top to bottom? Is “Secrets” meant to be read twice? The ambiguity of verbalisation in these lines makes it difficult to commit them to oral/aural memory to recite at will.

The climax of this conflict between the voice and the eye is the vertical line:

T  
h  
e  
r  
e  
i  
s  
n  
o  
l  
i  
l  
y  
o  
f  
t  
h  
e  
v  
a  
l  
l  
e  
y

where firstly reading aloud is difficult because we are not accustomed to reading vertically and because the gaps between the words are very small, and making one’s way down the

page without knowing what will follow can make a reader sound quite inarticulate indeed. Once a reader has apprehended what the line says, how does he/she render it verbally? Extremely slowly? As a sort of inchoate wail? This problem is foreshadowed by the words “Thick halting speech”, which are themselves halted by a long “—”. The anticipation of this moment is revealed in lines which also produce a ‘halting’ oral reading:

What time  
Subaqueous  
Cell on cell  
Experience  
Very slowly  
Is forming up

where the sense of waiting is amplified in the way the words are stacked up, a visual analogue of the line “[c]ell on cell”, taking one “[v]ery slowly” to whatever “[i]s forming up”. The next line (before “Thick halting speech”) is “[t]he coming to [...], the extended ellipses signifying the long silence of someone regaining consciousness. After “[t]hick halting speech—” we are halted almost completely from speech by the long vertical line, but first we are made to feel the gravity of this silence, by reading the rest of the line after the dash: “the curse of vastness”, which is followed by the vastness of white space surrounding the vertical line.

This disruption of speech by images is encapsulated in the line “The Scarlet Woman shouting BYRRH and deafening/St John at Patmos”. Julia Briggs, in her annotation of the poem, argues that this represents a rejection of the Logos (“Modernism’s Lost Hope: Virginia Woolf, Hope Mirrlees and the Printing of Paris’ 85”), the Logos being a unifying principle which is also the Word of God discussed by St John, among others before him. The fragmentation of the poem disrupts the all-embracing, unifying use of the word. This line can be construed as a distillation of Mirrlees poetic gesture, as an image literally drowns out the spoken word. Another instance of problematising the power of the word is the line “H u s s h” which of course (besides being difficult to read out loud because of the three “s”s and the letters being a space apart), means ‘do not speak’. The effect is amplified by the fact that the next ‘line’ is a bar of music, marking another obstacle for the reading voice.

Through the subversion of language and narrative as main carriers of meaning, as well as the highly performative use of typography and the process of hand-crafting, the antiquarian act that *Paris* performs in recording a moment in history takes on a strong non-verbal, physical dimension. As a result the poem becomes not only a record but a material relic, an artefact of the time it was written, participating in the search for a more tangible, dissident and original expression in art that formed part of the modernist project. Harrison’s theory of ritual emerges as a compelling framework for pursuing this aesthetic goal, harnessed by Mirrlees in her eloquent stress on materiality, performativity and process, combining with the thematic presence of ritual in the poem to enact an antiquarian ritual of preservation. Through this ritual-infused antiquarian gesture, Mirrlees acts out her wish for poetry to consecrate the present tangibly, and in turn epitomises the other form of antiquarianism she identifies in her essays: namely restoring the past. Like a shard of ancient Greek pottery depicting ceremonial proceedings, *Paris* comprises a remnant inscribed with the vibrant events of its time, laying in wait to be unearthed by future generations of literary archaeologists and antiquarians.

## Works Cited

- Ackerman, Robert. *The Myth and Ritual School: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Armstrong, Margaret M. "Sacraments, Sacrifice, and Ritual: High Church Mysticism in the Letters of Jane Ellen Harrison and Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion". Florida State University, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2007.
- Battles, Kelly Eileen. *The Antiquarian Impulse: History, Affect, and Material Culture in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century British Literature*. Michigan State University. Proquest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2008.
- Beard, Mary. *The invention of Jane Harrison*. Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard UP, 2002.
- Bohn, William. *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.
- Bornstein, George. *Material Modernisms: The Politics of the Page*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Briggs, Julia. "Hope Mirrlees and Continental Modernism". In *Gender in Modernism*. Bonnie Kime Scott. ed. Urbana and Chicago: Illinois UP, 2007. 261-303.
- . "Modernism's Lost Hope: Virginia Woolf, Hope Mirrlees and the Printing of Paris" in *Reading Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006.
- . "'Printing Hope': Virginia Woolf, Hope Mirrlees, and the Iconic Imagery of Paris". *Woolf in the Real World: Selected Papers from the Thirteenth International Conference on Virginia Woolf*. Karen V. Kukil. ed. Clemson, SC: Clemson U Digital P, 2005.
- Drucker, Johanna. *The Century of Artists' Books*. New York: Granary, 2004.
- . *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.
- Harrison, Jane Ellen. *Alpha and Omega*. London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1915.
- . *Ancient Art and Ritual*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1947.
- . "Epilegomena to the Study of Greek religion". in *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion and Themis*. New York: University Books, 1962a.
- . *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1922.
- . *Reminiscences of a Student's Life*. Hogarth Press, 1925.
- . "Themis: a Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion". in *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion and Themis*. New York: University Books, 1962b.
- Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1973.
- Materer, Timothy. *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.
- McGann, Jerome. *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- McKenzie, D.F., Peter D. McDonald, Michael Felix Suarez. *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays*. Massachusetts: U of Massachusetts P, 2002.
- Mirrlees, Hope. *A Fly in Amber: Being an Extravagant Biography of the Romantic Antiquary Sir Robert Cotton*. London: Faber & Faber, 1962.
- . "Listening to the Past". *Nation and Athenaeum* 39.23 (1926, Sept. 11): 670-71.
- . "Paris: A Poem. Reproduced as facsimile in Julia Briggs 'Hope Mirrlees and Continental Modernism'". *Gender in Modernism*. Bonnie Kime Scott. ed. Urbana and Chicago: Illinois UP, 2007.

- . “Untitled letter to Mirrlees’ mother, Emily Lena Moncrieff”. *Ms. Mirrlees’ Papers*. 2/1/3. Newnham College, Cambridge, 1922.
- Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing the Word*. London: Routledge, 1982.
- Parmar, Sandeep. ed. *Hope Mirrlees: Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2011.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture, with a New Preface*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.
- Rhein, Donna E. *The Handprinted Books of Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1917-1932*. Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985.
- Robinson, Annabel. *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.
- Schwartz, Sanford. *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth-Century Thought*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1985.
- Staff, Craig G. *Modernist Painting and Materiality*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2011.
- Surette, Leon. *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1994.
- Sword, Helen. *Ghostwriting Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002.
- Wright, Rita. *Jane Ellen Harrison’s “Handmaiden No More”: Victorian Ritualism and the Fine Arts*. The U of Utah, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations P, 2009.





## Regaining the Power to Say “No”: Imprisonment, Resistance and Freedom in *Avatar the Last Airbender*

Fulya İçöz

**Abstract:** Between the years 2005-2008, the animation world was shaken by a novel animation series called *Avatar the Last Airbender*. In the TV series, a young teenage boy awoke to a world torn apart by wars between the nations of Fire, Earth and Water. This boy was called the “Avatar”. All the nations were in the imprisonment of the Fire Nation trying to figure out an exit from confinement to freedom. While the nations’ confinement was more primary than resistance and freedom, while nobody could believe that freedom was possible, a group of teenagers was trying to liberate their nations as fighting forces assembled by the young boy the Avatar—first as invisible resistance to tyranny and then as fully equipped freedom fighters. In this paper, the process of resistance and its fruitful results in *Avatar the Last Airbender* will be examined. The representations of confinement, resistance and freedom are going to be monitored mostly in the episodes *the Boy in the Iceberg*, *Imprisoned*, *Day of the Black Sun—The Eclipse*, *Into the Inferno* and *Avatar Aang*.

**Keywords:** resistance, hegemony, race, tyranny, power, freedom

In the *Jungle Book*, the protagonist to a native says, “[b]ecause you cannot do likewise, you’re our subjects”. Imagine a world in which there is supreme sovereignty of a dictator and the citizens who refuse to be his subjects, who try to do the likewise. This is the world of the *Avatar: the Last Airbender*. In the TV series, which attracted millions’ attraction for three years, the Avatar or Aang, who is capable of controlling four elements altogether, and his friends try to reverse the reversed story of the nations and rebuild a justice society by constituting counter strategies against the dominant, the tyranny of the Fire Nation, through a well-grounded resistance. This essay is a precursory attempt to examine the process of resistance and its fruitful results in *Avatar the Last Airbender* in which, the projection of the entangled power relations between the Firelord, who is represented as a tyrannical power symbol and Aang, the rebellious resistance leader will be examined. The resistance in *Avatar the Last Airbender* ignores and repudiates the dominant inferior relationships and creates a history of its own and for itself by standing against the imposed rule and domination of the Fire Nation. The Last Airbender Aang and his friends unsettle the major structures of power that belongs to the Fire Nation on a massive scale and scatter the division between the benders constructing a whole new perception of identity among the nations.

Resistance is substantially the mastery of opposition, to have power to counter by creating a new action. It is sometimes an attempt to create a revolutionary border thinking practice; it opens the channels for a different way of thinking. It also operates on the circumferences of the hegemonic culture, which tries to relegate resistance to a frivolous or weak position. The goal or the direction of resistance is towards a change. In the performing of resistance, the two leading actors at work are action and opposition. While action is not “a state of being” (Hollander, Einwohner 539), but contains a sense of active behaviour, opposition can be best defined with the words “challenge”, “contradict”, and “conflict” and so on.

These common elements may seem self-evident: of course resistance includes an activity, and of course that activity occurs in opposition to someone or something else. Yet it is by identifying these consensual elements that the lines of disagreement become clear. We found that various discussions of resistance differed in their positions on two central issues, which we suggest lie at the heart of many disagreements about resistance: recognition and intent (539).

Visibility is one of the basic elements of resistance. Without being recognized and accepted by the opponent, to be observable is not enough in some forms of resistance. The type of resistance in *the Avatar* can be categorized as one that needs to be recognized. Thus, Aang and his friends first have to manipulate their actions to be recognized by the adversary. To be accepted as a resistance group is a way of earning respect from their opponent. At first, the Firelord does not regard them seriously but later he will have to affirm that they form a powerful resistance group. Since, “becoming ‘minor’ is not a question of essence [...] but a question of position: a subject-position that in the final analysis can be defined only in political terms” (Deleuze, Guattari 9). In this sense, the major or the mainstream in other words, the hegemonic casts the so-called minor as the powerless/marginalised/inferior. However, the hegemonic methods of the Fire Nation will no longer assume Aang’s resistance as the minor or the subaltern. Aang’s resistance will eventually prove itself as a revolution in every sense: a revolution that holds the potential and capability to change the operations of power. Contributing to the adversary’s recognition of resistance, there is also another descriptive signifier: the intent of the resister. The intent is the perception of the resisters’ own behaviours, interwoven with the perception of the targets’—their reaction. For Aang, the intent in the beginning is not obvious since he does not fully understand his mission and the situation he is confronted with. He must find a way to overcome the basic axes of power that separate people as social classes (benders vs non-benders) and races (The Fire Nation vs Earth/Air/Water Nations). At this point, the Firelord’s cruel and hegemonic display of power will make Aang recognize his intent and role. In *the Avatar*, Aang awakens to a world fragmented and divided into nations and ruled by the Fire Nation. The Fire Nation has fire benders and they have the ultimate control over the people of other nations. Although there are water benders and earth benders, they are not allowed to use their powers over the elements; solely the fire benders can use their bending ability in full measure. Building upon their privileged position, fire benders create a world of their own perceptions, a powerful and sound matrix in which they can establish an entire tyrannical world system. They subjugate other nations constantly by the forms of despotic dominance. Any member of another nation except for the Fire Nation is repeatedly exposed to the most fatal dangers: “the bare necessities of his life, his culture, the life and future of his family” (Gramsci 83). The Fire Nation holds an authorized position by imposing the dominant discourse. They never surrender the advantages that always favour them. As Firelord’s son, Prince Zuko raises this issue once:

*Prince Zuko:* Growing up we were taught that the Fire Nation was the greatest civilization in history. Somehow, the war was our way of sharing our greatness with the rest of the world. What an amazing lie that was. The people of the world are *terrified* by the Fire Nation. They don't see our greatness. They *hate* us. And we deserve it! We created an era of fear in the world. And if we don't want the world to destroy itself, we need to replace it with an era of peace and kindness. (2005c)

The Firelord, who rules the whole world of the benders and non-benders, is aware of the risks involved in any kind of loosening up of discipline. He grapples with hierarchy based on what Quijano describes as “social classification of the world’s population around the idea of race”. This idea of race acknowledges the power to the relations of sovereignty assessed by the victorious. The Firelord uses all the mechanisms of domination and operations of law and order at his disposal. Firstly by levying on forces and secondly bestowing life or death: his sovereignty has a purely disciplinary function. His power knows “its way around its network of tunnels, its multiple hole” (Proust 82): it forbids, it constricts, it controls and it absolves. As a result, there is no way out. The subject has no alternative: he or she plays the rules of the game or is imprisoned/executed. The mechanisms of power in the Fire Nation are ‘disciplinary power’ in Foucault’s terms. There are military centres, administrative apparatuses and a fully equipped army in it. The Firelord not only recruits and arms troops loyal to his personal and private interests but also disarms of the citizens. In the world governed by the Fire Nation, the imperial rule is represented as the constriction of the public and political space. Since tyranny or despotism reduces all political space to itself, the relation between the Firelord and the citizens is no longer reciprocal. It is pure tyranny in its naked state: the master, the Firelord, claims the absolute power; sovereignty is defined by the use of force and violence over subjects, and the Firelord is entrenched and possesses supremacy of power. As Foucault points out, “brutal tyranny consequently appears as the serene domination of Good over Evil, of order over disorder” (“Intellectuals and Power”). The Firelord declares that he is the one who brings order into that fragmented society, yet the circumstances prove the opposite. His illusion of power is portrayed unfaithfully schizophrenic. He points the fingers of accusation if he does not give his approval to someone’s actions. He penalizes the actions of his distaste with severe methods. The rationale behind this absolutism is to display the two edges of power relations, who holds it and who lacks it. His power operates through forms of control, superintendence, proscription and repression. It attempts to prevent “untoward” explosions of anger and frustration. This kind of power as it is well displayed in the series finds its ways in the Firelord Ozai’s obsession for superlative forms of hegemony. This obsession is very well described in Ozai’s words in the episode “Sozin’s Comet”: “When the comet last came, my grandfather, Firelord Sozin, used it to wipe out the Air Nomads. Now, I will use its powers to end the Earth Kingdom—permanently. From our airships, we will rain fire over their lands. A fire that will destroy *everything*. And out of the ashes a new world will be born. A world in which all the lands are Fire Nation, and I am the supreme ruler of *everything!*” (2008). A question is raised here: what is the way out of this confinement? The answer to this question is inevitably resistance since eventually material forces will have to be damaged by other material forces. “However, power never goes unchallenged; it always produces friction, resistance, and contestation” (Moll 126). Firelord’s power will soon be challenged since it creates the roots of conflict and resistance.

“At about the time James Scott called attention to forms of resistance that occur [within the official discourse of deference] inasmuch as they rest on ethical claims legitimated by official ideologies” (O’Brien 32). This kind of resistance “can hamstring political and economic elites because it is couched in the language of loyal intentions; it can reveal when members of powerful groups can bring to bear” (32). The route of resistance for Aang and his friends would primarily be mapping the dominant discourse of the Firelord—the political and the harmful elite of *Avatar the Last Airbender’s* world and dismantling his assumptions. It would not be a mistaken deduction to state that The Firelord Ozai has a worldview and readiness to regard his power as absolute, unquestionable and the

norm. It can be concluded from his own words: “You are right, I do have the power. I have all the power in the WORLD!” and/or “You *will* learn respect, and suffering will be your teacher!”

Under the circumstances mentioned, Aang stands as a peripheral and the conflictual figure. As it is indicated before, The Firelord Ozai and the Avatar Aang are on the two repelling sides of a power struggle, besides they are like chalk and cheese. While the Firelord Ozai restricts freedom and withholds power to himself, Aang tries to enrich and enlarge the rights of the politically oppressed and underprivileged. Aang takes the moral implications seriously; however, Ozai leaves no stone unturned to be victorious. Aang endeavours to unify the separate entities such as three different races and make them live together in constructive harmony. The Firelord Ozai divides races and by dismissing all the nations other than the Fire Nation, proves his supreme power. The more Aang supports peaceful resistance, the more Ozai oppresses:

*Firelord Ozai:* After generations of Firelords failed to find you, now the universe delivers you to me as an act of providence!

*Aang:* Please listen to me! We don't have to fight. You have the power to end it here and stop what you are doing.

As it is obvious from the quotations above, Firelord and Aang do not speak the same language, hence, would it be erroneous to claim that there is fixity in their relations? The Firelord Ozai has the interlocking reluctance to observe the situation from the submissive's point of view; his perspective is from the side of the power. In this context, *Avatar the Last Airbender* juxtaposes subjects who question and a ruler who does not stoop to answer. There is no common political space for these two; with the disappearance of any form of communication or mutual understanding; the only possible basis of interaction is inescapably force. The dialogue between these two forces is not means of communication, not a welcome endeavour. The Firelord Ozai's myopic empire does not foresee the tension rising on Aang's side. Thus, Aang's demand of recognition will gradually be accompanied by force and violence in his resistance, and the Firelord's attempts to suppress Aang's resistance will be harsher and crueller. It is a paradoxical affirmation in this sense because either Aang's resistance co-exists with the Firelord's power or it succeeds and destroys it. “Since Gramsci's days—political society and civil society, dictatorship and hegemony, *dominio* and *direzione*, violence and persuasion, force and consent—represent the double nature of power and the state, the articulation and inculcation of culture and ideology are essential for a revolutionary politics and a revolutionary consciousness” (Fontana 145). When there is the double nature of power and the state, the dialectical relationship between hegemony and resistance implies a dual vision. Force is accompanied with resistance; consent with rejection; violence with counter attack and persuasion with objection. “Resistance and domination have a cyclical relationship: domination leads to resistance, which leads to the further exercise of power, provoking further resistance, and so on” (Hollander, Einwohner 548). In this respect, Aang's resistance synchronizes with the violent attacks from the Fire Nation, it criss-crosses between being victorious or beaten. Especially at the beginning of the series, it is far from being a unified force in any kind of holistic sense because nations other than the Fire Nation are oppressed and divided. However, accordingly in their resistance they will do what the oppressed nations naturally do in a resistance:

The oppressed nation will therefore initially oppose the dominant military force with a force which is only ‘politico-military’, that is to say a form of political

action which has the virtue of provoking repercussions of a military character in the sense:

1. That it has the capacity to destroy the war potential of the dominant nation from within;
2. That it compels the dominant military force to thin out and disperse itself over a large territory, thus nullifying a great part of its war potential. (Gramsci 207)

The first battle between the armies of resistance and the Fire Nation is not very advantageous on Aang's side. Yet perseverance is the key component of resistance, as a matter of fact the next battle will annihilate the war potential of the Fire Nation. Inasmuch as resistance troops are better armed, their courage is polished and the war potential of the Fire Nation is thinned out.

In arguing for the activity of resistance, one can state that, it means to go outside of a situation, "as Deleuze insists, the Outside is battle, and not serenity. It is war, not peace" (Proust 25). In the first episode of *Avatar the Last Airbender The Boy in the Iceberg*, it is especially meaningful, as the Avatar Aang is captured in an iceberg for a hundred years only to be woken by siblings Katara and Sokka. At the end of the episode, Fire Nation's armada invades the place where Aang is found. Inevitably, Aang will have to find himself in the middle of a life and death battle. "Freedom (or will) would, then, consist of not rendering oneself unworthy of that which, in the exemplary event which is death (war or wound), has its component of eternity and impassivity. Thus resistance takes on its true face [...] to affirm, to confirm, and to rejoin one's destiny" (33). Aang at first is not a figure of revolt against unfairness, not in the heroic sense. Initially, he wants to reject the state he is in, he is unwilling to accept his destiny: to fight against a more powerful force. However, as Deleuze points out, "*Amor fati* is one of the struggles of free men" (Deleuze 149). At the beginning of the series, he is depicted as a teenager with extraordinary skills who, despite himself, is brought to visible "confrontation with power" (Proust 27). Yet, this confrontation is equivocal, the audience does not fully perceive what kind of dangers Aang is bound to face. His resistance at first will be immobile, he will not want to take the responsibility of what he can possibly do as the Avatar, the only person who can control four elements and can overcome the Firelord. His reaction is originally stubborn, stuck in its place, frightened and cultivates slowness. However, the Outside namely the resistance offers indocile "multiplicity of forces" (25). It jolts and moves. "It is a space of aleatory dispersion of points of singularity. They are points where a force is affected by and affects another. They are pure intensities [...] They are themselves knots, packets, centers, threads. They never cease to collide and crash" (25). This dynamism in the idea of resistance influences Aang, and his never-ending friction and collision with the hegemony of the Fire Nation starts. Gradually, Aang and his friends develop this sense of resistance. They first elaborate conscious self-identification, realizing who they are and what their role is and then, they demand acknowledgement from the Firelord. This demand and Firelord's derogatory reaction startles their resistance. It will soon be saturated with its own values and rules.

Aang's resistance is autonomous and spontaneous—based on his impulses, the Firelord's discipline on the other hand is mechanical and authoritarian. Actually, this mechanical and authoritarian discipline of the Firelord is reflected on his soldiers, "the very life, the very thought of the person who observes them" (Gramsci 32). His soldiers have the attitude of "pre-determined inferiority" in Homi Bhabha's terms towards the members of other nations. The members of other nations and the members of the Fire Nation do not have a symmetrical relation. The Fire Nation considers itself automatically as the superior,

its representation of itself as the master is actually not the formation of a nation but causes the deformation; because the hegemony it exercises is not capable of preventing unforeseen eruptions of the other nations. It tries to disrupt resistance fundamentally by making the resisters appear unreasonable, incapable and powerless. This claim is clear in the episode *The Imprisoned*. In this episode, the Fire Nation captures the water bender Katara with earth benders because earth and water bending are illegal. The soldiers of the Fire Nation hunt other benders and imprison them on ships. They kill two birds with one stone: they confine other benders so that they will be the only authority in the country, besides they make them work on the ships free. Despite there are a great number of skilful earth benders on the ship, none of them dares to defy. They submit to the fire benders, their courage is taken by their confinement. Then Katara arrives. At first Katara tries to fire earth benders' courage to resist, she tells them their own legends encouraging them. Yet, the Fire Nation has denied earth benders any awareness of their own history and culture. Earth benders' history is re-written by the Fire Nation, they are captives now, and there is master-slave relation between other benders and fire benders. Katara is simply shocked when she learns that earth benders do not even think of escaping:

Katara: If you don't mind me asking, what is your escape plan?

Tyro: Excuse me?

Katara: You know the plan to get everyone off the rig? What is it? Mutiny? Sabotage?

Tyro: The plan? The plan is to survive [...] Wait out this war. Hope that one day some of us can get back home and forget this ever happened. The Warden is a ruthless man and he won't stand any rebellion. I'm sorry but we're powerless. (2005a)

Earth benders turn into shadows; they do not feel like earth benders any more but as their substitutes. They have the fantasy of the position of mastery; they do not even recognize that they locate pressure points where the unity of fire benders can be shattered because resistance works near the channels of the authorized force. In addition, the ship is the very channel to operate resistance, create divisions, and fear among the so-called powerful. Only Katara is aware of this, thus she tries to light their fire:

Katara: Earth benders! You don't know me but I know of you. Every child of my water tribe village was rocked to sleep with stories of the brave Earth Kingdom and the courageous earth benders who guard its borders. Some of you may think that the Fire Nation has made you powerless. Yes they have taken away your ability to bend, but they can't take away your courage and it is your courage they should truly fear! Because it runs deeper than any mine you've been forced to dig, any ocean that keeps you far from home. It is the strength of your hearts that make you who you are, hearts that will remain unbroken when all rock and stone has eroded away. The time to fight back is now! [...] So remember your courage earth benders, let us fight for our freedom! (2005a)

There is no movement, Katara is disheartened and insulted by the Warden as well just as it is mentioned above, and the authority tries to make her look ridiculous, unreasonable. When she attempts to resist for the second time, the Warden ridicules her: "Foolish girl! You thought a few inspirational words and some coal would change these people? Look at these blank, hopeless faces. Their spirits were broken a long time ago. But you still believe in them? [...] They are waste of your energy little girl. You've failed". Then, the audience

observes a stone aimed at the Warden's head. It is from a young earth bender and it starts the resistance on the ship. However, why all of a sudden, the earth benders find the courage to strike back? It can probably be explained in Deleuze's description: Life becomes resistance to power when power takes life as its object. Here again, the two operations belong to the same horizon (we can see this clearly in the question of abortion, when the most reactionary powers invoke a "right to live"). When power becomes bio-power resistance becomes the power of life, a vital power that cannot be confined within species, environment or the paths of a particular diagram (1986, 92). In this scene, the audience witnesses the liberation of life itself from imprisonment, the forces of life that is bigger, more mobile, more positive and more affluent. This is what people can achieve in Foucault's terms as 'living beings', as a set of forces that resists. This is the fire of life in the earth benders, which is kindled thanks to Katara's efforts.

Considering the role of Aang in the episodes *Day of the Black Sun: Eclipse* and *Into the Inferno*, he is portrayed as a figure of transgression against the disciplinary society created by the Firelord. As it is stated before, he is the symbol of periphery. He fights against the hegemony and constriction and he refuses to collude with power. He stands against the totalizing forms of repression. He makes people believe in himself, he challenges and criticizes the authority of the Firelord, because "to criticize power is to participate in counter alignments to resist or evade its effects" (Rouse 112). By resisting the Firelord, he displays that Firelord can be challenged and must be challenged because his power lacks fair judgement and common sense. In *Day of the Black Sun: Eclipse* the first attempt to revolt against the Firelord will bring Aang and his friends the advantage of the acknowledgement by the Firelord and will put fear in his heart. For the first time in his life, he will face the reasons why his subjects are defying him. A quotation from Machiavelli can best describe this situation: "[W]henver either princes or republics are afraid lest their subjects should revolt, it results mainly from the hatred of the subjects on account of the bad treatment experienced from those who govern them; and this comes from either the belief that they can best be controlled by force, or from the lack of sound judgement in governing them". Because of creating a full tyranny, the Firelord will come face to face with the struggle aiming at revealing, undermining, sapping and taking the power itself.

The hierarchical, constant and operational surveillance of the Firelord is everywhere and always watchful, it leaves no air to breathe, no shade to hide, no zone of freedom. It results the whole country being a huge prison for everyone living in it. Aang's resistance is based on the liberation of the whole country. Thus, all those on whom power is operated cruelly and who find it unbearable start clashing in their domain relying on their own pain and actions for freedom. Aang as a figure of transgression (from the perspective of the dominant) tries to compose an empty form of freedom, its absence. He aims to bring what does not exist in the domination of the Fire Nation. His purpose is the reversal of power and a beginning of new resistance against the existing forms of power. When Aang and The Firelord are finally in a battle, the Firelord declares his surveillance: "After generations of Firelords fail to find you, now the universe delivers you to me as an act of roudedens [...] I have all the power in the world! [...] You are weak, just like the rest of your people. They did not deserve to live in this world, in *my* world!" (2008) He reveals the very source of his power, his tyranny. He believes that his power is unquestionable and uncrossable. However, Aang's resistance uses the entire space in the line it crosses. He sees "the horizon of the uncrossable" (Schwarzmantel 82) and transgresses it by overthrowing the Firelord. His resistance can be regarded as a force "to create a new mentality and diffuse a culture in opposition to the one that had been hitherto dominant" (82).



“There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor” (Deleuze, Guattari 26). The minoritized races in the Avatar’s world try to take back what is theirs in the first place: the way out of confinement towards freedom. The resistance in *Avatar the Last Airbender* aspires to turn the Fire Nation’s domination upside down. It manifests the tyranny of the Firelord, his finger of accusation, his crooked view of power, domination of so-called Good over Evil. Although Aang is considered as a transgression figure by the Firelord, the Firelord himself is the one to go to extremes and to push the limits in his governing. In the darkness of his tyranny, Aang’s resistance is like a flash in the middle of the night, yet it owes its strike to the night; since if there had not been the despotism of the Firelord, there would never have been the resistance against his insufferable exercise of the power. It would not be unsound to say that there is a paradoxical relationship between the power of the Firelord and Aang’s revolt. As Françoise Proust states resistance is not debatable, it is double-dealing. “It is the contemporary and double of the power it resists, neither primary nor secondary relation to it” (Proust 35). The seed of resistance is in the core of power. The more brutal the Firelord becomes the more resistant Aang and his friends get. The Firelord indirectly feeds the very roots of resistance in his own domain. Where his tyranny reduces all the power to itself, it leaves space to the resisters. “Resistance constantly accompanies power [...] and, ironically, finds itself confronting its adversary” (35). If there is only power, there is no freedom. Zero is a good base to initiate resistance. In Foucault’s words, “transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also the entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses” (34). The Firelord is the unwilling father of Aang’s resistance. He becomes the very victim of the destiny he would like to condemn the resisters forever. He puts Aang and the other resisters into the strictest and the cruellest situations possible but the more pressure he puts, the more resistant others get. All in all, as Deleuze states “resistance comes first” because by opposing the tyranny of the Firelord, Aang and his companions liberate themselves and the other nations; have the realization of who they are and what their mission is, make the Fire Nation's hegemony upside down and write a story of their own.

### Works Cited

- Avatar the Last Airbender. Imprisoned.* Michael Dante DiMartino, Bryan Konietzko. 25 Mar. 2005a.
- . *The Boy in the Iceberg.* Michael Dante DiMartino, Bryan Konietzko. 21 Feb. 2005b.
- . *The Day of the Black Sun (Part 1: The Invasion/ Part 2: The Eclipse).* Michael Dante DiMartino, Bryan Konietzko. 30 Nov. 2005c.
- . *Sozin’s Comet: Part 3 Into the Inferno.* Michael Dante DiMartino, Bryan Konietzko. 19 July 2008.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault.* Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 1986.
- , Guattari, Felix “What is a Minor Literature?” *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002.
- Fontana, Benedetto. *Hegemony and Power on the Relation Between Gramsci and Machiavelli.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.

- Foucault, Michel. "A Preface to Transgression". *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Donald F. Bouchard. ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selected Writings*. David Forgacs. ed. New York: New York UP, 2003.
- Hollander, Jocelyn A., Rachel L. Einwohner. "Conceptualizing Resistance". *Sociological Forum* 19. 4 (Dec., 2004): 533-554.
- McHoul, Alec, Wendy Grace. *A Foucault Primer Discourse, Power and the Subject*. Taylor and Francis e-library, 2002.
- Moll, Luis. C. "Rethinking Resistance". *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 35. 1 Race, Power, and the Ethnography of Urban Schools (Mar., 2004): 126-131.
- O'Brien, Kevin J. "Rightful Resistance". *World Politics* 49. 1 (Oct., 1996): 31-55.
- Proust, Françoise, Penelope Deutscher. "The Line of Resistance". *Hypatia* 15. 4 Contemporary French Philosophers (Autumn, 2000): 23-37.
- Quijano, A. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America". *Nepantla* 1.3 (2002): 533-580.
- Rouse, Joseph. "Power and Knowledge". *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Gary Putting. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 95-122.
- Schwarzmantel, John. "Gramsci and Political Agency". *Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and Resistance*. Mark McNally, John Schwarzmantel. eds. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Townshend, Jules. "'Giddens' 'Third Way' and Gramsci's 'Passive Revolution'". *Gramsci and Global Politics*. Marc McNally, John Schwarzmantel. eds. NY: Routledge, 2009.
- Vanden, E. Harry. "Social Movements, Hegemony, and New Forms of Resistance". *Latin American Perspectives* 34. 2 Globalizing Resistance: The New Politics of Social Movements in Latin American (Mar., 2007): 17- 30.



## Virgins, Wives and Whores in the Eighteenth Century Ironic Myths

Dilek Kantar

**Abstract:** This paper compares selected satirical representations of women in William Hogarth's prints titled "A Harlot's Progress", Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. Within the context of Northrop Frye's "Theory of Myths" this paper will illustrate how female sexuality is illustrated in the eighteenth century ironic myths through three different identities: virgin, wife and whore. The ironic language of satire subverts the images of women in such a way that there occurs an implicit metaphorical connection between these three words as signs. Three different genres this study involves seem to have common attitudes in their projection of carefree male fantasies on the female body as a site of hypocritical modesty. While women in these works are held to a standard of chastity, they are depicted as femme fatales incapable of controlling their sexual appetites. The tension between romance, heroism and their mock versions create a dark satirical world where we witness a ridicule of the ruining of female innocence by experience.

**Keywords:** Ironic myth, "A Harlot's Progress", *Rape of the Lock*, *Beggar's Opera*, eighteenth century, female sexuality

*Be sure the eunuchs guarding your wife are really eunuchs.  
Who will guard the guards themselves?  
Juvenal, Satire VI*

William Hogarth's prints titled "A Harlot's Progress", Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* create mock-heroic or mock-romantic worlds, in which women are cast as virgins, wives or whores in general. Under the apparent moralizing tone of satirical language, these works tend to reflect the evil face of the prostitute both in the virgin and the wife as an archetypal double. To understand how Moll, Belinda and Polly become such duplicitous signs, it is essential to understand how satirical language makes use of mythical understanding.

As Northrop Frye explains in *Anatomy of Criticism*, satire arises out of an ironic tension between the mythical idealistic and the realistic forms of experience: "As structure, the central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance: the application of romantic-mythical forms to a more realistic content which fits them in unexpected ways" (223). In the works we analyze, the idealized experience initially evoked in the reader's mind clashes with a realistic world teeming with actual problems of the eighteenth century society. As a result, the author's or the artist's attitude towards his characters involve an implicit moral standard, or sometimes, double standard against which the innocence of the female characters are measured. As Frye explains, "satire is irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd, is reflected in its double focus of morality and fantasy" (224).

Roland Barthes uses different terms to describe the same phenomenon: myth is the second order of speech and it is parasitic upon the first one, that is, the ordinary language we

use, therefore it is a sort of “metalanguage” (115). To understand the signification process of this metalanguage, we need a whole set of values: history, geography, morality, literature etc. Myth is by no means limited to verbal language. Even objects and pictures can speak to us if we know their language. Pictures, Barthes contends, “become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a *lexis*” (110). In Hogarth’s prints, for example, similar details are used in different prints to complement the message carried out in the series of prints as a whole. As a result, small details in a single picture work like certain words that emphasize the meaning in a sentence.

To make better sense of how satire works in general, we can say that it is a realistic check on mythical understanding. While all the value systems implied by an idealistic worldview act as the first order of “speech”, the second order of satirical speech subverts this first order through displacement. For example, when the typical heroine of a romance, who is supposed to be superior to others and to the environment finds herself in an ironic myth, she has to come to terms with the unsavory truth that she is not fortune’s favorite. The romantic heroine gradually becomes the parody of her own image. All the supernatural powers she is supposed to have and the magical encounters which would lead her out of harm’s way in a typical romance turn against her, only to lay bare worldly vices and follies of a common, anti-heroic, anti-romantic individual. This is what happens to all of the three female characters that we analyze in this study.

Satires involving aristocratic characters work as anti-romantic agents of disenchantment that project the world not as it should be, but as it is. This, however, does not always work on women’s behalf. As Mc Creery (*The Satirical Gaze*) explains, of the five thousand satirical visual prints held by the British Museum dated between 1760 and 1800, approximately two thousand deal with women: Prints of women as men’s sexual partners form by far the largest category, which includes images of wives, courtesans, and especially prostitutes. “Both the prostitute and the artist” Mc Creery claims, “used the women’s beauty and expression to attract customers—the prostitute through her gaze, the artist through the print” (41).

The painter and print-maker, William Hogarth, portrays cheats, delusions, dead conventions and false ideals, to which lower classes women were subject. As Riding remarks, his representations of London urban life were “more ambitious than the typically scatological disorderliness evoked in cheap satires”, and they bore little resemblance to the idealized “genteel perspective views of the city” (16). His approach towards common life involved a deep individualized understanding of personal drama, revitalized by ironic humor. In a series of six paintings and prints titled “A Harlot’s Progress”, completed in 1732, Hogarth dramatizes the downfall of Moll Hackabout, a young country virgin drawn to the vanity of bourgeois lifestyle and the false promises of a loose life lurking in the back streets of London. 1200 copies of the prints of this series were sold at the time (Hogarth 26) As Brewer and Bullough explain, “[a]t a time when it was considered improper to talk about the sexuality of proper women, men could put all their fantasies on to the prostitute or courtesan. English society at the time tolerated men having a variety of sexual experiences and partners, but not women” (16).

The first three plates of Hogarth’s “A Harlot’s Progress” series illustrate best the irony of the romantic myth of a country woman achieving wealth and happiness in the upper class world of the city. Moll’s aspiration to a life of fashionable dresses, furniture and servants makes her fall prey first to a bawd and a rake. In Plate I<sup>1</sup> Moll is portrayed as a young maid

---

<sup>1</sup> Hogarth’s paintings involved scenes that represented actual events and characters from contemporary life. Moll is met by Elizabeth ‘Mother’ Needham, a notorious brothel keeper who died in 1730 after being brutally assaulted by the London crowd as she stood in a pillory. In the

who has just arrived from country to London. While she is looking for a job, probably as a servant, she is approached by a brothel keeper. The dark spots on this woman's face implies that she has syphilis, which can be found on the face appearing as patches.



**Plate I**

Behind Moll, a clergyman is busy looking at the address on a letter, and his horse disturbs a pile of pots and pans while trying to find something to eat. In many of his prints, Hogarth uses animals to symbolize human psychology. While the clergyman turns his back on prostitution and the criminal activities taking place before him, Moll, like the clergyman's horse behind her, initiates her own downfall as she is also searching for a means of survival. The tumbling of kitchenware acts as a symbol for the initiation of turbulence in Moll's life in the next plate. In

---

background stands Colonel Francis Charteris, an infamous Scottish rake nicknamed 'The Rape-Master General of Britain. Behind him is John Gourlay, a pimp whom he was wont to company. In March 1730 Charteris was convicted of the rape of a maidservant in his employ (Trusler 1812, Shesgreen 1973).

the right hand corner a wealthy rake, with hands in his pockets, is observing Moll intently. Moll appears to be the whitest figure in the scene, and the imminent death of her innocence is represented through a limp, white bird in the lower right-hand corner of the picture. The full blown rose on Moll's dress contrasts with the modesty and simplicity of her country attire and perhaps it signals Moll's evil side, her eagerness to become a part of her corrupt surroundings.



**Plate II**

Hogarth's attitude towards Moll's downfall moves from possible sympathy towards satirical condemnation through his employment of mockery in the second picture of the series. Here, Moll is depicted as the kept mistress of a wealthy Jew. He seems to have interrupted a love scene between Moll and her aristocratic young lover, who is trying to sneak out of the room in the background with the help of a maidservant. In the lower left corner, Hogarth creates a mirror image of Moll's bodily posture in the figure of a chimpanzee dressed in women's clothes. The resemblance between the facial expressions of the chimpanzee and the Jew is also striking. The figure of the chimpanzee draws the onlooker's attention to the discrepancy between reality and appearance. Despite all her efforts, Moll cannot become anything but a poor imitation of an aristocratic lady, and all her love affairs are doomed to fail,

since she needs men's money to finance her life style. The white mask on the table to the left seems to point to the fact that Moll has now taken off her mask of innocence to take part in a loose life involving servants, lovers and luxury.



**Plate III**

In Plate III Moll finds herself in Drury Lane<sup>2</sup> (The word “Drury” is etched on the pewter pots), the most notorious street for prostitution in the eighteenth century, in much worse surroundings than those depicted in the previous plate. Now, she is obviously involved in a life of crime as well as prostitution. She is holding a watch in her hand which might have been given to her by a famous criminal, John Dalton, whose name is written on the wig box standing

<sup>2</sup> Sir Richard Steele in *The Tatler* (No. 46) gives a picture of Drury Lane: “There is near Covent Garden a street known by the name of Drury, which, before the days of Christianity, was purchased by the Queen of Paphos, and is the only part of Great Britain where the tenure of vassalage is still in being. All that long course of building is under particular districts or ladyships, after the manner of lordships in other parts, over which matrons of known abilities preside, and have, for the support of their age and infirmities, certain taxes paid out of the rewards for the amorous labours of the young” (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13645/13645-h/13645-h.htm#number46>).



on the screen above the bed. The gentlemen at the door are a band of constables who have come to arrest her<sup>3</sup>. The most striking satirical image in the picture is the cat on heat displaying its rear end to the viewer. Hogarth mocks the animal instincts of sex unchecked by morality embodied in prostitutes like Moll. From this point onward, Moll finds herself in a much lower condition than the one she began in. In prison, she is forced to do menial work which reinforces her original class identity. The last two scenes from her life show her suffering from syphilis in a destitute condition, without even a bed to die on.

While Hogarth's Moll is a satire of the type of woman devoured by the glitter and grandeur of a class to which she does not belong, the rightful members of this class become the target of satire in Pope's mock epic *The Rape of the Lock*. According to Koehler "Mock genres continually defamiliarize both their lofty and low planes, acting as an endlessly prolific source of disruption and thus of attention" (67). As Koehler further explains, mock heroics demand a "parallel processing of diverse and discordant stimuli" (67) from the reader. The reader has to take into account both high and lowly aspects of the subject treated, or, both the first literal order of common speech and the mythical order of meta-reflective ironic speech of. Highborn lords and ladies with lowborn aims are a constant resource of mock genres. Well-bred lords pursue not only common maids like Moll, but also gentle belles like Belinda. In his dedicatory preface to *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope states that his poem is intended to "divert" young ladies who know how to laugh at their own "little unguarded follies". He draws a mock parallel between the ancient poets and the modern ladies, both of whom tend to make an event of high grandeur out of something trivial. Pope bases "The Rape of the Lock" on an actual quarrel that took place between two Catholic families over a lock of hair. A twenty-one year old gentleman called Lord Petre cut a lock from Arabella Fermor's hair, which made her quite indignant. Pope addresses "The Rape of the Lock" to Arabella Fermor who is represented as Belinda in the poem. While Pope politely asks her to "laugh at" her own follies alongside those of womankind in general in his address, he seems to undermine the metaphorical significance of Arabella's losing of her locks, which he associates with the loss of her virginity in the poem: "What wonder then, fair nymph! thy hairs should feel, The conqu'ring force of unresisted steel?" (III. 177-8).

In "The Rape of the Lock", Belinda is portrayed as an aristocratic, foolish but admirable lady lost in self-love. To imply that vanity is the guiding principle in the lives of women of the higher classes, Pope chooses Rosicrucian sylphs, the inhabitants of air, as the protective and guiding spirits for her. The roots of vanity, symbolized by air, are so deeply rooted in a woman's world that they continue to exist even after death: "Think not, when Women's transient Breath is fled, That all her Vanities are at once dead" (I. 51-2). Love of courtly balls, midnight masquerades, music, dancing, "the glance by day and the whisper in the dark" (I. 74) swell women's "Prospects and Exalts their pride" (I. 80). They are easily "tainted" by the outward appearance of "garters and stars", the emblems of knighthood. Belinda has all the characteristics of contemporary vanity: she is enchanted by the romantic tokens of "billet-doux, wounds, charms and ardors" (I. 119). She can only use her "cosmetic powers" to fight with the outdated conventions of a love code.

However, Belinda is doomed by Pope to be defeated from the very beginning: "This Nymph, to the destruction of mankind, / Nourish'd two Locks, which graceful hung behind/In equal curls" (II. 19-21). The woman's locks, symbolizing her virginal beauty, are regarded as a threat to mankind in general. This mock heroic comment has a double edge: on the one hand it

---

<sup>3</sup> The gentleman fondling his moustache has been identified as Sir John Gonson, "a type of the perennial harlot prosecutors whose righteousness is only equalled by their compulsiveness" (Hogarth 20).

trivializes Belinda's imminent loss of her locks, and on the other it sees female sexuality "nourish'd" by woman as a destructive force for "mankind". The Baron who resembles a hero from French Romances, aspires to have the bright locks Belinda has and the speaker wonders "whether the Nymph shall break Diana's vow/or some frail *China* jar receive a Flaw" (II. 104-5). Like Moll, Belinda has two faces: innocent virgin and destructive femme fatale.

Belinda, with her ironic "Thirst of Fame", normally associated with an epic hero, encounters the Baron on the field of her own vanity, the card game Ombre. After a careful analysis of the actual game and the cards played in the poem, Baker (70) suggests that Belinda might have deliberately bid the wrong card in the game, which further suggests that she actually wants to play a losing game, which might symbolize her sexual hypocrisy. After the loss of her "lock" to the Baron, Belinda comforts herself by defaming her own sex: "Yet am not I the first mistaken Maid, By love of Courts to num'rous Ills betrayed" (IV. 151-2). Like Hogarth's Moll, she is characterized as a vain and stupidly credulous woman who courts her own destruction: after she loses one of her locks, the other lock "the fatal shears demands/and tempts once more thy sacrilegious hands" (IV. 173-4). So, Belinda fulfills Pope's earlier prophecy in the poem: "maids turn'd bottles, call aloud for corks" (IV 54). However, her story lacks the dramatic quality Moll's story has. We know that unlike Moll, who is threatened by destitution and disease, Belinda only has her virginity and her reputation to lose, which could probably be compensated by her high social status.

In John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* we have a different type of woman, Polly, who upholds romantic ideals of love, however, these ideals become a travesty of their romantic counterparts in London crime scenes. The play was one of the first examples of popular drama: the ballad opera, and it was performed more than any other play in the eighteenth century. Through this play, Gay burlesques the plot conventions and formal properties of Italian opera replacing Italian arias with popular English ballads. As Dugaw explains, ballads were more than forms of lyric expression for the eighteenth century society: "They were journalistic, both informing people about the news of the day and satirically commenting upon it" (45). Swift (*Letter to Pope* in McIntosh) calls *The Beggar's Opera* a "pastoral ridicule" among "whores and thieves" in Newgate, the most infamous prison in London. In the highly materialistic world of the eighteenth century, a woman is seen as a commodity, a step to be used to rise on the social ladder. The play satirizes the materialistic logic which reduces marriages to a financial contract between the partners. The thief taker Mr Peachum's wife sings: "A Wife is like a Guinea in Gold,/Stamp't with the Name of her Spouse;/Now here, now there; is bought, or is sold;/And is current in every House" (Gay 154). In the criminal world of London, wife pandering, especially for divorce, was not an unusual practice<sup>4</sup>. However, Gay indirectly draws attention to the materialistic basis for all of the marriages of his day.

Although the eighteenth society tolerated men having all sorts of illicit sexual experiences, "women were depicted as fundamentally untrustworthy and devious, and ruled by their ungovernable sexuality. These stereotypes were considerably reinforced with the performance and publication of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*" (Shoemaker 80). Women are categorized under three groups: virgins, wives and whores in the play. The commonplace logic is voiced in Air 4 (153):

If love the virgin's heart invade,  
How, like a moth, the simple maid  
Still plays about the flame!

---

<sup>4</sup> See Wilputte, Earla A. "Wife Pandering in Three Eighteenth-Century Plays". *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38.3 (1998): 447-464.

If soon she be not made a wife,  
 Her honor's singed, and then for life  
 She is—what I dare not name

Actually Gay dares to name those women over and over again. Frye claims that literary attacks should rise above the level of personal hatred because we have limited vocabulary to express our displeasure of a person (224). Calling a woman “a bitch”, Frye notes, affords us limited satisfaction. However, Gay, for example, has a very wide range of vocabulary to describe a woman of uneasy virtue. Besides his all too frequent use of such pejorative words as “hussy”, “slut”, “wench”, and “whore”, we have different last names for the female characters which all mean “prostitute”<sup>5</sup>: Molly Lay, Dolly Trull, and Betty Doxy. The leading female character, Polly, is called a “whore” and a “slut” by her own parents because she says she is in love with a highwayman called Macheath, and wants to marry him. The parents believe that highwaymen are “very good to their whores, but they are devils to their wives” (152). Molly seems to represent the ideal of romantic love in the play, but not for romantic reasons. She thinks a woman should refuse to marry for money not to be “thrown upon the common” (which means to become a prostitute), because she knows that “Virgins are like the fair flower in its lustre” (156) but

When once plucked 'tis no longer alluring,  
 To Covent Garden 'tis sent (as yet sweet),  
 There fades, and shrinks, and grows past all enduring,  
 Rots, stinks, and dies, and is trod under feet (156).

Her logic here implies that when a rich husband loses interest in her wife after marriage, she might find herself without enough means to live by, and the only way out for a woman of her surroundings seems to be prostitution in Covent Garden.

The vices embodied by the lower classes are used as a tool to satirize the commonplace values of the time on a broader scale. The characters constantly try to justify the moral basis of their behaviour by generalizing it to the society as a whole. When her mother asks Polly about how she is going to make a living in the future, she answers: “like other women, upon the industry of my husband” (161). In order to defend her secret marriage to Macheath she says “I did not marry him (as 'tis the fashion) coolly and deliberately, for honor or money—but I love him” (138). But the man she loves comes to think that “[w]omen are decoy ducks; who can trust them! Beats, jades, jilts, harpies, furies, whores!” (174). Despite Macheath's pronounced hatred of women and of marriage, Polly refuses to change her views until the end of the play when she realizes that her husband Macheath is actually a womanizer and has six or seven wives. Macheath advises his wives to go to the Indies if they want to buy a husband, or husbands for themselves. This ironic advice presupposes that women can only act like men in a place “elsewhere”, in the native lands of dark-skinned slaves whom they can have as sexual partners because in the New World buying, selling, prostituting and killing slaves is the key to a life freed from the burden of all sorts of labor.

At the end of the play, Polly's romantic ideals are doomed to fail because she has to survive in a world based upon on the low principles of beggars, convicts and thieves. In the last scene, the play is given an ironic happy ending in order to “comply with the taste of the town”. Macheath is saved from hanging and presents different partners to all of his wives to dance to

---

<sup>5</sup> Random House Dictionary (2013).

the final air. He admits that he wants to marry Polly: "I take Polly for mine-and for life, you slut, for we were really married. As for the rest-But, at present, keep your own secret" (206).

But the final air subverts the ending once more:

Thus I stand like the Turk, with his doxies around  
 From all sides their glances his passion confound  
 For black, brown and fair, his inconstancy burns,  
 And the different beauties subdue him by turns  
 Each calls for her charms, to provoke his desires:  
 Though willing to all; with but one he retires  
 But think of this maxim, and put off your sorrow,  
 The wretch of to-day maybe happy to-morrow (206)

A Turk with a harem becomes a symbol for unchecked sexuality. The beauty of different willing women around Macheath is a constant source of temptation and flattery for the male ego. While Macheath seems to take Polly for a wife, he insinuates that he is going to continue sleeping with his other "wives". Here, women become obedient objects of male sexual desire once more and they do not protest against being treated as women in a Harem.

As parody turns into satire in the selected examples above, mockery gradually becomes a form of attack. The question is, are the eighteenth century writers and artists actually moralizing, or do they willingly take part in the perverse pleasure of verbal and pictorial abuse of women? Is this attitude a part of the patriarchal perverse pleasure of discourse on perverse pleasure?<sup>6</sup> For Pope, the perverse fantasy is rape, for Gay it is the Turkish harem, and for Hogarth it is sex with a prostitute. No matter whether a woman is of high or low birth she seems to have no other option than being designated a virgin, a wife, or a prostitute from the male point of view. Although the words virgin, wife and whore have opposing connotations in the ordinary language we use, the ironic language of the eighteenth century satire subverts the images of women in such a way that there occurs an implicit metaphorical connection between these three words as signs. Surprisingly, a woman's being a virgin does not guarantee her virtue, because under her pretended mask of chastity she is supposed to desire sex inwardly and she does not even protest a rape until it is "too late" as implied in Pope's poem. In the works we analyze, the romantic idealistic image of the virginal Madonna metamorphoses into credulous wife Eve desiring and building up her own destruction. As Dijkstra observes, a woman could be "too weak a creature to be able to sustain man's lofty dreams of her material sainthood" (4) from the self-righteous male viewpoint.

### Works Cited

Baker, Oliver. R. "Ombre in Alexander Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock'". *The Explicator* 70.1 (2012): 67-70.

---

<sup>6</sup>In *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, 1978) Michel Foucault traces the origins of Western obsession with building up a complex discourse around the topic of sexuality while trying to suppress it through various medical and religious institutions at the same time: "Toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, there emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex" (24).

- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday Press, 1957.
- Brewer, Gwen, Vern Bullough. "Women, Pornography, and Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Britain". *Sexuality & Culture* 9.1 (2005): 14-27.
- Dijkstra, Bram. *Idols of Perversity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Dugaw, Dianne. "High change in 'Change Alley': Popular Ballads and Emergent Capitalism in the Eighteenth Century Ballads". *Eighteenth Century Life* 22.2 (1998):43-58.
- Gay, John. *The Beggar's Opera. The Beggar's Opera and Other Eighteenth Century Plays*. London: Everyman, 1993.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.
- Hogarth, William. *Engravings by Hogarth*. Shesgreen, Sean. ed. New York: Dover, 1973.
- Koehler, Margaret. "The Filter of Attention and Indissoluble Attractors in Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poetry". *Modern Philology* 108.1 (2010): 65-88.
- Mc Creery, Cindy. *The Satirical Gaze: Prints of Women in Late Eighteenth-Century England*. London: Oxford UP, 2004.
- McIntosh, William. "Handel Walpole and Gay: The Aims of Beggar's Opera". *Eighteenth Century Studies* 7.4 (1974): 415-433.
- Pope, Alexander. "Rape of the Lock". Aubrey Williams. ed. *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*. Boston: Riverside, 1969. 78-119.
- Shoemaker, Robert B. "Print and the Female Voice: Representations of Women's Crime in London, 1690-1735". *Gender & History* 22.1 (2010): 75-91.
- Riding, Christine. "Hogarth's London: Satire and the Street". *History Today* 57.2 (2007): 12-20.
- Trusler, John. *William Hogarth: Works of William Hogarth in a Series of Engravings, 1812*. Google Book Search. Web. 21 Oct. 2013.
- Swift, Jonathan. "From a letter to Pope". d. August 1716, in McIntosh 1974.

## Forms of Togetherness in Contemporary Urban Drama and a Return of Direct Address

Ewa Kęblowska-Lawniczak

**Abstract:** Discussing the concept of *togetherness*, analysed from a sociological perspective by Zygmunt Bauman and from a philosophical by Emmanuel Levinas, Sharon Todd expounds further on the classification of forms of *sociality* from the point of view of their educational and ethical value. The present study draws on this debate in its brief insight into constructions of *relationality* adapted in a selection of contemporary urban plays. In accordance with Bauman's proposition, *being-aside* denotes a futility of successful communication; *being-with* is rule-governed, involves relevance for one another, contains hope for empathy but no promise of transformation. It is *being-for* that guarantees transgression, "a leap from isolation" and, ultimately, "fusion". It is a communicative gesture which has as its end "communicativeness" in a Levinasian sense of *response*. The present study traces and examines the ways in which contemporary urban drama and its medium, traditional and avant-garde theatre, may adapt variants of togetherness, often reflected in its use of urban space. Finally, the present discussion concludes pointing to a potential revival of the traditional form of direct address arguing that the restoration of a medieval technique coincides with a return of ethical interests. The study refers, among others, to experimental projects like the collection of unpublished podcasts entitled *Urban Scrawl*, *The Urban Dream Capsule* (an installation) and to a selection of printed urban plays including *Bluebird* by Simon Stephens, LaBute's *autobahn*, and Gary Owen's *Ghost City*.

**Keywords:** contemporary urban drama, space, communication, togetherness, direct address

Opening the discussion of *togetherness*, the sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman admits that "it comes in many kinds" (1995, 44). In this way he acknowledges its inherent diversity. *Life in Fragments: Essays on Postmodern Morality*, where Bauman devotes a chapter to a dissection of various forms of togetherness, almost an equivalent of *sociality*,<sup>1</sup> turns out to be a continuation of themes explored in an earlier study, *Postmodern Ethics* (1993). It is there that Bauman writes extensively on the postmodern "floated" responsibility resting with the *role* rather than the *person* (19) but, at the same time, argues for an ethic of "being *for* the Other before one can be *with* the Other" (13). The Levinasian echoes in both works are prominent and clearly recognizable. Although a key theorist of postmodernity in the 1980s and 1990s, a classification of Bauman's writing as simply

---

<sup>1</sup>Togetherness, sociality and relationality are concepts variously defined by sociologists, notably by the theorists of community. Further differences in their understanding emerge from the philosophically or psychologically oriented studies. However, these differences are not essential for the present discussion and therefore will be ignored. The theorists of community privilege face-to-face relations called *events*. Theoreticians like Young comment on the magic immediacy of the relation as a "metaphysical illusion" (233). Still, a successfully mediated face-to-face event becomes "a fundamental condition of sociality" in Young's analysis of community life (233).

postmodernist appears to be ungrounded. In a more recent interview with Nicholas Gane the philosopher and sociologist openly admits that he has “distanced [himself] from the ‘postmodern’ grid of the world-map” somewhat earlier and for several reasons (17). The term, he explains, “outlived its usefulness” which he defines as a “clearing job” whose task was to remove the modernist map of the social world which ceased to function (17). As opposed to the postmodern, the post-post present-day world seems to be looking forward to a positive theory.

In the “Introduction” to *Postmodern Ethics* Bauman distinguishes between the perspective of rational order (a form of *universalization*) with efforts at ethical legislation anchored in *ratio*, on the one hand, and a moral responsibility which precedes such an engagement through “knowledge, evaluation, suffering or doing” on the other (13). In spite of an acknowledgement of these differences or even priorities, the chasm between Baumann’s tendency to rely on rationalization and the Levinasian notion of responsibility remains unbridgeable. From a sociological point of view, the human condition rendered on the contemporary stage and the pursuits of stage-audience communication in theatrical city projects, podcasts and regular urban plays can be viewed in terms of Bauman’s togetherness and similar concepts of sociality (or relationality) whose theoretical context is found in the more community-oriented reflection of either Baumann or other thinkers like, for example, Iris Marion Young. However, it is important to notice that the contemporary theatrical reflection on the condition of humanity goes further and appears to be rooted also in questions pertaining to the dilemma of responsibility and learning from the Other, in what is called the ethical turn. This noticeable shift from emphasis on sociology to ethics involves interest in education and educators often inspired by Levinasian reflection, for example Sharon Todd. Setting out from Bauman’s assumptions, but drawing more explicitly on the Levinasian concepts as well as on the propositions put forward by psychoanalysis (though juxtaposing the views rather than trying to integrate them), Todd explores togetherness as “the ways in which people come together” (13), in reference to a broadly conceived demand for social justice and its teaching. As a result, more than Bauman, Todd concentrates on the reception and response to the Other as part of a teaching/learning process. Whether explicitly defined as an instrument of social engineering by politicians or not, the theatre has been a site of civic education in a diversity of cultural and historical contexts<sup>2</sup>.

The following discussion of communication and mis-communication patterns taken over by the stage concentrates on a sample selection of scenes from contemporary urban

---

<sup>2</sup> Leaving aside the past, it is, for example, Adrienne Scullion who considers the theatre-in-education projects and the educational function of the theatre while reviewing the citizenship debate going on in Scotland after the devolution; moreover, Scullion reflects on participatory projects which concentrate on critical reading and spectatorship rather than plays written specially for young people. On the other hand, Mark Ravenhill’s *Education* (2004) and *Citizenship* (2005) provide fairly bitter comments on the idea of teaching “civic skills” although the playwright, especially with the latter play, embarks formally on an educational project, the National Theatre Connections programme. Theatrical education and education via theatre reappears in political discourse. Tessa Jowell, the New Labour Culture Secretary, emphasizes the educational function of what she prefers to define as “complex” rather than “high” culture stating that “theatres, galleries [...] need intelligent public subsidy if complex culture is to take its place at the heart of national life” (7). Today the discussion also oscillates between the concept of a civic or national theatre of moral instruction and performance as an ethical encounter.

plays and proposes to consider them, initially, in accordance with Bauman's sociologically-oriented proposition. Further on, the study tries to investigate the extent to which coming together may evolve, or turn out to be, an ethical face-to-face encounter with the radical alterity of the Other. Apart from the easily noticed potential for a genuine encounter when "some shapes" do condense into strangers, which Bauman acknowledges in *Life in Fragments* (44), it is worth analyzing whether the sites of sociality whose content is/becomes liquid<sup>3</sup> may also reveal unexpectedly ethical potential.

Bauman distinguishes six modes of relationality: *mobile* (44), *stationary* (45), *tempered* (46), *manifest* (46-8), *postulated* (47-8), and a *meta* or *matrix* (48-9) mode of being together. To explore the first mode he takes the example of the street he refers to as a "site of passing by" (1995, 44) where the priority of efficient navigation identifies strangers as *intruders* and an unpredictable *risk* to be eliminated. Most of the fellow-users of urban trajectories, according to Bauman, "flash through the periphery of attention" (44) attracting none and thus discouraging relationality. In Levinasian terms (99), adopted also by Todd (9), *attention* is essential but it is defined as consciousness itself. From a somewhat different perspective Levinas explains that to "be attentive is to recognize the mastery of the other" (178). Attending to the alterity of the Other—a capacity for attentiveness (Todd 118) central not only for conversation but also for listening—is perceived as crucial for both the ability to respond to the condition of the peripheral and to responsibility. Writing on postdramatic theatre and performance, Hans-Thies Lehmann reflects on the ethics of spectatorship emphasizing the importance of "*response-ability*" which reveals the "broken thread between personal experience and perception" (185-6), a state of comforting duality or splendid isolation. In Bauman's proposition, street-style togetherness can be reduced to an analogously indifferent relationship of isolation called *being aside* (1995, 45). Assuming, like Peter Langer (100) and, later, Ralph Willet (11) that the street in conjunction with the postmodern city evolves towards a conflation of bazaar and jungle, Bauman comes to the conclusion that the old Benjaminian world of arcades, once functioning as "spaces to be in, not just pass through"—the home of the *flâneur* (Desert 147)—no longer exists. In consequence, the street becomes either a *non-place* or an in-between whose otherness the author of "Desert Spectacular" imagines, classifies and ultimately de-others by choosing to understand it in almost nineteenth century, sociological terms reminiscent of Henry Mayhew's<sup>4</sup> categories: "on the pavements are waiters and sellers [...] but more often dangerous people pure and simple: layabouts, beggars, homeless conscience-soilers, drug pushers, pickpockets, muggers, child molesters and rapists waiting for the prey. [...] street is more a jungle than the theatre" (148). In Bauman's essay, knowing *about* the other of either the bazaar or the jungle streets presupposes a maieutic method of learning where the educational value of the encounter often boils down to a recollection of what is already known and therefore an exercise in self-knowledge. As a result the usage of a classification of the urban (for instance as a "bazaar") becomes an act of codification and coercion whose aim might deliver us from moral quandaries in the course of a comfortably rational disengagement. The maieutic method views learning in terms of a recovery of knowledge and, as a result, reduces the importance of encounters with the Other.

---

<sup>3</sup> In the interview with Gane, Bauman refers to liquid-modern sociality as a term that conveys the "processuality of relationships" (Gane 22), their unfinished and revocable nature rather than the petrifying patterns.

<sup>4</sup> See Mayhew for an early classification of London's inhabitants, 216 ff.



Todd, who avoids the Socratic method, argues that “the conditions for relating to one another carry enormous ethical weight” and, further on, emphasizes the importance of the practices we follow in “relations to otherness”, i.e. the way we engage the Other (9). From her point of view the ambulatory counter-discourse that pervades the writing of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau, Guy Debord as well as the more recent psychogeographical concepts borrowed from the Situationists and popularized by Marlin Coverley (successfully implemented in the films of Patrick Keiller, clearly recognizable in the writing of Ian Sinclair as well as in theatrical web projects like the *Urban Scrawl*) must promise more successful encounters with otherness due to a much stronger engagement with the marginal and the quotidian. Recognizing the importance of true encounters, Benjamin Rossiter and Kathryn Gibson discover an attempt to “reclaim” the streets in a relationality-oriented theatrical installation project called The Urban Dream Capsule (first created in 1996). The project was “visited” and viewed in the Myer Melbourne windows by an estimated 200.000 people who were attracted by the experiment during the brief time of the Melbourne International Festival in 1996 (441). In The Urban Dream Capsule, the flash of recognition and misrecognition on the side of the audience does not seem to be a symptom of *passing by*. On the contrary, it becomes a starting point for various attempts to communicate and establish some relation with the performers: smudges on the window pane, fax messages and physically delivered presents become starting points. It seems that the idea of the installation was that in the course of the brief successfully provoked encounters, the viewers would be extracted from the safety of their isolation. Yet, the ultimate effect was not *fusion*—a concept Bauman brings into focus when referring to the modality of *being-for* (1995, 51). In his analysis of spatiality and togetherness, fusion is associated with mysticism and a dissolution of identity while the modality under discussion, the *being-for*, like an alloy, strives to preserve the distinct qualities of its “ingredients’ alterity and identity” (51). Theatrical and urban experiences often involve the transformative, metaphorical language of alchemy<sup>5</sup>.

Iris Marion Young, who comments on new models of sociality in postmodern cities and discusses assessment criteria of good city life considers the *event*, here almost the equivalent of a successful *encounter*, an example of a new mode of “being together of strangers” (232) which becomes indicative of good life. Concluding their analysis of the Melbourne event, Rossiter and Gibson also believe the “experiment” to be proof of new “civic sensibility and caring of others” while the ensuing “urban narratives” capable of “enabling futures” as opposed to the dangerously “nostalgic pasts” (446). Future-orientation rather than heritage-orientation may be regarded as a sign of successful, participative citizenship, an assessment assuming a generally favourable reception of

---

<sup>5</sup> The obvious example from a theatrical point of view is Antonin Artaud. See Ann Demaitre (237). A more interesting reference to the urban experience appears in Kirsten Seale’s comment on Ian Sinclair’s method of writing: “Sinclair dwells on the margins of a post-industrial landscape, scavenging amongst the texts and oral histories that have been omitted or neglected. Literary ragpicking resurrects discarded texts, moulding them into new texts. Like the mudlarks he observes sifting sewage in *London Orbital*, Sinclair is driven by an alchemical urge to transform textual dross into his own peculiar alloy of narrative gold. His gold is the unauthorised biography of London, the unflattering flipside of officially sanctioned histories, like those of Peter Ackroyd. Sinclair’s approach is that “the past is fluid, a black swamp; dip for whatever you need” (n. pag.). As opposed to Ackroyd’s antiquarian method of digging up what the palimpsestically arranged past offers, Sinclair focuses on encounters with the marginalized here and now. Walking is to a lesser extent a practice of remembrance.

diversity. As opposed to Bauman's negative vision of the street level defined as dead space, both *The Urban Dream Capsule* and the *Urban Scrawl* collection follow de Certeau's more optimistic approach and his encouragement to "compose a manifold story" that "remains daily and indefinitely other" in its practise (93). In the background of such projects, launched against the imaginary totalizations of concept-cities, there seems to be the Barthesian challenge to familiar rationalizations (maps, guide books). They provide city inhabitants with safely limited systems of knowing *about* a place (33) but prevent them from a recognition of the potentially transformative eroticism of urban fragmentariness and the experience of its exciting intermittence. Initially, *The Urban Dream Capsule* takes the co-presence of *being-aside* for granted (no significant interaction among the users of streets and shopping areas takes place). Still, the theatrical event evolves gradually into *being-with*, a type of encounter Bauman still defines as *mis-meeting* (1995, 51), and where togetherness is non-transformative—exhausted in a mere observance of rules. In the course of time closer relations are encouraged and it is in the immediacy of interaction, in the sudden leap from isolation (51)—as through the gift of the pot flower—that the transformative *being-for* is triggered off and a sense of powerful commitment replaces convention. Bauman's *being-for* evokes *feeling-for* as an ethically desirable relationship with radical alterity. This relation, says Levinas, is a relationship with Mystery (75) which preserves the distinction between self and Other. Hence *feeling-for* requires refraining from the Freudian projection and from the coercive imagining of the Other. On the contrary, it involves *attentiveness* and self-exposure.

Mobile forms of togetherness appear as significant, contemporary *modes of existence* rather than mobile settings. This is valid not only for performance projects, theatrical experiments and urban virtual *events* like *Urban Scrawl* but also in regular theatre plays like Biyi Bandele's *Brixton Stories* (2001), Ed Thomas's *Stone City Blue* (2004), Daragh Carville's *The Other City* (2009) or Gary Owen's *Ghost City* (2004). Unlike plays which explore the erotic ambivalence of physical co-presence, for instance Steven Berkoff's *West or Welcome to Dalston Station*,<sup>6</sup> the earlier mentioned plays problematize mobile street togetherness in accordance with more recent urban concepts. Hence, staging togetherness, they oscillate between liberation and incarceration, *being-aside* and *being or feeling-for*.<sup>7</sup> Bandele's *Brixton Stories* introduces London via Brixton and its market, overtly a bazaar but essentially a magic space where wordmongers offer "meanings, origins, synonyms, antonyms" (5) and sometimes "whole sentences", where dream-vendors, dream-seekers, shape-shifters, conjurer-clowns, moonstruck-magicians, deities and demons (43) send words "flying into the great void beyond sound or silence" (7) in the dream landscape inhabited by the Brixton Undead (3). Ossie Jones, a character which awakes from the prison of the unconscious of coma, enters the limbo-like Brixton streets (a traditionally transformative place) leaving his body behind in a manner reminiscent of a medieval dream allegorical poem. Brixton, whose blurred image inscribes into the heterotopias of prison and hospital (2), allows Ossie to recognize himself in the otherness of the damaged souls "paralysed with guilt for sins not yet committed" (3), to travel from the nightmare of the unconscious into a dream fantasy where he feels happy enjoying the presence of his daughter Nehushta who accompanies him, "arm in arm, father and daughter" (2) during a curious journey through the floating Brixton Underworld and in

<sup>6</sup> Premiered at the Donmar Warehouse, London 2 May 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Additionally, underlying this classification is the modern concept of *civic* citizenship and the conviction that "city air liberates", an inscription commonly found on the gates leading to Hanse cities.

search of a language of relationship. While Bandele brings all the languages into a multicultural market of a Babel Tower heteroglossia, Ed Thomas, staging an imaginary global city, collapses distances and differences between Paris, Berlin, Cardiff, Siberia or Antwerp. *Stone City* dismantles the possibility of an *in-between* and of a passer-by once the institution and symbolic organization of *home* is replaced by a *hotel* non-place. As a result of the general dissolution, liquid *drifting* supersedes the well-defined activities of passing and crossing. Chaotic, fluid street mobility becomes the sole mode of existence. The new “home” is indistinctly anonymous, a bed in The Big Sleep chain of hotels advertised by John Malkovich. Characters are reduced to voices whose gender remains unclear. R4 (one of the voices rather than characters in *Stone City*) occupies himself with cruising the city (7) calling himself “the huggler of streets” and “crawler of kerbs” (9). In this way he experiences a new form of sociality: it consists in being together with the anthropomorphic stone city, an experience in street traffic.<sup>8</sup> Drifting but also driven by a desire to restore the lost sense of difference, the voice seems devoted to the search for a perfect human stranger (72) who would guarantee a true encounter. In the entropic timelessness the global city is immersed in, disconnected, a stranger to himself, not knowing what is made up and what is memory, R1 feels s/he is walking round his/her own life unable to recognize himself or herself (71). In the floating inter-art reality, like in Tom Stoppard’s world of games where Ros and Guil can swap their names without significant consequences, there are only questions as the certainties of *knowing about*, having studied English, *knowing* literature and having been to university lead nowhere in the process of learning.<sup>9</sup> Immersed in urban intertexts, R4 fails to know himself by learning *about* himself. But, paradoxically, to truly *re-connect*—to engage in some form of togetherness—he successfully strives to *know himself* as a “perfect stranger”. It is in this way that s/he struggles to expose himself/herself to a possible face-to-face encounter with the Other.<sup>10</sup> In accordance with what Levinas writes, the encounter is “not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other’s place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery” (75). Voices in *Stone City Blue* make an effort to learn and re-connect—even if through violence and suffering. “I want him to hurt me / So that I can feel”, R4 confesses (67). Feeling means more than a mere physical sensation of pain or even self-mortification though the latter remains significant. Pain, according to Elaine Scarry, not only resists language but “actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language” (4). Therefore suffering and exposure to pain become instrumental in the process of re-awakening in search of the inexpressible, in pursuit of a relationality that resists codification (rationalization), but enhances response and responsibility or, at least, assists in the pursuit of experiencing a sense of guilt, an effort which Bauman associates with “moral impulse”.<sup>11</sup> In *Stone City* it is a chance to restore both difference and togetherness:

---

<sup>8</sup> The anthropomorphic city image is rooted in the rich imagery of the urban body on the one hand and the concept of the city as her people on the other.

<sup>9</sup> Even the concept of a stranger becomes fluid.

<sup>10</sup> Gender instability pervades the voices of R1, R2, R3 and R4.

<sup>11</sup> In *Postmodern Ethics* (10-3) Bauman discusses the significance of *moral impulse* in the context of moral ambivalence which, according to the philosopher, “resides at the heart of the ‘primary scene’ of human face-to-face” (10). Still, coherent ethical codes remain permanently incompatible with this primary ambivalence. As a result, the efforts of rationality to “override” moral impulse can “silence” or weaken the “good being done”(10).

R 2 [...] Then I opened the lid and there among the rubbish I saw a pair of beautiful brown eyes. Like glass staring at me. [...] I kept on seeing that face over and over again. Wouldn't leave me. A woman she was. A dead woman, looking back at me. Like it was my fault. (Thomas 2004, 21)

R2 Did I hear the screams of the city? [...]

R1 Did you?

R4 Did I watch as he opened the lid?/Drop the rubbish/Freeze on the spot /As he sees a pair of beautiful blue eyes/Like glass./Stare back at him?/Is that the face? He keeps on seeing./Over and over again./Won't leave him./A dead woman's face./Looking back at him./As if he did it? (Thomas 2004, 95)

In comparison with *Stone City Blue* where we still struggle to trace some continuity in the feeble narrative resting on the Rs, Gary Owen's *Ghost City* delivers life in radically unrelated fragments by increasing the number of voices/characters. Arranged in 25 scenes located in different parts of Cardiff, with the precise address and time given, the play offers to the audience a series of isolated *events* whose social and ethical potential must be gauged separately. For instance scene 12 ("Can I Call You Back in Half an Hour") is located at Cowbridge Road East at 15.10 while scene 20, entitled "Learning to Fall", is situated at Sophia Gardens at 11.02. The landscape play has no continuous plot-generating dialogue. Neither the locations, easily traceable on the city map, nor the time provides any sense of a meaningful topography or purpose-oriented mobility. The scenes/stations stage sights of pain and suffering, which brings about a gnawing feeling of uneasiness or even embarrassment—a condition Todd calls "liberal guilt" when she alludes to its potentially sentimental quality (96). What is perhaps most important, the series of twenty-five scenes exposes the audience to other individuals' inexplicable and inexpressible suffering—each time anew as there is no continuity. In these events or scenes of togetherness, both the audience and the witnesses on stage are involved in a public recognition of suffering while, at the same time, their ability to empathize is probed. Michael Kelligan observes that "each performer has to play a selection of parts, sometimes addressing the audience directly and at other times inwardly reflecting their own, not to be spoken, thoughts" (n. p), i.e. the unspeakable. Addressed directly not to convey instructions but to "infect" with a sense of guilt, the audience is exposed to a call of the other, a concern for grappling with the dilemma of responding to the inexplicability of another's pain, a probing of one's susceptibility towards suffering and injustice. In accordance with Todd's proposition (111), the audience is made to feel guilty for deeds it has not committed and thus responds to a trauma incurred through the Other's narrative, a wound inflicted by the Other in the course of its addressing the self. A less consistent but significant return to direct address pervades *The Other City* where otherness is thematized as the play opens with an almost medieval self-explanatory introduction. Like *Ghost City*, Carville's Belfast generates a sense of guilt to demand participation if not commitment.

The paradox of the second unwanted *stationary* togetherness, proposed by Bauman, consists in an accommodation of two often separately classified modalities under one heading. It is togetherness in the mobile capsule of a railway carriage (or aircraft cabin) on the one hand and the stationary togetherness of a non-place of a waiting-room (or airport lounge) on the other (1995, 45). De Certeau insists that these are states of incarceration experienced in the immobility inside and outside a railway car (111) although *Urban Scrawl* proves that the over and underground railway area can become a site of freedom dense with stories and true encounters. Auto-mobility, as a modern mode of sociality which

often replaces railway navigation (excluded from Bauman's early discussion), becomes a more prominent theatrical subject as early as in the seventies, for example in Stephen Poliakoff's *Strawberry Hills* (1977). Interestingly, it becomes an object of in-depth urban sociological studies around 2004.<sup>12</sup> The car is perceived as either a symbol of liberation—Bauman claims later that it is home of the new *flâneur* (Bauman 1994, 148)—or, if the car is channelled as a particle into the flow of traffic, another mode of incarceration destructive of public space and pavement sociality. An analogously interesting ambivalence characterizes non-places defined by Marc Augé at first in negative terms as non-relational (78) though, later on, perceived as relational, as products of supermodernity “formed *in relation*<sup>13</sup> to certain ends”, like transport, and the “relations that individuals have with these spaces” (94). The complexities of this overtly “stationary” mode of togetherness pervade LaBute's *autobahn* as well as David Greig's *San Diego*. In both urban plays the prevalent modes consist in *being with* and *aside*. In the former all episodes involve driving, travelling and being inside the car even if in the “Bench Seat” *meta* or *matrix* togetherness could be postulated. The impossibility of commitment and *being-for* is either implied or made explicit. The opening episode of *autobahn* concentrates on a broken parent/child bond/relation—a mis-meeting. The dialogue alludes to an off-stage rehabilitation centre the daughter has been released from. Whether a hospital-like centre or a centre of correction, it turns out to be a dissocializing place of discipline and surveillance, a regime that finds extension in the mother/daughter sterile emotional unrelatedness, in their incarceration in the little theatre of the car capsule channelled into motorway traffic. In *autobahn* coercion and objectification prevent attentiveness and in that way interfere with ethical interest. Even a single trace of sympathy or empathy is missing. This refers also to the traditionally romantic scene of parting lovers. In the opening, as in the following episodes, communication—including the level of gestures—becomes a mere side effect of motorway travel. Travelling side by side the characters never face each other. Neither do they directly address the audience. It is the dangerous journey into the country, the off-road and thus a departure from urbanity, that liberates the travellers from the motorway<sup>14</sup> formatting to produce a sense of mystery and resistance. However, the absence of response in diverse forms of *silence* (in “All Apologies”) only foregrounds the sense of failure in creating successful togetherness. *San Diego* moves even further in its global extensions of the problem. The play, written by a Scottish playwright, globalizes and universalizes the familiar local effects of imprisonment in motorway traffic, with its distinct regulations, by introducing a “co-ordinated universal time” (78) complemented with the non-place city of freeway traffic which merges almost imperceptibly into the desert. “What attracts the stranger to the city”, states Bauman somewhat paradoxically, “is what makes the city and the desert alike: in both, there is the present that may be lived as the beginning [...] a beginning that does not threaten to solidify into a consequence” (1994, 140). Indeed, little solidifies into a stranger in the amorphous, liberal and nomadic *San Diego*. The only sense of “being at home” can be experienced either in the village community of the aircraft (79), where the boarding card with one's name provides the passengers with a sense of belonging and formal identity, or in the distant Mexican village over the border: the two locations—the modern and the traditional—are curiously brought together. However, the effect characters expect in desperately trying to meet the other, a leap towards fusion, remains beyond reach.

<sup>12</sup> See Mimi Scheller and John Urry “The City and the Car”, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>14</sup> The motorway functions as an extension of the urban environment.

It is in Simon Stephens's *Bluebird* (1997) that, with the help of a direct form of address, the protagonist in the role of a faceless taxi-driver reveals, in a genuinely confessional tone, the story of his failure as a father, a story of guilt and—once again—suffering whose impact Stephens amplifies with a collection of painful accounts delivered by the driver's fares. Direct address becomes the dominant form of communication with the audience. Addressing the audience not in the mode of moral instruction but by way of a face-to-face encounter, the stereotypically face-less city "cruiser" and story-teller calls for *attentiveness* and invokes, if nothing else, a empathetic *response*.<sup>15</sup> from the audience which transforms from viewers to listeners. In still another contemporary variant of direct address, foregrounding most explicitly the learning process, Jonathan Harvey also appeals to the audience for response. In *Babies* (1994), Harvey locates the audience simply in the classroom with the Learning Support teacher and tutor addressing the on/off stage pupils to deliver lessons/confessions—a pedagogy of being "supportive" of respecting the privacy of sexuality (95) no matter how problematic or alien its form appears to the listener. The support teacher appeals to his double audience to "imagine" how the others feel (including old Ivy or Tammy whose dad dies of cancer). In this way Harvey encourages the audience to empathize rather than *learn about* the other. Hence his aim is a participative rather than a skills-oriented *good* citizenship. Both the *tempered* togetherness of the classroom and the *manifest* togetherness of Mandy's birthday party would remain inefficient if not for the transformative togetherness born out of the immediacy of interaction in Joe's exposure when his alternative gender identity is suddenly revealed. Indeed, it is in a blend of self-exposure and a return of the seemingly obsolete direct address—without its deictic and framing rhetoric of instruction—that, avoiding superficial didacticism, the solid stories begin to teach responsibility by creating a sense of communal togetherness as well as a moral space.

Although the structure of this study is inductive rather than deductive, which precludes the author from providing the customary formal conclusion, the aim of this article which I would prefer to call a scholarly personal essay (or personal scholarly essay) was to draw the reader's attention to certain genre and context revisions, to ask (even if indirectly) for *attentiveness* and *response* to the increasingly powerful return of interest in ethics, including the ethics of listening and watching, both in the theatre and in theatre studies. The conviction that the twentieth-century ultimately erased the context for values and such genre as morality plays can be revised in the twenty-first century theatre where the return of medieval techniques is not a fad but a well motivated need.

---

<sup>15</sup> The driver is homeless, a self-imposed condition whose source is his feeling of guilt, responsibility and need to make amends. As he lives in his car in a state of permanent mobility, the term "city inhabitant" is not accurate.

## Works Cited

- Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. trans. John Howe. London, New York: Verso, 1995.
- Barthes, Roland. *Empire of Signs*. trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- . “Desert Spectacula”. in *The Flâneur*. Keith Tester. ed. London/New York: Routledge, 1994. 138-157.
- . *Life in Fragments: Essays on Postmodern Morality*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- Bandeled, Biyi. *Brixton Stories*. in *Brixton Stories and Happy Birthday, Mister Deke D*. London: Methuen Drama, 2001. 1-44.
- Berkoff, Steven. *West or Welcome to Dalston Station. The Collected Plays* vol.1. London: Faber and Faber. New edition, [1983] 2000, 43-94.
- Carville, Daragh. *This Other City*. London: Oberon, 2010.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley, L A, and London: U of California P, [1984] 1997.
- Coverley, Marlin. *Psychogeography*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials. Kindle Edn., 2010.
- Demaitre, Ann. “The Theater of Cruelty and Alchemy: Artaud and Le Grand Oeuvre”. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33. 2 (Apr.-Jun., 1972): 237-250. U of Pennsylvania P. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708871>.
- Gane, Nicholas. *The Future of Social Theory*. New York, London: Continuum, 2004.
- Greig, David. *San Diego*. London: Faber and Faber, 2003.
- Harvey, Jonathan. *Babies. Plays I*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, [1994] 1999. 92-184.
- Jowell, Tessa. “Government and the Value of Culture”. [http://www.shiftparadigms.org/images/Cultural\\_Policy/Tessa\\_Jowell.pdf](http://www.shiftparadigms.org/images/Cultural_Policy/Tessa_Jowell.pdf). (2004): 1-19.
- Kelligan Michael. “Review of Gary Owen’s *Ghost City*”. *Theatre in Wales* <http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/index.asp>.
- LaBute, Neil. *Autobahn*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2005.
- Lehman, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. trans. Karen Jürs-Munby. London and New York: Routledge, [1999] 2006.
- Langer, Peter. “Four Images of Organised Diversity: Bazaar, Jungle, Organism and Machine”. *Cities of the Mind: Images and Themes of the City in the Social Sciences*. Lloyd Rodwin, Robert M. Hollister. eds. New York: Plenum, 1984. 97-108.
- Levinas, Emanuel. *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*. trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburg: Duquesne UP, 1969.
- Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor. A Selection by Rosemary O’Day and David Englander*. London: Wordsworth Editions, 2008.
- Owen, Gary. *Ghost City*. London: Methuen, 2004. Print.
- Poliakoff, Stephen. *Strawberry Fields. Plays I*. London: Methuen Drama, [1977] 1989. 379-463.
- Rossiter, Benjamin, Katherine Gibson. “Walking and Performing ‘the City’: A Melbourne Chronicle”. *A Companion to the City*. Gary Bridge, Sophie Watson. eds. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007 [2000]. 437-447.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.

- Scullion, Adrienne. "The Citizenship Debate and Theatre for Young People in Contemporary Scotland". *New Theatre Quarterly* 24.4 (2008): 379-393.
- Scheller, Mimi, John Urry. "The City and the Car. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 2000*". Malcolm Miles and Tim Hall. eds. *The City Cultures Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. 202–219.
- Seale, Kirsten. "Eye-Swiping London: Iain Sinclair, Photography and the *Flâneur*". *The Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*. 2005. <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2005/seale.html>.
- Stephens, Simon. *Bluebird. Plays I*. London: Methuen Drama, [1997] 2005. 1–72.
- Todd, Sharon. *Learning from the Other: Levinas, Psychoanalysis, and Ethical Possibilities in Education*. New York: State U of New York P, 2003.
- Thomas, Ed. *Stone City Blue*. London: Methuen Drama, 2004.
- . *Urban Scrawl* 2009. TheatreVOICE. <http://www.theatrevoice.com/category/audio/urban-scrawl-podcast-series/>.
- Willet, Ralph. *The Naked City: Urban Crime Fiction in the USA*. Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1996.
- Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton UP [1990] 2011.





## **Wealth and Women: The Expatriate Performance of Affluence**

**Matthew Koch**

**Abstract:** This article explores the intersections among three seminal works of American expatriate fiction of the Modernist period: Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and "Winter Dreams" (1922). These texts inform one another and were largely produced with a conscious awareness to each other, especially the latter two. Their collective effect, though, is to color the tone of American fiction of the Twenties and its obsession with exposing the demagoguery of the dollar. At the heart of this discussion is the contention that the male protagonists in each of these three works are fundamentally concerned with constructing their own identities based upon and rooted in fiscal consciousness. Furthermore, their self-reflections of economic efficacy are irreducibly melded to the women that each man pursues.

**Keywords:** Twentieth century American Literature, expatriate fiction, 1920s, modernism, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald

The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not possibly have won. The pathetic is achieved when the protagonist is, by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force. (Miller 7)

The quote above, from Arthur Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man", allows for one to treat F. Scott Fitzgerald's legendary Jay Gatsby as a tragic hero whose noble pathos strives hopelessly but valiantly against overwhelming and nefarious conditions. If this is the case, then what exactly is the "superior force" that he battles? Miller specifically addresses an American audience, writing that "we who are without kings" (7) should celebrate the "heart and spirit of the average man" (7). What Gatsby crusades against and perhaps what all Americans encounter—are the economic hegemonies and social structures from which he cannot wrest control. Embedded within Gatsby's notorious pursuit of Daisy Buchanan, in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, is a class struggle and social commentary.

While this point may be easily recognizable, what is less noticeable is the relationship between Jay Gatsby and Ernest Hemingway's Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*. Both Barnes and Gatsby, in their respective texts, have a fundamental and complex relationship with money, and the vehicle that exposes this relationship is each character's romantic liaison with a woman. In addition to examining the most seminal literary achievements of the Twenties by these two prominent American authors—*The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby*—this essay will also investigate Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" and its significance when considering the production of his later novel.

American expatriate writers of the nineteenthcenturies lived amid a world of transatlantic affluence. Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, in particular, lived among a Parisian circle of writers and artists such as Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Pablo

Picasso. Recalling the struggles of their early careers yet enjoying eventual success during this decade, Hemingway and Fitzgerald straddled the polarized worlds of the wealthy and the working classes. They were part of a postwar sphere of spending, excess, and amorality. At the same time, however, they were both highly critical of the individuals who populated such a society. By closely examining economically infused scenes from Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" and *The Great Gatsby*—and the relationship between the latter two texts—I will explore the role that women play in developing the economic consciousness of the male protagonists in each work.

In Chapter IV of *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes departs from Lady Brett Ashley and Count Mippipopolous after a night of excess food and drink and returns home to his apartment. From the concierge, he receives two letters from the United States. The first is a bank statement, and Jake recites his exact state of financial affairs: "It showed a balance of \$2432.60. I got out my check-book and deducted four checks drawn since the first of the month, and discovered that I had a balance of \$1832.60. I wrote this on the back of the statement" (38). While contemporary readers may initially interpret this scene as Jake's acute awareness of his dwindling resources, Jacob Leland points out that "the 600 dollars Jake Barnes spends (twice Robert Cohn's extravagant maternal allowance, to keep the novel's own economic score) in 1926 was worth \$6271.19 in 2003. Moreover, it was relatively cheap to live in Paris in the 1920s" (39). Rather than minding his finances with dogmatic precision, Jake is posturing for his narration.

In this scene, timing is important. Jake has just departed from Brett and a potential new romantic interest. Given Jake's inability to perform sexually, his performance is instead financial—made more poignant by the fact that the Count is, himself, quite wealthy and bears war wounds of his own. However, it is unproductive to myopically evaluate Jake's flaunting of his bank account as a surrogate for sexual functionality. Several Hemingway scholars point out that the possibility for a sexual relationship between Jake and Brett does still exist. Dana Fore refers to the first private moment within the novel for the couple, which occurs in a Paris taxi, as hinting toward the potentiality of nontraditional forms of sexuality between them (80).

Fore writes that Brett "affirms a capacity to experience intense physical sensation from simple stimulation—which may translate into an ability to derive satisfaction from nontraditional sex" (80-1). The possibility for "nontraditional sex", according to Fore, stems from Brett's admission to Jake: "I simply turn all to jelly when you touch me" (34). Other critics, such as Chaman Nahal, contend that the scene when Brett and Jake are alone together in his apartment presents the best opportunity for some unnamed sex act to have taken place during a mysterious and glaring gap in the narration (44).

During this scene, Brett sends off the Count, suddenly leaving her and Jake alone in his bedroom. When Jake inquires about the Count, she responds, "Sent him for champagne. He loves to go for champagne" (62). Jake, however, does not appear to answer her. Instead, the next line reads, "Then later" (62). Since Hemingway (via Jake) does not supply an explanation for the missing time, it is certainly possible that an expression of sexuality does take place, which Jake is uncomfortable verbalizing. In either case, the point remains that some form of sexual congress between the two characters is possible in the novel, which suggests that Jake's financial performances extend beyond singularly compensating for his sexual inadequacy.

The role of Count Mippipopolous in the scene above begs an interesting and contentious question. Jake knows little about the man and his young and ineffectual protégé, Zizi, but they soon are able to speak to one another during the Count's second appearance in the novel. Some verisimilitudes between Jake and the Count appear to

surface during their conversation with Brett, yet the vague and possibly coded language of the three hinders any definitive reading of the scene:

“My dear, I am sure Mr. Barnes has seen a lot. Don’t think I don’t think so, sir. I have seen a lot, too”.

“Of course you have, my dear,” Brett said. “I was only ragging”.

“I have been in seven wars and four revolutions,” the count said.

“Soldiering?” Brett asked.

“Sometimes, my dear. And I have got arrow wounds. Have you ever seen arrow wounds?”

“Let’s have a look at them”.

The count stood up, unbuttoned his vest, and opened his shirt. He pulled up the undershirt onto his chest and stood, his chest black, and big stomach muscles bulging under the light.

“You see them?”

Below the line where the ribs stopped were two raised white welts. “See on the back where they come out”. Above the small of the back were the same two scars, raised as thick as a finger. (66-7)

The Count’s assertion that he and “Mr. Barnes” have each “seen a lot” implies some common experiences and supports Brett’s exclamation that he is “one of us” (67). Wolfgang Rudat contends that the Count’s wounds were the result of his “fighting as a mercenary for the Italians” (10). At first glance, fighting as a mercenary suffices as an easy explanation for the Count’s participation in “seven wars and four revolutions”, and certainly his wounded veteran status links him intrinsically with Jake. Additionally, a few sentences after reading his bank account statement, Jake strangely thinks of the Count, stating “the count was funny” (38)—employing the same word (“funny”) that he repeatedly associates with his own groin injury.

Upon closer reading, however, Jake and the Count are not of the same ilk, and Jake recognizes this fact. William Kerrigan was the first critic to point out that the Count and Jake possess the same sexual impairment (87). Like most other scholars, though, Kerrigan assumes that the Count does share an *injury* with Jake. This is a possibility, considering the scars he exhibits in the dialogue above. The problem here is that the “arrow wounds”—the only injuries to which the reader is privy—were acquired in Abyssinia when the Count was twenty-one (67). Since the Count claims to “have been around a very great deal” (66), it seems unlikely that he has been impotent since the age of twenty-one. Also, the wounds do not appear to be particularly near the groin. If this incident did not cause the “funny” injury, then it is possible that another physiological explanation exists regarding the Count’s impotence that may not relate to combat at all. The Count’s involvement in the Italo-Abyssinian War at age twenty-one places his present age at around fifty. Also, upon first encountering Mippipopolous, Jake describes him as “a fat man” (36). Although the Count may be intentionally directing the conversation—with Jake’s injury as the unspoken elephant in the room—toward his external scars, it is possible that his impotence is merely the product of age and weight.

The nature of the Count’s involvement in “seven wars and four revolutions” also must be examined. Unlike Rudat’s assertion that the Count is a lifelong mercenary soldier, William Adair contends that “the Count may be a negative character: a war profiteer and purveyor of a false philosophy” (92). This is a far cry from the claim of most critics, such as Rudat, who writes that “The Count has become so much one of them” (9). Adair casts him as somebody quite different: “The imagery surrounding the Count suggests that he

made his big money in the Great War. He fits the popular wartime image of the profiteer: fat, cigar-smoking, champagne-drinking, using a walking stick, given to sumptuous meals and young mistresses. The only thing he lacks is a top hat” (92). Unlike the assumption that the Count shares some battlefield solidarity with Jake, the text appears to lend support to Adair’s contention. When Brett asks the Count if he was in the army, he responds, “I was on a business trip, my dear” (67). While a “business trip” could refer to either mercenary soldiering or war-profiteering—and his involvement in so many conflicts could support either possibility—it seems more likely that this wealthy noble would be involved in the latter rather than the former.

The Count also subtly violates an important self-imposed stricture of both Barnes and Hemingway. He extends beyond permissive epicurean indulgence in food and drink when he orders “the oldest brandy [they] have” (68), which turns out to be from 1811, at a restaurant near the Bois (de Boulogne). The significance of the year 1811 is heightened by the fact that a comet that was discovered that year by the French astronomer Honoré Flaugergues. Brandy from this year was dubbed “Comet Vintage” and is, to this day, considered some of the finest of the last several hundred years (Harding 45-7). Though Jake hardly exists in a state of penury, he is never seen ordering “the finest” or “the oldest”. His concern is a direct and fair exchange, and he meticulously records his purchases and the prices he pays. Jake’s spending habits are far from frugal, as he continuously partakes in the splendors of food and drink throughout the novel. Likewise, he informs the reader of the tips he leaves, and he does point to his financial assistance to other characters—such as the poverty-stricken Harvey Stone and, of course, Brett. However, he does not openly deal in extravagances, which the Count does with his purchase of an 1811 Brandy.

Immediately, Brett rebukes the Count for his bombastic display and appeals to Jake’s sense of modesty: “I say. Don’t be ostentatious. Call him off, Jake” (68). Jake’s silence indicates that by verbalizing a misstep on the part of the Count he would be violating yet another rule in Hemingway’s code of conduct. By contrast to the Count’s spending, Jake narrates the functional elements of his purchase: price, tip, and quality of the product. In this scene, there is no mention of the Brandy or if it was worthy of its historic designation. They soon change the subject, and then Jake’s narration simply dismisses the dinner altogether. As opposed to “ostentatious” displays, Jake subscribes to Bill Gorton’s philosophy, which he espouses in Chapter VIII after encountering a taxidermist’s shop: “Simple exchange of values. You give them money. They give you a stuffed dog” (78). Essentially, one only pays for what one believes an object is worth.

The Count, on the other hand, asserts his own system of values prior to their dinner at the Bois. “Values” in this scene take on a dual meaning as both a measure of monetary worth and a moral code. To the Count, however, the two are indistinguishable. He explains to Jake his system as follows:

“You see, Mr. Barnes, it is because I have lived very much that now I can enjoy everything so well. Don’t you find it like that?”

“Yes. Absolutely”.

“I know,” said the count. “That is the secret. You must get to know the values”.

“Doesn’t anything ever happen to your values?” Brett asked.

“No. Not any more”.

“Never fall in love?”

“Always,” said the count. “I am always in love”. (67)

First, the Count aims his explanation squarely at Jake, which emphasizes the competition between the two. His claim that having “lived very much” provides for his ability to “enjoy everything so well” makes no sense without decoding “lived very much” as “making lots of money”.

Within the context of this novel, “lived very much” cannot be innocently read as “life experience”. Jake’s formative “life experience” has only rendered him unable to enjoy sexual pleasure. Consequently, if the Count’s value of enjoyment is interpreted as a fetishistic cult of money, then the remainder of the above dialogue characterizes him as an arrogant and stubborn nobleman. After tersely stating, “[y]es. Absolutely”, Jake drops out entirely from a conversation that had initially been directed toward him. His silence throughout the remainder of the scene indicates his subtle but important disagreement with the Count’s system of wealth as values. To Brett’s question of love, the Count lamely replies that he is “always in love”. This ambiguously impersonal and public voicing of an emotion is antithetical to Jake’s own values—including his smoldering, yet safely concealed, love for Brett.

Another point to consider when comparing Jake’s spending habits to those of the Count is that Jake avoids publicly displaying his wealth. He repeatedly catalogues painstaking records of his spending for the reader but never to other characters. Jake reads alone and at home his bank account statement and the tremendous amount of money that he recently, and mysteriously, spent.

The purpose of calling attention to the incongruities existing between Jake and the Count is to dispel the common critical assumption that Count Mippipopolous is, in fact, “one of [them]”. If he is to be read as a contrasting persona or even a foil to Jake, then the narrator’s fastidious reading of his precise bank account balance is a posture in response to the exhibition of wealth by a rival. Leland writes that “Jake Barnes depends upon earning and spending practices to establish an American, male, expatriate identity in Paris” (37).

Certainly an emphasis on gender identity and financial potency exists for Jake. The narration reveals a pronounced obsession with the minute details surrounding his financial transactions, and this is even more prevalent in scenes involving Brett. Leland also states that “Jake Barnes exercises spending power. To make money and to circulate it, rather than to possess a valued object, allows Jake to imagine himself as a fully realized male and an agent of U.S. economic power, in control of the modernizing marketplaces he inhabits” (38).

While this is largely true, it is important to understand that Jake’s spending and financial cognition do not necessarily result from a desire to become a “fully realized male”. Jake sounds off to the reader about his substantial amount of money in the bank and precipitous spending only after meeting the Count, who probably is also impotent. Thus, any rivalry that exists between the two men stems more from their respective interests in Brett, rather than Jake’s desperate attempts to compensate for physiological damage to his genitals. In other words, the “economy of masculinity” (37) that Leland describes does not only function as Jake’s reaction to his own sexual disability but is also present even when he encounters a character with the same physical ailment.

Although the concept of spending is made more poignant by Jake’s injury, it would still remain as a critical thrust of the text even if the narrator were sexually functional. This foreshadows the final moment in the novel when Jake, for perhaps the first time, demonstrates recognition that his injury is not the only factor keeping him and Brett apart:

“Oh, Jake,” Brett said, “we could have had such a damned good time together”.

Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton.  
The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.  
“Yes,” I said. “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” (251)

Even if Jake could “[raise] his baton” while Brett is “pressing” up against him, he still would be impotent to combat the forces of the modern world that truly blockade relationships in this novel: psychological war trauma, chaotic new gender role reversals (evidenced by their respective word choices in the above passage), a generation that has—at least temporarily—lost its moral compass, and a deflection from emotional distress to superficial spending.

One obstacle to any close reading of *The Sun Also Rises* is the unfocused lens through which Jake narrates the story. As a result of misleading, veiled, or omitted narration, the reader sees only the world Jake chooses to present—and his emotional investment in the plot severely compromises his objectivity. In a novel based primarily on characterizations, Jake—as important a character as anyone—clouds the portrayals of the people in his life. Brett, in particular, may not be treated fairly by Jake, which leads to misreadings by critics. Lorie Watkins Fulton writes, “such misinterpretations stem from the fact that we as readers see Brett as Jake sees her, and his ideas about Brett seem conflicted at best” (62). Jake’s “conflicted” attitudes toward Brett do not singularly influence his presentation of her character. Instead, the heightened emotions that color passages involving Brett also emerge when he describes her various suitors—his romantic, if not sexual, rivals. As with the case above involving Count Mippipopolous, Jake responds cleverly in his narrative performance once a foil appears in the novel.

The one character who arguably receives an even worse treatment by Jake than Brett is Robert Cohn. Cohn’s Jewish identification immediately becomes evident through Jake’s portrayal, and as the depictions of him become progressively worse throughout the novel, the narration descends into apparent anti-Semitism, which many critics associate not only with the narrator but also Hemingway himself. Linda Wagner-Martin, for instance, claims that “Hemingway presented Robert Cohn’s Jewish qualities with consistent, and insistent, derogation throughout the novel” (39). Such statements wrongfully shift the burden of narration onto the author and ignore the crucial purposes behind Jake’s unique, though uncomfortable, characterization. Wagner-Martin goes on to assert that “anti-Semitism mars the text far beyond narrative need” (39).

Other critics spare Hemingway from an outing as an anti-Semite, but they nonetheless make assumptions about Cohn’s inferiority in the novel. Lee Thorn remarks that “Robert Cohn and Pedro Romero represent the opposite extremes of the code / etiquette / aesthetic” (44) and that “we learn that Cohn is ugly and a bad artist in the first chapter” (44). Yes, Cohn’s characterization in the text differs wildly from Romero, but critical studies often gloss over the reasons, assuming any negative portraits of the former to be reflexive of either the anti-Semitism of the narrator, author, or both. When Jewish stereotypes coalesce neatly with Cohn’s violation of presumed masculine codes in the novel, then scholarly inquiries into this character and his complex relationship with Jake tend to fall short.

It is my contention that Jake admires Robert for the same reasons that he feels threatened by his presence. Rather than admitting his own weakness in the face of a worthy romantic foe, Jake’s narration attempts to obscure Robert’s strengths as it descends into petty stereotypes and gross mischaracterization. Furthermore, Robert is not altogether antithetical to Pedro. Actually, the two share quite a few similarities, which Jake downplays. Since Pedro is also a formidable romantic rival, an obvious question emerges: If the two are more alike than different, then why does Jake openly marvel at the one and

scorn the other? I assert that the opposing socioeconomic backgrounds of the two characters do cloud Jake's narration.

Jake and Hemingway begin the novel with a description of Robert, immediately stressing the importance of this character to both the narration and its narrator.<sup>1</sup> After announcing that "Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton" (11) in the first sentence, Jake immediately counters with "do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title" (11). If Jake were truly as unimpressed as he professes, then he likely would not have opened his narration by listing this accomplishment. Then, Jake mentions that "he was so good that Spider promptly overmatched him and got his nose permanently flattened. This increased Cohn's distaste for boxing, but it gave him a certain satisfaction of some strange sort, and it certainly improved his nose" (11). What comes across as merely a distasteful and baseless stereotype of the Jewish physiognomy actually contains hidden flattery. First, Jake acknowledges that the reason Robert's nose was broken was that he had been matched up against a boxer of a higher weight class because his coach, Spider Kelly, had been duly impressed with him. Second, by facing the dangers of stepping into the ring against a bigger fighter and then sustaining a significant injury, Robert has proven that he is not a coward—and that like Jake and Pedro, he persists despite his outward wounds. Although Jake pretends that this incident "increased Cohn's distaste for boxing", the textual evidence suggests otherwise.

Later on in Jake's biography of Robert, he mentions that, once in Paris, Robert "boxed at a local gymnasium" (13). Jake also reveals that Robert "played a very good end on the football team" (12) in prep school. The chapter concludes with Jake admitting that he "rather liked him" (15). Regarding Thorn's comment that Robert is "ugly", Jake only mentions that he had been "hardened into a rather unattractive mould under domestic unhappiness with a rich wife" (12). This comment could as easily apply to a temporary disposition as to physical features. Considering the immediacy with which Brett invites him to San Sebastian and begins a sexual relationship, coupled with Jake's own statement that Robert "realized that he was an attractive quantity to women" (16), it is plausible that Jake never really considered him "ugly". Additionally, Robert is a novelist, which Jake aspires to become, and although Jake first decried his novel as being "very poor" (13), he later states that "the publishers had praised his novel pretty highly" (16). In the first two chapters, Jake essentially praises several important areas of Robert's life—all of which cause envy in the narrator. Jake's narration is conflicting because he both admires and fears his subject. Jeremy Kaye writes that "Cohn is not the weak and sickly caricature of anti-Semitic fantasy. Rather, he embodies Max Nordau's idea of the 'Muscle Jew'" (50). Robert, it turns out, is exactly the type of man to whom Brett is viscerally attracted, so Jake pretends to be unimpressed, though moments of praise continually seep their way into the novel.

Overall, Cohn possesses the athleticism, artistic ability, and sexual vitality that Barnes desires for himself. Brett selects him over Jake for her trip to San Sebastian, and Robert easily defeats both Jake and Pedro in a physical altercation. Intimidated by Robert's successes, Jake skews his narration in Book II to characterize Robert as whiny, effeminate, and utterly ineffectual.<sup>2</sup> None of these characteristics are consistent with the depictions of Robert in the first chapter. Then, after Robert is effectively expunged from the novel as a result of his brutality, his absence is significant. Kaye argues that Robert's "Jewishness

<sup>1</sup> Wagner-Martin, among many other critics, points out that Hemingway deleted the original "first chapter and a half, removing essential information about both Lady Brett and Jake Barnes" (39).

<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that Jake plainly reveals that Robert knocked down Pedro "about fifteen times" (206) during their fight in Pamplona, Jake also mentions twice that "Cohn was crying" (206).



becomes most important to the novel at exactly this juncture. After Cohn's departure, everything falls apart for Jake" (53). While Jake is threatened by Robert, he and Pedro are the characters Jake most admires, and both become tarnished by their obsessions with Brett, who doesn't appreciate the way either of them tries to effeminize her. Both Robert and Pedro, however, possess the passion that the other characters lack. Their respective failures reflect Hemingway's disillusion with a superficial and meaningless modern world—a world into which neither Robert nor Pedro fits.

Whether or not Robert and Pedro suffer similar textual expulsions by the end of the novel, there is an undeniable difference in the way their characters are described and treated by Jake. Both are passionate athletes, both achieve public notoriety for their professional successes, and both sleep with Brett. However, Jake not only tolerates Pedro's affair with Brett but actually facilitates its occurrence. The unacknowledged point of disparity between the two characters that, perhaps, contributes to Jake's wildly divergent treatment of them is their respective socioeconomic backgrounds. Kaye points out that "Cohn is a member of one of the richest and oldest families in New York, whereas Jake, the rootless expatriate, must work and does not have a family, or at least never mentions one" (52). While we know very little about Pedro's background, it is likely that he comes from more humble origins than Robert and has had to establish himself. In *Bullfighting, Sport, and Industry*, Hemingway explains the typical circumstances of a young bullfighter:

Poor boys, without any financial protection, follow the bullfights as bootblacks, eager to get into the ring in any kind of an amateur fight no matter how dangerous; practicing the various passes on each other, a passing waiter, a cab horse; riding under the seats of trains with their fighting capes rolled up as pillows; going for days without food when they have been put off a train somewhere by a conductor who catches them without a ticket; going through all the hell of the *capeas* or village fights where an old, experienced, criminal of a bull is let loose in the barricaded square of a country town and all the aspirant bullfighters may practice with it or be practiced on by the bull. There was one such bull that was used in the province of Valencia which killed sixteen amateurs and crippled badly more than thirty others before the law forbidding *capeas* was enforced and the bull was finally sent to the slaughterhouse. Boys following this method of learning to bullfight get the worst of it first, but they do not have to worry about having their confidence suddenly destroyed by their first wound or by some bull that may have other ideas than to follow the cape. (42-3)

Prior to this passage, Hemingway only briefly discusses the path for aspiring bullfighters hailing from affluent families, but he quickly dismisses this route, suggesting that financially privileged young matadors will likely "lose their courage and usefulness" (41). Clearly, Hemingway's sympathies rest with the "poor boys" who work their way up through the ranks, against tremendous odds, continuing purely for love of the artistry and athleticism. And, it is also obvious that the vast majority of twentieth century matadors emerged from the ranks of the poor.

What this means for the novel is that Jake's narration relates a form of class consciousness and identification that classifies the characters. Just as Count Mippipopolous functions as a foil to Jake, Pedro does the same for Robert. All four of these characters are in love with Brett, and they can be neatly bisected into two parallel old money/new money class binaries. Despite the similarities between Robert and Pedro, Jake has an easier time relating to the success of Pedro, perhaps ignoring Robert's personal triumphs. In a sense, Jake must awkwardly select a phallic surrogate for Brett, and his implicit jealousy of

Robert's socioeconomic background may skew his characterizations and influence his odd acquiescence toward Pedro and Brett's sexual relationship. Beneath it all, Jake evinces respect and envy toward both of the above men—though he strives mightily to feign contempt for the “Jew”—which elicits a tougher personal constitution within the Hemingway lexicon than to admit to wrenched emotional jealousies over Cohn's ease with money and women.

In *The Sun Also Rises* Jake's economic awareness affects his performance of wealth, his relationships with other characters, and his narrative voice—and all of these occur within the particular context of his unfulfilling love for Brett. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's “Winter Dreams” a woman once again serves as a catalyst for class consciousness. However, unlike *The Sun Also Rises*, this story concerns upward mobility and the “American Dream”. Fitzgerald's protagonist, Dexter Green, conceives of wealth and class in relation to his romantic pursuit of the affluent Judy Jones. “Winter Dreams” presents women as mirages that inspire false hope regarding the concept of upward socioeconomic advancement. In this narrative, Judy Jones becomes a symbol for the leisure class—a representation that will wholly dictate the course of Dexter Green's life.

The first angle with which to consider Dexter's pursuit of Judy is her influence on his life in regard to education and work. The story begins with the following opening line concerning Dexter's boyhood employment: “Some of the caddies were poor as sin and lived in one-room houses with a neurasthenic cow in the front yard, but Dexter Green's father owned the second best grocery-store in Black Bear—the best one was ‘The Hub’, patronized by the wealthy people from Sherry Island—and Dexter caddied only for pocket-money” (217). Fitzgerald's first sentence immediately creates a societal stratification of “wealthy”, “poor”, and then Dexter, who exists in an unarticulated middle-class through which he simultaneously resides in both of the previously mentioned classifications.

He caddies for the affluent patrons of the Sherry Island Golf Club, but he is not of either the poor or working class. This is an important demarcation, as it insinuates that Dexter is conscious of the role of the leisure class and its separation from those, like himself, who must work for a living. However, Dexter exists in easy circumstances compared to some of his colleagues since he “caddied only for pocket-money”. Sociologist Brian Starks explains that “whites, the well-educated, men, dominant class members, and those with higher incomes are all more likely to believe in the American Dream than ‘underdogs’ with the opposite characteristics” (207). Thus, Dexter serves the wealthy, but he is far enough removed from the desperation of the poor to concretely envision upward social mobility, which directly relates to his first encounter with a young Judy Jones.

One day the fourteen-year-old Dexter suddenly quits his job as a caddy, claiming to be “too old” (218). The impetus for the immediate cessation of his employment is directly related to his socioeconomic awareness once he witnesses the haughty behavior of Judy Jones as a young girl:

The little girl who had done this was eleven—beautifully ugly as little girls are apt to be who are destined after a few years to be inexpressibly lovely and bring no end of misery to a great number of men. The spark, however, was perceptible. There was a general ungodliness in the way her lips twisted down at the corners when she smiled, and in the—Heaven help us!—in the almost passionate quality of her eyes. Vitality is born early in such women. It was utterly in evidence now, shining through her thin frame in a sort of glow. (218)

The narrative voice in the passage above employs such diction as “ugly”, “misery”, and “ungodliness”, but then balances these with “beautifully”, “lovely”, “passionate”, and “vitality”. The complicated and competing connotations of these word choices hint at the concurrent outward beauty and hidden flaws of Judy.

Certainly Dexter is uncontrollably drawn to her physical features, but he is even more attracted to the lifestyle she represents. A scene develops between the eleven-year-old Judy and her nurse that demonstrates the supercilious nature of the young girl. After angrily pounding the ground with her club, Judy “raised it again and was about to bring it down smartly upon the nurse’s bosom, when the nurse seized the club and twisted it from her hands” (220). Then, she yells, “you damn little mean old *thing!*” (220) at the nurse, obviously implying that Judy treats her family’s hired help as an object that she can physically or verbally abuse at her own discretion. Once the caddy-master orders Dexter to pick up Judy’s clubs, he promptly declines—and quits. Judy’s leisure-class lifestyle inspires Dexter to abandon his own work because he now seeks acceptance by the wealthy rather than to serve them. The fact that Dexter is attracted to Judy despite her disdainful behavior suggests that he is drawn not toward the girl but to the social class she represents.

So, after unwittingly influencing one of Dexter’s early decisions concerning employment, Judy will unknowingly affect several more. First, though, Dexter bases his choice of college on his desire for “glittering things” (221). Fitzgerald writes that “the quality and seasonability of these winter dreams varied, but the stuff of them remained. They persuaded Dexter several years later to pass up a business course at the State university [...] for the precarious advantage of attending an older and more famous university in the East” (220). The “winter” aspect of Dexter’s dreams implies that they will ultimately fade and die. Unaware, Dexter begins his lofty pursuit of the American Dream at what is likely an Ivy League university. Fitzgerald summarizes Dexter’s post-collegiate success:

He made money. It was rather amazing. After college he went to the city from which Black Bear Lake draws its wealthy patrons. When he was only twenty-three and had been there not quite two years, there were already people who liked to say: “Now *there’s* a boy—” All about him rich men’s sons were peddling bonds precariously, or investing patrimonies precariously, or plodding through the two dozen volumes of the “George Washington Commercial Course,” but Dexter borrowed a thousand dollars on his college degree and his confident mouth, and bought a partnership in a laundry. (221)

Although he once again serves the wealthy, Dexter’s business spreads and catapults him into their lot. Accepting an invitation to play at the Sherry Island Golf Club, Dexter again encounters Judy, and once more her bad manners are on display. She wildly launches a ball into the stomach of Dexter’s golfing companion, Mr. T.A. Hedrick. Unencumbered by the adult Judy’s rudeness, Dexter continues to be smitten with her and embarks upon a rocky courtship to which she never fully commits herself. During their first meeting, Dexter’s recent social advancement comes into play as Judy probes his background. Point blank, Judy asks, “Are you poor?” (226), to which he replies, “I’m probably making more money than any man my age in the Northwest” (226). Their dialogue occurs in response to Judy’s admission that she had left a man earlier in the afternoon since learning that he was poor.

At this point in the story Dexter appears to have fulfilled the “winter dreams” of his boyhood fantasies. By all objective measures he is a success—not only regarding his own specific undertakings but as having become a symbol of American capitalism. Although not

quite a Horatio Alger character, he does embody the work ethic and economic expansion of a quintessential model for the American Dream. However, as the dreams of this tale belong to winter, something is wrong. Inexplicably, the relationship between Dexter and Judy never does solidify, and as the story progresses his frustrations only grow. Eventually, after Dexter has become engaged to another woman, Judy lures him into an affair that only lasts a month. Once it has ended, Dexter plans to return permanently to New York. However, World War I comes, and “he was one of those young thousands who greeted the war with a certain amount of relief, welcoming the liberation from the webs of tangled emotion” (233). Toward the end of the story, his “dreams” take on several different meanings. Dexter’s dreams at the beginning of the story involve aspirations of socioeconomic upward mobility. However, the thrust behind this movement is his desire for Judy, whom he ultimately fails to have. Therefore, his “dreams”, near the end, materialize as mere illusions.

The illusory quality to Dexter’s tale is twofold. First, Judy proves to be little more than a fiction—a girl with only a trifling resemblance to the symbol of upper-class perfection that Dexter makes her out to be. In the final section of the story, Dexter, after avoiding Minnesota for the past seven years, encounters a man called Devlin, who has recent knowledge of Judy. His depiction of present-day Judy angers and confuses Dexter:

“I’m not trying to start a row,” he said. “I think Judy’s a nice girl and I like her. I can’t understand how a man like Lud Simms could fall madly in love with her, but he did”. Then he added: “Most of the women like her”.

Dexter looked closely at Devlin, thinking wildly that there must be a reason for this, some insensitivity in the man or some private malice. (235)

This description makes no sense to Dexter, who has fashioned his life, from age fourteen forward, around seeking the education and employment necessary to attain this personification of feminine beauty. He is reticent to even accept this latest portrayal, assuming that some “insensitivity” or “private malice” must be in play. Essentially, Dexter cannot conceive of the temporality of beauty because to him beauty metaphorically represents a manifestation of the fruits of capitalism. It is also possible that Judy never possessed the physical attractiveness that Dexter remembers and that he has simply mythologized her, seeing in her not a person but the “glittering things” (221) that are synonymous with her.

In either case, the second disillusion that Dexter experiences through these recent revelations of Judy relates to his faith in upward mobility. While his economic validation appears to be fully realized through his entrepreneurial endeavors, Judy has, since Dexter’s childhood, served for him as a symbol of the American Dream—the Holy Grail of male economic achievement in the story and a confirmation of Dexter’s graduation into the leisure class. Not only does Dexter fail to attain her, but he also learns that the object of his pursuits either was only desirable for a fleeting moment in time or never was what he perceived her to be. His realization, seven years later, of this predicament is what causes the greatest trauma to Dexter at the end of the story:

He wanted to care, and he could not care. For he had gone away and he could never go back any more. The gates were closed, the sun was gone down, and there was no beauty but the gray beauty of steel that withstands all time. Even the grief he could have borne behind in the country of illusion, of youth, of the richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished.

“Long ago,” he said, “long ago, there was something in me, but now that thing is gone. Now that thing is gone, that thing is gone. I cannot cry. I cannot care. That thing will come back no more”. (235-6)

He understands that his toils have been misdirected in seeking such a girl as Judy. As noted above, Fitzgerald’s earliest descriptions of her as a child explicitly identify her personality flaws. However, Dexter defies this girl who is as known for her cold cruelty as her beauty.

In the final lines of the story above, Fitzgerald presents an interesting, and characteristically pessimistic, vision of the Modernist world. The narration states that “there was no beauty but the gray beauty of steel that withstands all time”. What fails Dexter is not a person but the American Dream. There is no personal reward for the victor in this paradigm.<sup>3</sup> Instead, one’s labor will only lead to the “gray beauty of steel” that is industrialization. Faith in the beauty of anything else is misplaced and can only produce impermanent results.

The model that exists in “Winter Dreams” is a well-known motif to readers of Fitzgerald. Commonly, such tales involve a young man whose interest in an upper-class woman intersects with his drive for socioeconomic advancement. Such stories are equally saturated with ambition and disillusionment, and they simultaneously represent American success and failure in the early twentieth century. It is nearly impossible to consider “Winter Dreams” without examining the story within the context of Fitzgerald’s most famous work, *The Great Gatsby*. Gerald Pike explains that Fitzgerald considered “Winter Dreams” as an early version of *The Great Gatsby* (315).<sup>4</sup> The similarities are unmistakable.

In 1925, the same year as *Gatsby*’s publication, Edmund Wilson wrote that “Fitzgerald is a dazzling extemporizer but his stories have a way of petering out: He seems never to have planned them thoroughly or to have thought them out from the beginning” (82-3).<sup>5</sup> Such criticisms are common of Fitzgerald’s early work.<sup>6</sup> *The Great Gatsby*, then, can be viewed as the culmination of an extant idea in his lexicon—a more mature variation on his previous work. Besides admittedly revisiting “Winter Dreams” in an improved novel form, other examples of Fitzgerald’s meticulous and calculated efforts in *The Great Gatsby* provide evidence of the well-considered nature of the text. In a letter to his longtime Scribner editor, Maxwell Perkins, Fitzgerald writes from Italy of his final revisions:

After six weeks of uninterrupted work the proof is finished and the last of it goes to you this afternoon. On the whole it’s been very successful labor.

- (1) I’ve brought *Gatsby* to life.
- (2) I’ve accounted for his money.
- (3) I’ve fixed up the two weak chapters (VI and VII).
- (4) I’ve improved his first party.
- (5) I’ve broken up his long narrative in Chapter VIII.

This morning I wired you to hold up the galley of Chapter X. The correction—and God! It’s important because in my other revision I made *Gatsby* look too mean—is enclosed herewith. Also some corrections for the page proof.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the epigraph to *The Beautiful and Damned* states, “The victor belongs to the spoils”.

<sup>4</sup> “Winter Dreams” was published in 1922—three years before *The Great Gatsby*.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund Wilson was a college classmate of F. Scott Fitzgerald at Princeton.

<sup>6</sup> This is especially true of Fitzgerald’s first two novels, *This Side of Paradise* (published in 1920) and *The Beautiful and Damned* (published in 1922).

We're moving to Capri. We hate Rome. I'm behind financially and have to write three short stories. (177)

Two crucial ideas emerge from this letter. First and foremost, Fitzgerald has carefully studied and analyzed his subject-matter, and as a result of this he has not only written a well-crafted novel but also created a realistically developed title character; Jay Gatsby is a more gritty and convincing manifestation of Dexter Green. The second issue at hand is the personal economic conditions of the author that factor into the production of his works. Studies of the biographical association between Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby* are obvious and abundant and need not be discussed in any great detail for the purposes of this examination. Suffice it to say that economic realities forced their way into the author's life during the writing of this novel and likely are consciously reflected in the text.

Regarding the first of the two issues above, the focal point of this discussion is the evolution of Dexter, a character who obtains wealth through legal and noble enterprises, into Jay Gatsby, who resorts to illicit methods. Roger Lewis comments on the relationship of the two characters, noting that "Gatsby is abstemious and careful—a man aware of his own doubleness. Both dreamer and vulgarian at the same time, he is, like Dexter Green, a money maker and a romantic; unlike Dexter Green, he seems to balance the two" (43-4). However, Gatsby's supposed "balance" and temperance undercut some of the seedy realities of his character. He is a murky persona and ultimately deceitful to those around him.

Gatsby also conducts an adulterous affair, and above all he is a criminal—a fact he conceals not for fear of prosecution but because he knows it would expose him as an unfashionable member of the new rich. Scott Donaldson writes that "Gatsby's clothes, his car, his house, his parties all brand him as newly rich, unschooled in the social graces and sense of superiority ingrained not only in Tom Buchanan but also in Nick Carraway" (77). Thus, social exposure is a legitimate and continuous problem regardless of the amount of wealth Gatsby has accumulated.

All of his faults are, in some ways, excusable because they are couched within his ultimate drive at winning back Daisy, who is married to Tom Buchanan. Thus, Gatsby is not Fitzgerald's primary object of scorn. Nick Carraway, as narrator, explains that "no-Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (2). Nick confirms his opinions of Gatsby at the end of the novel by chastising the representatives of the old aristocracy: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together" (180-1). In other words, Gatsby is regarded as a victim of society, which subverts the natural order of the criminal as predator. Furthermore, it is Gatsby, rather than Tom or Daisy, who elicits the pathos that Arthur Miller discusses in "Tragedy and the Common Man".

The implication, then, is that Jay Gatsby is a criminalized version of Dexter Green. Gatsby, and his lifestyle, are the product of a more sophisticated and scrupulous author. Like "Winter Dreams", "it tells a cautionary tale about the debilitating effects of money and social class on American society and those who seek fulfillment within its confines" (Donaldson 97). But, in this novel Fitzgerald raises the stakes, because the "money and social class" that he had previously chastised for their superficial and fleeting nature in "Winter Dreams" now also propels men into organized crime. The idealistic ascent into grand entrepreneurial and capitalistic successes that Dexter leverages as a young man is amended in Fitzgerald's retelling of the story. Following a more realistic path for the decade of the Twenties, Jay Gatsby, or James Gatz of North Dakota, who cannot reasonably

expect to quickly accrue the wealth necessary to entice a woman such as Daisy, turns to organized crime.

Regarding the hazy nature of Gatsby's exact operations, Michael Millgate writes that "the precise methods by which Gatsby makes his money are irrelevant. What is not irrelevant, however, is the element of illegality involved: this is why Fitzgerald makes such use of an otherwise peripheral character, Meyer Wolfsheim" (336). Seizing the particular historical moment of the Twenties, Gatsby becomes involved in bootlegging, gambling, and other schemes. Tom angrily reveals that "He and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That's one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him, and I wasn't far wrong" (134). Tom is referencing an earlier moment when, in speculation of the source of Gatsby's wealth, he explains, "a lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers, you know" (109). Tom is correct, but what is important is that he can essentially assume that "newly rich people" likely had to resort to illegal means in order to successfully broker upward social mobility.

If Jay Gatsby is to be considered a hero, he is a distinctly American version. His father shows to Nick a daily schedule that Gatsby, as a boy, had drawn for himself in order to improve himself. It is almost certainly based upon the routine that Benjamin Franklin advocated in his *Autobiography* (174).<sup>7</sup> Mr. Gatz explains that "Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that" (175). As a young man, the precocious Gatsby left home and went to sea with Dan Cody, experiencing for the first time the flashy lifestyle of the wealthy (99-101). He later served in the military. Eventually, Gatsby managed to accumulate a tremendous amount of wealth through his own crafty ingenuity—all for the love of a beautiful woman. Theoretically, Gatsby embodies the traditional qualities of the hero of the American Dream. Fitzgerald molds Gatsby after Dexter, but no longer considers legal economic systems as a viable option for his character's social mobility. Fitzgerald even takes Dexter's last name (Green) and inserts it as a recurrent symbol of hope, and money, throughout the novel. At the end of Nick's narration, he makes a final mention of the profoundly symbolic green light at the end of the Buchanans' dock: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther [...] And one fine morning—" (182). For Dexter and Gatsby, however, "it is not money alone that matters, but money combined with secure social position" (Donaldson 83). In other words, the new rich are fated for failure in Fitzgerald's vision of Modernist America. Gatsby cannot, in the end, win Daisy any more than Dexter can win Judy. While Dexter's efforts result in disillusionment, Gatsby's end with death.

In all three of the texts discussed within this essay, male characters struggle with their own economic identity. Jake Barnes, Dexter Green, and Jay Gatsby each carve their own financial niche and achieve some form of success despite indeterminate or unimpressive familial backgrounds and connections. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, women are indelibly linked with the economic consciousness of all three characters. For Jake, the awkward proposition of a romantic relationship with Lady Brett Ashley is further complicated by money. Jake is obsessed with exact enumerations of wealth, and his narrative voice reflects interpretations of other characters based upon class.

---

<sup>7</sup> This highly influential text was not published until 1868 and includes his "13 Virtues" (68) for success and personal fulfillment.

In “Winter Dreams” the concepts of feminine beauty and affluence are indissoluble from one another, and Dexter’s attainment of upper class status can only symbolically be capped by winning the most gorgeous rich girl in sight. As for *Gatsby*, Donaldson writes that “Daisy represents the most desirable object of all. She is invariably associated with the things that surround her, her car and her house and, most of all, her voice” (87). None of the above men winds up with the girl. Despite their various financial achievements and clear demarcations of economic success, they all meet heartache, misery, and a bleak ending.

Starks writes that “whereas the American Dream of the mid-1800s involved the move westward and the ability to start fresh on a new homestead and farm, the post-WWII American Dream involved the move to the suburbs and the ability to own a home, raise a family, send one’s children to college, and support oneself in old age” (206). The problem, then, is to define the American Dream as it relates to the points in between. For the American expatriate writers living and working in Europe during the nineteen-twenties, their native land was a paradox. They label it the Jazz Age but seem to lament the end of Victorian order. Living in Europe during the early to mid-twenties, especially Paris, neither author prominently features French characters in his writing. In the case of Hemingway, whose novel is largely set in Paris, the paucity of French figures is perhaps a reflection of World War I’s catastrophic ravaging of nearly an entire generation of young Frenchmen. Fitzgerald, on the other hand, did not employ a European setting in any of his three novels published during the twenties.

Both authors likely saw firsthand the devastating effects of World War I on the Parisian society surrounding them, though neither man was technically a veteran of the war. Fitzgerald enlisted but never saw combat, and Hemingway served as a volunteer for the Red Cross but was actually near the frontlines.<sup>8</sup> Abroad, they were citizens of the world, enjoying cosmopolitan lifestyles, while being Midwesterners when at home. In defiance of the American mythology of the West as an Edenic paradise of hope, personal and national growth, and prosperity, these authors send their characters eastward. Perhaps this accounts for the iniquities they encounter among the upper-classes and the superficialities of the women they love.

However, Hemingway and Fitzgerald offer no viable alternative, and traveling west will not improve their stock. As Jake Barnes says, “you can’t get away from yourself by moving from one place to another” (19). But, these authors did move away from their native land, though their writings continued to focus primarily on Americans. During the twenties, Hemingway and Fitzgerald kept a safe distance from their Midwestern roots—but they maintained a critical eye toward their homeland and questioned the ethics of the entire transatlantic world.

### Works Cited

- Adair, William. “Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*”. *Explicator* 60.2 (2002): 91-94.  
 Alger, Horatio. *Ragged Dick: Or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks*. New York: Signet, [1867] 2005.

---

<sup>8</sup> Hemingway was badly wounded in the leg while serving as an ambulance driver on the Italian front.



- Donaldson, Scott. "Possessions in *The Great Gatsby*: Reading *Gatsby* Closely". *Fitzgerald and Hemingway: Works and Days*. Scott Donaldson. ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2009. 76-97.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. New York: Scribner, 1986.
- . *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Ed. Andrew Turnbull. New York: Scribner, 1963.
- . *Novels and Stories: 1920-1922*. New York: Penguin, 2000.
- . "Winter Dreams". *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Matthew J. Bruccoli. ed. New York: Scribner, 2003. 217-36.
- Fore, Dana. "Life Unworthy of Life?: Masculinity, Disability, and Guilt in *The Sun Also Rises*". *Hemingway Review* 26.2 (2007): 74-88.
- Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Dover, [1868] 1996.
- Fulton, Lorie Watkins. "Reading Around Jake's Narration: Brett Ashley and *The Sun Also Rises*". *Hemingway Review* 24.1 (2004): 61-80.
- Harding, Graham. *A Wine Miscellany*. New York: Clarkson, 2006.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *Bullfighting, Sport, and Industry*. Sacramento: Meeker, [1930] 1999.
- . *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, [1926] 2003.
- Kaye, Jeremy. "The 'Whine' of Jewish Manhood: Re-Reading Hemingway's Anti-Semitism, Reimagining Robert Cohn". *Hemingway Review* 25.2 (2006): 44-60.
- Kerrigan, William. "Something Funny about Hemingway's Count". *American Literature* 46.1 (1974): 87-93.
- Leland, Jacob Michael. "Yes, that is a Roll of Bill in My Pocket: The Economy of Masculinity in *The Sun Also Rises*". *Hemingway Review* 23.2 (2004): 37-46.
- Lewis, Roger. "Money, Love, and Aspiration in *The Great Gatsby*". *New Essays on The Great Gatsby*. Matthew J. Bruccoli. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, [1985] 1989. 41-57.
- Miller, Arthur. "Tragedy and the Common Man". *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. New York: Viking, 1978. 3-7.
- Millgate, Michael. "Scott Fitzgerald as Social Novelist: Statement and Technique in *The Great Gatsby*". *Modern Language Review* 57.3 (1962): 335-39.
- Nahal, Chaman. *The Narrative Pattern in Hemingway's Fiction*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1971.
- Pike, Gerald. "Four Voices in 'Winter Dreams.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 23.3 (1986): 315-20.
- Rudat, Wolfgang E.H. "Sexual Dilemmas in *The Sun Also Rises*: Hemingway's Count and the Education of Jacob Barnes". *Hemingway Review* 8.2 (1989): 2-13.
- Starks, Brian. "A New Economy and the American Dream: Examining the Effect of Work Conditions on Beliefs about Economic Opportunity". *Sociological Quarterly* 44.2 (2003): 205-25.
- Thorn, Lee. "*The Sun Also Rises*: Good Manners Make Good Art". *Hemingway Review* 8.1 (1988): 42-49.
- Wagner-Martin, Linda. "Racial and Sexual Coding in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*". *Hemingway Review* 10.2 (1991): 39-41.
- Wilson, Edmund. "Fitzgerald before *The Great Gatsby*". *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work*. Alfred Kazin. ed. New York: The World, 1951. 77-83.

## **“Borders to Freedom:” Sitting Bull’s Precarious Canadian Refuge in Sharon Pollock’s Play *Walsh***

**Klara Kolinska**

**Abstract:** In a 1979 interview, Sharon Pollock, one of the most outstanding contemporary Canadian playwrights, asserted that: “Canadians have this view of themselves as nice civilized people who have never participated in historical crimes and atrocities [...] But that view is false”. In her 1973 play *Walsh*, she dramatized the history of Chief Sitting Bull and his failed attempt at finding retreat in Canada after the battle at Little Bighorn. The play focuses on Sitting Bull’s interchange with the NWMP officer Major Walsh, and the causes for the eventual disaster of the Sioux: while Sitting Bull claimed that the Sioux were as much Canadian Indians as American, given that the Great Plains were their traditional hunting grounds, the Canadian authorities saw the Sioux as American Indians who had trespassed the international boundary into Canada and should be persuaded to leave. The paper proposes to discuss Pollock’s *Walsh* as an example of “historiographic metadrama” (Knowles), and as an important contribution to reconstructing a crucial episode in Canadian Indigenous history that has proven requisite for the country’s self-definition.

**Keywords:** Canadian Drama, Sharon Pollock, Sitting Bull, historiographic metadrama

Sharon Pollock, one of the most outstanding contemporary Canadian playwrights, is known in her country for repeatedly challenging the prevalent view among her fellow Canadians of Canadian history as boring, smoothly-running, and generally uneventful. Pollock’s historical interest was inspired, according to her own account, by her feeling “angry at [her] own ignorance, and that the historians hadn’t told [her]”, and by her realization of the need specifically “to direct attention to neglected aspects of that history” (Nothof 13).

In her 1973 play *Walsh*, which was her first work for stage that brought her national attention, Pollock dramatized the history of Chief Sitting Bull and his tragically failed attempt at finding a safe retreat in Canada after the historic battle at Little Bighorn in 1876. In this play she thus “looks at the greatest of Canadian myths, the Mounties, those glamorous red-coated heroes. She is disturbed most specifically by the treatment of Indians, which is part of her message for the present” (Nothof 13-14). For the first time in her career as a playwright, Pollock undertook substantial independent research, this time into the history of the Canadian West, during which she encountered a fascinating, complex web of manipulations, biases and preconceptions in the discourse of Native history, in the narrative of Canada-US relations in the nineteenth century, as well as in the process of the formation of Canadian national history as a whole.

While Sitting Bull may have been the most famous Native leader to have challenged the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, the border between Canada and the US, which resulted from the war of 1812, he certainly was not the first one. From the 1850s, the Ottawa government had been aware of the growing instability in the West, caused by a rapid decline of the numbers of the buffalo, by an influx of immigrants from the East, as well as by the plans for the construction of the transcontinental railway. Besides, there was growing awareness in

Canada of the danger of the extension of the frontier wars in the US across the border into Canada, made acute by the lack in Canada of the provincial resources, as well as legislature, for such a case. The British North America Act of 1867 stipulated that law enforcement was provincial responsibility, while federal forces would only be applied in those areas that were not yet included in the confederation. The central law enforcement agency in Canada, the Mounted Police, was formed mere three years before Little Bighorn, in 1873, according to the model of the British Royal Irish Constabulary, which was a different kind of force from the traditional decentralized British system. For one thing, it was armed, whereas the regular police was not, and was organized along centralized military, rather than civil lines. It was the model applied by the British in the colonies, such as India, and in the 1870s it was the model that the first Canadian Prime Minister, John A. MacDonald, chose for his country. The original plan was for the recruitment of the Métis for at least half of the rank and file of the new corps, but the violent opposition in Ontario against the initiative forced MacDonald to abandon the idea. When The North-West Mounted Police, a forerunner of the RCMP, was eventually established in 1873, it was all-white.

The new force was brought into action almost immediately in the Cypress Hills, at the future border between the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and sacred grounds for both American and Canadian Native people, where tribes facing hostilities and difficulty could traditionally retreat in peace. In 1873, groups of American liquor traders and hunters repeatedly crossed the US-Canada border in Montana in pursuit of Assiniboine warriors, under the pretext of searching for stolen horses. In the ensuing skirmishes during that year, nearly 100 Native people were killed. 150 North-West Mounted Police officers were sent out to settle the matters, the task which proved fraught with logistic difficulties, including the expedition getting lost at one point on the way, and eventually finding only one trader of those they were supposed to confront.

The arrival of Sitting Bull and his followers, numbering almost 4000 people, created an unexpected problem for the police; Olive Patricia Dickason pointed out that: “instead being a regional problem [...] this time the question of the Sioux refugees was national because of changes in jurisdiction as a result of Confederation” (Dickason 282-3).

Sitting Bull crossed the US-Canada border on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1877, and was met by 34-year-old North-West Mounted Police Major James Morrow Walsh, commander of 90 men stationed at Fort Walsh in the Cypress Hills, now a Canadian national historic site. Sitting Bull presented to Walsh his plea for a sanctuary and protection in the “White Grandmother’s” country, to which his people were entitled for their service to the British Crown during the War of 1812. He even presented himself with the medal that King George III bestowed on his grandfather in recognition of his loyalty and military merits. Sitting Bull repeated to Walsh his grandfather’s words of advice: “If you should ever wish to find peace, go north to the land of redcoats” (Anderson 34). Walsh then strove to obtain a promise from Sitting Bull that his followers would strictly and unconditionally obey the Canadian law, this being an inescapable provision under which their protection would be guaranteed.

Historians repeatedly maintain that Walsh and Sitting Bull held respect, if not even affection, for each other—even though this view has been challenged by many as a projection, and an imposition of European notions onto the Native culture, its emergence may well have been given by the way the Mounties typically exercised law enforcement in the Native communities:

[T]wo or three scarlet-coated men riding calmly into large camps of armed Indians and making arrests or letting offenders off with stern warnings. Not backing down and never showing fear was perhaps the reason they—a mere handful of resolute men—were so successful in their dealings with the Indians. The Indians admired courage, perhaps above all else. Walsh had given Sitting Bull something to think about. (Anderson 34-35)

In any case, Walsh took an active part as a negotiator between Sitting Bull and both the Canadian and the US governments, especially during the US government peace commission, led by General Alfred H. Terry, sent in August 1877 to meet the Sioux. It was Walsh who managed to persuade Sitting Bull to encounter General Terry, although the Sioux leader eventually refused to return to the US, in fear of deadly retributions awaiting his people in case they cross the border to the south.

At that time, newspapers on both sides of the border launched what was basically a public campaign against the Sioux; *The Montreal Witness*, for example, reported that Sitting Bull had asked the Canadian Blackfeet “to join him in the conflict with the hated American Government, after which he would help them with any conflict they might have with the Canadian Government” (in Anderson 35). Some newspapers issued headlines such as “Sitting Bull Preparing for Spring Campaign”, and others, such as *The Toronto Globe*, warned that the situation “could erupt at any time”, because: “Sitting Bull is amply supplied with ammunition” (in Anderson 35). In April 1878 the *Fort Benton Record* cautioned that Sitting Bull “was sparing no effort to form a league among [the] congregated tribes [...] He appeared with 30 of his best warriors dressed in the clothing of soldiers killed in the Custer Massacre, and called upon assembled Indians to witness how he had treated the soldiers and how easy [it would be] to clean out all the whites and have the country among themselves” (in Anderson 36).

During this campaign, Walsh consistently maintained the much-needed voice of reason, and kept dismissing the rumors of a great Indian alliance under Sitting Bull. He traveled repeatedly to Ottawa via the US—since the Canadian transcontinental railway was not completed until 1885—where he tried, with the help of some friends, to dissuade the sentiments of revenge against the Sioux. His efforts earned him a reputation of “Sitting Bull’s boss”, and eventually Prime Minister MacDonald’s distrust, leading finally to his constrained early retirement from the force.

The rumors of the Sioux danger were, however, somewhat justified by the extant strategic attempts by another Native exile—in the opposite direction: it was the Métis leader Louis Riel, who sought refuge in Montana after the abortive Métis rebellion in Manitoba in 1869-70, and had since then striven to form an across-the-border Indian-Métis alliance with the aim to eventually claim the prairies, which, in his view, rightfully belonged to his people. The failure of the second Métis resistance movement led by Louis Riel in Manitoba in the 1880s is tragically linked to the fate of the Sioux. Arthur Ray explains that the Canadian Plains Cree “had steadfastly refused all Métis entreaties to join them. The experience of their American cousins south of the border, particularly those of Sitting Bull’s people who had defeated General Custer at the Little Bighorn River in 1876, made it clear that armed conflict, even if temporarily successful, ultimately led to disaster for Native people (Ray 220).

In western Canada, the situation worsened rapidly, largely due to the fact that the presence of the Sioux was making increasing adverse inroads into the numbers of the buffalo, the staple source of food, and thus survival, for the Native people in the area. The herds of the animals were getting smaller every year, and in the 1870s there were hardly

enough of them to feed the local Canadian Native tribes, let alone the unexpected newcomers. Intertribal tension in the west grew rapidly, and so did hostility of the government, who did not want to burden itself with the cost of feeding the Sioux, not to mention the obvious danger of the aggravation of the, already uneasy, relationships with the United States government. In the late 1870s the remaining herds were so small that the animals were no longer migrating to the north, and Sitting Bull's Sioux were forced to occasionally cross the border in search of the scattered remaining buffalo. The Native people began to starve, and the Canadian government maintained that it had no treaty obligation towards the Sioux. Small groups were gradually moving back to the US, in the hope of obtaining some food, if nothing else. By the summer of 1880, an estimated 3.700 Sioux gradually returned to their home country. Sitting Bull still refused to trust the Americans, and held his Canadian stand with some 200-400 diehard adherents.

In the growing crisis Prime Minister MacDonald started blaming Major Walsh for the situation, and had him transferred to Fort Qu'Appelle, a Hudson Bay Company trading post, some 160 miles northeast of Fort Walsh. Before leaving, Walsh promised Sitting Bull that he would plead on his behalf that the Sioux be granted a reserve in Canada, and did his utmost to keep true to his words. After an unfavorable interview with Prime Minister MacDonald in Ottawa, he contacted a friend in the Indian Bureau in Chicago, and asked him to intercede in favor of the Sioux. It was only after Walsh's advice that Sitting Bull agreed to a repatriation plan proposed by the Americans that included full amnesty. He crossed the border back in July 1881, and surrendered to the authorities. He became prisoner of war, and was eventually killed in a fight with the tribal police in 1890.

According to Grant MacEwan, author of the book: *Sitting Bull: The Years in Canada*, Walsh wrote when he heard of Sitting Bull's death:

I am glad to hear that Bull is relieved of his miseries, even if it took the bullet to do it. A man who wielded such power as Bull once did, that of a King, and over a wild spirited people, cannot endure abject poverty [...] without suffering great mental pain, and death is a relief [...] Bull had been misrepresented. He was not the bloodthirsty man reports made him out to be. He asked for nothing but justice. He was not a cruel man. He was kind of heart. He was not dishonest. He was truthful. He loved his people and was glad to give his hand in friendship to any man who was honest with him. (in Anderson 40)

As for Walsh's career, it, not surprisingly, did not last much longer after the Sioux crisis. He was first given extended leave in Ontario, to be removed from the site of the conflict, and was forced to resign from the force in 1883. He died in 1905—the year in which Saskatchewan, the stage for Sitting Bull's Canadian story, eventually entered the Canadian confederation.

Given Sharon Pollock's sincere, personally engaged and extremely responsible attitude towards rewriting and re-presenting historical accounts, it is no wonder that, especially in the later versions of the text of her play, she increasingly focused precisely on the character of Walsh and his irreconcilable moral dilemma, and thus named her play after him. Denis Salter explains this focus by the fact that primarily Pollock

is using the theatre to expose deception, to probe the origins of behavior, to weigh the truth of a character or situation, and to determine people's responsibilities for their actions. She is using the theatre, in other words, as an instrument of moral inquiry, to project (though seldom to achieve) a better world with a better set of values by which to live. (Salter)

In spite of the fact that some reviewers rather mercilessly denounced the play for: “[leaning] towards simplistic ideas and holier-than-thou didacticism” (Salter), it is, perhaps, exactly this sincerity, and this focus on the character of an average white man—about whom little had been known before the premiere of Pollock’s play—that transform the straightforward historical text into a more general, and thus more distinguished dramatic analysis of universally relevant moral issues. Simply, Pollock’s Walsh “is not merely a man of action but a man who is prepared to reflect upon the meaning of his life” (Salter). For Pollock, “the past is not merely a stable body of evidence but an ever-shifting set of so-called facts, which are ostensibly objective but in effect prejudiced by the ideological values with which we interpret them” (Salter). Her Walsh thus “finds himself torn between his respect for the Sioux and his allegiance to his country [...], [and] is ultimately unable to reconcile his responsibility to the British government with his personal moral responsibility” (*New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia*), which he ultimately, and perhaps inevitably, betrays.

This effect, and this aesthetic philosophy, is construed in the play by two main dramatic strategies: one is reporting, narrativization, “telling rather than showing”, which, at the crucial moments of the play, replaces visualization on stage, and the other one is the fact that all the important characters are “ex-centric”, transgressive and transgressing types, itinerant border-crossers by definition, who constantly connect and disconnect different geographical, as well as ontological worlds.

The reporting, narrativization strategy qualifies the play as a case of historiographic metafiction, as defined, among others, by Linda Hutcheon, the foundations of which it concurrently challenges and subverts.

Using songs, letters private and official, documented evidence as well as the numerous unsupported myths and legends that have evolved around this particular historical moment... Pollock lets the ‘unsung many’ speak: with the voices of soldiers, settler women, scouts, raw recruits—and the Indians—she creates a multi-perspective historical chorus that breaks the fabric of a homogenized and closed historical account at the same time that it exposes and subverts the mechanisms of traditional history. (Müller “Sharon Pollock’s *Walsh—An Exercise in Historiographic Metafiction*”.)

The subversion of the mechanisms of traditional history, the creation of the “hearsay version” thereof, can be documented, for example, in the following dialogue between Clarence, a young North-West Mounted Police recruit, and Harry, an American wagon master, a much older, and thus more experienced, sobered, and realistic veteran of frontier wars:

Clarence: Hey, did you hear the talk over at the fort?

Harry: That talk’s everywhere, Clarence.

Clarence: Do you believe it?

Harry: Don’t see why it couldn’t be true.

Clarence: Aren’t you scared?

Harry: Now, why’d I be scared, Clarence?

Clarence: We’re gonna have ourselves an Injun War, just like the States, that’s why! The Sioux are headed north [...] An Injun War! I could get to kill the man who killed Custer!

Harry: And who might that be?

Clarence: Why, Sitting Bull, of course.

Harry: How'd you know it was him personally killed Custer?  
 Clarence: Well... Everybody says so! It was Sittin' Bull himself killed Custer at the Little Big Horn—with his huntin' knife! *He thinks about it and backs down a bit.* I guess the only ones know for sure are the men who died with Custer, eh?  
 Harry: *politely* Ain't you forgetting something?  
 Clarence: What?  
 Harry: I seem to recollect there were some other people present at the event.  
 Clarence: Who?  
 Harry: Jesus Christ, Clarence! The Indians, that's who! You think a white man's the only person kin know anythin' for sure? Whyn't you try askin' an Injun who killed Custer? (*Walsh* 141-2)

This passage demonstrates how all-too easily Clarence, as a young and inexperienced man, succumbs to the generally held beliefs and prejudices about the Indians, and how little objective, verifiable proof he demands to form his opinion and attitude towards them. The myth of the murder of General Custer at the hands of Sitting Bull thus assumes a life of its own, independent from admissible evidence, not to mention eye witness testimony.

Seen as a historical statement, the striking absence of visual information mirrors our own ignorance of past events and the subsequent ambiguity of historical 'truths' [...] Each ostentatious reporting situation in the play tests the characters'—and our own—critical ability, calling to our attention that the truth value of what we are being told is potentially distorted and refracted by the perspective of those who tell it. (Müller)

The realization of the inescapable un-attainability of “absolute truth” explains not only Pollock's fascination with Sitting Bull, as yet another “myth of the West”, but also her utmost caution, if not hesitation, in approaching her character's potential “Native” version of the story, in interpreting it, and serving as its spokesperson, in fear perhaps of repeating similar discursive misapprehensions. Indeed, “[t]he image of the Indian Chief [...] is totemic, almost unreal. The ‘true’ person escapes our grasp; the fading image that remains is the mysterious icon that haunts us on the photographs of the time. We are forced to ask ourselves if the Sitting Bull Clarence [eventually] bemoans can ever be known” (Müller).

The second dramatic strategy, the employment of transgressive, border crossing characters, is manifest, primarily, in the protagonist, Major Walsh, who is an outsider in the western borderland, never feeling quite at home there, but concurrently alienated from—and extremely frustrated by—the distant official federal agenda, of which he is a part and servant. His only solace in the painful dilemma he is forced to face is his—real or imagined—correspondence with his wife, his private symbol of the comprehensible order, security, and comfort of the East. “The physical separation of husband and wife represents the chasm between East and West, between the emotional changes imposed on Walsh [...] and the stasis of security which he associates with his family (whom he remembers as on a faded photograph, ‘suspended in amber’” (Müller). However, this association of the East with legitimate order and sound judgment is a tragic misconception that ultimately brings about his fatal moral and emotional downfall—it was precisely the mismanagement and corruption of power, delegated from the East, which led to the destruction of the Sioux by abstract, buck-passing proxy. Different geographical areas—most of them present only in the characters' discourse, thus assume meanings resonant with not only political, but also moral implications. Thus,

The United States is dangerous, aggressive, barbaric—a place where deals are made and where people die. Britain, as the centre of imperial policy, is byzantine in its complexity, remote and all powerful, able to colonize any form of political opposition at the mere stroke of a pen. Ottawa is similarly remote but also weak, a mere pawn of British and American foreign policy [...] The West, in stark contrast, is portrayed as the romantic cliché of new world hopes and noble savages, but it has been polluted by debased political values irreversibly brought to bear from centres of power located elsewhere. (Salter 1989)

Other characters who represent different facets of spatial, racial, discursive and identity border-crossing include, namely, Harry, an American wagon master who transports treaty supplies for the Canadian Indians to Fort Walsh; Harry's position as a non-Canadian, and an ideologically unengaged bystander enables him to see more acutely both the American and Canadian aspects of the argument, without actually taking sides. Harry occasionally assumes the role of the narrator, but his arguably neutral position leads, inevitably, only to resignation and—not dishonest—realization of his own helplessness.

Louis, the Métis scout in Walsh's services, and another "border-crosser", is in a similar position: Even though a part of him identifies with the Sioux and understands their plight, he moves in a symptomatic "no man's land" of identity and belonging, incapable of any act of protest—other than a somewhat melodramatic gesture of spitting at Walsh's feet—and resorts to silence and passivity, reminiscent almost of the clichéd image of the stoic Indian.

The only character who undergoes an inner change of attitude and rhetoric is thus young Clarence, who experiences the most bitter and eye-opening rite of passage. The experience of seeing the injustice in the application of the administration and the suffering of the Sioux brings him to a realization of his human responsibility, and transforms him into a mirror image, or the young alter ego of Walsh, and the voice of his superior's moral conscience—ineffectual perhaps in practice, but powerful in certain stage realizations.

In conclusion, Pollock's *Walsh* is not only a historical drama dealing with an embarrassing, but resolved episode from Canada's past, but a play that boldly "exposes the ineffectiveness of Eurocentric political policy and bureaucracy" (Pollock), and addresses moral issues of universal currency. For this reason Anja Müller, an attentive and apt reader of Sharon Pollock, reminds us of the contemporary context from which the play emerged:

The play about a Canadian attempting to save a group of people from persecution by the United States allegorically reflects upon the role of Canada as the bolt-hole for Americans drafted for the Vietnam war. Discovering Canadian tolerance and humanity in events almost one hundred years apart, Pollock establishes a line of tradition that not only explains and justifies 20th-century action but actually calls for it. (Müller)

*Walsh* is thus concurrently an earnest contribution to understanding certain defining moments in Canadian history, and a dramatic text that helps to inspire the still ongoing debate about the country's self-definition in cultural terms.



**Works Cited**

- Anderson, Ian. "Sitting Bull and the Mounties". *Wild West* 10. 5 (February 1998).
- Dickason, Olive Patricia. *Canada's First Nations. A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992.
- Müller, Anja I. "Sharon Pollock's *Walsh*—An Exercise in Historiographic Metafiction". <http://archiv.ub.uni-marburg.de/sum/84/sum84-9.html>.
- Nothof, Anne F. ed. *Sharon Pollock. Essays on Her Works*. Toronto: Guernica, 2000.
- Pollock, Sharon. *Walsh*. *Canadian Theatre Review* 69 (Winter 1991): 141-42.
- Ray, Arthur J. *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began. An Illustrated History of Canada's Native People*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2005.
- Salter, Denis. "(Im)possible Worlds: The Plays of Sharon Pollock". 1989. [http:// www.ucalgary.ca/ lib-old /SpecColl/pollockbioc.htm](http://www.ucalgary.ca/lib-old/SpecColl/pollockbioc.htm).
- "Sharon Pollock" *New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia*. [http://w3.stu.ca/stu/sites/nble/p/pollock\\_sharon.html](http://w3.stu.ca/stu/sites/nble/p/pollock_sharon.html).

## **Manipulation and Venturing Spirit in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth***

**Ferma Lekesizahn**

**Abstract:** In *The House of Mirth*, Edith Wharton addresses superficial and deceptive values of the fin de siècle New York upper crust. She treats the replacement of fundamental social values with the market values in a manner that is suggestive of economic metaphors. In Wharton's portrayal of the wealthy, social relations take the form of commercial transactions that are expected to produce profit. Cold speculations of gains and losses determine individuals' actions, motives, and choices, engendering an ever-increasing volatility and deception. Presenting a network of relations immersed in manipulation and deception, the novel, in fact, is very much suggestive of an economic bubble.

**Keywords:** Economic metaphor, stock-exchange market, financial transactions, overvalued assets, economic bubble

Reflective of the issues of class and money, Edith Wharton's major works of fiction are certainly treasured by Marxist critics. Especially, her seductive portrayals of the wealthy and the carefree in *The House of Mirth* gained the novel a singularly iconic status in Marxist literary critical tradition. Wharton's novel display such biting critique of the culture of capitalism that, although representing an earlier era in the development of modern American bourgeoisie, it inspires as much awe as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*—the masterpiece that has probed into the world of the rich deeper than any other. Wharton's subtle observations and compelling descriptions of the trappings of high bourgeoisie in *The House of Mirth* are just as much delightful to cultural historians or commentators as to the ordinary readers. Yet, she is certainly more than a painter of social scenes and attitudes. Her insights into the ways in which economic agency embedded in the social network of New York's leisure class underlie the real strength of her fiction. In Wharton's portrayal of the wealthy, social relations take the form of commercial transactions that are expected to produce profit. Cold calculation of gains and losses determine individuals' actions, motives, and choices, engendering an ever-increasing volatility and deception. Presenting a network of relations immersed in manipulation and deception, the novel, in fact, is very much suggestive of an economic bubble. Just as greedy speculators' purchasing overvalued assets with the intention of selling them to other speculators, who are willing to pay a much higher price, creates the economic bubble, the acts of speculating and fooling create an insincere and dishonest social atmosphere in the novel. What goes on among the upper crust of New York is a lugubrious game of trying to fool each other in order to receive the top price for their "overvalued assets". As such, Lily Bart spends her modest funds in order to polish her outworn attractiveness—her most important asset in the matrimonial market; Simon Rosedale tries to secure his social ascension by advertising stock-market tips; Percy Gryce enjoys the reputation of an intellectual young man thanks to his collection of books although he is dull to the bone; Gus Trenor earns Lily's confidence by making her believe in his expertise in stock-exchange; Bertha Dorset passes as a faithful wife while she successfully hides her affairs from her husband and the list goes on. Although no one really is what they seem, they all

get credit from they do not have and enjoy the undeserved privileges of certain qualities attributed to them. In economic reality, the chain comes to a halt when the greatest fool pays the top price for the overvalued asset and cannot find anymore buyers; in *The House of Mirth*, it is Lily Bart who ends up being “the greatest fool”.

Among all the characters, who are skilled in asset-management as well as manipulation, Lily Bart seems to be one of the most adept, yet even she experiences difficulties in the competitive marriage market. Although she successfully manages her assets—her beauty, elite upbringing, elegant family background, and wit—her plans of getting a return, namely, embarking upon a huge fortune crowned with a respectable social status are delayed. As a response to her friend Lawrence Selden, who reminds her of the fact that “marriage is [her] vocation”, she frankly expresses her worries about having been “about too long”. She feels that “people are getting tired of [her]; they are beginning to say [she] ought to marry” (31). Lily’s concern is that her most important assets are transitory, that is, perishable. Her beauty and youth will not stay with her for too long. So beauty and youth do not represent any stable values; they, in fact, represent the overvalued assets in the market logic. To maintain her stylish looks as part of her asset-management is costly too: “If I were shabby no one would have me: a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like [...] Who wants a dingy woman?” (33). What underlies the logic here is that men do not look for any real virtues but go for the looks, although looks represent only the front. A woman can hide anything behind her looks and let men overvalue a facade with a total void behind it. What matters here is time. There is an urgent need for Lily to make herself marketable as she is twenty-nine and she is not left with too many choices given the supply and demand ratio in the marriage market. “A self-acknowledged ‘human merchandise’”, her business is to look for buyers (Dimock 375). The topic of her conversation with Selden resonates in her conduct during her fateful encounter with the potential candidate—Percy Gryce—on the train to Bellomont. Lily sees him an easy prey: “Some girls would not have known how to manage him [...] But Lily’s methods were more delicate” (39). Her business methods inspire confidence to such an extent that she approaches Gryce, whose \$800,000 yearly income is certainly more attractive than his personal qualities, with the assurance of gain:

The certainty that she could marry Percy Gryce when she pleased had lifted a heavy load from her mind, and her money troubles were too recent for their removal not to leave a sense of relief which a less discerning intelligence might have taken for happiness. Her vulgar cares were at an end. She would be able to arrange her life as she pleased, [...] she would have smarter gowns than Judy Trenor, and far, far more jewels than Bertha Dorset. (65)

Yet, Lily may be making a serious mistake by putting her happiness at stake and prioritizing fortune and status. Gus Trenor’s remarks about Gryce’s flaws imply that it is an unadvised move that Lily sets herself up for: “A great deal of money? Oh, by Jove—you don’t mean Gryce? What—you do? Oh, no, of course [...] good Lord, *Gryce!* Did Judy really think you could bring yourself to marry that portentous little ass?” (95). For Gus, his flaws definitely overshadow Gryce’s assets and he cannot bring himself to believe that Lily, given her much superior qualities, finds any value in him. She is, however, frustrated when her expectation of a high return from Gryce-business—her patience with his dull conversation and fake interest in his boring book-collection—comes to naught. Her failure is a result of her own mismanagement of her assets. The setup does not work out because she trifles with the principle that utility is the basis of value. Taking Gryce as a fool blinds Lily

to the fact that Gryce may be a smarter buyer than she thinks. While giving the impression of an inexperienced young man with limited wits, Gryce comes across as a buyer who cares for fundamental values such as virtue and stability. Lily's mistake is failing to see that not everyone is to be duped by her 'overvalued' assets—her looks and manipulative strategies. There is also the economic fact that the exchange must be advantageous to both buyer and seller, which involves an equality in value. Expecting to benefit from Gryce's high status and fortune as his wife, she must present a warranty for his expectation of value in return—a warranty consisting of constancy and loyalty. Being drawn to Lawrence Selden at a critical moment of Percy Gryce-affair nevertheless tarnishes her credibility: "She was like a waterplant in the flux of tides, and today the whole current of her mood was carrying her toward Lawrence Selden" (68). Lily thus cannot fulfill her obligations in the bargain. Caught in the act of flirting with Selden in Bellomont, she ruins her commodity value for Gryce and becomes 'damaged goods' in his eyes. "For it is not sexual pleasure but the continuity of family and fortune that is at stake in the proposed transaction" (Robinson 345). Her limited financial means also put Lily in a compromising position with regard to potential buyers: "Lily's sexual attractiveness is undeniably a material asset in her struggle to improve her social and financial position through marriage. But ironically it is also a liability as long as it is not backed up by money and status" (347). Unless she wants to be regarded as improper for an advantageous marriage, Lily must be careful about parading her attractiveness. Robinson further clarifies the market rules: "[I]t is an auction where her beauty is only an adjunct to her sexual trustworthiness, since the purpose of the proposed sale would be defeated if the wares are displayed in what the customer perceives as an overly suggestive fashion" (345). As a result of Lily's trifling with Gryce's sensitive considerations, the sale never happens and she cannot even recoup the amount of her capital—a costly weekend in Bellomont—let alone reaping any profit. To her much regret, Lily realizes that she must be persistent in her strategies for an erroneous moment of deviation can cost dearly. Reflected badly on her balance sheet, Percy Gryce-affair seals off her further dealings in the matrimonial market for a while. Lily once again finds herself in the grip of 'vulgar' cares: "[T]he daily friction of unpaid bills, the daily nibble of small temptations to expenditure" continue to harass her (89).

Throughout most of the book, we witness Lily's running out of her entrepreneurial energy in managing her assets. As her economic behavior evolves into the riskier ventures, her assets lose value. On the other hand, the need for an urgent settling of the debts presses hard and she turns to Wall Street speculations: "This vast Wall Street World of 'tips' and 'deals'—might she not find in it the means of escape from her dreary predicament?" (93). An up-coming investor in Wall Street, Lily needs expert opinion, which brings her to contact with Gus Trenor, who occupies the central place in the novel's monetary discourse along with the financial speculator, Simon Rosedale. By virtue of representing the new generation of capitalists, who are also known as *nouveau riche* in the New York social scene, Gus and Simon stand at the crossroads where finance capitalism replaces the liberal competitive market capitalism of the previous era. Their position can be considered as a key to the novel's presentation of manipulative economic agency as the basis for power. Brandishing their expertise in handling interest-bearing capital—Simon is known to make his wealth from the stock-market—Gus and Simon come across as new actors who have the leverage in expanding their capital through brokerage. With all due respect, the broker's loans promoted by Gus and Simon may look profitable, but if one submits to such speculative dealings with no reserves and deliberation, a bust is almost a sure thing. Lacking information about the stock-market operations, Lily is totally in Trenor's power: "She was too genuinely ignorant of manipulations of the stock-market to understand his

technical explanations, or even perhaps to perceive that certain points in them were slurred” (96). Lily’s predicament reflects the general mania of the fin de siècle New Yorkers driven to expanding their capital without heeding the fact that money that circulates in the Wall Street has no basis in fundamental values: “She understood only that her modest investments were to be mysteriously multiplied without risk to herself” (96). Ignorance triggers an unfounded reliance on tips. In Lily’s case, her position is even more deplorable as she is required to use her feminine charms on Simon Rosedale in order to receive tips, which ironically causes her to lose all her money. Lily, therefore, has to agree when Gus suggests her to suck up to Rosedale, who is “a chap it pays to be decent to” (103). Such interest-driven attitude shows that social immersion in the logics of economy dictates its own norms: “The principle of exchange, the idea that one has to ‘pay’ for what one gets, lays claim to a kind of quid pro quo justice, and it is this justice, this ‘Fair play,’ that Trenor demands from Lily” (Dimock 377). Although Lily knows very well that both Rosedale and Trenor will ask for more favors in the most compromising form, she does not refrain from provoking them as her priority is to secure the profitability of her stocks and bonds: “She felt herself ready to meet any other demand which life might make. Even the immediate one of letting Trenor, as they drove homeward, lean a little nearer and rest his hand reassuringly on hers” (96).

As Lily receives her cheques from Trenor, she lets go of her worries about not being able to pay her debts and indulges herself in new purchases: “The transaction had justified itself by its results: she saw now how absurd it would have been to let any primitive scruple deprive her of this easy means of appeasing her creditors” (97). What she considers as easy money-making, in fact, is based on an unreliable and risk-filled system of transactions. In the third volume of *The Capital*, Karl Marx offers an extensive analysis of the speculative investment in the form of bonds, stocks, and securities, pointing to the deceptive aspects of the system:

The paper serves as title of ownership which represents this capital. The stocks of railways, mines, navigation companies, and the like, represent actual capital, namely, the capital invested and functioning in such enterprises, or the amount of money advanced by the stockholders for the purpose of being used as capital in such enterprises. This does not preclude the possibility that these may represent pure swindle. But this capital does not exist twice, once as the capital-value of titles of ownership (stocks) on the one hand and on the other hand as the actual capital invested, or to be invested, in those enterprises. It exists only in the latter form, and a share of stock is merely a title of ownership to a corresponding portion of the surplus-value to be realised by it. A may sell this title to B, and B may sell it to C. These transactions do not alter anything in the nature of the problem. A or B then has his title in the form of capital, but C has transformed his capital into a mere title of ownership to the anticipated surplus-value from the stock capital. (20)

The passage implies the possibility of an economic bubble as an effect of the speculative nature of transactions. Every page of *The House of Mirth* is similarly full of hints at the disastrous consequences that gullible investors like Lily are likely to be faced with such as the scene where she cheerily receives the news of more cheques from Gus. The news make her forget about her losses from her previous ventures:

The news filled her with glow produced by a sudden cessation of pysical pain. The world was not stupid and blundering after all [...] At the thought her spirits

began to rise: it was characteristic of her that one trifling piece of good fortune should give wings to all her hopes. Instantly came the reflection that Percy Gryce was not irretrievably lost; and she smiled to think of the excitement of recapturing him from Evie Van Osburgh. What chance could such a simpleton have against her if she chose to exert herself? (102)

The passage does not only reflect her gullibility as a financial actor but also establishes her as a naive dreamer in a world where speculation is only the privilege of those who can afford to lose. Her tragedy is hidden in the fact that she is easily overcome by the illusion that she has the power to fulfill her wishes.

Lily's understanding of the stock-business extends as much as the idea that her shares must yield a certain amount of surplus-value; beyond that, she never considers that the capital does not exist twice. In other words, she does not understand that her stocks do not represent the actual capital. She is, however, constantly tricked by Gus Trenor into thinking that investing in stocks is a sure business: "There could be no question of her not paying when she lost, since Trenor had assured her that she was certain not to lose. In sending her the cheque he had explained that he had made five thousand for her out of Rosedale's "tip", and had put four thousand back in the same venture as there was a promise of another 'big rise'" (97). Gus' over-confidence reveals Lily's implication in the economic bubble. A further implication of the economic bubble is the way Rosedale doubles his fortune: "The mere fact of growing richer at a time when most people's investments are shrinking, is calculated to attract envious attention; and according to Wall Street rumors, Welly Bry and Rosedale had found the secret of performing this miracle" (127). Whereas, we know that in the rational world of hard facts, there is no place for miracles and sooner or later, the bubble will burst. Lily, however, is bought into the rumors and surrenders—in economic jargon—to the magic of the interest-bearing capital without ever inquiring into the ways of recouping her principal. She deplorably disregards the fact that speculative transactions based on credited money bear an illusion of profit only for a limited period of time. In fact, Gus' reliance on tips imply the insubstantial and deceptive character of such transactions. In order to maintain one's profits, one deals in uncertain and contingent conditions rather than establishing certain facts directly related with the businesses such as credit and debt rolls of industries. So, when Gus tells Lily that "I don't know that I can promise you a fresh tip every day", he, in fact, admits the system's dependency on contingencies (103). As far as Gus is concerned, Lily should make Rosedale happy to receive more tips: "But there is one thing you might do for me; and that is, just to be a little civil to Rosedale" (103). Although Lily has an insight to Rosedale's lack of credibility, she suppresses it for the sake of her venture. Rosedale is looked down upon as a 'social ascent' in Lily's social milieu. He is certainly not a favorite of Lily who "had always snubbed and ignored him" (36). He provides credit for himself by giving advice on the stock-market. "Rosedale's first successful social interactions come about through his willingness to introduce men like Gus Trenor to advantageous deals" (Robinson 343). When he shows up at Lily's house inviting her to the opera, she cannot afford to reject him. She thus becomes a plaything between Gus Trenor and Simon Rosedale, the former constantly pressing her to satisfy his and Rosedale's wishes and the latter insinuating her that he has access to information about her and unless she comes into line, he may damage her reputation.

At the night of the opera, Lily ends up being cornered by Gus, who presses for an amorous trip to Bellomont. Taken aback, Lily tries to reject him quietly and cautiously as not to cause any outburst of anger, yet Gus puts more pressure on her: "'Hang talking!

That's what you always say', returned Trenor, whose expletives lacked variety. 'You put me off with that at the Van Osburgh wedding- but the plain English of it is that now you've got what you wanted out of me, you'd rather have any other fellow about' (124). Gus' strategy is to talk her into the idea that she owes him considerably and to make his service look like indispensable. He also suggests that Lily consents to a fair exchange of favors with other men and it is incumbent upon her to make sure Gus also gets his fair share. "Ah-you'll borrow from Selden or Rosedale- and take your chances of fooling them as you've fooled me! Unless-unless you've settled your other scores already-I'm the only one left out in the cold" (149). Gus shows some nerve in treating her as if he owns her: "I'll tell you what I want: I want to know just where you and I stand. Hang it, the man who pays for the dinner is generally allowed to have a seat at table" (148). Lily is totally unprotected in the face of his aggressively manipulative strategy. Although she agrees to take a walk with him in the park to guarantee the continuity of cheques, she has an inherent knowledge of the fact that she is playing with fire: "Miss Bart had in fact been treading a devious way, and none of her critics could have been more alive to the fact than herself; but she had a fatalistic sense of being drawn from one wrong turning to another" (133). Lily, however, never deliberates about the crucial question whether it is worth taking the risk of tarnishing her reputation by succumbing to Gus's wishes. Her ambition for being a part of the New York jet-set seems to be above every other consideration, even her liking for Selden: "'Ah, love me, love me-but don't tell me so!' she sighed with her eyes in his and before he could speak she had turned and slipped through the arch of boughs" (142). Selden knows that he cannot provide Lily with expensive clothes and jewels but he expects her to appreciate him for his genuine emotions, not for his material assets. His expectations are however based on naive impulses, which Lily lacks. Her letting go of the genuine chance of happiness with the man who truly loves her shows Lily's clear perspective of what she wants most. Her obsession with what Thornstein Veblen calls "conspicuous consumption" makes her a victim of Gus' tricks (15). Drawing her to his house under the pretense that it is an invitation from his wife, Gus puts her in a very compromising position. As she is seen coming out of his house, Lily becomes the subject of the town-talk about financial and amorous involvement with a married man: "Her beauty and her need to use it make her vulnerable to false assumptions about her behavior and lessen her credibility" (Robinson 347). Much as she knows how to use her beauty as a manipulative instrument, Lily is not good at handling others' manipulation. Gus Trenor's treachery engenders disastrous results for her. In Lily's milieu, 'false assumptions' can cause irrevocable damage. The gossip quickly finds its way to her aunt, Mrs. Peniston, the epitome of Victorian morality: "'Lily and Gus Trenor?' she said, growing so suddenly pale [...] such things were never heard of in my day. And my own niece!" (129). Mrs. Peniston's reaction is decisive considering Lily's dependence on her. The terms are very clear with Mrs. Peniston: She provides Lily with abode and income and in return, she expects an immaculate social conduct from her niece. Lily has the foreboding that she will be punished in the strictest form: "Her relation with her aunt was as superficial as that of chance lodgers who pass on stairs. But even the two had been in closer contact, it was impossible to think of Mrs. Peniston's mind as offering shelter or comprehension to such misery as Lily's" (151). Lily knows inherently that her aunt cannot tolerate disgrace. Her punishment takes the form of disinheritance and exclusion from all the other privileges provided by Mrs. Peniston: "It seemed to Lily, as Mrs. Peniston's door closed on her, that she was taking a final leave of her old life" (220). Lily blames herself for what happens to her: "I am bad through and through -I want admiration, I want excitement, I want money-" (166). The feeling of guilt

shows her internalization of her oppression. Lily is not capable of seeing that she is made a victim by those who mercilessly manipulate her.

The volatility and deceptiveness of the speculative economy is reduplicated in the novel's view of the transformation of social relations into depthless, insincere, and volatile affairs. Assimilating the economic reality, the social scene also evolves into a cruel and manipulative environment in which fair competition becomes an aggressive battle. One such aggressive risk-taking behavior involves Bertha Dorset's desire for distracting her husband's attention during their cruise in Mediterranean so that her adulterous affair with Ned Silverton can pass unnoticed. Bertha's deceptive strategy involves employing Lily as the distracting factor. According to her scheme, Lily uses her charms on Bertha's husband, George, which keeps him totally ignorant of her affair taking place under his nose. The deal is very attractive for Lily, who cannot pass the offer of three months of cruising in the Mediterranean and the opportunity of social interaction with noble people. "We all know that's what Bertha brought her abroad for", Carry Fisher says, "When Bertha wants to have a good time she has to provide occupation for George [...] and of course Lily's present business is to keep him blind" (184). When she realizes that she takes a serious risk for three months of free entertainment, it is too late: "That was what she was 'there for': it was the price she had chosen to pay for three months of luxury and freedom from care" (217). Once again succumbing to a friend's wishes, Lily runs headlong towards another scandal. Bertha's scheme indeed works flawlessly and George Dorset takes a genuine interest in her. Lily, however, finds herself harrassed by rumors. Pretending to be jealous, Bertha starts accusing Lily of having an affair with her husband and uses it as a pretext to kick her off the yacht. At the end of the cruise, Bertha emerges as victorious and reaps the benefit of her manipulations. She manages to hide her affair with Ned Silverton by diverting her guests' attention to Lily and George. Although found out, Bertha's cheating on her husband does not imperil her marriage as she has now the leverage on him thanks to Lily. Bertha through meticulous scheming and masterful manipulation squeezes a big win from her investments without risking too much cost. In the novel's presentation of the jet-set scene, someone's gain means someone else's loss. Just like Gus, Bertha betrays her unsuspecting friend, Lily, who finds herself in a morally and socially compromising position as the femme fatale who seduces her friends' husbands. Expelled from the yacht, Lily pays dearly for taking the risk of being an accomplice in an immoral scheme with the expectation of gain. Lily's speculative ventures never work out as the risks she takes are too great to handle.

A grave mistake Lily makes is to allow herself being immersed in fine manipulation, which emerges as a form of oppression in the novel. Selden observes her natural talent in an astonished manner: "She was 'perfect' to everyone: subservient to Bertha's anxious predominance, good-naturedly watchful of Dorset's moods, brightly companionable to Silverton and Dacey [...] as Selden noted the fine shades of manner by which she harmonized herself with her surroundings, it flashed on him that to need such adroit handling, the situation must indeed be desperate" (186). Lily's chameleon-like abilities are supposed to save her from an insecure and unpromising future. Selden is not wrong in inferring that something oppresses Lily: "He seemed to see her poised on the brink of a chasm, with one graceful foot advanced to assert her unconsciousness that the ground was failing her" (186). Lily is totally blind to the fact that she is the one who is manipulated by those who hardly care for her welfare. At this point, Selden cannot help noticing that although she is surrounded by vultures, no warning will help her against them for she is in acceptance of the situation and even seems to enjoy it. Lily indeed seems to have the symptom of loving her oppression. It is this symptom that drives her to Rosedale in the moment when she feels a deep despair. Early in the novel, believing her abundant options,



Lily rejects Rosedale's marriage proposal as she is repulsed by his 'reified' notion of marriage: "I've got the money [...] and what I want is the woman-and I mean to have her too" (174). Making his offer, Rosedale shows a strict business rationality: "You're not very fond of me-yet-but you're fond of luxury, and style, and amusement, and of not having to worry about cash. You like to have a good time, and not to have to settle for it; what I propose to do is to provide for the good time and do the settling" (175). In his undertaking of a clarification of the applications of the concept, 'reification', Timothy Bewes points to the ways in which it may inform matrimonial relationship: "It may be applied at different socio-historical moments to marriage—a social form in which an essentially material, economic relation between two people appears in an abstract form as a thing" (12). For Rosedale, marriage is indisputably the 'thing', namely, an instrument that helps his social ascension. His objective, therefore, is not to win Lily's heart but benefit from her instrumental role in climbing to a higher social stratum. To maintain his profitable transactions with the wealthy, he needs to have an equal footing in their world and Lily can provide him the access. Having all these calculations in the back of his mind, Rosedale nevertheless manages to sound as if he is doing a favor to Lily by offering her the comforts of cash. While Lily perceives his utilitarian scheme behind his courting, in all her naiveté, she believes that Rosedale has genuine feelings for her: "Under the utilitarian motive of Rosedale's wooing she had felt, clearly enough, the heat of personal inclination. She would not have detested him so heartily had she not known that he dared to admire her" (229). In her naive way of thinking, Lily thinks that his admiration for her is persistent and she has power over him she can use as she chooses. So, in the early stage of their interaction, she rejects Rosedale's proposal considering that she has better options. Only after the disasters come in her way—she is seen as a disgraced woman by an important portion of the society—, because she runs out of options, she turns to Rosedale.

Lily's final communication with Rosedale is interesting in showing her doomed acquiescence. Acting under the assumption that his marriage proposal is still valid, she decides to talk to Rosedale. The awareness of risking her honor makes it difficult for her to talk: "she suddenly cut short the culmination of an impassioned period by turning upon him the grave loveliness of her gaze. 'I *do* believe what you say, Mr. Rosedale', she said quietly; 'and I am ready to marry you whenever you wish'" (240). Her wounded honor is yet to bear more pain. The final blow comes in the form of Rosedale's rejection of her: "'My dear Miss Lily, I'm sorry if there's been a little misapprehension between us—but you made me feel my suit was so hopeless that I had really no intention of renewing it'" (240). He, of course, refrains from any direct reference to the rumors about her and from voicing his own opinion of her as 'damaged goods', which renders a matrimonial suit between them impossible. Yet, perceiving her dire situation and with the intent of taking advantage of that, he also takes his shot about inducing her into an affair: "'Why do you talk of saying goodbye? Ain't we going to be good friends all the same?' he urged, without releasing her hand. She drew it away quietly. 'What is your idea of being good friends?' [...] 'Making love to me without asking me to marry you?'" (241). Since Rosedale does not need her to ensure his social ascension anymore, he does not need to renew his proposal, either. Instead, he offers a deal that absolves him from responsibilities. Rosedale, in fact, is convinced that he can have Lily for a much cheaper price now. She becomes a bargain for him. The humiliation she has to bear is far deeper than she could ever imagine. What renders the scene compelling is the knowledge that the deceptive mechanisms that cause Lily's ruin are the same she repeatedly turns for help. The victim of the speculative economy and its agents, Lily is not only duped but also humiliated in a way she does not deserve. The novel successfully draws attention to the fact that the cruelty of the system

puts her in the mercy of the perpetrators. She loses all her capital in the stock-market because of Rosedale's useless tips; whereas, if she kept it, she would not need to humiliate herself to the extent of throwing herself at his feet. She nevertheless still relies on his so-called affections for her and regards him as a kind of saviour. Buying their 'overvalued assets' is a useful metaphor that brings clarity to her dealings with these people—Trenor, Rosedale, and Bertha Dorset. They promise her too much but actually give her nothing and, in fact, cause her ruin. They put up such a lustrous front that Lily is drawn to it like a moth. The brightness of the dreams they weave for her disguises the dark void behind. Yet, Lily is already blinded by the glow and wants to become a part of it. She, therefore, allows to be used and taken advantage of by them, and then, she lets herself to be discarded by them. She becomes the greatest fool in the deceptive social scheme. Holding them in high esteem and trusting them her money and her honor turns against her. Lily's end is tragic. Deprived of her capital, her good reputation, her status, she dies in a way she has most feared: surrounded by dinginess.

*The House of Mirth* can be regarded as a masterpiece in its treatment of superficial and deceptive values' replacement of fundamental social values as a similar process to the bloating of the assets in the stock-market. Just as naive buyers are duped into buying assets, the value of which is only illusory being the result of manipulative transactions, the unsuspecting heroine, Lily Bart, falls for dreams of easy fortune and ends up giving more than she makes. Wharton brilliantly shows the correspondence between the economic behavior and social behavior. The manipulation in the stock-exchange is reduplicated in the social scene where social interaction is prevailed by exchange and, furthermore, trick and deception. A product of this system Lily yields to the oppressive reality of manipulation. What primarily motivates her is material gain and popularity among the rich, yet the fundamental irony of the novel is her lack of awareness of the fact that she hardly needs to pay a high price for them.

### Works Cited

- Bewes, Timothy. *Reification, Or, The Anxiety of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 2002.
- Dimock, Wai-Chee. "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*" in *The House of Mirth*. Shari Benstock. ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 1994.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital* Vol. III. Part V. Division of Profit into Interest and Profit of Enterprise. Interest-Bearing Capital. Chapter 23. Interest and Profit of Enterprise. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch23.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch23.htm).
- Robinson, S. Lilian. "The Traffic in Women: A Cultural Critique of *The House of Mirth*" in *The House of Mirth*. Shari Benstock. ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 1994.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *Conspicuous Consumption*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth*. Boston: Bedford, 1994.



## The Intersections of Magical Realism and Transnational Feminism in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

Anja Mrak

**Abstract:** The article explores the intersection of magical realism and transnational feminism in Christina García's 1992 *Dreaming in Cuban*. Though the formation of one's identity and constructions of belonging (familial/national/cultural/political) are the central concerns of the novel, they are recast in magical realist terms to question the primacy of certain hegemonic paradigms. The inherent duality of magical realism also motivates a re-examination of the position of women in transnational contexts, effectively overcoming the sort of lack of cultural and historical understanding and awareness that characterises representations of female experience across the world. Specifically, García warns of the dangers of rigid ideologies and boundaries that are divorced from conditions in the real world but to which the modern world is in thrall. To counter this, the author presents a family chronicle that facilitates and validates alternative (female) spaces, histories, stories and perspectives, without attempting to write a definitive version.

**Keywords:** Christina García, *Dreaming in Cuban*, magical realism, transnational feminism, identity and belonging

Magical realism was first perceived as a literary phenomenon exclusive to Latin America, but soon became a literary mode employed the world over, in no small part due to its inherently hybrid nature and anti-imperialist discourse.<sup>1</sup> The ability of magical realism to open alternative perspectives on society, culture, and history also makes it an effective literary mode for rendering transnational issues. It achieves this by way of incorporating diverse voices, thereby facilitating a re-examination of various—even contradictory—ways of codifying reality in an attempt to topple the monochromatic narrative of imperialism, globalisation, and other systems that reinforce oppression. Similarly, transnational feminism eschews particularistic discourse, and, in turn, encourages dialogue and signals attention to the intersections of gender, race, nationality, and sexuality. If magical realism functions to blur the boundaries between the “real” and the magical, transnational feminism endeavours to deconstruct and dismantle the West/Third World (Non-West) hierarchy. Christina García's 1992 *Dreaming in Cuban*, I argue, embodies the aims and concerns of both magical realism and transnational feminism.

In the centre of the novel is the theme of identity and belonging, be it to one's family, nation, or political creed. As Nira Yuval-Davis notes, “[b]elonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’”, while “[t]he politics of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities” (2006, 197). In the novel the correlation between political and

---

<sup>1</sup> The roots of magical realism can be traced back to 1925, when German art critic Franz Roh coined the term to describe an emerging style of painting. The heyday of magical realism in literature was undoubtedly the Latin American “el boom” in the 1960s and 1970s, with Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*, 1967) becoming the prototypical text (Hart 1).

private/familial spheres of life is underscored, as the del Pino family is politically and geographically divided by the Cuban revolution, with their opposing views and affiliations preventing them from building a closer relationship. “[F]amilies are essentially political” and sooner or later one is compelled “to choose sides”, one of the characters most tellingly observes (García 86). The politicisation of family relationships takes place within a context of migration, which opens questions of the female experience in transnational space. The novel queries and critiques how committing oneself to a nationalist hegemonic discourse and its politics of belonging re-affirms “the boundaries that separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them’” (2006, 204). The reader bears witness to the intricate processes of identity formation of individual characters as well as how and to what extent family figures in it. A magical realist text, *Dreaming in Cuban* deploys neo-fantastic elements, mainly to probe the relativity of space in fostering family bonds, and recasts the lens through which to view the historical events of the Cuban revolution—here seen through the eyes of three female protagonists. Though their singular views may be partial, their combination suggests that no one single univocal perspective can sufficiently encapsulate such systems as Cuban communism or American capitalism. This engenders a re-evaluation of hegemonic and ideological representations of both past and contemporary historical moments. Alternative perspectives, characteristic of magical realism, highlight “the conflicting positions that define the Cuban Revolution without encouraging polar thinking or advocating one perspective over another” (Tate 147).

This article, then, examines the intersections of magical realism and transnational feminism as manifest in García’s novel. It does so by first explicating the conventions of the literary mode of magical realism, specifically, its inherent potential for subversion and deconstruction of Eurocentric notions of identity, reality, meaning, and truth. It then turns to the critical thought developed by transnational feminism, which centres on purging reductionist representations of women the world over. Key thematic, textual, and narrative components are thus extrapolated to acknowledge the lure and social power of hegemonic ideologies and identity politics as foregrounded in *Dreaming in Cuban* and to destabilise such univocal constructions by proposing alternatives to the traditional coherent image of identity and reality.

The body of texts labelled as magical realism comprises a wide array of works that share one hallmark characteristic: the coexistence of two mutually exclusive ontological codes within a single fictional environment (Durix 188). However, in delimiting magical realism from other literary modes or genres, this feature proves to be too all-encompassing. Thus in her 1985 *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony*, Beatrice Amaryll Chanady identifies the following formal criteria of magical realism in an effort to sufficiently demarcate it from fantastic literature: the text facilitates an amalgamation of “realist” and “supernatural–magical” elements, whereby both perspectives are equally autonomous and coherent, and presupposes an unproblematic acceptance of the supernatural by the narrator and literary personae, as well as the reader (Chanady 18-23).<sup>2</sup> Accepting the supernatural is therefore the necessary criterion of magical realism and precisely what sets it apart from the fantastic: “[W]hile in the fantastic the supernatural is perceived as problematic, since it is patently antinomious with respect to the rational framework of the text, the supernatural in magical realism is accepted as part of reality. What is antinomious on the semantic level is resolved on the level of fiction” (30).

---

<sup>2</sup> The origin of the magical/supernatural varies according to the cultural environment of the author, Brenda Cooper notes, and may be “taken from any source that the writer chooses, sycritized [sic] with a developed realistic, historical perspective” (16).

Wendy B. Faris further delineates the mode of magical realism as adhering to five primary characteristics: the text features an “irreducible element of magic”; there is a “strong presence of the phenomenal world”; “the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events”; “the narrative merges different realms”; and, finally, “magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity” (7). Tomo Virk observes that, according to these criteria alone, magical realism would also subsume works by authors such as Kafka, Grass, and Nabokov, and proposes to qualify Chanady’s definition by including characteristics based on content/subject matter, namely, that magical realism critiques Eurocentric discourse, incorporates mythology, diverse timelines, and alternative views of history (134-5).

Though the practicability of such descriptive criteria in examining works of magical realism is indisputable, they nevertheless become too loose when attempting to formulate a precise definition of magical realism in terms of its poetics. What lies at the heart of magical realism is its dual nature—not merely in the sense of fusing two diametrically opposed literary traditions, but rather in that it serves as a vehicle for cultural and political scrutiny. In a recent study *What is Magical Realism? An Analysis of Literary Style* (2013), Kenneth S. Reeds develops a definition that considers both literary and extraliterary conventions, and reads magical realism as “a combination of the neo-fantastic used to recast history” (124).<sup>3</sup> “The neo-fantastic differs from its nineteenth-century predecessor because it does not presuppose that the positivist-based rules of reality govern its narration and instead allows space for a naturalized magic which is capable of elucidating aspects of the real world that cannot be expressed within the limits of realistic narration” (124). The quintessential neo-fantastic text is Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, in which the fantastic is completely naturalised. As Reeds maintains, Kafka

does not accept the positivist precept that the world can be identified, organized, and analysed [and] makes clear that within his story a positivist reality is not presupposed, but instead the supernatural was to be introduced into the narration from the beginning. This was not done to cause fear in the reader as his predecessors had often intended, but to open a part of reality either difficult or impossible to express within the constraints of rationalism. (84)

Jorge Luis Borges and Alejo Carpentier, whose works implement the neo-fantastic and the recasting of history respectively, are precursors to magical realism, which combines the two narrative strategies (124). The naturalisation of the fantastic (as found in Borges for example) corresponds to Chanady’s notion of the resolved antinomy of magical realism, that is, the fusion of two opposing codes “integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and characters in the fictitious world” (Chanady 23).

The second component of Reeds’ definition is the recasting of history. The inherent subversive potential of magical realism, already discussed by such literary critics as Zamora, Durix, and Faris, allows it “to elucidate historical voices which had previously been marginalized or ignored. These new perspectives on what happened do not replace established ideas of the past, but are placed next to them in order to augment our understanding of history through the addition of new points of view” (Reeds 104-5). Put differently, magical realism enables alternative representations of history and society at large. Such a recasting of history occurs in Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World*, Reeds

---

<sup>3</sup> The term neo-fantastic was coined by Jamie Alazraki to mark the evolution of the nineteenth-century fantastic, as previously outlined by Tzvetan Todorov (Reeds 81).

demonstrates, where the “official” historical narratives are displaced with the voices of African slaves. Carpentier also successfully integrates two opposing notions of historical perception—linear and cyclical—within the bounds of a single textual reality. Brenda Cooper calls this temporal dimension “third time”. Specific to magical realism, it describes a time that is neither linear historical nor circular mythical, but a blend of different temporal forms (Cooper 33).

Magical realism combines the neo-fantastic and recasting of history so as to “expose the tensions and add other voices which history has marginalized” (Reeds 155), and thus partakes of the processes of decolonisation. As noted by Stephen Slemon, “magic realism, as a socially symbolic contract, carries a residuum of resistance toward the imperial center and to its totalising systems of generic classification” (408). Through its duality, it points to the blind spots in the established historical narratives “to improve the future” (Reeds 146), since it “challenges borders, nationalities, and notions of reality” (211).

The multitude of voices and alternative/alternating perspectives—on the past and the present—that magical realism integrates makes it a vehicle well-suited for investigating transnational spaces and issues, including those pertaining to transnational feminism. Transnational feminism calls for aware and attentive approaches to women across the globe in an attempt to purge simplistic and essentialist portrayals, explanations, and views. Among the first to foreground this problematic was Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who, in her influential essay “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1986), alerts to the reductionist representation of the “Third World woman” in some Western feminist texts. She refutes the notion that women form a coherent and pre-constituted group, with no reference to class, ethnicity, or race—a notion that also presupposes a homogenous oppression of all women (21-2). Mohanty continues:

This average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “Third World” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This [...] is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions. (22)

She condemns such discourse as colonialist in essence and as instrumental in creating “Third World difference” (39-40). In “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited” she puts forward a more comprehensive and revitalised view that links “everyday life and local gendered contexts and ideologies to the larger, transnational political and economic structures and ideologies of capitalism” (225). She re-affirms the importance of understanding differences and particularities to “better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete and rigidly determining” (226). In the introduction to *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, Mohanty and Alexander describe transnational feminism as “a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces, rather than as *all* women across the world” (emphasis original) and as “an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples” (“Introduction” xix). Elsewhere, they also probe the question of transnational histories and practices in its colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial dimensions in various geographical contexts (2010, 24). To actively espouse differences and thereby put an end to the commonality of oppression, Mohanty argues for a focus on solidarity, decolonisation, anticapitalist critique, and antiglobalisation (7). She

concludes that “[d]iversity and difference are central values here—to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances” (7).

Magical realism shares with transnational feminism the potential and viability of decolonisation and of rendering specific, usually marginal, voices and realities. Its literary devices open the possibility “to disrupt fixed categories of truth, reality and history” and to “create a space beyond authoritative discourse where the unrepresentable can be expressed” (Bowers 77). This is inextricably bound up with the category of the transnational, which highlights “uneven and dissimilar circuits of culture and capital”, whereby “the links between patriarchies, colonialisms, racism, and other forms of domination become more apparent and available for critique and appropriation” (Grewal, Kaplan 2). Magical realist texts re-examine the processes of marginalisation and the exclusion of the “other” from discourse and power relations, and are notable for “their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness [that] encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures” (Zamora, Faris 6). They lend themselves to “exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic” (5). Such aims and conventions mirror those of transnational feminism, which, according to Ella Shohat, “challenges a Eurocentric ordering of women’s cultures, les/bi/gay identities, and feminist histories. It questions the benevolence of ‘allowing’ other voices to add themselves to the ‘mainstream’ of feminism by looking at feminism as *itself* a constitutively multi-voiced arena of struggle” (15-6) (emphasis original).

Bowers maintains that magical realism cannot be geographically contained (31) and is frequently employed by “cross-cultural women with a political agenda relating to gender and the marginalization of cultures” (54). The following are some of the cross-cultural female authors known for using magical realism: Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Ana Castillo, and Cristina García. Their works situate the legacy of “official” history in the light of patriarchal, nationalist and colonial oppression, and explore the means whereby agency and liberation of female subjectivity and bodies may be obtained. That the culturally hybrid character of magical realism connects it “to postcolonial and border feminism” and the articulation of “new strategies for negotiating borders between cultures and individuals” has already been noted by Faris (171). The issue of memory is central to magical realism, as it “tends to thematise memory-related concerns, exploring in particular the suppressed or erased aspects of memory” (Rzepa 22). Memory often demands a re-thinking of history, while it also calls into question contemporary political and power-related concerns, including gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Transnational feminism, Grewal and Kaplan write, is used to “articulate the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, ‘authentic’ forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-judicial oppression on multiple levels” (17). By the same token, Nira Yuval-Davis differentiates between “identity politics”, which “homogenizes and naturalizes social categories and groupings, denying shifting boundaries and internal power differences and conflicts of interest”, and “transversal politics”, an alternative where “perceived unity and homogeneity are replaced by dialogues which give recognition to the specific positioning of those who participate in them as well as to the ‘unfinished knowledge’ that each such situated positioning can offer” (1997, 131). Located at the intersection of feminism and postcolonialism, transnational feminism strives to liberate gender from preconceived ideologies and representations relating to female identity in ways that are parallel to magical realism, a literary mode that functions to reveal fissures in discourse, to promote



dialogue and alternative perspectives through its duality, and to deconstruct oppressive images of women.

*Dreaming in Cuban* is a family saga, which traces the lives of three generations of women of the del Pino family. Their relationships mirror the broader political situation between Cuba and the United States of America in the years after the communist revolution, which took place between 1953 and 1959. The polyvocal, fragmented, and non-linear narrative structure represents a modern family chronicle—one that grants no space for unified truth and history.

“Identities are narratives”, Yuval-Davis summarises Martin Denis-Constant, “stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)”, and as such comprise the “constructions of belonging” (2006, 202). *Dreaming in Cuban* explores identity formation through three layers of Cuban migration: the narrative of those who stayed in Cuba, of the first generation of migrants in the USA, and of the “one-and-a-half” generation that came to the USA as children. Representative of these three generations are grandmother Celia, her daughter Lourdes, and her granddaughter Pilar respectively. By providing insight into identity-forming processes and influences, the novel affirms the notion that “[i]dentities are too complex to be captured by concepts that rely on national borders for reference” (Schultermandl, Toplu 11). Born in Cuba but raised in the United States, Pilar is torn between the competing and contradictory voices of her emigrational legacy, with her estranged mother and her geographically remote grandmother representing the two major components of her identity. The negotiation of her hyphenated identity (Cuban-American) is foregrounded by the narrative structure in that she is the only protagonist to relate her story in the first person and implicitly acts as an agent/subject in the formation of her narrative, while Celia’s and Lourdes’s stories are related by an omniscient narrator, which posits them as victims/objects of their own fixed beliefs. This is one of the narrative strategies the novel utilises in an effort to make the reader re-think the status and the danger of clinging to rigid ideologies and essentialist perspectives.

The del Pino family memoir opens with their family tree—a solid structure that signifies linear progression and causality. The family history soon falls into disarray, however, as narrative fragments, flashbacks, glimpses of the future, and non-chronological events—which nonetheless manage to reveal a curious interconnectedness—manifest that unified and linear narratives are no longer viable in a transnational context. Chapter division as it is found in the novel also works in the service of disrupting traditional ideas of logical sequence, that is, that one event leads to another. Here, these divisions generally ignore logical, or “natural”, progression. Instead, some chapters reveal past events in the form of flashbacks, other recount the same event but from a different narrative perspectives, still other offer intimations of what is yet to come to pass. Traditionally, the purpose of chapter division was also to provide reference, and though the novel does sometimes, though not invariably, mark the chapters, it does so in such a way as to subvert the sort of univocal and “objective” perspective one would expect to find in a chronicle. Chapters are variously labelled with names of focalisers, important years, or poetic titles. While this does provide a vague reference, it also makes it harder for the reader to form a coherent narrative. This is a critique of the Eurocentric perception of reality as a rectilinear progression from an origin to an ending. The implied statement of a fragmented narrative is that time and space are relative constructs that function to consolidate our belief in universal coherence and truth. The narrative structure of *Dreaming in Cuban* and the magical realist devices it employs open a space where traditionally held notions of time and identity are dismantled. The use of different narrators, time dimensions, and even generic

discourses (such as letters and poems) disconfirms the idea of a unified or coherent narrative as well as personal identity, ushering in a fluid and compound structure.

Pilar seeks to establish a connection with Cuba, but this “is made difficult by her mother’s alternating silence and tirades on the subject, both of which compound Pilar’s alienation from her Cuban heritage and her desire to reconnect with it” (Tate 153). The spatial distance that separates her from Cuba and her grandmother results in a nostalgia for a world she is, in fact, entirely unfamiliar with. This leads to an estrangement between Pilar and her mother, and the former finds solace in conversing with her grandmother through telepathy, a neo-fantastic element that facilitates communication irrespective of geographical distance: “I hear her [Celia] speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day” (García 29). Mediating between the familiar setting of New York and an imagined/idealised Cuba, Pilar’s desire to belong drives her closer to her grandmother and fuels her wish to return to Cuba. “Pilar’s negotiation of her identity is nevertheless overshadowed and overdetermined by this nostalgia and its own confused origins” (Sáez 131). She confesses: “I feel much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom, even though I haven’t seen my grandmother in seventeen years. [...] she’s left me her legacy nonetheless—a love for the sea and the smoothness of pearls, an appreciation of music and words, sympathy for the underdog, and a disregard for boundaries” (García 176).

Pilar welcomes all the different aspects of her identity, though she is discouraged by her mother, who only allows for a singular interpretation of history, prompting Pilar to comment, “This is a constant struggle around my mother, who systematically rewrites history to suit her views of the world. [...] It makes her see only what she wants to see instead of what’s really there” (176). Lourdes is unable to accept her daughter’s separate identity and invades her private space on several occasions by reading her diary and supervising her doings (Tate 154). She refuses to settle for her daughter’s indifference towards her own strong endorsement of the American political system. Blaming the political situation for not being able to explore her roots, Pilar muses, “I resent the hell out of politicians and the generals who force events on us that structure our lives that dictate the memories we’ll have when we’re old. Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there’s only my imagination where our history should be” (García 138). Her desire to belong becomes increasingly more pronounced, not knowing whether her place is in New York or Cuba. At one point she exclaims, “I’ve been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn’t feel like home to me” (58), yet later on she asks herself, “Cuba. Planet Cuba. Where the hell is that?” (134). Torn also between the Spanish and English language, she finds some common ground in the universal language of painting.

If Pilar represents an open-minded approach to constructing and negotiating one’s identity, her mother Lourdes and grandmother Celia embody fixed and rigid identities based on hegemonic political ideologies. Yet the complexity of the novel lies precisely in its objectivity; though clearly standing in opposition to Pilar’s impartiality, Celia and Lourdes are by no means two-dimensional characters. Their slavish adherence to hegemonic ideologies and their identity politics in fact originate in traumatic experience, which forecloses simplistic judgment of their actions and interactions with others. And despite Pilar’s struggle to understand their motivations, pondering “how Mom could be Abuela Celia’s daughter. And what I’m doing as my mother’s daughter. Something got horribly scrambled along the way” (178), the reader is immediately granted insight into the past experience of the protagonists and is therefore encouraged from the outset of the novel to maintain a high level of objectivity in order to grasp the narrative reality in its entirety.

After suffering a miscarriage and being brutally raped by a revolutionary soldier who uses a knife to carve an illegible inscription on her stomach, Lourdes emigrates to the United States of America with her husband and their two-year-old Pilar. She sees migration as a chance for a clean slate and an opportunity to reinvent herself: "Lourdes considers herself lucky. Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. [...] She wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her" (73). However, the traumatic past and the memories of Cuba return to haunt her. Through the gendered violence of rape, the revolution subordinated Lourdes's body. It is therefore imperative that she regain control over it; she attempts to do this first with compulsive over-eating and sexuality, and then with obsessive dieting. Magical realism unhinges traditional temporality, allowing the past to physically enter the present as an embodiment of the traumatic memory of Lourdes's rape and as such expands the general notion of memory. Her trauma is underscored by way of a literalised metaphor, a device specific to magical realism which enables a "movement from the abstract to the concrete, from the figurative to the literal, from the word to the thing" so that abstract words or phrases "acquire a distinctly material presence" (Hegerfeldt 68-9). After many years have already passed, memories of the rape manifest physically: Lourdes "smells the brilliantined hair, feels the scraping blade, the web of scars it left on her stomach" (García 196). Anne Hegerfeldt further maintains that by "rendering the metaphor 'real' the text emphasises the power such constructions have over human thought and human action, and the very real suffering they can inflict" (69).

In direct correlation to her traumatic experiences in Cuba, Lourdes constructs her belonging by fully embracing the American dream, consumerism, and capitalism; she runs her own bakery business and volunteers for the New York auxiliary police force. She partakes of anything diametrically opposed to Cuba, seeing America as a land of freedom and justice, and sharing the American fear of communism: "Mom [Lourdes] says 'Communist' the way some people says 'cancer', low and fierce" (26). She works from dawn to dusk and she has "envisioned a chain of Yankee Doodle bakeries stretching across America" (171). Her devotion to capitalism is on a par with her controlling and near-paranoid behaviour: she hires cheap immigrant labour to help in her bakery, only to fire them on suspicion of stealing and being idle. She has a stepmotherly attitude towards immigrants—which, in light of her own status as immigrant, is highly ironic. Her daughter provides the following related comment, "[s]he believes she's doing them a favour by giving them a job and breaking them to American life" (32). Lourdes' service in the auxiliary police force is another example of her impulse to control her surroundings and feel empowered. Since she clearly divides the USA and Cuba into "us" and "them", she feels the need to extensively and publicly exhibit her newly acquired American identity, for example at the opening of her second bakery joined with the celebration of the bicentennial "birthday" of America, selling "tricolor cupcakes and Uncle Sam marzipan" (136).

If Lourdes is to perceive migration as a new beginning, she must revisit her past, memories, and beliefs and appropriate them in such a way that they correspond to her vision of her adopted homeland and become a vehicle for her new identity. "Migration becomes the means by which memories are narrated in specific historical con-texts, infusing the empty/open/silent spaces in history, discourses, and politics with resistant and alternative paradigms" (Stefanko 50-1). As Pilar poignantly notes: "Mom's views are strictly black-and-white. It's how she survives" (García 26). Lourdes' wish is to eliminate Cuba from her consciousness: "Cuba is present only as an absence, an absence chosen and, hence, quite satisfactory" (Vasquez). While Lourdes rejects everything relating to Cuba, including her mother, a fervent supporter of Castro's regime, she is deeply devoted to her

father, who dies in America following a long illness. They continue communicating even after his death—an ability that is reminiscent of Pilar’s telepathy. During his last visit he explains that he is partially to blame for her mother rejecting her at birth, when she handed her to him saying “I will not remember her name” (García 43).<sup>4</sup> He reveals to Lourdes that her sister died and that he knows about the rape, urging her to return to Cuba to find closure—“There are things you must do, things you will only know when you get there” (196). By way of magical realist elements, such as telepathic communication or post-mortem visits, the permeability of borders is explored, be they spatial or ontological. Lourdes finds it extremely difficult to cross the geographical border between Cuba and the USA for fear that old wounds might reopen.

Back in Cuba, Celia represents Lourdes’ antipode. After her husband’s death, she pledges body and soul to the Cuban revolution and its vanguard, El Líder. By much the same token as Lourdes, Celia strives to assume control and empowerment through political and community work as well as by demonstrating her devotion publically. Cuba and the United States “inspire an exaggerated ideological passion [and] Lourdes and Celia uphold their respective ideologies by aiding in the submission of the population” (Holmes 122). She also underwent a traumatic experience when her husband Jorge left her with his mother and sister to punish her for a Spanish lover she had prior to marrying him. Subjected to constant physical and emotional abuse, she experienced a breakdown and was confined to a mental institution shortly after she disavowed her newborn daughter. Jorge confides in Lourdes: “A part of me wanted to punish her [Celia]. For the Spaniard. I tried to kill her, Lourdes. I wanted to break her” (García 195). He loses Celia once again to another love—her love for the revolution. She develops erotic feelings for El Líder; she daydreams of being seduced by him and keeps “a framed photograph of him by her bed, where her husband’s picture used to be” (110). While Lourdes enforces law and order in an auxiliary police unit, Celia scouts the coast for invaders and serves as a judge in the People’s court, which invokes in her a feeling of self-importance. Unable to mend her family, Celia finds solace in political work, giving the nation what she cannot give to her children. She contemplates, “[h]ow is it possible that she can help her neighbours and be of no use at all to her children” (117). And even though she is able to maintain a bond with Pilar, the telepathic link between them eventually also breaks.

The novel culminates in Lourdes’s and Pilar’s return to Cuba. Yet the crossing of geographical borders does not necessarily entail a crossing of ideological borders, which Pilar immediately senses: “Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all” (219). Pilar seizes the opportunity to reconnect with her grandmother and to recast her nostalgic vision of Cuba. The bond or communication between Pilar and Celia is re-established and its significance stressed through a literalised metaphor: “As I listen, I feel my grandmother’s life passing to me through her hands. It’s a steady electricity, humming and true” (222). The natural beauty of Cuba becomes integrated with the atrocities of the revolution, which Celia refuses to acknowledge, since they do not mirror her idea of the revolution. She does, however, subconsciously reveal them to her granddaughter: “I [Pilar] know what my

---

<sup>4</sup> This traumatic event severs the bond between Lourdes and Celia and antagonism marks their future relationship, though both are wholly unaware that similar traumatic experiences affected their lives. The novel again stresses the pain of the moment by the way of the literalised metaphor; as Lourdes wishes to confide in her mother, she physically feels the memory of her mother’s rejection on her body: “Instead, like a brutal punishment, Lourdes feels the grip of her mother’s hand on her bare infant leg” (García 238).

grandmother dreams. Of massacres in distant countries, pregnant women dismembered in the squares” (218). Romanticised notions of Cuba give way to a more objective understanding that it contains both positive and negative aspects. As noted by Samantha L. McAuliffe, the lens through which Pilar sees Cuba, one that is not biased or fragmentary, also enables her to facilitate a dialogue between her mother and grandmother, although she cannot fully conceive the antagonisms between the two, nor those between her mother and Cuba itself (5). Pilar ultimately establishes a connection with her lost heritage and reconciles her place between the two worlds. By accessing the other component of her identity, Pilar also reconsiders her own relationship with her mother and with the United States: “I know now it’s where I belong [New York]—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here [Cuba]” (García 236) (emphasis original). She learns that her hyphenated identity does not comprise two contradicting halves, but a cross-fertilisation of ideas, concepts, beliefs, languages, and truths.

“Pilar is the personification of the meeting between two cultures, languages, and histories which form something entirely new” (McAuliffe 6). This endorsement of both cultures is made evident when she begins to dream in Spanish, a language in which she is hardly proficient: “I’ve started dreaming in Spanish, which has never happened before. I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. There’s magic here working its way through my veins” (García 235). Her quest for a coherent identity poses questions of difference, and ultimately ends in a compound identity, which Trinh T. Minh-ha describes as: “The moment when the insider steps out from the inside she’s no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that underdetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out” (418). She realises that it is possible to occupy more than one cultural and national space at one time. This can be linked to Homi Bhabha’s concept of “third space”, that is, a space “which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as integrated, open, expanding code. [It] challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as homogenising, unifying force” (54). In her struggle to understand both her mother and grandmother without passing judgment, Pilar embodies a position favoured by transnational feminism and thus stands as an example of an identity politics which “deconstruct prevalent concepts of selfhood and thus open up new channels of cross-cultural conversations” (Schultermandl, Toplu 23).

In Cuba, Pilar also reveals that she possesses powers of clairvoyance and uncanny empathy, which seem to have been triggered when she was sexually assaulted by a group of young boys back in the USA: “Since that day in Morningside Park, I can hear fragments of people’s thoughts, glimpse scraps of the future. It’s nothing I can control. The perceptions come without warnings or explanations, erratic as lightning” (García 216). Pilar’s powers can be read in direct relation to the task with which her grandmother entrusts her, namely, to record the history of the family as well as public history—from both a female and a migrant perspective—and to fill in the blanks in the official history. Her chronicling will be all-encompassing, giving voices also to the forgotten and the forlorn, for as her grandmother holds, “She will remember everything” (245).

The compound identity of the novel, with its juxtaposition of narrators, focalisers, generic discourses, and temporal frames, mirrors the compound identity of Pilar as a woman in a transnational environment. Her identity and constructions of belonging are not fixed by the rigid and perceived boundaries of nation states and the hegemonic politics of identity and belonging they impose. Hyphenated identity as a term that implies a dual

identity can likewise be read as a limited construct based on essentialist sentiment and simplistic affiliations. *Dreaming in Cuban* wards against narratives of cultural homogenisation and proposes ones that articulate diversity and foster solidarity and understanding. It sees identity and reality as a meeting ground of various legacies, spaces, and meanings. Thus García liberates the traditional chronicle from its bondage to hegemonic discourse and univocal representations—both personal and public—of history, opening new, alternative (female) spaces, histories, and perspectives without pitting one against the other, without dividing space into “us” and “them”.

### Works Cited

- Alexander, M. Jacqui and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. “Cartographies of Knowledge and Power: Transnational Feminism as Radical Praxis” in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*. Amanda Lock Swarr, Richa Nagar. eds. Albany: State U of New York P, 2010. 23–45.
- . “Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements”. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. eds. New York and London: Routledge, 1997. xiii–xlii.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. 1994. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Bowers, Maggie Ann. *Magic(al) Realism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Chanady, Amaryll Beatrice. *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*. New York and London: Garland, 1985.
- Cooper, Brenda. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing With a Third Eye*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Durix, Jean-Pierre. *Mimesis, Genres and Post-colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism*. New York: Macmillan, 1998.
- Faris, Wendy B. *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004.
- García, Cristina. *Dreaming in Cuban*. 1992. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.
- Grewal, Inderpal, Caren Kaplan. “Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity” in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan. eds. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994. 1–33.
- Hart, Stephen M. “Introduction. Magical Realism: Style and Substance” in *A Companion to Magical Realism*. Stephen M. Hart, Wen-chin Ouyang. eds. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005. 1–13.
- Hegerfeldt, Anne C. “Contentious Contributions: Magic Realism goes British”. *Janus Head* 5.2 (2002): 62–86.
- Holmes, Amanda. “The Spatial Self: Remembering the Caribbean Diaspora in Esmeralda Santiago, Jamaica Kincaid and Cristina García”. *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 30.1 (2005): 109–128.
- McAuliffe, Samantha L. “Autoethnography and Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*”. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.4 (2011): 1–9.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. “Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, Ella Shohat. eds. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 415–419.

- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003.
- Reeds, Kenneth S. *What is Magical Realism? An Explanation of a Literary Style*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen P, 2013.
- Rzepa, Agnieszka. *Feats and Defeats of Memory: Exploring Spaces of Canadian Magic Realism*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009.
- Sáez, Elena Machado. "The Global Baggage of Nostalgia in Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*". *MELUS* 30.4 (2005): 129–147.
- Schultermandl, Silvia, Şebnem Toplu. "A Fluid Sense of Self: The Politics of Transnational Identity in Anglophone Literatures" in *A Fluid Sense of Self: The Politics of Transnational Identity*. Silvia Schultermandl, Şebnem Toplu. eds. Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2010. 11–24.
- Shohat, Ella. "Introduction". *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*. Ella Shohat. ed. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998. 1–62.
- Slemon, Stephen. "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse". *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Lois Parkinson Zamora, Wendy B. Faris. Durham. eds. London: Duke UP, 1995. 407–426.
- Stefanko, Jacqueline. "New Ways of Telling: Latinas' Narratives of Exile and Return". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 17.2 (1996): 50–69.
- Tate, Julee. "Matrilineal and Political Divisions in Cristina García's 'Dreaming in Cuban' and 'The Agüero Sisters'". *Letras Femeninas* 32.2 (2006): 145–163.
- Vasquez, Mary S. "Cuba as text and context in Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*". *Bilingual Review* 20.1 (1995): n. p.
- Virk, Tomo. *Strah pred naivnostjo*. Ljubljana: LUD Literatura, 2000.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging". *Patterns of Prejudice* 40.3 (2006): 197–214.
- . *Gender & Nation*. London: SAGE Publications, 1997.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson, Wendy B. Faris. "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s". *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Lois Parkinson Zamora, Wendy B. Faris. eds. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995. 1–11.

## Postcolonialism, Female Portrayal and Self Understanding in Selected Novels of Doris Lessing and Bessie Head

Adamu Pangmeshi

**Abstract:** This essay seeks to explore and portray the tensions in the lives of Doris Lessing and Bessie Head's female characters within the dialogic opposing tendencies such as male domination, oppression, power and powerlessness. It also seeks to demonstrate that in spite of this domineering stance of the men, women can still carve their own space. Although there is a constant hidden force which drives the females towards various extremes such as isolation, despair, survival and self-understanding, the women in this context have transformed themselves. In their novels, Lessing and Head concentrate more on personal lives of the protagonists but put them in relation with the patriarchal society. After having been pushed and confined to the wall by societal discourses, the characters finally come out of the threshold with a critical opinion of theirs and at the same time build a solid image of themselves which could be commented upon. To further this argument, I will employ the tenets of feminism and postcolonial theory.

**Keywords:** patriarchy, portrayal, isolation, despair, survival, post colonialism

Since time immemorial, women have continuously been dominated and relegated to the background either by societal discourses or patriarchy. Consequently, there is a constant hidden force which drives the females towards various extremes; isolation and despair, survival and self-understanding. Lessing and Head have been brought together in this paper for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are postcolonial authors who try to project the image of women in most of their writings. In spite of the fact that their writings have a bearing on South Africa, their thematic concerns in literature are similar. The tenets of feminism and postcolonial theory will be employed in this paper. Talking about feminism, feminist writers sometimes manipulate their female characters to fight against social structures that relegate women to an inferior position through resistance. Elizabeth Goodman in *Literature and Gender*, argues that "Feminist literary criticism is an academic approach to the study of literature which applies feminist thought to the analysis of literary texts and the contexts of their production and reception" (xi). In her book, *A Valediction of the Rights of Women* Mary Wollstonecraft, challenges the idea that women should exist to please men. She further proposes that women should receive the same treatment as men in education, job opportunities and politics. On his part, Raman Selden postulates that the central idea with feminism is to "challenge male chauvinism, and end women's exploitation by patriarchy at all levels" (135). This view matches Bill Ashcroft's when he states that feminist theory generally attempts to unmask, reject and fight for female equality (249). Lessing and Head in their selected texts, *The Grass is Singing*, *The Golden Notebook* and Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru*, present the female predicament in a patriarchal world. What is interesting is the fact that their ideas like Ashcroft's have unmasked and rejected the relegation of women to the background. They have involved themselves in a journey not only in quest for freedom against the shackles of custom and tradition but have become self-reliant. Lessing and Head's idea here is to demonstrate that change is inevitable in any



human society. To concur this point, Susan Arndt in *African Women's Literature: Orature and Intertextuality*, underscores that:

Feminism is a world view and way of life of women and men who as, individuals in groups and/organisation, actively oppose social structures responsible for the discrimination against, and oppression of women on the basis of their biological and social gender. Feminists do not only recognize the mechanisms of oppression. They also aim at overcoming them. (324)

This shows that feminism is engaged in fighting against difference and the marginalization of women. This will be discussed in the foregoing paragraphs. On the other hand postcolonial theory is of importance in this work. This is because it has to do with the questioning of unjust power relationships. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin et al note that "Postcolonial theory involves discussion about experiences of various kinds; migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial cultures such as history, philosophy, and linguistics" (1-2). This theory is very vast. An understanding of this theory will help to interrogate the complex relationship that exists between gender and patriarchy. Homi Bhabha is of the opinion that:

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and even forces of cultural representation involved in the context for political and social authority within modern world order. Postcolonial perspective emerge from the colonial testimony of third world countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within geopolitical divisions of East and West, north and South. (in Lazarus 3)

The task of postcolonial theory is therefore much but it must invariably seek to call the different facets of colonialism into question. This evidently involves women because they are not only dominated but marginalized. Rachel Bailey Jones in *Postcolonial Representations of Women: Critical Issues for Education* notes that:

Early well known scholars in the field (Cesaire, 1972; Fanon, 1963; Said, 1978,etc), articulated the psychological, academic, and cultural effects of colonialism from a male point of view [...] the colonizer and the colonized were assumed to be male and the effect on women and their important roles in the resistance movements were marginalized or ignored completely. (39)

Neil Lazarus in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* also underscores that "under contemporary circumstances of globalization and the almost complete sway of capitalism world-wide, the condition of women has become a more urgent issue than ever. Gender issues are thus inseparable from the project of postcolonial criticism" (201). Consequently the feminist movements like postcolonial criticism came about to check patriarchal attitude and evidently challenge it.

In *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing concentrates more on personal lives of the protagonists but puts them in relationship with the society. This falls in line with Ngugi Wathiong'O's idea that "literature is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society" (xv). Mary Turner, the protagonist in *The Grass is Singing* initially refuses marriage but is later constrained to do so by societal expectations. She is not strong enough to ignore the prejudices of the society concerning the role of woman and she simply decides to "conform to a woman

stereotype” (King 8). Through this marriage, she actually “evades responsibility for her own life” (9). This woman stereotype, however, does not correspond with her “self”. Following her decision, a great conflict arises concerning “the gap between what one is and what one aspires to be” (10). Mary’s loss of selfhood is a critical moment for her because “her idea of herself was destroyed” and she cannot recreate herself “(11). It is essential to take into account the fact that she “split into two selves, the one who feels totally without power, and the other whose power is ‘burrowed’ from the system which enforces her own oppression” (12). The constant struggle between these two selves is also the cause of her nervous breakdown.

As a matter of fact, the male-female relationship between Mary and Dick Turner as well as that between Frances Lennox and Johnny in Doris Lessing’s *The Sweetest Dream* go through different phases. There is no understanding between them. At first, Dick appears to represent a submissive husband who does not seem to make any attempts to defend himself against his wife. The narrator explains that “it had really been such an easy way to win Mastery over him, the sort of trick women use to defeat their home” (110). He does not seem to be the “boss” in their relationship in spite of the fact that he is the one who takes care of the farm to make a living. Due to the fact that he is unable to solve their problems, all the troubles are blamed on the inhospitable weather. They are depressed by making no profits on their farm and by living in poverty. Mary’s initial superiority however does not last for long. We are told that “she would have to sit like a queen bee in this house and force him to do what she wanted” (127). Mary is therefore presented as a lady who loves power and will power. Dick does not show submissiveness but his behaviour and attitude does so. In various conversations with his wife, he always ends up “apologizing, abasing her and her forgiving him” (75). This is part of where the tension between Dick and Mary lie. At first, Dick sees Mary as a “busy *and* popular woman with a secure place in the social life of the town” (52). Nevertheless, people made her to get married as she says, and this is what makes her unhappy in her current life. She feels her old life in the town might have been a better choice for her but for the constraints of the society. Apart from this, Mary has also demonstrated that she cannot take over the role of a man. As King says, She is not however allowed to assume the role of the boss, since she as a woman exists on the margins of the black/white power structure. This shows some kind of powerlessness in Mary. This is the status that she will strive to uplift. Her energy and efficiency threaten Dick’s position in this unjust power relation. Mary’s superiority over Dick, however, does not last for long as she would have liked. We are told that “if she were always with him, always demonstrating her superiority ability, his defensiveness would be provoked and he would refuse in the end, to do anything she wanted” (134). Mary wants Dick to work on his own, to be successful and not just wait. We are told that:

When she saw him weak and goalless, and pitiful, she hated him and the hate turned it on herself. She needed a man stronger than herself, and she was trying to create one out of Dick. If genuinely, simply because of the greater strength of his purpose, taken the ascendancy over her, she would have loved him, and no longer hated herself for becoming tied to a failure. (134)

Mary is portrayed as a lady who is confident of herself. She does not believe in any failure. She can be likened to Paulina Sebeso in Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*. She is an assertive woman who works in collaboration with Gilbert to ensure that the agricultural project should succeed in Golema Mmidi. Mary is thus portrayed as energetic and foresighted and would not want to be isolated.

However, Dick Turner is still unable to fulfill her expectations. This is what makes her feel dissatisfied. She tries to change the situation however unsuccessfully. Dick feels aggrieved for having not satisfied them. We are told that “he stubbornly went his own way, feeling as if she had encouraged him to swim in deep water beyond his strength, and then left him to his devices” (135). This is what has brought in despair. At this moment, there is still some hope about the future prosperity of the farm and many do not refuse to believe it. It is revealed only a few moments later that it is just her dream of hope. But suddenly her dreams turn into despair.

Mary has been making useless attempts to escape from the farm. As she cannot bear the life on the farm anymore, she goes to the town, regardless of the consequences. To her great surprise, she is not accepted by the local people who used to be friends. Dick does not reproach her for this escape. Instead, he feels more closely attached to her. We are told that:

He was attentively solicitous to her after her running away [...] for her return had bound him to her in gratitude for ever. If he had been a spiteful sort of man, he might have gone cold against her because it had really been such an easy way to win mastery over him, the sort of trick women use to defeat their men. But it never occurred to him. And after all, her running away had been genuine enough; though it had had the results that any calculating woman could have foreseen. (128)

We note that Dick cannot imagine living without her in spite of her solitude. As they get over this difficult phase of their relationship, they seem to get closer to each other again. He could not imagine returning to a house where they were not many and even her rages against her servants seemed to him, during that short time, endearing. He was grateful for the resurgence of vitality that showed itself in an increased energy, over the short comings and laziness of her houseboy. Their intimate relationship is underscored in the following lines thus, “[t]hey were moving gently towards a new relation; they were more truly together than they had ever been. But then it was that he became ill; and the new tenderness between them, which might have grown into something strong enough to save them both, was not yet strong enough to survive this fresh trouble” (130). At this point, Mary still feels she can change their lives and hence takes the responsibility for the farm in the course of Dick’s illness. Dick is worried that his wife, who will be in charge of the whole farm, will not manage it well. His worry is expressed in the lines below:

Every conscious moment he worried about the things that would be going wrong without his supervision. Mary nursed him like a baby for a week; consciously, but with impatience because of his fear for himself. Then the fever left him, and he was weak and depressed, hardly able to sit up. He now tossed and kicked and fretted, talking all the time about his farm work. (132)

Having cured himself, Dick eventually comes to take up the control of the farm again as if her sovereignty had been nothing, nothing at all. This shows an issue of powerlessness. When Mary proposes to start growing tobacco, he cannot stand it. Her interference into the affairs concerning the farm is unacceptable. Dick looked at her almost with horror, as an alien creature, who had no right to be with him, dictating what he should do. He presumably feels defeated and humiliated as a man. This is part of what pushes Mary towards isolation and despair. His reactions are expressed thus:

Well boss, can I think it over for a few days? [...] but his voice was strained with humiliation. And when she said irritably, I do wish you wouldn't call me boss. He did not answer, though the silence between them said eloquently what they were afraid to say. She broke it at last by rising briskly from the table, sweeping away the books and sitting with his thoughts [...] three days later he said quietly, his eyes averted, that he as arranging with native builders to put up tow barns. (155)

The word "boss" that Dick uses is a clear demonstration of Mary's initial superiority in their marriage. In fact, the only time she could bring herself to show endearments to her husband, is when she was feeling victorious and forgiving. His cravings for forgiveness and his abasement before her was the greatest satisfaction she knew, although she despised him for it. Put another way, Mary's feelings towards her husband are rather contradictory. Although she finds the idea of normal sexual relation with Dick repulsive, both her subconscious, expressed through dreams and her psychotic state towards the end of her life demonstrate the extent to which an abnormal or unusual sexual manifestation is desired. This psychological conflict is, undoubtedly, the cause of her dissatisfaction and her subsequent mental breakdown. It could be said that Mary's portrayal demonstrates a lady who is, energetic, conscious and ready to change her plight. She exerts power over Dick although it is short lived. She is so full of herself. This falls in line with the tenets of feminist criticism which has to do with challenging male chauvinism. In line with this, Donovan Josephine (2000) opines that "Feminists theorists in the natural rights tradition sought to argue, however, that women were citizens, were 'persons' entitled to the same basic rights as men" (21). It is with this idea in mind that Lessing has portrayed her female characters. Her portrayal has revealed the opposing tendencies that exist between them.

Even though the females in *The Golden Notebook* are presented in a different light, they are also portrayed as self conscious women. *The Golden Notebook* is a multi layered novel composed of four different notebooks that Anna, the protagonist writes. She identifies these notebooks in terms of colour. The blue notebook is her diary; the yellow notebook is composed of her experimental creative writing, a red notebook for her experience in politics, and a black notebook, in which she dwells on her writing. These notebooks are in essence an extension of her fragmented personality and serve to make explicit the splits in Anna's character. Moreover, there are also the sections entitled 'Free Women' in which a more objective, third person point of view is given to high light the course of events. Thus, the novel has at least five levels to it, and as Saul Green also points out, "This situation of an Anna who writes a novel about an Anna, who gives up writing is a closed, self-cancelling circle. Like a novel, Anna writes about an Ella who writes a novel about suicide or like the 'sadistic-masochinistic cycle' in which Saul and Anna are caught" (119). The metafictional layers of the novel increase in complication as Anna abandons writing in her separate notebooks and unifies them in a single Golden notebook. Furthermore, when the reader confronts the character of Saul at the end of the novel she or he discerns that he gives Anna the opening sentence of the novel which she intends to write, and which incidentally, is identical to that of the opening of *The Golden notebook* which is titled "Free Women". This section also appears to be written by Anna.

Secondly, the novel ends with an entry in the blue notebook (Anna's diary), and then the reader is given the last of the Free women sections. Therefore the novel has two endings, one as Anna writes in her diary, and the second the ending that the more objective voice gives, which could also either be Anna or the author herself. In fact, it neither provides the reader with a concrete resolution as they both send the reader back to the

beginning of the novel, thereby completing the cycle of events. Greene further notes that *The Golden Notebook* “isn’t explicitly a feminist text” (97). However, we should understand that this novel is centred on the female experience. There is a presiding femininity here in that the females exhibit only the point of view of women and not men. Male characters lack depth in the novel and appear as puppets with a single explicit characteristic. This novel does not provide a solution to the problem, that of marginality, but it rather questions the role given to women by imposed norms of the society. This falls in line with one of the tenets of postcolonial criticism<sup>1</sup>. This is because postcolonial theory is also occupied with questions of marginality and representation. The protagonist here has accomplished a reunion of her own personality with that of the world around her. Anna separates from the man that she loves. But we understand that she is not really happy even though her conflict is resolved. Anna’s conflict is made explicit from the very beginning of the novel as she states to Molly, regarding their intimate relationships, that they are “[f]ree women”, which is also the name of this section of the book. We are told that, “[w]hen we’re so different in every way, said Molly, it’s odd. I suppose because we both live the same kind of life [...] not getting married and so on. That’s all I see’. ‘Free women’, said Anna, wryly [...] ‘They still define us in terms of relationship with men, even the best of them’. ‘Well, we do, don’t we?, said Molly, rather tart”(26).

Though both Molly and Anna are presented as free women, it is evident that the role of the kind of woman that they are acting, do not correspond to what they feel or want. Molly’s retort of “we do, don’t we?” exemplifies that they are not altogether different from their constructed stereotype of the woman who defines herself in terms of acceptance by men. The title of the section and the way that they talk about being free women becomes ironic as the novel progresses and shows us that Anna is far from being free. She is still dominated and oppressed. We understand from our reading that “Anna is essentially dependent and not at all free as the ironic title of her interior novel would have us believe. This is a reality that she struggles to escape throughout the novel” (68). There is therefore an opposition between them and the men.

She is not only portrayed as a woman struggling to be free but also as a mother, two aspects of her personality that she must reconcile, but which she insists on keeping separate, like the other dualities she also faces. “The two personalities, Janet’s mother, Michael’s Mistress, are happier separated. It is a strain having to be both at once” (Sprague 336). Later on she accepts the irony of her situation as she relates it also to her concept of writing. She notes that

My being ‘free’ has nothing to do with writing a novel; it has to do with my attitude toward a man, and that has been proved dishonest, because I am in pieces [...]. I am left with more than some banal commonplace that everyone knows: in case, those women’s emotions are still fitted for a kind of society that no longer exists. (Lessing 283)

The fact that this acceptance comes through in her writing ( In the yellow notebook), as she puts the words into the mouth of Ella, her alter ego, suggests that even though society is changing, it does not want the women to change. Women are still held down in some patriarchal societies.

Anna, on an unconscious level, perceives the falsity of her role as a ‘free woman’ when it comes from Ella, both a fictional and an autobiographical character. Ella serves the role of bringing out those suppressed feelings that Anna wishes to keep hidden because they do not fit into her role of the free woman. For her, Ella represents her romantic and

idealizing self. Ella is part of her who identifies herself largely with social norms and male domination. The fragmented Ella of Anna's personality is only happy when lying next to, or cooking for, the strong, admirable man in her life. This is disturbing to her. Anna is horrified that such a personality exists within her and wishes to eliminate Ella by stopping to write in the yellow note book. This of course does not provide the solution that she needs. The resolution comes when Anna succumbs, towards the end of the novel, into madness, which seems necessary in her need to see her fragments as an onlooker. At the end of the novel, this conflict is finally resolved as Anna finally accepts that Ella is a part of her and becomes intelligent enough to let men go. Gaining her psychic wholeness shows their mutual understanding. She is thus at peace as a free woman. For Molly, another female character, the situation is reversed as she decides to get married and passively demonstrates that she is not, and perhaps never was fit to be a 'free woman'.

The conflictual situation in which Anna finds herself cannot be confined to a specific society. It could be transferred to any context. Any lady put the same situation, will suffer the same conflict. Greene states that "Anna is torn between roles of single parent, political worker, writer, lover and friend" (97). Perhaps the most important issue for Anna is the dilemma she faces between her role as Janet's mother and of being a 'free woman'. The question of marriage and the complications arise because she feels that she would have to accept her need for a male companion, which does not correspond to her role as a free woman. The paradox here is of course, that she does not want a man and in fact, likes looking after one. This is part of what pushes her to isolation. This is depicted in the character of Ella. The problem with Anna is that she has to work out the unity that involves the concept of being a free woman. This is similar to that of her problem with the Communist Party. She is expected to rip off the propaganda and the jargon to see it in its pure form. This implies that she must make her decision, whether she wishes to be part of it or not. Her concern with the Communist Party is in fact an echo of her dilemma between her roles as a woman. It is again a dilemma of belief, and accentuates the cycle of conflicts in the novel. Anna must leave the communist party and she does so. Her reconciliation with her identity as a woman comes later, but we see that once she is able to see her femaleness in its naked form, coherence is established between her conflicts of being a mother, an author and a lover. Lessing has succinctly portrayed women in her master piece *The Golden Notebook*. Their socio economic and political lives have been presented in detail. As was previously mentioned, Anna for example has been presented as a mother, an author and a lover. I think that an attempt has been made at identifying and demonstrating the facets in which they have been portrayed and how their opposing tendencies with the men come about. The positions of these women fall in line with the tenets of postcolonialism which has to do with the questioning of unjust power relationships. It should also be noted that feminism parallels postcolonialism. In talking about this, Lois Tyson notes that:

Patriarchal subjugation of women is analogous to colonial subjugation of indigenous populations. And the resultant devaluation of women and colonized peoples poses very similar problems for both groups in terms of achieving an independent personal and group identities; gaining access to political power and economic opportunities; and finding ways to think, speak and create that are not dominated by the ideology of oppressor.(423)

Feminist criticism has the same preoccupation like postcolonial criticism. Deepika Bahri (2004) concurs that "Feminist theory and postcolonial theory are occupied with similar questions of representation, voice, marginalization, and the relation between politics and

literature” (201). Ghandhi Leela (1998) further underscores that “both bodies of thought have concerned themselves with the study and defence of marginalized ‘others’ within repressive structures of domination and, in so doing, both have followed a remarkably similar theoretical trajectory”(83).

The same situation obtains in Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power*. In *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power*, women are trapped in the complex web of romance which are somehow magical and self denying. Head in *When Rain Clouds Gather* presents her female characters as they begin their journey of self assertion and the major role that they play. In the novel, women are more educated than their male counterparts. Yet their personal growth does not keep pace with their learning. One is impressed with Paulina Sebesso, who, even though she is beset by the personal tragedy of her husband’s suicide having been accused of embezzlement, sets out for Golema Mmidi with her son, Isaac, and her daughter, Lorato to start a new life. In this harsh environment, Paulina struggles against loneliness frustration and male dominance, conditions which characterize Head’s female characters. Paulina as earlier mentioned, distinguishes herself among the women where she emerges as an assertive woman who could be depended upon. She is daring and different and although the women want to exploit her frustrated situation at not having intrigues, she is afraid of the untrustworthiness of men with no strength or moral values. It was as though a whole society had connived at producing a race of degenerate men but stressing their superiority in the law and overlooking how it affected them as individuals. These things Paulina felt intuitively, but had not thought out in a coherent form (93). Male domination and male superiority stand at opposite ends of the spectrum. They cloud female inferiority and subjugation and rather help to push women to isolation and despair.

In Golema Mmidi as in Motabeng, Paulina and Elizabeth fight tooth and nail to eliminate female subjugation by men. Mma millipede highlights the distinct bonds between women and men by indicating that one is purely physical while the other is more “serious and rare” (34). This could lead to mental breakdown and suicide on the part of women, because it was assumed that the man was worthy of adoration, while in reality he was full of shocks and disappointments. On the other hand, this adoration assumed the proportions of a daily diet of a most dangerous nature (98). We note that in her novel, Head is critical of African men’s display of profane superiority, arrogance and shamelessness in their relationship with women. She is equally critical of women who accept their lower status and positions in life. By portraying women with all their complexities of mood and character, she constantly takes them to the brink of the lunatic fringe and back. The feeling of loneliness, frustration and helplessness exhibited by Head’s female characters provide an existential insight into their lives of torture and torment. These are the extremes to which women have been pushed.

Paulina’s love for Makhaya is obsessive. Through her son’s death, she is drawn closer to Makhaya and eventually marrying him at the close of the novel. Maria too, is overwhelmed by her marriage to Gilbert, the Englishman and he becomes homesick. We see her defiance in not wishing to go to England. The duality in the personality of these women is more pronounced in Maria who is as Gilbert says, is a “changeable, unpredictable woman” (101). She is purported to have two women in her. One is “soft and meditative” while the other is “full of ruthless common sense and those two uncongenial personalities clashed and contradicted each other all at the same time. He wasn’t ever sure if Maria was in need of his constant protection or whether everyone was really superfluous to this still, midnight world of quiet self-absorption in which she lived” (101).

Ola U. Virginia maintains that though Head's characters especially the female characters go through very difficult situations, they contribute enormously to the harmony that reigns in Head's trilogy. This is explained in the lines below thus:

Head's characters are refugees, exiles, victims, all of whom are involved in a personal and very private odyssey of the soul from which they finally emerge regenerated, as well as spiritually and psychologically enriched. These characters inhabit the harmonious new worlds which operate in her novels [...]she seems to imply that it is only from the interaction of both men and women in relationships of mutual love and respect that such a society can be created.(40)

She further tells us that like Ngugi, Head has a number of solid, resilient, and resourceful women in her novels. Through these women, she explores the limitations of women's roles, their disadvantages and their bruised self-image and celebrates their occasional successes (40). Women here are presented as having very important role to play. They function as a catalyst towards the achievement of peaceful co-existence within the world of Head's trilogy which is part of Head's vision for mankind. Moreover Ola underscores that the women in Head's trilogy help to build rather than destroy the harmony which Head is searching for. This is a positive portrayal of the image of women within Head's trilogy. In *When Rainclouds Gather* three women emerge. As was earlier indicated they trail the usual characteristics of Head's women, who normally fall into a pattern of social abuse, emotional trauma, suffering, and finally growth in wisdom, peace, and partial happiness. Ola further notes that though peace and harmony are the major themes in *When Rainclouds Gather*, Makhaya's success in achieving stability within a harmonious social order, is thanks to his association with the old woman, Mma. Millipede and his future wife Paulina Sebeso. This demonstrates the important role that women play in this novel. This therefore is a positive presentation. Mma. Millipede has been a victim of the crude and brutal power that Head criticizes in all her novels. She was as said initially forced into an unwanted marriage with a chief's son Ramogodi, whom the author describes as "a drunkard and a dissipated boaster" (68). This is the extreme to which Mma. Millipede has been subjected to. She has been isolated and pushed to frustration. Eventually, she is divorced by the same Ramogodi, who soon falls in love with his younger brother's wife and marries her after the offended younger brother hangs himself. However, it is Head's moral vision that Mme. Millipede and old Dinorego, whom she was initially prevented from marrying should come together as neighbours. Mme. Millipede through her resourcefulness settles down to a new life in Golema Mmidi. Ola informs us that, "Mma. Millipede emerges from her harrowing experience wiser and more generous. Her kindness and concern for everybody soon make her the mother of all. She watches, counsels the young, and participates in their problems. The young man Makhaya is the greatest beneficiary of the old woman's wisdom and love" (41).

Makhaya, we know is a drowning man who has come to a strange community searching for a few simple answers on how to live well and sanely. The narrator makes us to understand that "it was to amaze Makhaya after all this that an old woman in the village of Golema Mmidi, named Mma. Millipede, was to relieve his heart of much of its ashes, frustration, and grief" (126).

These statements come after a period of friendship and trust, deliberately initiated by the old woman, who is partly motivated by her liking for Makhaya and partly for the sake of her friend Paulina Sebeso who had shown interest in the refugee. Makhaya has learned from the old woman that generosity of mind and soul is real because the old woman



sustains that precious quality at a pitch too intense for him to endure. We are told that he was never to know how to thank her for confirming his view that everything in life depended on generosity (132). One can say that Head has presented to us ideal women. They are all tough, resolute, hardened in suffering, and are endowed with shrewd common sense. Their relationship with men though unhealthy from the beginning turns out to be positive. Head however laments the fact these women still remain docile and inferior, despite their exposure to the opportunity of missionary school. She presents women who are naturally disposed to hard work. However, her picture of them remains all the same admiring. We are told that:

It was always like this. Any little thing was an adventure. They were capable of pitching themselves into the hardest, most sustained labour with perhaps the same joy that society women in other parts of the world experience when they organise fetes or parties. No men ever worked harder than Botswana women, for the whole burden of providing food for big families rested with them. It was their sticks that thrashed the corn at the harvesting time and their winnowing baskets that filled the air for miles and miles around with the dust of husks, and they often, in addition to broadcasting the seed when the early rains fell, took over the tasks of the men and also ploughed the land with oxen. (104-5)

This is the image of the woman that Head portrays in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power*. Maria's character foreshadows Elizabeth's in *A Question of Power*. It could be said that relationships in Head's novel assume ambivalent postures. Gilbert gets married to Maria, a Botswana girl. Paulina marries the refugee Makhaya. Margaret from the Masarwa tribe, marries the prince Maru and Elizabeth runs away with her son from a marriage that thwarts her spiritual freedom and personal growth. Each female character works out her own salvation and endeavours to fulfil her public obligation despite her private grief and sorrowing Paulina loses the two men in her life, her first husband and her son Isaac, but still manages to bring a dynamic change and sense of solidarity to the village of Golema Mmidi. At the close of the novel, Makhaya asks Paulina to marry him and assume that this marriage will be based on mutual sharing, caring and understanding. This is an indication of the fact Head's objective is to bring about peaceful co-existence for humanity.

In *Maru*, Margaret's marriage to Maru points to an idyllic world where equality exists. This world view also presents a political shift in the attitude of the majority to the outcast minority, the Masarwa. In *A Question of Power*, despite her insanity, Elizabeth manages to harness the energies of the Motabeng women in a way that creates a sense of pride and industry in them.

Of the three main female characters, it's Elizabeth's life that demonstrates more fully the contrary states that form the nexus of this analysis. In *Maru*, Margaret Cadmore II suffers discrimination because of her assigned status as a Masarwa. Her inferiority by birth and the fact that she is a female, make her an easy target for oppression in a society that treats her people as sub-human. Her life begins with uncertainty and ends with a degree of certainty. She is born beside a roadside where her mother dies in childbirth with an expression of a goddess on her face. The image of the goddess is metaphorically significant, for it implicitly encompasses the notion of some sort of saving grace.

Margaret's mother's death is the culmination of the image of the down trodden female, while her own birth heralds the emergence of female power as legitimate,

beneficent and independent from that of the male. Her unyielding attitude towards these men, underpins her own trust in herself. Female power is contained in the goddess symbol as pressed by her dead mother's countenance. Moreover, it adds power and political affirmation to women in their daily lives as they struggle to counteract male dominance and authority. The first act of saving occurs when Margaret Cadmore, an English woman, rescues the younger Margaret from the roadside as a baby. She brings her up and instils in her the dream that one day she will liberate herself and her people. This is what she eventually does. Indeed, this is Head's vision for all oppressed people and women in particular. Margaret's movement towards freeing herself is obstructed by some countervailing forces. Pete, school principal and Dikeledi confront her about her racial origin. She, however, remains defiant and declares that she is a Masarwa. She is harangued by Maru, bailed by Moleka and harassed by the villages and the school children for whom she teaches.

It is noted that, Head creates in Margaret a situation of individualism that enables her to withstand all the dehumanizing acts of brutality, racism and victimization. Her residence is linked to her connection with woman as goddess, the symbol of feminine vitality, beauty and power. That Head chooses a Masarwa to state her views on racism and female subjugation and to further show the effects of contrary states on the human psyche. She reminds us early in the novel that Africans always discriminated against the Masarwa, as if they are not Africans. The Masarwa's plight is exacerbated by the arrival of the Whiteman. Head laments that "of all things that are said of oppressed people, the worst things are said and done to the Bushman" (11). The Masarwa is an untouchable, an outcast who is vilely used by the Botswana perhaps as "the slaves and downtrodden dogs of the Botswana" (18). It is rather ironic that the Bushman is treated as other on a continent where (Africans) feel that they are incapable of oppression and prejudice.

Head's depiction of Margaret's movement from the 'non-human' to the supernatural in her ultimate goddess-like stature balances Maru's god-like powers. Her transformation in status is a political and human triumph for women over the destructive energies of male power as is seen in the novel. Throughout the novel, Margaret manages to balance her public responsibility with her private pain in the face of male dominance. She refuses to be intimidated by either Maru or Moleka as they compete for her love. She further demonstrates her taunting of the school children about her racial origin. She conducts her life with a serenity that focuses on an order which is depicted in her paintings out of nature's deficiencies, she brings a wholeness that is evidenced by the way she maintains her inner moral strength and outward public integrity. It is noteworthy that Margaret's final acceptance of marrying Maru combines his personal sacrifice with her salvation. He gives up his kingdom to Head "straight for a home, a thousand miles away here the sun rose, new and new and new each day" (125). Beyond this, the marriage is symbolic of pulling together those disparate selves and contrary forces, to forge something new. It provides a symbolic release for the Masarwa and perhaps will change the Africans' view of them. It also signals liberation and self understanding. In spite of the fact that Head's female characters strive to dismantle those barriers that create inferior and superior beings, one may argue that out of the sacrifices endured by Maru and Margaret some sort of redemption and salvation come to both Africans and Bushmen which display their common humanity. This change is symbolized by the "wind of freedom which was blowing through the world for all people" (126). Cadmore II has suddenly moved from a situation of isolation, despair to a changed person. This shows that there is always a gate way for the marginalized. The notion of freedom taken to its logical conclusion is a paradoxical concept since it implies a state of imprisonment condition of liberation.

Psychological liberation form one of the structural bases of Head's *A Question of Power*. Here, contrarities establish the action/reaction pull that is evident in Elizabeth, the heroine of the text. Though insanity dominates the thematic thread of the novel, there is a movement towards spiritual wholeness. This dual nature within Elizabeth's character highlights the torture and torment that are inherent in her personality. While correspondingly, it shows her eventual triumph over competing forces of good and evil and a movement towards an integrated self. It is safe to say that Head's women characters bear some form of psychical disfigurement which tends to further marginalize them in their already restrictive worlds. Margaret on the other hand is culturally isolated and is considered sub-human. On the contrary, Elizabeth is treated as human, even if at the lower end of the scale. There are constant references to her 'half breed', nature and to her inferiority to Africans and whites. These are the references that push her to the margin.

Isolation, personal deprivation and mental anguish mark the lives of both women (Margaret and Elizabeth). The physical environment of Motabeng could be linked to the lives of the characters. It is a place of sand, barren and infertile. Yet, it is the place where Elizabeth's mind is most fertile and productive and where it becomes a battle ground for bouts of sanity and madness. We are made to understand that:

It was in Botswana where mentally, the normal and the abnormal blended completely is a continuation of Margaret's character. However, there is a little twist. Margaret does not go insane. Like Margaret, the principal reveals Elizabeth's racial identify. She underlines thus "your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native. (16)

Sello and Dan haunt her life. One is a resident of Motabeng and the other a figment of her demented mind. Sello and Dan, alter egos and gods of sorts, represent the male dominance that stifles womanhood. Elizabeth for a long time "had no distinct personality, apart from Sello" (32). This transpossession creates a tug-of-war between the opposing states of madness and sanity and intensifies the drama for the central control of Elizabeth's soul in which torture and the abnormal are featured. We are told that "she had been so intensely drawn over a certain period that her mind diverts entirely at this intangible level of shifting images and strange arguments" (38). This pushed her to the extremes of isolation and despair.

Within these worlds of opposites, there is a progressive movement towards light and goodness and away from darkness and evil. On one occasion in the hospital, Elizabeth makes the discovery that "the centre of herself was still sane and secure, and the evils which had begun to dominate her mind had a soaring parallel of goodness" (55). These polarities in the personalities of Head's female characters tend to show transformation from marginalization to inclusively, a movement which lead to utopian worlds and which embraces Head's ironic construct of a social order. For Head, people's humanity must be based on mutual respect, sharing and cooperation in all the spheres that govern their lives, the political economic and religious. Elizabeth's preoccupation with what she seems to be the African male's love of power, sex, greed and political exploitation of the masses and more particularly women is an attempt to raise the social and political consciousness of women. In one of her outbursts she declares:

The social defects of Africa are, first, the African man's loose, carefree sexuality; it hasn't the stopgaps of love and tenderness and personal romantic treasuring of

woman. It is just sex, but it is not obscene because the women have a corresponding mental and physical approach (137). Elizabeth's mental torture not only stems from her revulsion of the African male, but also from the fact that she is not "genuinely" African. (159)

This outcast status reduces her to a state of permanent terror and isolation. The terror in Elizabeth's soul results from a journey into the inner self where chaos and turmoil reign and correspondingly, where good competes with evil for control over her person. This inward quest over a three year period leaves her mind at the "intangible level of shifting images and strange arguments" (38). At one end of the journey stands Sello, the monkish character that dominates her life and oscillates between good and evil. At the other end stands Dan whose intent is to destroy her. She is afflicted with transpossession where "people's soul walked into her" (104). Ironically, it is not only the lascivious and debauched world of sex-crazed males that tend to trigger Elizabeth's madness; it is, too, those women whom she identifies as oppressors. For instance, she despises the half-mad white woman, Camilla who "never saw black people as people but objects of permanent idiocy" (76). Camilla in essence represents for Elizabeth white oppression as she experienced it in South Africa. This also demonstrates her feminist attributes.

Unlike in *Maru*, where the elemental nature of the goddess works towards liberation, the goddess in *A Question of Power* rather produces untold mental anguish for Elizabeth. Indeed in Elizabeth's World, both males and females contribute to her sense of that dividing line between good and evil" (161). Tom, the American, remains with Elizabeth throughout her illness and into her recovery, while Kenosi carries on the work at the garden. Tom is white and Kenosi is black, a point worth nothing since Head deals with the question of racism in all novels. For Head, human bonding and relationships go beyond gender and race. Head, through Elizabeth, argues that the victim of racial oppression "is really the most flexible, the most free person on earth" (84), and that is the oppressor whose life becomes disintegrative. However, for the victimized, there is always a ray of hope that freedom will eventually be gained. We understand that the oppressor is always in a state of mental anguish, fearing the day of the victim's liberation. The males including Dan and Sello find themselves in this category.

Over the years, women were been proven to be naturally weak and presupposed to be lacking in rationality and thus excluded from the role of citizenship. They have therefore been continuously subjected by patriarchy and male dominance. This paper sought to explore the tension in some of Lessing and Heads' female characters within the opposing tendencies such as male domination, female subjugation, power and powerlessness. However, this paper has demonstrated that Mary Turner, Anna Wulf, Ella, Mma Mmillepede and Paulina Sebesso have become so conscious of themselves and have empowered themselves socially, economically and politically. They have made an effort in challenging male chauvinism. We realize that at the end of the novels there is a gateway for them. It could be said that these women are a representation of the twenty first century woman. The paper has raised the awareness that there is need for maximum collaboration between men and women especially within the African context so that together they can put in place effective changes. The role of the woman for any effective change has become inevitable. An attempt has also been made at demonstrating that human bonding and fraternal relationship go beyond gender and race. At the end of *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, there is a glimpse of hope, but there is a compelling social action which could lead us to believe that African males will relinquish power. The female characters have succeeded in moving into the world of men. In fact, Elizabeth's integrated personality is an

indication that she realizes that good triumph over evil and that men will be forced to accept women as equal. This has always been the dream of women around the globe. Head and Lessing have made a tremendous effort towards the realization of this dream at least literarily. They have the conviction that positive change in the society could be engineered by women. In *When Rainclouds Gather*, Gilbert also has a similar sentiment. He underscores that: "Perhaps all change in the long run would depend on the women of the country" (43). He sees women as healers and people who set things right after men have destroyed almost everything. Lessing and Head have not only portrayed the socio-political ordeal that women go through in their selected texts, but they have further demonstrated that when inner feelings reach an equilibrium with external reality, there is harmony. Over and above all, the discussions have indicated that the woman has resisted and deconstructed cultural paradigms and redefined her role. She has transcended that servile and stagnant position of being subservient and insignificant.

### Works Cited

- Abraham, Cecil. *The Tragic Life: Bessie Head and Literature in Southern Africa*. Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1990.
- Arndt, Susan. *African Woman's Literature: Orature and Intertextuality*. Eckhard Breitinger. ed. Bayreuth: Bayreuth UP, 1998.
- Ashcroft, Bill et al. ed. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Culler, Jonathan. *On the Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.
- Bahri, Deepika. "Feminism in /and Post colonialism" in *The Cambridge Companion To Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Lazarus Neil. ed. 2004. 199-220.
- Deborah L. Madsen. *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*. London: Pluto Press, 2000.
- Donovan, Josphine. *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions*. New York: The Continuum, 2006.
- Ferguson, Maria. *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid: East Caribbean Connections*. New York: CUP, 1993.
- Gallager, Catherine, Stephen Greenblatt. *Practicising New Historicism*. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 2000.
- Ghandhi Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998 .
- Guerin, Wilfred et al. ed. *A Handbook of Critical Approches to Literature*. New York: OUP, 1999.
- Head, Bessie. *A Question of Power*. London: Heinemann, 1973.
- . *Maru*. London: Heinemann, 1971.
- . *When Rain Clouds Gather*. London: Gollanz, 1969.
- Jones, Bailey Rachel. *Postcolonial Representations of Women: Critical Issues for Education*. New York: Springer, 2011.
- King, Jeannette. *Doris Lessing*. London :Edward Arnold, 1989.
- Lazarus, Neil. eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: CUP, 2004.
- Lessing, Doris. *The Grass is Singing*. London: Michael Joseph, 1950.
- . *The Golden Notebook*. London: Michael Joseph , 1962.
- . *The Sweetest Dream*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 2001.

- Lomba, Ania *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Ola, Virginia U. "Women's Role in Bessie Head's Ideal World". *Research in African Literature* 17.4 (1986): 39-47.
- Sprague, Claire. *Rereading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition*. London: The U of North Carolina P, 1987.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Wathiong'O, Ngugi. *Homecoming*. London: Heinemann Educational Books. 1972.



## **Performing Identity: Intersectionality in Three Autobiographical Texts by Women**

**Regine Rosenthal**

**Abstract:** In analogy to Judith Butler's claim of the performativity of gender, this paper argues for the performativity of identity. Making its case for a non-essentialist, flexible nature of identity, it stresses the intersectionality of culturally and personally constituted and contested identity categories such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, descent, family, and creativity. The various implications of these intersecting, if shifting elements are explored in three recent autobiographical texts by women: Rebecca Walker's 2001 *Black, White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self*; Paule Marshall's 2009 *Triangular Road: A Memoir*; and Linda Grey Sexton's 1994 *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton*.

**Key Words:** performativity, identity, intersectionality, autobiography, gender

In her essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", Judith Butler addresses the relationship between gender and performance when she claims that gender, far from being "a stable identity" (415), is a "performative accomplishment" (415-6). In fact, as she postulates, gender identity is a "constructed identity [...] which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform" (415). Thus for her, "gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time" (415). Butler's inherent denial of an essential, stable gender identity corresponds with concurrent claims by postcolonial and poststructuralist theorists and cultural critics of an ever changing, anti-essentialist concept of identity. Stuart Hall, for instance, posits in a 1990 essay that cultural identities "undergo constant transformation" being as they "are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (225). Similarly Paul Gilroy, along with various other critics,<sup>1</sup> argues against "immutable" identities and "ethnic absolutism" in favor of the "theorization of creolization, *métissage*, [...] and hybridity" (51).

Following this line of argument and taking Butler's claim on gender identity as a point of departure, this paper will move beyond the gendered body as performance to make the wider claim of personal identity as performance. It will explore memoirs and autobiographies by three American women writers over the past twenty years in terms of multiple identity categories and ask how these women were acting when they did and how they are re-enacting their selves in the present by looking back and giving shape to their past life in the act of writing. The essay will argue for the intersectionality of personal identity, i.e. for its being shaped by, performed, and constantly reinvented in relation to the individual's position in a culture with its historically and socially informed discourse on identity-defining characteristics. To be more specific, the categories of gender, race, ethnicity, heredity, illness, and artistic creativity will be examined in terms of their cultural and personal significance and performance in specific autobiographical works by women:

---

<sup>1</sup> Critics such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Jane Ifekwunigwe, Lisa Lowe and Rey Chow argue for multiple, changing identities that are informed by race, ethnicity, class, descent as well as gender.



Rebecca Walker's *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* (2001); Paule Marshall's *Triangular Road* (2009); and Linda Gray Sexton's *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton* (1994).

### I.

In her essay, "Speaking in Tongues", the writer Zadie Smith reflects on language, the flexibility and authenticity of voice/s, and identity. In discussing Barack Obama's gift for grasping and representing different voices in his 1995 autobiography, *Dreams from My Father*, she makes the case that authenticity in personal identity is by no means equal to speaking in one uniform voice. For her, Obama's story is one "of a genuinely many-voiced man. If it has a moral it is that each man must be true to his selves, plural" (42). When "personal multiplicity is printed on your face", as in the case of multi-racial people like Obama and herself, the dreamed-of place for them "is a place of many voices" that takes into account their "complicated back stories, messy histories, multiple narratives" (42). Her eventual impassioned plea for flexibility of voice as a positive choice open to all of us (44) is actually another way of making the argument outlined above, i.e., that identity needs to be performed. Identity is a creative enactment of its various components and in order to be true to oneself one must allow these different parts to be given a voice and heard in context.

The argument Smith makes in her essay is of special relevance to Rebecca Walker's 2001 autobiography, *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self (BWJ)*. Known as a third wave feminist, Rebecca Walker was born in 1969 in Jackson, Mississippi to the black writer Alice Walker and the white Jewish civil rights lawyer, Mel Leventhal. As she subsequently spent her childhood and adolescence shuffling back and forth between the conflicting cultural, ethnic, and racial worlds of her family and friends, she had to learn to negotiate and perform an identity according to the often exclusivist codes of each group.<sup>2</sup> In fact, in line with Zadie Smith's argument on the integration of different voices, she writes about the early days that "[m]oving from household to household is like switching between radio stations: Each type of music calls for a different dance, but it all exists simultaneously, on the same dial. Doing the switching is easy, it's figuring out how one relates to the other that is hard" (Walker 2001, 39).

Writing the memoir in her early thirties, Walker does not offer the vantage point of a long life remembered. Rather into the account of not-so-distant events, the voice of the present briefly breaks in to admit to the difficulties of finding her voice and to assert its authenticity. Having relied for most of her growing-up years on the cues of others, on being "an empty screen for [... others'] projections" that neglect her own inner experience (74), she realizes that writing her life truthfully means having to feel it, too. She will have to pursue uninvited thoughts and "heed the unsettling emotions that erupt from somewhere inside" (74). So her act of remembering her life by writing about it means claiming an identity by reenacting her former selves. It also means a re-evaluation of her formerly attempted performance of identity in the light of who she is now. Thus in her autobiography, she sets out to find and re-interpret the inside story she had not dared to openly admit to herself or anyone else before.

The basic assumptions informing Rebecca's identity and her very existence are the ideals held by her parents in the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1960s United States. The liberal, law-oriented white Jewish father and the black storytelling mother "believe in

---

<sup>2</sup> In *Scattered Belongings*, the critical feminist ethnographer Jayne Ifekwunigwe memorably describes her own experience as a mixed-race child with code switching in West Los Angeles and other places.

justice and equality and freedom” (23) and they break all the rules when becoming a so-called ‘interracial couple’ and marrying against state laws that prohibit it (23). So when looking back, Rebecca insists on her legitimacy, even when her parents were transcending the rules of society at the time. “I am not a bastard, the product of a rape, the child of some white devil. I am a Movement Child. My parents tell me I can do anything I put my mind to, that I can be anything I want. [...] I am not tragic” (24).

But the tenets of society are claiming their due when the ideology of the Movement turns more exclusively racialized and her parents grow disenchanted with each other. To the rising Black Panther and Black pride movement, her parents’ interracial defiance becomes suspect and unacceptable. “The only problem, of course, is me. My little copper-colored body that held so much promise and broke so many rules. I no longer make sense. I am a remnant, a throwaway, a painful reminder of a happier and more optimistic but ultimately unsustainable time. Who am I if I am not a Movement Child?” (60).

After her parents’ divorce when she is eight years old, Rebecca shuttles back and forth between the divided families in a separation that is deeper than the split of the parents. Each family group and each subsequent group of Rebecca’s friends reflect the views of society that Rebecca cannot escape due to her body and the color of her skin.

On the one side of the equation is her Jewish family in Brooklyn. Her Great-grandma Jennie from Russia, still haunted by pogroms she had experienced in the old country, does not talk to Rebecca for fear of the difference inscribed on her body. Her Jewish grandmother comes to accept her, though she complains about the lack of Jewish grandchildren because “her sons married shiksas” (46). The fact that Rebecca’s black mother never attends any of the Jewish family’s gatherings in Brooklyn is a clear sign to Rebecca that race is indeed an issue. She could feel fully included only with her mother there. As it is, she notices the inability of her relatives to deal with the specter of race. So she pulls back emotionally, feeling that some part of her is not quite there, “as if I am in the family through some kind of affirmative-action plan and don’t entirely belong” (47). Even though she likes the “bicultural theme” in the family of Jewish Uncle Jackie and Italian Catholic Aunt Lisa, she cannot remember them ever coming to her mother’s house, either. So in her look back on those early years, she has to finally admit that out of fear of never being fully accepted she had been keeping a part of herself back, not allowing herself to perform all aspects of her identity.

On the other side is her mother’s black family in Atlanta where Rebecca goes for summer vacations. She loves being with Uncle Bobbie and her black cousins, but there, too, she finds an ultimate dividing line. Not only does her white father, in analogy to her mother, never come to visit that part of the family. But once, when Rebecca laughs hysterically, Uncle Bobbie captures their cultural divide in calling her behavior the “crackers”. Over the years, Uncle Bobbie will use this term repeatedly to describe Rebecca’s mannerisms as something strange or not black. And despite the humorous nature of the remark, part of Rebecca feels pushed away, not knowing where she belongs. And when she learns years later that “*cracker* is a term black people use for white people [...] to signify] the insanity, the cruelty, the maniacal culture of racist white people” (84) (emphasis original), she asks herself, “[h]ow do I reconcile my love for my uncles and cousins with the fact that I remind them of pain?” (85). Furthermore, when comparing her female maternal and paternal ancestors, the slave May Poole and Great-grandma Jennie, she wonders if she could ever have been included in their different worlds.

After the divorce, her parents both go back to what is familiar to them: her father to marrying a Jewish girl and her mother to a black boyfriend. But beyond what most children of divorced parents experience as divided worlds, and what Rebecca painfully experiences

when spending two years, alternately, with each parent, she feels that by moving from Jewish to black, from middle class status quo to radical artist bohemia, she is “moving from planet to planet between universes that never overlap” (117). And as an inner self-defense, she chooses to forget about her emotional ties from one place to the next, to not let anything stick, for “holding on makes it harder to be adaptable, harder to meet the demands of a new place” (117). In addition, if she did not just live in the present “I’d be feeling all that loss, all that tearing away” (164). As a long-term result, Rebecca notices in the present of writing her autobiography that she is uncomfortable with the stability of any daily routine. She rather gravitates towards “change, impermanence, a pattern of in and out, here and there, [...] place to place [...]. Letting go and holding on” is the only constant in her life (167).

Moving seamlessly from ethnic to racial to color group of family, friends and classmates in Washington D.C., San Francisco, and various sections of New York City, Rebecca tries out and enacts her different selves, all the while feeling challenged by each group to make a choice. In order to belong, she has to perform, to learn the language and the walk, the rhythm and movements of each group. Though thus learning to be “a border crosser, a human bridge” (244), she knows that this comes at a price. Staying with her Jewish stepmother Judy in Washington, she wonders whether “a white mother is going to work for or against me” (90). When brown, curly-haired Rebecca then chooses the white, tall Judy to be her mom, she feels joyful but also “duplicitous, shameful, [...] bad, like I am betraying my [black] mother, like I am choosing this shiny white version over her” (92).

She also has to learn the cost of rejection based on the color of her skin. At Jewish summer camp, Rebecca Leventhal is one of only three black girls in a multitude of white ones. Disguising her feeling of not belonging, she watches herself “perform, shift, contort, sweat” (178). Along with the other girls she plays at being a Jap, a Jewish American Princess, but in her assessment, “I never get it quite right, never get the voice to match up with the clothes, never can completely shake free of my blackness” (179-80). In turn, the white girls perceive her as “intimidating” for being black. Ultimately, she is ignored by the boys for not being Jewish enough and by the camp management for being too independent-mindedly black. So despite all of Rebecca’s attempts at enacting the Jewish part of her identity, she knows something is missing. “I heighten the characteristics I share with the people around me and minimize, as best I can, the ones that don’t belong. At Fire Lake I am a Jap, but not one. [...] I move my body like I belong but I also hold it back” (184-5).

As a teenager, Rebecca engages in risky behavior. With a range of black, Hispanic, mixed-race, and white friends, she experiments with drugs, sex, and petty crime. She is dumped by her white Italian boyfriend for being black, while his hockey team friends call her a “nigger” (220). Pregnant by her long-time black boyfriend Michael at age fourteen and getting an abortion, she is accused by him of becoming a “half breed” (268) when she switches from a mixed, low-achieving public to a mostly white private school. For, as he tells her, it brings out her whiteness in voice and behavior. Only after a stay in New York does she feel “well trained in not breaking the code, not saying something too white around black people, or too black around whites” (271). But in view of her mixed heritage, Rebecca continues to be confused about her identity. “For marrying a black woman, my father was disowned. For marrying a white man, my mother was called a traitor” (290-1).

Even though convinced that “race is just about the biggest cultural construct there is” (305), she arrives at the conclusion that in “the race-obsessed United States, my color defines me” (304). So at age seventeen, she decides to change her name from the Jewish sounding Rebecca Grant Leventhal, which connects her to whiteness, to Rebecca Leventhal

Walker, which links her closer to her mother and to blackness.<sup>3</sup> Though her father suggests that her “choice has something to do with [...her] own anti-Semitism” (313), she insists on her closer affinity to blackness. But in her early thirties, in the act of writing her autobiography, she reasserts her freedom to define herself in performing and re-performing the *full* range of her identity. Echoing Zadie Smith’s plea for a flexibility and multiplicity of voices, she embraces her *in-between* status. “I am tired of claiming for claiming’s sake, hiding behind masks of culture, creed, religion [...]. I exist somewhere *between* black and white, family and friend” (321-2) (emphasis mine).

## II.

By contrast, in her award-winning 2009 memoir, *Triangular Road (TR)*,<sup>4</sup> the writer Paule Marshall<sup>5</sup> fully embraces her blackness in all its dimensions when she re-enacts her identity as a black woman and a writer in the larger context of the black diaspora. Originally conceived as a lecture series, the text was delivered at Harvard University in 2005 on the theme of “Bodies of Waters” and their profound impact on black history and culture throughout the Americas. Thus the memoir traces Marshall’s personal history embedded in the history of the Atlantic slave trade by following the link from the James River, to the Caribbean Sea, to the Atlantic Ocean.

The memoir’s three main parts are prefaced by an account dedicated to the black poet Langston Hughes in which Marshall recalls a 1965 reading tour to Europe organized by the US State Department to which the eminent poet Hughes had invited the young fledgling writer Marshall. Though seemingly unrelated to the main part’s overarching theme, this initial essay goes beyond acknowledging the significance of Langston Hughes as mentor and literary sponsor of Marshall’s writing career. In fact, by dwelling on the many heated discussions Hughes and Marshall had with their European audiences on the American Civil Rights struggle of the mid-1960s, the essay leads to the heart of the memoir’s overall theme of slavery, US racism, black/white relations, and Marshall’s personal place in the fight for freedom.

In the first of the three main parts Marshall moves freely back and forth between the historical present and the past in relation to the James River and its intersection with herself and the socio-economic history of slavery. Starting out in Richmond, Virginia, in 1998, she lets her leisurely walk along the river invite her on a tour of the imagination that takes her to the not-so-distant past in 1983 when she launched a literary and academic career in the South which in turn sent her on many trips to the library for a self-administered “private crash course in southern history” meant “to redress the truncated, [...] deliberately sanitized version of the antebellum South that had been standard in the textbooks of my day in high school and even college” (Marshall 52).

What she learned there enables her to imaginatively wander even further back to the chattel cargo trade of slavery times when Richmond, VA was “the principal port of entry for Africans brought to the New World in the eighteenth century” (47). Thinking of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca’s attachment to blackness was reasserted in her 2012 edited collection *Black Cool*. Yet her relationship to her mother had come to a public break in 2004 over Rebecca’s pregnancy and birth of a son and her mother’s criticism of emancipated women’s ‘enslavement’ by motherhood (Walker 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Marshall won a MacArthur Foundation “genius” award for it (Lee C1).

<sup>5</sup> As a girl, Marshall was so smitten with the black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar that she changed her given name Pauline to Paule with a silent e (Lee C6, Marshall 23).

brisk trade and plentiful money involved in buying and selling the newly imported slaves, she vividly imagines the degrading ‘scrambles’, where

the chattel cargo was taken from the hold, off the boat, and herded into a fenced-in yard or pen or stockade with a locked gate. Waiting outside would be a crowd of eager buyers, each with a long rope. Then, once the gate was opened, the “scrambles” began, with the buyers dashing about the yard or pen or stockade, desperate to lasso and corral as many chattel as possible never mind their condition: the stench, the running sores, the caked shit. (47-8)

Emotionally absorbing this scene, Marshall cuts to the core by re-imagining, re-enacting and re-exploring it in terms of her own identity as a black woman and a writer. *“I’m suddenly chattel cargo, merchandise, goods, a commodity to be bought and sold [...] in a Tidewater ‘scramble’, where I’m lassoed in the shame of my nakedness and filth. For a hairbreadth I’m caught in a terrifying time warp* (51) (emphasis original).

The realization that “at the time, the trade in chattel cargo was routed mainly from West Africa to Brazil and the Caribbean archipelago” (57) leads Marshall, in the following chapter on the Caribbean Sea, from her birthplace in Brooklyn to her own West Indian ancestry in Barbados and the island’s place in the long history of slavery. In fact Barbados, after the ships’ long Atlantic voyage, “was a principal way station at the outset of the [American slave] trade” (63). It was also the birth place of Marshall’s parents. As part of the black Great Migration North from the West Indies, they came to the United States in the early 1920s and settled in the upwardly-striving Barbadian community in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Marshall tells the family story of strong women, such as her “little dictator of a grandmother” (109) and her hard-working mother Adriana, paired with colorful men, such as her “rumhead of a grandfather” (109) and her restless father Sam Burke who eventually abandoned the family. The Barbadian women of the Brooklyn neighborhood were “superlative talkers and master storytellers” (88) who gave young Paule the “first lessons in the art and craft of writing” (89).

While her mother’s failure to accept and support her in her dreams drove Paule away from home at an early age, Marshall found initial success as a writer with the draft of her first novel. With advance money from her publisher and advice from her editor, she chose Barbados as a place where to re-write her manuscript for publication and to trace and understand the history of her parents on that small island. She followed the pro-independence movement there, comparing it enviously to the black struggle for political agency in the US. And she watched the native population interact, especially in a memorable scene of a road accident which brought out among the men “much posturing and displays of menacing gestures. All of it pure theater” (115). The women “headers”, in turn, who carried heavy bundles of sugar cane on their heads, “soon also started cursing” (115). Only one of the headers stood silently apart, gazing into space and dreaming, as Marshall imagines, of the Barbados slave rebellion of 1816 led by “the ‘incorrigible’ Bussa” (117) and the house servant Nancy Griggs. This scene of enacted theater, as Marshall sees it, later served as inspiration for her second novel.

With the Guggenheim fellowship money she won for that first novel, Marshall spent another year on the Caribbean island of Grenada. Struck in the very beginning by a massive writer’s block,<sup>6</sup> Marshall was finally released by two memorable scenes. First, she watched

---

<sup>6</sup> Marshall conjectures that it could have been out of guilt feelings that at this critical juncture she missed out on participating in the Civil Rights movement at home.

a political rally staged by Gairy, the island's chief minister. He theatrically launched into his address to the crowd by approaching from the sea on a stately, white sailboat in a Christ-like pose. "All that was missing", as Marshall comments, "were the crown of thorns and the stigmata on his open palms" (136). Yet the promise of his speech in political terms was short-lived. Gairy eventually became "a minor figure in the unfortunately long and disheartening list of postcolonial leaders who misused, disappointed and failed their own" (140). Far more liberating and positively transforming proved her participation in a Big Drum/Nation Dance ceremony on the small adjacent island of Carriacou. Over an entire night, the men drummed while the women danced a range of dances, each signifying a different nation of their origin in Africa. This deeply moving ceremony did not only trigger the idea for a later novel. But it also provided the impetus to overcome the writing block and start, from a different angle, the historical novel Marshall was planning to write. It made her understand that "as a fiction writer, a novelist, a storyteller, a fabulist [...] my responsibility first and foremost was to the story" (148).

The memoir's last short chapter completes the triangle of the slave route by shifting the scene to Lagos, Nigeria, for a World Festival of Black and African Arts in 1977. In the inaugural ceremony modeled on the Olympic Games Grand Parade, the US delegation marched in, unprepared for this grand pageantry. But, as Marshall notes, "the crowd nonetheless loved us" (158). The Africans were proud of the *Omowalies*, their black children who "had returned representing the wealthiest and most powerful [...] nation in the world" (158), while daring to agitate for their full civil rights. But mixed in on the Africans' part, as Marshall suspects, was also a well-deserved "large measure of guilt and sorrow" (159). After all, many of the African forbears had been complicit in the nefarious slave trade that had reduced the slave forbears "to mere articles of trade, commodities, merchandise, goods, cargo, *chattel cargo!* to be bought and sold and whipped and worked for free!" (159) (emphasis original) Thus reconciliation and forgiveness were both sought and extended and Marshall was claimed as one of their own.

In the end, though, she envisions her life as divided into three parts that each need to be explored, and collectively performed in order to arrive at a fully lived identity. "Africa, Barbados, Brooklyn—that's the triangle that defines me and my work" (Lee C1). There is Brooklyn, USA, the place of her birth and upbringing in the tightly-knit West-Indian Barbadian immigrant community. Then there is Barbados and the Caribbean where she spent a major part of her writing life; and finally, across the Atlantic is the Western coast of Africa with its history of ancestral home and betrayal which Marshall has yet to discover and integrate as "the greater portion of my tripartite self" (163).

### III.

In March 2009, Nicholas Hughes, a fisheries biologist living in the forests of Alaska and son of the poets Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, committed suicide. A few days later, the *New York Times* editorial, "A Tortured Inheritance", delved into this suicide's personal and larger implications. Written by Linda Gray Sexton, daughter of the poet Anne Sexton, the text underscores the parallels between Linda's and Nicholas's experiences as children of highly creative, yet suicidal mothers.<sup>7</sup> Thus implying a connection between artistic creativity and suicide, it probes Linda's personal and larger questions of depression,

---

<sup>7</sup> Sylvia Plath committed suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning when Nicholas was four, Anne Sexton by similar means when Linda was twenty-one.

familial emotional implications of suicide, and ultimately advocates the acts of speaking and writing about the pain as a possible way to recovery.<sup>8</sup>

Her 1994 memoir *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton (SMS)* represents just such an attempt at speaking about the darkness of mental illness, its detrimental impact on the family, and the vagaries of the creative process. By extension and more importantly, it underscores the immediate role of inheritance and family in developing and shaping an identity. Re-enacting in remembering her growing-up years in the shadow of both her mother's illness and her poetic creativity, Linda Gray Sexton uses the act of writing this autobiography to initiate a process of deeply needed understanding and healing in the tortured relation to her mother. At the same time, she is probing that relationship in terms of her own development as a woman and as a writer.

Linda unravels and re-enacts that relationship between mother and daughter in a range of different layers. She starts in the present in 1993, at age 40, with the act of writing the autobiography some twenty years after her mother's suicide in 1974. It is also the point in her life that her mother Anne had anticipated in a letter of apology to sixteen year old Linda. In this letter, Anne had warned Linda about the difficulties and loneliness of life and had assured her in advance that no matter what, "I love you, 40-year-old Linda, and I love what you do, what you feel, what you are! Be your own woman" (1994, 5). Framing the autobiography in this complicated present, Linda then goes on to re-stage and re-live her life with her mother from the beginning.

She starts with the perspective of the daughter going through the different phases of childhood, adolescence and young womanhood. After her mother's suicide, as Anne Sexton's literary executor, Linda is forced again, on an almost daily basis, to return to the painful past and relive her childhood with ever increasing knowledge of her mother's struggles and emotions. First, she sifts through her mother's correspondence to publish in 1977, together with Lois Ames, the volume, *Anne Sexton: A Self-Portrait in Letters*. Secondly, she works for years with Diane Middlebrook, a skilled literary critic and reliable, sensitive writer. Linda provides her with all possible information, including innumerable hours of haunting psychotherapy tapes, for a literary biography, published in 1991 as *Anne Sexton: A Biography*. In addition, from the changed perspective of her present self as a wife, a mother, and a writer, she relives, through her children, scenes of her childhood that triggered so much anxiety, while repeated bouts of depression that seriously interfere with her own writing help her to better understand her mother at the time. "My story as a daughter and my mother's story as a mother begins in a Boston suburb, back in the 1950s, when I was exiled from my childhood home to make room for someone else: Mother's mental illness, which lived among us like a fifth person" (1994, 11).

With these words Linda begins her account of a childhood filled with fear. She forever feared that, with lengthy hospital stays, her mother would abandon her again to the care of unloved relatives. Yet Linda was also tortured by guilt that it was her own fault, that her being a difficult child was driving her mother to repeated mental breakdowns. It left her with the lingering anxiety of not knowing when or how her fragile mother would break again. "The years would bring suicide attempts, trances, fugue states, fits of rage—and depression so intense that [my mother...] sat for hours staring into space, or paced restlessly like an animal in a cage, or spoke to the voices inside her head. Fear was the four-letter word [...], locked inside me like a dirty secret" (13).

---

<sup>8</sup> Linda Gray Sexton delves deeply into her own struggle with suicide in her recent 2011 memoir, *Half in Love*.

As a result, Linda and her sister did everything they could to avoid angering their mother or provoking a bitter, consequential fight between their parents. So from early on, Linda cast herself in the role of her mother's watchdog to both protect her against any looming dangers (41) and to prevent her from spilling the dirty family secrets of mental illness and sexual improprieties. Furthermore, reversing the roles of mother and child, nine-year-old Linda repeatedly gave in to her mother's wish to "play nine", allowing her mother to regress to the stage of a nine-year-old girl in need of cuddling and protection. Linda felt trapped by the dual responsibility of being the mother her mother could not be and of having to keep her sane to avoid another hospitalization. Even now, Linda complains about "how little comprehension [...] mother] had of the terrible fear she ignited in me each time she indulged herself with this game [which...] was a metaphor for all that was to come, the increasingly blurred nature of our relationship, mother versus daughter. Who was who?" (60).

From then until Linda turned sixteen, the respective roles changed as Linda became her mother's loving companion, her "live-in best friend, an enthralled and adoring little sister" (116). But she also was the caretaker, when the public poet Anne Sexton took twelve-year-old Linda on a reading tour to serve as a chaperone watching over her excesses. Anne Sexton had started writing poetry on the advice of her psychiatrist and, in 1957, had taken an initial poetry seminar with John Holmes in Boston. There, at the beginning of her burgeoning career, she had met other promising young poets, such as Sylvia Plath and Maxine Kumin, and over the years formed with the latter a strong, sustaining bond of literary friendship. In this setting of endlessly discussing and writing poetry, young Linda became a poet in her own right who was only too happy to share with her mother their common interest in books, writing, and language and was tutored, in turn, by Maxine Kumin. During that time, Linda felt that creativity or writing poetry was the only way to keep her mother sane, to keep at bay periods of debilitating depression. But deep down the family sensed that mother's "mental instability was a terminal illness [...] we knew with our collective consciousness that one day my mother would kill herself" (114).

Despite this companionship in shared creativity, adolescent Linda eventually felt suffocated by her mother getting too close as an ever probing confidante and, most damaging of all, engaging in a sexually deeply intrusive and repulsive behavior. As a result, Linda turned away from her and, feeling deeply torn between identification and dissociation, received treatment for depression herself. She became increasingly embarrassed and angry with her mother for splitting up the family while spiraling forever more out of control with medications, alcohol, suicide attempts, and outrageous behavior. Vowing that she would not be drawn down "into the quicksand of her disintegration" (162), Linda continued, in the last summer of her mother's life, "to flee from her dramatics, from her hysterics and her pain" (169). As she notes, "[m]other had turned [our house ...] into a stage upon which she was the star, and increasingly, sole player; the rest of us were the supporting cast [...]. Mother wrote the script, directed, and produced the drama. Nothing we felt, nothing we said or did, affected either action or denouement" (177).

Finally, longing for freedom from her mother's illness that had taken over the person she had once loved, Linda steeled herself against her mother's desperate calls, while both dreading and craving her suicide. In the end, the 40-year-old-Linda of the present has to confront the darkness that had lain covered up for so long. "*I had wished for my mother to die* [...] I say these words to know them for the first time and to admit my greatest guilt: in the last months of my mother's life I chose to ignore her cry of loneliness. I refused to make her last days less painful. In the end, I left her to die alone" (186) (emphasis original).



Anne's suicide on October 4, 1974 did not bring the relief Linda had craved, but rather anger, pain, and sorrow. Furthermore, the need for achieving a distance between herself and her mother was undermined by Anne Sexton's last will that designated Linda to be her literary executor. Over the ensuing two decades, the process of sifting through her mother's voluminous personal and poetic material forced Linda to constantly re-enact and re-imagine herself by working through many layers of grief and trauma. Diane Millbrook's continued queries while writing Anne Sexton's biography kept Linda facing the moments and emotions of her childhood filled with "violence, insanity, and unpredictability" (235). Against these continuing powerful reminders of her mother as a person and a gifted poet, Linda was determined to build her own career as a writer with a range of narrative works in fiction and non-fiction. And in the face of challenging odds, she realized that she had raised her own family in "a futile attempt to reenact and heal the past" (258-9). When a deepening depression finally forced her to work through her conflicted emotions of fear and self-hatred, Linda realized that suicide "is an immediate and permanent solution to pain" (294). Only then did she understand that her mother "had known, by the time she was forty-five, that she would never get well, that she would suffer recurring bouts of intense and debilitating depression [...and that she] had sought death because she believed she had no alternative" (294). Anne Sexton had known that poetry "contained the magic of temporary healing" (295), but when depression took over, there was no more poetry, creativity dried up.

This new understanding based on her own experience finally allows Linda to empathize with her mother and to re-start the long-interrupted process of mourning. The act of writing her autobiography has thus proved a necessary exorcism by releasing her pent-up anger, admitting her guilt-feelings, and cleansing her soul. She can stop running away from her mother, because in reaching understanding, she has learned both to forgive and be her own person. Ultimately she has come to the place her mother had been seeking all her life. It is the metaphorical home, called 'Mercy Street' in Anne Sexton's creative work (8-9), "the place where past and present reconciled, where confrontation joined hands with forgiveness" (9).

#### IV.

In their different ways, all three memoirs have defined and redefined the personal identity of the writing self by revisiting and reenacting the individual past in the light of larger issues of society, history, and descent. While Rebecca Walker has addressed the personal impact of racial and cultural hybridity in color-conscious contemporary American society, Paule Marshall has re-imagined herself in terms of the long, painful history of American slavery and its commercial relations to Africa. Linda Gray Sexton, in turn, by zeroing in on the mother-daughter relationship, has shed light on the formative role of the family in developing an identity. Taking into account the issues of creativity, mental illness, and identification versus distance, she traces the process of growing up as a series of steps towards understanding and transcending the immediate self. In all three memoirs, achieving the sense of an, however evolving, identity consists in trying out different roles, adopting or rejecting them, and of continuing to perform a self in interaction with the demands of society.

Finally, to return to Judith Butler's point on gender constitution in the beginning, the three woman writers discussed here perform their gender identity from different perspectives and with different results. Rebecca Walker, the self-proclaimed third wave

feminist,<sup>9</sup> who as an adolescent had freely experimented with sexual and other roles and in the memoir's narrative present lives with a black female lover, has more recently re-enacted her gender identity in terms of a traditional family with a male partner and their child, while criticizing her mother and feminism at large for their dismissive stance on motherhood. Her ongoing personal and feminist activist reinvention of gender roles thus fits most closely into Butler's concepts of the constructed nature of gender identity. For Marshall, in turn, gender identification goes hand in hand with the art of writing. She is happy to play the role of mother to her son. Yet it is the artistic inspiration she draws from the strong, story-telling Barbadian women in her Brooklyn neighborhood that allows her to work through the racial, social, and historical issues that inform her memoir. Linda Anne Sexton, for her part, draws heavily on the special, creative bond to her artistic mother and, by extension, the female line in the family, as a model of positive gender identification. Yet given the tortured relationship to her mother, only by finding and enacting her own versions of her mother's fraught role performances as writer and mother can she find understanding, forgiveness, and peace.

### Works Cited

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987.
- Barstow, David. "Heir to a Sad Literary Legacy Adds a New Chapter of Grief". *New York Times*, 12 April, 2009: A1, A16.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". [1997] in Carole R. McCann, Seung-Kyung Kim. eds. *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 415-427.
- Chow, Rey. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Jana Evans Braziel, Anita Mannur. eds. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 49-80.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Jonathan Rutherford. ed. London, 1990. 222-237.
- Ifekwunigwe, Jayne O. *Scattered Belongings: Cultural Paradoxes of "Race," Nation and Gender*. London, New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Lee, Felicia R. "Voyage of a Girl Moored in Brooklyn". *New York Times*, 12 March, 2009: C1, C6.
- Lowe, Lisa. Lowe, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking American Asian Differences". *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1.1 (1991): 24-44.
- Marshall, Paule. (TR) *Triangular Road: A Memoir*. New York: Basic, 2009.
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood. *Anne Sexton: A Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991.

---

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Walker closes her 1992 essay in *Ms* magazine with a declaration of a continued adherence to feminism, but of a new kind, when she declares, "I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave" (41). Similar views are apparent in her 2009 edited essay collection *One Big Happy Family*.

- Obama, Barack. *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. 1995. Rev. ed. New York: Three Rivers P, 2004.
- Sexton, Linda Gray. *Half in Love: Surviving the Legacy of Suicide, A Memoir*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2011.
- . (SMS) *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1994.
- . “A Tortured Inheritance”. *New York Times*, April 3, 2009: A23.
- and Lois Ames, eds. *Anne Sexton: A Self-Portrait in Letters*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
- Smith, Zadie. “Speaking in Tongues”. *New York Review of Books*. 26 February, 2009: 41-44.
- Walker, Rebecca. “Becoming the Third Wave”. *Ms*. Jan./Feb. 1992, 39-41.
- . ed. *Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness*. Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull P, 2012.
- . (BWJ) *Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self*. New York: Riverhead, 2001.
- . “How my mother’s fanatical views tore us apart”. 23 May, 2008. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1021293>.
- . ed. *One Big Happy Family: 18 Writers Talk about Polyamory, Open Adoption, Mixed Marriage, Househusbandry, Single Motherhood, and Other Realities of Truly Modern Love*. New York: Riverhead, 2009.

**From Sissy to Man:  
Performance as a Process of Becoming in *The Talented Mr. Ripley***

**Gamze Sabancı**

**Abstract:** According to Judith Butler gender is performance, “a stylized repetition of acts” (*Gender Trouble*). It is a display that is constantly acted out, thus it does not express an inner truth. Consequently, she suggests because the acts that are performed have no “ontological status” (173) gender is real only to the extent that it is performed and that the natural essence of sex is cancelled by imitating the dominant conventions of gender. When imitation is repeated and internalized, the self eventually creates an alternative reality. That’s why performative bodies cause ambiguity in the distinction between reality and illusion and “genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (174). When bodies are compelled to signify social and political regulations by imitating and performing, the individual eventually internalizes these acts and stability of an identity is finally achieved. In addition to the stability of an identity, forced heterosexuality is also achieved through performative gender identity. By expanding this theory to the literary field, I provide as an example Patricia Highsmith’s novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley* which bases its plot on Tom Ripley’s desire to signify socially idealized gender roles, such as masculinity and success, by constructing an illusionary gender-identity that complies with the 1950s American society and brings to the surface a critique of American success dream, which is so great that men otherwise not criminals will murder to fulfill it.

**Keywords:** performance, identity, masculinity, American dream, crime

According to Judith Butler gender is performance, “a stylized repetition of acts” (*Gender Trouble*). It is a display that is constantly acted out, thus it does not express an inner truth. Consequently, she suggests because the acts that are performed have no “ontological status” (173) gender is real only to the extent that it is performed and that the natural essence of sex is cancelled by imitating the dominant conventions of gender. When imitation is repeated and internalized, the self eventually creates an alternative reality. That’s why performative bodies cause ambiguity in the distinction between reality and illusion and “genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (174). When bodies are compelled to signify social and political regulations by imitating and performing, the individual eventually internalizes these acts and stability of an identity is finally achieved. In addition to the stability of an identity, forced heterosexuality is also achieved through performative gender identity. By expanding this theory to the literary field, I provide as an example Patricia Highsmith’s novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley* which bases its plot on Tom Ripley’s desire to signify socially idealized gender roles, such as masculinity and success, by constructing an illusionary gender-identity that complies with the 1950s American society and brings to the surface a critique of American success dream, which is so great that men otherwise not criminals will murder to fulfill it.

The novel opens with a scene in which Tom, the protagonist, is asked by Herbert Greenleaf, a rich businessman, to retrieve his son Dickie from a town in Italy. Tom, who is

“God-damned bloody bored” (9) with his life, accepts the job since he wants to leave New York. He travels to Italy aiming to find Dickie and take him back home, accomplishing his task and getting paid. However, rather than retrieving him, Tom finds himself someone to bond with, thus he distorts the Greenleaf’s mandate to return with his son. From that point forward he makes a fateful decision “to make Dickie like him. That he wanted more than anything else in the world” (47). When Tom’s desire to be liked is rejected by Dickie his response to that rejection is to brutally murder him. In order to cover up Dickie’s absence, Tom assumes his identity, forges his signature to take his money, goes so far as to forge a will stating that all of Dickie’s fortune is to be left to Tom. By creating a protagonist, who swings between two dominant post-war attitudes; the simultaneous urge for alienation and engagement and denial in the face of reality by using performance as a tool, Highsmith manages to highlight the protagonist’s motive for his murder and thus creates an anti-hero that the readers can empathize.

In the article, my argument proceeds in two stages. First, I analyze Tom Ripley as Highsmith’s critique of the 1950’s American conventional male models clinging to masculinity as a flight from the fear of homophobia. In this part I specifically make a gender based analyses of Tom and argue that Tom creates himself with each role he performs. By emphasizing on Tom’s process of identity formation, I suggest Highsmith demonstrates America’s obsession with performance as a process of identity construction. Second, I propose that the duality between alienation and engagement results in Tom’s escape from the boundaries of identity. Consequently his alienation from the American society, symbolized by his trip to Italy, eventually causes alienation from “the self” and his engagement with another, symbolized by Dickie, determines his engagement with “the other”. I conclude by claiming that at the end of the novel although Tom is presented as fugitive, he manages to grow and mature after he killed Dickie, because he escaped from being a regarded as sissy by being violent which is, as Michael Kimmel claims, “often the single most evident marker of manhood” (189). Through a very violent way, Tom proves his manhood to himself.

The opening of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* presents a moment where the distinction between illusion and reality is ambiguous, a space where appearance takes priority over reality for Tom. Virtue of role-playing is consequently embraced by Tom, and he starts creating himself with each role he performs:

Tom glanced behind him and saw the man coming out of the Green Cage, heading his way. Tom walked faster. There was no doubt that the man was after him. Tom had noticed him five minutes ago, eyeing him carefully from a table, as if he weren’t quite sure. Was this the kind of man they would send after him? Was he, wasn’t he? He didn’t look like a policeman or a detective at all. He looked like a businessman, somebody’s father, well-dressed, well-fed, graying at the temples, an air of uncertainty about him. Was that the kind they send on a job like this, maybe to start chatting with you in a bar, and then bang!- the hand on the shoulder, the other displaying a policeman’s badge, Tom Ripley, you’re under arrest. (5)

Tom is on the run firstly because he assumes that he is in danger. Yet, he is a little surprised about “the kind they would send after him”. At this point, through Tom’s narration readers only manage to interpret Tom as an important fugitive and he is shocked to see a business-man like old person that is sent after him by the authorities. However, the readers find out after a paragraph that all this is Tom’s imagination; the man after him is

just the father of his friend. He is after all imitating the role of an important fugitive. By presenting the protagonist in such a deceptive scene, Highsmith directs her readers towards an important method of role-playing: self-conviction. Tom makes his material alive to him because in order for Tom to perform, he needs to convince himself on the reality of his role. Although at the beginning of the novel, self-conviction appears to be an utmost part of performing, at the later stages of the novel, as well as of this article, for Tom what is real and what is just an act eventually gets blurry. He convinces himself on the reality of his act and by presenting such a transformation from fantasy to reality, Highsmith illustrates what Tom implicitly wishes and desires. He desires to be a man of power.

While Tom is running away he constructs himself as a central character by narrating the action pivoting around him, which eventually allows him to cast himself as the author of his own fictive world and thus imitates the role of an author. The reader's focus is therefore twofold: Tom as a character in Highsmith's novel, and Tom as both author and character of the story he narrates. However, the duality of being both encourages the reader to doubt the reliability of any information provided by Tom, exemplified by Tom's groundless belief that the man after him is a detective. In this scene, what the readers are presented with is Tom's talent in creating a role, constructing a scenario, adapting a different identity and performing it.

In his essay "Patricia Highsmith's Method", Michael Trask claims the cold war society "made it compulsory for all its members to treat identity as a continual dress rehearsal" (587) because the privileges of fifties America changed so rapidly that in order for an individual to catch up with this mobility and pursue finer things in life, identity management was crucial. However, he also argues performance "assimilates to the binary of resistance and conformism by mapping authenticity onto the former category and performance onto the latter" (587). The individual's talent in treating identity as a dress rehearsal, performing suitable identity on a suitable environment discourages individuals to resist troubling social norms but encourages them to conform. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman suggests as a result of performing in the process of becoming "self does not derive from its processor, but from the whole scene of his actions" this self-is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it" (252). "Other-directed people" as Riesman labels, are thus the products of the stage they find themselves on.

One can thus clearly see that Highsmith's Ripley discovers himself only in the reflection of and interaction with others, and therefore it is essential for him to be in relation with others. Besides recreating himself through others, Tom both dissolves in to and reveals himself through his actions. In other words, Tom's character develops dependent on how his actions unfold or as Goffman suggested Tom becomes a "product of the scene".

As seen in Tom's world, appearance takes priority over reality, or, to be precise, for Tom performance becomes an effective reality. In his article Carl Malmgren suggests that "in time Ripley finds out that the right false signifier creates the right false signified, that fake appearances create 'real' realities" (148) and thus, points out that it is not important for Tom if the role he puts on is false, what is important is that it is right. The failure of the character is thus due to his belief that appearance is reality. Interestingly, Patricia Highsmith presents this capacity of escaping from reality, creating alternatives and various appearances, as a talent.

As the title of the novel may suggest, Tom is considered talented because he can exceed the rigid confines of identity and change himself so he is able to traverse multiple identities. However, it can also be suggested that his performances also reveal his sense of inferiority that he feels is important to cover up:

What was he himself doing at twenty-five? Living from week to week. No bank account. Dodging cops now for the first time in his life. He had a talent for mathematics. Why in hell didn't they pay him for it somewhere? Tom realized that all his muscles had tensed, that the matchcover in his fingers was mashed sideways, nearly flat. He was bored, God-damned bloody bored, bored, bored!  
(9)

When Tom feels useless, in this case because of his lack of financial means, he feels tense and angry. Although he starts to feel isolated in the world he occupies because of his uselessness he shifts focus away from his flaws, instead engaging himself with the world through his perceived strength, his masculinity, which is clearly presented in his smashing the matchcover.

G. Stanley Hall, who feared that overcivilization endangered manhood, promoted the belief that savagery in boys should be recognized (in Bederman 79) because as Michael Kimmel suggests that manhood is equated with power, and "The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, a man of power"(184). The emphasis on power is so great that Kimmel claims fetish for power is also the reason for feeling powerless because even a slightest fraction can wound man's masculinity.

In addition to the emphasis on power regarding masculinity, Kimmel points out masculinity "is a homosocial enactment, its overriding emotion is fear" (187)—fear of being perceived as gay. Psychoanalytic historian Geoffrey Gorer claims "[t]he lives of most American men are bounded, and their interests daily curtailed by the constant necessity to prove to their fellows, and to themselves that they are not sissies, not homosexual" (129). Fear of being seen inadequate by other men or any circumstance that is likely to create suspicion that they are not who they are, encourage men clinging to masculinity. As Kimmel points out "violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood" (189), thus men mostly use their bodily power to prove their masculinity.

So far we have seen how Tom creates himself with each role he performs. This desire to be someone other than himself is firstly demonstrated by the man following Tom. At the given moment, it is only clear that his anxiety increases when he feels the gaze of the man on him, because he realizes that he is part of the perception of others and that increases his anxiety and consequently disturbs Tom. He is disturbed because the illusion that he has carefully created is in danger of being disturbed by the intrusion of reality. That is to say that Tom is running away from reality in order to hold on to the source of his pleasure. The source of Tom's pleasure becomes narratable when the readers are introduced to the possibility that seeing the man looking like a businessman but assuming that he is really a detective, reminds Tom of his own performance as Tom. Thus it is his own performance that he tries to safeguard by running away from a reality that forces him to see that he is not who he is pretending to be.

The introductory action of the novel not only functions as a presentation of what kind of character readers are faced with, but also functions as a foreshadowing of the interference of the reality that Tom will struggle with throughout the course of the novel. The moment Tom suspects that the man following him is pretending to be someone else; he becomes unable to distinguish between acting and being. Therefore, in the first scene Tom is also forced to face the reality that he is not suited for the role he is playing. In other words, running away from what it represents, illustrates his denial of reality and thus Tom alienates himself further from his present environment. However, while he is alienating himself from the environment, it becomes apparent that he is also alienating himself from

reality. His tendency to perform reflects his awareness that he has fallen short of who he can be, and he consequently alienates himself so that he can recreate himself. His constant desire to be someone else appears to be the only way to exist in a world where he feels useless, inferior and in accordance with Kimmel's description, powerless. In order to constantly be someone else and thus to deny reality, he adapts various identities that provide him with the satisfaction of being able to conform to social requirements regarding masculinity.

Impersonation is one of Tom's method of adapting alternative identities. At the beginning of the novel the impersonation of a tax collector on the phone claiming to collect unpaid taxes was nothing more than a "practical joke" (14) for Tom. Granting impersonation as adapting a different identity, Tom severs himself from the reality that he is a misfit and creates an illusion of success around a joke. In his case however, the joke not only serves to humor him but also to attain a sort of relief. According to Freud, in some cases, like in the case of Tom, one of the motivations of jokes is to insult another person and thus create pleasure and relief at the same time:

We have an impulse to insult certain person; but our sense of propriety, our aesthetic cultivation, is such a barrier to it that the insult cannot take place [...] But we might be offered the possibility of turning the material of words and thoughts used for the insult into a good joke or witticism, that is, of releasing pleasure from other sources that are not obstructed by the same suppression [...] The insult takes place, because it is possible to make a joke with it. But the pleasure aimed for is not only the pleasure generated by the joke; it is incomparably greater than the pleasure from the joke that we have to assume that the previously suppressed tendency has succeeded in getting through, possibly without any loss (2003a, 130-131).

According to Freud, joke-work creates a camouflage that allows the expression of forbidden desires. Similar to dreams in its function of discharging the unconscious, jokes also present wish-fulfillment in a waking state. Any desire that is banned by the conscious mind as a result of subjugation according to the rules of social order and therefore repressed in the unconscious is censored and transferred back to the conscious through dreams and jokes. The motive behind jokes is to achieve the pleasure of satisfying desires that are condemned by social order, and is consequently obtained through the showing off one's cleverness by implicitly insulting others, which otherwise cannot take place due to the ego's control over consciousness. Tom, who feels isolated in reality, yearns to be included by others, while engaging in meaningful human contact, develops a volatile stage pertinently created and acted to satisfy his need for engagement, while avoiding feeling like a misfit. He gains recognition through the medium of other people:

'No, sir. I went to Princeton for a while, then I visited another aunt in Denver and went to college there.' Tom waited, hoping Mr. Greenleaf would ask him something about Princeton, but he didn't. Tom could have discussed the system of teaching history, the campus restrictions, the atmosphere at the week-end dances, the political tendencies of the student body, anything. Tom had been very friendly last summer with a Princeton junior who had talked of nothing but Princeton, so that Tom had finally pumped him for more and more, foreseeing a time when he might be able to use the information. Tom had told the Greenleafs that he had been raised by his Aunt Dottie in Boston. She had taken him to Denver when he was sixteen, and actually he had only finished high school there,



but there had been a young man named Don Mizell rooming in his Aunt Bea's house in Denver who had been going to the University of Colorado. Tom felt as if he had gone there too. (18)

During his dinner with the Greenleafs, Tom introduces himself as a Princeton graduate, using the life story of a man whom he actually had met the previous summer in an attempt to fit in amongst this upper class group. By being close to these people and asking detailed questions about their lives, Tom manages to collect stories. He then internalizes the stories of others using them as his medium to seek fulfillment and completion in the opinion of others, thus gain recognition. He desires to be like the young, rich, flamboyant men he has met, yet he achieves more than they do with their own stories: not only does he act like them, he becomes a better them. According to John Dale, the reason behind the strategy of altering one's identity is the individual desire to "interface with the world, seeking to actively engage with their environment while anxiously protecting their own psychic space" (408). By doing this the individual creates strong boundaries that will protect his self-respect and generate inner security. However in Tom's situation, his psychic space of existence should not exist at all. His existence should be replaced with a better one, and that replacement should be protected. He covers his reality not to protect it, but to deny it. Through impersonation, he denies his reality and desires to preserve the pleasure that comes with these volatile alternative identities.

The second part of the novel starts with Tom's journey to retrieve Dickie. This is a new beginning for Tom. It is a new country and he feels like "he was starting a new life [...] A clean slate!". Although Tom wishes this journey to be a new beginning, a blank page where he can recreate himself, we see that Tom repeats his usual act of performance. In this part of the novel Tom, for whom performance becomes a habit of being, presents a shift from impersonating as a method of performance, to identifying.

After their first meeting, Tom realized his failure in how he approached Dickie and cursed himself for being humorless. The moment he sees Dickie as attainable he claims that he can do a one-man show, trying to prove that he is an entertaining person. As an example he poses as an Englishwoman in front of Dickie, putting on a drag act.

'This is for example.' He struck a pose with one hand on his hip, one foot extended. 'This is Lady Assburden sampling the American subway. She's never even been in the underground in London, but she wants to take back some American experiences.' Tom did it all in pantomime, searching for a coin, finding it didn't go into the slot, buying a token, puzzling over which stairs to go down, registering alarm at the noise and the long express ride, puzzling again as to how to get out of the place- here Marge came out, and Dickie told her it was an Englishwoman in the subway, but Marge didn't seem to get it and asked, 'What?'- walking through a door which could only be the door of the men's room from her twitching horror of this and that, which augmented until she fainted. Tom fainted gracefully on to the terrace glider.

'Wonderful!' Dickie yelled, clapping (51).

Although the joke seems to be about an Englishwoman in the subway, the sexual innuendo cannot be dismissed: the woman who has never ridden the underground in England, emphasizing her lack of experience, and her desire to accomplish it in America. When it is followed by the symbols of coin and token and the fact that she could not find where to insert them, reveals her ignorance of the mechanics of the sexual act. The long

express ride she is taking is the moment of intercourse and her puzzlement as to where to go next implies that she is clumsy and unskilled at sex. Indeed, the moment when she walks into the men's room, also a reference to the vision of male phallus, she faints. Thus Tom is making fun of her confusion and inexperience. The joke, which is pornographic in its subtext, makes Dickie laugh and this makes Tom pleased. This is also the difference between Tom's previous practical joke as a tax collector and this joke as an act. In the previous jokes, the aim was to entertain himself but now Dickie is the one that he wants to entertain. This shift concerning the audience is an alternative way to grant acceptance into the realm of manhood.

According to Michael Kimmel, "manhood is demonstrated for other man's approval" and "women become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale" (186). Sexism is thus the result of desire to prove manhood in the eyes of other men. In addition to humiliating women to promote masculinity, creating a hierarchical binary between man and woman, man distances himself from woman because "being a man means not being like women" (185).

In addition to Kimmel's approach, for Freud, the tendency of bawdry jokes is to ally the speaker as the first person and the listener as the third person, through the medium of a woman as the second person. As he suggests, the aim of these kinds of jokes is to please the third person who is the listener.

In general, a tendentious joke requires three persons: apart from the one who is telling the joke, it needs a second person who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual aggression, and a third in whom the joke's intention of producing pleasure is fulfilled [...] the person who tells the joke is not the one who also laughs at it and enjoys the pleasure it produces, but the inactive listener. In the case of bawdry, the three persons have the same relations. The course of its development can be described thus: as the first person finds his satisfaction inhibited by the woman, his libidinal impulse develops a hostile tendency towards this second person and calls on the third, originally the intruder, to be his ally. The first person's bawdry talk strips the woman naked before the third, who is now, as listener, bribed- by the effortless satisfaction of his own libido (95).<sup>1</sup>

The second person is the object and the third person is the target of the first person in the joke. According to Greg Forster, the triangle is a demonstration of "the oedipal structure" (129) where the son allies with the father in his seduction of the mother, and identifies himself with the father as soon as he interferes with the child's desire for the mother. In order to be recognized in the triangle, the child allies with the father and takes the risk of losing the mother. Therefore, the subtext of bawdry talk represents a desire on the speaker's part for social recognition by allying with the more powerful third element. By denying the woman as subject, the teller of the joke gains gratification through the laughter of the third party. Thus Tom manages to negate Dickie's girlfriend Marge for the sake of bonding with Dickie. Marge, unnecessary and unwelcome, is unconsciously understood by Tom to be a threat to his dyad with Dickie, and is therefore left out of the joke.

Although the element of a mother is crucial to the oedipal triangle, in Tom's joke both the mother and the father are embodied in Dickie. Tom, who is the child in the triangle

---

1. In the Penguin edition of the book 'bawdry' is used instead of 'smut' as it is used in the Standard edition.

both desires to seduce Dickie, like a child seducing the mother, and ally with Dickie to gain social recognition, like a child allying with the father. It can thus be suggested that with the joke, Tom manages to satisfy both his erotic needs, by seducing Dickie, and his aggressive and destructive impulses, by negating Marge. In his joke Tom also embodies a double role: he is both the first and the second person, indicating a split in his identity. In Tom's case, the split and the invisible part looking for a role to play, finds its way into existence by impersonation. However this time he is impersonating in order to diminish the side of his visible self that lacks confidence, the one that is puzzled and insecure, all characteristics of the woman in his joke. This is his way of "starting a new life [...] A clean slate!" (31) and his first step into his new life, which is to "make Dickie like him. That he wanted more than anything else in the world" (47), has been accomplished with the joke.

In addition to being liked by Dickie, Tom also has an image of Dickie in his mind, which means that he is not only re-creating himself through Dickie, he is at the same time re-creating Dickie in accordance with the image in his mind. "Mr. Greenleaf was right. Yet it gave Dickie something to do, kept him out of trouble. Tom supposed, just as it gave thousands of lousy amateur painters all over America something to do. He was only sorry that Dickie fell into this category as a painter, because he wanted Dickie to be much more" (53).

Soon after Tom sees Dickie's painting, he realizes that Dickie is similar to other second rate painters in America. He is not especially gifted, but instead, ordinary just like Tom. This scene may be a reminder of the relationship between the father and the son during the oedipal stage, in which, in Freud's formulation, the son desires his mother, wishes to replace his father, and as a consequence of the guilt for having these desires, develops a self-protective identification with the father. In Tom's case, he idealizes Dickie, as a child idealizes his father, so that he can replace him one day. That's why he wants Dickie to be much more, so that he can be much more than ordinary.

Tom's identification with Dickie is more promising in his desire to refashion himself than his previous attempts in impersonating people had been. As mentioned above, impersonation is a subtle reference to the person's discovery of his own difference and his attempt to cover it by being someone else. However, through identifying, Tom manages to create a mirror for himself where he becomes visible as he is, both for himself and for the others around him. Dickie thus functions as Tom's mirror image. "It seemed to Tom that he was looking in a mirror when he looked at Dickie's leg, and his propped foot beside him. They were the same height, and very much the same weight, Dickie perhaps a little heavier" (59).

The similarity between Tom and Dickie is only based on appearance. They have the same height, similar weight, same expression, and same attitude when dressed the same. He felt as though he had found his twin or more precisely, he fashions himself into Dickie's doppelgänger. According to Freud, the idea of having a double can create a sense of insurance since it is "originally an insurance against the extinction of the self" (142). As a result, the oneness that occurs with the double creates a bond between the ego and the world. The instability in the personality that occurs as a result of the split between the ego and the world is thus stabilized, and the state of sameness is obtained.

Apart from this "natural" sameness, Tom magnifies the duality by wearing Dickie's clothes:

He took off his knee-length shorts and put on the grey flannel trousers. He put on a pair of Dickie's shoes. The he opened the bottom drawer of the chest and took out a clean blue- and- white striped shirts [...] Tom darted back to the closet

again and took a hat from the top shelf [...] He put it on rakishly. It surprised him how much he looked like Dickie with the top part of his head covered. (59-69)

With Dickie's clothes, Tom alters his self-perception, through which he finds a way to escape his belief that he is a failure. In this scene, Highsmith manages to treat identity as a dress rehearsal. Tom wears Dickie's clothes and becomes Dickie. Therefore we can claim that Tom again falls into the deception of appearance. He appears to be like Dickie, and that appearance becomes reality for him. He becomes Dickie. He has lost touch with reality and lost himself, and according to Freud when humans enter into social bonds, they sacrifice themselves. In addition to losing one's self, in the novel we also see that casting himself as Dickie's double, Tom creates a sense of dependence on Dickie. Without him, Tom will not be able to be him. From a Freudian perspective, the dependence of one on his double becomes an object of terror.

By slow degrees a special authority takes shape within the ego; this authority, which is able to confront the rest of the ego, performs the function of self-observation and self-criticism, exercises a kind of psychical censorship, and so becomes what we know as the 'conscience' [...] However, after considering the manifest motivation behind the figure of the double, we have to own that none of this helps us understand the extraordinary degree of uncanniness that attaches to it, and we may add, drawing upon our knowledge of pathological mental processes, that none of this content could explain the defensive urge that ejects from the ego as something alien. Its uncanny quality can surely derive only from the fact that the double is a creation that belongs to a primitive phase in our mental development, a phase that we have surmounted, in which it admittedly had a more benign significance. The double has become an object of terror, just as gods became demons after the collapse of their cult. (Freud 142-143)

The person, who has never seen himself, as others see him, is suddenly faced with the reality of himself and cannot deny it any more. He becomes the one who is watching himself. A double becomes a way of self-seeing, and self-criticism, and no longer promising wholeness; instead offers only horror. Through the double, the self may be able to see himself outside of itself, in a self that is not its own but familiar in an uncanny way. In the case of Tom and Dickie, the familiarity has given a sense of sameness to Tom something he has desired for a long time. Through this connection, Tom finds a satisfactory way to exist, but with this satisfaction he is completely dependent on Dickie. This peaceful moment of the sameness is disturbed as soon as Dickie sees Tom wearing his clothes and looking like him. This is the moment of the uncanny return of the familiar for Dickie, since the mirror effect creates horror in Dickie as he is horrified to see his reflection in the body of Tom. From that moment on, he tries to avoid any friendly intimacy with Tom by being indifferent and together with Marge "they were just quietly and gradually leaving him out of their preparations" (79). And gradually Tom starts feeling more left out with the entrance of Marge into the dyad Tom had created with Dickie. Now it is Dickie and Marge, and Tom again starts feeling like an unwelcome outsider, and he "had never before in his life felt like an unwelcome, boring guest" (85), since he has always made himself suitable for the environment he was in, as we saw him imitate a Princeton graduate in the company of Greenleafs, so that he would not feel like an outsider and thus unwelcome. When Tom is rejected by his double, and therefore when his existence through his dependence on Dickie is threatened, destroying Dickie appears to be the only solution for Tom.

A crazy emotion of hate, of affection, of impatience and frustration was swelling in him, hampering his breathing. He wanted to kill Dickie. It was not the first time he had thought of it. Before, once or twice or three times, it had been an impulse caused by anger or disappointment, an impulse that vanished immediately and left him with a feeling of shame [...] He had failed with Dickie, in every way. He hated Dickie, because, however he looked at what had happened, his failing has not been his own fault, not due to anything he had done, but due to Dickie's stubbornness. And his blatant rudeness! He had offered Dickie friendship, companionship, and respect, everything he had to offer, and Dickie had replied with ingratitude and now hostility. Dickie was just shoving him out in the cold. If he had killed him on this trip, Tom thought, he could simply say that some accident had happened. He could—He had just thought of something brilliant: he could become Dickie Greenleaf himself. (87)

Confused by contradictory emotions of love and hate, Tom tries hard to find reasons for his desire to kill Dickie; the most important reason of all being that Dickie failed him in every way. Tom, who has been a failure all his life, never blamed himself for his failures. However, he does blame Dickie for his failure, as he had previously blamed civilization, taking his revenge by insulting it through his jokes. Killing Dickie allows Tom to eliminate the reality that he is a failure.

What is also underlined in Tom's hostility towards others, especially towards Dickie after he rejected Tom's companionship, is that this is his way to achieve self-preservation. The Eros that allows the ego to attach itself to an outside object is now threatened by rejection and the disappearance of either part of the dyad. Therefore, rather than being destroyed, the ego destroys the other and thus protects itself. Tom who would be destroyed with the de-bonding as he would return to be a failure and a misfit, kills Dickie and becomes him so as to keep the bonding forever and keep his current delusion forever.

Soon after brutally murdering Dickie, Tom travels to Dickie's home and tells Dickie's parents and friends that Dickie decided to stay in Rome for the winter and he has come to collect some of Dickie's belongings. Actually, Tom is doing this for himself, as he needs Dickie's things to feel like Dickie, to become Dickie. He later on forges letter from Dickie to his friends, so that no one would notice Dickie's sudden disappearance. The letter confirms the existence of Dickie to those who would miss him, but on another level it gives Tom more reasons to be Dickie. He starts talking like him, writing like him, and eventually he starts feeling like him. By completely becoming Dickie, he lets his identity as Tom fade away and this disappearance is acceptable as long as he has found a better self to be in the world. Yet this replacement has to be replaced by reality when Dickie becomes the main suspect of Freddie Miles' murder, whom Tom has killed to protect his new identity. After stopping by his apartment, Freddie suspected that Tom was up to something and when Tom realized his suspicion he had to kill him so that his plan would not be destroyed. Yet his murder brings an unbearable consequence, he has to be himself again so as not to be blamed for the murder of Freddie, he has to be Thomas Ripley and he "hated becoming Thomas Ripley again, hated being nobody" (164). Yet he immediately has found a way to dismiss this unpleasure by acting a "dreary role as Thomas Ripley" (166). From now on everything will be an act; he would impersonate Thomas Ripley so as to hide Tom Ripley. His self is divided into two within himself: Tom and Thomas. Under the siege of Thomas, Tom would be invisible.

As Freud states "[c]ivilization demands sacrifices" (64) and that a civilized man has to exchange a portion of him for a portion of security (73). This article has suggested that

Thomas Ripley sacrificed Tom Ripley in favor of a more constant and social identity. Through his various performances, he alienates himself from reality and identifies with the 1950s American society that demands man to be with and in power. Therefore, performance helps him to pursue his impossible wish to exceed to social position he was born into and to signify socially idealized man. American success dream that is imposed on him is so great that he has murdered to fulfill it. Patricia Highsmith presents the new American hero, who is transformed from being a sissy to a man, through using violence as the “most evident marker of manhood”.

### Works Cited

- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 1995.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Dale, John. “Crossing the Road to Avoid Your Friends: Engagement, Alienation, and Patricia Highsmith”. *Midwest Quarterly* 51.4 (2010): 405-423.
- Forster, Greg. *Murdering Masculinities: Fantasies of Gender and Violence in the American Crime Novel*. New York and London: New York UP, 2000.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1989.
- . *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. New York: Penguin, 2003a.
- . *The Uncanny*. New York: Penguin, 2003b.
- Gorer, Geoffrey. *The American People: A Study in National Character*. New York: Norton, 1964.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor, 1959.
- Highsmith, Patricia. *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. London: Vintage, 2010.
- Hilfer, Anthony Clannel. “‘Not Really Such a Monster’: Highsmith’s Ripley as Thriller Protagonist and Protean Man”. *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought (MQ)* 25. 4 (1984): 361-374.
- Kimmel, Michael S. “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity”. *Feminism and Masculinities*. Peter F. Murphy. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.
- Malmgren, Carl. D. *Anatomy of Murder: Mystery, Detective and Crime Fiction*. US: Bowling Green U Popular P, 2001.
- Riesman, David. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1950.
- Rzepka ,Charles J., Lee Horsley. eds. *A Companion to Crime Fiction*. London: Blackwell, 2010.
- Trask, Michael. “Patricia Highsmith’s Method”. *American Literary History* 22.3 (2010): 584- 614.
- Tuss, Alex. “Masculine Identity and Success: A Critical Analysis of Patricia Highsmith’s *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*”. *Journal of Men’s Studies* 12.2 (2004): 93- 102.



**Aestheticizing Absence:  
Representations of the Twin Towers' Shadow  
in 9/11 Literature and Film**

**Silvia Schultermandl**

**Abstract:** This essay investigates alternative representational practices of dealing with the events on September 11 without replicating prevalent ideological discourses of American hegemony. My argument is that representations of the Twin Towers' shadow in film and literature depicting the September 11 attacks on New York City creatively intervene at the intersection of personal loss and ideological commodification. Through the representation of not the Twin Towers but their shadow, artistic responses to 9/11 resist discourses of patriotism and US-centrism and fully explore the polysemic potential of the 9/11 attacks. The examples I discuss here are Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of no Towers* and Sean Penn's untitled short film on Alain Brigand's compilation *11'09''01*. These examples from graphic memoir and short film emphasize through various stylistic interventions the dialectical relationship between the Twin Towers as buildings and the symbolic meaning they have acquired.

**Keywords:** 9/11, memory, Twin Towers' shadow, Art Spiegelman, Sean Penn

Ten years after the destruction of the World Trade Center Twin Towers, the 9/11 Memorial opened with an exclusive tour for the victims' families. Many family members had, no doubt, visited Ground Zero before, but with the opening of the 9/11 Memorial, the space they privately sought out for acts of remembrance, is now officially designated as a space of public mourning. The 9/11 Memorial, designed by Michael Arad who gave it the telling name "Reflecting Absence", shows the footprints of the WTC Twin Towers in the form of two identically-shaped recessed pools (each one acre big). The pools are framed by bronze parapets which display the names of the victims of the September 11 attacks and the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. From these parapets, cascades of water fall into the pools in continuous streams. Surrounded by a park with white oaks, the 9/11 memorial is less a memorial in the common sense as it is a meditative space.

Arad's memorial, which the American Institute of Architecture recently awarded as one of the top 10 American urban designs for 2013, opts against realistic representation and thus intentionally diverts the focus away from the memory of the towers. Arad's decision not to reproduce the Twin Towers or a memorial which references their looming phallic twin shape, but to capture their legacies in the form of hidden recessed twin pools outnumbered the almost 5000 contestants in the architectural competition prior to the award in 2004. Not the shape of the memorial reminds of the Twin Towers but their "square footprints" (Goldberger 42) in the ground, their only traces left on that very site. Arad's memorial is a space for contemplation and introspection, triggered by the abstract rendering of the gaping void left by the Twin Towers. It does not recreate images of the Twin Towers but memorializes their absence and the feeling of loss.



Through this non-mimetic form, the memorial distances itself from established practices of public memory in the wake of the September 11 attacks. Together with displays of the American flag, the proliferation of images of the Twin Towers<sup>1</sup> has dominated not only the landscape of Lower Manhattan in the immediate aftermath of the attacks but the ways in which Americans remember the events on September 11, 2001 at large. Much more than the partly collapsed Pentagon or the field in rural Pennsylvania where the forth hi-jacked aircraft crashed, the Twin Towers encapsulate what 9/11 has come to signify today: the architectural achievement the towers once constituted (Gillespie), their emblematic function as representation of American capital power in a global context (Baudrillard, Chomsky), and the aesthetic spectacle of their attack and subsequent destruction (Redfield). Realistic depictions of the Twin Towers suggest the persistent trauma and the impossibility to make sense of the September 11 attacks. Almost as though prompted by a conscious refusal to accept the gap in the New York City landscape, images of the *intact* as opposed to *attacked* towers emerged as first responses to the events (Hyman). The memorabilia of the 9/11 attacks (pins, bumper stickers, coffee mugs, t-shirts, etc.) quickly adopted the images of the Twin Towers as intact buildings often also featuring slogans expressing emotions of grief, perseverance, and patriotism. Realistic images of the intact towers now destroyed also morphed into the moniker 9/11 itself, with the Twin Towers as iconic stand-ins for the number 11. Perhaps because 9/11 was a “semiotic event” (Versluys 2), so, too, has been its representation in public memory through endless reproduction of the same semiotic codes.

Arad’s memorial constitutes a break with this established form of memorialization, and, consciously or unconsciously, also offers a critique of the global power dynamics implied in the proliferation of images of the Twin Towers in the context of American patriotism. Realistic depictions of the attacks on the Twin Towers appear not only in folk art but were also appropriated to justify the need for U.S. military interventions in what came to be called “rogue nations” (the Afghanistan attacks between 2001 and 2010; the Iraq War 2003-2010). Much of U.S. memorial culture of the Twin Towers is encoded in patriotic verbal and visual vocabulary that quickly became synonymous with discourses of American nationalism, culminating in the Homeland security act passed on 25 November 2002. Cara Cilano has made a similar point when arguing that “9/11 as a designation functions monolithically, disallowing any diversion from its fear-based, militaristically-based signifying power” (15). This conflation of 9/11 as a cultural event in the United States and as the driving motif in soliciting American sympathy for foreign policy interventions poses a challenge to the study of 9/11. Perhaps by the very assumption that September 11 was an event of world-changing magnitude, exemplifying the oft-quoted “clash of civilizations”, scholarship on 9/11 needs to be careful not to replicate and contribute to the notion that 9/11 constitutes a metaphorical moment in world history. While the 9/11 attacks initially held the potential for collective and even global mourning, its appropriation for the justification of American foreign policy interventions (cf. Cilano 13-15) coined 9/11 in strictly “America-centric and provincial” terms (Sturken 2008).

What Arad’s memorial seems to suggest is that there can be, and perhaps should be, other forms of memorialization which contextualize 9/11 not within the rhetoric of

---

<sup>1</sup> This dominant presence of the Twin Towers is a very complex issue: Deems Morrione concurs that the attack on the Twin Towers “eclipsed” the other two attacks on the same day. Still, Morrione argues that the full semiotic significance of the attack on the Twin Towers was only established through the attack on the pentagon which linked the commercial and political center of the United States and gave the attacks the same symbolic meaning.

American Homeland security but raise issues about the processes of memorialization at large. This is an issue which Don DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins of the Future" raised already a few months after the September 11 attacks. DeLillo's by now famous phrase, "[t]here is something empty in the sky", gave expression to the gaping void left by the absent Twin Towers, but perhaps more so, to the question as to how and with what literature can address this emptiness (39). Literature ultimately succeeds, DeLillo contends, in "giv[ing] memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space" (39), but he is conscious of the difficulty of rendering 9/11 representable, arguing that the event itself is "a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perception" (38-39). For Marco Abel, who offers a critical analysis of the ethics of DeLillo's essay, the question about the representation of 9/11 centers on its "response-ability", i.e. the cultural practices of responding to the public crises (1237). Abel suggests, following Theodor Adorno's pronouncement that there can be no poetry after the horrors of the Holocaust, that "[t]he careless deployment of representational language in the form of similes and analogies enforces a culture of judgment instead of prompting an investigation of how values function" (1246-7).

Nevertheless, the fascination with the Twin Towers, perhaps because they were "oddly beautiful" (Calhoun et al. 1), but also because their destruction was beyond the scope of imagination, permeates literary and filmic responses to 9/11. Much of the literature depicting 9/11 is not only set in New York City but features detailed depictions of the attack on the Twin Towers, either as catalysts in the plot development at climactic positions or as exposition. The representation of the attacks and their immediate aftermath include intermedial renderings and ekphrastic passages which evoke the same visual images of 9/11 dominant in the global news media. These "visual turns" in the narrative representation of 9/11 introduce into the fictional worlds of the novels moments of familiarity for the reader (Schultersmandl 2010) Richard Gray summarizes this phenomenon by arguing that "[n]ew events generate new forms of consciousness requiring new structures of ideology and the imagination to assimilate and express them" (133). While the intermedial representation of 9/11 is not new *per se*, it captures the mechanisms of representation which made 9/11 dependent on the visualization of the attack on the Twin Towers in the first place.

Yet, visual representations of the trauma 9/11 conjured, inadvertently reproduces dominant political discourses of American nationalism. In their introduction to the special issue, "Cultural Productions of 9/11", of the online journal *Reconstructions: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, Christopher Schaberg and Kara Thompson explore the question how to write about 9/11 "without reproducing the very mythologies that [they] set out to critique" (n.p.). Such mythologies manifest themselves in what they call "Avatars of 9/11", i.e. secondary and tertiary effects of the aftermath of 9/11, involving manifestations of the U.S. homeland security policies in everyday-life situations including airport security. This (both spatially and temporally) far-reaching avataristic effect of 9/11 conjures up "many banal reminders of the long shadow of 'the war on terror'" (n. p.) and constantly builds on the repertoire of fear which first emerged in the direct aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Rachel Greenwald Smith makes a similar observation when she claims that "the attempt to represent (or even perform the unrepresentability of) trauma in the wake of the event often slips into discourses around trauma that at best obscure the continuity of neoliberal political, economic, and social policies in the period and at worst justify continued U.S. geopolitical exploitation" (163). Smith's argument addresses the politics of representation of 9/11 and the selective foci through which trauma is generally addressed in September 11 fiction. While Smith acknowledges the experimental narrative patterns in such works as DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, she also deplors

the absence of efforts to capture the social conditions which prompt trauma in the first place: “What is unrepresentable in September 11 fiction is therefore not the trauma itself, but the intricacy of the web from which it emerges and that it causes to vibrate in turn” (169).

It seems as though the very endeavor to remember 9/11 by means of a visualization of the September 11 events ultimately complies with the same political rhetoric which appropriates 9/11 for discourses of American exceptionalism. It also seems as though the alternative, namely remembering 9/11 without the implied national iconicity, must be available by shifting the focus away from the Twin Towers. This is also Marita Sturken’s suggestion in “The Aesthetics of Absence”, where she investigates practices of memory culture which revere 9/11 outside of its nationalistic context. Sturken’s attention there is on the remnants of the destroyed Twin Towers and their significance for public mourning. For instance, with regards to the dust and debris of the destroyed WTC Twin Towers, Sturken reminds us that, in the absence of physical remains of the victims, they have become “material artifacts that can provide some kind of corporeal presence to mediate the absence of a loved one” (312-3). This presence of the Twin Towers (albeit in pulverized form), suggests Sturken, is left unaddressed in the naming of the Twin Towers area as Ground Zero. Sturken’s argument departs from her observation that Ground Zero, both semantically and conceptually, evokes a tabula-rasa connotation which fails to address the processes of memorialization of the before and after 9/11 and the events on 9/11 themselves, “Ground Zero is a site where practices of memory and mourning have been in active tension with representational practices and debates over aesthetics, a place, one could say, defined and redefined by a tyranny of meaning” (312). What Sturken, Smith, and Schaberg and Thompson equally emphasize is that discourses surrounding the memory culture of 9/11 focus too narrowly on the Twin Towers themselves.

Arad’s memorial resists these pitfalls of inadvertently reproducing American nationalist ideology, simply because all mimetic representation conjures up the same images the Bush administration used to justify military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. But his memorial is temporally removed from the September 11 events and does not seek to represent the events but to remember their effects. In contrast, the majority of 9/11 novels, beginning with Frédéric Beigbeder’s novel *Windows on the World* (2003), reproduce or evoke images of the Twin Towers as iconic signifiers of the New York City setting on that September 11, 2001. Such novels function “as a prosthesis, an awkward substitute for and attempt to compensate for the unrepresentable absence effected by 9/11 itself” (Keniston, Quinn 2).

### **The Dialectic of the Shadow**

In light of these initial thoughts, my essay investigates an alternative representational practice of dealing with the events on September 11 without replicating prevalent ideological discourse of American hegemony. My argument is that representations of the Twin Towers’ shadow in film and literature depicting the September 11 attacks on New York City creatively intervene at the intersection of personal loss and ideological commodification. Through the representation of not the Twin Towers themselves but their shadow, artistic responses to 9/11 resist discourses of patriotism and U.S.-centrism but fully explore the polysemic potential of the 9/11 attacks. The examples I discuss here are Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* and Sean Penn’s untitled short film on the compilation *11’09’01*. These examples from graphic memoir and short film emphasize through various stylistic interventions, the dialectical relationship between the Twin Towers as buildings and the symbolic meaning they have acquired. Both

examples discursively disrupt the notion of linearity and uniformity by employing simultaneity as a form of transmission of story: Spiegelman's memoir has several narrative strands with multiple connections, also intertextuality, meta-referentiality, and simultaneous narration of several thematically-linked stories; in Sean Penn's short film—split screen depictions allow varying angles on the protagonist's everyday life, a life which is haunted by the loss of his wife and his inability or refusal to address this loss fully. In both examples, this simultaneous rendering of multiple pasts goes against the grain of the linear causal links which emerged between September 11 and international terrorism. Conversely, Spiegelman and Penn emphasize introspection: on the personal level, by privileging first-person perspectives and on the national level, by debating critical issues in the U.S. social and political landscape, long before 9/11 became the term which transferred the focus of attention away from internal political to foreign politics.

The Twin Towers' shadow functions on two levels: on the aesthetic level, it lends itself for an incorporation of the memory and legacy of 9/11 and are, as such, framed through specific stylistic devices to establish the narrative sequence in the graphic novel, or the visualization of the fall of the towers without actually using already canonical images in the media coverage of 9/11; Spiegelman and Penn employ the Twin Towers' shadow in order to defamiliarize the audience from established narratives of 9/11. Secondly, on an ideological level, the shadow in Spiegelman's and Penn's works respectively historicize the uncanny presence of the Twin Towers in a post-9/11 era without replicating the same images and discourses prevalent in the popular imaginary. This invites a critical stance towards the mechanisms of representing 9/11, including the highly documentary, mimetic and authentic images with which most narratives of 9/11 operate.

My analysis of the Twin Tower shadow relies on Derrida's metaphoric use of the shadow as a signifier of cultural aporia. In *Of Grammatology*, his core definition of deconstructivism, Derrida argues that "a reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of language that he uses. The relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness and force but a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce*" (158) (emphasis original). Derrida's suggestion that a text's essence depends on the dialectical relationship between more obvious and more hidden meaning is at the basis of deconstructivist criticism; in Derrida's own words: a deconstructive reading "attempts to make the not-seen accessible to sight" (163). Of course, Derrida's reference of the shadow as a signifier of meaning may be mere word-play. But in a Jungian sense, the archetype of the shadow can potentially complement subjectivity. For Jung, the shadow is the representation of the negative and unwanted aspects of identity. While this attribution of negative qualities to the shadow is a form of repression and compartmentalization of the unwanted, the confrontation with the repressed is a necessary step for trauma recovery and the maintenance of psychological health. Jane Caputi adopts a Jungian reading of the shadow in her analysis of the news covers that represent Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein as shadow figures and antithesis of American values. Caputi argues that in order to fully comprehend one's subjectivity, "[t]he shadow must be encountered, recognized, and ultimately integrated into knowledge of the self" (4). A Derridian reading of the Twin Tower shadow zooms in on the innate ambivalence in Spiegelman's and Penn's representations of 9/11: on the one hand, they use the Twin Towers as referents of the September 11 attacks but on the other, they demystify the Twin Towers by intentionally marginalizing them. Hence, the Twin Towers do not hold center stage but contextualize the aesthetic rendering of Spiegelman's and Penn's critical depictions of the representational practices. Following Jung's archetypal theory, the Twin

Towers' shadow provides a mode of representing 9/11 without resonating with the nationalized iconography the Twin Towers themselves acquired over time.

### **Art Spiegelman: “Tragedy Transformed into Travesty”**

Art Spiegelman responded very quickly to the question of representing life in New York City after 9/11 with the decision to transfer discourses from realistic depictions of the Twin Towers to stylized depictions of their shadow. Together with his wife Françoise Mouly, he published a black-on-black image of the Twin Towers in the September 24, 2001 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine. Bearing the title “9/11/2001”, this image consists of “stark silhouettes, their jet-black, monolithic forms barely distinguishable against the only slightly lighter dark gray of the background” and constitutes “an absent presence upon which any number of associations and memories can be projected” (Krause 12). On the cover of *The New Yorker*, the black-on-black image of the Twin Towers symbolizes the phantom pain New Yorkers felt towards the absent Twin Towers. When Spiegelman later adopts the image of the Twin Towers’s shadow to narrate his personal trauma of the experience of the September 11 attacks in his graphic memoir *In the Shadow of No Towers*, the black-on-black image of the shadow on the cover stands in contrast to the counter-monolithic narrative which unfolds within the book’s pages.

Each of the ten double panels—Spiegelman calls them comix—functions as an individual and thematically distinct chapter which narrates Spiegelman’s experience of the actual day of the attacks, when he rushed to pick up his daughter Nadja from Stuyvesant High school, only a few blocks away from the World Trade Center. On each comix page, Spiegelman wrote the copyright information, indicating the time frame during which he was working on each of the panels from the first draft to the finished page. This copyright information also establishes a chronological order of the comix pages and suggests a chronological development, starting from Spiegelman’s personal trauma to collective anxiety and even national paranoia. Spiegelman’s graphic memoir is highly critical of the semiotic practices with which 9/11 had been commodified for nationalistic purposes. He depicts himself as torn between the threat of Al-Qaeda on the one hand and the Bush/Chaney administration on the other in numerous visual examples throughout the memoir; most verbal is his critique in his suggestion that 9/11 has become “tragedy transformed into travesty” (10).

Spiegelman’s memoir plays with the obvious paradox of visually representing something that is no longer there. According to the laws of optics, the representation of the shadow of the missing towers is paradoxical, as is the title of Spiegelman’s graphic memoir: shadows depend on the existence of concrete objects and their specific constellation to a source of light. Spiegelman’s use of the shadow as signifiers of a post-Twin Tower reality refutes the division into a before and “after the fall”<sup>2</sup> and, by extension, the implication that the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center constitute a moment of historical rupture.<sup>3</sup> In a three-panel episode on the first comix page, Spiegelman

<sup>2</sup> Richard Gray’s study *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011) adopts this metaphor and its implied biblical reference to the fall from grace for his categorization of the poetics which demarcate a new form in 21<sup>st</sup>-century American art.

<sup>3</sup> In *9/11 and the War on Terror* (2008), David Holloway argues that the representation of 9/11 in the years 2001 to 2006 relied heavily on “American and Western cultural and intellectual history”; and while there was an “undeniably strong revisionist current in contemporary thought and culture”, Holloway notes that the post-9/11 era does not show “clean breaks” with already established traditions and practices.

in fact satirizes the effects of 9/11: we see the same family sit on the sofa in front of the TV screen in all three panels; what changes is that beginning with September 11 their hair is raised in terror and that an American flag is pinned onto the back wall of their family den. Thematically, the shadow in Spiegelman's memoir gives expression to the sense of loss and mourning felt after the September 11 attacks but does so without according 9/11 with the status of an unprecedented and absolute tragedy. In part, Spiegelman interlaces his 9/11 memoir with quotations<sup>4</sup> from his previous graphic memoir *Maus*, a narrative of the trauma of the Holocaust his parents experienced as interred Jews in Auschwitz and their survivor's guilt as well as his own. This inter-textual relationship between *In the Shadow of No Towers* and *Maus* deconstructs the singularity of the September 11 events.<sup>5</sup>

Stylistically, the destroyed towers establish coherence among the ten comix pages. Their repeated appearance in the form of the glowing skeleton of the North Tower in various positions on the page depicts the last moments of the North Tower's "life" shortly before its collapse. This glowing skeleton sticks out from the diegetic level of the memoir because of its repeated but always modified appearance. It also sticks out because it was, unlike the hand-drawn panels which make up the main narrative of Spiegelman's memoir, designed digitally.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the skeleton, the use of the memoir's title as chapter title for each of the ten comix pages duplicates the synthesizing effect of the glowing towers. Spiegelman first introduces the glowing skeleton on the first comix page, where he places the burning tower in context with American patriotism: as the top panel of the glowing tower tilts as if it were to fall from the page, the American flag appears underneath it, suggesting the temporal sequence between the fall of the Twin Towers and the appearance of American flags in public spaces through the United States. In the same corner, the comix gestures toward an extra-diegetic moment of the graphic memoir: with the words "in our last episode..." the comix offers a temporal digression from the memoir's actual story and hints at a past which is actually not recorded in the memoir. Martha Kuhlman argues that Spiegelman's "simultaneous temporality" serves as a way of representing trauma through destabilized narrative discourse (850). This confusion of temporalities resonates with the use of the shadow as a paradoxical referent of the absent Twin Towers.

A horizontal sequence of panels at the top of comix page 2 exemplifies the uncanny presence of the Twin Towers in Spiegelman's life. With the American eagle hung by a rope and tied around his neck like the proverbial albatross referencing Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, Spiegelman is depicted in a frantic soliloquy about the way the September 11 attacks haunt him. What underscores the uncanniness of the content is the morphing of the panels from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional image so that what starts out as an image of Spiegelman ultimately becomes an image of the burning Twin Towers. The three-dimensionality of the towers is highlighted through the shadow they cast across the page, running diagonally from the top right to the bottom left corner. This shadow signifies the looming presence of the towers in whose

---

<sup>4</sup> Spiegelman's eponymous character Maus appears in *In the Shadow of No Towers* as part of the multi-perspective diegesis but as in the form of panels from individual panels from *Maus* which Spiegelman assembles to a collage of present and past trauma narratives.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Davis's essay "The Flames of New York" juxtaposes 9/11 with already existing images of an apocalyptic New York City.

<sup>6</sup> In the foreword to his memoir, Spiegelman explains that he "repeatedly tried to paint [the glowing skeleton] with humiliating results but eventually came close to capturing the vision of disintegration digitally on [his] computer" (n.p)

shadow Spiegelman's narrative unfolds. But more than on the level of story, the interplay of towers and shadow opens up a dialectical space of mourning and recovery.

Spiegelman's graphic memoir is often cited as an example of a trauma narrative, whereby trauma is predominantly conceived in terms of manifestations which cannot always easily be traced back to the event which triggered them. As such, trauma constitutes a ceasura in everyday life. In Spiegelman's graphic memoir, not the relationship between event and trauma but his efforts to live with that trauma (both national and personal) shape the narrative's plotline. This idea of living in the shadow of the Twin Towers is indicative of Lauren Berlant's concept of "crisis ordinariness" which describes the mechanisms of daily survival after the traumatic event. Berlant counters prevalent notions in trauma theory by emphasizing the process of habituation to crises in the form of daily rituals which address the crisis head-on for the sake of survival. In Berlant's own definition, crisis ordinariness is at work when "[t]he subject of the traumatizing event is opened to a new habituation of history" (81).

In Spiegelman's memoir, this crisis ordinariness entails learning to live in the proverbial shadow of no towers, in the space left vacuous after the destruction of the Twin Towers. In this vein, the Twin Tower shadow on the cover page contains a palimpsest of histories and events and not only the linear narrative of the Twin Tower's destruction. Thus, even though the Twin Towers feature prominently in Spiegelman's narrative, the stories through which they are contextualized do not follow a linear development, nor do they function monolithically.

#### **Sean Penn: "And there was light"**

Learning to live with a new situation is also at the center of Sean Penn's untitled short film included in Alan Brigand's compilation *11'09''01*, where an old man, who lost his wife a long time ago, only accepts her death after the fall of the Twin Towers. In Penn's short film, the shadow indicates the destruction of the Twin Towers and the emergence of a new perspective on America's social status quo. In this sense, the fall of the Twin Towers implies the end of an era, but only in the context of the protagonist's acceptance of a past event which predates 9/11. In other words, the rupture which affects his life is not so much brought about by the September 11 events but by the entirely unrelated event of his wife's death.

Brigand's project is unique among the textual responses to 9/11 in that it consists of eleven short films by directors from as many countries: each film is exactly eleven minutes and nine seconds and one frame long, a fact which serves both as a structural element of the film as a whole but also as a conscious digression from the moniker 9/11, the American tradition of indication time and its recalling of the 911 American emergency number. Thematically, the eleven short films are connected by their alternating perspectives on the events of September 11 themselves, the war on terror and its repercussions, and American military involvement in general.<sup>7</sup> Sean Penn's film offers a stylized depiction of the

---

<sup>7</sup> I have elsewhere (Schultermandl "Perspectival Adjustments" 187-88) identified three thematic categories of the films: one which focuses on different modes of aestheticizing 9/11; one which deals with the "other 9/11", that is other mass-murder events in recent world history, including the Bosnian massacre of Srebrenica and the coup-d'état on Chilean president Salvador Allende (literally another event which took place on a September 11); and a third category of films which deals with terrorism both in the United States and in the Middle East. The only film which does not fit any of these three categories is a surrealist film set in Japan during World

September 11 attacks by making use of the World Trade Center Twin Towers' shadow as markers of a post-9/11 reality: the collapse of the Twin Towers, seen both on the screen of an outdated TV set in the protagonist's home and in the form of receding shadows on the outside wall of his apartment building signify the disruption of American every-day life and mark the beginning of a new social reality. While the collapse of the towers serves as an unmistakable marker of time, the post-9/11 reality depicted at the end of Penn's short film is highly ambivalent: it intimates loss (of the towers and of the protagonist's wife) but also gain of awareness of that loss, symbolized by a host of wilted flowers which become miraculously revitalized once in full daylight. This also marks the beginning of the old man's realization that his wife has actually died: before that, he goes about his daily routines as though she was still living, setting out the clothes for her and exchanging bits of conversation. This realization, and the grief and destitute that his tears over this realization connote, suggest the beginning of a new era, one of, if not greater awareness, then of a different look upon reality.

Penn's film opens with a black screen and the off-voice of the sole protagonist, an old Caucasian man with a moderate New York accent. His line, "I woke up before your alarm clock" suggests that he is in a dialogue with another person, but the subsequent shots, some of them stills, others slightly out of focus, make clear that he is actually alone, and thus seems to be talking to himself. A series of shots soon establishes the biographical context of the protagonist ranging from his service in the U.S. military to multiple references to his middle-income, working-class background, suggested, in part, by shots of his small but well-kept studio apartment. Everything in the apartment is old, dating probably back to the early 1960s in terms of the color scheme, fabric materials, and technological devices in the apartment (the TV set, the alarm clock, the automatic shoe polisher). This retro-feel of the setting creates the impression that the protagonist has in fact been living in that very apartment for a long time.

Amongst the individual shots of the setting, there is also one of a black-and-white photograph of a woman, probably dating back to the protagonist's years in military service: within the domestic setting of the film, it soon becomes clear that the woman in the portrait is the protagonist's wife, and, in conjunction with his line about the alarm clock, his interlocutor. But she herself is absent. Her absence becomes felt when the protagonist, while continuously talking to his wife as if she was there, attends to her wardrobe: He gently picks up a nightgown which is lying spread out flat on what looks like his wife's side of their queen-size bed, kisses the soft fabric, and carefully puts it on a hanger; hanging up the nightgown in the closet, he then sets out to select a summer dress for his wife which he then lays out flat on the bed in the same place of the nightgown before. This ritual of dressing his absent wife is charged with emotions and leads to the audience's realization of his loneliness and his mental incapacity to grasp the absence of his wife. The film does not disclose the reasons for his erratic behavior and never explains when and under what circumstances his wife died. This gap in the film's diegesis adds to the enigmatic feeling of the protagonist's identity.

Even though the specific references of this gesture of dressing his absent wife are left unclear, it is evident that what the protagonist does is part of a personal memorial practice. Engaging his absent wife in everyday conversations and dressing her suggests a form of memory which conserves the status ante of their prior life. It also implies a degree of denial of her absence. This ritual is similar to the memorial practices through the

---

War II, focusing on the trauma of active combat in its depiction of a soldier who returns from war and pretends to be a snake.



proliferation of images of the Twin Towers in the greater New York City area. Photographer Jonathan Hyman has documented them in elaborate series of documentary pictures of folk art. Hyman comes to the conclusion that the depictions of the intact Twin Towers reference the pre-9/11 era instead of the actual events of September 11, much less of their aftermath. Penn's short film acknowledges this form of memorial culture as an important coping mechanism in times of personal loss. However, it does not approach the destruction of the Twin Towers with the same reverence.

This does not go to say that Penn's short film offers no depictions of the Twin Towers at all. On the final day depicted in the film's plot, the protagonist's alarm clock does not go off in the morning. This signals a break with the protagonist's daily routine, a routine which the film narrates through repeated references to the alarm clock. As the protagonist is still soundly asleep, the camera sweeps from a close-up shot of the alarm clock to a closer of his face, down the length of his body and to a shot of his TV set, where the burning Twin Towers are positioned in perfect symmetry on the screen. The camera pauses there and then zooms into the gap between the Twin Towers to the degree that the image becomes a dark, blurry mass. The shot of the alarm clock indicates the time, 9:17 am, by which time the protagonist overslept more than over an hour and 15 minutes. The indication of time also signifies a specific development in the destruction of the Twin Towers, namely the collapse of the South Tower. In Penn's film, this collapse is partly visible through the live coverage on the TV screen, but also through the increasing entrance of daylight into the protagonist's apartment. As a reversal of the earlier sweeping shot from his face to his toes, the camera now moves in step with a progressing line between darkness and light which begins to fill the room. When the receding shadow is fully pushed back against the bedroom wall, the protagonist, now asleep in bright daylight, stirs in his sleep and finally wakes up.

This entrance of light is highly stylized: much of what the camera records occurs in slow motion, the choreography of the camera in long sweeping shots creates distance and perspective in the before rather claustrophobic seeming apartment. And quite literally, the viewer sees the apartment in a new light as the camera revisits some of the same shots of the apartment's interior. When he wakes up and sits up on his bed, visibly stupefied by the brightness of the room, his gaze soon falls on the wilted flowers on the window sill. A shot which focuses on the protagonist's face and leaves the flowers decidedly blurry shows the magical transformation of the flowers from wilted into blooming. Continuing in the usual dialogic mode with his absent wife, the protagonist picks up the flowers and carries them to the bed, showing them to the nightgown he laid out the night before. The euphoria with which he presents the flowers in full regalia to his wife abruptly stops when he realizes her absence. The emotional climax of the scene shows the weeping protagonist pull up the night gown with his fingertips and buries his face in it.

Penn's film depicts two losses: that of the Twin Towers and that of the protagonist's past. In the depiction of both losses, light serves as a marker of a new consciousness. In bright daylight, the protagonist realizes that his wife is actually not there and succumbs to his feeling of mourning. But the film also channels the protagonist's refusal to accept his wife's absence in earlier scenes through the reference to light. For instance, when the protagonist turns on the light in his bedroom closet, the excitement and gentleness in his expression as he chooses one from his wife's clearly-dated clothes convince the audience that he still acts as though his wife was alive. The protagonist's line, "And there was light" as he turns on the closet light coincides with the audience's realization of his illusions.

In the film's final frame, the interplay of light and darkness gets substituted through a depiction of the North Tower's receding shadow on the outside wall of the protagonist's

apartment building. This creates a semiotic link between the Twin Towers and the lack of light in the protagonist's apartment. His soliloquies in earlier moments in the film also establish a socio-economic connection, implying that the Twin Towers as symbolic manifestations of Western capitalism, cast a shadow on the American "common man". When the protagonist polemically states that "rich people [are] a bunch of crumbs bound together by dough", he voices a critique of corporate America. In this context, the changes that the September 11 attacks brought about have a positive effect on the protagonist's housing situation, allowing in the daylight that was previously cut off by the Twin Towers.

### Conclusion

The significance of the Twin Towers' shadow lies in their ambivalent stance towards the commodification of artistic productions in response to 9/11, and, perhaps by extension, to art in general. Stef Craps argues that the "events of 11 September 2001 caused a rupture not only in the order of things but also, and perhaps especially, in the signifying systems underwriting that order" (183). In Spiegelman's and Penn's depiction, the Twin Towers' shadow takes center stage and opens up space to understand 9/11 in different, previously unacknowledged or marginalized contexts. Alain Badiou captures this notion in his suggestion that art can only be called art if it unearths that which is ignored by empire: "Today art can only be made from the starting point of that which, as far as Empire is concerned, doesn't exist. Through its abstraction, art renders that inexistence visible. This is what governs the formal principle of every art: the effort to render visible to everyone that which for Empire (and so by extension for everyone, thought from a different point of view), doesn't exist" (n.p.). Aestheticizing the absence of the Twin Towers through the deployment of representations of their shadow is such a counter-hegemonic practice of memorialization.

### Works Cited

- 11'09''01*. Dir. Youssef Chahine et al. prod. Alain Brigand. DVD. Galatée Films/Studio Canal, 2002.
- Abel, Marco. "Don DeLillo's 'In the Ruins of the Future': Literature, Images, and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11". *PMLA* 118 (2003): 1236-50.
- Badiou, Alain. "Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art". *Lacanian Ink* 23 (spring 2004). <http://www.lacan.com/frameXXIII7>.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2002.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001.
- Calhoun, Craig, Paul Price, Ashley Timmer. eds. *Understanding September 11*. New York: The New P, 2002.
- Caputi, Jane. "Guest Editor's Introduction: Of Towers and Twins, Synchronicities and Shadows: Archetypal Meanings in the Imagery of 9/11". *The Journal of American Culture* 28.1 (March 2005): 1-10.
- Chomsky, Noam. *9-11*. New York: Seven Stories P, 2001.
- Craps, Stef. "Conjuring Trauma: The Naudet Brother's 9/11 Documentary". *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue canadienne d'études américaines* 37 (2007): 183-204.
- Davis, Mike. "The Flames of New York". *New Left Review* 12 (Nov/Dec 2001): 34-50.

- Däwes, Birgit. *Ground Zero Fiction: History, Memory, and Representation in the American 9/11 Novel*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011.
- DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September". *Harper's Magazine* (Dec. 2001): 33-40.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1976.
- Gillespie, Angus Kress. *Twin Towers: The Life of New York City's World Trade Center*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999.
- Goldberger, Paul. "Test Drive". *The New Yorker* (Oct. 12, 2009): 42-43.
- Gray, Richard. *After the Fall: American Literature after 9/11*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Holloway, David. *9/11 and the War on Terror*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008.
- Hyman, Jonathan. "The Public Face of 9/11: Memory and Portraiture in the Landscape". *The Journal of American History* 94.1 (June 2007): 183-92.
- Keniston, Ann, Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. "Representing 9/11: Literature and Resistance". *Literature after 9/11*. Ed. Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. New York: Routledge, 2008. 1-15.
- Krause, Timothy. "Covering 9/11: The *New Yorker*, Trauma Kitsch, and Popular Memory" in *Portraying 9/11: Essays on Representations in Comics, Literature, Film and Theater*. Veronique Bragard, Christophe Dony and Warren Rosenberg. eds. Jefferson, NC: McFarland P, 2011. 11-29.
- Kuhlman, Martha. "The Traumatic Temporality of Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*". *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40.5 (2007): 849-66.
- Morrione, Deems D. "When Signifiers Collide: Doubling, Semiotic Black Holes, and the Destructive Remainder of the American Un/Real". *Cultural Critique* 63 (Spring 2006): 157-73.
- Redfield, Marc. *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror*. New York: Fordham UP, 2009.
- Schaberg, Christopher, and Kara Thompson. "Avatars of 9/11". *Reconstruction* 11.2 (2011): n. p.
- Schultermandl, Silvia. "Art Imitating Life? Visual Turns in 9/11 Novels". *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 58.1 (2010): 39-54.
- . "Perspectival Adjustments and Hyper-Reality in '11'09'01" in *From Solidarity to Schisms: 9/11 and After in Film and Fiction from Outside the US*. Cara Cilano. ed. New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009. 183-99.
- Smith, Rachel Greenwald. "Organic Shrapnel: Affect and Aesthetics in September 11 Fiction". *American Literature* 83.1 (March 2011): 153-74.
- Spiegelman, Art. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. New York: Pantheon, 2004.
- Sturken, Marita. "Memorializing Absence". Social Science Research Council. [http://www.sccr.org/sept11/essays/sturken\\_text\\_only-htm](http://www.sccr.org/sept11/essays/sturken_text_only-htm).
- . "The aesthetics of absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero". *American Ethnologist* 31.3 (2004): 311-25.
- Versluys, Kristiaan. *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*. New York: Columbia UP, 2009.

## **A Home on the Threshold: Family, Community and Identity in the Liminal Landscape of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy***

**Libby Bagno Simon**

**Abstract:** The calamitous events of 9/11 brought upon a reshuffling of American life, and specifically of racial, economic and social categories. Critics have identified domestication as a key element used by American culture in an attempt to make sense of the trauma. This focus on domesticity threatens to paralyze authors and endangers their ability to represent this liminal moment in history for what it really is: layered with voices and multicultural. In this essay I explore issues of home, family and community in Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, and examine the ways in which the novel, set in the wilderness of seventeenth-century America, employs post-9/11 aesthetics of liminality and "threshold" moments. Bringing these aesthetics into play allows it to bear witness, promote marginalized voices, and in the vein of subversive post-9/11 novels, ultimately abandon the idea of a return to a reassuring domesticity only to warn against the dangers of zealous individualism and exceptionalism.

**Keywords:** Toni Morrison, *A Mercy*, Post-9/11, liminality, American exceptionalism, Home

In the wake of the catastrophic events of 9/11, the American nation in general, and American culture especially, were faced with the challenge of dealing with trauma through words. But how do you represent trauma? How do you speak the unspeakable, bear witness to what has happened, and attempt to make sense of things in what seems a senseless situation? It appears that the events of 9/11 were responsible for a reshuffling of American life—of racial, economic and social categories. As Richard Gray writes in his article "Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis", writers have reached a "recognition that the old mindset has been destroyed or at least seriously challenged" (132). This recognition, Gray argues, has led to the domestication of the crisis and to a discussion that measures cataclysmic events in terms of personal emotional impact (134). The problem, as Gray sees it, is that anything outside domesticity leads to paralysis. A sense of dread takes over and writers' opportunity to examine their culture in a more challenging and provocative way is overlooked and thus missed. Gray claims that writers in the wake of 9/11 can and should "represent the reality of their culture as multiple, complex and internally antagonistic" as well as allow "their work to be a site of struggle between cultures" (147).

In this essay I intend to explore issues of home, family and community as represented in Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy* (2008). Though not a straightforward post-9/11 novel, *A Mercy* takes on the aesthetics that Richard Gray urges writers to adopt as it goes back to a time in American history that, at least symbolically, has many features in common with the fragile, chaotic and ever-changing mindset of post-9/11 America. In *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11*, Georgiana Banita explores the ethics of several post-9/11 texts and though *A Mercy* is not one of them, it seems to seamlessly fit the overall aesthetics she suggests: "What has happened in literature since the attacks testifies to a new set of anxieties about how to relate the present to the

past, but also about how knowledge of the past (and its residual traces) inflects our understanding of the present, seen not as a break with history, but as its organic outcome” (4). My discussion of the novel will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which Morrison executes what Gray encourages post- 9/11 authors to do—to get “into” history, to participate in its processes, and to get “out” of it in order to enable readers to understand exactly how these processes work (147).

The determining feature of trauma, Gray notes, is that it is unsayable (136) and a traumatic event, adds Cathy Caruth, is defined by “the impossibility of [...] direct access” (4). Indeed, Freud himself termed the phenomenon as an event the full horror of which cannot be experienced fully at the moment of occurrence but only belatedly.<sup>1</sup> The first step towards healing, Gray argues, is testimony, and that, I argue, is what *A Mercy* attempts to achieve. Due to the inaccessibility of trauma, Gray proposes that perhaps the way to tell a story that cannot be told is “to tell it aslant, to approach it by circuitous means, almost by stealth” (136). Morrison’s landscape is that of an America yet undetermined and unmarked by race, where slavery—perhaps America’s biggest trauma—was deprived of its racial context. Through its multi-vocal nature, the novel serves as testimony to the trauma of slavery, an event that could only be accessed in hindsight. However, it simultaneously functions as a cautionary tale directed at a nation still licking its wounds, still in the midst of trauma. I examine *A Mercy* through the prism of post-9/11 novels and explore the ways in which it bears witness, promotes marginalized voices, and in the vein of more subversive post- 9/11 novels, ultimately abandons the idea of a return to a reassuring domesticity only to warn against the dangers of zealous individualism and exceptionalism.

*“The world is breaking open for us, yet its newness trembles me”*

*A Mercy* takes the reader on a journey of creation and salvation in late seventeenth-century American that was simultaneously characterized by danger and opportunity. In the novel it is depicted as a place where there are “laws authorizing chaos in defense of order” (*A Mercy* 10)—a definition that makes clear that disarray and confusion are the rulers of this “virgin land”. Nevertheless, as I have mentioned, opportunity and the very early seeds of what would become the “American Dream” were also principal elements of the country’s landscape at the time. Jacob Vaark wants a piece of that dream and like all the other characters in the novel, he will have to leave his past behind in order to move forward: “Now here he was, a ratty orphan become landowner, making a place out of no place, a temperate living from raw life. He relished never knowing what lay in his path, who might approach with what intention” (12). This “place out of no place” Morrison goes on to explore, becomes a surprising site of domesticity based on a need to belong and on shared communal desires. The alternative family of orphans that forms on the Vaark farm is made out of lost souls belonging to all colors. Slavery at the time was not racially marked and the distinctions between the inhabitants of this ad hoc mini-society are fluid and ever-changing. This allows for them—even if only for a short while—to be a part of this improvised family structure. The historical landscape that allows this sort of fluidity is closely related to post-9/11 aesthetics as I intend to discuss in depth later in this paper. La Vinia Delois Jennings asserts that *A Mercy* “challenges us to historicize the realized political momentum that ushered in perpetual servitude based on non-whiteness and to meditate on the analogous form of early colonial servitude [...] that might have united rather than divided persons,

<sup>1</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays*. trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth P, 1974.

especially persons of the underclass or of varying nationalities or of disparate religions” (645). Indeed, Morrison examines what brought these people together and aims to uncover what made them fall apart—not only in the world of the novel but in post-9/11 America as well. The constant tension between past and future, between memories and newness, and between community and individualism, was, and still remains, a dividing element coming between people who are otherwise committed to each other as entities within a joined community. In his book *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, Richard Gray claims that although the events of 9/11 are considered to represent a radical and fundamental change, many novels do not register this change. In fact, he argues, these works reduce their dealings with the aftermath of the events to the usage of conventional and traditional narrative structures filled with tropes that assure the reader that nothing has ultimately changed. These narratives are based mostly on convenient and familiar binaries (23-5). Gray is interested in works that do not rely on simplistic divisions and often leave their protagonists in a state of paralysis and confusion. Also, he accentuates the importance of discussing and exploring fault lines, border situations and thresholds (65). Novels like Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*<sup>2</sup> and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*,<sup>3</sup> are examples of post-9/11 literary works that occupy themselves with crude oppositions that help define the crisis in familiar and easily digestible patterns. According to Gray though, the site on which authors should deal with trauma and start to bear witness is a liminal space where the either/or distinctions are subverted, and boundaries constructed by the linear narrative of the nation cease to exist. This is precisely the scene Morrison sets before us in *A Mercy*. Her landscape of seventeenth-century America is volatile, dangerous and unfounded. In these moments of threshold, where racial markers as we know them today were not yet invented and so much a part of the culture, in these moments, Morrison’s band of orphaned misfits can have a voice and become—if only temporarily—a family.

“We never shape the world. The world shapes us”

“*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*” also serves as an example for post- 9/11 works that concern themselves with reassuring the reader that the drastic change that seemed to occur in the aftermath of the events, is not so drastic after all. By the end on the novel, domesticity is rehabilitated, restored and even expanded as Oscar, the young protagonist, weaves a familial network that incorporates all the people he has encountered on his journey. Moreover, the novel ends with the now iconic image of the falling man from the day of the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers. However, in Safran Foer’s novel, instead of descending to his death, the man is elevated back towards the building. This almost juvenile reassurance defies what Gray defines as the place of “hybrid” where trauma should be encountered and dealt with. This reassurance of domesticity and stability is also shattered in *A Mercy* as Lina’s contemplations can attest to: Pride alone made them think that they needed only themselves, could shape life that way, like Adam and Eve, like gods from nowhere beholden to nothing except their own creations. She should have warned them, but her devotion cautioned against impertinence. As long as Sir was alive it was easy to veil the truth; that they were not a family—not even a like-minded group. They were orphans, each and all (*A Mercy* 59). Lina’s insight is sharp and saddening but it accurately depicts the formation of a society based on individualism and achievement. In that liminal moment in history—where

<sup>2</sup> DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Scribner: New York, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Houghton Mifflin Company: New York, 2005.

categories of race and class were still in a process of creation—these orphans could come together in a way that they could not have if slavery was marked with color. However, these liminal spaces do more than simply unite Morrison’s characters, give them a voice, and abolish crude divisions. Their fluidity and volatile nature serve as the catalysts for the formation of dangerous individuality that ultimately—unlike in Safran Foer’s novel—ends with the loss of home and family. Maxine L. Montgomery claims that in place of liminality “characters possess an unprecedented level of freedom as they stand aloof from social constructions and form a potentially unlimited set of communal configurations” (631). I agree with Montgomery’s argument only partially since she seems to focus solely on the home as a space undefined by established conceptions thus making it the only safe haven these characters are able to fit into. Although this is the key to the formation of this alternative family on the Vaark farm, Montgomery, who places great emphasis on liminality in her article, neglects to discuss the fact that the same landscape that allows Morrison to situate “tropes of home within a liminal space where language is insistently fluid and bereft of an association with established linguistic meaning” (629), is also the landscape of an ever-growing hunger for individuality, a hunger that in *A Mercy* infiltrates the “home” and demolishes it from within. Morrison, as Susan Strehle notes, carefully attends “to how binary separations emerge out of the myth of an exceptional destiny to shape American society and to limit the potential for community” (120). In “From Psychoanalysis to Schizoanalysis: Synthesis and Virtual Machines in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *a Mercy*”. Naihao Lee emphasizes the fact that the members of this “family” do not belong to any single category and that they exhibit a noticeable tension between a shared desire and an individual one. Lee notes that although the group assembled on the Vaark farm develops consistency, this tension eventually reveals the inconsistencies between them. The attempt to organize this family is disorganized, Lee claims, by the interacting force within the family (226). However, Lee does not view this tension as a debilitating or destructive force and argues that while this “disorganization” breaks the bonds established within the family, it simultaneously prevents the identities of the family members from being permanently fixed thus freeing them from any strict system of representation (226). I found Lee’s argument to be thought-provoking because it manages to bring a fresh perspective on the breakdown of home and domesticity as illustrated by Morrison in the novel. *A Mercy* describes a moment in history where ambition and individualism became marked with color. What Valerie Babb calls “origin narratives” unified “polyglot Europeans of different ethnicities into a single white ‘race’ whose ‘divine destiny’ included land acquisition through Native American removal and economic development based on African enslavement” (150). Morrison herself, in her nonfiction work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, promotes an understanding of racism—the construction of an “Africanist” Other—as the enabling binary ground for America’s exceptionalist vision and identity. On these binaries she writes, “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not historyless, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (52). Lee’s arguments seem to speak louder when examined in light of this knowledge. Moreover, after aligning *A Mercy* with other post-9/11 novels that defy the sentimental return to domesticity, I believe that Morrison tries to comment on the fact that there is no home to go back to, at least not one that is in any way desirable. The home that was formed on the Vaark farm changed its nature along with society. According to Babb, “Morrison reveals how development of a culture based on market-place values corrupts and undermines the human value of all races, classes, gender and sexualities”

(148). Indeed, the home the novel begins with is not the home we end up with, and a return to such a home is a dangerous one, both literally and metaphorically. We get a sense of the threat the lies in individual desire for control and possession in Lina's story about the eagle trying to protect her eggs from the "evil thoughts of man":

One day a traveler climbs a mountain nearby. He stands at it summit admiring all he sees below him. . . The traveler laughs at the beauty saying, 'This is perfect. This is mine.' And the word swells, booming like a thunder into valleys, over acres of primrose and mallow. Creatures come out of caves wondering what it means. Mine. Mine. Mine. (*A Mercy* 62)

The traveler, we later learn, strikes and injures the eagle as she tries to defend her territory. When Florens asks where the eagle is now Lina answers, "still falling [...] she is falling forever" (*A Mercy* 62). This beautiful and intense depiction, I believe, works on several levels. The "fall" is first and foremost a literal one and I view it as Jacob's fall from grace, that Babb argues "stems from a belief that he can participate in the currency of human bodies yet still remain noble" (155). Similarly to the biblical fall of man, Jacob's fall also marks the end of innocence for the members of his alternative family as well as for society at large. Their home on the farm was a little paradise where they could all-orphaned and misplaced-find a place to rest their heads and feel a sense of belonging. This paradise is lost by the end of the novel, leaving the reader to contemplate the fact that in a post-9/11 America, what became an obsession driven by fear were the differences between people and the features that separated them rather than bringing them together. I argue that *A Mercy* aims to demonstrate that although liminal moments in history promote the emergence of other voices, other sides of the story, and other silenced perspectives, they are also the sites of division and separation. When diverse voices emerge, differences are highlighted, and when a sense of dread carries through the air, these differences cause individual entitlement and exceptionalism to rear their ugly heads. This is what caused race and slavery to become forever historically connected, and this, I believe, is the dangerous path Morrison fears America is following in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The return to the "home" and the reassurance of stability cannot come to be. History teaches us that the "real" home, the one based on brotherhood and communality is irretrievable in a society whose members have become driven by the concept of "Mine". Melissa Sande brings up another interesting point, regarding the narrative structure of the novel, which I found relevant to my discussion about the volatility of home and identity: "This narrative structure demonstrates a fluid sense of time [...] however, ending where the story began, the authority of the past is reasserted and this authority is what the reader is left to contemplate" (27). Sande claims that this repetition of the past in the present is a clear critique of the American model of an achievement-oriented society. As I have mentioned, it is my contention that the novel is designed to emphasize how similar its volatile landscape is to that of post-9/11 America, and how this "return" to the beginning, to a place of origin and safety, is really an ironic one. *A Mercy* does deliver a return to a "home" by its conclusion, as the final chapter is narrated by Florens' mother whose warning—in a symbolic way—is a warning projected from the past onto today's American society: "To be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing" (*A Mercy* 167). Again, the attempt to return to domesticity is shattered. The novel ends exactly where it began and the only help Florens' mother can offer is a warning that was lost on her daughter, as the reader—by the end of the novel—already knows. If other post-9/11 novels strive to rebuild the home and



to assure the reader that “all is well”, *A Mercy*, I argue, uses the “home” in an ironic way rather than a reassuring one, to point to the dangers that arise from liminal moments in history where different voices emerge, collide and eventually silence and stifle each other. As Susan Strehle notes, Morrison’s “preferred narrative stance as witness to a series of characters’ private thoughts effectively serves her thematic focus in this novel, full of ironic separations and missed opportunities for communication; the novel’s form enriches its meditation on the loss of American community” (109). Indeed, Morrison makes room for all the voices brought together on the Vaark farm only to slowly and methodically unfold the distances between them.

*“Minus bloodlines, he saw nothing yet on the horizon to unite them”*

Mustapha Marrouchi claims that “understanding or interpreting the history of oppression is possible only because ‘men and women made it’, since we can only know what we have made” (49). *A Mercy* is an unconventional post-9/11 novel but its aesthetics and subject matters are compatible with what Richard Gray calls the “hybrid” site of occurrence where trauma can be confronted and the bearing-witness process can begin. In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which Morrison illustrates liminality and how the fluidity of categorization allows her characters to form a family, but one that is strictly ad hoc and cannot survive the rise of individual desire for achievement and power. *A Mercy* ends at the same point where it began, and to me, this seems symbolic. Indeed, the cyclical nature of the dangers the novel urges us to contemplate was as relevant in the wilderness of the seventeenth century as it is in post-9/11 America. “Although the text gestures toward a multiracial America, Morrison and her readers know what will happen with the industrialization of slavery in the United States and the erasure of this multiracial past in favor of a black/white binary” (Cantiello 173). The novel places the reader in a challenging position; there is a home that is being built and a sense of family restored, but this home and this family are based on multicultural and multiracial voices, and therefore it cannot endure. The 9/11 attacks turned America into a landscape very similar to the one described in Morrison’s novel. It is a place that experiences a reshuffling of categories, an emergence of diverse voices, an underlining of differences between individuals, and a sense of confusion with “laws authorizing chaos” implemented and considered to be a natural course of action. Morrison gives us a possibility of family, community and domesticity all the while highlighting the ways in which intolerance, racial markers and dangerous individualism undermine the concept of home—both in the novel and in American society after the attacks. Scully’s reflections towards the end of the novel address the failure of the family created on the Vaark farm:

They once thought they were a kind of family because together they had carved a companionship out of isolation. But the family they imagined they had was false. Whatever each one loved, sought or escaped, their futures were separate and anyone’s guess. One thing was certain, courage alone would not be enough [...] Nevertheless, remembering how the curate described what existed before Creation, Scully saw dark matter out there, thick, unknowable, aching to be made into a world. (*A Mercy* 156)

This was a home hanging by a thread, constantly threatened by the claws of ambition, individuality and what Jessica Wells Cantiello aptly refers to as “erasure”. I argue that the novel comments on the idea that post-9/11 America is also a home hanging by a

thread, threatened by the different voices emerging within it, blinded by terror, and unable to recognize and cherish the things that can bring people together, instead opting to adhere to what keeps them apart. I agree with Cantiello's argument that the lack of racial markers in the novel, and the fact that any character can be any color, is Morrison's way of showing us how utterly dependent we have become on these markers (173). Readers and reviewers alike feel that they have to know what feature makes each character *different* from the other thus paying less attention to the fact that the things that make them similar enable them to become a family. As I have argued, this need to understand what separates rather than unites is also true to American society in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. "In order to construct a community in the present, one must understand the past" (Sande 25), and I believe that *A Mercy* is a novel urging its readers to remember. The characters in the novel attempt to forget, and at times, even dismiss their past. This is their downfall and what ultimately leads to the destruction of their alternative family. Erasure of the past—then as well as now—is the reason why we cannot have any reassurance of home like we are given in novels like *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Reading *A Mercy* leaves us with the understanding that there are no neat divisions, no "us" and "them" but many voices that make up that "black matter aching to be made into a world". By describing the communal potential of one liminal moment in history, *A Mercy* comments on another. The "Americans" who founded this nation were composed of Africans, Europeans and many other groups who were once not racialized. As Morrison has proven time and again in her novels, "knowing where we have come from and acknowledging the past allows for knowing where we are going and founding a community in the present" (Sande 28).

Set on the fault lines of American history, *A Mercy* is anything but a conventional post-9/11 novel as it joins the family of subversive literary works that locate the crisis and the trauma of the nation in those liminal threshold moments. It is, in many ways, a cautionary tale, presenting readers with a potential home but reminding them why this potential could not have been realized. The beginning of slavery—as we have come to know it—is the trauma located in the liminal moment of the novel, but as an obvious allegory to the American social landscape after the 9/11 attacks, *A Mercy* also locates the current crisis in the confusion of liminality. A home which includes different voices and perspectives will never be possible in a society that while stuck in limbo, chooses to consecrate aggressive individualism and exceptionalism over communal values. The xenophobia and racism that emerged in the multicultural landscape of post-9/11 America are echoed in the novel in their more primal, undeveloped forms but the message seems to be clear: There is a unifying element, there is a potential for shared desires, and there is a prospect of home. Nonetheless, *A Mercy* comes to remind its readers that when we refuse to learn from the lessons that the past has taught us, when we exclude rather than include, and when we focus only on what makes us different from each other, any home that we will attempt to build will remain on the threshold—never quite making it through.

### Works Cited

- Babb, Valerie. "E Pluribus Unum? The American Origins Narrative in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*". *MELUS* 36.2 (Summer 2011): 147-164.
- Banita, Georgiana. *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2012.

- Cantiello, Jessica Wells. "From Pre-Racial to Post-Racial? Reading and Reviewing *A Mercy* in the Age of Obama". *MELUS* 36.2 (Summer 2011): 165-183.
- Caruth, Cathy. ed. *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.
- Gray, Richard. *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- . "Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis". *American Literary History* 21.1 (Spring 2009): 128-151.
- Jennings, La Vinia Delois. "*A Mercy*: Toni Morrison Plots the Formation of Racial Slavery in Seventeenth-Century America". *Callaloo* 32.2 (Spring 2009): 645-650.
- Lee, Naihao. "From Psychoanalysis to Schizoanalysis: Synthesis and Virtual Machines in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*". *International Journal of Arts and Sciences* 3.16 (2010): 217-230.
- Marrouchi, Mustapha. "A Passion for Excess or Just another Way of Telling". *College Literature* 37.2 (Spring 2010): 48-79.
- Montgomery, Maxine L. "Got on My Travelling Shoes: Migration, Exile, and Home in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*". *Journal of Black Studies* 42.4 (May 2011): 627-637.
- Morrison, Toni. *A Mercy*. New York: Knopf, 2008.
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1993.
- Sande, Melissa. "Looking Back so as to Move Forward: Voicing a Prehistory and Refuting the Progress Narrative in *A Mercy*". *[Inter]sections* 11.3 (Summer 2010): 24-29.
- Strehle, Susan. "'I Am a Thing Apart': Toni Morrison, *A Mercy*, and American Exceptionalism". *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 54.2 (2013): 109-123.

## **White Devils and Demons in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men***

**Klara Szmanko**

**Abstract:** The label “demon” and “devil” has a two-fold signification in *China Men*. On the one hand, it is a designation applied by mainland Chinese to foreigners and exported to the United States by Chinese immigrants. On the other hand, the very classification of “devils” and “demons” reaches a deeper, more engaged level of signification on American soil in the context of American labor relations in which Chinese immigrants had to negotiate their subject positions. In the portrayal of Chinese immigrants presented by Kingston, white people supervising Chinese workers in the cane fields of Hawaii and in the mainland United States during the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad display brutality stripping them off their humanity and adding much more tangibility to the labels “demons” and “devils”. The vision of demonic whiteness emerging from *China Men* exposes its brutality, dehumanization and exploitation of non-white racial groups, all of which undermine its self-assumed position of exemplary normativity. Seen through the eyes of Chinese immigrants, white demons reveal the features that estrange them from the rest of human kind.

**Keywords:** whiteness, demons, devils, exploitation, oppression, signification

The label “demon” and “devil” has a two-fold signification in *China Men*. On the one hand, it is a designation applied by mainland Chinese to foreigners and exported to the United States by Chinese immigrants. On the other hand, the very classification of “devils” and “demons” reaches a deeper, more engaged level of signification on American soil in the context of American labor relations in which Chinese immigrants had to negotiate their subject positions. In the portrayal of Chinese immigrants presented by Kingston, white people supervising Chinese workers in the cane fields of Hawaii and in the mainland United States during the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad display brutality stripping them off their humanity and adding much more tangibility to the labels “demons” and “devils”.

### **1.1 Nomenclature**

Kingston's translation of the Chinese term applied to white people sparked an animated debate in the Chinese American community. In particular, Ben Tong and Jeffrey Paul Chan were critical of Kingston's referring to white people in *The Woman Warrior* as “ghosts” rather than “devils” or “demons” as, according to them, the Chinese term “Kuei” or “Gwai” would require (Wong 32). Their claims were countervailed by Cynthia Sau-ling Wong, who was skeptical about translating the term by only one English denotation and barring all other “overtones” of meaning (37). Gayle K. Fujita Sato explains the difference in translation between *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* by drawing a distinction between a female vision of reality propounded by *The Woman Warrior* and much more male centered world of *China Men* (199). One may assume that the term “Kuei” was translated as “demon”, “devil” in *China Men* because whiteness carries a much more demonic charge in the novel. White “ghosts” hovering around the immature narrator's

house in *The Woman Warrior* are much more innocuous and less tangible to the narrator than white “devils” and “demons” supervising Bak Goong in Hawaii, Ah Goong in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, chasing China Men on completion of the Transcontinental Railroad or interrogating the narrator’s father on Angel Island. White oppressors of China Men are much more visible and tangible. While the narrator of *The Woman Warrior* also sees and exposes oppressive faces of whiteness, white oppressors of *The Woman Warrior* are usually not presented as coming in direct contact with Chinese American subjects, but practicing what Slavoi Žižek terms as “racism with a distance” (in Prashad 61). The mature narrator of *The Woman Warrior* directly confronts representations of corporate whiteness in the figures of her racist employers. Yet in most of the narrative situations in *The Woman Warrior*, white power operates from the safe distance. Dispossessing whiteness of urban restructuring that claims the narrator’s family laundry never materializes itself in the form of white officials performing the act of overtaking. Brave Orchid does express her indignation at “urban renewal ghosts” offering the family “moving money” to start a business elsewhere, but the features of “urban renewal ghosts” are never drawn. They remain ephemeral figures representing a larger power structure. What receives emphasis is the system of oppression in which whiteness maintains its hegemony, hovering in the background in the ostensibly pluralistic society while at the same time arraying racialized subjects in preordained subject positions.

White demons of *China Men* are much more gender-specific than the ghosts of *The Woman Warrior*. In most of the cases the demons and devils of *China Men* are clearly defined as men. When on one occasion the label is extended to proseletyzing white women, they are referred to through a gendered construction as white demoneses. While in *The Woman Warrior*, the pronoun he or she is used in reference to ghosts, in most of the cases their gender is not clearly identified. No gendered construction appears, for example, when Brave Orchid complains about the Noisy-Red-Mouth-Ghost haunting the family laundry (123).

The label demon applies consistently in *China Men* even when the narration is focalized through the female point of view. Both Brave Orchid and the narrator also call white people demons. An exception to naming whites as demons occurs in “The Brother in Vietnam” section, in which the label demon no longer applies. Nomenclature may change in “The Brother in Vietnam” section because in the face of war, differences between people become diluted. The narrator goes as far as to note the attenuation of differences between the warring sides, claiming that in the fervor of the battle it is difficult to decide on which side one is. The narrator’s brother perceives himself as the other in relation to the native inhabitants of Taiwan. It is also only in the Taiwanese section of the narrative that the phrase “white devils” is employed when the narration is momentarily focalized through the native Taiwanese’s point of view, that is when the brother imagines that he would be reproached by the Taiwanese for “Living with a gang of white devils” (296). The brother himself never refers to his white fellow soldiers as demons or devils. Yet he can imagine the native Taiwanese perceiving white people as “devils” or “demons” and extending the terms to him as well. Another term which he imagines as used hypothetically in reference to himself by the native Taiwanese is Ho Chi Kuei, the term applied by first generation Chinese Americans to the second generation Chinese Americans. All of the scolding remains in the realm of the brother’s imagination because *China Men* presents a much more lenient attitude towards the younger generation of Chinese Americans.

The narrator of *China Men* refrains from the classification of whiteness as “other” only when it shows its positive face. An instance comes in the description of Chinese massacres through the reference to “a good white lady” hiding the Chinese away from

white rampagers. The juxtaposition of the “good white lady” with “demons” signifying bad whites positions “demons” on the margins of whiteness, making them a subspecies of whiteness.

The label “demon” does not apply to whiteness in *China Men* when white people are positioned as equal in relation to Chinese Americans, which takes place for example when the narrator’s father shows his family an album of “gray and white photographs” presenting himself and white immigrants of various nationalities (245). The photograph earning the father’s special attention and commentary presents a group of multiracial students attending a class of English. Reminiscing on his life in the 1930s, the father is emphatic about the fact that all of the students “came from another country” (246). Whiteness no longer invites the classification of “demons” when Chinese American subjects find themselves in parallel positions to white people, who are also first generation immigrants rather than native Americans.

### 1.2 White Beasts

The figuration of whiteness invites the most graphic metaphors when the narration is focalized through the viewpoint of the very first Chinese immigrants into the United States, represented in the narrative world of *China Men* by Bak Goong of Hawaii and Ah Goong of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Seen through their eyes, white “demons” and “devils” receive the signification of “beasts”, “savages”, “snakes” and “monsters”. Bak Goong’s exhortation against “demons” resembles the 1960s black nationalists rant against white devils: “Take-that-white-demon. Take-that. Fall-to-the-ground-demon. Cut-you-into-pieces. Chop-off-your-legs. Die-snake. Chop-you-down-stinky-demon” (112) (emphasis mine). In another passage a white supervisor fuses into one with a beast, a horse, to the extent that the qualities of the horse are transferred onto the white man: “when a demon galloped toward him [Bak Goong], boss and horse both with cavernous nostrils wide open” (113). The narrative strategy employed by Kingston at this point approaches what Toni Morrison terms as *metaphysical condensation* (*Playing in the Dark* 68) (emphasis original). Morrison argues that “collapsing persons into animals prevents contact and exchange” (68). Yet in this instance these are not the Chinese immigrants that are responsible for the lack of the afore-mentioned exchange. These are white supervisors of the Sandalwood Mountains that limit themselves to exploitation and ordering their Chinese subjects about, not only foreclosing the avenues of interracial exchange but also silencing them, forestalling Chinese self-expression and mutual communication. The above-cited passage comparing the white supervisor to his horse unfolds in the context of whip wielding whites forcing sick China Men of the Sandalwood Mountains to work irrespective of their physical state.

At certain points of the narration animal metaphors are extended to China Men as well, but their context is different. China Men are depicted as displaying some affinity with animals because of the arduous labor which they perform and the defenses which they need to develop in order to protect themselves against white overseers. Introduced into the sugar cane plantation, Bak Goong is advised by other China Men: “work like an ox”, “Keep your machete sharp [...] when you smell a demon near you” (97). An act of “smell[ing] the demon out” gives China Men the verisimilitude of animals, but the metaphor is not in any way underlain by bestiality on the part of Chinese immigrants, as it is the case with white people. The “white scar” revealed by Bak Goong of the Sandalwood Mountains is a remnant of his contracted “coolie” labor reducing him almost to the status of a slave (39).

Cooliesm<sup>1</sup> was popular not only in Hawaii but on the mainland American continent as well. In “Is Yellow Black or White?” Gary Okihiro explains that cooliesm was very convenient to white Americans, who could replace manumitted slaves with cheap workers from Asia. They did not need to jockey for their votes, so they could pay them less than Afro-Americans and they could use them as a bargain card against African Americans (Okihiro 44). The narrator of *China Men* overtly reflects on a similar dynamic: “Some of the banging came from the war to decide whether or not black people would continue to work for nothing” (125).

Slave-like conditions of labor in Hawaii sugar cane fields validate labeling of whites as “devils” and “demons”. Kingston’s fictional representation of *China Men*’s life in Hawaii corresponds to socio-historical accounts delving into the nature of the Chinese presence in Hawaii. 18, 000 Chinese laborers worked in Hawaii between 1850 and 1885 (in Linton 43). Many Chinese workers had to wear plantation tabs (in Chiu 200). Monica Chiu argues that “nowhere in *China Men* is labor redemptive” (196). Alfred S. Wang identifies the system of labor presented in *China Men* as “collective slavery” (18). Ronald Takaki cites an account by William Hooper, a New England businessman visiting Hawaii, going as far as to claim that labor conditions on the island of Kauai exceed those of slavery: “They [Chinese immigrants] have to work *all* the time—and no regard is paid to their complaints for food, etc., etc. Slavery is nothing compared to it” (21) (original emphasis). Takaki also cites unnamed white missionaries, observing that Chinese men were “living like ‘animals’ on the plantations” (38). Monica Chiu notes that despite their unequivocal contributions, the Chinese were still “the swine of the labor market” (195). In “The Eye of Power” Foucault speaks of the “triple function of labor: the productive function, the symbolic function and the function of dressage, or discipline” (161). By denying the input of Chinese immigrants in the sugar fields of Hawaii and in Sierra Nevada Mountains, white overseers, white owners of the plantations and of Transcontinental Railroad as well as white civil subjects deny the symbolic function of their labor. Chinese immigrants were treated as bodies for labor or working beats. What white employers and overseers did not take into account was that “[p]ower, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body” (Foucault “Body/Power” 56). The “counterattack” in question never assumes the form of a direct physical rebellion in *China Men*, but it reveals itself in diverse, subtler forms of protest such as the protest of the Sandalwood Mountains *China Men* against enforced silence and the strike of the Sierra Nevada *China Men*.

In spite of dehumanizing labor conditions (and the dehumanizing treatment of their overseers), *China Men* drawn by Kingston in her narrative resist dehumanization and preserve their civility brought to the North American continent from China. Emphasizing their table customs, Kingston dubs Bak Goong and other *China Men* of the Sandalwood Mountains as “civilized” (96). The same reversal of an ethnographic gaze and textualization of whites as uncultivated and Chinese Americans as cultured takes place in the case of Ah Goong of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. White “demons” are represented as never having “seen theatre before” until they had an opportunity of seeing Chinese theatre in California (148). Kingston reverses the white Anglo-Saxon discourse, casting Chinese Americans as propagators of culture and placing white people on the receiving end.

The demonization of whiteness transposes the stereotypes attributed in the second half of the 19th century to Chinese immigrants. Labeling whites as demons, Kingston

---

<sup>1</sup> Monica Chiu cites Arnold Genthe’s etymological analysis of the term “coolie”. According to Genthe, “coolie” is the Anglicized version of the Tamil term “hireling”. In Mandarin “kuli” means “bitter strength” (in Chiu 194).

inverts the nomenclature applied to the Chinese. In *Never One Nation. Freaks, Savages and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture*, Linda Frost cites the examples of the demonization of the Chinese in poetry, press and short fiction writing of the period. In Ned Buntline's story "Dream Elmore" (published in an early 1869 *Golden Era* issue), the Chinese are referred to as "Vandals", "dirty Vandals" and as "opaque-eyed" (Frost 155). Buntline stereotypes the Chinese as disorderly, living in dirt, drinking excessively, smoking, eating opium, gambling and quarreling (Frost 155). In "Traveling Editorial Correspondence" (also published in the *Golden Era*), Buntline calls the Chinese "pagan creatures" (Frost 156). Frost also cites Bret Harte's poem "Plain Language from Truthful James", which in popular parlour circulated under the title "The Heathen Chinese" (Frost 141). In his commentary to Genthe's *Pictures of Old Chinatown*, Will Irwin dubs a section of the San Francisco Chinatown inhabited by elderly and unemployed Chinese men as the "Devil's Kitchen" (Moy, *Marginal Sights* 70). Irwin identifies a vendor of the "Devil's Kitchen" as a "hop fiend" (in Moy 70). The Chinese emerging from Irwin's description are still "beasts" lurking behind the masks of their civility:

as they drank and played [...] something deep below the surface came out in them. Their shouts became squalls; lips drew back from teeth, beady little eyes blazed; their very cheek bones seemed to rise higher on their faces. I thought as I watched of wars of the past; these were not refined Cantonese, with a surface gentility and grace in life greater than anything our masses know; they were those old yellow people with whom our fathers fought before the Caucusus was set as a boundary between the dark race and the light; the hordes of Genghis Khan; the looters of Atilla. (in Moy 73)

The passage establishes a clear distinction between what was believed to be the high traditional Chinese culture and the low Chinese culture looked down upon by the Orientalist discourse. Ning Yu argues that the Chinese workers of Hawaii, featuring in *China Men*, reject the high-low categories of the Orientalist discourse, resisting white attempts at classification and rendering them speechless. The scene in which Bak Goong and his fellow sugar cane workers refuse to work, dig out a whole in the ground, shout into a dug out pit, to later cover it up and draw a wheel of spokes above illustrates their rebellion against enforced silence and their ability to reclaim their voice and the right to speak during labor.

The portrayal of whiteness in *China Men* not only inverts the stereotyping of Chinese immigrants but also the discourse valorizing whiteness. In *Whiteness Visible. The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*, Valerie Babb enumerates "hard work, piousness, civility, cognitive ability, physical beauty" as the features ascribed to whiteness (87). To present themselves in this light, white people needed racial "others". Kingston undermines the afore-cited portrayal of whiteness, attributing most of the above mentioned features to Chinese American railway constructors cast as mythic forefathers and the pioneers of the American West. White people constructed by Kingston lose their clout of the champions of progress, cultivation and "civilization". Even if they are indirectly named in the narrative as responsible for initiating ground-breaking projects, they are still represented as the ones executing these alterative ventures on the backs of other people without giving them due recognition.

The most demonic features of whiteness are revealed during the massacres of Asian Americans. The narrator of *China Men* enumerates the following Chinese American massacres: the Los Angeles Massacre of 1871, the Denver Massacre of, the Rock Springs



Massacre of 1885, the Drivings out of Tacoma, Seattle, Oregon City, Albania and Marysville. Kingston does not mention the Chico Massacre of 1877 and the Seattle Massacre lasting from October 1885 to February 1886. The patterns of violence against Chinese American massacres delineated by Kingston match those described by historian Sucheng Chan, that is attacks against individuals, outbursts of violence against Chinatown communities and concerted attempts to oust the Chinese from certain towns (48). The narrator of *China Men* reports all of these instances of violence in a matter fact way as if being a historian herself. While whiteness shows its most demonic face in the violence and atrocities committed against the Chinese immigrants, the narrator does not draw this demonic face in her narrative accounts of the afore-mentioned events. Anti-Chinese violent events in *China Men* are never fully developed as to expose and figuratively unfurl the bestiality of white perpetrators. The narrator's mythic Grandfather Ah Goong always miraculously meanders between the atrocities against the Chinese immigrants, always hearing about them, but never witnessing them directly. The details of violence against the Chinese immigrants are barely mentioned, reaching merely the level of one sentence interspersions: "bandits [...] would hold him up for his railroad pay and shoot for practice as they shot Injuns and jackrabbits [...] he [Ah Goong] hid against the shaking ground in case a demon with a shotgun was hunting from it [...] the demons killed for fun and hate. They tied pigtailed to horses and dragged chinamen" (144), "demon women and children threw the wounded back in the flames" (146). Anti-Chinese violence is never presented in the form of a personal account bearing verisimilitude to white lynchings depicted in African American fiction.

The labels "demons", "devils", "barbarians" are applied in the narrator's contemporary times as well, but on most occasions they do not carry any connotations of wildness or bestiality. In most cases, if any pejorative meaning is hidden under the terms, then usually it implies the distrust of difference, the contempt for the perceived lack of cultivation on the part of white people or at most the presumed ill intentions towards the Chinese immigrants. Brave Orchid applies the term "barbarians" when claiming that they equate all Chinese with communists (193). As in *The Woman Warrior*, whiteness is accepted in the family laundry on sufferance, only as an indispensable part of making a living: "We knew that it was to feed us you [the narrator's father] had to endure demons and physical labor" (8). The ghosts hustling about the narrator's house in *The Woman Warrior* turn into demons. The milk ghost turns into the milk demon, the grocery ghost into the grocery demon. While in *The Woman Warrior* there is the garbage ghost, in *China Men* there is the garbage demon. Unlike the ghosts of *The Woman Warrior*, the demons of *China Men* are no longer capitalized. The demons hovering around the narrator's house stir up similar fears to the ghosts of *The Woman Warrior*. In *The Woman Warrior* it is not the immature narrator who is traumatized but her Uncle Bun, who shows certain traces of mental instability. Yet at least some of his concerns about the demons parallel closely those of *The Woman Warrior* narrator's about the ghosts. For example, the immature narrator of *The Woman Warrior* and her siblings display the greatest trepidation of the milk ghost because he embodies the most significant accumulation of whiteness. Uncle Bun suspects the milk demon of poisoning the food. He also suspects other "demons" supplying the food of poisoning it. The immature narrator of *The Woman Warrior* does not go so far as to suspect white people of poisoning the food, but she is also uneasy about the fact that whites are the source of their food supply, one of the most basic origins of sustenance: "For our very food we had to traffic with the Grocery Ghosts" (114). Uncle Bun of *China Men* eats only "greens and browns" (200). Interestingly, the poison is to be found only in foodstuffs that are also white in color. Uncle Bun speaks of "white food" being poisoned, identifying

the white color as only seemingly pure: “the seeming purity of white food” (195). Significantly for the title of this study, Uncle Bun brags about seeing to the ways of white people. The visual metaphor of seeing recurs when Uncle Bun recounts how he supposedly “saw” white demons poison his food: “today’s evidence is that I saw” (195). Seeing furnishes what he perceives as evidence of whites’ invidious actions, approximating the Berkeleyan mode of empiricist reasoning. Emphasizing his visual prowess, his “sharp senses”, which he claims to have developed on “wheat germ”, Uncle Bun still does not cast whites as totally blind, suspecting them of following, surveying him and hence successfully uncovering his communist sympathies. Whiteness emerging from Uncle Bun’s portrayal resembles the Foucauldian panopticon.

The construction of contemporary whiteness as bearing verisimilitude to wildness and as reaching the acme of its insensitivity takes place when the narrator presents the story of the Wild Man of the Green Swamp. Doubting the Wild Man’s putative wildness, the narrator calls him the Man, while whites remain demons: “he did not look very wild, being led by the posse out of the swamp. He did not look dirty, either. He wore a checkered shirt unbuttoned at the neck, where his white undershirt showed” (224). Never threatening other people, the Wild Man is still hunted like an animal by a posse of hunters and a plane. The Wild Man’s ability to survive in the wild terrain of the Green Swamp, Florida totally through his own resourcefulness contrasts sharply with white people’s inability to communicate with him successfully. They are able to marshal massive resources to capture and imprison him, but even after enlisting interpreters, they still do not manage to bridge the communication gap and thus prevent his penitentiary suicide, not being able to identify and honor his desire to go back to Taiwan rather than communist China.

### 1.3 Synecdochic Whiteness

While in *The Woman Warrior* Kingston at some point displays a metonymic approach to whiteness, referring to whites through the elements of their clothing, in *China Men* whiteness is often constructed through synecdoche, in particular parts of white people’s body, for example mouth. Bak Goong of the Sandalwood Mountains pays distinct attention to the white supervisor’s mouth when the latter tells him to maintain silence during work: “‘Shut up, Pakè.’ He heard distinct syllables out of the *white demon’s moving mouth*. ‘Shut up. Go work. Chinaman, go work. You stay go work. Shut up’” (98) (emphasis mine). The white overseer’s “moving mouth” may gain special prominence in order to accentuate the silencing quality of whiteness. Implicitly, the “white demon’s moving mouth” contrasts with the China Man’s mouth which is supposed to stay shut during work. A similar situation takes place when the China Men of the Sandalwood Mountains note that white female missionaries “spoke a well-intoned Cantonese, which sounded disincarnated coming out of their white faces” (110). Finding Cantonese and white faces mismatched, Chinese immigrants freeze and missionaries do not speak Cantonese solely for the purpose of forging communication but chiefly for the purpose of conversion.

### 1.4 Essentialization and Magnification of White Phenotypic Features

Whiteness is often magnified in the narrative through essentialization of the phenotypic features attributed to white people and through color aesthetics. Such essentialization and magnification of white phenotypic features takes place in the depiction of white female missionaries by Chinese immigrants of the Sandalwood Mountains as “Jesus demonesses with pale eyebrows and gold eyelashes” (110). Pale eyelashes conjure up the connotations of colorlessness. White women look “strange” to China Men, who fix them with an ethnographic gaze (110), also perceiving them as sexually titillating because

of their racial difference. China Men's sexual interest in white women to some extent mirrors Edward Said's statement about white people's conviction that the Orient was "a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe" (Said 190). A similar dynamic is at play behind some of the China Men's voyeuristic gaze upon the white women. Still other China Men display an interest merely in the women's ethnographic difference. Their touching of the yellow hair of the white women parallels the interest in China Men of the Sierra Nevada Mountains shown by some of the white strangers.

The narrator's father also essentializes whiteness, but his essentialization no longer captures whiteness as colorless. During the interrogation of the narrator's father on Angel Island, both the interrogator and the narrator's father subject each other to close scrutiny. Cross-examination is mutual. The interrogator listens for the wrong word and watches for the wrong move on the part of the narrator's father, while the narrator's father also takes the interrogator under the magnifying glass, to the extent of noticing the minute details of his physicality like for example the yellow hair on the hands of an immigration official (56). The examination exposes an invidious side of whiteness when the father undergoes a physical examination: "In a wooden house, a white demon physically examined him, poked him in the ass and genitals, looked in his mouth, pulled his eyelids with a hook" (50). The experience of the narrator's father parallels that of Chinese immigrants mentioned in *The Woman Warrior* chapter. In a poem included in *Songs from Gold Mountain* American prison officials are compared to wolves and tigers. The above cited passage of *China Men* shows the father's terrorizing encounter with whiteness. Another narrative moment when the father is terrorized by the prospect of an impending confrontation with whiteness takes place during his sea passage to the United States when he hides among cargo crates in the deck of the ship, being able to see a "white trouser leg" of a sailor who otherwise remains invisible to the father: "he saw a white trouser leg turn this way and that. He had never seen anything so white, the crease so sharp. A shark's tooth. A silver blade [...] Then, blessedness, the trouser leg turned once more and walked away" (48). The white color and the white person again invite connotations of rapacity. Additionally, whiteness is again represented through synecdoche. A "white trouser leg" is dismembered from the rest of the person whose race would be unclear had they not been identified in the preceding passage as white. It remains to be guessed whether the whiteness of the texture is really so white or whether the father's fear magnifies its whiteness. A similar magnification of whiteness is visible in the representation of white bosses by Bak Goong of the Sandalwood Mountains as "demons in white suits" (102). A "white suit" adds an extra layer of whiteness to the mien of white people, being one more variation on the theme of executive whiteness in Kingston's works. An equivalent of the "white suit" in *The Woman Warrior* is the boss's immaculate white shirt, which the narrator stains with blood in her imagination, unsettling in this way the racial purity to which the boss cleaves so anxiously. "Demons in boss suits" also feature in "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" chapter, appearing in the context of ruthless exploitation and merciless supervision demanding results irrespective of the casualties and the strain upon human beings (132). Yet in this case the whiteness of the supervisors receives no extra amplification on the aesthetic level of the narrative.

The father essentializes and magnifies white phenotypic features not only in the situations of white dominance over him but also when a white person finds themselves in a similar position to his own. This is how he describes the white man who together with him awaits the draft evaluation. He names whiteness as his most distinctive feature, mentioning it twice and in this way magnifying it: "The *white* man in front of me was *white* and fat-rolls of fat" (271) (emphasis mine). The perception of a white person mostly through the prism of their racial difference parallels the white perception of racial minorities almost

exclusively through the prism of their racial color, approximating what Toni Morrison terms as metonymic displacement or color coding (*Playing in the Dark* 68). Drawing a comparison between his own appearance and the appearance of the white man, the father never mentions his own skin color: “And there I was next to him—skinny with rows of ribs” (271). The essentialist portrayal of the white man contrasts not only with the father’s deracinated, deethnicized description of himself but also with the following passage in which the narrator describes a picture of Chinese American soldiers posing on the frontlines in Europe. The picture discussed by the narrator depicts the appearance of the soldiers with no mention of their race and no overt reflection on the fact that the gender of the soldiers was not self-evident either because of the military attire, helmets etc. In her own editorial caption to the picture, the narrator is emphatic about the fact that her cousin “did not look peculiarly Chinese” (271). The narrator’s construction of the passage may aim at exposing the very nature of racial and ethnic differences as primarily socially constructed rather than essentially biological. Still, the father’s earlier representation of the fat would-be army recruit as so overtly white shows the psychological mechanism parallel to that often performed by whites constructing themselves as free of race and ethnicity. In his representation of the fat man the father plays up the fat man’s race, effacing his own.

If in the above cited fat man passage whiteness is presented as a color marking the white man on a par with other of his physical features, a different representation of whiteness is displayed in the already cited “Brother in Vietnam” chapter, which plays down, rather than plays up, the color of whiteness. Apart from being largely free of the demonic charge characterizing whiteness in other passages of *China Men*, whiteness is also implicitly represented as colorless in the passage devoted to soldiers’ wives. All of them are characterized as “colorless” although they speak “in the accents of many nations and regions” (288). In the eyes of the brother, being ascribed primarily to their soldier husbands, they represent no one in particular, displaying no distinct identity of their own and no belonging. The race of the women in question remains unmentioned, yet “the accents of many nations and regions” imply diverse ethnicities. The only exception pertains to black women whose race is named, but they are also ranked as “colorless”: “even the black women looked colorless” (288). Even though the blackness of black women is textualized here as colorless, blackness implicitly remains a color marker to a greater extent than whiteness.

As in *The Woman Warrior*, the whiteness of *China Men* also invites the connotations of syntheticity and artificiality. Bak Goong of the Sierra Nevada Mountains has an impression that white supervisors of the Sandalwood Mountains “stare” at him with “glass eyes” (102). Glass invokes a clear sense of desensitization and unwillingness to establish a visual exchange. Unlike in *The Woman Warrior*, mechanization of the United States does not necessarily invite negative associations but instills the narrator’s father with awe. The immature narrator of *The Woman Warrior* expresses a palpable sense of unease about the extent of automation she stumbles upon at every twist and turn: “America has been full of machines and ghosts” (113). The narrator’s father dreams of the Gold Mountain and the family stories of the place highlight automation as a positive aspect, not something to dread of: “‘They know how to do things there; they’re very good at organization and machinery. They have machines that can do anything.’ ‘They’ll invent robots to do all the work, even answer the door.’ [...] ‘They have swimming pools, elevators, lawns, vacuum cleaners, books with hard covers, X-rays’” (47). The depiction is a far cry from *The Woman Warrior* complaining of Brave Orchid about the synthetic reality of the United States, in which her children cannot smell flowers or in which automation none the less has not solved the problems of labor and hence “she can’t sleep in this country because it doesn’t

shut down for the night. Factories, canneries, restaurants—always somebody somewhere working through the night. It never gets done all at once here” (*The Woman Warrior* 123-4).

An oxymoronic application of the term “demon” carrying the marks of sacrilege occurs in the representation of Jesus as “a demon nailed to a cross” (110). It remains doubtful that the term “demon” would merely signify a “stranger”, “alien”, “foreigner” or “white person”. The phrase reflects rather the first Chinese immigrants’ bewilderment and disenchantment while looking at “Jesus pictures, which were grisly cards with a demon nailed to a cross, probably a warning about what happened to you if you didn’t convert” (110). Kingston’s construction of the scene stands in direct opposition to Frank Chin’s accusations against her that she Christianizes Chinese culture by applying the B.C. nomenclature to speak of the events in Chinese history. Chin compares the practice to saying that Jesus died in the year of the pig. A similar effect is produced in the statement cited above and when missionaries are referred to as Jesus demons who can “sniff out Hawaiians and China Men even in the remotest valleys” (*China Men* 100). The label “demons” also applies to the Chinese immigrants who converted to Christianity (11) and the Chinese who did something wrong, as Ah Goong does when he trades his baby son for a girl. That is when his wife calls him a “dead man”, a “dead demon” (16).

The vision of demonic whiteness emerging from *China Men* exposes its brutality, dehumanization and exploitation of non-white racial groups, all of which undermine its self-assumed position of exemplary normativity. Seen through the eyes of Chinese immigrants, white demons reveal the features that estrange them from the rest of human kind. Devilish as they are, white demons with whom China Men come in touch are first of all the executors of the policies drafted to a great extent by invisible white originators of oppression. Kingston ensures visibility for the laws that helped to propel the ostracism of her people in “The Laws” chapter, rendering the oxymoronic character of whiteness presenting itself as universal and at the same time cautiously guarding its exclusivity.

### Works Cited

- Babb, Valerie. *Whiteness Visible. The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*. New York: New York UP, 1998.
- Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*. Boston: Twayne, 1990.
- Chiu, Monica. “Being Human in the Wor(l)d: Chinese Men and Reworking of Robinson Crusoe”. *Journal of American Studies* 34.2 (2000):187-206.
- Foucault, Michel. Foucault, Michel. “Body/Power”. *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Brighton: Harvester, 1980. 55-62.
- . “The Eye of Power”. *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. ed. Colin Gordon. Brighton: Harvester, 1980. 146-165.
- Frost, Linda. *Never One Nation. Freaks, Savages and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong Kingston. *China Men*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1986.
- Linton, Patricia. “‘What Stories the Wind Would Tell:’ Representation and Appropriation in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *China Men*”. *MELUS* 19.4 (Winter 1994): 37-47.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

- Moy, James. "Asian American Visibility: Touring Fierce Racial Geographies". *Staging Difference*. ed. Marc Maufort. New York: Peter Lang, 1995. 16-28.
- Okiihiro, Gary Y. *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1994.
- Prashad, Vijay. *Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*. Boston: Beacon, 2001.
- Sato, Gayle K. Fujita. "The Woman Warrior as a Search for Ghosts". *Approaches to Teaching The Woman Warrior*. ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim. New York: Modern Language Association, 1991. 139-145.
- Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1989.
- Wang, Alfred S. "Maxine Hong Kingston's reclaiming of America: The Birthright of the Chinese American Male". *South Dakota Review* 26.1 (1988): 18-29.
- Wong, Cynthia Sau-ling. "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese American Autobiographical Controversy". *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior. A Casebook*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. 29-53.



## **Racial and Gender-Cross-Dressing in Caryl Phillips's *Dancing in the Dark***

**Petra Tournay-Theodotou**

**Abstract:** Historically minstrelsy was a white form of entertainment with white actors performing in blackface with the objective of reproducing stereotypical assumptions about black people for a white audience. The present paper investigates the implications and the personal as well as communal cost of the “anomaly of a black person performing in blackface” (Garber 1992, 281) with reference to Caryl Phillips’s novel *Dancing in the Dark* (2005) in which he revisits the life of Bert Williams, the Caribbean-born American black minstrelsy entertainer. In this essay I argue that the black comedian who blacks up to go on stage turns into an involuntary crossover figure whose performance can be read as a form of racial and gender-cross-dressing.

**Keywords:** cross-dressing, minstrelsy, race, sexuality, performativity

Caryl Phillips’s novel *Dancing in the Dark* (2005) is a fictional account of the life story of Bert Williams, the famous African American minstrel performer, born in the Caribbean, who became the highest-paid black entertainer in America at the beginning of the twentieth century. In consideration of the “anomaly of a black person performing in blackface” (Garber 1992, 281) this essay examines the consequences of this anomaly for the entertainer concerned as well as for the black community at large. For, if in the case of the white man impersonating the black man there is a clear-cut difference between the performer and his role, this distinction is—to say the least—blurred in the case of the colored man in blackface. More specifically, in my analysis of the novel I contend that minstrelsy can be conceptualized as a form of transvestite theater, in which the black man appearing in blackface—that is, a caricature of ‘blackness’—turns into an unintentional crossover figure. In his performance of the stupid, shuffling buffoon, Bert Williams becomes a sign of emasculated ridicule, reassuring the white audience of the black man’s inconsequence in majority culture. Ultimately, the black entertainer’s body becomes readable, or misreadable, as a sign of femininity. Williams’s performance of the black man donning the black minstrel mask can hence be regarded as a simultaneous form of racial and gender-cross-dressing. I therefore propose to amplify the traditional definition of cross-dressing, which entails the wearing of clothes commonly associated with the other gender by adding the category of racial cross-dressing and show how, in Bert Williams’s case, these two categories are inextricably intertwined.

Caught in the complex web of the economies of race, identity, gender and sexuality, Williams’s adoption of African American stereotypical racist identity tropes with both its racial and gendered implication indeed serves as a powerful metaphor for an individual’s attempt at reinvention. As a black Caribbean immigrant and a man with an ambiguous sexuality, Williams tries to (re)make himself in an effort to find a space in his adopted country as an individual and as an artist. Similar to Josh Moody’s repeated acts of cross-dressing in Jacky Kay’s *Trumpet* (1998) or Black’s transformations in Chris Abani’s *The Virgin of Flames* (2007), Bert Williams’ crossover performance reflects the need to create a world of his own. The fact that all three of these characters are not only racial others but



also artists—Josh is a musician, Black is a painter and Bert is an entertainer—effectively emphasizes both the creative effort entailed in the act of reinvention and the necessity of occupying a creative space in order to cope with the homogenizing and alienating pressures of the dominant culture in which they live.

From the beginning of the novel when the eleven year old West Indian Bert and his parents “begin to learn how to be coloreds *and* niggers, foreigners *and* the most despised of homegrown sons (Phillips 2005, 24-5),<sup>1</sup> Bert’s double marginalization as a migrant subject and as a black person in the United States is clearly articulated. With the addition of his troubled sexuality, he is in fact a person thrice marginalized and stigmatized<sup>1</sup> by the dominant social discourses of race, ethnicity and sexuality and hence in desperate need of negotiating his vulnerable identity location. Williams first joins a medicine show at the age of nineteen because “for five years Bert had grown increasingly separate from other boys, who looked at this tall, queerly accented stranger in their midst and found it difficult to know where or how to place him. He was clearly not one of them” (25). Bert’s sense of displacement and cultural difference as well as the hint of sexual ambiguity together with a proven talent for comic wit initially lead him to perform in a minstrel show. He soon resigns because the “multiple indignities of this demeaning role [...] proved too much for him” (25), but returns to the entertainment business because the alternative of doing other menial jobs is impossible for him to bear for “to *perform*—this time as a servant—but to receive neither laughter nor applause in return seemed to him to defeat the whole purpose of the exercise” (25-6) (my emphasis). Through the ambivalent use of the term ‘perform’ in the previous quote, the writer clearly wishes to draw attention to the fact that our everyday existence is as much a performance as a performance staged in a theatre. This understanding converges with Judith Butler’s conceptualization of the social constitution – the performativity – of identity, which fixes the subject within a limiting identity of clearly circumscribed historical and cultural confines. In order to escape from preexisting scripts and multiple interpellations regarding his racial, ethnic and sexual difference, in effect, from the “*role* that America has set aside for him to *play*” (25) (emphasis mine), Bert turns to the minstrel stage as a means of refuge: “buffoonery and desperate clowning were the mask behind which he continued to hide” (25), only to become even more deeply entangled in the web of interpellating calls.<sup>2</sup>

At this point it seems necessary to explore Bert’s personal motivations and the cultural constraints for adopting and desperately holding on to a clearly demeaning and psychologically damaging form of entertainment. As far as Williams’ personal motivations are concerned, it is interesting to take into consideration some of the results that research into the psyche of comedians has rendered. According to these findings,

humor in professional comedians serves as a defense or coping mechanism in dealing with his or her early family experiences, and the burden of having to take care of oneself. This may motivate the comic to make people laugh in order to gain their acceptance, as well as [...] to make sense of their own lives. (Kaufman 2008)

---

<sup>1</sup> All further page references to the novel are included in the text.

<sup>2</sup> The conjunction of the notions of performance and servitude brings to mind key poems by two African-American writers—“Negro Servant” by Langston Hughes and “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Hence, Bert's desperate attempt at reinvention, at finding a space in his host country is driven by the need to "impress them [his predominantly white audience] with the overwhelming evidence of his artistry" (12) (my insertion) and thus prove his worth. In this effort at control and self-assertion, Bert strives to be "the center of laughter, not the object of it" (121) and to "make people laugh so they did not have time to ridicule or hurt him" (57). In comparison to actors, comedians are observed to have lower self-esteem, yet "in some paradoxical way these negative self-feelings provide a durable base for shaping one's identity and going off on an independent trajectory" (Kaufman 2008, online). If, therefore, Bert's performance should allow him to speak from a position of empowerment, it does in fact render the opposite effect. What should serve him as a 'durable base', as a firm foundation, for his self-fashioning, turns out to be his self-destruction. Apart from the outlined personal reasons for adopting the minstrel mask, the cultural rules as dictated by the dominant white majority made minstrelsy the only art form available to the black entertainer. America did not allow him to move beyond the minstrel show toward a celebration of black culture and history.<sup>3</sup> In order to preserve as much dignity as possible in the face of his adopted role, from the beginning of his career, Bert has been at pains to distinguish between crude minstrelsy (19, 25, 10) and his artistry (12). He continues to insist that he is an artist and that "the audience may think they are watching a powerless man but they are, in fact, watching art" (121). However, neither his white nor his black audience is prepared to follow him on this distinction.

It is important to recall that from its inception minstrelsy has been a white form of entertainment with white performers impersonating stereotypical black characters for the entertainment of a white audience. As such it is clearly one of the most popular and crudest forms of racial cross-dressing. In white minstrelsy the theatrical illusion is successful because the difference between the actor and the subject performed is taken for granted as both the player and the audience 'know' that the entertainer has taken on the role of the 'other'. The blackface mask emphasizes the white skin underneath and enables white minstrel entertainers to disassociate themselves from the people they are ridiculing and mocking. Thus, minstrel shows not only constitute a sign of white privilege to be able to 'know' black culture, but also function as a perpetual confirmation of the difference between the white performer and the black character he is portraying or, following Robert Nowatzki, "these performances of blackness were actually performances of whiteness" (2007, 116). However, this reading of minstrelsy becomes confused in the case of the black entertainer, who is obviously not able to assert himself as 'white' through his performance, but who is, on the contrary seen as identical with the role he has assumed. Tragically, Bert's performance, achieves precisely this effect: it is not an affirmation of the difference between the performer and his role, but the disavowal of difference. It is the identity with his assumed role that is perpetually reaffirmed. And his white audience "never failed to recognize this creature. That's him! That's the nigger! [...] I know him! I know him!" (57-8). Even though Bert and his partner George Walker insist that this "forlorn-looking indulgent black, with gross lips, and eyes and legs that move independently from each other" (120) never existed, their white audience needs the dramatization of this fabricated fantasy for its confirmation and for their own security. Bert's adoption of the blackface mask must therefore be understood as an enforced response to powerful discourses which determine who you are rather than you determining who you are for yourself. Even though

---

<sup>3</sup> Williams's one attempt at appearing without the minstrel mask resulted in his audience's violent rejection "the single word 'riot' floats back to him. They are angry because he has chosen not to cork his face" (191).

it might appear otherwise to Bert, he is in effect stripped of any form of decision-making and personal agency in the construction of his identity.

In this sense, Bert's painful attempt at self-invention and identity construction through adopting the blackface mask replicates the "social drama" (Loxley 2007, 152), the fundamental performativity of everyday life, the denigrating, insulting role-playing required of black people in America. As such, Bert's performance hovers uncannily between the boundary between 'art' and 'life' and reproduces precisely the "role that America has set aside for him to play" (25). Despite the fact that the performance is obviously marked as theatre or art with the theatre providing the necessary illusionary frame, in the case of this performance the audience refuses to suspend its belief in the "as if" and instead insists on the "just as". This blurring or even overlap between a strictly theatrical and a social performance brings to mind Richard Schechner's descriptions of performances that were experimenting precisely with the boundary between "life" and "art", which he has coincidentally also characterized as "dark play" or "playing in the dark". This occurs "when some or all of the players don't know that they are playing" (1993, 36). In the case of Williams's "dancing in the dark" one could therefore argue that it is the audience who is less ignorant than unwilling to acknowledge the difference between "life" and "art". Through his particular version of what the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal has termed "Invisible Theatre"<sup>4</sup>, the black minstrel entertainer in fact becomes the embodiment of Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man", invisible as to what he "really" is to his audience. In the process of his artistic portrayal of the dumb, shuffling "coon", Williams exiles himself even further from his effort at re-fashioning himself. As Tabish Khair has observed, the performer is caught "in the double bind of using the actor's art to confirm prejudices, which then blind their audiences to that art" (2005, online). It is precisely because Bert enacts the performative and gestural conformity of the black, slow-witted buffoon, that his performance is taken for real. Following Judith Butler:

what determines the effect of realness is the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect [...] This effect is itself the result of an embodiment of norms [...] an impersonation of a racial and class norm what appears and what it means coincide; the impossibility of reading means that the artifice works, the approximation of realness appears to be achieved, the body performing and the 'ideal' performed appear indistinguishable. (1993, 129) (my quotation marks)

This results in the painful paradox that Bert's art is successful precisely because it is read for 'real'. Tragically, the black man appearing in a blackface performance ultimately re-inscribes racist views rather than unmasking them by allowing his body to be recuperated for voyeurism and ridicule.

Throughout his career Bert seems to be deaf to the severe criticism of his performance from his colleagues, predominantly from his partner George Walker and members of the black community.<sup>5</sup> He desperately tries to ignore the perils of his form of self-invention by withdrawing behind the smoke screen of his art and insisting on the

---

<sup>4</sup> "Invisible Theatre" or "Theatre of the Oppressed" is a form of theatrical performance developed in the 1970's by the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal which disguised the fact that a performance is taking place and focused on oppression and social issues.

<sup>5</sup> At one point Bert receives a visit from a group of sophisticated members of the black community who implore him to "drag [his] troubled profession towards dignity" because "[p]layers who indulge in this so-called art are wounding the race" (180).

performative dimension of his show—"he was merely playing a character. His darky was clearly not representative of them and their worlds" (180). While his partner and other members of the black community have become impatient with Bert's blackface performance, he clings to it with desperate tenacity and insists that, "[h]e is playing a character. He is a performer who applies makeup in order to play a part" (35). One could even go so far as to define Williams's performance as a form of drag in that he portrays an exaggeratedly black character, in heightened costuming consisting of obvious make-up and showy clothes thus laying bare the performative aspect of his role-playing. Following Peter Ackroyd who said of drag that

the dame [...] is never merely a drag artist, since she always retains her male identity. The performer is clearly a man dressed as an absurd and ugly woman and much of the comedy is derived from the fact that he is burlesquing himself as a male actor. (in Garber 1992, 176)

In the case of the black entertainer, however, the 'comedy' turns into pain precisely because as George Walker has expressed in a scathing critique of Bert's 'darky' character: "Nothing seemed more absurd than to see a colored man making himself ridiculous in order to portray himself" (120). In effect, Bert could almost be described as a sort of faux queen. In the event of a cross-gender performance this term characterizes a woman doing drag—that is a woman ridiculing herself—whereas in Bert's case it would characterize a black man doing minstrelsy. In both instances the effect of the performance is equally demeaning to both the woman and the black man. If the performance of drag emphasizes the discontinuity between the anatomy/race of the performer and the gender/racial expressions that are being performed, in the case of the minstrel show this difference only works for the white performer and is denied to the black entertainer. The subversive potential of this race parody is lost on an audience that insists on a fixed racial identity. Hence, as the discussion has made abundantly clear, one of the key ideas of queer theory, that identity is free-floating and not connected to an "essence" but instead a performance, is sadly unavailable to the black entertainer.

As the novel progresses the contradictions between the man he is off-stage and the character he portrays on the stage become increasingly irreconcilable for Bert and cause him to engage in a form of inner migration and seek comfort in alcohol. Indeed, he suffers deeply from the identification with his role and is constantly at pains to assert and protect his 'true' identity in an effort to distinguish between the performer and the person behind the blackface mask. Throughout the novel Bert keeps reminding himself of this distinction: "I [...] set *my true self* to one side and put on the clothes and mind of another" (122) (emphasis mine) or "With each circular movement of the coarse towel more of the character falls away, revealing the *true man* underneath" (76) (emphasis mine).<sup>6</sup> In this sense I would contend that what Patrick Williams has said about Jackie Kay's novel *Trumpet* equally applies to *Dancing in the Dark*, that "the novel in general [...] supports the idea of a true identity to be discovered, uncovered or asserted in spite of everything" (43). In other words, while the novel to a large extent outlines and promotes Butler's strategies concerning the performativity of identity, it at the same time retains the very categories which she lays bare for reevaluation.

---

<sup>6</sup> See also the following passages: "the two boys [...] learn to obliterate their true selves on a daily basis" (29); "But this is not me. Surely the audience understands this. This is simply a person that I have discovered" (123).

Unsurprisingly, the notion of hiding and concealment serves as a pervasive metaphor of providing a sense of safety, security and protection throughout the novel. By virtue of being an entertainer Williams is someone who feigns and pretends, who hides behind a mask and covers up beneath the protective layers of make-up. Yet, it is especially the theatre and more particularly Bert's dressing room, which serve as spatial signifiers of a safe haven. While a Negro hunt is raging outside, Bert "remained hidden in his dressing room [...] hidden inside the theater" (67) with the theater manager assuring him "[y]ou'll be safe in here, Mr Williams" (67). If the theater as a safe space provides Bert with a sense of security and a means of escape from the realities around him, it also paradoxically holds him captive. In a similar context Marjorie Garber has said that the black entertainer is a "black man in captivity: as it were, on the stage" (1992, 281). In effect—as it says early on in the novel—he is kept in "performative bondage" (6). Ultimately the creative space that Bert Williams has fashioned for himself turns into a trap, from which it is impossible to escape unscathed.

Apart from catering to the stereotype of the black man's inferiority in social and in intellectual terms, what this black 'transvestite' does at the same time is to banish the latent fear of American cultural mythology of the black man as sexual predator. In addition to the need to keep the black man in his place, what white America needed most for its confirmation of the stereotype was to control its anxieties surrounding the black man's sexuality. Throughout American cultural history there have been two conflicting extremes surrounding the perception of black manhood. Following Myra Jehlen, "[o]ne stereotype of the black man threatens violence and uncontrollable sex. The other has him contemptibly effeminate. Black men are seen simultaneously as excessively male and insufficiently masculine" (1990, 46-47). In order to dispel the threat of the inordinately potent black American male, he had to be castrated—if not physically, at least metaphorically – and thus feminized. As Marjorie Garber has pointed out, "in some contexts black men 'became' 'women' in and for white Western culture (physically, through the violence of lynching and castration); socially, through their relegation to domestic service and comic inconsequence)" (1992, 281). Bert's blackface portrayal of the plantation 'darker' is clearly consigned to the category of comic inconsequence and "sweating servitude" (6) and as such provides his audience with the feminized and sexually impotent male they needed to see in order to contain their fear. Again in Garber's words,

The easy "equation" between castration and feminization, offensive to men and women alike—as if the violent mutilation of the black male body somehow made it equivalent in power and social status to that of a woman—is an all-too-clear demonstration of the ways in which categories like "gender" and "race" have been made to intersect and cross over one another in the service of political rhetoric and cultural domination. (1992, 271)

This intersection of race and gender is only too apparent in Bert Williams's blackface performance, in which racial cross-dressing goes hand-in-hand with gender-cross-dressing. Even though Bert is not a fully-fledged gender cross-dresser, who ostentatiously dresses up in women's clothes, his degrading act of a black man articulates the body in effeminate terms. Hence, in my understanding, the term transvestism not only applies to a full-scale gender-impersonation, but can also designate an exhibition of effeminating or de-sexualizing gestures. In this sense, Bert's representation of the 'darker' character not only evokes traditional racist associations of blackness with sub-humanity, idleness, and slow-wittedness, but also those of sexual insignificance and thus constitutes

an “imposed and enslaving act of emasculation, castration, ungendering” (Garber 1992, 275). Through this enslaving and simultaneously self-enslaving act, Bert turns into the Uncle Tom figure per se: submissive, passive, compromising and sexually deballed. In fact, many critics have seen Stowe’s Uncle Tom as a black man who behaves like a white woman. For John William Ward, for example, the “‘real’ woman is [...] Tom” (in Garber 1992, 286-7) and for Leslie Fiedler Uncle Tom “is really a white mother in blackface and drag” (in Garber 1992, 287). Bert’s performance of an abject, feminized body thus reproduces the social role performed by black American men during the times of slavery.

As already pointed out at the beginning of this essay, in addition to being a racial and cultural ‘other’ in the United States, Bert also seems to be a sexual outsider. For Bénédicte Ledent,

Bert is an expert shape-shifter, changing races, using masks, hiding his identity, transforming himself. This is obvious in his blackening up, of course, but also in his sexual life. Although a lot is left unsaid in the novel, his calling his wife ‘Mother’ and other elements point to Bert’s possible homosexuality. His racial masking might therefore go hand in hand with his own sexual indeterminacy. (2009, personal email)

While his sexless marriage and his general lack of interest in women and comments such as “nobody can remember a time when they’d ever witnessed him with female companionship” (40)<sup>7</sup> provide clues for Bert’s possible homosexuality, I would like to pursue a train of thought initiated by Louise Yelin’s observation that in *Dancing in the Dark* “Phillips underscores the engendering of psychosexual pathologies by the traumas of racism” (2007, 97). I therefore argue that apart from the possibility of Bert’s non-heteronormative sexuality, one can also read his sexual inactivity as a result both of the role he has been ascribed to play in American society and of the role he performs on the stage. In other words, his allotted racial and social identity affects his sexual identity; a dynamic which is exacerbated by the portrayal of the clownish, sexually unattractive character he plays on the stage. The interpretation of the sexually unappealing ‘coon’ not only perpetuates and affirms beliefs in the social but also in the sexual inconsequence of the black man in American society and ultimately serves as an effective metaphor for the unmaning of the entire black race. This specific body-down to its intimate sexual conduct—is hence shaped by dominant discourses and by political forces. Without wanting to exclude the possibility of the closeted homosexual, which would provide another motivation for Bert’s need of concealment and reinvention, his sexual behavior off-stage as well as on stage is that of an a-sexual individual, someone who represses his sexuality.<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, Bert counteracts his stage persona by an ostentatious display—that is, by the social performance—of an “offstage clerical dignity” (99) and civility as a private person. When he withdraws into his room, “surrounded by his precious hardbound volumes” (108), because “neither the thought nor the touch of his wife produces any kind of ardor in his loins” (108), Williams clearly engages in an act of sublimation. If, according

---

<sup>7</sup> For further reference see also for example “although he has recently been married, he too learns to stay up late [...] He is avoiding something; they all know it, but nobody, not even George, will speak of this directly” (41); “soon after he will slide into their bed, but there will be no touching” (49).

<sup>8</sup> Bert’s possible closeted same-sex orientation would also explain his “lavender marriage”, that is his marriage of convenience to “Mother”, which serves to protect his public reputation and preserve his career and secret sexual preferences.

to Freud, sublimation is a type of defense mechanism that transforms the libido into socially useful achievements, then both Bert's "quest for self-improvement" (19) through book-learning—"Philosophy, history, science, he read books on whatever subject took his interest" (19)—as well as his attempt at hiding behind the protective screen of his art as far as his onstage character is concerned serve as a means of displacement—and possibly protection and concealment—of his erotic energy.

In conclusion, Bert Williams is tragically caught up in a web of interpellating calls that fix and confine his identity within the boundaries of the roles ascribed to him by white American majority culture. All his belaboured orchestrations of a reconfigured subjectivity sadly fail and turn out to be unattainable escapist fantasies which force him to abdicate his identity and adopt a prescribed, typecast identity. The putative move beyond the racist implications of his minstrel performance by claiming that he is just a performer and merely presenting art is, deplorably, not allowed to the black entertainer. The freedom that Bert professes to possess only in his work and in his dreams (75) is an illusion, as he finally acknowledges toward the end of his life when he realizes, that "he has foolishly spilled his life" (183). Williams' corkface masquerade which—as I have tried to show in this paper—can be conceptualized as a form of racial and gender-cross-dressing affirms and perpetuates inherited stereotypes of black manhood for white consumption while it at the same time exposes "the pressure of cultural context upon individual creative design" (Garber 1992, 275). *Dancing in the Dark* hence articulates a major indictment of a racist environment that disavows the black subject control over its own image. To finish, I would like to quote James Baldwin, who once so aptly observed: "The world tends to trap you and immobilize you in the role that you play" (1961, online).

### Works Cited

- Baldwin, James. "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy". *Esquire* (May 1961). [http://www.vdb.org/smackn.acgi\\$stapedetail?NINEJAMESB](http://www.vdb.org/smackn.acgi$stapedetail?NINEJAMESB).
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex.'* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.
- Jehlen, Myra. "The Ties That Bind: Race and Sex in Pudd'nhead Wilson". *American Literary History* 2.1 (1990): 39-55.
- Khair, Tabish. "True Colours". *Guardian* (10 September 2005). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/sep/10/featuresreviews.guardianreview18?INTCM>.
- Kaufman, Scott Barry. "The Tears of a Clown. Probing the Comedian's Psyche". (22 December 2008). <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/beautiful-minds/200812/the-tears-clown>
- Ledent, Bénédicte. Personal email communication. November 2009. Reproduced here with the permission of the writer.
- Loxley, James. *Performativity*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Nowatzki, Robert. "'Blackin' Up Is Us Doin' White Folks Doin' Us': Blackface Minstrelsy and Racial Performance in Contemporary American Fiction and Film". *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 18 (2007): 115-136.
- Phillips, Caryl. *Dancing in the Dark*. London: Secker & Warburg, 2005.

- Schechner, Richard. *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993.
- Yelin, Louise. 2007. "‘Living State-Side’: Caryl Phillips and the United States". *Familial and Other Conversations: Special Issue on Caryl Phillips. Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings* (7.1): 85–114.





## Aphra Behn in the Novels of Our Time: Adventuress, She-Spy, Detective

Violetta Trofimova

**Abstract:** This article discusses the character of a fictive Aphra Behn in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century English and American novels: Philip Jose Farmer's *Riverworld* series, Daniel O'Mahony's *Newton's Sleep*, and Molly Brown's *Invitation to a Funeral*. The correspondence between historical Aphra Behn and fictive characters is established. Special attention is drawn to the genres of these novels and the problem of a correct approach to mass literature is posed. The conclusion is drawn that all these writers—Farmer, O'Mahony and Molly Brown—had substantial knowledge of Aphra Behn's biography, but created three different Aphra Behns: in Farmer's novels she is an adventuress, in O'Mahony's novel—an unsuccessful spy and a mediator between different worlds, while in Molly Brown's novel—a professional woman playwright and a detective. Aphra Behn's popularity among science fiction writers is explained through a compensatory function of this literary genre.

**Keywords:** Aphra Behn, Farmer, O'Mahony Brown, fiction

In the last thirty years there has been a wide interest in the life and writings of Aphra Behn—the first professional woman writer in England. Such kind of interest springs out of the second wave of feminism in the West, the discovery of the previously unknown history of female creativity, and also the bright and attractive personality of the writer, as well as the high standard of her dramatic, poetic and prose works. Modern authors are attracted by Aphra Behn's personality—she has become a character in several novels and plays written in the last three decades, and also by her short novel *Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave* (1688), which has been “rewritten” by English playwrights coming from Africa and Caribbean several times. Firstly, I will give an overview of the main works inspired by Behn's biography and writings, and then concentrate on three novels from the 1980's, the 2000's and the 1990's respectively. I am interested in the correspondence between historical Aphra Behn and three “Aphras”—the heroines of these novels, as well as their function in the texts. To understand the link between fiction and history I will have to bring in biographical details of Behn's life. I am also interested in the genres of the novels where Aphra Behn is a character. I am going to find the common genre ground for all these novels. Finally, three fictional “Aphra Behns” will be analyzed in the context of these novels and their appeal to a modern reader will be defined.

One of the first modern authors creating a fictive Aphra Behn in his novels was American science fiction writer Philip Jose Farmer. As early as 1980 he made Behn a heroine of his novel *The Magic Labyrinth* out of the series *Riverworld*. In 1983 she appeared again in his other novel, *Gods of Riverworld* of the same series. In 1992 Ross Laidlaw, quite well-known for her historical novels, published a controversial fake diary of Aphra Behn—*Aphra Behn: dispatch'd from Athole: the journal of Aphra Behn's secret mission to Scotland in 1689*. In 1995 Behn became the main character in Molly Brown's historical detective novel *Invitation to a Funeral*. A young English writer Daniel O'Mahony made Aphra Behn the heroine of his fantastic novel *Newton's Sleep* set in the

seventeenth century. Young playwrights are also inspired by Behn and her works. Liz Duffy Adams from the USA made Behn a character in her short comedy *Aphra Behn Does Antwerp* (2007) and two years later in the play *Or*, well-received by American critics. As for *Oroonoko*, it was staged by English playwright originally from Nigeria Biyi Bandele in 1999 and by English writer Joan Anim-Addo from Caribbean in 2008. While Bandele created a drama, Anim-Addo chose opera genre. The two latter works have been analyzed by literary scholars (Maureen Duffy, Giovanna Covi, Aspasia Velissariou etc.). Wolfgang Görtschacher dedicated his recent article to Molly Brown's *Invitation to a Funeral*, but the other works have not attracted critical attention yet. I am going to concentrate on Farmer's, O'Mahony's and Brown's novels.

It is necessary to note that all the novels I will analyze fall into the genres of science fiction and detective fiction. These genres belong to the category of mass literature, which is generally considered to be outside official literary hierarchy and is seen as artistically insignificant. But the works analyzed here pose a big theoretical problem: what is the correct approach to such kind of literature? Should we discuss just their structure, contents and the audience to whom these works are addressed, or may we analyze the way they are written? Is it possible to specify stylistic devices of the literary works made according to one formula and not intended to be artistically original? Or is it better to question their genre limits and deal with both aspects—structure and reception, on the one hand, and artistic originality, on the other hand? In O'Mahony's and Brown's cases, we can discuss the stylistic characteristics of the novels (Görtschacher analyzes diction in *Invitation to a Funeral* (196-197)). It should also be mentioned that all of them are filled with so many historical details that are unlikely to be interesting to an average reader. Therefore, a balanced approach is preferable, and the characteristics untypical for mass literature should not be ignored. In this article I am going to concentrate on the discussion of the characters of the analysed novels, not on their style and diction.

Philip Jose Farmer (1918–2009) is considered an important figure in American science fiction. He is the author of more than fifty novels and numerous stories. His series *Riverworld* made him famous. He created his own Universe in it. The series consists of five novels: *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* (1971), *The Fabulous Riverboat* (1971), *The Dark Design* (1977), *The Magic Labyrinth* (1980) and *Gods of Riverworld* (1983), as well as several adjoining narratives and stories.

*Riverworld* is a kind of a purgatory where all the people who had died by 1983 are resurrected young and healthy. The central characters of the novel are famous people: Richard Burton, a traveller and translator of *Thousand and One Nights*, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), Cyrano de Bergerac, Alice Hargreaves, the prototype of Lewis Carrolls' "Alice", and many others. Aphra Behn is introduced in the fourth part of the novel. Alice knows Behn as the author of *Oroonoko*. This fact pleases Aphra a lot: she was not forgotten in the twentieth century. Farmer describes her in the following way: "She was about five feet tall, slim, long-legged, and had medium-sized conical breasts with up-tilted nipples thinly covered with a wispy cloth. Her features were beautiful despite her somewhat too long nose. Exposing very white and even teeth, the blonde said in Esperanto" (*Magic Labyrinth* 44). Talking about Behn's appearance, the writer always makes a stress on her sexual attractiveness, though he does not forget about her work either. Then Farmer gives an account of her literary achievements, sometimes sounding like a piece of entry in an encyclopaedia:

So, this was Aphra Behn, the novelist, poet, and dramatist whom London called the Incomparable Astrea, after the divine star maiden of classical Greek religion.

Before she dies in 1689 at the age of forty-nine, she had written a novel, *Oroonoko*, which was a sensation in her time and was reprinted in 1930, giving Alice a chance to read it before she died. The book had been very influential in the development of the novel, and Aphra's contemporaries rated her with Defoe when she was at her best. Her plays were bawdy and coarse but witty and had delighted the theatergoers. She was the first English woman to support herself entirely by writing, and she had also been a spy for Charles II during the war against the Dutch. Her behavior was scandalous, even for the Restoration period, but she was buried in Westminster Abbey. (Farmer 1980, 44)

Farmer repeats the information about Behn which can be found in the books on English literary history, compares her to Defoe in a traditional way and mentions her spying activities. Aphra Behn does not play an important part in *Magic Labyrinth*. Sometimes she utters phrases full of common sense, and also reveals her scepticism on the verge with atheism, commenting Burton's opinion on the soul: "What you've just proved", Aphra Behn said, "is that there is no soul, not in the way it's commonly conceived of. Or, if there is one, it's superfluous, it has nothing to do with the immortality of the individual" (Farmer 340). Farmer gives an interesting comment on the religious opinions of the English woman writer. It is well-known she approached scepticism by the end of the life, but some scholars prove she was a secret Catholic. She is not at all religious in Farmer's book.

In the last novel of the series, *Gods of Riverworld*, Aphra Behn's character is developed. Farmer tells about her amorous relationships with a French adventurer de Marbot from the nineteenth century. Behn jokes wittingly, drinks "toast to craziness", talks about sex and recollects her life on the Earth (Farmer 1983, 31). She describes the beauty of Surinam, tells about her marriage (her husband was an old Dutch merchant Jans Behn) and about her spying mission in Antwerp. In a melodramatic way she admits she loved her husband and even rejected the king because of him. Aphra Behn gives a long account of her stay in prison, which was Lambeth according to author's opinion. Then Farmer quotes from her plays *The Rover* (Willmore's opinion on marriage) and *City Heiress* (Wilding's words about the unacceptability of trading in beauty). Despite that, he does not attempt at stylization or paraphrasing: his heroine speaks mostly twentieth-century language.

As a twentieth-century woman seeking a "room of her own", Aphra Behn defends her right for her own world: she refuses to live together with Marbot and flies over the tropical jungles and a magnificent palace, which is mentioned in her first biography *History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn*. Farmer underlines that Behn has a steel will and strong character: "Aphra, she is hard as platinum and twice the worth of that worthy metal in her weight" (1983, 74). The narrator considers her a candidate for advancement together with Alice. Closer to the end of the novel Aphra Behn dies, but she may be resurrected together with other characters, though nothing is said about it in a direct way.

Philip Jose Farmer shows substantial knowledge of Aphra Behn's biography. He makes her attractive both physically and spiritually. He seems to sympathize with her: "The sixteenth of April, 1689, her battle against prejudice, jealousy, gossip and the hatred of the puritanical and hypocritical was over" (1983, 144). In *Riverworld* series she is an example of a strong independent woman, a faithful friend and companion. Nevertheless her character seems somewhat trivial. Australian science fiction writer and literary critic Damien Broderick in *X,Y,Z,T: Dimensions of Science Fiction* makes a sharp judgment on Farmer's literary abilities: "The *Riverworld* books proposed a literary project far beyond Farmer's powers. Despite some embarrassingly heavy-handed attempts to define his characters through speech register, they clump about the stage like zombies" (74). This

criticism seems just, as we cannot see Aphra Behn in his novels as a living character, we only see her “figure” moving and fulfilling various tasks. Farmer does not attempt at the individuality of her speech, though there are some funny jokes uttered by her. Darren Harris Fain’s opinion on women characters in *Riverworld* series is also critical. He points out “women are often reduced to either chattel slavery, or, at best, the companions of the men who protect them” (Harris Fain 39). He notices that though “women are often depicted as strong, smart, and courageous, but none of them is a leader [...] Farmer seems to suggest women can only be the equals of men in an advanced society” (39). It is true that even Aphra Behn is lost in *Riverworld* series behind grand figures of male characters. Only Alice can compete with them. Although Farmer’s Aphra Behn is based on historical English woman writer, her character is not three-dimensional, she lacks peculiarity, originality, and the depth of psychological analysis. Nevertheless it is significant that as early as the beginning of the 1980’s Aphra Behn became known to the wide audience of science fiction readers. Her presence in Farmer’s novels may have stimulated them to read her own works. She may be perceived as a symbol of a new woman living after the sexual revolution of the 1960’s, a woman who chooses her partners and her way of life herself, who values independence and self-esteem. Such characteristics of Farmer’s Aphra Behn must have appealed to late twentieth-century readers.

Daniel O’Mahony’s novel *Newton’s Sleep*, published twenty-five years later than Farmer’s *Gods of Riverworld*, also represents the mainstream of science fiction, although, it stands even closer to the genre of fantasy than its predecessor. This novel is a part of the series about Faction Paradox—a sect of voodoo time-travellers. Faction Paradox first appeared in the novels of *Doctor Who* series. *Doctor Who* is one of the longest and most successful TV serials in the history of British television. *Faction Paradox* grew into a separate group of novels written by various authors.

In *Newton’s Sleep* Aphra Behn is one of the three central characters. The novel is fragmented and has a puzzle-like structure, which complicates its reception. The action takes place in the second part of the seventeenth century in England and France. The novel has several lines, one of which is the story of Faction Paradox, and they all meet at the climax point.

In one of the interviews Daniel O’Mahony says about his heroine:

The main historical ‘guest star’ is Aphra Behn, who was a real person, a Restoration playwright and the first woman to write professionally in English. She was also a spy, archly-royalist, archly conservative—this is a period when everyone’s political, and their politics inform every aspect of their lives. We know next to nothing about the details of her life, so I made something up for her! [...] She was a spy, and I loved that she seemed to have been an appallingly bad spy. From what little we know, and from what we can surmise from her writing, she comes across as wonderfully contradictory and complex. I loved writing for her, and I hope I did her justice. (Christopher 93-5)

Born in 1973 and belonging to a generation of professional writers very different from Farmer’s generation, O’Mahony has much less formal approach to Aphra Behn as a character of his novel. His attitude to her as a historical figure, both sympathetic and ironic, is reflected in his novel. O’Mahony does not make any references to Farmer as his predecessor, and creates a very different fictional Aphra Behn.

Aphra Behn appears in the second chapter of the novel called “Mistress Behn’s Holiday”. O’Mahony shows he studied her biography and her writings much more

thoroughly than Farmer, who mostly mentions well-known facts. Behn recalls her journey to Surinam, and here we see how the author paraphrases a piece from her novel *Oroonoko*: “She had borne back Indian feathers and butterflies from the New World” (O’Mahony 40). Aphra also recollects her failure in Antwerp and her way from Flanders to England. On board of the ship she talks with a Florentine merchant who shows her new telescopes. As well as Farmer, O’Mahony develops the episode dating back to *The History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn*, but in a more complicated way. He makes the merchant old and ugly and exploits the topic often used in Behn’s own writings, both drama and fiction—sexual desire of an old man. Aphra Behn thinks about Oroonoko, who was her lover and the father of her daughter in O’Mahony’s novel. African prince is a rare man whom Behn recollects with tenderness. O’Mahony refers to a very contemporary problem of interracial and intercultural relationships and, following historical Aphra Behn, makes a black man a very worthy and noble person. Aphra Behn also reads Thomas Creech’s *Lucretius*—his translation of Titus Lucretius Carus *On the Nature of Things*. This book, famous for its materialism and atheism, appeals her a lot.

Then we see Aphra Behn in Paris, where she acts as a secret agent of English intelligence and is to meet the members of a powerful and mysterious organization Le Pouvoir. The author gives a vivid description of Paris in the early 1680’s, Paris of slums that is to become an imperial city with monumental buildings and wide avenues in the future. Behn thinks about a serious work that would recommend her reputation to posterity, and suddenly meets her old acquaintance, an engineer Samuel Morland, also serving the intelligence. Morland reminds Aphra about their old friendship, their “cabal”, but she objects to that: “You were never part of *my* cabal, Sam. That was Carola, and she is dead” (O’Mahony 48). The author refers to Behn’s poem “Our Cabal”, in which her friends were praised under their pastoral nicknames. Then O’Mahony plays on Behn’s famous phrase: “Forced to write for bread and not ashamed to owne it” (Behn 7). Morland mentions her “scribblings” and then says: “You wrote for bread—And now I am ashamed to own it, Sam. I want to have done something good and lasting with my life” (O’Mahony 48).

During their talk Aphra gets an idea of her future farce *Emperor on the Moon* (the title is not mentioned in the novel, but the main point—mocking alchemists and all moon-stricken people—is made quite clear). She likes her idea and does not care whether she is remembered for this work or not in the future.

In “Le Pouvoir” episode we see the duality of Aphra Behn’s character: on the one hand, she is “punk and poetess”, timid and doubtful, on the other hand, she is fearless “Incomparable Astrea”. O’Mahony uses two famous characteristics of her coined by her contemporaries. His Aphra Behn is not the woman for secret service. She has a vocation for playwrighting. Nevertheless, it is Aphra Behn who sees strange and even frightful visions of the future on the screens. “M. Pantaloon” gives her the task to tell British secret service about these screens.

The next episode with Aphra Behn is called “The Third Day”. Aphra receives congratulations on success of her play *Forced Marriage*. She meets Samuel Morland’s wife Carola. O’Mahony points out Aphra Behn’s bisexuality: she enjoys a date with a woman much more than with a man. Behn-poetess did write verses dedicated to women. Aphra Behn as a bisexual woman is a very contemporary figure. Carola persuades Aphra to go to a mysterious Salomon’s House, a meeting place for wizards and alchemists. Behn agrees, but in this House she is a white crow, a spy with poor reputation treated as a prisoner. But the meeting with Nate Silver, the “Magus”, makes the situation better. They like and attract each other, and Behn helps Silver to escape the pursuers. Twelve years later they meet in Paris again, and this time Aphra is Silver’s warder. They become lovers, and Aphra Behn

confesses her “late husband” never existed. She invented him to have “widow’s freedom” in people’s eyes. Otherwise she could not become a writer. Though she is a very bad spy, she is a brilliant storyteller.

As an Englishwoman, a loyal citizen of her country, Aphra Behn feels lost during persecutions of Catholics in England. Watching Edward Coleman’s execution, she is not afraid for herself. She is afraid for England, “for what it was becoming” (O’Mahony 144). She even does not write, fearing to join the wrong side. In the atmosphere of witch hunting there appear in London such strange creatures as Jesuitess and “sisters” of Faction Paradox. Aphra Behn has to communicate with them. O’Mahony also includes “Dr Bendo” episode, based on historical fact—Earl of Rochester disguising as an alchemist and fortune-teller, and also used by Behn in *The Second Part of the Rover*.

On the intimate level, O’Mahony’s Aphra Behn is searching for wonders in the world. The author probably acquired this image of Behn in her poems, as her plays and narratives contradict such interpretation. He invents a teacher who brought her up in this way, telling about the ancient world and its inhabitants. Once she was walking in the forest and met a nymph she called Larissa. This nymph became love of her life. Aphra Behn is capable of everything for Larissa’s sake. Moreover, she understands her to some degree by the means of a dream. Aphra Behn who seeks the wonderful in the world appeals a lot to modern readers interested in esoteric matters. In the climax Behn kills nymph’s enemy and gives her advice how to get out of this bleak world for which Larissa is too bright. In the moving final of the novel Aphra Behn confesses to Silver she did not know properly who Larissa was: “A goddess, I thought. Except the gods are supposed to be *certain*, and she wasn’t, she wasn’t at all [...] I loved her” (O’Mahony 275). The writer makes dying Aphra pronounce the moral of the complete story: “You’re not a god. Go and find her. Find her and [...] forgive her. Because what’s your life worth without love?” (275). Silver pays attention to “coarse tongue” used by Behn and the sharp contrast between her speech and her literary works. She answers to that, establishing her place in the world: “It’s what I do with my pen that’ll be remembered [...] I want to live” (O’Mahony 276).

To sum up, Daniel O’Mahony creates a full-blooded and many-sided character of Aphra Behn, a writer and a spy, a mediator between different worlds. He shows deep knowledge of her philosophical and religious views. O’Mahony does not rewrite Behn’s biography, but reworks it creatively, paraphrasing her own works and creating an original character of this woman writer. Her speech is individual, her emotions are depicted in a realistic way, and being very contemporary in her attitude to race issues, in her doubts about the objectivity of this world, in her bisexualism and interest in abnormal events, she evokes sympathy and admiration in the reader of the novel.

Molly Brown’s novel *Invitation to a Funeral* was written in the 1990’s and does not belong to science fiction or fantasy, but to detective genre. Wolfrang Görtschacher discusses the peculiarities of the genre of this novel in his recent article (195-6). It is interesting to point out, though, that Molly Brown did write a fantastic novel for teenagers entitled *Virus* (1994). Molly Brown was born in the USA, but has lived in the UK most of her life. Her experience of a comical actress seems to have been reflected in her novel *Invitation to a Funeral*. Quotidian life of Restoration theatre is depicted in a vivid and humorous way.

*Invitation to a Funeral* differs from both Farmer’s and O’Mahony’s novels in lightness of the style and clarity of the plot. The writer manages to create the mood reminding of Samuel Pepys’ diary, a great evidence of everyday life of the epoch. The main characters of the novel, Aphra Behn and Nell Gwynn, are not only round, but sometimes

very funny too. Aphra's relationships with John Hoyle are depicted with a good deal of humour.

As well as Farmer and O'Mahony, Molly Brown actively uses the small amount of information we have about Aphra Behn's life. In this novel Aphra is a playwright above all. At the beginning of the novel her worries concern the success of her future comedy: "If the play doesn't run for at least three performances, I don't get a farthing. You know that! My last play only ran for two; I cannot afford another failure" (Brown 16). Molly Brown describes the realities of Restoration theatre: the income from the third performance was received by the playwright. O'Mahony also mentioned the "third day" in his novel, but did not comment on it. Brown confessed she created a fictive play by Aphra Behn and leads a kind of literary game with the reader (Görtschacher 193). Brown's Aphra Behn is a very extravagant woman because of her inability to say "no" to suppliants. She is ready to help every tramp and beggar because she knows herself what it is like to be in a difficult situation. Coming from Antwerp, she went to prison for debts.

The start of the detective story dates back to Aphra Behn's journey to Surinam. In *Invitation to a Funeral* the appointment of Behn's father to the post of Lieutenant General of the South American colony gave her a chance for promotion. Otherwise she would have had few opportunities: "As an unmarried woman, she had few respectable options. She might work seven days a week spinning cloth for two shillings and four pence without food, or six pence per week if food and drink were provided. If she was extremely fortunate, she might get a position as a ladies' maid in a fine house, and earn up to seven pounds a year" (Brown 37). Molly Brown's novel is rich in financial details. The same feature we can find in Aphra Behn's writings where the value of estates is always told to the readers.

Brown's book is full of irony. Her Aphra Behn is critical on marriage, which is proved by the following dialogue: "'They have a lot in common', said Nell, struggling to rise. 'They both have husbands they prefer to keep at a distance.' 'I suspect that many women have that in common', Aphra said, pulling Nell up by the shoulders" (Brown 40).

On the one hand, irony and humour in Molly Brown's novel have much in common with Restoration writings—the works from the period in which the action takes place. Her Aphra Behn is a lively character, a woman playwright fighting financial problems and social prejudices and never losing her strength. On the other hand, Brown's Aphra Behn appeals to modern readers by her courage and independence of the mind.

Contrary to O'Mahony, Molly Brown rarely paraphrases on Behn's writings. Nevertheless, in Courtin's letter she reflects the popular opinion of those times: "Aphra Behn is a woman of no social importance, subject to much disapproval for her lack of modesty, indulging as she does in the unfeminine occupation of writing for money" (Brown 215). This opinion was a lasting one, and still existed two centuries after Behn's death. Nevertheless, in *Invitation to a Funeral* Aphra Behn turns out to be a good and successful detective and manages not only to escape death, but also to find the dangerous letter by the king much hunted after. The end of the novel is open: Aphra Behn has not decided what to do with this piece of paper which caused so many troubles and even murders.

All the writers whose novels I have analyzed—Farmer, O'Mahony and Brown—reveal in their works good knowledge of Aphra Behn's biography. They rest upon the key facts about her life, though some of these "facts" still remain unproven. All of them mention her birth (there is still much discussion about her family origins), her journey to Surinam, her spying mission in Flanders, her imprisonment for debts, as well as her literary activities. In Farmer's novel Aphra is an adventuress, an independent merry woman with a sense of humour, capable of enjoying life. In O'Mahony's book she is a complex figure, an



unsuccessful spy and a mediator between the worlds open to the unknown. In Molly Brown's novel *Aphra Behn* is a cheerful and kind woman writer playing the role of a detective. In all these books her character is positive, and the authors treat her with great sympathy and admiration. Although, neither of these writers creates a fictive Behn independent of the real historical figure. Above all, fictive Behn in these three novels is a woman writer struggling for a proper place in literary field, and not just an adventuress, detective or spy. Each novelist made her appealing to modern readers by her independence and courage in the first place.

Why did Aphra Behn attract science fiction writers? Rosemary Jackson thinks that fantasy performs the compensatory function and "traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'" (3-4). For a long time Aphra Behn was excluded from English cultural space because of her reputation of a bawdy woman and underestimation of her literary works. Science fiction writers tried to overcome cultural limitations, and for them Restoration period was incomplete without the first woman in England earning money by her pen. They chose her both because of her rich biography still full of blank spaces and because of her problematic role in English literary history. They took her from the margins and made her (in two cases out of three I analyzed in this article) the central character of the novel, the heroine who makes decisions and solves the riddles. They made her attractive for the readers who will probably be stimulated to learn more about the historical Aphra Behn, after finishing these novels.

### Works Cited

- Behn, Aphra. *The Works of Aphra Behn*. vol. 4. New York: B. Blom, 1967.
- Broderick, Damien. *X,Y,Z,T: Dimensions of Science Fiction*. Rockville: Wildside Press LLC, 2004.
- Brown, Molly. *Invitation to a Funeral*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1995.
- Christopher, Adam. "Time-travelling Voodoo Terrorists". *Pantehnicon* 8 (September 2008): 91-97.
- Farmer, Philip José. *Gods of Riverworld*. New York: Putnam, 1983.
- . *The Magic Labyrinth*. New York: Berkley, 1980.
- Görtschacher Wolfgang. "Aphra Behn As Crime Investigator in Molly Brown's *Invitation to a Funeral*". *Aphra Behn and Her Female Successors*. Margaret Rubik. ed. Berlin: LIT, 2011. 187-199.
- Harris Fain, Darren. *Understanding Contemporary American Science Fiction: The Age of Maturity 1970-2000*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2005.
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Routledge, 1981.
- O'Mahony, Daniel. *Newton's Sleep*. Online edition. Wellington: Random Static, 2009.

## Epic Theatre on British Stage: The Alienation Strategies in Caryl Churchill's *Lives of Great Poisoners*

Zümre Gizem Yılmaz

**Abstract:** Caryl Churchill in *Lives of Great Poisoners* (1991) employs some of the epic theatre devices such as multiple role casting, episodic structure, and direct address to the audience in order to create Alienation Effect. However, the use of music and dance is the most dominant theatrical technique taken up in accordance with the epic theatre principles. In the play, two historical, Dr Crippen and Mme De Brinvilliers, and a fictional, Medea, poisoners are portrayed in three different episodes. Additionally, another notorious poisoner, Thomas Midgley, is seen in all the three episodes linking them to each other, which reinforces the use of episodic structure. Furthermore, in order to challenge the Aristotelian theatre, Churchill not only adopts the Brechtian way of using music and dance by giving equal importance to them with the speech in the dialogues, but also shatters the traditional actor/actress understanding through multiple-role casting. The aim of this essay is, thus, to analyse the epic theatre devices employed in the play with reference to Brecht's ideas on theatre, and to Churchill's socialist feminist stance underlying the challenge towards the discursive formations of the "self".

**Keywords:** Caryl Churchill, *Lives of Great Poisoners*, Bertolt Brecht, epic theatre, alienation effect

After the Second World War, British playwrights started to experiment with the new European theatrical techniques, one of which is Bertolt Brecht's (1898-1956) epic theatre that became influential following the first visit of the Berliner Ensemble to Britain in 1956. Caryl Churchill (1938- ), "whose playwriting career and political outlook have consciously been shaped by a continuing commitment to feminism and to socialism" (Aston 18) is among the significant British playwrights who made use of epic theatre devices in her plays. Through these innovative devices brought forward by the German playwright, director, and poet, Churchill apparently challenged the traditional form of the theatre, which is the Aristotelian theatre, in terms of the latter's potential to arrest the intellectual capacity of the audience by means of an emotional identification and cathartic feeling. Preventing the catharsis, which is the purging of emotions through identification with a certain character and/or action, both in the audience and in the actors/actresses, Churchill paves the way for the audience and the performers to make intellectual judgements on the situation represented on the stage. Generally, the conclusions drawn from her plays demonstrate the changing nature of self, race, age, class, and especially gender, as Churchill explicitly points to the ideological and social construction of these norms. Churchill ruptures the illusionary and magical atmosphere created in the Aristotelian theatre mainly through catharsis, and forces the audience to observe the real reasons, generally hetero-patriarchy and capitalism, underlying the sufferings of people. In *Lives of Great Poisoners* (1991), Churchill employs such epic theatre devices as multiple-role casting, episodic structure, direct address to the audience, and music and dance in order to prevent any cathartic drive by constantly reminding the fictionality of the play, as well as to urge the audience to draw intellectual conclusions related to the corruption in the use of medicine throughout history.

She further elaborates on the fact that poisonous medicine is used daily by everybody, which clearly demonstrates the manipulation of science and medicine:

SAINTE-CROIX. The whole political life depends on poison. Richelieu kept cats to smell his food. Colbert is constantly ill. Everyone in public drinks antidote every morning. [...] Exili and I are working on something imperceptible, one breath is fatal. People want this, Midgley, we've buyers all over Europe. We'll make a fortune. (231)

As can be understood from the quotation above, producers of certain poisons do not care about the sufferings or murderous acts they have initiated. If people want to die or to murder, it is not a problem for them despite the immorality of their acts, either, since the only thing they want is money. Apart from the corruption of medicine in terms of producers, Churchill also points to the harsh condition of people who decide to use poison as a way of escaping from the present system that apparently oppresses them. Henceforth, using poisons is not the personal decision of a particular character, which would indicate the wickedness in his/her own self in the traditional theatre; rather poison is seen as a kind of "saviour" that saves the character from the oppression that she/he is exposed to. So, the character chooses either poisoning himself/herself or poisoning other people to gain a "powerful" status in society:

BRINVILLIERS. Save me?  
 It's I who have the power.  
 I poisoned my father.  
 A slow decline.  
 I poisoned my brothers.  
 [...]  
 Save me?  
 Who's going to hurt me? (227-8)

In the portrayal of her characters, Churchill hints at the dominance of discursive formations and social practices on human behaviours so that the audience can evaluate the social background with its ideologies and discourses that pushes the character behave in a certain way instead of concentrating on his/her inner conflicts, bad nature since birth, or an inevitable fate. In order to make the audience question the presence of dominant ideologies in the action of the character, Churchill makes use of Brechtian devices of especially episodic structure, in which similar actions are demonstrated by different characters, time lines, or societies dominated with the same ideology.

*Lives of Great Poisoners* consists of three parts with three separate stories of three historically and fictionally important characters. In the first part, the case of Dr Hawley Harvey Crippen (1862-1910) is touched upon. The infamous poisoner Dr Crippen was tried and sentenced to death in 1910 for the murder of his wife Cora Turner, famous for being a music hall singer with the stage name Belle Elmore (Parry 170). Soon it was discovered that Dr Crippen poisoned his wife with hyoscine because of his sexual drives for his secretary Ethel le Neve. Moreover, Ethel also played a role in this murder, which reinforces Churchill's criticism of lack of sisterhood among women, where Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) is targeted. As the first woman British Prime Minister, known as "The Iron lady" or "Thatcher, the Milk Snatcher", the existence of a strong and powerful woman image as Thatcher brought women hope to believe that now they, too, would be leaders in society (Parlak, Biçer 121); however, Thatcher proved to be much more merciless than many of the

male Prime Ministers preceding her, by not displaying a woman's caring side in contrast to what society expected from her (Patterson 155). By the enforcements she brought, the working-class women suffered more. As a socialist feminist, Caryl Churchill underlines the double oppression of working class women (both for their gender in hetero-patriarchal society and for their class in the capitalist order) at the hands of another woman in British history in most of her plays including *Owners* (1972) and *Top Girls* (1982). In this play, in all the three parts, lack of sisterhood among female characters can be observed. In the second part, for example, Medea, the well-known mythical figure, kills the princess Creusa by means of a poisoned dress simply because of her desire to take revenge on Jason who left her to marry the princess. Upon wearing the poisonous dress, Creusa dies in agony, and her father, King Creon, also dies as a result of this murder plan after he embraces the suffering and dying body of his daughter. And in the third part, Mme De Brinvilliers (1630-1676), kills her husband through a method of poisoning she has learned from her lover, Sainte-Croix (*Lives of Great Poisoners* 185) in order to set herself free from patriarchal impositions.

Apart from these three "protagonists" of three episodes, another important historical figure referred in the play is Thomas Midgley (1889-1944), notorious for "having invented two of the most environmentally destructive chemical agents ever produced by humans—leaded gasoline and CFCs" (Vesilind 62). However, Midgley, "billed as one of the greatest poisoners of all because [of] his invention of leaded gasoline and the fluorocarbons that depleted the ozone layer" (Cullen 191), does not have a separate episode of his own story; instead, he is the link and bridge relating the separate episodes to each other. Hence, while keeping the unity of the play through Midgley, Churchill also portrays three different episodes which are separate from each other both in terms of characterisation and dramatisation, and which obviously do not "succeed one another indistinguishably but [...] give[s] us a chance to interpose our judgement" (Morelli 61). By means of episodic structure, the scenes are not linked to each other with a cause-effect relationship, unlike the Aristotelian theatre, which makes an unbreakable connection between the scenes leading the audience to the "cathartic" end of the play.

Making use of multiple historical lines, just as in *Cloud Nine* (1979), *Top Girls* (1982), and *Seven Jewish Children—a play for Gaza* (2009), Churchill makes the audience see and compare the usage of poison throughout history from the point of multiple stories, characters and timelines, whereby the function of episodic structure lies. Episodic structure is the opposite of the continuous linear plot at the end of which cathartic effect is achieved. Unlike traditional structure where every scene is bound to the one coming after it, in the epic theatre, the course of narration, rather than the plot, is important. With the employment of episodic structure, the attention of the audience is drawn to the narration by enabling intellectual judgements throughout the performance and the story of different characters under different circumstances, yet related to the same theme. This is explicitly seen in Churchill's *Lives of Great Poisoners* because although three characters with their unique stories seem to be unrelated to each other especially in terms of their historical timelines, at the end of each episode the poisoner is portrayed as transforming to the next one, which supports the interaction within the framework of the theme of the play. For instance, at the end of the first episode, Cora, whom Crippen left for Ethel, transforms into Medea that appears in the next episode: "*They embrace and walk slowly off watched by CORA who has transformed into MEDEA*" (209). These two characters are both betrayed by their husbands, which makes this transformation sensible in terms of the link in two episodes. Furthermore, in the play, it can be pointed out that the scenes are not linked to each other with a cause-effect relationship; conversely, each scene has its own conclusion. Hence, it

can be contended that *Lives of Great Poisoners* is “made up of a number of stories that all contribute to some overreaching theme or purpose” (Scott 30) and the transformation of the poisoners into one another reinforces the fact that these three separate stories are not totally irrelevant.

The most important thing about the play is that it is composed of three relevant scenes but these scenes do not lead the audience towards a cathartic conclusion. Through this technique, Churchill elaborates on the fact that, rather than the concept of the inevitability of people’s fate, the dominant discursive formations determine the lives of people. The characters are depicted as suffering not because of their personal decisions, but because of the ideologies of a particular system that apparently oppress them. The same situation is given in different episodes with a montage-like method, and the audience is left with a plurality of possible meanings (Bennett 27), as a result of which the audience thinks what would happen if the characters were not under the impositions of the oppressing system, which is the patriarchal discourse in the play. Therefore, instead of purging the emotions of the audience with a traditional approach in which the audience is made to feel the same as the characters do, Churchill draws attention to the outer reasons that make the characters feel the way they do. As Brecht himself underlines the difference between the audiences of the Aristotelian and the epic theatres in his essay “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction”:

The dramatic theatre’s spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too—Just like me—It’s only natural—It’ll never change—The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable—That’s great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world—I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre’s spectator says: I’d never have thought it—That’s not the way—That’s extraordinary, hardly believable—It’s got to stop—The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary—That’s great art; nothing obvious in it—I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh. (217)

So, with the epic theatre devices, the analysis also changes from inner feelings (where the inevitability of fate lies) to outer systems (where the oppressing ideologies are seen). In the Aristotelian theatre, each scene leads to the climax, where the suspense reaches its peak, and the audience, throughout the performance, gets prepared for the conclusion of the play where everything is resolved mostly in relation to the moral deficiency of the characters. This kind of theatre is “what is known as organic form, by which is meant the properties of a closed system whose parts by necessity serve to reinforce one another for the sake of a final end” (Rapaport 171). On the contrary, in the epic theatre, everything is resolved at the end of each episode, which obviously does not lead to the conclusion of the play, and everything is based upon the moral deficiency of the hegemonic systems. Just as in her many other plays, in *Lives of Great Poisoners*, Churchill allows “readings of drama that highlight social context over individual error as the source of suffering in our society” (Curran 302) by rupturing the formation of a cathartic illusion with her focus on the outer social and discursive reasons that urge the characters to take that action within the criticism of class identities, race, and gender in accordance with her socialist feminist discourse as well as her anti-capitalist stance.

In addition to the episodic structure, the epic theatre element which Churchill intensively makes use of is multiple role casting, by means of which she employs the technique of “fragmenting the actor’s presentation into multiple, inconsistent, and sometimes conflicting, roles” (Kritzer 129). In multiple role casting, the performers are

supposed to prevent any kind of emotional identification with characters, thereby critical and intellectual distance is preserved among the actors/actresses as well as the audience. In order to maintain the Alienation Effect formed by multiple role casting, characters are performed by different performers; or similarly, actors/actresses act different characters throughout the play. However, it is of great importance that the doubling of the actors must be done without disguise (Kritzer 129) through “multiple story-lines and fractured characters” (Goodman 236) in order to awaken the intellectual faculty of the audience by making it realise that what it is watching is just a result of work, as also Brecht himself, in one of his poems, “Theatre of Emotions”, states:

Don't show him too much  
But show something. And let him observe  
That this is not magic but  
Work, my friends. (425)

In other words, the epic theatre actors/actresses transform to other characters right in front of the audience without hiding, in order to expose the fact that the play is just a work, not an untouchable outcome coming from the Muses. In relation to the lack of magical transformation of performers in the epic theatre, Brecht, in his poem “On Everyday Theatre”, states as such:

The mysterious transformation  
That allegedly goes on in your theatres  
Between dressing room and stage—an actor  
Leaves the dressing room, a king  
Appears on stage: that magic  
Which I have often seen reduce the stagehands, beerbottles in hand  
To laughter—  
Does not occur here. (178)

The process of transformation of performers into characters is indicated clearly for the audience to see the fictionality of the play and to make it away from any feeling possible to occur as a result of catharsis, by rupturing the illusionary atmosphere. In this way, the audience understands that what it is watching is not a magical act reflecting the reality, but simply a result of work.

Multiple role casting is very explicit in *Lives of Great Poisoners* since Churchill makes groups of characters for a particular performer. For instance, the roles of Dr Crippen, Jason, and Sainte-Croix are to be performed by the same actor. Behind this grouping lies Churchill's desire to criticise the manipulation of science and medicine in a hetero-patriarchal society that clearly sees women inferior to men. Dr Crippen and Sainte-Croix both use poisons as a method of murdering, primarily for their sexual drives, and they kill women in order to have other women freely. So, women are seen as only instrumentally valuable properties that can be easily sacrificed for the sake of the satisfaction of men. In the case of Jason, although he seems to be the victim at first, it is understood that the one that puts Medea in a desperate position even to think about poisoning Jason's prospective wife is Jason himself. Medea only demonstrates her rebellious reaction to Jason's leaving her for another woman, because as a widow, she will never hold a position in such a patriarchal society. As a widow with children, society will see her immoral and ready for sleeping with any man who has offered sex. Moreover, when she rejects, she will be

scapegoat, and even be blamed for witchcraft by “powerful” men who has hegemonic power of the dominant discourses. In addition, Medea is depicted as a passionate, lustful, and mad woman, whose mere concern is sexual and emotional rather than intellectual satisfaction since she even sacrifices her own children and kills them in order to punish Jason who chooses to take another woman to his bed. This clearly underlines the categorisations of genders as women belonging to bodily features, and men belonging to mind. While men can decide using their intellectual capacity, women are locked up in their emotions, which, automatically, makes women inferior.

Apart from the character grouping mentioned above, the roles of Cora, Medea, and Mme De Brinvilliers are to be performed by the same soprano. Beneath this grouping lies the fact that these characters are accepted to be inferior human beings by the male characters because of their gender. At the end of the first episode, we observe the change of Cora into Medea, whereby the link of sisterhood for sharing the same fate, which is being betrayed by men, is emphasised. Similar to Medea, Mme De Brinvilliers also applies the method of poisoning as a safe way to set herself free from the patriarchal impositions. In search of “power”, Mme De Brinvilliers is persuaded by her lover, Sainte-Croix, that poisoning would give her competency to challenge the portrait of “weak” women in society. In addition to this character grouping, the characters of Ethel, Creusa, and Mme Sainte-Croix are to be performed by the same dancer. In categorising characters in this way, Churchill aims to illustrate the existence of sisterhood among women only to a certain extent because the hostile treatments of Cora, Medea, and Mme De Brinvilliers towards these latter characters is evident on the basis of their belief that these women have stolen the men they love. Thus, by showing the fragility of sisterhood when it comes to love and passion, Churchill also criticises the dominant hetero-patriarchal categorisation of women, who are believed to lack intellectual capacity and to behave only in accordance with their emotions and passions.

In addition to multiple role casting, another epic theatre device being employed as a way of creating Alienation Effect is direct address to the audience from the characters, that is, the performers’ becoming the narrator throughout the play by either stepping out of their roles or in their roles. In the epic theatre, the narrator figure is applied in order to point to the play’s “status as artifice” (Counsell 95), which is a metatheatrical development, unlike the Aristotelian theatre, in which the “narrator is that person on stage, (not always a *character* or active participant in events), whose function is to fill in details of the plot, (the narrative), not described by the play’s action, or to comment on events in the way a *chorus* might” (Harrison 168). Hence, it is clear that the epic theatre narrator is opposite the Aristotelian one who tells the background events, and who informs the audience without rupturing the “magical” atmosphere of the play. On the other hand, the epic theatre narrator deliberately shakes the audience by adding a metatheatrical dimension to the play, and consequently becomes a non-illusionary element. While the Aristotelian narrator is not included in the play, as he/she is separate from the characters, the epic theatre narrator is built in the play, generally from the characters. In *Lives of Great Poisoners*, the example of such usage can be seen only once in the first episode when Dr Crippen’s lies come to light after being caught by the police as he is blamed for the murder of his wife, who was thought to be missing. While Dr Crippen and Ethel are about to escape by ship, everything is resolved, and the Sailor signals to one of the music hall friends of Cora, Marie Lloyd, who then signals back to the audience to underline the unmasking of Dr Crippen and Ethel, who was pretending to be Crippen’s son: “KENDALL *approaches the couple and takes ETHEL’s hat off so that her hair falls down. He signals to the SAILOR. [...] During the above the SAILOR signals to MARIE LLOYD with flags and she in turn signals to the*

*audience. CRIPPEN wakes briefly*" (206). Even this little moment makes the audience realise that the actors and the actresses are aware of being "watched".

Apart from the epic theatre devices mentioned above, the most dominant epic theatre element in this play is the use of music and dance, as separate theatrical media to convey the message to the audience. In other words, as opposed to the Aristotelian theatre, in which music and dance are mainly "mood setter or bridge between scenes" (Chambers 631), in *Lives of Great Poisoners* they are used not to create a proper atmosphere for the audience to identify itself more with the characters and the action that takes place especially during the climax to increase the suspense. They are used as a means of communication between the characters in addition to the speech; henceforth, Churchill, like Brecht, shatters the privilege of speech over the other theatrical devices such as songs, dance, lighting etc. So, it can be stated that music and dance in *Lives of Great Poisoners* are used not to reinforce the main action by providing the necessary mood, but to interrupt and/or disrupt the flow of the narration by contributing to the play with a different comment. In order to awaken the audience to realise the fictionality of the play, that is, to create an Alienation Effect, generally, the source of the music should be visible to the audience, and for this reason the musicians are placed on the stage while producing their songs (Esslin 137). Therefore, in the epic theatre, such other theatrical devices as music, lighting, setting etc., referred as "non-literary elements of production" (Barranger 120), which are generally given secondary importance as speech being primary, have been visible in order to prevent any possible cathartic feeling. In addition to this strategy, Alienation Effect is also possible by making the words of the characters be delivered through the rhythms and bodily figures as the characters sing or dance, whereby they do not use only speech as a medium. As the director and the choreographer of the play Ian Spink states in the introduction, it is "a trio of singer/dancer/actor" (187); however, it is ensured by Churchill herself that there are "singers who sang, dancers who danced and actors who spoke, rather than everyone doing everything" (184), which further underlines the equality of all theatrical devices in delivering the thoughts and words of the characters. As in assigning the roles requiring speech to professional actors, those requiring dance and music should also be assigned to professional dancers and singers, which can be seen in *Lives of Great Poisoners* since specific characters are assigned to sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, baritones, and dancers as well as actors. As an example to the co-existence of speech, music, and dance in the play, which is "a narrative in song and dance about the murderous paths of four prisoners from different eras" (Sidiropoulou 104), while a character speaks in traditional terms, the other character responds to him/her by singing or dancing, and the sung parts are indicated as indented:

CORA. We're eight, that's two tables for whist.  
 CRIPPEN. Count me out, my love.  
 MIDGLEY. Do play, Crippen. (196)

As can be clearly understood, while Crippen uses speech for communication, Midgley and Cora prefers music rhythms. In addition to music, dance figures are also used for communication between the characters:

ETHEL *runs in disguised as a boy. She is wearing a suit and carrying a hat. She dances with CRIPPEN. Her movements are stronger and more exuberant. It's like a conversation between her movement and CRIPPEN's lines.* (205)



Ethel speaks through her bodily figures whereas Crippen uses speech to convey his thoughts. In addition to these examples, Churchill also gives the quarrel between two characters by utilising music rhythms and dance figures in the play: “MME DE BRINVILLIERS *and the* MARQUIS *quarrel—she sings, he dances*” (223). Furthermore, many of the scenes, in the play, are composed of only music and dance without any spoken words. For instance, in the scene entitled “Death of Creusa and Creon”, the process of poisoning is told merely through music and dance:

*Singing* POISONS, MEDEA *and* MIDGLEY *begin to sing her death.*  
 CREUSA *begins to feel the effects.*  
*One of the singing* POISONS *does an incantation over her.*  
*The SINGERS move away with* MEDEA, *leaving* CREUSA *with the dancing* POISONS.  
 [...]  
 SINGERS *prod* CREUSA.  
 DANCERS *move around her as she suffers, jumping over her, dancing with her and pushing her from one to the other.*  
 [...]  
 POISONS *and* MEDEA *do a triumphant dance.* (215)

As well as the on-going process of poisoning, the end of the process is also depicted through bodily figures, since Medea and the dancers representing the poisons dance triumphantly. While Creusa moves in agony as her body shivers, Medea moves happily and proudly as she has accomplished her goal to take revenge on Jason because of his leaving her for another woman.

Another dimension that music and dance brings to the play is their capacity to produce *Gestus*. As the famous composer Kurt Weill himself states, along with dance, “music has one faculty which is of decisive importance for the presentation of man in the theatre: it can produce the *Gestus* which illustrates the action on stage” (Weill 62). An example of gestic meaning deduced from music and dance can be given as such:

*CORA sings a music hall song. During the song* MARIE LLOYD *is doing a saucy dance with ribbons on sticks, MARTINETTI is doing funny faces and silly walks, BRUCE MILLER is doing a juggler-magician routine without props, CORA is doing a crass dance routine among them while she sings. She does it badly but is pleased with herself.* (199-200)

Every character reveals his/her social stance through movements. Moreover, they communicate with the audience and with each other through the songs and dance figures.

*Gestus*, “whose aim is to expose the essential social attitude underlying any phrase” (Sartiliot 128), is a way of pointing to the social factors behind a character’s behaviours, physical stance, and utterances. Therefore, with the power of these two theatrical media to provide gestic meaning, there has been a shift in the analysis of a character from inner life to social background (Esslin 134) leaving the character no choice but to exhibit certain patterns of behaviour of a certain class. As a result, the notion of “inevitability of the fate”, which was reinforced in the Aristotelian theatre, is annihilated; instead, the audience is made to see the oppressive social formations affecting the attitudes of the characters and determining harshly the social rank of the characters. So, the wrongdoings of the social discursive (and material) formations are demonstrated for the audience to give them an intellectual and critical outlook. For this very reason, it can be evidently contended that

contrary to the theatre of the past epoch, for the epic theatre, music is indispensable “because of its ability to clarify the action by gestic means” (Weill 64). The use of *Gestus* in the epic theatre presupposes that social and discursive formations are efficient factors determining the individuality of the characters by influencing who they really are.

In conclusion, Caryl Churchill employs four main epic theatre devices in her play, *Lives of Great Poisoners*, and these devices are episodic structure, multiple role casting, direct address to the audience, and the epic theatre usage of music and dance. The main purpose of employing these devices is to create an Alienation Effect, rather than a cathartic effect, among the audience. Episodic structure is obvious because the play is composed of three episodes of three historical and fictional characters, which, consequently, provides multiple stories with multiple historical lines. Thus, the audience can make its judgement by analysing the same situation under different historical conditions. Multiple role casting is an Alienation strategy employed with the aim of emotionally distancing the audience as well as the actors/actresses from the characters so that their intellectual and critical capacity is not arrested. Hence, rather than losing themselves with the emotional purging taking form with the catharsis, they open their mind to observe the social and discursive factors behind the oppressing lives of the characters within different historical eras. Direct address to the audience also awakens the audience intellectually since, as an epic theatre element, this urges the audience to realise that the performers are well aware of being watched, which, as a result, ruptures any possible cathartic effect in the audience and the performers. Lastly, music and dance are made use of in compliance with the epic theatre principles in the play, that is, they are given equal importance with speech in delivering the thoughts and message, whereby the priority of the speech as the sole way of communication is challenged. Furthermore, they are also of significance in producing gestic meanings, underlining the outer factors determining the harsh lives of characters. Within the context of these epic theatre devices, Churchill wants the audience to draw intellectual conclusions on how science and medicine are manipulated and misused throughout history under the impositions of a hetero-patriarchal society. Furthermore, how science is operated in an anthropocentric and patriarchal dominance of medical discourse is demonstrated by challenging the rigid categorisations of class, self and gender in *Lives of Great Poisoners*. As a socialist feminist, Caryl Churchill evidently underlines the popular emphasis on the discursive formations alone. By proving it wrong, Churchill illustrates the material formations of the self and gender, which contradicts the discursive impositions of a hetero-patriarchal and capitalist society by portraying three “famous” poisoners locked in their discursive “humiliations”.

### Works Cited

- Aston, Elaine. *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Barranger, S. Milly. *Theatre: A Way of Seeing*. California: Thomson Wardsworth, 2006.
- Bennett, Susan. *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Poems 1913-1956*. trans. John Willett, Ralph Manheim, Erich Fried. eds. New York: Routledge, 1987.
- . “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction”. *Literary Theories in Praxis*. Shirley F. Staton. ed. Pennsylvania: U of Pennsylvania P, 1987. 215-21.

- Chambers, Colin. ed. *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*. New York: Continuum, 2002.
- Churchill, Caryl. *Plays Three: Icecream, Mad Forest, Thyestes, The Skriker, Lives of Great Poisoners, A Mouthful of Birds*. David Lan. ed. London: Nick Hern, 2003.
- Counsell, Colin. *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Cullen, William R. *Is Arsenic an Aphrodisiac?: The Sociochemistry of an Element*. London: RSC, 2008.
- Curran, Angela. "Feminism and the Narrative Structures of the *Poetics*". *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*. Cynthia A. Freeland. ed. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1998. 289-322.
- Esslin, Martin. *Brecht: The Man and His Work*. New York: Anchor, 1961. Print.
- Goodman, Lizbeth. *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Harrison, Martin. *The Language of Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Kritzer, Amelia Howe. "Theatricality and Empowerment in the Plays of Caryl Churchill". 125-31. <journals.ku.edu> .
- Morelli, Henriette M. *Somebody Signs: Brechtian Epic Devices in the Plays of Caryl Churchill*. Dissertation, U of Saskatchewan, 1998. <http://library.usask.ca>.
- Parlak, Erdinç, Ahmet Gökhan Biçer. "Dialectics of Sex in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*". *The Journal of International Social Research* 5.20 (Winter 2012): 120-26. [www.sosyalarastirmalar.com](http://www.sosyalarastirmalar.com).
- Parry, Leonard A. *Some Famous Medical Trials*. Washington: Beard, 2000.
- Patterson, Michael. *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Rapaport, Herman. *The Literary Theory Toolkit: A Compendium of Concepts and Methods*. Chishester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Sartillot, Claudette. *Citation and Modernity: Derrida, Joyce and Brecht*. Norman and London: U of Oklahoma P, 1993.
- Scott, Shelley. *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work Is Always Done*. Edmonton: Athabasca UP, 2010.
- Sidiropoulou, Avra. "The Challenge of Neo-dramatic Writing in the Anglo-Saxon Theater". 91-108. [my.enl.auth.gr](http://my.enl.auth.gr)
- Vesilind, Aarne P. *Engineering Peace and Justice: The Responsibility of Engineers to Society*. London: Springer-Verlag, 2010.
- Weill, Kurt. "Gestus in Music". *Brecht Sourcebook*. trans. Erich Albrecht. Carol Martin, Henry Bial. eds. London: Routledge, 2000. 61-5.

**Kevin Ohi. *Henry James and the Queerness of Style*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011. 228 pp.**

**Hivren Demir-Atay**

Problems of gender identities have long intrigued Henry James scholars. Both women in James's life and his female characters have continuously been a subject of exploration. However, the homoerotic aesthetic of his writings complicates the issues of gender and sexuality, calling for new approaches to his work. Kevin Ohi's *Henry James and the Queerness of Style* is one of the recent responses to this call. Departing from Gilles Deleuze's definition of a great writer as the one who explores the possibility of foreignness within his / her own language, Kevin Ohi aims to uncover the foreign elements of Henry James's language. Through the technique of close reading, Ohi delves into the stylistic characteristics of James's work such as symbolic and figural language, tone, abstraction, depiction, voice and perspective, thus foregrounding the queerness of style rather than the representation of sexualities and identities.

It is in fact this attempt to move beyond mere representational terms that makes Ohi's book original and thought-provoking not only for James scholarship, but also for the studies centered on the issues of identities extending from political to sexual. Emphasizing that queerness of James's work resides more in the effects of his style than his thematic choices, Ohi performs detailed, nuanced and conceptual readings of some of James's essays and fictions. For that reason, the book, while conveying the potential of stimulating creative ideas for any reader, is particularly exciting for the readers who are familiar both with James's convoluted style and the philosophical framework of contemporary critical theorists, especially the writings of Deleuze.

*Henry James and the Queerness of Style* encompasses four chapters in addition to an introduction. After discussing how eroticism and queerness relate to literary style, the book analyzes *The Golden Bowl*, *The Wings of the Dove*, some of James's late writings, and *The Ambassadors* in the following four chapters successively. James's two essays, namely "The Art of Fiction" (1884) and "The Future of the Novel" (1899), constitute the basis of all these analyses because Ohi views these texts as important sources that show the role James assigns to the novel. This role, Ohi suggests, departs from a "discussable" model of the novel rather than "given formalizable rules" (7). While "discussable" model of the novel demonstrates to James the disruption of the understanding of reading based on consumption, what Ohi calls "moralized reticence" adds to this disruption eventually enhancing the queerness of James's style (8). Since morality is often considered in the context of Victorian interpretation of representations that are harmful to the youth, James's concerns about morality and reservations about the representations of sexuality due to their potential to seduce and corrupt the youth may also amount to a Victorian moral reservation. Ohi's suggestion, however, locates James in a position in which morality is addressed in a reticent manner that distinguishes James's style from a Victorian expression of morality. Tracing James's conceptualization of "experience" in the context of inexperienced youth who are susceptible to corruption, and dwelling in the inevitable corruption of the child, which manifests the disruption of futurism as a form of fantasy, Ohi suggests that the queer style finds its voice in the "eruption of the Real in the Symbolic" (15).

Ohi's close readings of "The Art of Fiction" and "The Future of the Novel" not only expose how these essays frame the queer erotics of James's late style but also draw a

theoretical frame for Ohi's close readings of James's fiction in the following chapters. While focusing on James's two essays in this introductory chapter, Ohi goes on to engage with numerous writers, theorists and philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Leo Bersani, Gilles Deleuze, Marcel Proust, and Colm Tóibín. The thought-provoking voice of Ohi's book stems from the fact that it intertwines close readings of individual passages with intense references to multiple readings of a concept or a problem. Hence Ohi describes the concept of style, and particularly the queer style, in a substantial way with many references to different uses of the concept. Departing from Deleuze's notion of style which "names the subtraction of the individual" (23) and which is "the foreign language within language" (24), Ohi emphasizes that literature does not represent one's life, but rather it recovers a childhood which is not one's own (25). Ohi explores this "self-subtraction" or confrontation with the impersonal in James's writing by avoiding psychological and thematic explanations of the queerness of the belated life. According to Ohi, "Foundational to queer theory (and what separates it from 'gay studies') is the axiom that its analyses extend beyond (indeed must extend beyond) elements of culture where same-sex desire is explicitly at stake" (27).

Therefore, Ohi's readings of individual texts in four different chapters reflect his specific attention to the unique natures of literary pieces that take their power from their styles. In his analysis of *The Golden Bowl* in the first chapter, Ohi finds a narrative equivalent for the theme of "betrayal" in the novel which is enhanced by the blurred linguistic registers. Linking the reticence in the novel to belatedness and tracing the figures of zeugma or "double governance" in language, Ohi concludes that *The Golden Bowl* presents a queer plot in which "the lag in consciousness registered by the characters might thus be read as an after-effect of [the] principle of novelistic antiformalization" (43). In *The Wings of the Dove*, as Ohi discusses in the second chapter, it is the free indirect narration that functions to disrupt such formalization. Ohi suggests that the reflexive nature of the free indirect narration in the novel results in "a form of nonpsychological identification" or a paradoxical intimacy that enhances depersonalization rather than identification, exposing another facet of James's queer style (60). In the third chapter Ohi traces the words "hover", "torment", and "waste" in some of James's late texts: Introduction to Rupert Brooke's *Letters from America*; "Is There a Life after Death?", James's letter to Rupert S. Rantoul for the 1904 Hawthorne centennial; and his preface to *The Tempest*. Uncovering the style of these texts, Ohi reflects on the notions of life, death, memory and eulogy: "Hover, torment, and waste present different modes of the self-subtraction through which author and reader meet, unexpressed and unfulfilled, in the 'taking place' of the text" (147). Ohi further examines this "unexpressed and unfulfilled" meeting of author and reader in the fourth chapter, which functions as a concluding and compiling part of the book. Ohi suggests here that even though the life of Strether, the protagonist of *The Ambassadors*, evokes James's own life, it is not because of the representation of a failed life or homoerotic desire, but because "belatedness is an experience of becoming, of the becoming Deleuze calls 'a life'" (169).

Defining life as becoming, Kevin Ohi opens a philosophical debate on queerness, psychoanalysis and identity studies in *Henry James and the Queerness of Style*. While the drawback of the book is the lack of exposition at times, one can suggest that it is in congruity with the style that the book itself discusses. Ohi's book, with its rigorous arguments, close readings and complex linguistic structure, performs belatedness, enabling the meeting of author and reader in the "taking place" of the text.

**Terry Eagleton. *The Event of Literature*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2012. P/bk 252 pp. ISBN 978-0-300-19413-5.**

### **Laurence Raw**

In *The Event of Literature* Terry Eagleton revisits the question of “what is literature” in an age when literary theory has been largely discredited, despite the fact that it continues to dominate the curricula of most literature departments.

Eagleton simplifies the debate into a question of realism versus nominalism. “Realism”, as understood in philosophy or theology, presupposes the existence of a category “literature” existing outside our subjectivities. This strategy helps us distinguish what we might term a “literary” text from other texts—for example, advertisements or television programs. The nominalists reject such constructions on the grounds that literature is part of life. Eagleton sees both positions as unnecessarily extreme; drawing on Wittgenstein’s argument of family resemblance and language games, he likens literature to love: while its borders might not be readily identifiable, that does not mean that literature should not be discussed any more. He identifies five characteristics of a “literary” text; it must be fictional, moral, linguistic, non-pragmatic and normative, offering an insight into human experience while employing language in a heightened, self-conscious way.

The rest of the book has Eagleton exploring the viability of these characteristics. In his analysis of the moral aspects of literature he acknowledges its empathetic aspects—it can offer guidance to anyone, provided they “listen” to the language and thought—but highlights the ambiguity of such responses. We might lack sufficient capacity (intellectual, emotional or otherwise) to develop this kind of reaction. Empathy can also prove negative: dictators derive much of their authority through manipulating people by means of passionate speeches. Eagleton employs the same kind of approach (highlighting the negative as well as the positive aspects) for the other four concepts, showing how many of them invoke common assumptions that require deconstruction. This is Eagleton at his best, avoiding definite conclusions while exposing the complexities underlying familiar terms.

The book subsequently offers a way of reading based on numerous provisos. We cannot appreciate Shakespeare’s style without understanding the ideological bases that underpin his works. On the other hand, we cannot deconstruct ideology without concentrating on the ways in which texts affect readers in different contexts. Eagleton poses the question: to what extent can a work be studied on its own terms (focusing on narrative, plot and character), or should it be evaluated as a response to—as well as a representation of—external circumstances? Or should a text be approached from both perspectives?

*The Event of Literature* is a complex book, drawing on a wealth of material from different disciplines. Eagleton takes the opportunity to demolish certain theorists—Stanley E. Fish, Paul de Man—while prioritizing others. In the light of his earlier work (especially during the Seventies and Eighties), it is interesting to see him championing F. R. Leavis. Eagleton also believes there is such a thing as “bad” literature (citing Robert Southey as an example) and “bad” novels (such as Melville’s *Pierre* (1852)), even though he does not explain why *Pierre* should be considered “literary” as opposed to (say) E. L. James’s recent succès d’estime *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011).

Ultimately what Eagleton asks us to do is to be more self-aware about books, and reflect on why they might be considered “literary” or not. Rather than simply describing a text as “transcendent” or “uplifting” we should consider in greater depth what these terms

signify. This requires us to think more deeply than we might have done previously about its structure, themes and style. What *The Event of Literature* lacks is an analysis of how this reflective process might create an effective “event” of literature. Although very interesting in terms of abstractions, Eagleton does not acknowledge how texts can be consumed differently across cultures. What might be deemed “good” or “bad” literature is very much dependent on the contexts that produce such judgements.

On the other hand Eagleton highlights the shortcomings of much current literary criticism, especially the lack of attention paid to authorial intention and/or reader response. We can still make close readings of texts, but we need to make more of their subjectivities. The real value of this book is summed up by Eagleton’s observation that while literature cannot change the world, it can make us “more self-critical, self-conscious, flexible, provisional, open-minded and robustly skeptical of orthodoxies [...] It [Literature] says almost nothing about how we are to live once the doors of perception have been cleansed; but it [...] [plays a part] in altering our stance in the world, which is perhaps the best this residual humanism can muster in a deconstructive age” (104). This represents perhaps the most effective “event” of literature.

**Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2013. /bk 390 pp. ISBN 978-0-224-09809-0.**

**Laurence Raw**

The nation's favorite diarist is back. Now a widow of fifty with two young children—Mabel and Billy—Bridget seems to have discovered the kind of emotional and sexual security that she seldom enjoyed in her previous diaries. She even has the chance to have one of her screenplay treatments turned into a feature film.

As usual, however, all is not well in the Jones household. Her boyfriend (Twitter handle Roxster) proves unable to cope with the emotional side of their relationship; this is chiefly due to societal pressure. Even in an apparently 'free' society like Britain, there is still a stigma attached to the idea of a younger woman going out with an older man. The man is considered somehow inadequate, searching for a surrogate mother rather than a lifelong partner. While Bridget's close friends Tom, Talitha and Jude offer emotional as well as conversational support, it's clear from Bridget's diary entries that they envy her a little. How can a woman with such a checkered career in attracting men become involved with such an attractive younger man? While not exactly expressing satisfaction when the relationship founders, Bridget's friends do claim that they saw it coming; perhaps this is a defense mechanism—a means of covering up their basic envy—while convincing themselves that their particularly relationships are working effectively.

Bridget's reaction is predictable, as she blames both Roxster and herself for the collapse. Her diary entries assume a resentful tone, proving how difficult it is for a middle-aged woman to sustain her allure. While undoubtedly funny, *Bridget Jones: Mad about the Boy* makes some telling points about the ways in which women—far more than men—of the over fifty generation are stigmatized. Apart from some honorable examples—the actor Joan Collins springs to mind—they are considered “past it”, unless they resort to facelifts, breast implants or other artificial ways of slowing up the aging process.

Bridget's professional aspirations are equally unfulfilled. Her screenplay—of a little-known play by Anton Chekhov (*Hedda Gabbler*)—is enthusiastically embraced by the production company, but her participation in the project is abruptly curtailed as a younger (and hence more dynamic) talent is brought in. Author Fielding makes some telling criticisms about the filmmaking process: none of those involved seem to realize that *Hedda Gabler*—note the spelling—has been written by Ibsen, not Chekhov. Bridget remains blissfully oblivious to the mistake, which might suggest equal ignorance. But this is not really the point: Fielding asks us instead to focus on the shortcomings of most filmmakers. George, the managing director of the company producing the *Gabler* (or should it be *Gabbler*) project, spends most of his time talking to his Blackberry; needless to say, he has little time for anyone or anything around him. In today's supercharged environment, where deals are done at the touch of a smartphone button rather than face to face, youth counts for everything: tyro screenwriters are treated like geniuses by airheaded producers determined to establish themselves as quickly as possible.

Of course things don't always work like that: the Man Booker Prize-winning novelist Penelope Fitzgerald did not begin her successful writing career until she was well into her sixties. “Veteran” performers like Judi Dench can still star in successful films (most recently *Philomena*), while directors such as the theater legend George Abbott continued working until they were over one hundred years old. *Mad about the Boy*



encourages us to look beneath the surface at the person underneath and recognize creative talents for what they are. While Bridget might have little talent as a screenwriter, she possesses a gift for storytelling in diary form.

Written in a series of staccato sentences, explaining feelings as well as recording her tweets, *Mad about the Boy* lays bare the psyche of someone in perpetual search for fulfillment, while trying her best to be a good mother to her children. Bridget has to deal with some particularly snobbish parents—why are the English still so obsessed with class, one asks?—many of whom enjoy superior lifestyles to her own. Despite such rebuffs, she copes extremely well; and gets her own back on one particularly vindictive mother whose affluent existence proves an utter sham. Although Bridget's culinary skills remain as rudimentary as ever—not extending much beyond pasta and tinned food—she manages to satisfy her children's needs.

*Mad about the Boy* is at once extremely funny yet sharply observant about the highs and lows of contemporary London life. Due in no small part to the success of the film adaptations as well as the books, I had a mental picture of Renee Zellweger as Bridget; no doubt the film version will prove as profitable as ever. The style is both racy and colloquial, making it an ideal text to read from cover to cover in one sitting. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

## Conflictual Familial Relationship and Fear of Death in *Wrath of the Titans*

Antonio Sanna

The recreation of a remote age when human beings had a closer contact with their gods and their demons; conflictual familial relationships developed to the most extreme consequences; mythological creatures reproduced with excellent special effects; a cast of talented actors; fast-paced action; beautiful natural landscapes and a compelling plot. This is what constitutes Jonathan Liebesman's 2012 *Wrath of the Titans*, a film where different Greek myths continually intersect with each other and offer a series of gladly-welcome surprises for those viewers who appreciate the original myth, but are ready to accept a reinterpretation of it that frequently does not adhere to the primary source. *Wrath of the Titans* could therefore be easily accused of being an unfaithful adaptation that deforms the traditional version(s) of the mythological stories passed down through the centuries. On the other hand, the film is a very good sequel to Louis Leterrier's 2010 *Clash of the Titans* and, I would say, it even develops a more compelling and more intricate story.

The story begins some years after the facts narrated in *Clash of the Titans*, focusing on the quiet life of Perseus (Sam Worthington) as a fisherman, now father of a young boy, in a village on the coast of Greece. Zeus (Liam Neeson) descends on the earth to ask for his demigod son's help by explaining that the walls of Tartarus, the underground prison of the monsters and Titans defeated by the Olympian gods in the ancient times, have begun to fall after the gods have lost their powers. The relationship between father and son—a theme extensively developed in the previous instalment of the series, whose story is mainly based on Perseus' almost adolescent refusal to acknowledge Zeus' paternity and authority—assumes central importance in this film as well, where it is shown from the first scenes as more affectionate and definitely founded on mutual respect. Familial relationships are thus central in *Wrath of the Titans* as well, as Zeus' affectionate attachment to Perseus and the latter's love for his own son Helios demonstrate.

As anticipated by Zeus, monsters and demons freely wander the earth, destroying all signs of civilizations on their path and exterminating all the human beings they encounter. If the most dangerous of them all, Cronos, father of the main Olympian gods, could escape from the centre of Tartarus, as Zeus says, "it will mean chaos. The end of the world". This film thus reprises the myth of the war of the gods in Heaven, a myth that is present in many religions and is based on the dualism of good versus evil (in the Christian religion, for example, it is epitomized by the fight between God and Lucifer), and updates it in a later age. Indeed, the war between the Titans and the Olympian gods fought before the creation of humankind now involves human beings too and is waged on the earth, humans playing a fundamental role in determining its final result.

Perseus initially refuses to help Zeus, but, after a chimera devastatingly attacks his village and endangers the life of Helios, the demigod decides to help his father. However, he discovers from the deadly-wounded god Poseidon (Danny Huston) that Hades, ruler of the underworld and of Tartarus, has betrayed and imprisoned Zeus in order to liberate their common father Cronos in exchange for immortality.<sup>1</sup> Hades' revenge has been coldly calculated during the years allegedly intervening between the two films and he executes his plan after allying himself with the god of war Ares (Edgar Ramirez), who feels a blind hatred against his father Zeus' preference and affection for Perseus. Almost like Cain towards Abel, both Hades and Ares are jealous of their respective brothers' fortune and

position and they decide to conspire against them to win over Cronos' and Zeus' attention and favour. Specific mention must be made of Ralph Fiennes' interpretation of Hades, which conveys the character's rage as it has been solidified through the centuries of banishment to the underworld. On the other hand, Fiennes exemplarily manifests Hades' repressed fraternal love through his glances and silences.

A certain message of peace is suggestively implicated through the negative representation of the only two gods who still hold their effective powers thanks to human prayers: Hades and Ares, respectively the gods of death and war. The story suggests that, by having stopped praying for the other gods, human beings do not care any longer for matters such as the arts (protected by Apollo), charity and hospitality (represented by Hestia) and beauty and love (personified by Aphrodite). Furthermore, the fact that the alliance between Hades and Ares would probably cause the annihilation of the entire human species is a warning to contemporary viewers: worshipping war and death can only lead to suffering and destruction. This is corroborated by Perseus when he tells Argos' soldiers not to pray to Ares anymore because it would only strengthen the god that actually is their real enemy and because nobody can "make peace with the god of war". Instead, the behaviours of Perseus, Zeus and Andromeda (Rosamund Pike) indicate that forgiveness, unity of the family and reconciliation are the vehicles for a (morally) good life.

A very interesting point is also made to explain the motivation offered for Hades' actions. Indeed, the Olympian gods have lost their immortality since human beings stopped invoking and praying for them (a condition that is visually exemplified by the decaying temple in which Poseidon appears). Hades is afraid of death, precisely as many humans are. The gods are therefore presented as closer to the "mortal viewers" of this film because they both share the fear of what comes after death. As Hades explains, "when a god dies it's just absence. It's nothing. It's oblivion": contrary to their ageless—but not immortal—bodies, the Olympian gods actually have a mortal soul. Hades does not expect death to be followed by a conscious afterlife and is thus represented as possibly much more frightened than a human being. This is certainly contrary to the fear of death as "the undiscovered country" that is portrayed in the Prince of Denmark's most famous and much quoted "To be or not to be" speech in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (III. I). According to the eponymous protagonist, the end of life may be the equivalent of sleep; it may bring fantastic dreams; or it may bring hellish torment. For Hamlet, not knowing what comes next is a good reason to avoid death. For Hades, there is not indecision or consolation, but certain and inescapable annihilation.

The story proceeds with Perseus reaching Queen Andromeda's camp on the battlefield near the city of Argos and then liberating Poseidon's demigod son Agenor (Toby Kebbell) from prison. The three of them thus navigate towards the Island of Kail to seek advice from the "Fallen" god Hephaestus on how to enter Tartarus and help Zeus escape before Cronos absorbs all of his power/vital strength. From her first appearance on the scene, it is inescapable to notice that in this sequel Andromeda is a strong-willed woman, who personally leads the army and engages actively in battle, with no fear of duelling with her adversaries. She is not as passive as in *Clash of the Titans*, where she is a victim of her parents' disrespectful behaviour towards the gods and almost a marionette of the Argos crowd that wants to sacrifice her to the Kraken. In *Wrath of the Titans* she wears an armour, firmly holds a sword, directly addresses the Olympian gods and, by resolutely planning the course of her actions, determines her own fate.

Totally unexpected (for both the characters and the viewers) is the encounter with the aggressive Cyclops on the Island of Kail and their attempt to capture the humans. The Cyclops, servants of Hephaestus, are ingeniously introduced through the point of view of one of them; in this case it is literally the single view of one of them looking down at

Perseus that gives the first clue to the identity of the creature. An excellent performance is then offered in the subsequent scene by actor Bill Nighy through his interpretation of a bewildered Hephaestus, who has become mad after loosing his powers and, with rolling eyes, continually changes his moods, talks mainly on his own (I do not want to spoil the reader's surprise in realizing the actual addressee of the god's remarks) and nostalgically evokes the time of a better past when he lived with Aphrodite and when he forged the gods' weapons. These weapons are indeed the secret for Perseus' victory: by reuniting Zeus' thunderbolt, Poseidon's trident and Hades' less known pitchfork (also called the bident, which has been often represented in Renaissance paintings as accompanying the god of the underworld) he could form the Spear of Trium, the only weapon that can defeat Cronos.

Perseus' mythical quest to reach and save his father (reprising the Egyptian myth of the god Horus' journey to the underworld) is regularly interrupted by the scenes which focus on Zeus' imprisonment in Tartarus and his two rivals' gloating over his slow weakening and the simultaneous resurgence of Cronos. Zeus' life blood has the appearance of a lava river that glowingly flows from the god's body towards the Titan to form the latter's veins. Such a river temporarily illuminates the gloomy environment of Tartarus which, with its dark caverns, continuous rock slides and empty corridors perfectly reproduces the sense of void and sadness characterizing the afterlife according to the ancient Greeks. This is a very good transposition of the "cheerless" Asphodel Fields (Graves 120-1) and, although we do not see any wandering soul of the dead, director Liebesman seems to follow Homer's words when characterizing this environment as a "gloomy land" remote from the sunlight, where even great warriors such as Achilles do not want to reside (325).

After being guided to the entrance of the underworld, Perseus, Andromeda and Agenor have to pass through a labyrinth which, as Hephaestus explains, has been designed "to play tricks with the mind. After all, the mind is the greatest trap of all". The danger thus does not only derive from the difficulty of finding the right passage among hundreds of corridors whose design continually changes, but also from the minds of the characters who hear the voices of their past and witness the materialization of their fears and doubts. In this way, the representation of the labyrinth in *Wrath of the Titans* perfectly suits the definition elaborated by critic Fred Botting when arguing that it is "a space that is other to, constitutive of and resistant to, the known limits of society and subjectivity. [...] In the labyrinth subjectivity and the environment become mirror of each other" (249). This also corresponds to Sigmund Freud's comparison between the unconscious mind and the "subterranean realms" in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (in Worlan 187). Specifically, Perseus' fears take substantial form when he is attacked by the Minotaur, the ferocious creature part-man and part-bull. Although such an episode actually belongs to the myth of Theseus at Crete (Apollodorus 140), the presence of the monster—that is very realistically recreated through an accurate makeup underlying the creature's hybrid status—in my opinion does not disrupt the viewers' expectancies about the adherence to the original Greek myth, but is instead almost anticipated as soon as the labyrinth is mentioned.

Andromeda and the two demigods finally reach an extremely-aged and weak Zeus by the time that he has actually reconciled with Hades, but also in time for Cronos to have acquired enough power to free himself and prepare his assault on all of humankind. Cronos' appearance reprises some readings of the Titans as "primordial, often earth-born first beings, who are unruly and dangerous—sometimes personifications of volcanoes, earthquakes" (Leeming 149). Indeed, he is portrayed as an anthropomorphic gigantic mountain that is made of rock, fire and lava, and thus becomes a sort of representation of a volcanic eruption devastating all the surrounding territories. The Titan is ingeniously

represented as speaking an untranslated ancient language that belongs to an era allegedly pre-dating the creation of humanity. It is however a disappointment that he mainly pronounces only the names of his sons Zeus and Hades, as if obsessed with the hatred he feels for having been defeated and imprisoned by them, whereas a development of this character's verbal expressions would have definitely enriched the film's narrative. Moreover, Cronos could be also implicitly associated with the figure of Lucifer, the rebel angel incarcerated at the centre of the earth in the last canto of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, "Lo 'mperador del doloroso regno" (the emperor of the grievous reign, XXXIV, v. 28) who could however unleash the forces of evil and his army of devils if returning on the earth.

The final battle between Perseus and Cronos is worth being called "epic" because the small human being confronts the power and immensity of the Titan as they are displayed in all of their mightiness. The fight also could be seen as expressing the symbolism of the smallness of a human being against a personified and vengeful nature. As was the case of the battle against the Kraken in the previous instalment of the series, this is the most exemplary occasion for the display of the excellent special effects. The major merit of these derives from the fact that they rarely appear to be computer-generated, but offer instead a very realistic representation of creatures such as the chimera and the Cyclops, especially if we consider that such creatures are always presented through well-staged and "choreographed" battles characterized by a fast-paced rhythm and an extreme care of details. Cronos throws lava at Perseus and destroys the hills in front of him; desperation seems to prevail over the soldiers (as it happens when the company of the ring faces the creature made of smoke and fire that is the Balrog in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*); and humanity seems on the brink of extinction. Nevertheless, and in keeping with the fairytale tradition, the hero is victorious and defeats the gigantic "monster", finally also conquering the love of Andromeda.

Specific mention must be made of the orchestral soundtrack, composed by Javier Navarrete, which surpasses Ramin Djawadi's soundtrack for *Clash of the Titans* with its majestic intensity and more frequent choirs. The sixteen tracks, indeed, provide many scenes with a solemnity that sometimes lacks in the previous film. It is particularly interesting to observe that the electric guitar often corresponds with the malevolent actions of the adversarial creatures, whereas the choirs usually accompany and particularly emphasise the most emotional moments of the story such as Poseidon's petrified death (which occurs at the feet of the god's own decaying statue) or Cronos' aggression of Andromeda's army immediately after his liberation/resurrection.

Considering the positive result of this film, it is desirable to expect another sequel in the (near) future. It would be interesting to watch on the screen a battle between humans and the remaining Titans or other creatures such as the harpies, the sirens or the sphinx. Gods such as Pan and Dionysus have not been represented yet and introducing the "wild" cult of the Maenads and the Satyrs could offer another occasion to deal with the theme of religion—or the lack of it—that has been repeatedly developed in both *Clash of the Titans* and *Wrath of the Titans*. Otherwise, and following the example of many films of the last decade such as *Red Dragon*, *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* and the recent *The Hobbit: The Unexpected Journey*, viewers could expect a prequel focusing on the creation of the world, Cronos' rebellion against Uranus, or the epic fight of the Titans against the Olympian gods and the creation of the Kraken. It is regrettable to assist at the disappearance and death of the gods occurring in *Wrath of the Titans* and a prequel could satisfy all of those viewers who want or need the presence and support of the god(s). On the other hand, a sequel would probably appeal to those viewers who believe that human beings are sufficiently mature and autonomous to live without their gods.

### Notes

1. In the film, the name of the Titan is spelt “Kronos”. I have however preferred to use the spelling “Cronos” throughout the article, as usually indicated by many scholars and critics of the Greek myth. The episode of the chimera is actually related to the character of Bellerophon in the Greek myth (Graves 253).
2. Hades would not agree with Greek philosopher Epicurus’ (341-270 B.C.E.) argument that “Death is nothing to us, since when we are, death has not come, and when death has come, we are not” (124b-127a). If death is indeed an experiential blank, then it cannot be considered as a frightening or bad experience.

### Filmography

- Clash of the Titans*. dir. Louis Leterrier. Warner Bros: 2010.  
*The Hobbit: The Unexpected Journey*. dir. Peter Jackson. Warner Bros: 2012.  
*Red Dragon*. dir. Brett Ratner. Universal: 2002.  
*Underworld: Rise of the Lycans*. dir. Patrick Tatopoulos. Screen Gems: 2009.  
*Wrath of the Titans*. dir. Jonathan Liebesman. Warner Bros: 2012.

### Works Cited

- Apollodorus. *The Library of Greek Mythology*. trans. Robin Hard. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- Botting, Fred. “Power in the Darkness: Heterotopias, Literature and Gothic Labyrinths”. *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. vol. 2. Bred Botting, Dale Townshend. eds. London: Routledge, 2004. 243-68.
- Dante Alighieri. *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Vol. 2. Milano, IT: Fabbri, 1963.
- Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus”. *Epicurus: Letters, Principal Doctrines, and Vatican Sayings*. Russell M. Geer. ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997.
- Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths: The Complete and Definitive Edition*. London: Penguin Books, 2011.
- Homer. *Odyssea*. trans. Enzo Cetrangelo. ed. Milano, IT: Fabbri, 2000.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. London: Collins, 2001.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: Harper Collins, 2001.
- Worland, Rick. *The Horror Film: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.
- Perseus (Sam Worthington) riding Pegasus faces the volcanic eruption that is Cronos near the end of Wrath of the Titans (copyright Warner Bros Pictures).



**Guillermo Gómez- Peña and Roberto Sifuentes. *Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011. 237 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-54922-6**

**Nevena Stojanovic**

Since the early 1990s Guillermo Gómez-Peña and his artistic group La Pocha Nostra have been experimenting with performance theory and radical performance art, involving contributors from different countries, from professional artists to random visitors of their performance sites. In this way La Pocha Nostra has been attempting to engage a great number of individuals in their progressive performance projects that deal with the issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and globalization and its effects and challenges. Drawing from his experience with La Pocha Nostra's diverse and internationally acclaimed projects as well as from his theoretical knowledge of the field, Gómez- Peña has published several books that tremendously contribute to our studying and understanding of the political potential of the contemporary performance art. Gómez- Peña and his long-term co-worker Roberto Sifuentes's latest publication, titled *Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy*, is a rich and beneficial handbook on how to organize, structure, and pace workshops in radical performance art. This engaging manual that contains the authors' advice, reflections, detailed descriptions and explanations of exercises, sample activities, photographs of the exercises done in past workshops, as well as conversations with a few of their respected colleagues is a valuable source of ideas and materials "for artists, students, performance collectives, and college professors" (38).

The introduction delineates the origin of La Pocha Nostra and its pedagogical experiments, highlighting that the formation of this group was motivated by the annulment of the Cold War borders, the 1990s US problems with gender, ethnicity, and nationality, and Gómez- Peña's realization that artists and non-artists should blend into a reformatory civic body. As Gómez- Peña explains,

By the mid-1990s, it became clear to my colleagues and me that our new artistic project had to start defining new intersections between performance, theory, 'community', new technologies, and activist politics. To do so, we needed to rethink our entire practice and reconfigure our poetic cartography, to invent a more inclusive map so to speak. Eventually performance pedagogy would give us the answers we were looking for. (3)

In order to establish the basic foundation for the radical performance pedagogy announced in the title of the book and mentioned in the previous excerpt, Gómez- Peña and Sifuentes discuss the ways La Pocha Nostra chooses participants and locations, give tips about workshop sites, light, sound, props, costumes, and other performance aids, suggest how leaders of a performance art workshop should stimulate a positive and productive work atmosphere, and offer preliminary advice to those who will partake in the workshops (17-38).

In the first chapter, Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes introduce the exercises that aim at helping the workshop participants prepare their bodies for the forthcoming artistic challenges, establish connections with the performance space, and immerse themselves in the workshop. In order to get the participants into the art-making mood, the opening



exercise titled “the monkey-breathing dance” asks them to imagine themselves as monkeys, imitate the monkeys’ walk and body language, and synchronize the movements with the electronic music (42-3). Building on this icebreaking activity, the subsequent getting-to-know-you exercises require that the participants stroll with closed eyes and rely on all the other senses but sight so that they could get used to the performance site (44-9), and that they explore human relations by choosing the objects/participants that they love and hate and by reflecting on the development of the love and hate in the end (50-1). The authors further recommend the exercises that aim at establishing a sense of trust and positive communication among the participants. In such exercises, the authors ask the participants to imagine an important border-crossing of any kind and run with closed eyes towards the goal (52-4), to shout their own names in order to announce the intended act of “falling down” so that their coworkers could save them (55-6), and to find a person who reciprocates their silent interest in order to steadily look at her/his eyes, thus engaging in a mute but friendly conversation (57-60). The chapter ends with a series of exercises that encourage the participants’ investigation “of the human body” (61-5), their playing with and education of their partners’ bodies (66-8), their power competition with arms, feet, and eye-contact (69-71), and their silent communication through facial expressions, eye-contact, motions, and pauses when the climax of the conversation has been reached (72-4). Evidently, the chapter is rich in ideas and instructions and adequately prepares the readers and future practitioners for the forthcoming stages of the workshop.

The second chapter offers a number of exercises that boost the participants’ confidence in various explorations of their bodies and the potential of the radical performance art. The opening activity of this kind is titled “poetic introductions”, and it asks the participants to present themselves creatively, and not through their bios (77-8). Following this icebreaker, “poetic exquisite corpse: mapping new territories of inquiry” requires that the participants finish the sentences that the instructor began in a creative way (79-81). Afterwards, “today’s question” is addressed to each participant in order to put her/him in the appropriate thinking mode for that workshop day (82-3). The subsequent exercises include envisioning a line that divides the space and people into diametrically different identities and asking everyone to occupy a spot in that line following their own personal inclinations (84-7), analyzing the problems in each group and reporting the results of the analysis to the entire workshop circle (88-90), debating what exercises in the workshop should be recorded (91-2), and generating short scenarios and enacting them (93-5). The final activity in the chapter titled “impersonating your favorite subculture in the city” asks the participants to dress in the style of the chosen subcultural formation, go out, and behave as representatives of that formation in order to experience the passers’-by reactions (96-8). Though the authors provide brief accounts of a few workshop participants’ experiences in this exercise, a larger pool of more detailed accounts would have been highly beneficial for both the practitioners and theoreticians of the radical performance art. Analyzing the shared stories of impersonation would help the readers imagine the challenges that different impersonations carry, understand better what it means to be an “other”, and stimulate the production of the readers’ own impersonation exercises.

In the third chapter, Gómez- Peña and Sifuentes provide a series of activities that help the participants come up with ideas about group performances. The opening exercise in this series is titled “activating/developing your prop and costume installation or ‘pop archeological bank’”, and it asks the participants to remove a few items from the initial item collection, use them in the exercise, and place them in a new order (101-3). An even more creative and provocative exercise is “one-on-one: constructing a live image on someone else”, which asks each participant to choose a partner so that they could perform

the roles of “the performance artist” and “the raw material” (106). During this exercise, “the raw material” should be shaped into a unique tableau vivant that reflects the views of “the performance artist” (105-10). The remaining activities in this section ask the participants to practice group tableaux vivants (110-2), to stage group tableaux vivants in different nooks of the workshop site so that they look like “living museums” (113-5), to stage “human altars” (116-9), to stage the tableaux vivants in different closed and open spaces (120-4), and to mark a spot in the performance location, pose in it, and allow two other people to enter the same area in order to destabilize the initial image (125-8). The “bonus” material at the end of the chapter introduces the energizing and innovative activities intended for longer workshops (129-32). The section is rich in ideas and directions that stimulate the exploration of human bodies in different spaces and relations to their surroundings.

The fourth chapter presents a number of exercises that help the participants use the knowledge gained through the former sessions and start accumulating the material for the final performance. The opening activity titled “basic” jam session: beginning to let go of the methodology” asks a few participants to experiment with different objects, poses, and increasing and decreasing presences of the participants in the marked spot in the performance space (137-41). The subsequent exercises involve the freezing and moving of the staged tableaux under the instructor’s command (142-6), the creation of characters, accompanied by the inclusion of interested outsiders in the performance and the addition of visual, acoustic, and digital aids (147-9), and finally the enactment of the tableaux in two or more performance sites (150-1). Since this chapter aims at showing how the participants can shed the methodological constraints, channeling their creativity and acquired skills into the forthcoming provocative projects, Gómez- Peña and Sifuentes could have provided more exercises. A larger pool of ideas for the participants’ successful completion of the last stage of their artistic “rite of passage” and confident transition to the final performance would have been a significant aid, especially to the less experienced practitioners.

The fifth chapter offers advice on how to prepare “the final performance” and stage it in public (155). The opening activity titled “strategizing the final performance and discussing the nature of the performance material” is actually a discussion of each participant’s best pose that could be included in the final event (155-7). It is followed by a workshop of the participants’ final “personas” (158-63) and by practicing and polishing the enacted creatures/poses as well as deciding who is going to participate in the performance and who can assist with the preparation of the space and gadgets and the recording of the performance (164-74). These activities are accompanied by sample syllabi for short and long workshops (175-83), “humble advice for emerging performance artists” (184-8), and the conversations between the authors of the book and Kimberlee Perez, a participant in La Pocha Nostra’s workshops (189-203), and afterwards between the authors and Emma Tramposch, the producer of the group’s numerous workshops (203-15). Gómez-Peña concludes the chapter with a brief recollection of the Oaxacan event—the performance staged in the Oaxacan museum at the peak of the teachers’ protest against the government—pointing out that the local population and the visiting artists were united in their mutual struggle for social justice and progress (216-20). This inspiring recollection is followed by the written material produced in the “poetic exquisite corpse” exercise in the group’s previous workshops (221-8) and by the authors’ humorous farewell advice: “Now, go kill your instructor!! You are on your own” (230). The chapter offers inspiring ideas for the final workshop events, provides a sense of closure for the reader, and encourages the future practitioners to experiment with their bodies and the knowledge gained by reading the manual.

Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy opens a path of development for the prospective workshop participants, theoreticians, students, and performance instructors, offering them a variety of exercises and wise advice from the experienced artists. The only drawback of this manual is that it does not provide any ideas about how some exercises can be adapted to an academic classroom, particularly in undergraduate and graduate classes on interdisciplinary projects, theater, or performance theory. Though the authors label their activities foundational, intermediate, or advanced, suggestions about the academic utilization and adjustment of the material in the book would have been very helpful for those who intend on including some of the exercises in their syllabi. Since the title of the manual suggests that pedagogy is its crucial concern, the inclusion of the teachers' experiences with these activities as well as a range of ideas on how to turn the classroom into a productive, experimental lab in performance art would have been a great asset. Nonetheless, this handbook is a remarkable contribution to the field of performance studies and an inspiring read for anyone interested in the possibilities of performance art.

### **Works Cited**

Gómez-Peña, Guillermo, Roberto Sifuentes. *Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.

**Berkem Güreñci Sađlam. *Representations of London in Peter Ackroyd's Fiction*.  
Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2012. P/bk 189pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-  
7734-2578-1**

### **Şebnem Toplu**

In *The Making of London* Sebastian Groes states that Ackroyd has a “complex vision of London as a historical process” (122). Elaborating on Ackroyd’s *London: The Biography* (2000), Groes maintains that Ackroyd sees “hundreds of Londons all mingled”, using the idea of palimpsest as a guiding principle because it shows that imaginative writing is “able to contain many different versions of the city within the same place” (123). Following the same thread by a different perspective, Berkem Güreñci Sađlam elaborates on Ackroyd’s approach to the city in his four major novels. With a Foreword by Dr. Laurence Raw, in her *Representation of London in Peter Ackroyd's Fiction “The Mystical City Universal”*, Güreñci Sađlam discusses Ackroyd’s *Chatterton*, *The House of Doctor Dee*, *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* and *Hawksmoor*. Since rewriting the city of London Ackroyd rewrites the lives of famous Londoners by the techniques of detective plot and parodied biography, Güreñci Sađlam’s book is composed of three parts, the first disclosing the theoretical background related to the novels she has selected, the second, elaborates on the novels themselves and the third part covers the conclusion along with the bibliography and index.

The first part is composed of two chapters; the first, which is titled as “Rewriting and Parody” reveals that Ackroyd regards various attributes of postmodern novel, especially of historical metafiction, confirming Hutcheon claim that “we can only know [the past] through texts” (7). As for parody, Güreñci Sađlam points out that the two major genres that Ackroyd parodies in his fiction are detective story and biography, along with autobiography as the confessional form. Güreñci Sađlam reveals that the “essential atmosphere of the city” in Ackroyd’s fiction is that it is “ungraspable”, the combined elements of the city “all serve to illustrate that while it changes from century to century, as it expands, the city becomes more unknowable” (39). Devoting the Second Chapter of Part I to “Rewriting Genres”, Güreñci Sađlam suggests that Ackroyd’s fiction do not follow a chronological single plot of investigation like the traditional examples of the genre, but uses multiple narratives, parodying, in fact, all the aspects—the plot, the structure, the detective, the Watson figure, and even the central mystery (48). Likewise, parodying the biography in his fiction, she writes, Ackroyd claims that a biography is just as fictional as a novel, thus, “parodying the biography in his fiction” reveals that “features of each form are used in the other” (61).

In the Second Part and the Chapter Three of her book, Güreñci Sađlam maintains that as his most metafictional of Ackroyd’s detective parodies, in *Chatterton*, Ackroyd projects the question of forgery and its relationship with theoretical notions of intertextuality, imitation, parody, plagiarism and pastiche, through three narratives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The whole novel is based on levels of imitation, so Güreñci Sađlam concludes, that world of infinite allusions is acknowledged by Ackroyd as a product of London as all the characters are united in their sense of place; “London rewrites itself, is rewritten by characters (like Harriet), and is written and rewritten by authors” (87).

The fourth chapter covers *The House of Doctor Dee* which bears similarities in the structure of the main story to *Chatterton*. The deviations from the conventional biography of Dee reminds the reader that it is a fictional text. Hence, Güreñci Sağlam suggests, the question that Ackroyd raises by distorting such facts is “whether conventional biographies and histories are to be believed, or may they be as fictional as his own narratives?” (91-2). As for the main concern of the book, she argues that London figures as “the most prominent feature—the city is the catalyst, the evidence, the mystery and the solution”; the ending of the novel exposes that the city is “given as it underlines the fluidity of London—the flow of the city which parallels itself through its visionary inhabitants” (105-6).

*Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* is discussed in the fifth chapter; while the first two novels merged different narratives from different periods to show the continuity of the city, its narratives are centered only in the nineteenth century (107). Moreover, the concern with the parody of biographical concerns is also enlarged to include George Gissing, Karl Marx, and Dan Leno, yet they are not given major roles in the course of the events. However, Güreñci Sağlam comments that in both *The House of Doctor Dee* and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* “the inexplicable beings the detectives search for end up being London itself” and that the novel underlines the fact that “the city will always be ungraspable no matter how many detectives search for it” (127-8).

Lastly, *Hawksmoor* is elaborated in the sixth chapter. Similar to the first two novels Güreñci Sağlam covers, the fourth one is also built in multiple but parallel centuries; eighteenth and twentieth. Concentrating on two central characters, the novel is unfolded as Dyer’s autobiographical journal. Besides the detective story, the images such as the rhymes repeated by children and the sounds heard on the street repeated in both time frames “emphasize the circularity of life in London. Thereby, comparing the novel with the former ones, she maintains that “it is the sense of place—the eternal essence of London—that enables the repetition” (150) of characters and events.

Güreñci Sağlam concludes that for Ackroyd, London is a “spiritual center of English cultural and literary heritage”—“a city that repeats and rewrites itself as newer generations delve into their secrets” (151). Apart from the prominence of the city of London in Ackroyd’s novels, her book brings together a detailed analysis and a very clear argumentative stance on highlighting the palimpsests of his works with a detailed argument on parody, intertextuality and historiographic metafiction, which enables the book to be significant source for all readers on three points: Ackroyd’s tactics as a writer, Ackroyd’s fiction among other London books and the deployment of postmodernism.

### Works Cited

- Groes, Sebastian. *The Making of London—London in Contemporary Literature*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

**Zeynep Zeren Atayurt. *Excess and Embodiment in Contemporary Women's Writing*. Ed. Koray Melikoğlu. Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2011. P/bk 198 pp. ISBN-13: 978-3-89821-978-5**

### **Şebnem Toplu**

Throughout the centuries women were regarded as mothers and housekeepers. However, by the twentieth century, with the contribution of the technological developments such as television, printing and advertisements, woman turned into beautiful and sexual objects. Almost in everywhere; on the streets, websites, vehicles, newspapers, magazines, beautiful women are presented setting the standard for beauty. Notion of beauty, then, is shaped according to what is shown us as beautiful. John Berger in his *Way of Seeing* states, “[m]uch of the literature on the representation of women in advertising is built on the feminist argument that media are patriarchal, and that in patriarchal societies, men watch women, women watch men watching women” (11). Likewise in *Journal of Communication* Katherine Frith et al claim “[t]he consensus after years of discussion is that advertising creates unfair expectations in women because ads hold up an unattainable beauty ideal that is often related to a ‘desirable body shape’” (12). Atayurt’s book elaborates on this crucial issue which has been a problematic since the twentieth century, she maintains that “the prioritization of the lean physique has created a social environment of distress over food and discomfort with one’s body size which has a tendency to equate women’s happiness, health and even success with reference to size” (1). Hence, it leads her to ask “How is the representation of the ‘fat’ female body constructed in women’s fictional and non-fictional narratives?”, disclosing the fact that “[t]he fear and dislike of fat, which tends to characterize Western society’s cultural obsession with body size and obesity inspired” her interest “in the representations of corpulent female bodies” (9). Thereby, Atayurt explores the social, cultural and psychological mechanisms operating under the contextualization of fatness, as a multi-faceted literary design –the hidden implication and deeper layers of meaning that hold together various aspects of physical embodiment in the writings of Fay Weldon, Jeanette Winterson, Margaret Atwood, Claude Tardat, and Judith Moore among many others (10).

Atayurt focuses on visual image and its impact especially on women’s relationships to their bodies reflected in Weldon’s *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983), Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), Atwood’s *Lady Oracle* (1976), Tardat’s *Sweeth Death* (1989) and Moore’s *Fat Girl: A True Story* (2005). Grouping the selected fiction that reveal the ways narratives transform the cultural and personal obsessions with fatness through various narrative strategies, Atayurt divides her book into three chapters.

In the first chapter titled as “‘A comic turn, turned serious’: reading the Female Embodiment in Romance, the Trickster and the Cyborg in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*”, Atayurt examines the ways in which Weldon’s construction of a ‘fat’ heroine represents aggressive attitudes towards valorized and oppressed female bodies within established disruptive forms such as the mythical trickster. She states that rooted in transgression and subversion, the trickster can facilitate a critical exploration of the social and cultural codes represented in this novel. Moreover, Ruth’s affiliation with the controversial figure of cyborg brings about sharp contrasts to the promotion of the female body normalized by cultural and social practices while producing a critical narrative on the beauty norms held by these practices. In the following chapter which elaborates on

Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, the cultural bodily ideal is further dismantled in the image of a huge woman whose power becomes inspirational for a modern slender woman in her fight against the politics of her society. Nevertheless, Atayurt discloses that Winterson's novel liberates both the 'fat' and the 'thin' body from these confines, and lays the emphasis on the notions of interconnectedness and unity. Therefore, the second chapter has the title "I still think it was poetic': The Poetics and Politics of Hyperbole in *Sexing the Cherry*. Atayurt further argues that the novel alludes to the process of "botanical grafting", which helps create various species of plants to increase their strength and resistance, drawing a parallel with the Dog Woman and Fortuna, at the end of the novel who forge stronger selves. She concludes that in this carnivalesque order, bodily hierarchies cease to exist, creating a sense of harmonious "diversity and interconnectedness" (93). Linking this notion to the third chapter, she maintains that the "fat" body transforms into a "cultural impossibility" and "embodies a site of repression" in Atwood and Tardat's fiction in whose confessional narratives excess becomes a source of trauma at the center of mother-daughter relationship. The final chapter, then, is entitled "Mothers, Daughters and Excess in *Lady Oracle* and *Sweet Death*". Atayurt underlines that both novels explore mother-daughter relationship from the point of view of the daughter, in which the daughter's obese body poses a challenge to the normative requirements of the female body and the idealization of the mother mainly in Hélèn Cixous' writings. Accordingly, Atayurt divides her third chapter into two basic subtitles and three further divisions. These divisions cover headlines as follows: "'The outline of my former body still surrounded me like a mist': Traumatic Resonances of 'Excess' in *Lady Oracle*", "'Obesity', Trauma and Manifestations within the Mother-Daughter Dyad", "From 'Fat' to 'Thin': Reversals, Reconciliations, and Confrontations", "'I know what I look like. It's all planned, calculated, willed': The revenge Narrative of 'Excess' in *Sweet Death*", "Accessing the Private through Writing of 'Excess'" and lastly "Tensions in the Mother-Daughter Dyad and Desire for Power". These titles reveal a thorough analysis by Atayurt covering mother-daughter relationship from various points of view, confronting Cixous' assertion that women should eliminate "the effects of the past", concluding that "the effects of the past" particularly the early relationships between mother and daughter can "hardly be removed since they become heavily embedded in the protagonists' personal and social experiences" (167).

After exploring diverse representations of female corpulence as metaphor and literary trope in literary texts, to conclude, Atayurt selects an autobiographical text, *Fat Girl: A True Story*, to expose the limits of "extra-textual representation, the tensions arising from the unlivability" of Moore's life, in which Atayurt maintains "fat" reveals an "idiosyncratic identity" with "specific appetites, a specific story, about a specific family" (169). Moore's critical self-gaze, Atayurt reveals, is "in fact implicative of a social gaze that represents her culture's views on 'excessive' embodiment", so her gaze, Atayurt suggests is an "inspecting gaze"—"the index of her dislike of her body" signifying a critique of contemporary American bodily ideals (182). Thus, as an overall decree on the texts she analyses, Atayurt asserts, fatness, which is regarded as "unaesthetic" is both legitimized and has become "aesthetic". At this point, I'd like to remind that as forming a significant section (patriarchal?) of the society, medical doctors also fight fatness claiming it is unhealthy—causes increase in blood pressure and diabetes and even cancer—so oblige people, men and women alike in this case, to stop eating processed food and move around a lot. Nevertheless, from the literary and academic perspectives, Zeynep Zeren Atayurt's book is invaluable; the texts she has selected to explore and the elaboration she has brought to these highly interesting books is a highly significant contribution to the academic field and would be of great interest for non-academic readers as well.

**Works Cited**

Berger, John. *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin, 1972.

Frith, Katherine, Ping Shaw, Hong Cheng. *Journal of Communication*. 55.1 (March 2005): 56-70.





## CONTRIBUTORS

**Ingy Aboelazm** is a Lecturer of English Literature at the Department of English Language and Literature in Ain Shams University, Egypt. She obtained her Ph.D. degree in English Literature (1<sup>st</sup> class honours) in 2013. She has published and presented a number of articles on African, Irish, and Caribbean literature at various international conferences. Aboelazm's academic interests are in drama and postcolonial literature. Address: 18221, 150<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Cai, 12642, Springfield Gardens, 11413-4010, New York, USA. E-mail: ingyaboelazm@gmail.com

**Gillian Alban** is Assistant Professor at Istanbul Aydın University, Turkey. Her book, *Melusine the Serpent Goddess in A. S. Byatt's Possession and in Mythology* (Lexington 2003), is her first writing on women in literature through an archetypal perspective. She is currently working on contemporary women novelists showing girls growing into adults and mothers. Address: Istanbul Aydın University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Beşyol Mah. İnönü Str. 40, 34295, Küçükçekmece, Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: gmealban@gmail.com

**Mohamad Almostafa** is an Assistant Professor of English Literature in Al al-Bayt University, Jordan. He received his Doctorate in English Literature & Criticism (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA) in 2012. He has three published articles on Shakespeare's King Henry V, John Keats & Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb, & Feminist Politics of Location. His research interests include Postcolonial/Feminist theory, Renaissance drama, English/Arabic poetry and Arab American literature. Address: Al al-Bayt University, Department of English Language and Literature, 130200, 25123, City of Mafraq, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. E-mail: m\_sun\_set@yahoo.com

**Ahmad Abu Baker** is an Associate Professor of English & Comparative Literature at Al al-Bayt University, Jordan. He received his Doctorate of English & Comparative Literature from Murdoch University/Western Australia in 2002. He has seventeen published articles in international refereed indexed journals on a variety of topics including: postcolonial theory, Emily Dickinson and War Poetry. He is contributor of the four volume set *The Dictionary of World Literary Characters*. Address: Al al-Bayt University, Department of English Language and Literature, 130200, 25123, City of Mafraq, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. E-mail: literarystudies@yahoo.com

**Sihem Arfaoui Abidi**, Ph.D., is a professor-assistant at the High Institute of Human Sciences of Jendouba in Jendouba University, Tunisia. Her recent publications include "Reading Against African Children's Literature: Nationalist Didacticism in Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*," in *Writing Difference: Nationalism, Literature and Identity* (Atlantic Books, 2013); "Gish Jen and Diana Abu-Jaber as Trespassers of Cultural Homogeneity: Claiming Hyphenated Cultures", *Dynamisme des Langues, Souveraineté des Cultures* (Tunis, 2012). Address: Institut Supérieur des Sciences Humaines de Jendouba, Avenue Union du Grand Maghreb Jendouba Nord, 8189, Tunisia. E-mail: aa\_sassou@yahoo.com

**Charles Campbell** is a Canadian professor of English literature at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, where he teaches Shakespeare, Eighteenth Century and film studies. He has published on James, Pope, Johnson, Thoreau, Dreiser, Howells, Hitchcock, Fitzgerald,

Joyce and Shakespeare. Forthcoming in *English Literature in Transition* is his Freudian study of women in Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. He published "'The Tale of the Cloth' in *Silas Marner*" in *Interactions* 20.1-2. Address: Sultan Qaboos University, Department of English Language and Literature, POB 42 Muscat 123, Oman. E-mail: campleosa@yahoo.com

**Carla Comellini**, Associate Professor of English Literature and Director of the Canadian Centre "Alfredo Rizzardi", is on the board of the Doctorate on European Literatures at Bologna University, Italy. She is also a Fulbright scholar (USB, 1981-82) and she got two grants by the Canadian Government (1988,1993) and two by the Italian CNR: USA, 1991; South Africa, 1996-97. Address: University of Bologna, Department of Foreign Languages, Via Cartoleria n.5, 40124, Bologna, Italy. E-mail: carla.comellini@unibo.it

**Francisco Costa** is interested in queer approaches to contemporary theatre and performance and the relationship between performance and the wider socio-cultural and political contexts in which it is made. He is currently affiliated to the University of East Anglia, U.K. He also teaches various courses on Literature, Cultural Studies, and Theatre and Performance Studies. Address: School of Humanities, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, UK. E-mail: f.costa@uea.ac.uk

**Hivren Demir-Atay** holds a BS in International Relations (Middle East Technical University, Ankara), an MA in Turkish Literature (Bilkent University, Ankara) and a PhD in Comparative Literature (State University of New York at Binghamton). Currently she is working as an Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature at Gaziantep University, Turkey. Her research and teaching interests include theories of literature, psychoanalysis, and comparative literature. Address: Gaziantep University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature, 27310, Şehitkamil, Gaziantep, Turkey. E-mail: hivren@hotmail.com

**Wojciech Drag** holds a PhD in English Literature and is currently a lecturer at Wrocław University, Poland. Most of his publications have focused on the contemporary novel, particularly on the work of Kazuo Ishiguro, Julian Barnes, John Banville and J. M. Coetzee. Address: Instytut Filologii Angielskiej Uwr ul., Kuźnicza 22, 50-137, Wrocław, Poland. E-mail: moontauk@gmail.com

**Nina Ravnholdt Enemark** is a final year PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow, UK. She holds an MLitt in Modernities, also from the University of Glasgow, and a BA in English Philology from the University of Helsinki. Her research focuses on the modernist writers Jane Harrison and Hope Mirrlees. Address: University of Glasgow, Department of English Literature, School of Critical Studies, 5 University Gardens, G12 8QH, Glasgow, Scotland, UK. E-mail: n.enemark.1@research.gla.ac.uk

**Fulya İcöz** is an instructor at TED University, Ankara, Turkey, since 2013. Previously, she worked for Ankara University for seven years. She received her B.S from Ege University in 2005 and her M.A. from Women's Studies at the same university. Her research interests center on fiction and re-writing mainly through Science Fiction and Gothic Literature. She translated and edited books for several publishing houses. Address: TED University, Ziya Gökalp Str. 48, Kolej, Ankara, Turkey. E-mail: icozfulya@gmail.com

**Dilek Kantar** is currently working as a faculty member at the Department of Western Languages and Literatures in Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Canakkale, Turkey. All her degrees are in English. Her major fields of research include theory of the novel, Bakhtinian discourse analysis and metaphor studies. Address: Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Department of Arts and Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature, Terzioğlu Campus, 17100, Çanakkale, Turkey. E-mail: dkantar@comu.edu.tr.

**Ewa Kęblowska-Lawniczak** is currently working as Associate Professor of English Literature and Comparative Studies at the Department of English Studies, Wrocław University and Associate Professor of English Literature at the Department of Modern Languages, Philological School of Higher Education in Wrocław, Poland. She is Head of English Literature and Comparative Studies at Wrocław University. Her major current research areas include modern and contemporary drama in English; theatre and visuality; urban studies and the politics of citizenship. She has published articles in the field of contemporary drama, theatre and urbanity in drama, fiction and non-fiction in the English language. Her books include *Shakespeare and the Controversy over Baroque*, *The Visual Seen and Unseen: Insights into Tom Stoppard's Art* (2004) and *From Concept City to City Experience: A Study in Urban Drama* (2013). Since 2012 she is general editor of *Anglica Wratislaviensia* (Wrocław UP) and co-editor of *Silesian Studies in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures* (Peter Lang). Address: Instytut Filologii Angielskiej, Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, ul. Kuźnicza 22, 50-158, Wrocław, Poland. E-mail: freeway.bohemia@gmail.com

**Matthew Koch** is a writer, literary scholar, screenwriter, and Assistant Professor of English for the City University of New York, USA. He holds a doctorate in English from Texas Christian University and a BA in Political Science and an MA in English from the University of North Texas. Address: 722 Leonard Str. 3B, 11222, Brooklyn, New York, USA. E-mail: MKoch@qcc.cuny.edu

**Klara Kolinska** teaches at the Department of Anglophone Studies of Metropolitan University, Prague, Czech Republic, and at the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures of Charles University, Prague. Her main areas of teaching and research include early and contemporary Canadian fiction, theatre and drama, multiculturalism, and Aboriginal literature and theatre. She has published mainly on Canadian Aboriginal literature and theatre, Canadian prose fiction, contemporary drama and theatre, and theory and practice of narrative and storytelling. Address: Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Philosophy & Arts, Dept. of Anglophone Literatures & Cultures nám. Jana Palacha 2, 116 38 Praha 1, Czech Republic. E-mail: klarakolinska@yahoo.com

**Ferma Lekesizahn** completed her doctorate at the University of Southern Mississippi and is currently teaching at Istanbul Aydın University, Istanbul, Turkey. She has a book on modern literature in which she addresses class issues along with narcissistic individualism and “conspicuous consumption”. She has also published articles about modern literature in the international and Turkish journals such as *English Studies in Africa*, *Doğu Batı*, *Varlık*, *Cogito*, and *Mesele*. Address: Osmanağa mah. Yoğurtçu Park cad. 16/6, Kadıköy, İstanbul Turkey. E-mail: fermene@yahoo.com

**Anja Mrak** is a PhD student of literary studies at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her dissertation studies in depth the literary mode of magic realism and its (potential)

implication for and application in feminist literary theory. Address: Vojsko 24a, 5280, Idrija, Slovenia. E-mail: anja.mrak@gmail.com

**Adamu Pangmeshi** holds a PhD in Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies. He is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English, Higher Teacher's Training College of the University of Maroua. He is also Service Head for academic staff. His articles have featured in national and international journals. His book *Towards the Demystification of Literature Teaching: Methods and Approaches* will soon be published. Address: Department of English and Literatures of English Expression, Higher Teachers' Training College, University of Maroua, 46, Cameroon, Maroua. E-mail: pangmeshi@gmail.com

**Laurence Raw** teaches in the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Baskent University, Ankara, Turkey. His recent publications include *The Silk Road of Adaptation and Adaptation and Learning: New Frontiers* (both 2013). He is currently working on a book about the Shakespearean actor Donald Wolfitt, to appear in 2015. He is also Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal Of American Studies in Turkey* (www.asat-jast.org). Address: Baskent University, Department of English, Ankara, Turkey. E-mail: l\_rawjalaurance@yahoo.com

**Regine Rosenthal** is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies Program at Dartmouth College, USA. She has published widely on American, Comparative, Jewish, Holocaust, and Women's literature. Her current interdisciplinary teaching in Cultural Studies addresses literary, theoretical, sociological, historical, and philosophical perspectives on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, race, diaspora, and migrations. Address: Dartmouth University, Master of Arts in Liberal Studies, HB 6092 - 116 Wentworth Hall, Hanover, NH 03755-3526, USA. E-mail: regine.rosenthal@dartmouth.edu

**Gamze Sabancı** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of American Culture and Literature at Halic University, Istanbul, Turkey, specializing in Feminist Movement in the 19th and Early 20th century English and American Literature, gender and genre, short stories, inter-disciplinary possibilities in reading and minority representations in literature. Dr. Sabancı graduated from İstanbul University, Department of English Language and Literature in 2001 and received her MA and PhD from English Literature Department of the University of Liverpool. Her PhD dissertation entitled "Both Can Be Done: The Conflicts and Contradictions in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Short Stories" has been published under the title "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Short Stories as Social Criticism: Conflicts and Contradictions in a Nineteenth Century Author" by The Edwin Mellen Press in 2010. Address: Halic University, Department of American Studies, Siracevizler Str. 9, Bomonti, Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: gamzesabanci@halic.edu.tr

**Antonio Sanna** has received his PhD at the University of Westminster in London. His main research areas include horror films, Gothic literature, Victorian culture and postmodern theory. He has published articles on Kinema, Oasis, Gothic Studies, Literature/Film Quarterly, Alphaville, Law and Literature, the Journal of Film and Video, and in the volumes *Acts of Memory: The Victorians and Beyond* and *The Culture and Philosophy of Ridley Scott*. Address: via Biasi 5/a, 07100, Sassari (SS), Italy. E-mail: isonisanna@hotmail.com

**Silvia Schultermandl** is an Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of Graz, Austria where she teaches courses in American literature and culture studies. She has published widely on ethnic American literature, transnational feminism, and 9/11. She is the author of *Transnational Matrilineage: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Asian American Literature* (2009) and the (co-)editor of *Contemporary Asian American and British Asian Literatures* (2006), *A Fluid Sense of Self: The Politics of Transnational Identity* (2010), *Growing Up Transnational: Identity and Kinship in a Global Era* (2011), and *Contact Spaces of American Culture: Localizing Global Phenomena* (2012). Together with Erin Kenny (Drury University), she is the series editor of LIT Verlag's book series *Contributions to Transnational Feminism*. She is currently at work on a monograph on the aesthetics of transnationalism in American literature from the revolution to 9/11. Address: Department of American Studies, Attemsgasse 25/II, 8010 Graz, Austria. E-mail: [silvia.schultermandl@uni-graz.at](mailto:silvia.schultermandl@uni-graz.at)

**Libby Bagno Simon** is PhD Candidate at the English department at Haifa University, Israel. Her dissertation explores female relations in Jane Austen's novels, and her main research interests are eighteenth and nineteenth-century British literature, contemporary American literature and adaptation studies. She teaches English for academic purposes and works as a culture journalist. Address: Department of English Language and Literature, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, 199 Aba-Hushi Avenue, Haifa 31905, Israel. E-mail: [libby@s1mon.co.il](mailto:libby@s1mon.co.il)

**Nevena Stojanovic** is a Lecturer in the English Department at West Virginia University, USA. Her research centers on presentations of Jewish identities in nineteenth and early twentieth-century transatlantic literature, rearticulations of selfhood in contact zones, and the potential of radical performance art. She is working on a book that examines performances of Jewishness in non-Jewish American novels of the 1800s and early 1900s. Address: West Virginia University, English Department, 327 Colson Hall, 1503, University Avenue, 6296, Morgantown, WV 26506-6296, USA. E-mail: [nstojano@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:nstojano@mix.wvu.edu)

**Klara Szmanko** is a Polish scholar specializing in Asian American and African American literature. She received her M.A. (2002) and Ph.D. degrees (2005) in American literature and literary studies from the Department of English, University of Wrocław. The recurring themes of her publications are the typology of vision, power dynamics, whiteness, textualization of space as well as gender relations in Asian American and African American literature. Klara Szmanko is the author of the book on the invisibility trope in selected works of African American and Asian American literature published in 2008. Address: Białowieska 40/16, 54-235, Wrocław, Poland. E-mail: [klarka@op.pl](mailto:klarka@op.pl)

**Şebnem Toplu** is Full Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Ege University, Turkey. She is the author of: *Cultural Materialism Text and Context Relation in Jane Austen's Novels* (Modena: Il Fiorino, March 2001), *Diverse Aspects of Italy and Italians in Contemporary British Literature* (Modena: Il Fiorino October 2001) and *Fiction Unbound Bernardine Evaristo* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, 2014) and the (co-)editor of: *A Fluid Sense of Self: The Politics of Transnational Identity* vol.2. (Wien: LIT Verlag, 2010) and *Redefining Modernism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). She is currently writing a book on the eighteenth century British culture and literature. She has been the editor of *Interactions* since 2002. Address:

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Ege University, Bornova, Izmir, Turkey. E-mail: sebnemtopl@hotmai.com

**Petra Tournay-Theodotou** is Associate Professor of English at European University Cyprus, where she teaches Postcolonial, British, African-American and Women's literature. She obtained both her Masters and PhD in English and Spanish language and literature from the University of Aachen, Germany. Due to her academic background in two cultures, her publications include essays and book chapters on Spanish, Latinamerican and British literature and a monograph on the Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. Recently, her research focus has been on Black British, British Asian and migrant literature with special interest in the work of Caryl Phillips. She is also Assistant Editor of *Cadences, A Journal of Literature and the Arts in Cyprus*. Address: European University Cyprus, Department of Humanities, 6 Diogenes Str., 1516 Engomi, Nicosia, Cyprus. E-mail: tournayp @ spidernet.com.cy

**Violetta Trofimova** received her Ph.D. from St. Petersburg State University with a thesis on Aphra Behn's prose writings in 2002. Since then she has published more than eighty articles and two monographs on seventeenth-century women's literature both in Russian and in English. She is currently finishing a postdoctoral project on women's intellectual culture in the seventeenth-century Europe. Address: ul. Pskovskaja, d.13, kv.3, 190121, St. Petersburg, Russia. E-mail: violet\_trofimova@mail.ru

**Zümre Gizem Yılmaz** is a doctorate Research Assistant at Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey. She received her BA (2010), and MA (2012) at the Department of English Language and Literature, Hacettepe University. Her master's thesis is entitled "The Illustration and Function of Epic Theatre Devices in Selected Plays by Caryl Churchill". She also published at the journal *Ekoeleştiri: Çevre ve Edebiyat* (Ecocriticism: Environment and Literature), 2012. Her research interests include contemporary British literature, contemporary British drama, new materialisms, posthuman studies, queer fiction, animal studies, and gender studies. Address: Hacettepe University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature, Beytepe Campus, 06800, Çankaya, Ankara, Turkey. E-mail: zgizemyz@gmail.com

## ARTICLES

- Ingy Aboelazm 1 A Poised Crown: Rival Monarchs in *Richard II*
- Gillian Alban 13 The Irrepressible Lilith in Angela Carter and Toni Morrison
- Mohamad Almostafa & Ahmad Abu Baker 29 Towards An Anodynic Concept of Death: A Comparative Study of a Selection of English & Arabic Poetry
- Sihem Arfaoui Abidi 45 Private Knowledge in Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman" Situated Between Coercion and (Trans)formation
- Charles Campbell 53 Margins, Mirrors and Breasts: Pearl's Place in *The Scarlet Letter*
- Carla Commellini 69 The Influence of Dante, Italy and the Mediterranean Myth in Malcolm Lowry's Fiction
- Francisco Costa 77 "There was something different about the boy": Queer Subversion in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- Wojciech Drag 87 Modernism—An Abandoned Legacy?: Gabriel Josipovici's Critique of the Contemporary British Novel
- Nina Ravnholdt Enemark 95 Poetry as Preservation Ritual: Jane Harrison, Antiquarianism and Hope Mirrlees's *Paris*
- Fulya İçöz 113 Regaining the Power to Say "No": Imprisonment, Resistance and Freedom in *Avatar the Last Airbender*
- Dilek Kantar 123 Virgins, Wives and Whores in the Eighteenth Century Ironic Myths
- Ewa Kęłbowska-Lawniczak 133 Forms of Togetherness in Contemporary Urban Drama and a Return of Direct Address
- Matthew Koch 145 Wealth and Women: The Expatriate Performance of Affluence
- Klara Kolinska 161 "Borders to Freedom": Sitting Bull's Precarious Canadian Refuge in Sharon Pollock's Play *Walsh*
- Ferma Lekesizalın 169 Manipulation and Venturing Spirit in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*
- Anja Mrak 179 The Intersections of Magical Realism and Transnational Feminism in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*
- Adamu Pangmeshi 191 Postcolonialism, Female Portrayal and Self Understanding in Selected Novels of Doris Lessing and Bessie Head
- Regina Rosenthal 207 Performing Identity: Intersectionality in Three Autobiographical Texts by Women
- Gamze Sabancı 219 From Sissy to Man: Performance as a Process of Becoming in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*
- Silvia Schultermandl 231 Aestheticizing Absence: Representations of the Twin Towers' Shadow in 9/11 Literature and Film
- Libby Bagno Simon 243 A Home on the Threshold: Family, Community and Identity in the Liminal Landscape of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*
- Klara Szmanko 251 White Devils and Demons in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*
- Petra Tournay-Theodotou 263 Racial and Gender-Cross-Dressing in Caryl Phillips's *Dancing in the Dark*
- Violetta Trofimova 273 Aphra Behn in the Novels of Our Time: Adventuress, She-Spy, Detective
- Zümre Gizem Yılmaz 281 Epic Theatre on British Stage: The Alienation Strategies in Caryl Churchill's *Lives of Great Poisoners*

## REVIEWS

- Hivren Demir-Atay 291 *Henry James and the Queerness of Style*
- Laurence Raw 293 *The Event of Literature*
- Laurence Raw 295 *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy*
- Antonio Sanna 297 Conflictual Familial Relationship and Fear of Death in *Wrath of the Titans*
- Nevena Stojanovic 303 *Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy*
- Şebnem Toplu 307 *Representations of London in Peter Ackroyd's Fiction*
- Şebnem Toplu 309 *Excess and Embodiment in Contemporary Women's Writing*

