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A Journal of Literature
Theory and Culture

No. 8 [2018]

■ **ENGAGING IRELAND**

■ **AMERICAN & CANADIAN STUDIES**



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A Journal of Literature
Theory and Culture

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ENGAGING IRELAND: HISTORY, POLITICS AND AESTHETICS

Michael McAteer

Péter Pázmány Catholic University, Budapest

Post-revisionism: Conflict (Ir)resolution
and the Limits of Ambivalence
in Kevin McCarthy's *Peeler*

ABSTRACT

This essay considers a historical novel of recent times in revisionist terms, Kevin McCarthy's debut novel of 2010, *Peeler*. In doing so, I also address the limitations that the novel exposes within Irish revisionism. I propose that McCarthy's novel should be regarded more properly as a post-revisionist work of literature. A piece of detective fiction that is set during the Irish War of Independence from 1919 to 1921, *Peeler* challenges the romantic nationalist understanding of the War as one of heroic struggle by focusing its attention on a Catholic member of the Royal Irish Constabulary. In considering the circumstances in which Sergeant Séan O'Keefe finds himself as a policeman serving a community within which support for the IRA campaign against British rule is strong, the novel sheds sympathetic light on the experience of Catholic men who were members of the Royal Irish Constabulary until the force was eventually disbanded in 1922. At the same time, it demonstrates that the ambivalence in Sergeant O'Keefe's attitudes ultimately proves unsustainable, thereby challenging the value that Irish revisionism has laid upon the ambivalent nature of political and cultural circumstances in Ireland with regard to Irish-British relations. In the process, I draw attention to important connections that McCarthy's *Peeler* carries to Elizabeth Bowen's celebrated novel of life in Anglo-Irish society in County Cork during the period of the Irish War of Independence: *The Last September* of 1929.

Keywords: Royal Irish Constabulary, detective, war, revisionism.

Kevin McCarthy's debut novel, *Peeler*, received enthusiastic praise from the Ireland correspondent for *The Observer* newspaper, Henry McDonald, when it was published in 2010. Reviewing the novel in *The Belfast Telegraph*, McDonald considered it "a brilliant first novel . . . that rescues from the margins of Irish history a group that the future Free State and official Ireland airbrushed from national memory: the Royal Irish Constabulary" (38). The novel deals with the experiences of officers serving in the Royal Irish Constabulary (hereafter, RIC) during the course of the Irish War of Independence, 1919–21. The title is deceptive in its simplicity: "Peeler" was a derogatory term for Irish-based officers of the Metropolitan Police Force, founded by Sir Robert Peel in 1829. The term "Peeler" was commonly used by Republicans and some Loyalists in Northern Ireland for the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) up to the 1990s, until the force was reformed as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) under the terms of the Patten Report as part of the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Considered in this context, the title of the novel creates the expectation of a narrative that will be inflected with a Republican perspective of the old RIC as part of a repressive colonial state apparatus in Ireland under British rule. However, the title also names the protagonist of the novel, RIC Sergeant Seán O'Keefe. The novel traces a murder investigation that O'Keefe leads in the West Cork region in 1920 at the height of the guerrilla war that the Irish Republican Army (hereafter, IRA) were then fighting against the RIC and the British Army. The story of this investigation is pursued under the shadow of O'Keefe's emotional de-sensitization, having been exposed to the horrors of trench warfare during the First World War; de-sensitization exacerbated by the death of his brother when serving with the 16th Irish Battalion of the British Army.

In many respects, McCarthy's novel answers to a central tenet of Irish historical revisionism as inaugurated by historian T. W. Moody and developed most influentially in the work of R. F. Foster. This concerns the need to de-mythologize Irish history as it has been perceived in nationalist terms, bringing to light the wide spectrum of Irish historical experience—particularly at local level—that has been silenced or suppressed in the interests of retaining a public official consensus concerning the political legitimacy of the war fought for an independent Irish Republic in the 1919–21 period.¹ In the critical spirit of historical revisionism, historian Peter Hart has made one of the most distinctive interventions in showing just

¹ Regarding the revisionist approach, see essays by T. W. Moody, R. D. Edwards, R. F. Foster and Alvin Jackson in Brady (*Intepreting*). For criticism of revisionism, see pieces by Desmond Fennell, Seamus Deane, and Anthony Coughlan in the same volume.

how dirty the Irish War of Independence actually was. In his introduction to *The I.R.A. and Its Enemies*, "The Killing of Seargant O'Donoghue," Hart presents the case of an old-time RIC officer from County Kerry who was murdered one evening in Cork, provoking a murderous backlash from a British Army Auxiliary unit that left three people dead in the Marshes district of Cork city, including one of those involved in the attack on O'Donoghue. Hart proposes that the case shows how civil war had already started in Ireland during the years of the Irish War of Independence:

It was a civil war, fought not just between Irish people, but between rival visions of Ireland. James O'Donoghue loved and served his country. He was a good Catholic and good Irishman. The same can be said of the O'Briens. The sergeant's death represented a clash between the old loyalties of the policeman and the new certainties embraced by the gunmen. (18)

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McCarthy's novel centres on the figure of RIC Sergeant Seán O'Keefe as he investigates a sex-crime murder in the west Cork region just as the IRA were consolidating their control of the area in late 1920. In this aspect, the novel addresses in its crime-fiction form some of the real-life historical events that Peter Hart's studies have brought to light. Of course, there is an extensive number of works of literary fiction over the past forty years that have challenged the traditional nationalist ethos of the Republic of Ireland, particularly as it was consolidated under the rule of Éamon De Valera from the 1930s. One need only consider such celebrated novels as Jennifer Johnston's *How Many Miles to Babylon?*, John McGahern's *Amongst Women* or Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture* by way of example. McCarthy's novel, however, is distinguished by the crime fiction genre that the author adapts in creating what Edna Longley has identified as a revisionist form of literary work.² Addressing deeply fraught political and historical considerations through the medium of crime fiction, *Peeler* lies open to the objection that the genre may not be sufficiently capable of addressing the complex range of emotional and psychological layers that literary revisionism peels off (excusing the pun), particularly through the ambivalences and complexities of modern Irish poetry as Longley discusses it. Reviewing the novel in *The Irish Times*, Declan Burke hints at this when he comments that McCarthy "hasn't made things easy for himself in choosing for his protagonist an RIC sergeant who is a veteran of the Great War and who works alongside Black and Tans" (49). Yet Burke regards the novel as a success, praising the characterization of Sergeant

² See, in particular, Longley's reading of poetry and revisionism (50–68).

O’Keefe as sympathetic “in a compelling narrative” (49). In this essay, I argue that *Peeler* represents a post-revisionist moment in contemporary Irish writing. In the sympathy that the novel engenders for its protagonist, *Peeler* contributes to the ongoing recovery of personal historical memories that had been effectively rendered subterranean in much of Irish society from the 1930s to the 1990s. In this respect, it can be located within a general context of historical and cultural revisionism. However, it is also a novel that steps beyond the revisionist pre-occupation with the repressive or distorted nature of traditional Irish nationalist narratives, as revisionists have regarded them. It does so in two ways. First, *Peeler* brings to the surface the limitations of ambivalence, a central aspect of the revisionist critique of nationalism in Ireland, as an ideology that demands certitude (see, for example, Hart’s reference to the “new certainties” in the quotation above). Second, in its crime fiction form, the novel stretches beyond the ethno-religious framework through which intellectual alliances and enmities have been sustained in various guises over many decades in Irish political and cultural debate.

The narrative of *Peeler* gives rise to two questions of legitimacy. The first of these concerns how a crime can be investigated by the police when the forces upholding law and order have lost the consent of the communities to which they are assigned, whether that loss derives from the sympathy for, or the threat from, an organization such as that of the IRA. The second question relates to this in raising the issue of the conditions under which the role of the police is transferred from an existing civic administration like that of the RIC to an organization that was founded to overthrow it. By highlighting the politicized nature of policing in the context of a state of guerrilla warfare, the novel tests the genre limits of crime fiction itself. In so doing, it diverges from the major works in the tradition such as Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* or the *Sherlock Holmes* series of Arthur Conan Doyle. Having said this, *Peeler* contains all the elements of a crime thriller. The narrative includes a gruesome murder, a scattering of clues, the digression of “the wrong suspect,” and the case of a serial sex killer. As a consequence, the novel is more concerned with character-type than the evocation of affective complexity. It presents to the reader the “old-timer” RIC-man Logan reminiscing about the good-old days; the seedy brothel-keeper Barton; the stereotypical Anglo-Irish gentry-type Major Wallace Burleigh; the clinical gentleman-surgeon Matthew-Pare; the knowingly brutal barmen operating under the protection either of the IRA or the RIC Special Branch; most of all, the serial killer Bill “Birdy” Cole. The eight sections of the novel correspond to the eight-day time span of the events that it addresses. Each of these sections is concluded with some discreet passages describing the growth of a pathological mind. Apart from these

passages, McCarthy foregoes the highly interiorized narrative form that readers encounter in John Banville's major work of crime fiction, *The Book of Evidence* (a form that Banville abandons for the most part in his crime fiction written under the name Benjamin Black). Nevertheless, the typological conventions of the crime fiction form are undercut from behind and from before in *Peeler*: from behind, in the backdrop of generalized brutality arising out of the human slaughter of the First World War; from before, in the immediate crisis of civil society in Ireland during the course of the War of Independence.

Particularly given the County Cork setting of *Peeler*, there is one very important precedent for McCarthy's novel: Elizabeth Bowen's 1947 novel, *The Heat of the Day*. Bowen's novel is regarded primarily as a treatment of London society during the Blitz in World War II and also as part of literary modernism in Britain. However, it is essentially concerned with a criminal investigation of Robert Kelway passing information to Germany. From this perspective, it shares with *Peeler* a concern with the problem of legality and the operation of systems of justice during the course of a state of emergency. In contrast to Bowen's work, *Peeler* presents a relatively conventional narrative form that does not test the limitations and possibilities of language itself as a medium of representation in the fashion of early to mid-twentieth century literary modernism. McCarthy's narrative approach is justified by the fact that, unlike *The Heat of the Day*, he is dealing with an additional element: guerrilla warfare. To some extent like the Northern Irish Troubles of the 1970s–1990s, the Irish War of Independence was a war that was not quite a war, in the sense that it operated on a fault-line between the maintenance of civil society and the imposition of military control. Considered in this aspect, it could well be argued that if the backdrop of the First World War to the Cork setting for the Irish War of Independence in *Peeler* carries the influence of *The Heat of the Day* in the connections that Bowen draws between the London of the Blitz and rural Cork, McCarthy's novel carries a deeper relation to Bowen's earlier work *The Last September*, set predominantly in Cork during the 1919–21 period. Undoubtedly containing Bowen's distinctive stylistic features that place her writing in relation to Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett, *The Last September* is nonetheless a more conventional narrative than *The Heat of the Day*. In the concluding scene of an RIC barracks in County Cork burning down at the end of McCarthy's *Peeler*, there is a palpable reminder of the Naylor's Anglo-Irish residence at Danielstown in Cork burning to the ground at the end of *The Last September* (Bowen, *Last* 206).

Peeler begins with a crime scene: a woman's dead body on a country roadside near Ballycarleton in west Cork, her legs wide apart, her arms

in the posture of an embrace, one breast cut off and the word “trator” marked in tar across her chest. She is later identified as Deirdre Costello, a young woman who had dated an IRA member, Seamus Connors—with a reputation for brutality—before becoming involved with an affluent English gentleman resident in the up-market Montenotti area of Cork city. The location of the body is open to IRA sniper-attack so O’Keefe and his colleague require a team of Auxiliary soldiers (infamously known as “the Black and Tans” because of their uniforms) to secure the area before the location of the body can be secured in turn as a crime scene. From the outset, therefore, the narrative inaugurates a field of conflict and interaction between three autonomous ideological spheres through which plot, topology and characterization are developed: the sexual, the legal and the political. This is made evident immediately in the connection that is drawn between posture and photography, a connection that will lead the narrative into the realm of the sex industry as it opens out the ambivalent juxtapositions between state power and cultural allegiance. While the narrative in its entirety might be taken as an account of the last days of the RIC, the opening murder scene announces a whole new form of evidence-gathering that would change the nature of police investigation and legal process in the early-twentieth century through the mass production of cameras:

Not every murder scene in Ireland was photographed, but it was becoming increasingly common. Juries and coroner’s courts were requesting photographic evidence on a regular basis and O’Keefe, a keen amateur photographer, could not imagine examining a crime-scene—particularly a murder—without his Kodak Box Brownie (McCarthy, *Peeler* 12)

Photographing the semi-mutilated body of a woman to the end of identifying the culprit, O’Keefe throws into relief the contradiction that is triggered by a new confluence of visual technology and state power. Born from the voyeuristic gaze of the sex-criminal “Birdy” Cole—through which the female body is made into an object of desire through distance rather than intimacy—the crime demands the same representational form through which it is to be solved. In other words, a level of de-sensitization is necessary for a proper collation of evidence. In contrast to the rookie RIC officer Keane, Sergeant O’Keefe’s capacity to study the dismembered body dispassionately has been formed through his exposure to widespread bodily mutilation during the battles of the trenches in the First World War. In this respect, he shares one thing in common with the perpetrator of the crime, “Birdy” Cole: de-sensitization as a result of traumatic experience. Watching his mother work as a prostitute while his

father was away fighting in the British Army during the Boer War in South Africa, forced to scavenge for food around a hen-house, Cole has been subject to regular violent beatings in his childhood. He has withdrawn into a voyeuristic gaze upon women working as prostitutes as a result, a habit that becomes compulsive in adulthood. Ironically replicating “Birdy” Cole’s depersonalized observation of these women, Sergeant O’Keefe’s capacity for calculating observation—amplified by the technology of the camera—enables him to recognize that the posture of Deirdre Costello’s body was arranged in such a manner that it was deliberately intended to be photographed:

Too much care had been taken in the positioning to be the random work of gravity or rigor mortis. The pose reminded him of the French picture postcards of whores or North African harem girls that soldiers had bought and traded during the war (*Peeler* 12).

This association of a forensic with a pornographic image develops in the novel through its exploration of the underworld of a Cork city brothel and a private club styled in the manner of the infamous Hell Fire clubs of which commanding officers like Major Burleigh and Detective Inspector Masterson were members.³ The intrigue that this generates recalls the late-nineteenth-century sensation crime-fiction of Arthur Conan Doyle, particularly Doyle’s story, “The Sign of the Four,” but the crime-narrative format is troubled throughout *Peeler* by the political context of the murder investigation with which Sergeant O’Keefe is engaged. Indeed the sexual aspect of the murder of Deirdre Costello straddles the border between sexual violence as a criminal offence and as an act of war. Early into his investigation, O’Keefe comes across the case of Katharine Sheehan, an egg-woman who had been warned on several occasions by a local IRA unit to stop selling eggs to the police at Bandon RIC barracks and to members of the local British Army garrison in the town. After refusing to stop, Katharine Sheehan was assaulted by two men and a pig-ring was inserted into one of her buttocks. The doctor’s report indicated that she had been raped (*Peeler* 63). Reading this report, a feeling of self-disgust wells up in O’Keefe as he confronts the inability of the RIC to offer protection or justice for people like Katharine Sheehan, a woman violated for continuing her business of selling eggs to local police and soldiers: the only means of earning a living that was available to her. However, when he enquires

³ The first Hell Fire club in Ireland was founded in Dublin by the 1st Earl of Rosse, Richard Parsons, around 1737. For a history of the clubs in Ireland, see Ryan (*Blasphemers*).

of surgeon Mathew-Pare as to whether or not Deirdre Costello was raped before she was murdered, O'Keefe is reminded of the prevalence of sexual violence in war:

The surgeon said, "I'd lean more towards a sex-crime than execution, myself. But there's no reason to say that it wasn't both. Rape and war have come as a matched pair for as long as they have existed. Sometimes, I imagine, it's rather difficult to separate the two." (*Peeler* 129)

16 In this aspect of the narrative, McCarthy probes something other than the Irish War of Independence as the consequence of circumstances of generalized brutality emanating from the horror of the First World War. More immediately, *Peeler* brings out the distorted loyalties that turn the order of emotional value on its head. This makes itself most manifest in the mutual suspicion of the state and individual families. When Deirdre Costello's parents come to the RIC barracks to identify her body, Constable Keane offers her father a glass of whiskey. He stubbornly refuses "to take soup from Crown spies like yerself." This is a reference to those instances of starving Irish Catholic children during the years of the Irish Famine (1845–48) who were fed in schools set up by Protestant Bible societies on the condition that they received Protestant-based religious instruction.⁴ O'Keefe is left with a feeling of intense anger at the father's response: "The man's ignorance angered O'Keefe. He was trying to help him and his wife, and all the farmer could do was dredge up the rebel posturing of his youth" (*Peeler* 183). Deirdre Costello's father undoubtedly regards his distrust of the police as consistent with a need to protect his family during a period of guerrilla warfare. However, Sergeant O'Keefe sees his attitude as an example of putting loyalty to the Irish nation above any concern to find justice for a murdered daughter. From this perspective, the exchange between Mr Costello and Constable Keane exposes the same contradiction evident in the violation of Katharine Sheehan. In fighting for the rights of Irish people against British domination, the IRA violently degrade members of the community that they claim to be defending.

The circumstances in *Peeler* are complicated even further by a piece of news that is passed on to Sergeant O'Keefe by Detective Inspector Masterson. 'T Division has received information that the Sergeant's sister is to marry into one of the most well-known Republican families in County Dublin. The intrigue of the narrative involves Detective Masterson as an ally of the culprit "Birdy" Cole in the Deirdre Costello murder-case. In confronting

⁴ For a consideration of soupierism in the cultural memory of the Famine, see, for example, Ó'Gráda (*Black* 212, 221).

Sergeant O'Keefe with the disclosure that the security services are aware of a family-member association with the IRA, Masterson sets O'Keefe up. If the Sergeant's investigation strays away from the IRA as the chief suspects, then O'Keefe himself lies open to the suspicion that he is engaged in a cover-up in order to protect his sister. This circumstance highlights the precarious nature of kinship ties that both the insurrectionary guerrilla army of the IRA and the state security force of the RIC proclaim to protect and defend. As a police officer, O'Keefe feels a duty of obligation to bring the killer of Deirdre Costello to justice, if only for the sake of her grieving parents (despite what her father thinks of the RIC). Yet Detective Masterson's intimidating disclosure raises in O'Keefe a fear for the welfare of his sister. It is a circumstance that underlines the Civil War aspect to the Irish War of Independence that Peter Hart brings to light: a circumstance that presages the divisions that occurred within Irish families during the War of Independence that followed the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921. Through Masterson's role in this aspect of the narrative, however, it also points to a feature that Hart's study overlooks: the degree to which these family and community divisions within Irish society were amplified—even engineered in some instances—by members of the British state security forces.

The structural ambivalence of Sergeant O'Keefe's performative identity in *Peeler* carries three conflicting dimensions: 1) fidelity to his role as a police officer providing the state's guarantee of protection against the violation of citizens' inalienable rights; 2) tacit recognition that the state apparatus within which he functions as a police officer finds itself in a situation of crisis: one that demands that Sergeant O'Keefe suppresses any regard for the political grievances that motivate support the IRA guerrilla campaign; 3) further recognition that to switch his allegiance to the Republican cause, in the process of solving the Deirdre Costello murder case, would involve betraying those RIC colleagues of his who have been killed by the IRA. The narrative is sustained by the tension between these aspects of O'Keefe's position. The story of Lieutenant Smyth, veteran of the King's Own Scottish Borderer, is a case in point. Appointed Divisional Police Commissioner for the province of Munster early in 1920, Smyth provokes the only-recorded mutiny in the RIC during the Irish War of Independence. During a speech that he delivered to RIC officers in Listowel barracks in County Kerry, Smyth declared that it would please him mightily the more Irishmen they shot. A month later, Smyth himself was shot dead in the City and County Club in Cork. The story is based on the facts of the Listowel mutiny of RIC officers that began on 17 June 1920.⁵ O'Keefe's feelings about the execution capture the conflict in

⁵ For a witness-based account of the Listowel mutiny, see Gaughan (*Memoirs*).

loyalties very precisely: “O’Keefe wasn’t alone in the Constabulary in that the man might have had it coming, but he kept such thoughts to himself” (*Peeler* 213).

The ambivalence of O’Keefe’s feelings and circumstances endures right to the end of *Peeler*, when the RIC barracks at Ballycarleton comes under attack from an IRA “flying column” and is burnt down as a result. As noted earlier, this conclusion is strongly reminiscent of that of Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* of 1929, a novel also set in County Cork in 1920. As a contemporary work of crime fiction, McCarthy’s *Peeler* is vastly different in style and tone from *The Last September*, a novel bearing strong affinities with the fiction of Virginia Woolf and, in some respects, a work that anticipates Samuel Beckett’s obsession with negation in his fictional works of the 1950s. Having said this, both *Peeler* and *The Last September* draw the reader’s attention to the impact of the Irish War of Independence on women. In stark contrast to *The Last September*, all the characters in *Peeler* are men. Yet the novel pivots on one woman, the murdered Deirdre Costello. She haunts the narrative, her death provoking a race between the RIC and the IRA to claim that she had been murdered by the other side. *The Last September* examines Irish-English relations at the time through interactions between Anglo-Irish landowning society and members of the English upper middle-class. While Bowen’s focus on character is more widely and deeply distributed than that of McCarthy, it is plausible to contend that the central figure is Lois Farquar, the eighteen-year old daughter of Laura Naylor Farquar—sister of Sir Richard Naylor, owner of the estate at Danielstown. In observing a correspondence between the ambivalence in loyalties and attitudes that we encounter in *Peeler* with the ambivalence in feeling that we find in *The Last September*, it is notable how important women are to its generation.

In *Peeler*, O’Keefe’s growing doubt that Deirdre Costello has been murdered by the IRA derives from his knowledge of the fact that she had not only been intimate with IRA man Seamus Connors, but also with Major Wallace Burleigh of the First Royal West Kent Regiment. In the course of *The Last September*, Lois Farquar explores an old abandoned mill in the Cork countryside with her friend Marda Norton while out on an afternoon walk. Here they are surprised to come across a sleeping man. He is armed, and evidently an IRA member. When he asks them where they are from, Lois tells him that they belong to the estate at Danielstown. This disclosure may be the piece of information that leads to the burning of Danielstown estate at the end of the narrative. The man tells them that they shouldn’t be out walking and that if they “had nothing better to do, you had better keep in the house while y’have it” (*Last* 125). Hearing this, Lois feels that she has nowhere to go now, given how restrictive she

feels society at Danielstown to be. As a consequence, upon hearing the IRA man's threat, the first clear thought that comes to Lois's mind is that she must marry Gerald. This is Gerald Lesworth, a British soldier from Surrey: marriage to Gerald would mean a new life in England for Lois away from the pressures of Anglo-Irish decorum and the tensions of political insurrection in the country. The trouble for Lois is that she finds Gerald to be uninteresting. In a way, her predicament is the same as that of a much less sympathetic character, Major Wallace Burleigh, in McCarthy's *Peeler*. When Sergeant O'Keefe comes to question him about the Deirdre Costello case, he finds Burleigh with the blinds down pouring himself a whiskey, denouncing "Shinners" (Sinn Féin rebels) with a tear in his eye about the state into which Ireland has fallen. This prompts in O'Keefe that thought that the time would eventually come "when pulling the shutters over and drinking himself senseless just wouldn't do any more and Major Burleigh too would have to pack himself off to England" (*Peeler* 313). The thought might well be read as a blunt appraisal of the determination in the Anglo-Irish society of Bowen's novel to ignore the IRA threat as much as possible and carry on with social gatherings.

There is another aspect to Lois and Marda's encounter with the gunman in *The Last September* who is hiding in the abandoned mill. As the man looks at the two young women, they "feel framed, rather conscious, as though confronting a camera" (*Last* 125). In view of the fact that it is a man in hiding who is staring at the women, Bowen's way of describing the circumstance is deeply prescient of the opening to McCarthy's *Peeler*. As noted above, when Sergeant O'Keefe first observes the dead body of Deirdre Costello at the crime scene, he gets the distinct impression that she has been positioned as if for a photograph. This lends a deeply unsettling aspect to O'Keefe photographing the body at the crime scene as part of his investigative duty. Thus we find a congruence between *The Last September* and *Peeler* on the topic of women in situations of threat or violation that are framed through photography. The feeling of the two women being photographed in the scene inside the old mill in *The Last September* is also strongly reminiscent of the opening act of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. In the drawing room of Prozorov's house, Fetodik, a second lieutenant in the Russian Army, photographs the sisters when he enters with his fellow lieutenant Rodè (Chekhov 92–93). The gesture is significant in capturing the sense that the sisters feel being trapped in the boredom of life at Prozorov's estate far from the glamour of Moscow. However, it also captures a moment of Russian history that is about to disappear with the loss of Prozorov's estate by the end of the play. Historical change is represented through the camera as a new technical instrument replacing older artistic forms of representation in painting. In a strikingly similar

fashion, the women's feeling of being framed by the gaze of the gunman in *The Last September* captures the sense of entrapment that Lois Farquar feels generally at Danielstown estate. The simile of being photographed that Bowen uses to communicate the women's unease also presages the passing of the old Ascendancy world of Danielstown with the arrival of new technologies like that of the photograph. In this respect, the encounter with the IRA gunman links to a wider decline in the stature of the English aristocracy during the years immediately following the First World War.

Considering this precedent of the scene at the old mill in *The Last September* and the current of *Three Sisters*' influence in the figures of Lois and Marda, the significance of photography in *Peeler* becomes palpable. The opening to McCarthy's novel captures the paradox in the nature of the photograph that Roland Barthes identifies. Apart from the social and cultural means of transmitting a photograph, Barthes sees the photograph in itself as carrying a denotative and a connotative aspect. As a purely technical means of capturing a moment, a photograph is devoid of any code through which it may be interpreted: Barthes calls the photography "*a message without a code*" (17). It is precisely this aspect of the photographic image that Sergeant O'Keefe tries to capture through his Box Browning photograph of the dead Deirdre Costello. Devoid of any aesthetic dimension in its scientific configuration of light in real-time, the photograph carries the potential to be received as a piece of judicial evidence (in a way that an artist's sketch of the scene could not). However, O'Keefe is also alert to the connotative aspect of the same photograph when the scene that he photographs reminds him of those French erotic picture-postcards that soldiers had traded during the First World War, as noted earlier. This carries what Barthes describes as a "historical grammar" through which a photographic image carries connotations because of the existence of a host of stereotypes and associations (22). In this instance, we might think of the panoply of paintings, drawings, poems, novels and plays within which the prostitute or the Arabic harem girl has been represented erotically. It is likewise with Lois and Marda before the gaze of the gunman in *The Last September*. They are literally framed by his look, without any recourse to the poses or disguises practiced as part of the decorum of Anglo-Irish society. In this sense, the photographic quality of their circumstance in the old abandoned mill gives the impression of a return to nature (an effect of the photographic in its denotative aspect, as Barthes understands it) (20). Yet in this apparent simplicity of actual circumstance, the denotative aspect of the image generates a series of connotations: Lois and Marda representing feminine nature at odds with masculine order; the decayed mill a backdrop that insinuates the dislocation that both women feel in the society of Danielstown; Marda's curious desire to remain before the man and Lois's desire to flee immediately.

Both *The Last September* and *Peeler* conclude with the burning of buildings that are associated with the British governance of Ireland up to 1921. Bowen's novel ends with a description of the Big House at Danielstown in flames on the same night that Castle Trent and Mount Isabel have also been burnt down by IRA flying columns. *Peeler* ends in the RIC barracks at Ballycarleton coming under IRA attack just as RIC Sergeant O'Keefe is in the process of confronting Detective Inspector Masterson with the evidence that he covered up the murder of Deirdre Costello. Apart from the generic differences of style, both novels are also set apart in the attitude to these events that is imparted to the reader. Sir Richard and Lady Naylor are so horrified at what they witness that they dare not look at one another as the house burns (*Last* 206). In contrast, Sergeant O'Keefe watches with indifference as Ballycarleton police barracks burns, more preoccupied with those involved in the Deirdre Costello cover-up having made their escape. In *The Last September* Lois is sent off to England following the killing of Gerald Lesworth in an ambush on his army patrol in the local area. Sir Richard is horrified at the thought that friends of Peter Connors, a son of the Connors couple with whom he has been on friendly terms but who was captured by Gerald and his comrades, might have had some involvement in the attack (*Last* 203). By an odd coincidence, Connors is also the name of the chief suspect in the Deirdre Costello murder-case. Knowing that he is not guilty, Sergeant O'Keefe has him imprisoned in Ballycarleton RIC barracks to protect him both from the agents within British security who were involved in her killing, as well as from the local IRA brigade who regard Connors as the culprit. In the melee of the attack on the barracks, Connors is shot dead by one of the agents. The conclusion to *Peeler* carries no sense of the unspeakable that we are given in *The Last September*. McCarthy's novel concludes with Sergeant O'Keefe conversing in a *laissez-faire* manner with local IRA commander Liam Farrell concerning what transpired following the attack on Ballycarleton barracks.

While both novels bring ambivalent attitudes to the surface during the course of the Irish War of Independence, their conclusions also identify the limits of this ambivalence. In this way, they move beyond Irish historical and literary revisionism, concerned as revisionism has been with the simplification of Irish history in nationalist narratives. In *The Last September*, the reader sees ambivalence reach its limit with news of the killing of Gerald Lesworth. Denise Rolfe, who had organized a dance in the hut where her father was stationed, struggles to express her outrage in conversation with her closest friend, Betty Vermont. Saying that the killers of Gerald should be tortured rather than simply shot or hanged, she becomes inarticulate: "Oh, I do think, I mean, I do think when you think—" (*Last*

199). The unspeakable in this instance serves three functions: it indicates the incomprehension of the women at the news of Gerald's violent death; the willingness of Denise to break all lady-like decorum in speaking of a need to torture the local native Irish who were guilty of the killing; the end of the cultivated ambivalence through which Anglo-Irish society sought to sustain its relation to England during the course of guerrilla warfare in Ireland. Yet the women's horror is also undercut by the seeming indifference that Betty Vermont (or possibly Lois Farquar) voices later to the loss of Gerald (surprising even herself). The manner in which the sentence is written leaves it unclear whether the thought is that of Betty or Lois: "What I mean is, it seems so odd that he shouldn't really have meant anything" (*Last* 200). This indifference relates back to enormous loss of life suffered by British regiments in the First World War, atomizing the significance of a single soldier's death. Yet it also anticipates the burning of Danielstown at the novel's end as inevitable, however incomprehensible it might seem to its owners and to the guests who stayed there. Betty's (or Lois's) sentiment expresses surrender to the course of history, both local and international, with a note of resignation. However much the burning of Danielstown leaves Sir Richard and Lady Naylor speechless at the end, the final two chapters of *The Last September* (beginning with the news of Gerald's death), carry the same indifference that Sergeant O'Keefe displays at the very end of *Peeler* to the course of events as they have unfolded. The momentary indifference of Betty or Lois to the death of Gerald is felt more expansively and obviously in *Peeler* in the image of O'Keefe watching Ballycarleton barracks burning while he smokes a cigarette. The novel concludes with banter among the policemen as to where they will be transferred or whether they would be pensioned off. Officer Daly offers to buy O'Keefe a drink, to which O'Keefe responds: "at my funeral" (*Peeler* 479). Calling O'Keefe "a jammy bastard" for having survived all that he has, Daly ends the narrative by declaring that O'Keefe will outlive them all.

Particularly when considered in the light of Bowen's fiction, *Peeler* is important as a novel that recovers the personal histories of members of the RIC, histories that were neglected at official levels in Ireland through the course of the twentieth century. It testifies to the complex nature of policing in Ireland during the years of the War of Independence, exploring the issue of betrayal on many levels. These include the perception of IRA supporters in the local area that O'Keefe himself is a traitor in working for the British Government as an Irish policeman. O'Keefe himself feels that Deirdre Costello has been betrayed by her local community in their refusal to help with the investigation of her murder. There is the ultimate betrayal of discovering that the killer is a member of the Black and Tans who is being protected by a secret, powerful cabal of Englishmen within

the upper-ranks of the police-force in Ireland, the force for which he himself works. All of this is encapsulated in the misspelt word “trator” that has been tarred on the body of Deirdre Costello. By the end, these conflicting senses of betrayal, coupled with the loyalties that they employ, prove unsustainable. Watching Ballycarleton police barracks burning as so many other police barracks have been burnt, O’Keefe’s resignation is a sign that the circumstances of the RIC in places like West Cork could not be sustained indefinitely. His conversation with local IRA leader Farrell points already to McCarthy’s sequel to *Peeler*, *Irregulars*, in which O’Keefe is now a demobbed RIC man working alone on a missing-person case in the early years of the Irish Free State. Set in relation to the killing of British soldier Gerald Lesworth towards the end of Bowen’s *The Last September*, Lois Farquar being packed off for a ‘Tour abroad in consequence, and the final burning of Danielstown house, the conclusion to *Peeler* presents the reader with a narrative that finally extends beyond the revisionist frame of interpretation. Neither McCarthy’s novel nor Bowen’s long before it endorse a rebel nationalist account of Irish history by which British rule in Ireland was considered oppressive and undemocratic. Yet both works suggest that, however important the ambiguities in Irish-English relations were right into the War of Independence, circumstances as they emerged in the 1920s rendered inevitable the end of the Anglo-Irish Big House as a force of social significance, just as they also made it impossible for the RIC to function as a regular police force any longer. Describing this as a moment of decolonization erases the range of emotions that an RIC constable like Sergeant O’Keefe experiences, a range that reminds us of Lois Farquar’s conflicting feelings about Ireland and Irish-English relations in *The Last September*, particularly through her dissatisfaction at the prospect of married life with Gerald in England. Yet to describe *Peeler* as a revisionist literary work of historical recovery is to neglect how ambivalence itself goes up in smoke in the conclusive burning of Ballycarleton RIC barracks. It is a moment in which revisionism itself reaches a terminus as a frame of historical understanding, from within rather than from without.

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“No Country for Old Men”? The Question of George Moore’s Place in the Early Twentieth-Century Literature of Ireland

ABSTRACT

The paper scrutinizes the literary output of George Moore with reference to the expectations of the new generation of Irish writers emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although George Moore is considered to belong to the Anglo-Irish ascendancy writers, he began his writing career from dissociating himself from the literary achievements of his own social class. His infatuation with the ideals of the Gaelic League not only brought him back to Dublin, but also encouraged him to write short stories analogous to famous Ivan Turgenev’s *The Sportsman’s Sketches*. The idea of using a Russian writer as a role model went along with the Gaelic League advocating the reading of non-English European literature in search for inspiration. However the poet’s involvement in the public cause did not last long. His critical view on Ireland together with his uncompromising approach towards literature resulted in a final disillusionment with the movement. The paper focuses on this particular period of Moore’s life in order to show how this seemingly unfruitful cooperation became essential for the development of Irish literature in the twentieth century. *The Untilled Field*, though not translated into Irish, still marks the beginning of a new genre into Irish literature—a short story. More importantly, the collection served as a source of inspiration for Joyce’s *Dubliners*. These and other aspects of Moore’s literary life are supposed to draw attention to the complexity of the writer’s literary output and his underplayed role in the construction of the literary Irish identity.

Keywords: Gaelic Revival, George Moore, Ivan Turgenev, *The Untilled Field*.

In his latest publication, *Vivid Faces. The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890–1923*, Roy Foster discusses the emergence of the generation which led the Easter Rising. The 1916 generation, as Foster calls it, construct their identity, first and foremost, in opposition to Parnell's generation, whose failure in the negotiations with the British parliament for Home Rule in 1914 marks the symbolic end to the role of the landed gentry and the Anglo-Irish ascendancy in Irish politics and cultural life. The topos of a compromise is replaced by a call for military action so that the world once again would hear about Ireland's struggle for independence. However, as Foster rightly points out, the 1916 generation were not as homogenic in their views as it is usually portrayed. Especially in its early stage, it comprised divergent approaches towards the future of the country from the social, political, and most importantly, from the literary point of view. At the turn of centuries, two main paths of development of Irish literature might be observed. They are represented by two distinct organizations—the Irish Literary Theatre, and the Gaelic League—and two literary persona—William Butler Yeats and Douglas Hyde, respectively. At first glance, it seems natural for George Augustus Moore as the son of the famous George Henry Moore—an MP in Parnell's government, and an Irish nationalist—to join Lady Augusta Gregory since he shares with her an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy background. However, in his early career, George Moore rebels against his father's heritage and leaves Moore Hall for Paris, preferring art to politics. So how does the Anglo-Irish writer find his way to the Irish Literary Theatre and the Gaelic League, an organization whose actions predate the political rebellion? This paper aims to answer this particular question, as well as other inquiries concerning Moore's cooperation with William Butler Yeats, his fascination with the Irish language, together with his short literary liaison with Douglas Hyde. The analysis of these aspects ought to disclose the writer's literary path of development, as well as his changing expectations towards literature concomitant with his place in the Irish literature of the time. In what follows, the discussion will dislodge Moore's continuous urge for experimentation with form and the aestheticization of Irish literature, which, on the one hand, forces the writer to become an inner emigré of the Irish literary scene, but on the other, allows him to pave the way for Irish modernism. The analysis of Moore's literary output predominantly focuses on the collection of short stories *The Untilled Field*, which serves as an example of the writer's futile attempt at reviving Irish language and literature according to his vision of how modern literature should be composed. Despite its initial failure, the collection served as a source of inspiration for the young James Joyce to write his *Dubliners*. Therefore, the discussion on Moore's text also includes its modernistic potential.

George Moore's stay in Dublin and his Irish fervour marks the third turning point in his literary career, preceded by the French and English periods.¹ The success of his Independent Theatre Society attracts W.B. Yeats's attention. This results in Yeats's and Edward Martyn's (Moore's old friend and an Irish "neighbour"²) visit at Moore's flat in London. They ask Moore to participate in the founding of a Literary Theatre in Dublin. Moore's first reaction is rather negative, as he does not think much of the Irish capital: "to give a Literary Theatre to Dublin seemed to me like giving a mule a holiday," is the writer's immediate reply (*Hail and Farewell* 77). However, "the thought of an Irish Literary Theatre, and [his] own participation in the Celtic Renaissance" (78) is so pleasing an offer that Moore decides to ignore the call of reason, even whilst saying that "it never does an Irishman any good to return to Ireland" (77). Moore does not participate in the famous summer party at Tillyra Castle, and then Coole Park, when the idea for the Celtic Literary Theatre is brought about. However, another name considered for the organization is the Irish Independent Theatre Society (Frazier 264–65), which clearly testifies to Moore's indirect influence on the concept, with his London theatre project laying the foundation for the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin.

The theatre as a bridge of communication between Yeats and Moore results in a short but rather intense collaboration on the production of new plays. The most controversial seems to be the case of Edward Martyn's play *The Tale of a Town*, which, dismissed by Moore, becomes one of the victims of the writer's constant revisions with the accompaniment of Yeats. They change it into a completely new text, and thus they have to provide it with a new title—*The Bending of the Bough*³—since Martyn

¹ The reasons for his sudden decision to return to Ireland predominantly stemmed from his disenchantment with the Victorian prudery in English society, which prevented English literature from following the French path of development. Tired of his fruitless efforts to introduce naturalism into English prose and of his losing battle with the circulating libraries' censorship (*A Mummer's Wife*, *Esther Waters*, and *Evelyn Innes* caused a moral scandal in London), Moore turned to drama. His idea of reviving the English theatrical scene led to the creation of the Independent Theatre Society, which analogously to *Théâtre Libre*, would go on to promote unconventional, original and literary plays (Frazier 218).

² George Moore and Edward Martyn were cousins who knew each other from childhood, still living in family houses in Ireland. They both shared their Anglo-Irish Catholic descent together with their interest in literature, and later they also both became Irish landlords of Moore Hall and Tillyra Castle, respectively (Frazier 99).

³ The most controversial change Moore introduces into the play is his satirical comment on Dublin society, as each character resembles someone from

does not accept the new content. This situation already discloses Moore's lack of desire to collaborate, preferring to play the dominant role in the theatre rather than taking a back seat with Yeats capturing all attention.⁴ Critics chase after the best expression to convey Moore's approach towards the Irish Literary Revival by calling him "a disappointed John the Baptist" (Kenner 8) or a reversed version of St Patrick (Foster, *Telling Tales* 19); nonetheless, the need to prevail over the movement discloses no intention to monopolize it, but rather to manifest his personal vision. Nonetheless, other members of the movement frown upon Moore's overwhelming decisiveness. Lady Gregory comes to the conclusion that Moore is "resolving himself into a syndicate for [the] rewriting [of] the plays" (353), by this token, enforcing his vision of a politically involved theatre upon other playwrights, especially Yeats. She would rather the Irish poet remained a folklore gatherer, a mystic and a propagator of cultural revival, whereas Moore intends Yeats to resemble his own idea of a writer: a politically engaged and progressively satirical critic of the contemporary Dublin literary scene. Furthermore, Lady Gregory begins to fear that Moore is too controversial a figure for the Irish audience with his socio-political involvement and fame as a scandalist, which consequently may threaten the reputation of the new theatre. Yeats, at the beginning, recognizes the need for a public controversy over the theatre, and therefore he uses Moore to write a preface to the edition of Martyn's plays *Meave* and *The Heather Field*, which are to be staged at the opening of the theatre. However, Moore's open letters to Queen Victoria, in which he criticizes her for the Boer War, add to the growing dissatisfaction of Lady Gregory with Moore's negative influence on Yeats's talent (Frazier 278–88).

Moore's Anglo-Irish background together with his anticlericalism are other threads which keep Yeats interested in the Irish landlord. Moore's speech during the famous dinner at the Shelbourne Hotel⁵ clearly dislodges

the public life of the capital (Frazier 280). Such socially involved and critical plays are what Moore understands as belonging to Independent Theatre. Edward Martyn and Augusta Gregory are far from this opinion.

⁴ Other plays meet the same fate of rewriting: Yeats's *Countess Cathleen*, *Shadowy Waters*, *Diarmuid and Grania*, Martyn's *The Heather Field*, Hyde's *Casadh an tSúgáin*. Moore even attempts to have his say in Alice Milligan's *The Last Feast of the Fianna* (Frazier 282).

⁵ The dinner was organized by T. P. Gill on 11 May 1899, the editor of the *Daily Express*, to celebrate the success of the first season of the Irish Literary Theatre. Among the invited guests are Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, W. B. Yeats, Douglas Hyde, George Moore, John O'Leary, T. W. Rolleston, J. F. Taylor, John Eglinton, William P. O'Brien, Max Beerbohm, and many others (Dunleavy and Dunleavy 216).

the writer's aristocratic approach towards the Celtic Renaissance. For him, the Irish Revival is possible thanks to the finished Land War between tenants and their landlords. While the peasants have won their rights, the aristocracy has won the opportunity for a further development of the country, with Home Rule being one of its consequences (Moore, *Hail and Farewell* 137–38). Moore's approach goes in accordance with the unionist line of Augusta Gregory and Yeats's views on the Irish class system, which the poet clearly delineates in an article "The Academic Class and the Agrarian Revolution" (qtd. in Frazier 537).⁶ It is Moore's genuine belief in the redemptive role of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy in the Irish revival which brings Coole Park and Moore Hall together. Moore in his early life serves the function of an absentee landlord; whereas, when back in Ireland he tries to turn his Moore Hall into a cultural centre, analogously to Lady Gregory's Coole Park and Edward Martyn's Tillyra Castle. In 1902 he decides to organize a Gaelic lawn party with the staging of a play *An Tincéar agus an tSídheog* (*The Tinker and the Fairy*): "I want to have a Gaelic speaking audience. I think this would be a very good thing, and I think it would annoy Dublin society very much, which will add considerably to my pleasure" are the words Moore writes to his brother when he is planning the party (qtd. in Kiberd, "George Moore's Gaelic Lawn Party" 21). To a certain extent, Moore begins to associate himself with the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, despite the fact that he has never followed the views of his father. This is visible in Moore's urge to write about his own social class, which springs from the assumption he shares with Balzac that: "the history of a nation as often lies hidden in social wrongs and domestic griefs as in the story of revolution, and if it be for the historian to narrate one, it is for the novelist to dissect and explain the other" (qtd. in Genet 120). To him, as to other Anglo-Irish writers, the history of their class is part and parcel of the Irish cultural heritage, which many decades after Ireland gains its independence is challenged by such critics as Seamus Deane.⁷

⁶ Yeats also expresses his approval for the involvement of the Ascendancy in the shaping of Irish culture in *The Countess Cathleen*, where he underlines the bond between the landlord and the tenants in the form of a female martyrdom, in this way opposing the emerging Catholic bourgeoisie in Ireland (Smith 32). Yeats, despite his partial middle-class origin, aspires to be treated as a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy by participating in the cultivation of its intellectual freedom. Thus, his approach towards the Easter Rising is at least ambivalent: "At the moment I feel that all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature and criticism from politics" are the words, which best illustrate his fear of the possible aftermath of the rising (qtd. in Longley 22).

⁷ Deane notoriously accuses Yeats of misjudging the role of the Protestant Ascendancy by associating it with "the spiritual aristocracy of the Catholic and

What is important to note is the fact that Moore's collaboration with Yeats in the Irish Literary Theatre is partially triggered by his wish to create an Irish speaking theatre. His new vocation of the Irish language revivalist leads Moore to a short infatuation with the Gaelic League. Moore's growing involvement in the revival of *Gaeilge*, although appreciated by Lady Gregory and Yeats, brings second thoughts due to the political underpinning of the Gaelic League. Lady Gregory manages to discourage Yeats from participating in yet another idea of Moore's, this time of going on a lecture tour in the USA "as Gaelic League missionaries and anti-war protesters" (Frazer 291). With time, Moore's engagement in the language campaign results in him acting too unpredictably. Contrary to his anticlericalism, Moore starts cooperating with the clergy, first, in the case of the theatre, then, in the production of short stories. Thus, Yeats states in the pages of the *United Irishman* in 1901 that "the revolutionary initiates bent on overthrowing a decadent modern civilization" are allegedly working upon the Church's errand (qtd. in Foster, *Vivid Faces* 4). A similar remark concerning his lack of acceptance for the production of plays under the censorship of priests published in *Freeman's Journal* several days later may be read as the last warning for Moore (Frazier 306). Such declarations serve as an example of the literary society becoming divided between the followers of the national and the cosmopolitan visions of art, with the Gaelic League being more and more often accused of "boyscoutish propaganda" (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 157). Still it is the argument about the rights to the idea for a new play *Where There is Nothing* that is read as the end of the friendship between the two writers and as the main source of later accusations and snipes.⁸

While still participating in the Irish Literary Theatre, George Moore becomes engrossed in the Irish language campaign organized by the Gaelic League. He treats seriously the words of Douglas Hyde from the article "On the Necessity of De-anglicising Ireland," welcoming all those who want to teach the native language, write new literature in Irish or translate the already existing one into the mother tongue. His first idea concerns the

Celtic peasantry—defining aristocracy in each case as a mark of Irishness and Irishness as a mark of anti-modernism—that he distorted history in the service of myth" (*Celtic Revivals* 32). A similar comment may be found in the critic's other monograph *Strange Country* (163). This stems from Seamus Deane's republican views and his postcolonial stance on the issue of the Anglo-Irish (protestant) aristocracy as the descendants of the colonizer.

⁸ According to Cantwell, the layout for the play, which Yeats later claims to be his, has been constructed by Moore. For the justification of Moore's line of argument, the critic provides the reprint of Moore's letter to Yeats, in which the plot is clearly sketched (103–04).

participation in the creative process of other activists, among them Thomas Ua Concheanainn, whom Moore intends to lend a hand to in writing an autobiography (Frazier 284). As even Hyde finds Moore's enthusiasm problematic, the Gaelic League prefers to direct the Irish landlord's energy into other actions, for example, putting a play on in Irish, giving prizes to his tenants for speaking Irish or writing a composition in the native tongue, organizing for Hyde a publication of his poems, or having his nephews be taught Irish (Frazier 292). However, it is the public campaign against professor John Pentland Mahaffy—a great opponent of the Irish language entering schools (Pierse 88)—that shows the power of the Irish landlord's public image. Moore's ironic article "Plain Words to Party Men" published in *Bat* in 1901 by such people as George Russell is read as a sign of "a new Voltaire" arriving in Dublin, whereas Hyde is rather shocked how easily the reputation of a well-established public persona may be destroyed at the Gaelic League's command (Frazier 302). Since Maurice Moore is sent to fight in the Boer War, his brother—George—turns against all the manifestations of the British establishment, the Trinity professor being one of them. Therefore, it seems difficult to decipher whether Moore is led by his missionary vision of Gaelic Ireland or private grudge against his family's forced involvement in a war.

A similar blend of vocational and private reasoning is observable in George Moore's disappointment with what is happening to English culture. When in Ireland, he starts criticizing the English language:

From universal use and journalism, the English language in fifty years will be as corrupt as the Latin of the eighth century, as unfit for literary usage, and will become, in my opinion a sort of volapuk, strictly limited to commercial letters and journalism. (qtd. in Kiberd, "George Moore's Gaelic Lawn Party" 17)

Moore's negative comments on literature in English partially stem from his harboured resentment against the poor reception of his novels by the English literary scene. Since his mission to introduce naturalism into English literature failed, Moore tries to find his place in Irish literature. "I came to give Ireland back her language" (qtd. in Kiberd, "George Moore's Gaelic Lawn Party" 14), claims Moore once he arrives in Dublin, and the fact that he does not speak a word of Irish himself does not cause any dissonance to him. The Irish landlord looks at the two nations through the prism of their language, the English embodying the sterile imperialism of England, its abstraction and commerce, and the Irish expressing the spontaneity, vividness and freshness of Ireland, untouched by modernity (Welch, Preface 7). Therefore, his aim is to "make Ireland a bilingual

country—to use English as a universal tongue, and to save our own as a medium for some future literature” (qtd. in Kiberd, “George Moore’s Gaelic Lawn Party” 18). To sound authentic Moore has to make himself bilingual first. However, his enthusiasm for learning Irish wanes fast, as he realizes it would take him ten years to master it to the extent necessary for being able to write literature. He believes he is too old to learn it.⁹

Moore’s inability to speak Irish does not discourage him from popularizing the language. His cousin, Edward Martyn, is the one who encourages Moore to get involved in the production of plays in Irish. However, the growing tension between him and the rest of the Irish Literary Theatre pushes Moore to the idea proposed by William Kirkpatrick Magee (known under the pen-name—John Ellington) for the Irish landlord to become Dublin’s Turgenev (Frazier 306). By this time, Moore, already disillusioned with French naturalism, has turned to the Russian writer for inspiration.¹⁰ The idea of writing stories about Irish life appears in Moore’s mind long before the momentous conversation with Ellington; however, it is the comparison with Turgenev which encourages Moore to collaborate with Father Tom Finlay on the creation of a text-book for learning Irish in primary schools based on Moore’s short stories. The first three stories are successfully translated into Irish by Tadhg O’Donoghue and Pádraig Ó Súilleabhain and published in the *New Ireland Review*: the Irish version of “The Wedding Gown” (“An Gúna Phósta”), “Almsgiving” (“An Déirc”), and “The Clerk’s Quest” (“Tóir Mhic Uí Dhíomasuigh”) (Welch, *Changing States* 41). However, another two of Moore’s stories—“Home Sickness” and “Exile”—are already too anticlerical for the clergy to be published in the Jesuit magazine. Still, this does not diminish the writer’s enthusiasm. The first version of *The Untilled Field* is published by the Gaelic League in 1902 under the title *An-t-Úr-Ghort* and includes altogether six stories in Irish. At the time of the publication, Moore’s involvement in the Irish language cause is considerable enough to claim that after the translation of the “The Wedding Gown” from Irish back into English, the sentences are

⁹ Since Moore is unable to learn Irish himself, he decides to provide Irish education for his nephews, as suggested by Douglas Hyde. He intends to hire a nurse from the Arran Islands to teach the children the native tongue. He even threatens his sister-in-law that he will disinherit the boys if they do not learn the language. His zealotry shakes Hyde, who claims that there are good teachers nearby, so there is no need to bring a woman from the other end of the country.

¹⁰ Ivan Turgenev becomes an important source of inspiration for Moore already in the 1880s, with the greatest manifestation of it being the article “Turgeneff” for *The Fortnightly Review* in 1888. Richard Cave enumerates the Russian writer as one of the two long-lasting literary influences of Moore apparent already in *Drama in Muslim* (18–19).

“much improved after their bath in Irish” (Kiberd, “George Moore’s Gaelic Lawn Party” 21). The booklet, first and foremost, includes the two stories dismissed by Father Finlay: “Home Sickness” as “Galar Dúithche,” “The Exile” as “An Deóraidhe.” Apart from them, the publication comprises the reprint of “The Wedding Gown,” but also three new stories: “A Playhouse in the Waste” as “San n-Diothramh Dubh,” and two stories, which do not appear later in the English version. “Ír-ghrádh” disappears from *The Untilled Field*, whereas the last Irish story later becomes part of “Some Parishioners” (Cronin 115).

By comparing the Irish with the English version of the stories, one may easily observe that already in the early stage of the composition Moore is driven by the urge to rewrite the already existing stories. According to Cronin’s meticulous comparative scrutiny, “A Playhouse in the Waste” departs from its Irish original, with the ending being changed—the plans of the priest are fulfilled: the playhouse is built, but it falls into ruins, for which the girl and the death of her illegitimate child are held responsible (115). Still, the 1903 version of the story, with a friendship between a Catholic priest and a Protestant minister, stands out from the rather satirical view of the clergy presented in the rest of the collection. Most interesting seems to be the case of the Irish story “Ír-ghrádh,” which focuses on “a heroic figure who undergoes a mystical experience on a mountainside, feels called upon to join the Boers in their fight against British imperialism and emigrates to South Africa to join in the battle there” (Cronin 115). The story, from which Moore later resigns, clearly embodies the current frustration of the writer that most probably later, when the war finishes and Maurice returns back home, stops playing such an importance in Moore’s life. This serves as yet another example of Moore acting upon emotions. According to Cronin, the romantic nationalism expressed in the story is too idealistic for the collection, especially in its English version (116). Yet there might be a third reason for the writer’s change of mind. The grudge against the British for the Boer War is quickly replaced by the disappointment with the state of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The years of absence result in Moore gullibly believing that “Archbishops are educated men,” thus the intellectual collaboration analogous to his father’s with the clergy of his time is still possible (qtd. in Yeats 446).

The embitterment felt for Father Finlay drives Moore back to his anticlerical views and to his involvement with a new idea concerning Dublin’s “Parisification” as an act of rebellion against the growing Irish Catholic bourgeoisie (Frazier 319). Although Moore at this point could once again be accompanied by Yeats, who shares the dislike for the Catholic middle class, Moore still feels embittered about Yeats stealing, allegedly, his idea for the play. His loss of enthusiasm for the Celtic Revival goes

in accordance with his disillusionment with Irish society, which is clearly disclosed in a letter to Dujardin: "I have absolutely renounced all my Celtic hopes. Of the race there is now nothing but an end left over, a tattered rag, with plenty of fleas in it, I mean priests" (qtd. in Frazier 328). The greatest manifestation of his dissociation from the Catholic Church is his official conversion to Protestantism in 1903. He explains his decision to the public in a letter published in *The Irish Times*, in which he underlines his lack of acceptance of the clergy being politically involved in the affairs of Ireland. Similar to the public protest against the visit of Queen Victoria, this time Moore expresses his criticism for the Irish Catholic Archbishop's warm welcome of King Edward VII.

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At the beginning of the twentieth century Moore already rightly foresees the increase in influence of the Catholic Church on the final shape of Irish literature. He may not have managed to become a saviour of Irish literature, but undoubtedly he might be treated as a prophet of the gradual increase in nationalistic moods visible on the Irish literary scene with his cosmopolitan vision of Irish literature turning into a lost battle. Therefore, with time he realizes that Ireland is no country for his generation of Anglo-Irish writers who dream of revolutionizing the literary scene in a cosmopolitan sense. His disappointment is shared years later by Yeats and well resonates in the words: "This is no country for old men" from "Sailing to Byzantium." However, what Moore does not manage to predict is the fact that his experimental collection of short stories, treated as an apparent failure in the revival of Irish language and literature, still have a considerable function to fulfil in the history of that literature. The critical image of the countryside created by Moore is inventive enough for Joyce to think of his own collection of short stories. There is no denying that Moore's collection is a source of inspiration for Joyce's *Dubliners* (Brown xiv). Very tellingly, Joyce also plans a sequel to *Dubliners*, to be titled *Provincials* (Norris 48). This is not the first time Joyce is inspired by Moore's work. The Irish modernist sees the first staging of *The Bending of the Bough*, which makes him impressed enough to write his own play, *A Brilliant Career*, with a similar municipal theme (Frazier 288). Moore's novel *The Lake*, which at first is supposed to be a short story added to *The Untilled Field*, marks another of the writer's experiments, this time with interior monologue, the method borrowed from *Les Lauriers Sont Coupés* written by his friend Dujardin. Interestingly, Joyce, at this time being in Paris, comes across Dujardin's novel and discovers the new type of narration, which Moore already incorporates into his new novel in 1905 (Frazier 323). Yet what attracts Joyce's attention in terms of *The Untilled Field* is, first and foremost, Moore's critical view on the current state of Ireland.

At the time of writing the stories, Moore becomes increasingly disillusioned with the social situation in Ireland, finding the Catholic Church to be responsible for it. It is not without reason that the process of rewriting and adding new stories into *The Untilled Field* is accompanied by a changing amount of anticlerical remarks. The first edition, as well as the following three ones, start with the two stories which were previously dismissed by Father Finlay. While in "The Exile" Moore ponders the question of false or forced vocation, in "Home Sickness" the writer already places clear blame on the local priest for the protagonist's disenchantment with Ireland. The title of "The Exile" might be treated literally, as James's journey to America, but it also connotes a metaphorical exile from one's desires and love into celibacy, which happens both in the case of Peter and Catherine. For a long time Peter does not know what he wants to do in his life; he therefore chooses priesthood to meet the expectations of his father, because "there has always been a priest in the family"¹¹ (Moore, *UF* 7). Catherine's case is clearer: "she didn't go to the convent because she had a calling, but because she was crossed in love" (Moore, *UF* 12). In the first story the opposition between desire and religion, though not directly implied, emerges as a leitmotif for the whole collection. An analogous mixture of motifs of exile and forced submissiveness are prevalent in Joyce's *Dubliners*. "Eveline" begins with the desire of the protagonist to leave Ireland and finishes with a resigned acceptance of her Irish fate. The idea of a paralysis, which Joyce introduces into his collection, elaborates on this seemingly paradoxical coexistence of a longing for change accompanied by a reluctance to act which is already noticeable in Moore's stories.

In "Home Sickness" the Irish landlord also plays with the double meaning of the title. At first glance, it seems to express the longing for Ireland that leads the ill James Bryden back to Duncannon. Although the surnames differ, the repeated name of James provides a link between the first story and the second. In the former, the reader sees him leave for America; in the latter, he is back in Ireland after thirteen years of absence. James's reaction to what he experiences during his return might be compared to the author's own bemusement at his arrival in Dublin. Duncannon does not resemble the place James remembers from his youth: "the country did not seem to be as much lived as it used to be" (*UF* 25). It turns out that many young people have left the village. However, it is "the obedience of these people [who stayed] to their priest . . . their submission of a primitive people clinging to religious authority" (*UF* 30) that most strikes the protagonist. Moore reacts analogously, though for some time he still believes that Ireland may "awake at last out of the great sleep of Catholicism" (qtd. in Kiberd,

¹¹ All quotations from *The Untilled Field* are marked with the acronym *UF*.

“George Moore’s Gaelic Lawn Party” 13). As the story of “Home Sickness” develops, it transpires that Moore’s fear that the clergy might take the place occupied by the landlords comes true. The local landlord, to James’s surprise, no longer plays the central role in the community as he used to do. Now it is the priest who governs the place. Thus, the letter from an American friend evokes a true feeling of home-sickness: “When the tall skyscraper stuck up beyond the harbour he felt the thrill of home that he had not found in his native village” (*UF* 34). Moore may share a similar feeling once he leaves Dublin in 1910 and goes back to London and then to his beloved Paris. The motif of leaving Ireland reappears in “The Wedding Feast,” “Julia Cahill’s Curse,” “The Wild Goose” and “Fugitives,” by this token becoming one of the key associations that Moore ascribes to the state of Ireland at the beginning of the new millennium. Similarly, in Joyce’s short stories some characters are determined enough to emigrate. The tone of Moore’s “Home Sickness” prevails in Joyce’s well-known “The Dead” with Gabriel’s negative approach towards his own country. Nonetheless, Joyce’s collection includes another story “A Little Cloud,” which corresponds well with Moore’s “Home Sickness.” Two friends—Chandler and Gallaher—embody two possibilities that Joyce sees for young Irish people: stay and live in a paralysis or leave to meet your expectations. The story, presented from the perspective of a frustrated good-for-nothing poet, Chandler, who blames his wife and child for his artistic inertia, embellishes the success Gallaher achieves in London Press. Those who manage to leave, like Gallaher, visit Dublin occasionally and have a good time there because they have a home elsewhere.

Other anti-Catholic overtones concern the critical portrayal of the clergy. Apart from the famous Father Flynn in “The Sisters,” Joyce devotes a lot of attention to the clergy in the story “Grace.” Mr Kernan’s conversation with his friends abounds in ironic comments on the Irish priesthood. In particular, the words “I haven’t such a bad opinion of the Jesuits,’ he said, intervening at length. ‘They’re an educated order. I believe they mean well too’” (Joyce 127) uttered by Mr Kernan—a Protestant with anticlerical views, who marries a Catholic, therefore officially having to convert to Catholicism—echo Yeats’s critical remark on Moore’s gullible belief that the Irish Jesuits with whom he collaborated to publish the stories are educated enough to appreciate his literary talent.

It is difficult to decipher whether Moore bears in mind this past incident while writing the stories, since in his collection several types of priests are depicted, not all of them negatively. Particularly interesting is the contrast between Father Maguire and Father MacTurnan, who reappear in more than one story. As the author explains in the preface to the collection: “the somewhat harsh rule of Father Maguire set me thinking of a gentler type of a priest, and the pathetic figure of Father MacTurnan tempted me”

(*UF* xx). Indeed, the image of Father Maguire, who forces Kate into an unwanted marriage (“The Wedding Feast”), who refuses to marry Ned and Mary for less than five pounds (“Patchwork”), and who intends to denounce a girl from the altar for delivering a child out of wedlock (“Some Parishioners”) stands in stark contrast to Father MacTernan’s progressive approach. His controversial collaboration with a Protestant minister to provide his parishioners with some entertainment (“A Play-house in the Waste”) or his proposition for the clergy to get married and have children as a solution to the problem of Ireland’s depopulation (“Letter to Rome”) make him not so much “pathetic,” as Moore claims, but rather too irrational or revolutionary for traditional Ireland. Interestingly, the reasoning behind Father MacTernan’s abolition of celibacy resides in the fact that: “the priests live in the best houses, eat the best food, wear the best clothes; they are indeed the flower of the nation and would produce magnificent sons and daughters” (*UF* 92). This openly ironic remark by Moore on the great discrepancy between the poor parishioners and the wealthy clergy points to another of the writer’s accusations “that the Church had enriched itself at the expense of the people, and that Ireland would never thrive under its oppression” (Frazier 309). By this token, Moore places blame on the institution rather than on individual priests for all the wrongs done to Irish society. If the clergy takes the place of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, as Moore claims, it is still the semblance of the feudal system that is partially to blame. This Moore does not see, since, as an Irish landlord living from the work of his tenants, he perceives the landlord-tenant relationship idealistically as a partnership.

As long as Moore remains conservative in his assessment of the positive role of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy in Irish society, his anticlericalism is not the only reason why he is still treated as a controversial figure in Dublin. His attitude towards sexuality, shaped during his stay in Paris, results in his progressive approach towards the role of women in society. However, here the writer is not the exception to the rule, since such views are shared by many people, especially those belonging to the 1916 generation. To follow Foster’s argumentation, women who take part in the republican movement first and foremost fight for their emancipation. Many of them are daughters of well-established politicians, ambassadors, or Anglo-Irish Ascendancy landlords (*Vivid Faces* 20). Joining the cause has its private dimension, as they rebel against the roles imposed on them by social norms. The problems they aim to solve concern birth control, the traditional treatment of motherhood, and sexuality, strongly believing that “sex feelings are to be expressed as freely as any other kind and more harm is done in the world by repression of them than almost anything else” (qtd. in Foster, *Vivid Faces* 131).

The progressive approach towards female sexuality proposed by the 1916 generation is in accordance with Moore's viewpoint on the subject. His novel *Drama in Muslin* portrays Alice's rebellion against her parents' wish to find her a husband appropriate for a girl of an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy background. In *Esther Waters* the writer focuses on the problems of a working-class woman who has to raise an illegitimate child on her own. *Esther Waters* presents one of the rare examples of a novel of the time, where the hardship of a woman's life, together with a detailed description of a case of child labour, is presented so naturalistically. The problem of female sexuality reappears in *The Untilled Field*, where women do not want to sacrifice their lives for the sake of marriage contracts. In contrast to the male characters, who obey the rules imposed on them by the Catholic Church, Moore's female protagonists manifest their independence in many different ways. One example is Kate from "Some Parishioners" and "The Wedding Feast," who is courageous enough to speak her mind directly to Father Maguire, disagreeing with the priest's statement that "those who wish to make safe, reliable marriages consult their parents and they consult their priest" (UF 45). "I think a girl should make her own marriage" is what Kate replies. When the marriage is enforced on her by her parents, she leaves Ireland for America just after the ceremony, by this token, choosing the "unpredictability of her own nature, her own odd, aloof freedom" (Welch, *Changing States* 43).

Neither the Irish Literary Theatre, nor the new generation of 1916, embrace Moore's literary manifestations of female sexuality. Once again the presentation of the issue finds an associate in the young James Joyce. Joyce shares with Moore the aesthetic perception of the human body evoked by a fascination with classical art. Both also clearly delineate in their literary works that a Catholic notion of the female body's sinfulness stands in opposition to the aesthetic perception of female beauty. This incongruity, famously grasped by Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, may be found earlier in Moore's short story "Fugitives." The first English edition of *The Untilled Field* from 1903 seems most straightforward in the depiction of Moore's opinion of the Catholic Church, sexuality and art, since the tale of the sculptor Rodney is presented in two stories: "In the Clay" and "The Way Back." In both examples Moore clearly condemns Irish philistinism, partially resulting from the repressive actions that the Catholic clergy exerted on Irish society (Cronin 117). Therefore, the two stories provide a tentative conclusion that Moore must have reached in 1903 that "Catholicism and nationhood are incompatible" (Frazier 310). The two stories are missing from the second 1914 edition, and then in the last edition from 1931 "Fugitives" is introduced, in which the two original stories are merged. Still the clear division of the story into two parts indicates the original partition.

The story is the last in the collection, and thus it may be treated as a conclusion of the whole book. The plot focuses on John Rodney, an artist who tries to make a living from art in Dublin. Already famous for his talent, which was shaped during his stay in Italy, one of Rodney's patrons is Father McCabe, who seems to be deeply fascinated with art, since he eagerly discusses "the Irish Romanesque, the Celtic Renaissance . . . [or] the possibility of returning to the origins of art" (*UF* 202). The priest sees in Rodney an Italian artist: "he has often told me that I am more Italian than Irish, that he had seen my narrow eyes in an Italian bust, and that if I had lived three hundred years ago I should have been one of Cellini's apprentices" (*UF* 197). Father McCabe's perseverance in obtaining funds to reconstruct a Medieval Abbey and to enrich it with the finest pieces of art is supposed to prove his understanding of art in general. However, when Rodney has to create a statue of the Virgin Mary with a child, it appears that Father McCabe's artistic sensitivity prohibits a nude model from being used. This point of disagreement indicates a real discrepancy between the priest's and the artist's perceptions of art and their understanding of the role of the human body within it. Rodney is well aware of the fact that the magnificent statues one may find in the churches of Rome are based on real female bodies. Therefore, he is happy when he manages to find a model in prudish Dublin. Lucy, the embodiment of innocence, agrees to pose naked because she wants to help her cousin, Father McCabe. Once Father McCabe learns the truth, he prevents Lucy from posing, treating it as an act of sin, while the destruction of Rodney's studio together with the statue of the Virgin Mary by Lucy's brothers further testifies to Irish society's philistinism. The second part of the story clearly illustrates two crucial conclusions Moore seems to have reached. The first concerns the lack of freedom of expression in Dublin. Thus, Rodney leaves his country and goes to London, where he meets two other Irish artists who are already in exile. The second refers to the role of the artist, who should follow the rule of beauty and nature. Rodney, as an artist, perceives Lucy's physical beauty exclusively in aesthetic terms. However, Father McCabe, after the affair with Lucy, comes to the conclusion that: "bad statues were more likely to excite devotional feelings than good ones, bad statues being further removed from perilous nature" (*UF* 214). Father McCabe bears much resemblance to Father Moloney, whom George Moore had occasion to meet during a Gaelic festival in Galway. As Yeats relates, Father Moloney presented himself as a specialist on Greek art and tried to converse with Moore, known as an art critic at that time. When Father Moloney states: "I have always considered it a proof of Greek purity that though they left the male form uncovered, they invariably draped the female," Moore has one possible reply for him: "Do you consider Father Maloney that the

female form is inherently more indecent than the male?” (Yeats 404). This exchange of remarks clearly summarizes the idea behind “Fugitives”: that of the Catholic Church misunderstanding the aesthetic concept of art and, consequently, restricting freedom of artistic expression.

Thus, the idea of writing *The Untilled Field* also ought to be read in terms of Moore’s search for an appropriate form of artistic expression. This is a challenge for Moore, who so far has mainly novels to his account. The short story form is new to Irish literature, with Moore being one of the first Irish writers to produce a collection of short stories. Nevertheless, Moore’s constant experimentation with the form is not solely limited to the genre but also covers the aspect of the language used, which brings Moore close to modernism. Everything Moore does is governed by the idea that “through dialect one escapes from abstract words, back to the sensation inspired directly by the thing itself” (*Hail and Farewell* 246). What further triggers the constant development of Moore’s writing is the change in the writer’s understanding of nature’s role in the creative process. It is no longer naturalism which governs the representation in *The Untilled Field*, but the idea borrowed from Turgenev: “obey Nature’s laws, be simple and obey” (qtd. in Cave 52), which rather echoes Pope’s understanding of Nature inherited from Aristotle. A narrative governs the story, not descriptions. Real life situations, analogous to Turgenev, are the source of inspiration for Moore.¹² Consequently, with *The Untilled Field* Moore manages to present a panorama of Irish society, with a special focus on the countryside.

Looking at George Moore’s Dublin period, one may come to the conclusion that the ten years he spent in the Irish capital mark one of the many stages in the writer’s self-development as an artist. As Gerber rightly points out:

Moore may have regarded his invasion of Ireland as a missionary opportunity. He may have begun by having some Messianic notions of himself, but he ended by being an artist first and foremost. . . . In the *Field*, like his sculptor Rodney, George Moore discovered that the model is not his vocation, art is. (279)

The time Moore chooses to spend in Ireland is special, as the first decade of the twentieth century abounds in sea changes in the social, political and literary life of Dublin. Moore’s views on literature clearly express a need for a constant experimentation with form together with freedom of expression

¹² Moore takes the idea for a plot for the majority of his stories from tales he hears from other people, among them Edward Martyn and George Russell (Frazier 308).

as prerequisites for the emergence of a new Irish literature. Paradoxically, once this process begins it turns out that there is no place in the new literary scene for George Moore, since Ireland goes in the very opposite direction to that which the writer expects from his country. To him, and similarly to Yeats and Joyce, Ireland loses its intellectual, denominational and literary freedom once it gains a political one.

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Recessive Action
in Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn*

ABSTRACT

Colm Tóibín's 2009 novel *Brooklyn* accompanies Eilis Lacey, a native of Enniscorthy, Ireland of the 1950s on a reluctant voyage across the Atlantic. Her passage reconstructs a common experience of immigration and exile to New York for the Irish working class seeking to escape the lack of prospects in small-town Ireland after the Second World War. Caught as she is between two homes—the traditional Irish culture she emerges from and the new capitalist society of America to which she emigrates—Eilis is placed in a polemical relationship to the public sphere, staked on multiple grounds of in-betweenness: she is a woman, Irish, and an exile. Belonging, for her, is posited on a complex understanding of the tensions between national and transnational identities. Eilis's parochialism, at first, and cosmopolitanism, later on, are both decisive characteristics that become driving forces behind her social integration and marriage prospects. She is initially barred from promising job and marriage opportunities due to her naivety and lack of sophistication. As an Irish female immigrant, Eilis becomes in the course of the novel a cosmopolitan from the margins, one of the newly uprooted, and ultimately a split self.

Keywords: Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, immigration, detachment, minimal realization.

Colm Tóibín's 2009 novel *Brooklyn* accompanies Eilis Lacey, a native of Enniscorthy, Ireland of the 1950s on a reluctant voyage across the Atlantic. Her passage reconstructs a common experience of immigration and exile to New York for the Irish working class seeking to escape the lack of prospects in small-town Ireland after the Second World War. Caught as she is between two homes—the traditional Irish culture she emerges from and the new capitalist society of America to which she emigrates—Eilis is placed in a polemical relationship to the public sphere, staked on multiple grounds of in-betweenness: she is a woman, Irish, and an exile. Belonging, for her, is posited on a complex understanding of the tensions between national and transnational identities. Eilis's parochialism, at first, and cosmopolitanism, later on, are both decisive characteristics that become driving forces behind her social integration and marriage prospects. She is initially barred from promising job and marriage opportunities due to her naivety and lack of sophistication. As an Irish female immigrant, Eilis becomes in the course of the novel a cosmopolitan from the margins, one of the newly uprooted, and ultimately a split self.

Much has been made of Eilis's detachment and downright passivity and paralysis, and critics have explored the connection between her passivity and her immigration status. Tory Young diagnoses Eilis's "watchful remove from action," the feeling of "being distanced from not only one's surroundings but oneself" (131) as owing to depression. Narratively, the style of the novel enacts this condition in what Young describes as a "narrative report": "the reader is privy to Eilis's feelings and is often tormented by her inability to voice them" (131).

In what follows I would like to describe Eilis as trapped in a different in-between space than that of immigration. Rather, she is trapped between two different discourses: the Romantic and the realist one. On the one hand, she enacts a contemplative non-instrumentality. On the other, she could be read as the passive object of realist capitalism that instrumentalizes her very act of contemplation and negation. Eilis appears to be completely immobilized and trapped by her environment. Her emigration is decided for her, her American-Italian boyfriend, Tony, persuades her into marriage and thus activates the plot, and throughout the text Eilis is dominated by silence. Young also points to the realistic narrative style as stultifying, to the point that Tóibín, she claims, inhabits Eilis's mind and he "could tell us anything he liked about what she is thinking" (137). This points to the awkwardness of Eilis's detachment throughout the novel.

It is this detachment that is of interest in the narrative. Because of its ambiguity, Eilis's state of mind has given rise to a multitude of critical interpretations, most of which are aligned with Young's idea that Eilis is a trapped, passive, agentless creature, written along the lines of her

predecessor, Joyce's Eveline. Eve Stoddard describes Eilis as "trapped as she faces her reality" (164). Young draws a direct parallel between Eilis and Eveline as women who lack control over their lives and are not free to act. Edward Hagan points to a "double consciousness" (33) in Eilis that ultimately makes her "a marginalized person, left to live in one of those [two] worlds under compulsion" (40). Hagan is also fond of the similitude between Eveline and Eilis, though he claims that Eilis's story reverses that of Eveline—she does achieve emigration, unlike Joyce's protagonist—though with little in way of redemption or liberation from the constraints of her community. Although Eilis succeeds in getting married, she "will now have a marriage that she is locked into by her community: Miss Kelly's action succeeds in changing Eilis's act of freedom into a choice circumscribed by her mother's and her neighbors' insistence on marriage to Tony" (Hagan 42). This, according to Hagan, amounts to "the failure of emigration as liberation" (42). For Young, the parallel between Eveline and Eilis is supposed to resonate even at the level of name choice, as well as that of third-person narrative. They are both passive observers, and they both watch from a window as life passes them by (124). "Both characters seem acted upon[,] not acting" (Young 124). Moreover, Eilis is split between mind and body, with a loneliness that tears at her in Brooklyn, while Eveline experiences a restrictive world at home. For Young, the question arises as to whether there might be a "nominative determinism that indicates how little choice [Eilis] has about where she is going" (134). And even though Young admits that Eilis changes to an extent throughout the story, achieving something very close to glamour upon her return to Ireland, she is still so distant from her actions, so little prepared to take responsibility, that she does not experience a moral dilemma at the point at which she contemplates bigamy.

Using the theory of recessive action detailed by Anne-Lise François's *Open Secrets*, in this paper I argue that in *Brooklyn* renunciation, self-negation, and weak attachments bring about a type of non-instrumental fulfillment that manages to subvert the ethics of ambition and productivity. François's theory of "recessive action" claims that an event is "the idea of 'nothing' as an event made or allowed to happen" (xv). She draws on attitudes and figures that define themselves against action, "whether this is understood in the dramatic sense of public performance, in the moral sense of intervention, or in the economic sense of materialization and productivity" (xv). These figures are mainly characters from the 19th century who are described in terms of "passivity and inconsequence" (xv), to the point of appearing almost self-punishing by virtue of their "ethics of chastity, renunciation, and waste" (xvi). Rather than reading these narratives as stories of self-denial, however, François makes an argument

for “an open secret of fulfilled experience, where the term *open secret* refers to nonemphatic revelation—revelation without insistence and without rhetorical underscoring” (xvi). Fulfillment is located not in success, or fruition, or other forms of unmediated satisfaction, but rather in a “freedom from work” (xvi), whether work be defined in terms of “self-concealment or self-presentation” (xvi).

Polemically, this theory of the open secret “contests the normative bias in favor of the demonstrable, dramatic development and realization of human powers characteristic of, but not limited to, the capitalist investment in value and work and the Enlightenment allegiance to rationalism and unbounded progress” (xvi). François continues by noting the predilection for infusing words like *frankness*, *directness*, *transparency*, and *self-expression* with an unambiguous positive normativity that does not allow for “the reception of the self-quieting, recessive speech acts and hardly emitted announcements . . . of missed or declined experiences” (xvi). These small, quiet acts are certainly aimed against rationalism and the kind of productivity that can be measured, but not only that. They also rescue contemplative life and imaginative play from instrumental reason and goal-oriented action. François calls this approach to life the “ethos of minimal realization” (xviii) which marks, in Romanticism and elsewhere, a turn toward the aesthetic experience that offers a “respite from the rushed action of a modernity so bent on bringing about the future that it leaves no time for the taking—deferral or postponement—of time” (xviii). In an effort to define this aesthetic turn, François uses concepts like “uncounted experience,” “aesthetic play,” “reticent assertion” and

minimal contentment often indistinguishable from a readiness to go without (answer), something that, translated into a psychological ethos, might look like accommodation to a world that promises one no return. Such complaisance without hope, akin to the mildness of the disappointed lover who bears his dissembler no ill will, differs from the tranquility of stoic self-sufficiency and the stoniness of silent protest, although it can easily pass for either. More importantly, however, it represents something more modest, wearier, and less redemptive than the aesthetic project of reconciling duty and inclination and regaining via art the immediacy of nature. (xix)

“Benevolent abandonment” (xix) is a gentle, quiet and generous mode of being, akin to grace, that makes no demands, and expresses no disappointment with reality, such as it is.

Tenuous attachment is a way for Eilis to subvert productivity, whether at home or in exile. When her emigration is determined wordlessly, with

only a tacit agreement on her part (more indecision than agreement), Eilis is already distancing herself from her future thus decided on her behalf:

And then it occurred to her that she was already feeling that [she] would need to remember this room, her sister, this scene, as though from a distance. In the silence that lingered, she realized, it had somehow been tacitly arranged that Eilis would go to America. (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 23)

Eilis's silence is akin to recessive action, in itself an event allowed to happen. While critics talk about feminine passivity in the hands of a patriarchal culture, priest, and domineering mother, one could also regard Eilis's reticence to participate in decisions that determine the course of her life as a reaction against the uncanniness of her position. Both "home" and "exile" become uncanny in the novel, and Eilis is a poor fit in both Enniscorthy and Brooklyn. Even though Eilis fears that the rest of her life in exile will be a struggle with the unfamiliar, from the beginning of the narrative she retells the daily events of her work at the store as if they were narratives meant to detach her from herself. She dramatizes her performance of productivity at the grocery shop in order to hide from herself and her family how little satisfaction she finds in her position there. Eilis's self-presentation is a form of self-concealment. Jim Farrell, a promising bachelor who makes a fleeting appearance in Eilis's pre-emigration romantic life, sees and does not see her. The same is true for Rose and her mother. With every move away from home, Eilis becomes more uncanny to herself. Estrangement is the condition of the immigrant, but also of the cosmopolitan. Eilis is most successful in what François calls "the ethics of minimal realization," and exile dramatizes her ability to achieve the goals of emigration—marriage, work, property ownership, and social standing—all without trying, and even while working against these goals. Her process of attachment to places and people is rather one of dis-attachment. Her emigration is reluctant, and she is as much undermining and displacing herself as she is situating herself in her new surroundings.

Even as she strives to comply with all that the priest, her boss, her landlord, and her family back in Ireland expect of her in terms of productivity, part of Eilis always lags behind in a mood that could be in turn described as nostalgic, alienated, depressed, estranged from her surroundings and herself, in a way that undermines the capitalist values of self-realization, investment in value and work, rationalism and progress. The narrative works to distance Eilis from the values of frankness, directness and transparency by always sidestepping self-expression. Eilis pointedly does not have a voice. She is silent, and allows herself to be silenced, in a way that contravenes with the normative narratives of female empowerment in

the private and public spheres. In the way she retreats in passivity, secrecy and alienation she pertains more to the sphere of the marginalized and the overlooked, who miss their chance at goal-oriented action. Her sister Rose's death catapults Eilis back into her past in a way that forces her to come to terms with the onrush of modernity that sweeps through Ireland as it does through America. What was stalled in the past—a job, marriage, a home, social standing—comes in flooding in the person of Jim Farrell. A rationalist, instrumental, and productive modern woman, newly schooled in the glamour of America, which seems to follow her around like an aura, would have found a way to secure for herself all the possibilities embodied in Jim Farrell, including the fact that she would not have previously contracted an impulsive marriage, based on promises of fidelity and trust, to Tony. But Eilis remains true to her quiet, recessive self that is more adept at missing opportunities rather than chasing or landing them, and even as she entertains visions of familiar normality in Enniscorthy, she knows instinctively that she will not go through with any plans of self-affirmation. To a narrative of self-investment, accumulation and victorious encounter with social forces, Eilis opposes an “ethos of minimal realization,” “reticent assertion,” and “minimal encounter” (François xviii), all of which is a way of acknowledging the odd fact that resignation in this narrative leads to a form of non-traditional fulfillment.

Even though the writing style of the novel is generally described as realist, in the way he eschews certainty, *Tóibín* undermines realism. In an interview with Joseph Wiesenfarth, *Tóibín* confessed that he was “terribly interested . . . in [the] level of moral mistiness surrounding characters” (8) in the novels of Joseph Conrad, in the idea that “in the middle of the whole thing he can put somebody at levels of ambiguity surrounding their moral being” (8). Ágnes Kovács is another critic who points to the “Jamesian secret” that envelops *Tóibín*'s narrative like an open secret. Kovács points out that *Brooklyn* inherits a Jamesian legacy of “ambiguity in the complications of this immigrant story” that “enhances the fluidity and socially preprogrammed nature of the immigrant experience Eilis undergoes.” As such, Kovács posits that Eilis is neither a heroine nor a villain, but a helpless character in a morally ambiguous situation.

Kovács presents the secrecy of Eilis's life in terms of the intersection between the private and public sphere. On one end, we see Eilis projecting herself in to the existing narratives of women in “mortal moral danger in America” (Kovács), mostly due to 19th-century conventions of the Anglo-Irish immigrant novel that portrayed women losing their Catholic faith and moral virtues once they left the security of their own home parishes. On the other end, Brooklyn itself is portrayed as a public place in which traditional identities can be reconfigured, and conventional notions about

gender, agency and subjection can be problematized. Most importantly, the meaning of “home” shifts with diasporic identity—“never at home in the homeland or in the host land” (Kovács). The private and the public spheres intersect and collide at the intersection between Irish traditional moral values and American social expectations that problematize those values. Public representations of Ireland, Kovács notes, oscillate between “dreary” and lacking in possibilities to nostalgic, idealized versions. These are constructed in the States. The third representation is constructed on Irish land, upon homecoming. As it happens to Eilis, on her return for her sister’s funeral, she finds herself cast in the role of the popular, glamorous young woman who is suddenly offered prospects that were not there when she left—a suitable job position and an attractive marriage offer. Suddenly, the two spheres, private and public, converge into one, as Brooklyn’s materialistic and social glamour and Ireland’s moral values coexist in the same setting, with Eilis filtering the changes through her newfound consciousness.

To navigate the sudden change in consciousness, as she is trying to separate illusion from reality, Eilis has recourse to silence as a means of communication. Kovács points out that Eilis communicates through silence at important junctures in her life: she keeps silent when her journey to the U.S. is arranged for her, in her letters to her family regarding her anxiety about immigration, her relationship with Tony, particularly after her journey back to Ireland, and about her marital status during Jack’s courtship. Her secretive propensities escalate to the point where she herself is tempted into confusing illusion for reality. Kovács sees proof of Jamesian influences in the novel because of the way Jamesian moral ambiguity allows for

the presence of two or more possible moral imperatives in a given situation that cannot be exercised at the same time. . . . Lying, silence, and betrayal get entangled here in a Jamesian fashion, in a process through which a traditional referential notion of truth becomes battled. (Kovács)

Kovács notes that the morality of Eilis’s decisions is rendered complex by the fact that she has to choose between competing concepts of duty that are superimposed on each other. She also considers Eilis’s immigrant experience and the fact that she has to navigate new cultural contexts premised on changing definitions of duty:

From the perspective of Jamesian ambiguity it needs to be pointed out that in *Brooklyn* the concept of “familial duty” itself changes its meaning which makes the need to return to duty problematic itself. . . . So the question of duty becomes more complex than a moral question of right and wrong, because the two concepts of duty are interposed on each other. (Kovács)

There is, thus, a way in which immigrant experience is entangled with secrecy, ambiguity, and complex moral decisions found at the intersection between the call of the new life and its contradictions vis-à-vis the call of the old one. Such complexities having to do with the new American setting cannot even be communicated to her family back in Ireland, except through indirections (as when Eilis first hesitates to accept Tony's occupation as a plumber as acceptable to her family back in Ireland, and later deferring to disclose her relationship to her family, for fear that Tony might be deemed unsuitable). The same thing happens in reverse: Eilis is unable to disclose her marital status to Jack, because divorce, while relatively socially accepted in America, is almost inconceivable to a prosperous middle-class man such as Jack.

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Eilis realizes she is developing a “double self” (Kovács) that a U.S. native like Tony does not have to struggle with. As she watches Tony, she is aware of a transparency and directness that indicates he harbors no concealed identities:

She discovered a vantage point from where, unless he looked directly upwards and to the left, he would not see her. . . . Yet somehow that delight seemed to come with a shadow, and she wondered as she watched him if she herself, in all uncertainty and distance from him, was the shadow and nothing else. It occurred to her he was as he appeared to her; there was no other side to him. (*Tóibín, Brooklyn* 144)

Her double consciousness, first discovered in Brooklyn, when it resulted in a deep sense of alienation, becomes more profound in Ireland when she feels as though she is split in two. This constant split leads to a shift in meaning of terms like home and duty, and this shift, in turn, leads to helplessness and moral ambiguity. While this might be true, and it is obvious that immigration and the constant shift between two normative cultures takes a toll, I would like to argue that this does not necessarily turn Eilis into the passive, helpless victim that Kovács and other critics see. I argue instead that Eilis is not passive because of helplessness or victimization. This is obvious in the way we see her in control of her choices through the narrative, and we register her self-awareness and inner critical voice that are able to rationalize her decisions at each juncture, including the fact that she is fully aware of the double game she plays, holding both Tony and Jack in tension at the same time. Rather than characterize Eilis's journey as morally ambiguous, I employ terminology of ethic and aesthetic deferral and benevolent abandonment that is also a “strange modality of patience, generous even, that leads to odd resignation as a form of fulfillment” (François xix).

Eilis consciously and strategically retreats into “recessive action,” thus defining herself against action as it is generally and publicly defined. Most importantly, she retreats from the very notion of public performance and productivity, where one’s decision must make social sense to one’s outer circle of family and community. Such figures appear therefore to those around them as passive and inconsequential through their “ethics of chastity, renunciation, and waste” (François xv). To the protagonists of renunciation, however, the retreat into the private understanding of self-denial as a means of acting and deciding becomes an open secret of a kind of fulfillment located not in success, fruition, or other types of publicly revealed forms of self-satisfaction, but rather in the freedom from proving oneself through self-presentation.

Such public silencing is perceived as succumbing to disappointment or the reality principle and accepting one’s lack of options and lack of fulfillment (the way Joyce’s Eveline does). But in rejecting adherence to social norms and expectations, be they American or Irish, Eilis opts instead for fulfillment through means other than direct and instrumental. Like Jane Austen’s Fanny Price, she ultimately gets what she wants, and more, far from settling for less, and freed from the carefully calculated moves of the woman seeking to arrange a suitable marriage and social standing for herself. It seems as if Eilis’s situation is resolved favorably by the end of the novel—married to a good husband with property in a progressively developing area of Long Island, education and promising job prospects, should she choose to pursue them—not despite her passivity, but rather because of it. It is Tony who insists on marriage, it is the priest who arranges schooling for Eilis, it is Miss Fortini who offers her a leave of absence from work and encourages her trip to Ireland, it is Jack who insists on marriage, and all the while Eilis contemplates her fate as its chain after meaningful chain link under her very eyes. Her public performance is one of holding on to the tension of the in-between. Her attachments, while temporarily maintained, are tenuous at best, but her small, quiet, and reticent acts produce in the end results as decisive, or even more so, than any cold calculations could render.

Eilis resolves her disappointments, indeterminacies and contradictions in her acceptance of her marriage to Tony. The way she embraces a future with him is, in many ways, the fulfillment of the mythic American dream promised to immigrants. This is embodied, as Savu (266) points out, in the specifics of property and consumeristic power—a piece of land on Long Island and career ambitions that amount, in Eilis’s view, to “much more than she had imagined she would have when she arrived in Brooklyn first” (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 163). On the other hand, Eilis’s fantasy fulfillment comes about not through the expenditure of productive capitalist energy

squandered to the molding of the public sphere, to her advantage, but rather despite Eilis's lack of capitalist savvy, to the extent that she felt, and behaved, as if she always belonged somewhere else, moving through a sense of "dark confusion" (192), mutely and obliquely, always wishing "she could say something clear" (193). If there is a fantasy taking shape in the course of the novel for Eilis, it is that of constant negotiation of what is real and what only seems real, but will prove in the end to be illusory. Eilis lives in a constant interlude between the old and the new world, and the way she navigates it is to shut herself off from possibilities of happiness beyond the immediate: "And not only that, but everything else that had happened in Brooklyn seemed as though it had almost dissolved and was no longer richly present for her" (240).

Stoddard notes that migration, and the severing of attachments from the home base, especially in the case of Irish women, was regarded with suspicion, and "was a mark of abjection, a sign of empowerment, or both" (156). If Eilis's struggle is between "mute obedience and meeting her own desires" (157), then the ambiguity of her position might just be a reaction to the competitive interests demanded by it. Both places become *unheimlich*, or unfamiliar, to her. In turn, she regards America, and later Ireland, as surrounded by the haze of a dream, and she often acts as if trapped in a dream-like state. Emigration and living death seem compatible metaphors at times in the novel, as Stoddard points out (161). "Home" becomes a place of alienation, no matter on which side of the Atlantic it is found. Eilis feels like a nobody, or even a zombie in Brooklyn, but she is also disconnected from the role of the dutiful daughter she feels it incumbent upon herself to perform in Ireland. In fact, her passive acquiescence to the romance initiated by Jim Farrell might be a way for her to cope with the detachment she feels toward her own home, mother, and Rose's things and memory. Her moral split does not speak so much to morality, as to disconnection from any agency—moral or otherwise. Her ghostly presence unto herself is rendered as a hazy illusion. While in Ireland, Eilis recalls her time in America as

a sort of fantasy, something she could not match with the time she was spending at home. It made her feel strangely as though she were two people, one who had battled against two cold winters and many hard days in Brooklyn and fallen in love there, and the other who was her mother's daughter, the Eilis whom everyone knew, or thought they knew. (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 218)

The splitting and doubling of the self can be seen as a disconnection from moral agency, but I read them as a way of loosely holding on to reality.

Clair Wills notes that there is a type of literature of immigration that focuses on 1960s Irish working-class realism told from the perspective of social mobility through a romance plot (110). In these texts, however, the link between home, family, and social mobility does not maintain its continuity due to the peripheral and uncertain status of Irish migrants. Tóibín was directly interested in the marginalized groups that were progressively rendered more visible by the fiction of the 1990s. “If you surround huge areas of expression with silence for so long and then a society suddenly opens up . . . a lot of people are going to start writing clearly and dramatically,” Tóibín confessed to Alan Riding at the end of the 1990s, when he was pointing to a resurgence of Irish fiction focusing on working-class female protagonists that were for the first time in Irish literary history moving from the margins to the center. In Tóibín’s tale of immigration, the shift to the center happens along the lines of constructing a new American self that redefines her Irish public identity as well, moving her into a new category, which at the time of the writing of the novel Tóibín described in an interview with Paul Morton as the “New Irish,” an emerging politicized class: “Some of the impulse for this [book] is entirely political. . . . [I]here were times in the last 15 years where I felt alone in Ireland in my views on immigration. . . . I believed—and I know this is an unsustainable belief—in an open door policy.”

Brooklyn evokes an “affective experience” as a reminder to Tóibín’s contemporaries of a recent past in which the Irish themselves had once occupied “the place of the despised or barely tolerated Other: a place now inhabited in Ireland by the Poles, the Nigerians, the Filipinos, and the Chinese” (Cullingford 81). As a character closer to the working class, marginalized categories currently populating Ireland, Eilis embodies future America as a place where emotional losses are balanced out by the potential gains (Cullingford 84). This does not conceal the fact that emigration is closely linked to exile and trauma, and the feeling of displacement gives rise both to grievance and empathy for the newly displaced Others. The in-betweenness of emigration points to a reality constituted by the conditions of late capitalism where economic instability, institutionalized racism and increased surveillance create a death of the social sphere.

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Masculinities, History and Cultural Space:
Queer Emancipative Thought in Jamie
O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys*

ABSTRACT

At Swim, Two Boys, a 2001 novel by Jamie O'Neill, tells a story of gay teen romance in the wake of the Easter Rising. This paper considers the ways in which the characters engage in patterns of masculine behaviour in a context that excludes queer men, and the rhetorical effect of transgressive strategies to form a coherent identity. These patterns include involvement with the masculine and heteronormative nationalist movement, as well as a regime of physical exercise, and a religious upbringing in 20th-century Ireland. The strategies of broadening the practices of masculinity include their renegotiation and redefinition, as well as attempts to (re)construct the Irish and the gay canons of history and literature. These strategies, as exemplified by character development, become a rhetorical basis for the novel's main argument for inclusiveness. This analysis deals with the central metaphors of space and continuity in the novel in the light of a struggle between identities. It also observes the tradition of parallels drawn between the emasculated position of the gay man and the Irish man at the beginning of the 20th century, and O'Neill's rhetorical deployment of the shared telos in construction of a coherent gay Irish revolutionary identity.

Keywords: Jamie O'Neill, queer, masculinity, *At Swim, Two Boys*, Easter Rising.

Ideas of power and masculinity are closely linked in the patriarchal order. The latter is a social phenomenon related to gender performances rather than an intrinsic quality; thus, it is not as much possessed as it is perceived, constituting an unstable element in power relations. It follows that a perceived lack of masculinity results in a state of powerlessness, and attempts to change power relations are closely linked to either (re)claiming masculinity or subverting its privileged status. The dynamics between masculinity and power, manifest as a cultural space, provide a thematic link between Irishness and homosexuality in Jamie O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys*, a historical bildungsroman telling the story of two gay teenagers set against the backdrop of masculinity performances leading up to and during the Easter Rising.

In order to reclaim power, both the gay man and the Irishman had to overcome cultural constructs according to which they lacked masculinity. Historically, the Irishman was emasculated by his subjugation and his circumstances were in that way similar to those of the Jewish man:

Both Jewish and Irish cultures were greatly affected by their weakness vis-à-vis the stronger majority, and Jewish and Irish men faced some conceptually similar stereotypes about their supposed deficiencies. Zionism, like Irish nationalism, was also a concerted effort to refute popular racial stereotypes and create a more prideful image of Jewish strength and power. (Beatty 5)

Attempts to reclaim masculinity by the Irish took an indirect form of Gaelic Revival, and manifested through a number of direct power struggles, such as the Easter Rising. The study, reinvention and popularization of Irish history and tradition played a critical part in the formation of Irish national identity which was a precondition for any independence claim.

There are some striking parallels between the struggle of the Irish at the beginning of the 20th century and the gay rights movement in the 1960s and '70s. First and foremost, the gay man used to be perceived as lacking masculinity:

Patriarchal culture has a simple interpretation of gay men: they lack masculinity. . . . The interpretation is obviously linked to the assumption our culture generally makes about the mystery of sexuality, that opposites attract. If someone is attracted to the masculine, then that person must be feminine if not in the body, then somehow in the mind. (Connell 143)

The rearrangement of this social construct started with the reconstruction of a canon, a discovery of the ages-old cultural heritage, spanning from Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, through the traditions of homosexuality persevering not only in Europe, but also in the Middle East, China and

Japan, to the acknowledgement of the 20th-century martyrdom of the pink triangle Holocaust victims.¹ These history studies fueled the formation of a shared identity, the defense of which resulted in the Stonewall Riots in 1969, commonly recognized as the beginning of gay liberation, a non-violent attempt to rearrange heteronormative power relations.

More than a historical parallel, however, the Irish and the gay identity claims were in active interplay ever since the stable formation of the latter at the end of the 19th century. First and foremost, the trial of Oscar Wilde resulted in the introduction of the gay subject into public discourse. Wilde, an Irish writer known for his witty, dandy style was accused of gross indecency, a legal euphemism for homosexual sex. The publicity his trial acquired, as well as its repressive outcome, forced public recognition of Wilde, his writing, and his style as elements of the homosexual code, which for centuries had circulated unrecognized in heteronormative culture. Another case is Roger Casement, an Irish human rights activist and a supporter of Irish independence, who was caught while aiding the organization of the Easter 1916 Rising and arrested for treason against the British crown. His actions and speeches acquired a queer context once his private diaries were investigated during the trial and an account of his homosexual love life became public knowledge.

Casement is important for contemporary queer literature not only as a historical figure, but also as a textual context. In James Joyce's masterpiece *Ulysses* Casement's biography is a significant background for the Cyclops chapter. According to Patrick R. Mullen, the scene of Bloom's conversation with the citizen draws upon Casement's "Speech from the Dock," representing the exclusionary practices of pure Irish nationalism and a queer idea of affinitive diverse Irish identities:

With the authenticated chastity of Irish identity achieved, the reactionary project of cultural, ethnic, and political verification can begin thus the citizen's fanatical inquisition of Bloom. The bugger's tool stages a vital multiplicity in which such verification makes no sense. Through this affective multiplicity Casement becomes a figure of intelligent sympathy, an affective tool, that allows Joyce to dissect critically the contradictions of the Irish, colonial situation. (108)

Joyce uses the figure of Casement to destabilize the idea of Irishness and to open it to a queer reinterpretation that is at odds with a hermetic Catholic, nationalist discourse.

¹ On various traditions of homosexuality, and reconstruction of a gay canon, see Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999).

Jamie O'Neill follows this tradition, as he draws a parallel between gay oppression and the Irish colonized situation in *At Swim, Two Boys* by telling the story of two gay teenagers and of how their national and sexual identities form. Doyler Doyle and Jim Mack engage in masculinity performances related to nationalism and Catholicism, both strong signs of Irishness, while they explore their sexual identities. The dynamics of participation in and deviation from prescriptive religious norms in the Irish context are visible in the title of the novel itself, as it relates to Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and, by extension, to the myth of *Buile Suibhne*, the prototypical Irish text about dissent against religion and about deviation from the norm. The main conflicts in the novel are not the Irish struggle against the British Empire, or the gay men rebelling against the forces that exclude them; rather, these elements are mostly suggested by the internal conflicts of the characters who are torn between their cultural understandings of masculinity performances and the sexual realities of their bodies.

One of the masculinity performances discussed in the novel is a religious practice. The novel presents the Catholic Church as an institution that disciplines society against all breaches in heteronormative perspective. At the beginning of the 20th-century religious institutions were still powerful and closely connected to the state, and they bore responsibility in the upkeep of patriarchy and the exclusion of gay people:

The Greek era's relative tolerance for select forms of homosexual activity . . . gave way to very harsh prescriptions against all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage during the Christian era. . . . Fueling this escalating persecution was the distinct fear that homosexual activity within religious communities would threaten the involved individuals primary allegiance to the church hierarchy. . . . Christian theocratic states [were] determined to repudiate pagan/Greek activities, enforce a gender order that kept women in a state of sexual and social servitude to men (and men channeling their sexual energies into creating new church members), and divide individuals into clear-cut domestic units that rendered political and social control much easier to achieve and maintain. (Hall 27–28)

As such, the Catholic Church plays a great role in the preservation of hegemonic masculinity. As the main characters are involved in religious tradition through their upbringing, the dynamics between their sexual development and larger disciplinary practices are crucial to the formation of their identities.

At the beginning of the novel, Jim Mack undergoes a religious education when he prepares to join the Brothers of Presentation. He is motivated to pursue this path because he is an orphan ashamed of his sexuality (at

the time unspecified as homosexuality): "A brother took vows, and if he kept those vows his mother need never feel shame before the angels" (O'Neill 106). The Catholic Church is identified as a heteronormative institution that practices its disciplinary power through control over the bodies and sexual lives of its members. However, as the story unfolds, Jim's mechanisms of repression are challenged when his childhood friend, Doyler, returns to their hometown of Glasthule. Doyler is a socialist and an uneducated, working-class boy. Jim recognizes him as an unfit companion:

There was plenty about bad company, however, in most the books they used at Presentation. In particular a manual called *Christian Politeness* which described the proper deportment of a Catholic gentleman. . . . Doyler might have posed for the thou-shalt-nots. His hands wouldn't settle, but swept along a wall or slapped against any lamppost he passed. He scrunched stones underfoot or scooted them away as though they posed an obstruction. According to *Christian Politeness*, the eyes were the windows of the soul: Doyler's rarely rested: proof of a giddy and unstable character. (95)

These observations do not discourage Jim from befriending Doyler. As a result, the boy is torn between the new friendship and the old ambition. Challenges arise when Doyler tries to convince his friend to skip Mass so they can swim together, having the popular bathing place all to themselves, or when he enters the chambers of Jim's mentor at school. Brother Polycarp, who embodies the religious disciplinary practice, has for a long time been disapproving of Doyler and at this point he decides to challenge his protégé in the hope of intimidating him into a denouncement of the troublesome friendship:

"Is this vulgarian to do with you?"

Jim felt the burning on his face. "He's my friend, Brother. You know that already."

"Pal o' me heart," said Doyler.

Jim saw himself weighed in the balance, then bitterly Brother Polycarp said, "And the half of your soul that is damned. Out of my sight, the both of ye." (139)

Jim's resistance leads to further disagreements with Brother Polycarp and to a shift in the boy's perception of the mentor, whom Jim begins to deem "an ignorant fool" (153) As a result, Jim chooses to fulfill Doyler's wish and skip Mass in order to swim together. Thus, the friendship between the boys begins to dissolve Jim's engagement with a heteronormative masculinity pattern of Christian practice even before the boys' rapport acquires a consciously homoerotic dimension.

However, this first change in Jim's behavior does not resolve the underlying internal conflict. Jim might no longer plan to escape his sexuality through the celibate life he intended to live, but he remains sexually repressed. When halfway through the novel *Doyler*, publicly denounced by a priest as a socialist, leaves Glathule in order to join the revolutionaries, Jim is left alone and confused about his sexuality. As a result, the boy goes through a sexual initiation with a random soldier. Dumbfounded, he seeks repentance in confession, but the religious practice fails him. He discovers he lacks words to express what he has done and the priest assumes the boy simply slept with a woman and promptly grants him absolution. Jim finds himself in a discursive void, unable to see any relevance of his bodily experience to culture, and believes his sin to be unique:

[N]o sin had been named that covered his wickedness. What he had done was so sinful, so unspeakably so, of such aberrance, to such unnatural degree, that the Church, for all her far-seeing and deep-searching, her vision and penetration, had not thought to provide against its happening. It was an extraordinary thing that he should have found this chink: he, the son of a Glathule huckster, of a quakebuttock, a quakebuttock himself, should in the majestic vault of Christendom a flaw have found. (412)

A rhetorical quality of these passages lies not only in the forceful self-hatred that inspires an empathetic reaction in the reader, but also in the clarity of Jim's mistake. He is far from being the first to engage in homosexual sex, and the Catholic Church is far from being unaware of that practice. However, cultural censorship renders Jim entirely oblivious to any history of homosexuality that might enable the formation of his sexual identity.

Precisely for that reason, Jim's friendship with the third main character in the novel, Anthony MacMurrough, has a healing effect on the boy. MacMurrough is an older man, an aristocrat, who was imprisoned for some time because of his homosexuality. He assumes the role of a mentor for Jim, as they talk about past cultural contexts and institutions established to give homosexual relationships some cultural space. The institutions and the stories of homosexuality include contexts that Jim has already been aware of, such as those from Ancient Greece, but with the censorship practices brought to light:

"The entire world grows up on those stories. Only difference is, I told him the truth, that they were lovers, humping physical fellows." Yes, and Jim had grasped instinctively that significance: that more than stories, they were patterns of the possible. And I think, how happier my

boyhood should have been, had somebody—Listen, boy, listen to my tale—thought to tell me the truth. Listen while I tell you, boy, these men loved and yet were noble. (607)

Through this education, O'Neill underlines the relevance of history in the process of identity formation. The suppression of gay history is a result of the homophobic structures of power, which are set to evoke the very self-loathing conundrum in which Jim was stuck. Teaching the boy about his history undoes this disciplinary practice and frees him. This is a close parallel to various undertakings intended to nurture Irish culture which are discussed in the novel, such as teaching the Gaelic language or folk songs. O'Neill posits the two processes of identity formation in close vicinity, presenting education as necessary in overcoming the institutional practices of shaming which can then result in the formation of a coherent identity regardless of the nature of that identity, be it national or sexual.

Curiously, their relationship not only informs Jim of gay history, but it also openly enacts the institution of pederasty from Ancient Greece, where the *erastes*, an adult male, teaches a youth, the *eromenos*, his student and beloved. Moreover, it parallels *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, where Lord Henry also teaches young Dorian his own, non-normative values. Significantly, MacMurrough references Wilde on multiple occasions, showing his sense of affinity with the writer, who at the time has already become a powerful icon in the homosexual code. However, while Lord Henry's philosophy encourages Dorian to follow his inner desires and ultimately brings about his downfall, Anthony's guidance explains to Jim his own sexual experience and helps him to form a healthy, functional identity. Moreover, Anthony's desire for Jim is controlled and halted throughout the novel, departing from the education in hedonism presented in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and presenting a possibility of a different non-normative guidance. The relationship of the boy and the aristocrat is connected both to the historical and the literary practices of signifying homosexuality, thus enacting the very ideas Jim learns about and forming their praxis.

The discovery of gay history also subverts the hegemonic understanding of male homosexuality as a lack of masculinity. The central metaphor of the novel, relevant in the context of the rising, is the Sacred Band of Thebes, an army of soldiers who were lovers and who would rather die than see their loved ones killed. This story is a radical transgression of a regular military masculinity practice: in this case homosexuality does not disqualify from engagement with it, but on the contrary, it is beneficial, as same-sex love is utilized to support a military virtue of loyalty. This transgression exemplifies the main rhetorical point of the book; it connects to the Irish

historic setting, in which the Irishman, culturally constructed as un-masculine, lays an identity claim through a masculine practice of military struggle with a need to transgress the cultural construct of homosexuality as un-masculine in order to forge a coherent identity and claim space for gay people within culture.

MacMurrough's own way of thinking about his identity as a gay man and an Irishman is yet another example of this subversive approach to history. He tries to renegotiate the patriotic notions by toying with the idea of Irish identity and using provocative statements to infiltrate the nationalist discourse with the idea of homosexuality. He delights in public embarrassments occurring in Irish society: "I was thinking: Parnell and Wilde, the two great scandals of the age: both Irish. It's good to know Ireland can lead the world in something" (308). While the statement is clearly a joke, Oscar Wilde plays a major role in MacMurrough's mode of thinking about Ireland. Provocatively, he describes Wilde's story to a Catholic curate, presenting him as an Irish martyr, for the thrill of his listener's outrage at the unjust treatment of the writer. In another scene, asked if he is "an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort" in a scene enacting a tableaux of coming out, MacMurrough responds: "if you mean I'm Irish, then the answer is yes" (309). In a similar manner to how Joyce uses the figure of Casement in *Ulysses*, O'Neill deploys Wilde in *At Swim, Two Boys* as a historical element destabilizing the meaning of Irishness and containing the parallel between the Irish position and the gay situation.

This parallel governs O'Neill's novel as a whole, as it constitutes an attempt to reclaim Irish history for gay people. Historically, the position of queerness in the Irish context has been determined through a colonial lens:

Alan Sinfeld (1994) has argued the late nineteenth century saw the association of "effeminacy" with homosexuality and the demonization of both in the course of the Wilde trials. Keeping in mind that the conflation of heterosexual maleness and "aggressive masculinity" as ideals were forming in this period, it is important to note that both the British colonial powers and the Irish nationalists were using the same language of "masculinity" and that both wrote homosexuality as a kind of foreign "pollution." (Conrad 127)

Homosexuality was conceptualized within the colonial framework as a foreign influence so that it could be distanced from the everyday experience of the Irish. Having gay protagonists participate in the Easter Rising, a foundational event for Irish national identity, and stressing Oscar Wilde's Irish nationality, allow for a reinterpretation of Irish history that

is more inclusive of non-normative sexualities, in a similar manner to how MacMurrough's education allows the boys to reclaim history in general as theirs. Both Irish and gay histories of marginalization are on the one hand connected by emasculation, and on the other by "telos of liberation" (Conrad 126), that is an uneven fight against a stronger, oppressive enemy. Moreover, even the means to an end are similar, as O'Neill focuses on cultural aspects of nationalist discourse, i.e. the Gaelic Revival, which is paralleled by the boys' education in gay history.

The goal suggested by the rhetorical dimension of the novel also parallels the Irish identity claim, as it argues that it is necessary for gay people to have space—in this case not geographical space, but cultural. The representation of gay history serves as a foundation for the discussion of an inherently political argument between essentialist and constructionist ideas of homosexuality. MacMurrough presents the work of his mentor, Scrotes, to introduce this argument:

You asked me earlier were there many of us about. The question for my friend was, were there any of us at all. The world would say that we did not exist, that only our actions, our habits, were real, which the world called our crimes or our sins. But Scrotes began to think that we did indeed exist. That we had a nature our own, which was not another's perverted or turned to sin. Our actions could not be crimes, he believed because they were the expression of a nature, of an existence even. Which came first, he asked, the deed or the doer? And he began to answer that, for some, it was the doer. (O'Neill 283–84)

The speech reflects the shift in the understanding of sexuality that occurred in the 19th century: a move from seeing same-sex desire as a singular act to the "invention of a homosexual," i.e. perceiving any sexual orientation as a stable quality of a person. MacMurrough's views here closely follow the identity politics of early gay activism, arguing that homosexuality is an effect of nature rather than nurture. This idea supports the claim for a cultural space for gay people and the argument against the deeply ingrained cultural perceptions of sexualities other than heterosexual as perverted and unnatural.

The discussion of disciplinary practices in the novel follows the emancipative logic of subverting and arguing against the juxtaposition of masculinity performances and homosexuality. One such pattern is Jim's self-loathing provoked by his religious upbringing. A similar repressive mechanism works against Doyler's early sexual liberty. Once the boy runs away from Glashule and joins the army, he becomes constrained by the cultural expectations of what it means to be a soldier. Much like Jim, who did not imagine it possible for his performance of a Catholic man

to allow for their friendship, now Doyler believes it impossible for their relationship to grow while he performs his duties: “I try not to think of him, only I can’t get him off my mind. . . . I try to make him go away, for I’m a soldier now and I’m under orders” (498). However, Jim, who becomes more and more interested in the revolution because of Doyler, does not see the two as mutually exclusive:

“We’ll be asked to fight for Ireland, sure I know that.”

“But what is Ireland that you should want to fight for it?”

“Sure I know that too.” . . . “It’s Doyler,” he said.

“Doyler is your country?”

“It’s silly, I know. But that’s how I feel. I know Doyler will be out, and where would I be but out beside him? I don’t hate the English and I don’t know do I love the Irish. But I love him. I’m sure of that now. And he’s my country.” (435)

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Jim’s interest in Ireland and his patriotic feelings are provoked by Doyler and their relationship, not disturbed by them. Assuming the story of the Sacred Band of Thebes as a metaphor for their position, he sees no problem in reconciling their burgeoning love with the masculinity performance of a soldier.

Conversely, Doyler’s lack of education in Catholic teachings allows him to inspire Jim’s abandonment of his religious self-discipline. After the boys make love for the first time, they go to the Easter Mass:

We went to Mass on Easter Sunday. We were at the back with the men and when it came to communion he stood up. He gave such a look at me and said, Come on. I thought, you know, after the night we’d spent. But he was so sure of things. We went up together. I snuck me eyes at him kneeling there. The priest was beside and he had his tongue out waiting. He was so sure everything was right and square. (598)

In both cases a lack of cultural awareness on part of one of the boys allows them both to participate in the masculinity performances in harmony with their stable and coherent identity. This points to the idea that the link between masculinity practices and the rejection of homosexuality is culturally constructed, juxtaposing those practices with the successful masculinity performances of the boys who remain unaware of their exclusion.

There is a last, bitterly ironic twist relevant to the theme of Jim’s religiousness. In the final chapters of the novel, the boys take part in the Rising and Doyler dies. Jim, in mourning, revokes his faith: “His rosary beads had dropped by his side and MacMurrough crouched to pick them

up. 'You can keep them,' the boy said. 'I won't be needing beads no more.'" (640) At first, it was Doyler who prevented Jim from engaging in the masculinity practice of a Catholic man when the boy was preparing to become a Brother of Presentation. Later, however, it was Doyler's example that allowed Jim to negotiate a space between his belief and his sexuality, outside of dogmas discriminating against gay people. Finally, the loss of Doyler is the reason why Jim decides to disengage from the practice altogether; it is not, however, due to any insecurities about his masculinity or his inability to fit into the pattern, but because of a universally human psychological process of questioning one's beliefs after suffering a loss. Ironically, the very same relationship that at first discouraged Jim from joining the clergy was in the end necessary for him to keep believing in God. Jim's sexual and religious identities start as mutually exclusive, but in the course of the novel they become interdependent. This reiterates the idea that love, including homosexual love, can amplify a masculinity performance, rather than render one unable to engage with it.

The boys' eponymous swimming exercise is yet another way in which the novel subverts the juxtaposition of homosexuality and masculinity practices. The boys undertake a heavy regime of physical exercise, which makes their bodies more akin to the ideal, muscled masculine body. On the one hand, this emblem of physical strength and ability is closely linked to the image of masculinity and rooted in a cultural belief that men are stronger and more able to perform physical tasks. On the other, it draws upon the ahistorical position of the author, referring to the post-emancipative gay gym culture, in which a muscled male body has become heavily eroticized, which can be seen in MacMurrough's comment on Doyler: "Swimmer's body, tight, lithe, all of a piece. It really is the best exercise and might be encouraged more among the lower orders as it costs nothing and the effects are wholly benign" (179). The characters throughout the novel go from unconscious appreciation to full acknowledgement of their bodies' aesthetic quality, which for the hegemonic masculinity discourse of the period is irrelevant. The swimming exercise has thus a twofold and unstable meaning, constituting both a masculinity performance, and a gay performance, similar in its rhetorical consequences and possibilities to the way O'Neill deploys the figure of Oscar Wilde.

This duality is reflected in their approach to the exercise. Doyler, who convinces Jim to practice swimming, frames their endeavor with the discourse of nationalism. Their overarching goal becomes reaching Muglins, an island located at a considerable distance from the coast. Doyler makes up a story of two patriots who wanted to claim that land for Ireland, but failed, and now their ghosts haunt the waters. Thus, their regime of exercise is not only a part of the masculinity performance by itself, but it

is also justified with a nationalist narrative. On the other hand, the journey to Muglins that is the goal of their exercise quickly acquires new meanings. The boys' physical development parallels their sexual awakening, which makes them realize their feelings towards each other. However, Jim decides that only once they achieve their goal can they act upon their desires:

"Come here to me, you gaum."

"No," said Jim. "No," he said again. "I mean it, Doyler, don't."

The shape that had crouched above him stiffened. "No?"

"We can't." . . .

"Don't you want me, Jim?"

Jim reached his hands to Doyler's shoulders. "Don't you know we have to wait until the island?" (506)

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Much as the exercise itself is driven by nationalist ideas but also awakens their romantic and sexual feelings, Muglins, the reason behind these exercises, becomes not only an Irish space they can regain for their country, but also a gay space where they might act upon their feelings. For Jim, who vocalizes this idea, the switch is obvious, and metonymic in its nature; the Irish space is, in his understanding, their space, because in his mindset fighting for Ireland means being with Doyler. Muglins serves as a physical representation of the revolutionary idea that Jim has in mind, one that would create a space for their love.

This metonymic switch is representative of O'Neill's whole rhetorical project in the novel, which involves putting homosexuality in proximity to masculinity performances, presenting the tensions which naturally would arise in early 20th-century Irish culture as a result, and slowly diffusing those tensions by exploring the idea that the two are not mutually exclusive. The eponymous boys manage to engage in masculinity practices in a meaningful way, and their same-sex desire does not prevent them from doing so. This is possible partly because they learn about historic practices in which there was no tension at all, and partly because they learn this from one another, as each of them is unaware of an exclusionary practice that blocks the other. This allows them to both experience and understand homophobia as a cultural construct. The novel's historical background makes it an exercise in the very process of reclaiming the history it describes. Drawing on the parallels between Irish history and the gay liberation movement, O'Neill both creates the fictional and reconstructs the historical Irish homosexual contexts. In doing so, the novel repeatedly subverts and dissolves the idea that homosexuality represents a lack of masculinity, along with the cultural meanings and the power relations relying on such an image.

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Michael Longley and Birds

ABSTRACT

The following essay attempts to shed some light on Michael Longley's poems about birds, which form a fairly complicated network of mutual enhancements and cross-references. Some of them are purely descriptive lyrics. Such poems are likely to have the name of a given species or a specific individual representative of that species in the title. Others make references to birds or use them for their own agenda, which often transcends the parameters of pure description. Sometimes birds perform an evocative function ("Snow Geese"), prompt the poet to explore the murky mysteries of iniquity ("The Goose"), judge human affairs from the avian vantage ("Aftermath"), or raise ecological problems ("Kestrel"). Most of the time, however, Longley is careful not to intrude upon their baffling otherness. Many of his bird poems are suffused with an aura of subtle yet suggestive eroticism, a conflation of the avian and the amorous.

Keywords: Longley, Ireland, poetry, birds.

Michael Longley once remarked in an interview that he hoped that by the time he died, his work would “look like four really long poems. A very long love poem; a very long meditation on war and death; a very long nature poem and a playful poem on the art of poetry” (Longley, “As English”). This essay will discuss one subcluster of his nature poems, namely poems about birds. That the Irish poet entertains a particular fondness for them is fully borne out by his own words. Once he went so far as to confess to being “especially obsessed by birds” (*Five Points*). He even seems to believe that birds are bearers of a certain variety of transcendence in a disenchanted world: “And then, when I hear a bird sing, it goes through me like an electric shock. And these are the things that matter to me. And I would call that transcendental” (“Vitality”). It is no accident that his *Selected Poems, 1963–1980* feature a bird in flight on the cover.

Generally speaking, all of Longley’s poems on both animals and plants flow from a philosophy deeply rooted in respect for their irreducible otherness. According to Donna Potts, “Longley’s poetry consistently registers an awareness of the nonhuman otherness of nature, as well as a realistic acceptance of human position in the world” (77). This is also true of his poems on birds. There is a tough-minded tenderness and an open-eyed reverence for the natural world in Longley’s work, which remains alert to the pitfalls of postromantic sensibility. A Longley poem creates a space where animals need to have no fear of usurpations from the human world. What I have in mind here is not only the obvious question of ecological depredations but also the less tangible dangers of intellectual appropriation, which is but a misguided attempt to drag the otherness of animals down into the bathos of human affairs.

On the other hand, the poet knows very well that the symbolic value of birds has historically carried great weight, and he occasionally has birds appear on battlefields, where they seem to sit in a horrified judgment over the baffling follies of humanity. “Aftermath,” a remarkably concise one-sentence poem from Longley’s first collection *No Continuing City* (1969), is a case in point:

Imagine among these meadows
Where the soldiers sink to dust
An aftermath with swallows
Lifting blood on their breasts
Up to the homely gables, and like
A dark cross overhead the hawk. (*Collected Poems* 31)

The imperative which opens the poem is also the crucial word here since it implies that the hard work of forgiving must have its wellspring in

imagination. At the same time, it may also suggest that it will never leave the realm of imagination as this touching vision can only be lyrically expressed but never enacted in reality. To further complicate matters, one should not be too easily swayed by the deceptively lucid symbolism of the swallows “Lifting blood on their breasts / Up to the homely gables” as suggesting nature’s compassion or possibility of restoration. It is not at all clear whether the swallows should be construed as symbolic of forgiveness. Longley is no self-deluding romantic and the picture of nature in his work is fraught with manifold ambiguities which must not be ignored.¹ In this brief elegy, the swallows’ blood-stained plumage and skyward soaring may evoke a desire for reconciliation and ultimate restitution on a higher plane. They could even be read as salvific, almost Christ-like, emblems of vicarious suffering, but the sinister presence of the hawk circling above undercuts any tempting affinities between the operations of nature and the process of human healing.²

The poet’s own commentary on this early poem is rather mystifying. In his introduction to *Secret Marriages*, a collection of just nine poems published in 1968, Longley says the following: “I imagine the possibility of swallows breeding near a battlefield and using blood as well as mud to build their nests. On second thought this doesn’t seem quite so likely” (3). The first sentence comes across as grimly realistic, while the second seems strangely diffident and somehow subversive of the poem’s message. This comment may also soberly suggest that for the swallows the soldiers’ blood is little more than building material lying ready to hand (wing?). What is remarkable about this brief poem is that it activates a variety of interpretations without committing itself to any one in particular. What it clearly does do, however, is outline a space of loss with swallows acting as insignia of lost innocence.³

¹ This is the main thrust of Robert Welch’s essay “Michael Longley and the West.” According to Welch, Longley is often tempted by “the free-fall exhilaration of romantic vertigo” (57) but he never lets go of sober Protestant reasonableness.

² According to Tom Adair, the hawk ushers in “the sudden sense of skewed reality” (18), while Medbh McGuckian sees the predator “as reminiscent of the Angel of Death marking the Israelite doors” (216).

³ Needless to say, Longley has also come to be recognized as one the most important chroniclers of the political unrest which ravaged Ireland for so many years, as well as a compassionate advocate for reconciliation. About the former he writes most movingly in “The Ice-Cream Man,” where the onomastic gesture of naming flowers is meant to counterbalance the tragic death of the eponymous victim, while the latter theme gave us the exquisite subtlety of his famous poem “Ceasefire.” The bird poems discussed in this essay, however, have little relevance to these issues. Some of them address the problem of man-perpetrated violence but not in the context of the Troubles.

“Aftermath” reverberates against “The Choughs,” a poem from the 2000 collection *The Weather in Japan*:

As they ride the air currents at Six Noggins,
Rolling and soaring above the cliff face
And spreading their wing tips out like fingers,
The choughs’ red claws recall my father

Telling me how the raw recruits would clutch
Their “courting tackle” under heavy fire:
Choughs at play are the souls of young soldiers
Lifting their testicles into the sky. (*CP* 258)

With its daring admixture of the horrific, the aerial, and the erotic, this is a more complicated text. It is trying to address several issues at once, one of them being tacit commemoration of the poet’s father, who was wounded in the Great War. The startling association which gives the poem its strength stems from the visual resemblance of the birds in flight to the recruits clutching their “courting tackle” for fear of emasculation. Despite the horror of its historical occasion, the conceit is lighthearted enough; consequently, the airily incorporeal is provocatively matched with the crudely physical—it is not often that one sees “souls” and “testicles” occupying the space of a single sentence. While less sanguinary than in the previous poem, the final image is even more shocking. One hermeneutic possibility is to read these lines as registering a tragically belated apotheosis, whereby the soldiers are posthumously wafted up into the empyrean regions in all of their individual integrity, which comprises both the spiritual and the physical. Despite the self-confident aura of the assertion in the final lines (self-consciously flirting with the declarative banality of the alleged synonymy between the humans and birds), the choughs “are” the souls of young recruits only in the poet’s desire to see them as such; once again the healing is effected primarily in the realm of the imagination. The eye of the poet may discern certain similitude in the carefree pirouetting of the choughs in the sky and the tragic fate of the soldiers, but—on the strictly literal plane—the process of restoration ends there. It occurs only poetically, which somehow both negates and enhances the poignancy of loss. At the same time, the poem’s playful eroticism and associative audacity almost succeed in redeeming the manifold horrors of the trenches.⁴

In spite of Longley’s confession that he generally prefers to write about ordinary birds, “the blackbird, the meadow pipit, the skylark . . .” (*Five*

⁴ Barry Sloan remarks that “This elegy is not for his father but for the many young men who died in World War I” (105).

Points), there is no shortage of poems about imposing predators in his work. “The Osprey” is a perfect example of his (occasionally unsettling) fascination with unmitigated savagery:

To whom certain water talents—
Webbed feet, oils—do not occur,
Regulates his liquid acre
From the sky, his proper element.

There, already, his eye removes
The trout each fathom magnifies.
He lives, without compromise,
His unamphibious two lives—

An inextinguishable bird whom
No lake’s waters waterlog.
He shakes his feathers like a dog.
It’s all of air that ferries him. (*CP* 13)

It begins with a tongue-in-cheek formality, also mischievously wrongfooting the reader, as “certain water talents” mentioned in the opening line are precisely what the bird lacks. Moreover, to describe talents as “occurring” to an individual is to flout standard usage in the hope of raising poetic utterance to a higher degree of intensity. “The Osprey” is not a philosophically challenging or theologically charged poem. Nor does the poet yield to the temptation of turning the bird into symbol. Quite the contrary, he is careful to keep the mystifying otherness of the bird intact, unencumbered by questionable allegories.

As in many other avian lyrics, Longley is out to capture the unique inscape of the bird. The poem depicts the osprey (identified only in the title of the poem) as an inhabitant of two distinct dominions, feeling at home in both, even though it is the sky that is “his proper element.” At the same time, the amused bafflement signaled in the opening stanza does not blind the poet to the fact that the osprey is a bird of prey, and it is rather good at being murderously efficient. The truth is that the osprey is a perfect killing machine; its wings are adapted for maximum lift off the water so it can easily get airborne, clutching its prey. Bearing in mind the numinous majesty of the predator, it is hardly surprising to detect a hint of quasi-religious awe in the polysyllabic adjective “inextinguishable,” which is normally accorded to creatures of myth, such as the phoenix.

This being an early text, it flaunts its poetic credentials in a more emphatic manner than Longley’s later work, where his artistry tends to be less self-conscious. Here, the parachesis of the final lines works through

a meticulously woven web of consonants chiming off each other, while the verb “ferries” in the last line is enriched by the ghost of “carries” which would be normally used in the context (in the same way as “talents” in the first quatrain echoes off the ghost of “talons,” its curved claws being the sea eagle’s most dangerous weapon). Longley’s word packs a more powerful punch as it suggests the lethal single-mindedness of the predator swooping down on its prey (the ocularly “removed” trout, the hapless victim wriggling for freedom, writhing in agony). It also heightens the musicality of the text, carried along by suggestive consonances and assonances, with the surprising “f” of the verb “ferries” ringing off the “f” of feathers in the previous line.

Perhaps this early text, which exhibits Longley’s preoccupation with avian cruelty, points forward to “Kestrel,” a puzzling one-sentence poem from *The Ghost Orchid* (1995):

Because an electric pylon was the kestrel’s perching
I wanted her to scan the motorway’s long acre
And the tarmac and grassy patches at the airport
And undress her prey in the sky and beat the air
Above grasshopper and skylark as the wind-fucker. (CP 210)

The poem is set in an environment in which man has left his ugly imprints all over the place. Most probably Longley is looking over his intertextual shoulder at the famous “Windhover” of Hopkins with a view to bringing out in sharper relief the difference between the Jesuit’s world and ours. Where for the Victorian poet the soaring kestrel becomes symbolic of mystical rapture leading up to God, Longley’s predator is a deracinated creature, whose native territory has been usurped by man. This is indeed a world where everything “wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell” as Hopkins memorably writes in “God’s Grandeur” (Hopkins 66); it is a world where kestrels are forced to perch on pylons.⁵ A note of strangely menacing eroticism which enters the poem with the speaker’s desire that the kestrel “undress her prey” (the poet’s choice of the bird as female is already telling) later broadens out into the crudity of the kenning-like “wind-fucker.” This violent term is likely to give offence, but its use is totally legitimate, as it preserves the old meaning of the verb: “to beat, strike.”⁶

⁵ Stephen Spender’s famous poem about pylons is probably another intertextual echo.

⁶ On-line research reveals that “*Windfucker* is synonym for a kestrel, which was used as early as 1599, and giving rise to a variation, *windhover*, in the late 1600’s” (“Windfucker”). It should be noted, however, that Longley has separated the two

Normally, Longley is careful to write a poetry which is happy to accommodate all forms of alterity, but here the poet's munificence is sullied by a desire for some sort of commination. The fairly unpoetic initial word "Because" already indicates that this one-sentence poem will follow a logic of cause and effect, but its movement appears tortuous and baffling. It seems that the poet postulates that the falcon become a vengeful deity as if a measure of salvific brutality could somehow cleanse the man-wrecked world, the only "solution" being recourse to symbolic violence. What is significant is that its victim is not the actual human trespasser, but other non-human creatures, which are made to suffer vicariously instead of the real culprit. On the other hand, for all its murderous glory, the kestrel remains every bit as vulnerable as she is threatening. This is pointed up by the prevalence of industrial lexicon (electric pylon, scan, motorway, tarmac, airport), which is only tenuously counterbalanced by the natural imagery of the final lines.

Even when Longley writes about less glamorous fowl, as in the poem "The Goose," from his 1986 collection *Man Lying on a Wall*, he continues to be perturbed by the mystery of violence. In fact, as many commentators have noted, his entire work wrestles with the question of the ubiquity of violence in the universe. Where "Aftermath" shows what man can do (and has frequently done) to man, "The Osprey" confronts the problem of natural violence, "The Goose" shocks with a painfully exhaustive account of the suffering which man inflicts on lesser creatures. This disturbing poem describes in uncomfortably close detail the process of slow dismemberment of the bird.

In the poem, the male speaker is accompanied by a silent female who seems more squeamish than himself, but remains involved in the act of cruelty, furtively enjoying its fruits. The poem has an air of studied callousness to it; the consecutive stages of mutilation are performed in a deliberately protracted and chillingly detached fashion:

Remember the white goose in my arms,
A present still. I plucked the long
Flight-feathers, down from the breast,
Finest fuzz from underneath the wings. (CP 86)

The goose may be the "proverbial creature of dumb innocence" (Kennedy-Andrews 77) but the dumbness (both meanings of the word are relevant here) could not save it from pain, which the poem euphemistically

nouns with a hyphen, perhaps implying in this way that the natural communion between the bird and the wind is no longer possible. See also: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/09/the-remarkable-discovery-of-roger-fuckebythenavele/>.

describes as a lingering “expression of disappointment” in the goose’s eye. On the other hand, the speaker appears less of a monolith than initially suggested as his hands freeze in a moment of guilty hesitation, his fingers reluctant to proceed:

It was right to hesitate before
I punctured the skin, made incisions
And broached with my reluctant fingers
The chill of its intestines . . .

Is this a sudden pang of conscience, a startled realization of the enormity of violence inherent in this otherwise “socially acceptable desecration” (Kennedy-Andrews 77) or is it more of a self-delighted deferment? Whichever it is, the grim session continues until the total destruction of the goose. At some level, the disembowelment is a ghastly mockery of birth-giving, especially when the speaker finds an egg hidden in the goose’s entrails: “Surviving there, lodged in the tract, / Nudging the bruise of the orifice / Was the last egg.” He goes on to “deliver it”—a word rich in suggestive semantic echoes, thus actuating various hermeneutic possibilities. But the male speaker is not going to shoulder the feeling of guilt alone, and the final line accentuates the complicity of his female partner: “We dismantled it, limb by limb.”

It might of course be argued that this variety of violence hardly qualifies as the disinterested malice of pure evil. After all, killing domestic fowl is a utilitarian action, resulting from our deplorable yet inescapable reliance on other creatures which must be slaughtered for food. At the same time, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews is certainly right to point up “an almost erotic thrill” (77) the male speaker derives from the power he wields; there is something deeply disturbing in the tone of self-conscious *jouissance* which pervades the text.⁷

The goose returns in a far more glorious context in “Snow Geese,” a poem from *Snow Water* (2004). Longley has often been praised for the careful arrangement of texts in his collections. The poem in question is paired on the same page with “The Pattern,” which precedes it. It is spurred into life by a chance finding; the poet is greatly moved on discovering a thirty-six-year-old “six-shilling *Vogue* pattern” (CP 294) of his wife’s wedding dress. It all happens on a day when snow has fallen, and the speaker is holding up the pattern against the opalescent “snow light.” In this way the poem is subtly gesturing towards its companion on the facing page. They share many similarities: both move between the past and the present, both

⁷ In an article reflecting on the influence of Ted Hughes on Michael Longley, John Redmond compares this poem to “View of a Pig” by Hughes.

contrast individuality against multiplicity, both are achingly nostalgic, both are intimately addressed, and both flirt with sentimentality without sinking into mawkishness. The second poem begins with a perception of distant snow geese, which are “So far away as to be almost absent / And yet so many of them we can hear / The line of snow geese along the horizon” (*CP* 294). This is followed by a surprising imperative addressed to an otherwise unidentified companion: “Tell me about cranberry fields, the harvest / Floating on flood water, acres of crimson.” Somehow the sight of snow geese conjures up a vision of floating cranberries. It would be tempting to go into learned disquisitions about one being the tenet and the other the vehicle of the metaphor, but they are never forced to merge: the whiteness of the snow geese and the redness of the cranberries remain distinct entities.⁸ Both are beautiful and haunting, but no elements are forcibly yoked together. One may surmise that the sight of the distant flock acts as a sort of Proustian alembic for the speaker, but the poem leaves us in the dark as to the details of the evocative alchemy that occurred in the poet’s mind.⁹

Where “The Goose” is likely to linger long in memory on account of the horrors it portrays, “Swans Mating” from *An Exploded View* (1973) shows Longley at his most lyrical. The best preface to the poem is Longley’s own commentary: “Swans Mating’ goes back to being a student at Trinity and walking along the canal at Dublin and sitting down and much to my amazement and delight, two swans came and did this amazing ballet which led to copulation. Now, the male swan, who’s the cob, he mounts the female who’s the pen so that she’s submerged. The moment of ignition takes place under water” (Longley, “Creative Minds”):

Even now I wish that you had been there
Sitting beside me on the riverbank:
The cob and his pen sailing in rhythm
Until their small heads met and the final
Heraldic moment dissolved in ripples.

This was a marriage and a baptism,
A holding of breath, nearly a drowning,
Wings spread wide for balance where he trod,
Her feathers full of water and her neck
Under the water like a bar of light. (*CP* 47)

⁸ In his perceptive analysis of “In Mayo,” Robert Welch has pointed out that “[t]here is no blurring of clear distinctions to evoke a rhapsodic blur” (62).

⁹ Perhaps another interpretative possibility would be to see this poem as tacitly addressing the problem of migration, especially painful for Ireland’s historical consciousness.

Simone Weil famously remarked that “[d]istance is the soul of the beautiful” (Weil 148), and this profound observation sets the philosophical context for the poem. The speaker is, at least in purely chronometric terms, removed from the scene of passionate love-making he is describing. The wistful invocation of another (probably female) person, who is otherwise only a vaguely intimated presence, serves to underline the passage of time separating the poet from the experience. It also shows that the sight of the rapturous congress continues to linger in his mind. Apart from that, the poem is graciously free from the weight of human affairs. This absence of human vantage allows for a language of delightfully lucent eroticism, as the intense moment of avian passion is recreated before our very eyes. It is most fortunate that Longley manages to keep in check any potentially intrusive commentary about the kind of effect that instance of evanescent eroticism had on himself. The description of the sexual act itself is accomplished with a compelling lyricism as language is moving towards a moment of near absolute unity with the thing described, and the poem is effortlessly carried along by its own lyrical momentum. Although religious idiom briefly intrudes at the beginning of stanza two, the poem remains a semi-pagan celebration of avian sexuality. The reference to sacraments may even suggest that the spontaneous love-making is a ritual which is its own justification. As Medbh McGuckian has pointed out: “The sacramental often intersects for [Michael Longley] with the natural world of begetting” (217).¹⁰

There are also poems where hazy eroticism and elusive predatoriness interanimate each other. “Peregrine” from *Gorse Fires* (1991) is a case in point:

I had been waiting for the peregrine falcon
As a way of coming to terms with the silence,
As a way of getting closer to you – an idea
Above the duach, downy whirlwinds, the wind’s
Mother-of-pearl for instance, an eddy of bones.

Did the peregrine falcon when I was cycling
To meet you, swoop from the corner of my eye
And in and out of the culvert and out of sight
As though to avoid colliding with me—wings
Under the road, a blur of spokes and feathers? (CP 169)

The opening lines of the poem are reminiscent of Ronald Stuart Thomas’s religious verse; the Welsh priest-poet often describes waiting

¹⁰ Interestingly, in the poem “In Mayo,” written just three year later, swans are described as “married for life” (CP 89).

for the sighting of a rare bird as figuratively representing waiting for an inscrutable deity to reveal itself.¹¹ But Longley's poem strikes off in a different direction. Admittedly, at first the "you" of the first stanza could easily lend itself to a theological reading, and supporting evidence this could be marshalled with ease: the waiting itself, the peregrine falcon as suggestive of spiritual wanderings, the bird flashing into presence only for a second, glimpsed out of the corner of the eye, etc. They might all steer the interpretation towards the familiar paradigms of religious verse, but the disarmingly unpretentious action of "cycling / To meet you" clearly shows that the "you" of the poem is no deity. One may wait for God (or a god) to appear, but (most likely) one can never cycle to meet Him. For all its intangibility and symbolism, the peregrine falcon the speaker has been waiting for is a real creature of bones and feathers. Moreover, one should allow the reading to be vectored by the poem's barely tangible yet strangely suggestive eroticism. As Seamus Heaney once noted, Longley's is a poetry "of direct amorous address, its dramatic voice the voice of indolent and occasionally deliquescent reverie, its subject the whole matter of sexual daydream" (140). Rather than evoking the awesome divinity of R. S. Thomas's verse, the "you" refers to the speaker's (probably female) companion, while the peregrine falcon might act as an airborne envoi between the two. The possible role of the bird as a go-between begins as pure potentiality, "an idea / Above the duach," but assumes more specificity when the speaker thinks he might have seen the falcon swooping down and flying out of sight. Its momentary emergence fails to bring the speaker closer to this lover, as he cannot be sure whether he really saw the bird at

¹¹ "Sea-watching" is probably the most sublime example of this mini-genre of religious verse (Thomas 306). Both poets share a fascination with the avian, but there is an important difference. For the Welsh priest-poet, birds are often seen as the least imperfect symbol of the operations of the divine in the world, and numerous poems approach the mystery of divinity by dint of the ornithic. The religious vantage of this kind is almost completely absent from Longley's poems on birds. It is true that in her theologically-oriented reading of "Owl Cases," Gail McConnell argues that in the poem, "Longley makes more explicit his birds' divine symbolism and the Christological context for this iconoclastic sensibility" (160), only to conclude that "[a]s a symbol of the divine, *Bubo bubo* remains as distant and silent as Luther's God." I must confess that I find this interpretation less than compelling. "Owl Cases" is not really a poem about the divine. The difference between R. S. Thomas and Michael Longley lies in the fact that the Welshman's poetry often offers theological ponderings under the form of ornithological metaphors, while Longley's poem reverses such dynamics, striving to capture the unique inscape of the bird through various metaphors, one of which happens to draw on a theological trope.

all; in fact the whole of the second stanza is couched in interrogative terms. The sighting remains uncertain and fleeting—a mere blur of spokes and feathers.

“Goldcrest” from *Gorse Fires* (1991) once again rings a note of tender eroticism combined with discreet mourning for the minute creature (goldcrest being the smallest of European birds):

When you weighed against
A dried-out cork
The goldcrest, then buried
The twelfth of an ounce
Which was its eye, feathers
And inner workings,
Did you release, love,
Among the tree tops
The ghost of a bouquet? (*CP* 172)

Longley is careful to get the ornithological details right: the goldcrest is an astonishingly colourful creature of very small size. That he bids it farewell with the lightest of threnodies is only too appropriate given the diminutive dimensions of the dead bird. When alive, the goldcrest may indeed be mistaken for a highly motile bouquet, since its colorful plumage looks like a miniature armful of flowers leaping gaily about in the treetops. The rhetorical question which ends the little elegy offers a suitably restrained mini-coda. In Kennedy-Andrews’s words, “The rhetorical questions suggest the speaker’s appreciation of the delicacy and wonder of the natural world, and the tentativeness and incompleteness of his efforts to find a form to express these intuitions” (95). This produces a poem full of lyrical grace, while resolutely staving off the dangers of misguided lachrymosity. Finally, one should not overlook the subtly erotic subcontext conjured up by the simple appellation “love,” addressed to the speaker’s beloved, who is also the careful performer of the funeral rite.¹²

Longley is well aware that the blackbird is highly significant in Irish writing (particularly associated with a famous medieval lyric about Belfast Lough). It comes as no surprise then that the blackbird is a recurrent presence in Longley’s verse. To wit, the seventh section of the terrifying poem “Ghetto” (*CP* 188) consists of just one distich: “Fingers leave shadows on a violin, harmonics / A blackbird fluttering between electrified fences.” At first this reads like a koanesque stanza lifted out of Wallace

¹² It is perhaps of relevance that death is in many religious traditions described as release from the pain of living, but it would be far-fetched to pursue this line of eschatological speculation in the context of the poem.

Stevens's famously cryptic poem about thirteen ways of looking at the blackbird, but here the bird's aliveness is made to contrast sharply with the deadly machinery of concentration camps. Another example of a highly contracted, haiku-like poem, which features the blackbird, is "Thaw" from *The Echo Gate* (1979), where the thaw is metaphorically likened to "a bird with one white feather" (CP 126), perhaps alluding back to Edward Thomas's poem on the same theme.

Yet another example is a poem entitled simply "Blackbird" from *The Ghost Orchid* (1995):

On our side of the glass
 you laid out the Blackbird's
 sleepy eyes, its twiggy
 toes, crisp tail-feathers
 and its wings wider than
 the light from two windows. (CP 218)

This tender lyric invites a more symbolist reading (one ought to remain wary though, for symbolist readings are always fraught with the dangers of eisegesis). Once again, Longley's affectionate attention to detail, which shows his kindness to other life forms, is very much in evidence. The opening line is suggestive of some sort of limbus between two very different kinds of reality, even though its exact nature is difficult to determine. That the span of the blackbird's wings blocks out the light from two windows comes across as vaguely minatory, once more, however, its exact import can hardly be established. Perhaps the real afflatus behind the poem was a simple desire to record what happened, and one is doing the poem a disservice by suggesting a symbolist potential lurking somewhere in those relatively straightforward lines.

One of Longley's latest poems with an ornithic component is "Heron" from the 2004 volume *Snow Water*. The title is slightly misleading, as the lyric offers little in the way of ornithological exploration. The eponymous heron is not really a bird, but the figure of Longley's late friend, Kenneth Koch. Longley himself has thus explained the inspiration behind the poem:

My daughter, Sarah, has done a drawing of a heron for the new book, and I have a poem in it which is dedicated to the memory of Kenneth Koch, the New York poet. There's such a timing, I realized he died late last year, on the afternoon we were driving down to Carrigskeewaun, and because he was very tall and thin like a heron, I think of him as a guardian spirit. "The Heron" brings together Carrigskeewaun and Central Park, and that was all I could offer him, really. (*Five Points*)

This semi-elegy is addressed directly to the American poet. Longley invokes numerous birds (curlews, lapwings, sparrows, starlings) but it is the heron that he singles out as a kind of avian guardian to watch over the spirit of his dead friend: “You are so tall and skinny I shall conscript a heron / to watch over you on hang-glider wings, old soldier, / An ashy heron, *ardea cinerea* . . .” (CP 323). In the closing lines the Irish poet urges his deceased companion in a voice of movingly restrained pathos: “Tuck your head in like a heron and trail behind you / Your long legs, take to the air above a townland / That encloses Carrigskeewaun and Central Park.”

This essay has only scratched the surface of Longleyan ornithology, and it would be unwise of it to make any claims to conclusiveness. Birds appear in Longley’s work so often that only a full-length book study could hope to do justice to their significance.¹³ One of the most conspicuous features of Longley’s avian poems is their diversity, with birds appearing in a variety of different contexts. The poems which limit themselves to verbal portrayal of their object often embark on a quest for the Holy Grail of all descriptive poetry—finding the word(s) to evoke the thing itself in a language of such semantic transparency that it would positively efface itself in the process. On the other hand, even in purely descriptive poems, birds can easily be (and Longley is on occasion “guilty” of this) forcibly recruited into the ranks of handy symbols, which the poet may then use to ponder the manifold pathologies of humanity. But Longley’s poems are always salvaged by a sense of tentative unease, of deferential wonder, as if the poet knew that by discussing the human by dint of the

¹³ Here is a fairly comprehensive list of Longley’s bird poems (the page numbers refer to his *Collected Poems*): “The Ornithological Section” (8; for an insightful, though slightly theologically biased, reading of this poem, see McConnell 158-59), the mini-cycle “The Corner of the Eye” (49) consists of four short poems on birds (49), “Whistle” (97), “True Stories” (99), “Home Ground” (121), “Architecture” (122), “Spring Tide” (124), “Among Waterbirds” (155), “Humming Bird” (174), “Quails’ Eggs” (175), “Swallow” (176), “Aubade” (178), “Autumn Lady’s Tresses” (197), “Perdix” (201), “According to Pythagoras” (202), “Oasis” (210), “Phoenix” (220), “Behind a Cloud” (223), “Birdsong” (233), “Chinese Occasions” (235), “Sandpiper” (239), “The Lapwing” (243), “Pale Butterwort” (244), “Scrap Metal” (274), “Leopardi’s Song Thrush” (277), “The Musical Box” (277), “Pascoli’s Portrait” (279), “Birds and Flowers” (282), “Flight Feathers” (288), “Marsh Marigolds” (289), “An October Sun” (292), “Stonechat” (296), “Dipper” (296), “Robin” (297), “Snipe” (297), “Wheatear” (298), “Two Pheasants” (298), “House Sparrows” (298), “Owl Cases” (303), “Edward Thomas’s Poem” (307), “Montale’s Dove” (313), “Up There” (314), “Woodsmoke” (317), “The Wren” (328).

avian, he is in danger of degrading the delightfully irreducible otherness of birds to something drab and familiar. His lyrics on birds' courting and mating rituals form another cluster of poems; they are usually energized by a sense of baffled joy at the innocence of avian erotics. Being the exquisite lyrical poet that he is, Longley is always at pains to recreate the dazzling choreographics of birds' lovemaking. Another distinct group are poems which address themselves to the mystery of violence. These are invariably accusatory towards humans and forgiving towards animals, even when the text darkens with the presence of birds of prey. While Longley always abhors human brutality, he may write about avian predatoriness with untroubled delight.

At the end of the day, for all their kinetic eloquence and chromatic charm, birds remain largely elusive of definition or description, even given the generous pliancy of poetic language. Longley is well aware of this; rather than insist on unlikely affinities between the two realms, he cherishes the distance by not striving for a sense of familiarity between birds and bipeds. If some poems recount an anecdote of a chance meeting, the encounter rarely leads to engagement or intimacy. If one side happens to be enriched by the experience, it is most certainly not the human. But their robust alterity is exactly what the poet finds so alluring about birds. If they were more like us, the poet would not find them so fascinating.

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**“Soldier Dolls, Little Adulteresses,
Poor Scapegoats, Betraying Sisters
and Perfect Meat”: The Gender of the
Early Phase of the Troubles and the
Politics of Punishments against Women
in Contemporary Irish Poetry**

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the literary representation of the beginnings of the Northern Irish Troubles with regard to a gender variable (women's roles and functions ascribed to them, mostly punitively, by men), in the selected poems by Heaney, Durcan, Boland, Meehan and Morrissey. The reading of Heaney's "Punishment" will attempt to focus not solely on the poem's repeatedly criticized misogyny but on analyzing it in a broader, historical context of the North's conflict. In Durcan's case, his prominent nationalist descent or his declared contempt for any form of paramilitary terrorism (including the IRA) do not seem to prevent him entirely from immortalizing female victims of the Troubles. Boland's attitude seems the most unequivocal: the clear aversion to the language of death and rendering Irish women's experiences (and children's) in this discourse. The article concludes with analysis of Meehan's "Southern" guilt for the situation of Catholics in the North with the simultaneous critique of perpetrated violence and Morrissey's complicated standpoint: atheist/neutral/Protestant/communist and her striving for the impossible impartiality in a war-ridden and politically divided country. Trying to avoid systemic victimization of Irish women, the paper intends to analyze the historical and political circumstances which made them more susceptible to various forms of attacks at the beginnings of the Troubles, as reflected in the titular labels.

Keywords: contemporary Irish poetry, gender discourse, the Troubles, Northern Ireland.

In her book *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and The Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* (1997), referred to by Princeton University Press as “the first feminist ethnography of the violence in Northern Ireland,” Begoña Aretxaga, a Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University, stresses that “[w]omen’s experiences of the war have been a widely ignored dimension of the ‘Troubles’” (“Ruffling a Few Patriarchal Hairs”). Consequently, the Northern Irish conflict tends to be portrayed in literature and culture as a predominantly male cause, and violent paramilitary attacks related to it are mostly rendered in the masculine war discourse. In the public eye, Irish women during the Troubles were perceived either as mothers mourning their beloved dead or as accidental female casualties of the male-centred struggle. Referring to the Troubles, Aretxaga clarifies that despite the cliché that all “women were united by a shared mothering nature that was contrary to violence. The reality of women’s experiences of political violence is, however, more complex and disturbing than these commonly held stereotypes.” Therefore, one can see a need to examine in depth the literary representations of women’s experiences during the Troubles, rendered by both male poets and Irish women authors. In doing so, one can probe the intersections of the war discourse, sexualized female images and nationalist, symbol-ridden imagery concerning the North. What is more, as emphasized by Lloyd,

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feminist critique . . . has to be located not in a generalized criticism of “men of violence,” but in the analysis of the totalizing effect of an identity thinking that discretely links terrorism to the state in whose name it is condemned. For what is at stake is not so much the practice of violence—which has long been institutionalized in the bourgeois state—as its anesthetization in the name of a freedom expressed in terms of national or racial integration. (30–31)

Bearing this in mind, the following article commences with Heaney’s fourth collection *North* (1975), published during the most intense phase of the Troubles. As most critics cited here agree, the volume derived from the poet’s sense of responsibility and from the tribal need for the collective identity of the Catholic minority. In his lecture titled “Feeling into Words” Heaney himself explains that “to forge a poem is one thing, to forge the uncreated conscience of the race, as Stephen Dedalus put it, is quite another and places daunting pressures and responsibilities on anyone who would risk the name of poet” (282). Historically, Heaney’s own political conscience seems to have been forged during the Belfast Riots of August 1969. During the protests, as the historian John Dorney states, the RUC used “armoured cars equipped with machine guns” against Catholic

civilians and did nothing to prevent Loyalists from burning down the two streets inhabited by Catholic families. According to the same source, during the RUC attack on Catholic Divis Flats, a six-year old boy was shot. In total, the 1969 Belfast Riots' death toll amounts to eight people, while 750 sustained serious injuries (Dorney). As such, one can understand the reason why Heaney acknowledges how formative the August 1969 Belfast events were for him: "From that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate for our predicament" (279). The possessive pronoun "our" appropriately emphasizes Heaney's identification and his own emotional involvement in the process of forging the "racial" consciousness of his community. Much in line with the above, Brown argues that

[a]ny poet concerned to accept with full responsibility the weight of the actual in the last two decades in the North of Ireland has perforce had to reckon with the challenge of the monstrous events there which have shaken the province like repeated earthquakes. Many Northern poems written since 1968 . . . have been weighed too by earnest, imaginatively serious attempts to comprehend the crisis there in the light of larger experience, deeper truths, more universal realities than the merely local. (65)

Therefore, in his 1975 volume, Heaney strives to look at the Troubles "in the light of larger experience," in order give the North a sense of communal identification. As Goodby highlights: "The outbreak of the 'Troubles' pushed Heaney to reveal in a less crudely sublimated way the sources of his own nationalist and Catholic inheritance of rupture, loss and violence" ("*New Wave*" 127). Following this line of thinking, Brown explicates the poet's need for seeking the "tribal," community-binding narratives in the past, claiming that "[i]nterpretative myths were accordingly required, explanatory context urgently needed" (65).¹ Taking into account the time in which it was composed and its politically relevant subject matter, Heaney's collection *North* constitutes a meaningful "attempt to define and interpret the present by bringing it into significant relation with the past" (Heaney 282).² Indeed, it is as if Heaney had, as Goodby called it,

¹ On the other hand, as Johnston points out in "Violence in Seamus Heaney's Poetry," "[o]ne may derive a mythic notion from *North*, but the poems are too explanatory, tentative, and dialectical to compose a coherent myth" (118).

² In the frequently cited, self-explanatory passage, Heaney admits having come across P. V. Glob's study *The Bog People* "the year the killing started, in 1969"; further, the poet acknowledges that "the unforgettable photographs of

“exhumed” (“New Wave” 127) the needed Northern Irish “tribal” context from the pre-historic bogland in the North of Europe, seeking “analogues with Viking Ireland and with the cults of death and fertility in iron age Denmark” (Brown 65).³ In *The Bog People*, Heaney located “an archetypal pattern” “more than an archaic barbarous rite,” as he put it (Heaney 280). In the ancient Mother Goddess Nerthus who, it was claimed, demanded annual human sacrifices to ensure the land’s prosperity, Heaney recognized her modern re-embodiment, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, who sanctified “the tradition of Irish political martyrdom” (280). In doing so, as Johnston argues, “a bardic persona enlarges the Ulster violence to include the state of mind called *north*, the sinister side of man . . . Current inhumanity is displaced by ancient inhumations” (*Irish Poetry after Joyce* 145–46). Following this vein, one could argue that it is *north* rather than the North that constitutes Heaney’s main preoccupation in his 1975 collection. Similarly to Salman Rushdie’s “Imaginary Homelands,” Heaney creates his Northern Ireland from the resources available to him: myths, old and new narratives, ancient rituals, his hopes, dreams, fears and obsessions.⁴

After all, *North* operates around “an exhumation of that which has been buried; psychic, linguistic and the actual disinterment” (Goodby, “*New Wave*” 127). In his full-length study *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness into History*, Goodby clarifies that the need for a myth “provided, it was felt, access to the atavism fuelling the ‘Troubles, at a level below which mere ‘rationalism’ could not reach” (216). Similarly, Cairns and Richards indicate “Heaney’s excavations into the psychic darkness of self and community . . . in which the modern desire to engage actively in the historical process is rendered impotent by the very completeness of intellectual understanding” (144). If the path to understanding lies beneath the coherent and structured, then, one faces a clear “calculated schizophrenia” (Johnston, *Irish Poetry after Joyce* 145).⁵ Accordingly, critics stress that this split manifests itself

these victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past . . . and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles” (280).

³ Goodby coins an adequate pun term on Heaney’s bogland, prehistoric and farmland themes: “corpuses” (*Irish Poetry* 151).

⁴ Referring to the poems created during the initial stage of the Troubles, Heaney admits: “I felt it imperative . . . to encompass the perspective of a human reason and . . . grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity” (279). The quoted passage undoubtedly elucidates Heaney’s official motivation conveyed to his readers, as it does communicate the poet’s authorized position. Nonetheless, it does not give much insight into latent and unconscious compulsions in the poet’s mind.

⁵ With reference to “Punishment,” Lloyd adds that “the poem rehearses with striking fidelity the propensity of bourgeois thought to use ‘reason’ to

even on the structural level of *North's* layout: its division into two parts (Johnston, *Irish Poetry after Joyce* 145).

As analyzed here, "Punishment" represents a canonical example of the poet's attempt to integrate the divided parts of his conscious and subconscious loyalties and identifications. In "Punishment," Heaney clearly enters a very unstable ground of explicatory violence, making brutality against women sound more "domesticated" and, thus, less abhorrent. On a declarative level, Heaney, as one could expect, does not justify punishing women for their assumed social offences or misconduct, yet, in a way, his poem does it for him. It is not, however, merely the type of penalty but the grounds for it that can raise one's objections. The problem remains that all the alleged "crimes" depicted in Heaney's "Punishment" are sexually-related transgressions committed (or claimed to have been committed) solely by women.⁶ Contemporarily, openly articulated accusations concerning "voyeurism, necrophilia, blood-sacrifice and hopeless abjection" (Goodby, *Irish Poetry* 158) seem to overshadow the illusory gender-neutral "tribal" dimension of Heaney's 1975 volume. The group of people can never become the inclusive community if one fraction of it, is seen as more disadvantaged than others, regardless whether on political or gender grounds. If, as Corcoran claims, the poet performs his "service to community—which is, in Heaney's reading of it here, virtually the creation of a community" (100), he seems to be constructing "his community" on physically and discursively violated female corpses.

Heaney's frequently debated poem "Punishment" examined in this article, seems to conceive of the gender-based origin of violence against women as the community binding force.⁷ With regard to Northern Ireland, punishment attacks of tarring and feathering were executed on women accused of maintaining sexual relations with British soldiers or the RUC policemen. Tarring and feathering was frequently accompanied by retaliatory hair shaving. Recalling the Biblical roots of having women's hair

represent irrationality as the emotional substratum of identifications, which, given as at once natural and logical, are in fact themselves thoroughly 'irrational'" (33).

⁶ Due to such a perspective, early feminist critics would point out that "[i]n his bog poems, Heaney sexualizes the religious conceptions of Celtic and north European prehistory" (Coughlan 100). Looking at more recent criticism, one could find more and more voices arguing that an "important weakness of *North* is its use of gender stereotypes" (Goodby, *Irish Poetry* 161). Much in line, Goodby argues that "Heaney is a poet who cannot deal with . . . female agency, . . . woman defined in biological terms. . . . [he] subsumes the individual female figure" (*Irish Poetry* 162).

⁷ Tarring and feathering, as argued by Ashleigh Wallace, can be traced back to the times of Crusades. Moreover, Jeffries provides the exact date of 1189 when Richard the Lionheart first imposed this castigation for theft.

punitively shaved off, Antony Beevor locates this practice among Visigoths; in medieval times it was used as punishment for alleged female adultery, and it appeared in the 1920s. During the Second World War, as stated by Beevor, the penalty was applied to German female citizens who had “non-Aryan” lovers and to women from the occupied territories who fraternized with German soldiers. Beevor reports that in France during the World War II the so-called “tondues—the shorn women” were tarred, stripped of their clothes and carried on the vans to show them around as warning to other citizens. As clearly demonstrated, tarring and feathering, and hair shaving, possess a perceptible gendered dimension. Heaney’s “Punishment” depicts a wide spectrum of chastisement of women, from making them look unattractive, and public shaming, to murder. Notably, as maintained before, in all cases the rationale for male violence is sexually based. In other words, the women depicted in “Punishment” are found guilty of contravening the established sexual code of a given society, be it ancient or modern. Along with each of these platforms, the female body is regarded as the property of the community in which women live, and, as such, this community may feel entitled to enforce “justice” for the misuse of its commodity.

Referring to Heaney’s poetry of the examined period, Corcoran argues: “Scrupulously self-critical, it constantly makes enquiry into its own resources and potential, its affiliations and responsibilities; into, in the end, its own exemplary status” (101). In “Punishment,” the modifier “artful” is also selected cautiously and consciously. It makes a witty pun on “artistic,” whereas, in fact, it denotes the opposite: sly, deceitful, even devious. Defining himself in such a self-deprecating way, might be regarded as a proof of the speaker’s sincerity and the impartiality of his own judgement. Assuming that the male voice in the poem is perfectly aware of his textually dubious stand, and yet seems determined to occupy this position in the discourse, weakens rather than strengthens the persona’s credibility. Therefore, rather than accepting Corcoran’s argument,⁸ in the light of the textual analysis, one feels inclined to subscribe to Lloyd’s claim that in “Punishment” the speaker’s declared self-awareness turns out to be a carefully assumed “pose of ethical self-query” (32).⁹

⁸ Corcoran as if defending Heaney reminds about “the extreme pressure of its historical moment,” the poet being “self-dividedly alert to its own potential to give offence; acts of offence, and the recrimination, or indeed revenge, consequent on the giving of offence” (103). The critic sees *North* as the movement towards “a new kind of exemplariness: more elusive and uncertain, still conscious of political obligation” (Corcoran 104).

⁹ In “Punishment,” it is not only what the male persona perceives but how he looks at the female corpse. Coughlan was one of the first to express objection

In “Punishment,” the speaker’s obsession with the scrutinized female corpse seems to be so intense that he claims to co-experience the physical sensations that the murdered woman would have gone through. His textually co-experienced sense perceptions derive from his presumptuous usurpations of the victim’s inimitable insight into the act of violence that she was exposed to. In the speaker’s view, the frosty wind which makes the victim defenceless and puts her body in discomfort, hardens her nipples, as if in a state of sexual stimulation. In a visually gratifying act, these highly sensitive erotic zones are compared to semi-precious stones. Therefore, Eugene O’Brien’s statement that “desire is enunciated as some form of racial revenge which functions as a means of validating the selfhood of the nationalist consciousness” (82) is not far from truth. One can argue that amber in “Punishment” stands for the frozen-in-time qualities that embalm the transcendental “tribal” identity “frozen” and unified inside.

In the image of the chest as the rib-cage, the modifier “frail” echoes the alliterated pair of “ribs” and “rigging.” The central “r” returns in “drowned,” only to be softened by “body in the bog.” The frontal sound pattern around “n” reappears in alliterated “the nape / of her neck,” “naked,” “nipples,” “nose a ring” (*A Rage for Order* 203–04). Heaney’s organization of the poem around what he himself previously defined as English masculine consonants rather than Irish feminine vowels puts the argument into further scrutiny. Consequently, Anglo-Saxon kenning is employed in the compact signifier for the head, “brain-firkin.” Further in “Punishment,” the speaker discloses deriving his textual pleasure from having access to the hidden anatomical female parts: “brain’s exposed / and darkened combs, / your muscles’ webbing / and all your numbered bones” (*A Rage for Order* 204). Moreover, “floating rods and boughs” make the persona seek the comparative ground between the dead woman and “a barked sapling” (*A Rage for Order* 204). What comes to mind is a scalped human and a seedling without its protective shelter, exposed, and not fully developed, never allowed to mature. Skinning the outer, shielding layer of the seed is one more way of denoting the victim’s defencelessness and the abuse done to her. The expression “the memories of love” (*A Rage for Order* 204) seems to destabilize discursively the declining intensity of the faded sense-perceptions. As if to compensate for the loss of love, the speaker declares his affection for the studied dead woman: “I almost

to Heaney’s sexualization and highlights the fetishization of the dead female body (97) and the fact that he “aestheticizes the horror of a murdered corpse and presents it as a natural phenomenon” (104). In line with that, other critics also noticed that in the examined poem, “[v]oyeurism is criticized merely as a pose, never for its function in purveying the intimate knowledge of violence by which it is judged” (Lloyd 32).

love you” (RAO 204). Nonetheless, the modifier “almost” diminishes the textual power of his pronouncement. What lessens it even more considerably is the contrasting clause beginning with “but” (“but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence”) (*A Rage for Order* 204).

What strikes one is the decisiveness with which the persona in “Punishment” pronounces his readiness to abstain from a potential intervention during the girl’s murder. Willingly or not, his silent unresponsiveness endorses violence against women in the name of ancestral customs and clannish conventions.¹⁰ In other words, viewed in this light, the “tribal” bonds in the minority communities can be perceived as being reinforced by the shared acts of violence against women in which “the concept of man as producer and as producer of himself through his products, posits an original identity which precedes difference and conflict and which is to be reproduced in the ultimate unity that aesthetic works both prefigure and prepare” (Lloyd 17).

Consequently, in Heaney’s “Punishment,” numerous passages and images reinforce the “aesthetic politics”¹¹ of the war discourse. The phrase “a stubble of back corn” (*A Rage for Order* 204) refers to the remains of the field, burnt to the ground, possibly after the bomb explosion or the gas attack. The blindfolded face implies a potential method of killing: execution by shooting. Similarly, soiled bandages might connote combat wounds but the colour is also reminiscent of soldiers’ darkening of the conspicuous, attention-drawing paler body parts. The bandages’ tint redirects one to women’s black-smearred heads and faces. The dead girl’s tarred face and her shaved head constitute the discursive common ground with the Troubles. Like earlier related historical contexts for tarring women, in the North this form of punishment also had clear gender and sexual grounds. During the punishment attacks in the early Troubles, the assaulted women were referred to as “soldier dolls” (“IRA Shave and Daub Girl, 16”). In her article Wallace describes in detail the punitive procedure and particularizes the several stages involved in it. The punishment attack would begin with a female victim being kidnapped and immobilized by masked men (“IRA Shave and Daub Girl, 16”). The woman’s hair was shaved, and, then, she was fastened to a lamppost. Burning tar was emptied upon her face and neck. The final stage was putting feathers upon the tar. Wallace stresses the reasons for such an elaborate practice: making the victim exposed,

¹⁰ On the other hand, Corcoran claims that Heaney in “humility and submissiveness to the exemplar” performs “his service to a community” (100).

¹¹ Lloyd explains: “Aesthetic politics in turn represents images of origin and unity to convey an ethical demand for the political coherence which will override whatever differences impede a unification in continuity with original identity” (17).

literally in the limelight, shamed in her own local district. The additional aspect comes from the fact that, during the chastisement, women's sexual appeal is targeted, and their desirability is supposed to be diminished. The speaker in "Punishment" admits witnessing the acts of violence directed against Irish women during the Troubles, seeing them covered in tar and left mortified. He confesses that:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings. (*A Rage for Order* 204)

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Declaring: "I who have stood dumb," the speaker proves that he does not shun taking responsibility for his ethically problematic behaviour. And yet he appears to show no trace of remorse. Ruth McDonald from BBC Radio 4, in her account "Has Northern Ireland Left the Past Behind?", draws upon the testimony of MacDermond, another eye-witness to 1970s IRA punishment attacks at the beginning of the Troubles: "People—while they might not even have supported that—they weren't going to interfere, they would have walked on." As demonstrated by MacDermond, the Irish Catholics in the North did not unanimously approve of the attacks on women on the alleged grounds of their fraternizing with occupant soldiers. Nonetheless, a majority of this population would, as the narrator of the poem, "cast a stone of silence" and turn away their eyes. Such an approach of the Catholic minority of pretending not to notice or not to hear was in line with the IRA official policy expressed in the doctrine "whatever you say, say nothing." The legacy of this policy led to the situation that "even today, those who speak out, face walls of silence" (McDonald). The reason for people's silent condoning of the punishment attacks stems from the fact that among the Catholic minority in the North, the IRA were regarded, at that time, as "the gatekeepers of the community" (McDonald). In denial of any legitimate authority fair to Irish Catholics during the Troubles, the IRA assumed the para law-implementing role in Northern Ireland, even though not all nationalists supported their militant course of action. During the conflict, the British Army frequently abused their power and Catholics "had to endure daily armed police and military men patrolling their streets, searching their houses, offering verbal abuse, harassing, arresting and killing" (Aretxaga). Historically, it needs stressing that the poor, working class, Republican communities did not always treat British soldiers with distrust and animosity. Weinraub reminds us that before the escalation of violence in 1970s, armed forces were perceived by Catholics as their defenders against organized, aggressive Protestant gangs. It was only later that RUC and the military's actions

enraged the minority by indiscriminately searching Catholic homes, placing large neighborhoods under curfew and virtual martial law to weed out a few gunmen, allowing “provocative” Protestant marches in Catholic ghettos, and implementing the provincial government’s policy of interning suspected terrorists without trial. The Catholics also say that the army seized up only Catholics. (Weinraub)

Bearing this in mind, even though the persona in “Punishment” gives testimony to the emotive response that the aforementioned aggressive attacks induced in demeaned women, he is still ready to equate the violation of the community rules with treason. Likewise, the adjective “betraying” passes a moral judgement on Irish women’s supposedly unpatriotic behaviour. Wallace argues that “feathers . . . would stick to the tar for days, acting as a reminder of their so-called crimes against their community.” In line with the above, Wallace remarks that this form of public penalty during the Troubles was directed against “perceived anti-social behaviour, with the aim of humiliating victims in front of their friends and neighbours.” As shown, the effectiveness of the punishment attacks operates on social dishonour, since targeted women were stigmatized in public as immoral and disloyal. Judging by their disfigured physical appearance, other citizens could immediately recognize “soldier dolls’ sins.”

As demonstrated so far, “Punishment” revolves around the double-voiced discursive palimpsest. On the one hand, the speaker seems to empathize with the female victim’s standpoint, but, on the other, he patronizingly addresses the dead woman as “little adulteress” (*A Rage for Order* 204). The modifier “little” reveals his alleged moral superiority over the murdered girl. It moderates the victim’s textual authority, depicting her as a petty delinquent who was disciplined for disobeying the conventions of the moral conduct accepted by her community. Concerned at it may seem at first, the expression “[m]y poor scapegoat” (*A Rage for Order* 204) is in fact equally condescending: as it implies that the target was naïve enough to be manipulated and taken advantage of as the community’s sexual deterrent. Consequently, the appellation “my poor” suggests the speaker’s ironic detachment from the victim. What is more, the male voice insists on the phrasing “you were punished” (*A Rage for Order* 204) which is a crude euphemism in comparison to “they murdered you.”

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that any kind of naming is an act of violence.¹² In her reading of Derrida in “The Time of Violence:

¹² Derrida writes: “To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute. To think the unique *within* the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture

Deconstruction and Value,” Grosz rightly observes that “[t]he violence of nomination, of language or writing, is an expropriation, covered over and concealed by the violence that names itself as the space of non-violence, the field of the law” (194). Therefore, the law disguised as non-violence normalizes the violence of the inscriptive and regulatory system. For that reason, the actual infringement of the legal regulations is partly the effect of the earlier linguistic appropriation and its later systemic legal concealment. Grosz argues:

Empirical violence, war, participates in both these modes of violence (violence as inscription, violence as the containment of inscription, the containment of violence). Mundane or empirical violence . . . “denudes: the latent or submerged violence of the law, whose transgression it affirms, while thus affirming the very force and the necessity of law. . . the violence we strive to condemn in its racist, sexist, classist and individualist terms is itself a violent consequence of an entire order whose very foundation is inscriptive, differential and thus violent. It is no longer clear how something like a moral condemnation of violence is possible, or at least how it remains possible without considerable self-irony. (194)

One could argue that, in “Punishment,” Heaney himself crosses the aforementioned barrier, arguing, in fact, more forcibly in favour of what might be called “civilized violence” rather than against “civilized outrage.” Lloyd notices that “[i]n locating the source of violence beyond even sectarian division, Heaney renders it symbolic of a fundamental identity of the Irish race” (31). In this way, the poet seems to agree that in the name of the “tribal,” unified consciousness, the violent suppression of any difference can take place. In this way, identitarian “inscriptive” violence appears to acquire a nearly national trait.

Despite the fact that Loyalists officially condemned punishment attacks as “organized brutality” (McDonald), they also used this kind of retribution themselves. According to *The Independent*, both sides of the conflict in the North, Republicans and Loyalists alike, were responsible for organized attacks upon women from their own communities (“IRA Shave and Daub Girl, 16”). This brings to light another noteworthy aspect: during the military conflict, women get punished not only by “the enemy” forces, but by their own population. The poem’s conclusion brings an unexpected finale: the modifier “civilized” with the positive connotations of culture and enlightenment weakens the weight of “outrage,” making it if not less fierce and brutal, then more humanized. The modifier “exact” signifies

of the arche-writing, arche-violence, loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence” (112, emphasis original).

the relevance of the deadly revenge, let alone its correctness. The adjective “tribal” echoes “civilized,” in the sense of referring to the whole community. Only “intimate” in the understanding of secretive and innermost, brings the question of retribution back to its sexual origin. It is a reminder that women’s “crime” was committed in the realm of privacy and not in the public sphere. Brewster rightly locates in the abjected female bodies, the derivative for the collective consciousness sought by the speaker/poet:

The tanned and tarred bodies provide the ground upon which an agonized poetic self-consciousness is forged (crafted authentically *and* counterfeited), but the exploitation of the exposed female body remains beyond question, as does the mythic inevitability of such rough but exact justice. The poem finds a conniving closure in the precision of its ambiguity and its displacement of the fear of abjection that underlies both “civilized” and “tribal” responses to the act of punishment. (27, emphasis original)

The speaker in “Punishment” does not want to give unanimous endorsement to violence, implying his unofficial authorization via the comprehension of its motives.¹³ It seems that, according to Heaney, even though society has to publicly condemn any violent transgressions, it is governed by the rules that are not less uncivilized than those forbidden by law. The situation of Catholics in the North during the Troubles, was just one instance of such legal procedures. Coughlan aptly observes:

The publicly expressible “civilized outrage” belongs to a language which the persona of all these poems feels is denied him and his ethnic group; he constructs Northern Irish Catholics as, like Celts to the ancient Romans, a race mysterious, barbarous, inarticulate, lacking in civility. But one might argue, the result of this expressed sense of marginalization by the speaker is to make the girl seem doubly displaced: the *object* of equivocal compassion by a *subject* himself forced to be covert, himself the *object* in turn of others’ dominant and therefore oppressive civility. (103, emphasis original)

Even if one agrees that the close-knit communities may have the right to their own “tribal justice,” the problem remains as to why this tribal justice has to operate on female bodies. Aretxaga notes that during the Troubles in the North

¹³ As appropriately stressed by Lloyd, “contempt for ‘connivance in civilized outrage’ is underexamined. . . . the ‘artful voyeurism’ of the poem is supposedly criticized at the safe stance of the remote and lustful ‘civilized observer,’ yet is smuggled back in as the unspoken and unacknowledged condition of the ‘exactness’ of ‘tribal, intimate revenge’” (31).

Women's bodies seem to provide a much more malleable material than men's for the inscription of state or nationalist meanings. Thus, their bodies are transformed not only into allegories (female representations of Ireland have a long tradition) but are also subjected to control as the very terrain in which the war is waged. Women's bodies were, like their houses, searched by male soldiers in hated surveillance operations. Women's bodies were tarred and feathered by zealous nationalists in punishment for loving British soldiers during the early seventies. Women's bodies were assaulted in Armagh prison by armed men in searching for forbidden skirts and berets used as IRA uniforms. It was at this level of the body that women revolted and symbolized a different experience of the war.

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During the Troubles, the war discourse would turn women not only into "poor scapegoats" but also into "perfect meat" for the war discourse. The latter denomination was used with regard to Irishwomen by Paul Durcan in "In Memory of Those Murdered in the Dublin Massacre, May 1974." The poem commemorates the victims of the bloodiest massacre during the Troubles, with the biggest death toll, which ironically took place in the South and not in the North. The bombing attacks rendered in "In Memory of Those Murdered in the Dublin Massacre, May 1974" were carried out by the UVF Loyalist paramilitaries.¹⁴ After the TV documentary *Hidden Hand: The Forgotten Massacre* (1993), the massacre acquired a nickname: "forgotten" and "unsolved," since the terrorists who caused it were never charged and convicted (Fleming). When analyzing the poem, one has to take into account Durcan's disapproval not just of Loyalist but also of Republican militarism. What is more, Durcan has made a name for himself for "his passionate opposition to the IRA" (Goodby, "New Wave" 125), which taking into account the poet's nationalist ancestries, could be regarded as not so obvious but not uncommon either.

"In Memory of Those Murdered in the Dublin Massacre, May 1974" refers to three car bomb explosions in Dublin (twenty six civilians, an unborn child and a stillborn, were killed immediately or died as a result of the explosion); the fourth bombing took place the same day in Monaghan (seven people were killed on the spot or died because of sustained injuries) (Interim Report 2–4). What distinguishes Dublin terrorist attacks from other bomb explosions during the Troubles is the aforementioned externalization of the warfare onto the South and not just the North, the unprecedented scale of fatalities, and the fact that among the dead, there were several very young children and numerous women. The persona in Durcan's poem appears to be shocked that the military conflict can engage into its discourse

¹⁴ UVF claimed responsibility for them, though explosions were allegedly supported by the British intelligence (Pallister).

even unborn children. Two victims of the Dublin explosions were unborn: a nine-month baby who died with Collette Doherty, the mother carrying the child, and a stillborn girl Martha O'Neill delivered after the terrorist attack (Interim Report 2–3). Ironically, once life may not even begin when one can be affected by the nationalist ideology. The expression “grime-ridden sunlight” (Durcan 53) seems to indicate the persona’s perception of the armed conflict aimed at civilians as a stain on one’s moral consciousness. The statement concerning “the labels / That freedom fighters stick onto the lost destinies of unborn / children” (Durcan 53) appears to indicate that the alliterated appellation “freedom fighters” is used in a contemptuously pejorative rather than a glorifying context. The speaker in “In Memory of Those Murdered in the Dublin Massacre, May 1974” claims:

Such a moment as would provide the heroic freedom fighter
With his perfect meat.
And I think of those heroes—heroes?—and how truly
Obscene is war. (Durcan 53)

According to the background data available in the Interim Report on the Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan Bombings, half of the victims of the first bombing, all victims of the third bombing, and all but one of the second attack were women (1-3). Therefore, Durcan looks at post-massacre Dublin from the perspective of a day after, and through the angle of ordinary, unsuspecting female citizens: young waitresses and an elderly cleaning lady, working in the city centre. The opening line: “And the waitresses cannot help but be happy and gay” (Durcan 53) seems to echo Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” (the poem’s proper title is “I wandered lonely as a cloud”): “The poet could not but be gay / In such a jocund company” (219). The natural, spontaneous joy of youthful women “As they swipe at the table-tops with their dishcloths-” (Durcan 53) evokes in the persona a moment of epiphanous revelation. Oblivious to the Troubles, girls remain unaware that they could be consumed at any time by armed fanatics as the “perfect meat” for their “freedom” struggle. The conclusion about the war’s obscenity criticizes the textual indecency: using sexualized female bodies as the ammunition for male nationalist rhetoric.

The poem “In Memory of Those Murdered in the Dublin Massacre, May 1974” ends with an image of the old Irish woman who mops the floor in the pub, supposedly, removing the traces of the earlier explosions. As Szymborska writes in “The End and the Beginning,” “Someone has to push the rubble / to the side of the road, / so the corpse-filled wagons can pass” (228). As frequently stressed by women critics (including Eavan Boland),

saw the normal home-going rush of people turned a scene of carnage. There were bodies, some limbless, some blasted beyond recognition, some burned lying on the pavements” (2). At this point, Heaney’s reference to Kathleen Ni Houlihan emerges again at the surface of the discourse.

For Irish poets, born in the South in general, and in Dublin, in particular (i.e. Durcan, Boland and Meehan), 1974 paramilitary Loyalist bombing attacks have become the tangible and palpable, traumatizing manifestation of the Troubles in their no longer safe locality. Boland, in her poem “Child of Our Time,” dedicated to underage victims of 1974, writes in a lyrical manner similar to Auden, “Yesterday I knew no lullaby / But you have taught me overnight” (*Collected Poems* 30). The persona maintains that her song is derived from the killed boy’s “final cry,” from whom she has learnt:

[. . .] from your unreasoned end its reason
Its rhythm from the discord of your murder
Its motive from the fact you cannot listen. (*Collected Poems* 30)

Because, in the speaker’s view, the war discourse is the language of death, in “Child of Our Time” writing comes from the dead and only this way can one learn its idiom. Its discourse remains oblivious, as Yeats would phrase it, to “the living stream” (120). The war speech does not encompass the names of animals, bedtime stories, nursery rhymes or protective folktales that can teach one how to survive. The persona in “Child of Our Time” argues:

We who should have known how to instruct
With rhymes for your waking, rhythms for your sleep,
Names for the animals you took to bed,
Tales to distract, legends to protect
Later an idiom for you to keep
And living, learn, must learn from you dead. (*Collected Poems* 30)

In “Child of Our Time,” the speaker assumes the position of the mother who looks at her son’s empty cradle. The persona accepts the collective responsibility for being a part of the system that legitimized the war discourse and, thus, enabled the bombing to take place. Similarly to Durcan, Boland evokes the linguistic emblem of the cracked images and fractured bones, severed limbs of people who died in 1974 terrorist attack. As Boland pronounces in “Time and Violence,” referring to women in the nationalist tradition, this wound/scar is what language did to us, pleading: “Write us out of the poem. Make us human” (*Collected Poems* 208). Even though the speaker in “Child of Our Time” identifies with the victim’s

mother, she is not a victim herself: she has found a voice to articulate her protest and her refusal to endorse the discourse of war. The persona maintains:

To make our broken images, rebuild
 Themselves around your limbs, your broken
 Image, find for your sake whose life our idle
 Talk has cost, a new language. Child
 Of our time, our times have robbed your cradle.
 Sleep in a world your final sleep has woken. (*Collected Poems* 30)

Concluding, the female voice in “Child of Our Time” asks “for a new language.” And she is not the only person who felt such a need after the 1974 Dublin massacre. The BBC in the report “1974: Bombs Devastate Dublin and Monaghan” quotes the words of the Irish Prime Minister, Liam Cosgrave:

I do not know which evil men did this but everyone who practiced violence or preached violence or condoned violence must bear his share of responsibility. It will bring home to us what the people of Northern Ireland have been suffering for five long years.

As shown in Paula Meehan’s poem “Borders,” without much first-hand experience of the Troubles until 1974, citizens of the Republic, could enjoy a relatively normal, safe, ordinary life, marked by friendliness and positive emotions, experienced “in the easy / Careless way” (*Return* 20). Faced with the terror of the Troubles in the North, the female voice seems to be apologetic for her own comfortable and unperturbed “Southern” existence. To put it crudely, the Republic’s price for its security and prosperity was accepting the partition of Ireland. One can see that the persona feels guilt-ridden and that the embarrassment referred to in the poem is not the addressee’s but her own. The speaker in “Borders” admits:

When you spoke of your embarrassment
 At the warmth of the South
 I laughed and hugged you in the easy
 Careless way of a Free Stater
 Suckled on the promise
 That at last the war had ended. (*Return* 20)

The final stanza of “Borders” elaborates on the theme of the South/North division with a gendered reference to the IRA punishment attacks (see “what state had tarred it”). It seems plausible to assume that what

was unmarked in the South (like the tar) in the North carried the burden of the aforementioned political connotations. The expression “the wars between men” clearly indicates the poet’s detachment from the male war discourse. Her argument seems to be that the Troubles were not women’s war, and that Irishwomen were trapped in-between two conflicted militant discourses. Such a view, however, does not seem to do justice to those female Republican fighters who supported and were actively engaged in the conflict. The persona in “Borders” concludes:

The difference in a stretch of road,
The colour of the tar
Told what state had tarred it,
Told us of borders
And the wars between men. (*Return* 21)

Unlike “Borders,” Meehan’s “No Go Area” renders an insider’s perspective on the Troubles. Historically, as stated in Flakes and Elliot’s *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory 1968-1993* during the Troubles, until 1972, the titular concept denoted mostly the territory beyond the jurisdiction of the Army and the RUC, barricaded and patrolled by the IRA, or less frequently by the UDA (247). In common understanding, in the North, “no go area” means the space beyond the dividing lines of strictly Loyalist or Republican neighbourhoods. In general, the term refers to any dangerous districts, violence and crime-ridden zones, controlled by illegal organizations such as gangs or paramilitaries (“No go area”). Ever since the Troubles, opposed communities have been separated with walls and dividing street lines. The knowledge of this war geography could save one’s life, as going into the disputed ground was regarded as a challenge and a provocation.

Entering “No Go Area,”¹⁵ as shown in Meehan’s poem, Irish women might be “stripped and searched / for hidden weapons” (*The Man* 31). During the Troubles, as earlier reminded by Aretxaga, “Women’s bodies were, like their houses, searched by male soldiers in hated surveillance operations.” Aretxaga explains that women were also searched during their prison visits to their male partners. “No Go Area” demands the authorization of one’s language, as the choice of words, accent or even intonation could either provoke violence or secure a safe passage. Linguistic identification, starting from the commonplace case in point of Londonderry vs Derry, for example, was one of the distinctive ways in which both communities would

¹⁵ The feminist, symbolic reading of this poem is included in my article “Beyond the Border of Body and Language: Moving on: Shapeshifting of Irish Women’s Location in Paula Meehan’s Poetry.”

communicate during the Troubles. Furthermore, Meehan implies in “No Go Area,” that during the Troubles, as in any other military conflict, women were regarded as gendered war trophies, and, as shown in “Punishment,” their representational and actual existence in the war discourse was sexualized (see the reference to zone five in the poem).

As demonstrated in Sinéad Morrissey’s 1996 volume *There Was Fire in Vancouver*, at “UVF-run rank,” during the aforementioned linguistic identification, one’s accent or the derivation of one’s family name could become a matter of life-or-death importance. UVF denotes the Ulster Volunteer Force that is the militant, paramilitary Loyalist organization (Flakes and Elliot 342–45). Only in 1992, “the UVF was believed to have accounted for at least eleven murders”; among the victims there was also a female student, Sheena Campbell (Flakes and Elliot 344). In Morrissey’s poem “Thoughts in a Black Taxi,” the petrified (“sweated”) father who feared that his insufficiently Protestant surname could put his daughter’s safety in jeopardy, pleads: “*Never say Morrissey again*” (19). Although Morrissey’s family background is Protestant, she was raised in an atheist, pro-communist family who tried to remain neutral during the Troubles. This ambitious aspiration seems doomed to failure during any war where one can be either “the enemy” or a “brother-at-arms.” Seen in this light, even the apparently innocent question may carry a gun-loaded meaning. The persona in “Thoughts in a Black Taxi” admits:

Four days to go until the twelfth, and the bonfire is fourteen feet high.

. . . .

I want to ask them where they got their ladders from.

One “What are *You* called?” from them, and it would all go black.

I’d have to run to stay whole. (Morrissey 19)

The speaker in Morrissey’s poems refuses to be taken hostage in “the wars between men.” The persona’s weapon is her ironic distance and seeing the actual gun violence in its textually incongruous and gendered context.¹⁶ The poem depicts the bonfire in the North celebrating the victory of the supporters of William of Orange (predominantly Protestant) over Jacobites (in majority Irish Catholics) in the Battle of the Boyne 1690. The provocative and turbulent (Flakes and Elliot 256–57) annual Orange Order marches on the 12 July, passing through the Catholic districts, are organized to remind the current minority about their subjugated status. In the confrontational Loyalist festivity, the persona in Morrissey’s poem perceives a manifestation of the self-

¹⁶ Compare my reading of this poem in *Towards Female Empowerment*.

important male paramilitaries who derive their illusory authority from intimidating the unarmed citizens. The patriarchal aspect of the militant men's manifestation is rendered in the way the speaker portrays the men on barricades. The sign "*Dump Wood Here*" puts the celebratory pomposity into question. Metaphorically, it implies that the fire of the Troubles seems to be burning with the donated wood: without people's support, paramilitaries and terrorists would not have managed to keep the whole population of the North in check for so long. The speaker in "Thoughts in a Black Taxi" comments upon it:

I imagine winding my way through the *Dump Wood Here* signs
And the fallout of black tyres,
Dismantled shelving and donated sofas
To the bare-chested men swanking about on top.

Fascinated by the organisation. (Morrissey 19)

Since I have devoted an entire chapter of my book (2015) to a detailed analysis of violence (especially with regard to the Troubles) in Morrissey's poetry, this article has only touched upon this issue. As outlined briefly,¹⁷ the representation of the Troubles in Morrissey's early poems oscillates between the poet's ironic estrangement from war discourse and her refusal to accept violence as her daily reality (i.e. "CDN," "There Was Fire in Vancouver," "Thoughts in a Black Taxi") through remembering the people killed in this war (i.e. "Europa Hotel," "In the Valley of Lazarus," "Ciara," "That Summer"), to end up with her mission to "explain" the rationale of the Troubles to confused foreigners (i.e. "English Lesson").

As argued in this article, the offensive gender labels such as "soldier dolls, little adulteresses, poor scapegoats, betraying sisters and perfect meat" disclose the sexual dimension of the war discourse. During the beginning of the Troubles, Irish women to whom those designations were punitively applied were disciplined on social, personal and national grounds. The paper attempted to examine the cultural and historical context behind referring to Irish women in this derogatory way. The examined poems by Heaney, Durcan, Boland, Meehan and Morrissey took into account a gendered perspective upon the literary representation of Irish women in the early phase of the Troubles. The textual analyses demonstrated that male poets focused on their self-assumed or imposed roles in the communities, and their political loyalties could objectify the female characters depicted in

¹⁷ The detailed analysis of these poems is included in my monograph *Towards Female Empowerment*.

their works from the examined period. In contrast, Boland, Meehan and Morrissey's heterogeneous viewpoints highlighted a richness in women's standpoints during the Troubles and their shared rejection of the sacrificial endurance of involuntarily chosen "women's labels and roles" in the name of political and/or cultural causes.

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Death of the Soldier and Immortality of
War in Frank Ormsby's
A Northern Spring

ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the collection of the Northern Irish poet Frank Ormsby entitled *A Northern Spring* published in 1986. On the basis of selected poems, the author of this paper aims to examine the poet's reflections about World War II, the lives of the soldiers, and the things that remain after a military combat, which are both physical and illusive. The poems included in the volume present the author's reflections upon the senselessness of war and dying, short lives of the soldiers, the awareness of their own meaninglessness in comparison to the broader picture, and the contradictory and desperate need to be remembered nevertheless. They also show what is left of the soldiers and the war, as well as how life goes on, with or without them.

Keywords: Frank Ormsby, war poetry, Northern Ireland.

Terence Brown states in his review of Frank Ormsby's *A Northern Spring* (1986) that "[p]oets from the north of Ireland have in the last twenty years been much concerned with the First World War. It is as if the current troubles cannot be addressed directly, so, by analogy, the Great War supplies metaphors for contemporary feeling" (79). Examples can be found in poems like John Hewitt's "Portstewart, July 1914" or "The Volunteer," Derek Mahon's "A Kensington Notebook," Seamus Heaney's "In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge" or Michael Longley's "Wounds," to name just a few. Terence Brown emphasizes that because Ormsby had decided to focus on World War II, the volume "make[s] for interesting reading" (79). This departure from the common canon sounds refreshing; still, one has to bear in mind that there were also other poets who were inspired or influenced by the war. John Brown observes:

World War II was witnessed by John Montague as a boy in Tyrone and Armagh; Seamus Heaney was aware early of "war coupons" on the farm; Roy McFadden's family were evacuated when he was a young man and pacifist in Belfast; Michael Longley recalls the war as a dim infant memory (supplemented by family experience and later reading of the war poets). (132)

There is no denying that the war had its influence on poets and writers all around the world. However, Ormsby recalls that

[t]he war ended before I was born but there had been an American military hospital camp in the woods near our house and as children we played in the air-raid shelters and on the stone floors in the undergrowth. Both the Catholic and Protestant graveyards in Irvinestown contained the graves of Canadian and American airmen, mostly the victims of training accidents. Maybe eight or ten years after the war, you would find rusty beer cans among the bluebells. Some of the Nissen huts were to be seen in local farmyards, serving as outhouses. The GIs had related particularly well to the Catholic community and stories about the "Yanks" were part of local history and folklore. (J. Brown 133)

Ormsby, born in 1947, admits that it was only the remnants of the war and American soldiers that allowed him to get into contact with this gruesome event. As a child he might not have understood the weight of the stories and the seemingly meaningless objects. Nonetheless, the "local history and folklore" (J. Brown 133), as he puts it himself, had a strong influence on him as a poet. In *A Northern Spring* published nine years after his first collection of poems, *A Store of Candles* (1977), he focuses on the topics which were distinguishable in the folk stories and were meaningful

to such an extent that he goes back to his childhood memories as an adult man and writer.

Ormsby explores the senselessness of war and dying, the truncated lives of the soldiers, the awareness of their own meaninglessness, as well as the contradictory and desperate need to be remembered. Finally, he also shows what is left of the soldiers and the war in the face of the fact that life goes on with or without them. Although the subject is grave, he tackles the issue with wit and irony. The economy of form of the poems adds to the clever and bitter remarks, as well as to the impression that the volume makes on its readers. Conleth Ellis comments in a review that “few of the pieces which comprise the sequence are self-contained poems. They support each other and they reverberate off each other” (169). This makes the volume more complex, as the themes intertwine and the poems are not just randomly selected. They do convey messages individually; however, after absorbing all of them, one has a fuller and more meaningful impression.

In *A Northern Spring* the poet demonstrates his attitude to the war in general. In poems such “The Flame Thrower,” “Apples, Normandy, 1944,” “The Night I Lost World War II” and “A Cross on a White Circle” Ormsby shows the senselessness of a military conflict, which is visible from the perspective of a dying young soldier. “The Flame Thrower” starts with harrowingly accurate lines:

We were all in the lap of the gods, as Smokey said,
an unpredictable, tumescent place.
You might be dandled there or due a caress
or fucked quick as lightning if your tree camouflage
wasn't just right. (Ormsby 13)

The excerpt constitutes two thirds of the whole poem, yet it is enough to provoke a feeling of admiration for the poet's aptness of perception. The language is acute and humorous; it draws attention to the grotesque narrative in a way that is economical and straightforward. The soldiers feel like puppets in the hands of a mightier and more important master. This being in power can be understood quite literally, as some divine entity which controls mortals, or as people in power who have the final say in national politics. Men who are more powerful, experienced or have a different perception of life decide about the lives of the younger generation who are more eager to fight as they thrive on ideologies and patriotism. The soldiers in Ormsby's poems are aware of their hopeless situations and try their best not only to survive, but also to stay sane. The atrocities take their toll, as the soldiers find different preoccupations which would enable them

to escape the surrounding reality. In “Apples, Normandy, 1944” Ormsby presents “a war artist [who is] sketching apples” (Ormsby 16):

“I’m sick of tanks,” he said. “I’m sick of ruins.
I’m sick of dead soldiers and soldiers on the move
and soldiers resting.
And to tell you the truth, I’m sick drawing refugees.
I want to draw apples.”

For all we know he’s still sitting under a tree
somewhere between the Seine and Omaha,
or, russet with pleasure, striding past old dugouts
towards the next windfall—
sketch-books accumulating as he becomes
the Audubon of French apples,

or works on the single apple
—perfect, planetary—of his imagination. (Ormsby 16)

The soldier in the poem is tired of the images and the connotations that the war brings. He is not devoid of sympathy, yet he perceives the world as broken and irreparable. Consumed by his fascination, he repeatedly draws the apples—simple fruit, which allow him to cope with his trauma and devastation—trying to achieve the perfection of the “planetary shape.” Because the whole world is involved in the war, his aim is to create a perfect fruit—an apple, a circular shape which will reflect the opposite of the chaos and destruction that the soldier is experiencing. The man is rebellious in that he defies the war by searching for peace in his own work. Defying expectations connected with his drawings and actions, he emphasizes his needs and juxtaposes them with the situation around him. On the more modern and contemporary mode, Ormsby admits that “Apples, Normandy, 1944” is, on one level, a reaction against journalistic pressures on Northern poets to write about the Troubles (J. Brown 133). For the editor of the *Honest Ulsterman* and numerous selections from Northern Irish poets, it is a typical one as “[t]hroughout his career [Ormsby] has been a vigorous enemy of what in Northern Irish literary circles we call “Troubles trash,” adding that “[a]rt is the opposite of propaganda” (Longley 11).

In addition, to the same theme of the pointlessness of the war and the actions of an individual there is a poem entitled “The Night I Lost World War II,” which starts like the small-talk one could experience at a local pub while chatting with a veteran sipping his drink in a corner. “How do you lose a war? I’ll tell you how” (Ormsby 18) begins the soldier who might want to give his interlocutor some friendly instructions. The speaker is

brief in summarizing the hardships: "Parachuting after dark . . . so far off course the maps were useless" (Ormsby 18). When the readers' attention is already caught, they expect the plot of the story to thicken and so the poet delivers what is anticipated:

At dawn the war found me, asleep in a barn.
The first man in the regiment to see the Rhine,
I starved in Bavaria for another year
as a guest of Wehrmacht.

Then home to Nebraska without firing a round. (Ormsby 18)

The defeat of the soldier is mixed with the only triumph that distinguished him from his regiment in a positive way. Ormsby looks at the life of the war survivors and is not afraid to brutally strip them of the glory and honour associated with most people who came back from war. It is a risky attempt considering the reactions of the broader audience, yet one that pays off as it contributes to a more complete and bittersweet image of the survivors. To put the reports in balance, in "A Cross on a White Circle" the poet presents a situation where soldiers fell into their own traps and died an unnecessary and senseless death:

A cross on a white circle marked a church
And a cross on a black circle a calvary.
Reading the map too hastily we advanced
To the wrong village and so had gone too far
And we were strafed by our own fighters.
In the time it takes to tell Bretteville sur Laize
From Bretteville le Rabet, twelve of us died. (Ormsby 28)

A mistake was all it took for a dozen men to die. What is ironic is that they were shot by their own countrymen, because a rapid decision was made. Ormsby allows, however, the soldiers themselves to speak of the tragedy that had nothing to do with bravery and commitment. Talking about his preparation for writing *A Northern Spring*, he expresses the same objectivity:

While *A Northern Spring* was in progress I read a lot about the Normandy landings and about America before, during and after the war. The absurdities could be harmless or poignant or lethal. The wry and ironic elements in the sequence emerged from these stories. In some cases I adapted actual experiences or built on passing references, in other cases I invented. (J. Brown 134)

Ormsby de-glorifies the incidents that show the hopelessness of war and the failures, which were the fault of no particular originator.

While the poems like “Apples, Normandy, 1944” or “A Cross on a White Circle” summon the reflection about the futility of the war, the brevity of human life is also demonstrated in *A Northern Spring*. The ever-present irony is used as a means to help cope with death. In a collection devoted to war, which comprises over fifty poems, there is an abundance of examples commenting on the brevity of life. As Ian Kendrick says: “The thematic unity of the collection is impressive when one considers the unlikely leitmotif of wartime death and its attendant ironies which runs throughout the title sequence” (25). The irony and humour with which the poet tackles the issue work well, not evoking aversion or indignation. “I Died in a Country Lane” is one of the poems which appears early on in the collection, and evokes the emotional turmoil that takes place throughout the ten lines which constitute the whole piece:

I died in a country lane near Argentan,
 my back to a splintered poplar,
 my eyes on fields
 where peace had not been broken
 since the Hundred Years War.
 And a family returned to the farm
 at the end of the lane.
 And Patton sent his telegram: “Dear Ike,
 today I spat in the Seine.”
 And before nightfall Normandy was ours. (Ormsby 9)

The fact that the story is told from a perspective of a dead person makes it an even more poignant record. Horrifying details of this particular death are conjured, and yet the soldier takes his time to evoke an epiphany related to the land where he died. The subsequent lines zoom out on a family, which continues to live in the area affected by the bloodshed. Finally, Ormsby enlarges the perspective to include General Patton reporting to the future president of the United States—Dwight Eisenhower—that he has accomplished his mission. From the calm report of the dead soldier, the poem proceeds to the presumptuous and crude bragging of the commander. The humility is replaced with a conceited comment. Nonetheless in the end the dead soldier is proud to report that they—collectively as the Allies, as the soldiers fighting on the same side, as his regiment—have regained Normandy. Tom Clyde states that in *A Northern Spring* “a sudden change of gear can make your head swim” (115). Ormsby repeats this approach of a deceased man relating his passing in the poem “I Stepped on a Small Landmine.” The short life of the soldier here is not ended in solitude:

"I stepped on a small landmine . . . / and was spread, with three others, over a field / of burnt lucerne" (Ormsby 11). The life again ends abruptly; but the dead man continues to relate how his "bits" (Ormsby 11) were shipped with the parts of the bodies of his fellow comrades in arms. The poet also tackles yet another distressing issue—racism:

The bits they shipped to Georgia at the request
Of my two sisters were not entirely me.
If dead men laughed, I would have laughed the day
the committee for white heroes honoured me,
and honoured too the mangled testicles
of Leroy Earl Johnson. (Ormsby 11)

The afterlife-like comment expresses bitterness, sharing the comic irony of this situation. The lives, which ended in this tragic accident, were equal in death as they were equal on the battlefield. Ormsby admits that "[r]acism is certainly a theme in the 'Northern Spring' sequence, especially the grim irony that not even a World War against a racist regime could annul such prejudices" (J. Brown 134).

The poet presents different aspects of a premature death, although one could assume that sudden shock and bitterness are all that is to be expressed in the poems. Nonetheless, the works entitled "Among the Dead," "From the German" and "My Memory Collected Places" evoke the theme of short lives from yet a different perspective. The "Among the Dead" poem conjures an image of "a bronze statue: the Spirit of American Youth" (Ormsby 35) in a cemetery—a common image commemorating the bravery of the youngest soldiers, who never came back from the war alive. As Ormsby puts it: "There were two score of ours among the dead / on the first day, none older than twenty" (35). The poem demonstrates that the soldiers were almost children—ordinary boys, immature and intoxicated with the sense of duty: "Grease-monkeys, farmhands, hash slingers, their names are rare / between the town registers of Birth and Death. / They look out of school photographs where their promise / has turned to a yellowing of unfinished lives" (Ormsby 35). Ormsby puts aside duty and higher motives and focuses on the possibilities that the young soldiers were deprived of. The bitterness evoked in relation to the lives spared and, at the same time, the lives wasted, lacks the ironic tone which opens the collection. The same happens in "From the German," in which the reader is confronted with the other side of the conflict. The poem emerges from the soldier's depths of regret and remorse after the war, in correlation with the German soldiers, who also, indisputably, died in combat. The work starts with an account from the past: "When I delivered the grenade cleanly through the slit / of the gun emplacement, /

I buried my face in seaweed and covered my ears” (Ormsby 36). It is forty years later, when the same person realizes the consequences of his actions, that he is reading a “wheelchair-veteran’s book of reminiscences / ‘translated from the German’” (Ormsby 36), and that is where and when he finds out “what ended there”: “Walter’s dyspepsia, Heinrich’s insufferable snores, / big Hoffmann’s correspondence course in Engineering” (Ormsby 36). The poem evokes the strangely normal and humane afflictions and interests of the supposedly cruel and heartless German soldiers. By means of a story told from the opposite perspective, the soldier, so brave at the beginning of the poem, is not faced with measurable consequences, but with an insight into the tragedy of the war-time enemies. As the veteran speaks: “elusively they rise / to baffle grief with an inviolable presence, some treacherous gift of innocence restored / I cannot believe in and would not refuse” (Ormsby 36). This is the only poem in the whole collection which presents glimpses of the German deaths; however, through this text Ormsby again comments on the short lives and abruptness of death on the battlefields. Presenting it from the German perspective enriches the volume and emphasizes the sympathetic side of the poet, as well as his open-mindedness.

Moreover, “My Memory Collected Places” continues to share this nostalgic and sentimental tone. The poem is brief, although it succeeds in calling up the torment which accompanies the soldiers. As the speaker admits, he carried home the locations, the places to which his mind was clinging. Again, as in “Apples, Normandy, 1944” one could say that memorizing the names and views of the passed places, a fascination of a kind, is a way of coping with the surrounding chaos. The places recalled by the soldier are “those Northern villages where I thought of death / and clung to living more than before or after— / Lison, Isigny, rising through the dawns / of a dangerous summer” (Ormsby 37). The man describes his fear openly, admitting that his life was dear to him and that he did not want to die. The fact that he returned to his hometown safe and sound makes the confession even more moving, as the reader realizes that the speaker was painfully aware that each moment on the warfront could be his last. With no irony and no humour the soldier recounts the images of places he visited during his campaign. Terence Brown, who in his reading of *A Northern Spring* focuses less on the previously-mentioned irony, states that:

Nostalgia is, perhaps, the ruling mood; for Ormsby clearly regrets the simple ordinary lives disturbed or destroyed by change. . . . But while nostalgia, and a wry humour, make these emotionally accessible and enjoyable poems, there is also a sense throughout that Ormsby is seeking, with an understated intelligence which saves the book from sentimentality, to re-define our understanding of contemporary violence. (81)

The contemporary violence, as he further explains, is understood as a reference to the Troubles. However, putting this connection aside, one may challenge the notion that the aforementioned mood dominates throughout the volume. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that it is clearly visible in the three discussed poems: "Among the Dead," "From the German" and "My Memory Collected Places."

The images that evoke the futility of war, as well as the poems that involve the speakers' abrupt deaths, are strictly connected with the ever-present sense that the lives of the soldiers do not really matter. In "The Flame Thrower" the soldiers feel like marionettes, as if they were controlled by some higher entity, cursed and condemned to be at the mercy of cruel gods, who are not in the least concerned with their well-being. "The Night I Lost World War II" presents a more personal story of a man who never had an opportunity to test himself in combat, a single unit, who in no way contributed to the result of the war. These men are painfully conscious of the lack of meaning their contribution had. A poem which exemplifies the notion in a prominent way is "Cleo, Oklahoma." The young soldier is leaving his hometown, afraid and uncertain about what the future will hold for him. Regrettably, the people who surround him, his closest family and the mayor of the town, already treat him like a lost cause. "I knew he'd be a big shot.' My mother's words, / in the third person, as though I'd already gone" (Ormsby 6) starts the soldier, sourly commenting on his mother's behaviour. The unconditional pride of the woman makes one think that perhaps this young man will have a chance, any chance in the confrontations to come, yet the very fact that he is going to fight in a war makes her treat him like a hero who will fall one way or another. The poem continues: "the Mayor spread his arms / and had trouble with History . . . / 'We've had History before now, folks, in this town. / There'll be more History soon" (Ormsby 6). The city manager spreads the same falsehood, presumption and self-righteousness, as he poses "for a possible statue" (Ormsby 6). And the town name here is a telling one too. Translated from Greek it may mean "pride," "fame" or glory." But all these attributes remain at home. The parade lasts until the soldiers leave, waving their goodbyes, uncertain of their future. They know, however, that the lack of meaning is there to haunt them through the nights to follow. The young man reflects: "Already I belonged / to somewhere else, or nowhere, or the next / photograph" (Ormsby 6), and that "[i]t was too late to cry / or too early" (Ormsby 6), emphasizing the confusion and anxiety that he is experiencing. To develop further the commentary on the participants of the war, Ormsby presents a story of a totally different soldier in the poem "For the Record." This man is not welcomed by anyone, has a difficult personality, and causes trouble all over the place, even in his own regiment. The soldier is transferred to

the country for stabbing a man in Belfast and has to endure “enough fresh air to poison a city boy” (Ormsby 12). The rebellious army man continues to take part and causes fights with his fellow comrades, which evolve into incidents of much bigger repercussions than just a black eye. Finally, when he gets to the front, when he can “gloriously” channel his anger and energy, one realizes that this is another confession of a deceased man. He says: “I shot my way / to a medal and commendation (posthumous), / a credit at last to my parents, whoever they were, / and the first hero produced by the State Pen” (Ormsby 12). A traumatized, emotionally neglected boy grows up to be a disturbed and angry man, who for once had a chance to show his bravery. He truly becomes a hero, posthumously receiving credit for his actions, although the accolade seems to lack any meaning for him. Through the title Ormsby shows that the soldier is only mentioning his act of courage for the sake of it, not attaching a lot of emotional value to it, just to be clear that he has done that. It is the rebellious incidents, which constitute two thirds of the poem, and not the heroic operations, that make the speaker proud. These actions seemingly have no meaning for him, either personally or in relation to the whole idea of the war.

Throughout the volume Ormsby shows senseless mortality, which is emphasized by the suggestions of the meaninglessness of the war and sudden deaths of young soldiers who were yet to experience and discover the meaning of life. The poet infuses the soldiers with a natural and understandable need to be remembered. “The Clearing” describes the life of the unit which has just arrived in Ireland and is waiting for their time in battle to come. Although the standard, yet non-violent, glimpses of army life are invoked, Ormsby focuses on one man, who is uncertain of his future. “Here is a place I will miss with a sweet pain, / as I miss you always, perhaps because I was spared / the colourless drag of its winter” (Ormsby 4) remarks the soldier who is enjoying the surrounding country and landscapes. Nevertheless, he continues: “This is the hour / to dream again the hotel room where we changed / from the once-worn, uncreased garments, / assured and beside ourselves and lonely-strange” (Ormsby 4). The “once-worn, uncreased garments” are the wedding clothes the couple wore during a ceremony, perhaps a hastily organized event before the man’s departure. The poet presents the anxiety of the man and his wife, who share some last days before the war. Although the soldier is speaking of him, remembering the place he is stationed and the love of his wife, the quickly organized marriage indicates that his need to be remembered by a person who loves him and wishes him well is dominant.

This need is also discernible in the poem “Cleo, Oklahoma,” where a young man realizes his life might be shown only through the very last pictures he took at home, moments before departing for the front.

Nevertheless, "The War Photographers" again shares a glimpse of the other side of the problem, or the other side of a camera to be more precise. Ormsby admits that the poem "draws images from specific Crimean War and American Civil War photographs" (J. Brown 138), adding that "photographers are working in positive, enhancing ways within their limitations" (J. Brown 135). Photographs cannot show the whole terror of war, the smells, the constant fear and atrocity, and the limitations may be beneficial for the viewers. As the poem opens: "Working with one eye closed or heads buried / under their drapes, they focus to preserve / the drowned shell-hole, the salient's rubble of dead, / the bleached bones of sepoy's torn from the earth" (Ormsby 47). Even if the photographers do not share the soldiers' need to be remembered, they immortalize the images and people. They take pictures, for example, of "a barren wood / that in one hour's carnage lost its name / to history and the world's memory of death" (Ormsby 47) so that they can still share what has remained or to testify, to "confirm the worst" (Ormsby 47). Ormsby concedes that his own sense of this poem is "warily optimistic," that for him "[m]aybe the very writing of poetry is warily optimistic, to a greater or lesser degree" (J. Brown 135). "Postscripts," the poem which closes the "Northern Spring" sequence, in its last stanza posits the photographs as the means by which the soldiers can be remembered:

These are my last pictures: in a trench
with Chuck and Harvey, by the pheasant-pen
behind the gate-lodge. The dark one with the gun
is Dan McConnell. Keep them. When I return
they'll fill an album. We could call it *Spring*,
or *Spring in Ireland, 1944, My Northern Spring*. (Ormsby 39)

These short sentences, concise as a postscript should be, do not reveal whether the soldier was able to come home alive. Still, they summon the hope and optimism about which Ormsby spoke in the interview. Despite the atrocities of the war, the soldier wishes the photographs to commemorate his time spent at the front. He wants the recipient of the letter to keep them for him, as he intends to create an album, a memento—either for him or for the people who might mourn him.

The photographs, which appear in many of these poems, serve as a convenient way of bringing back the memories, as well as commemorating the soldiers themselves. However, Ormsby passes from sinister concepts to more optimistic ones. In *A Northern Spring* the poet speaks of the things that survived the war. Poems such as "Cleo, Oklahoma," "The War Photographers," "Postscripts" and "Among the Dead" speak of

photographs and monuments as the only memorabilia marking the lives and deaths of the soldiers. In “For the Record” there is a medal that testifies to the bravery of the fallen man. In “From the German” there is a book commemorating the deceased German fighters. Poems such as “I Died in a Country Lane” and “I Stepped on a Small Landmine” share the gruesome images of corpses being discarded on fields and random roads, where few of the victims’ remains were to return home. Similarly, in the poem “Some of Us Stayed Forever” there is a tragic plane accident, where the remains of the plane, “[o]ur painted stork, nosing among the reeds / with a bomb in its beak, will startle you for a day” (Ormsby 38). As the title suggests, the dying soldiers were never to return home and the remaining wreckage is to haunt the ones who find it as they promise to rise and “foul your nets with crushed fuselage” (Ormsby 38). The poem briefly sketches the situation: “Some of us stayed forever, under the lough / in the guts of a Flying Fortress, / sealed in the buckled capsule” (Ormsby 38). The relics of the Boeing B-17 with the dead bodies inside it are what remains remote and invisible, yet hauntingly and eerily present. Ormsby talks about traumas which either cling to their victims forever or emerge on the surface of their consciousness in an unexpected way. In “Grenade-Fishing in the Orne,” for example, one reads:

They flew me back to Utah with shock in my eyes,
 that rimmed and frozen look the marines call
 the two-thousand-yard-stare.
 The bridges are all targets now, the pools
 belch like a hot springs and dead faces
 balloon on the surface.
 The dark flies glisten, the faces bloom in the sun. (Ormsby 20)

The trauma emerges in the soldier’s mind immediately and does not enable the man to cope with reality. In “Home and Away” the memories haunt back the veteran as he is taking pleasure in his summer holidays. The idyllic description of a resort and people enjoying themselves, which brings to mind a travel-agent’s brochure, is rapidly put aside and the flashbacks stalk and strike the oblivious man: “And suddenly, home and away, I am ghosting through towns / of the Teutoburg Forest” (Ormsby 40). In “After the Depression” Ormsby shows the actions that the civilians undertook during war, like preparing clothes and packages of supplies for the men fighting in Europe. While the soldier was “[f]rost-bitten in Bastogne . . . blessed the hands / that sew [his] blankets” (Ormsby 32), he is not able to cope with the image of the same people who earned substantial amounts of money by doing precisely what he appreciated on the front. “The war made people

rich in Ford County, / getters and spenders. I think I'll never warm / to the
brash place they've built there" (Ormsby 32). The poem is not only about
the ironically and surprisingly positive side-effects of the armed conflict,
but also about the inability of the veteran to cope with a luxurious and
comfortable life, which is so different from the hardships he experienced.
Another bittersweet reflection about what remains after the war is presented
in "They Buried Me in an Orchard." Ormsby creates a vision where a man is
buried on a farm and stays there for a whole year: "I lay / under leaves and ripe
windfalls, the thin roots / pressing me, fingering me, till I let them through"
(Ormsby 17). The land is claiming the body of the soldier as its own, gently
embracing it with plants and oblivion, until one day the man is dug up and
buried again "to a roll of drums / in a plain box on the ninety-seventh row /
of an immaculate war cemetery" (Ormsby 17). The unassuming, probably
hasty yet more meaningful burial contrasts with the staged ceremony, which
seems artificial and impersonal. The poet presents the contrast in a few lines;
however, the poem has more to offer. The deceased fighter shares a more
striking revelation, when he says:

If anything is left of me, it lives
in Ruth, Nevada, where my people farm
in spite of dust and drought, in spite of my death,
or a small town in Ireland where a child
carries my name, though he may never know
that I was his father. (Ormsby 17)

This bittersweet information about the soldier's child, who will never
again or never at all see his father, is striking, as the poet delivers it with
calmness and helplessness.

In yet another ruse, Ormsby presents images of people and incidents,
in which life goes on despite the soldiers' private tragedies. Throughout
A Northern Spring one reads about the constant struggle in poems like
"Cleo, Oklahoma," where the town mayor already plans his own statue;
in "I Died in a Country Lane," where a family goes back to their farm;
in "I Stepped on a Small Landmine," where the sisters of the deceased
man ship his body to Georgia to be posthumously honoured; or in "They
Buried Me in an Orchard," in which the child of the soldier grows up to
never hear from his father again. In "After the Depression" and "The War
Photographers" people do their jobs, serving the army and history away
from the gunshots and danger. Ormsby includes the best representation
of the ignorance and oblivion in relation to the presence of the army in
"The Convoy," in which almost all the lines describe a woman coming
back from shopping. Exhausted, barely catching her breath while cycling,

she is so preoccupied with her fatigue and weariness that she is almost certain to miss the soldiers moving forward. The reader is sure to miss it as well, focusing instead on the woman's asthma remedy. Were it not for the last line: "The convoy passes" (Ormsby 27), one would certainly still be captivated by her struggle. The humour of the scene is what makes the hard-to-miss event look like a petty incident, trivial for a bystander. The inevitable continuity of life is also demonstrated in "Soldier Bathing," in which a man is dreaming of a beautiful and peaceful world:

I dry on the shore and imagine the world renewed
cleanly between two islands I cannot name:
as a rounded stone, say, that the ebb left bare,
or light on water the morning after a war. (Ormsby 33)

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The soldier believes there is going to be beauty and purity in the world, even if he does not survive the war. Ormsby expresses an uplifting certainty that every war has to stop eventually so that everyone can move on.

From the brutality of the war, through the soldiers' struggles, to, finally, the reflections about what endures despite so many losses, Ormsby's poems are laced with contemplation, irony, and most importantly, optimism. The mixture of emotions and images is astonishing, as "[c]ompassion and humour suffuse the sequence" (Longley 12). Throughout the volume the soldiers are stripped of their pride, plunged into horror and uncertainty, but, crucially, with their mistakes, anxieties and loves, they remain human.

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Blindness in the Beckettland of Malfunctioning

ABSTRACT

Many of Beckett characters suffer from different kinds of disabilities and impairments, this being one of the ways of punishing them for “the eternal sin of having been born.” The article discusses blindness in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *All That Fall*. In the first of these plays blindness afflicts Pozzo during the interval between the two acts, that is during a single night. Combined with the loss of his watch it is indicative of his entering the subjective realm of timelessness. The blindness of Hamm in *Endgame* and his inability to walk make him dependant on Clov who is unable to sit, which recalls Pozzo’s dependence on Lucky in the second act. Similarly, the blind Mr Rooney also must get help from other people to be able to move around. In the case of all three plays blindness must be perceived on a literal, as well as metaphorical level.

Keywords: Beckett, drama, blindness.

One of the characteristic features of Samuel Beckett's *œuvre* are the numerous different impairments and disabilities of his characters. They suffer because of various mobility restrictions, both concrete and real, indicated in the most obvious case by a wheelchair, as in *Endgame*, but also represented by such simultaneously emblematic and symbolic impediments as the heap of sand in *Happy Days*. The tree in *Waiting for Godot*, on the literal level, denotes the concrete meeting place of the two tramps with the mysterious Godot, while its leaves growing overnight acquire a symbolic meaning. The characters have problems controlling their speech or making it sound reasonable, a disability of which Lucky's speech provides the most obvious, extreme case. His utterance, becoming more and more chaotic, is finally ended, when his hat is taken off. The titular character of *Not I* seems unable to stop the never-ending flow of speech and will, most probably, go on speaking until she confesses that the character from the story she is telling is, in fact, herself. She is not willing to do so, however, and thus is sentenced to go on speaking infinitely, this being a kind of disability, an inability to stop. Beckett's protagonists often cannot remember the past, as *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett's most explicit example of a memory play, clearly demonstrates.

The main focus of the article is blindness, an impairment which started being recognized as a disability a long time ago and which is a motif that reappears in a number of the Nobel Prize winner's dramas: *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *All That Fall*. In all of these plays, the deficiency is a literal reference to an actual kind of disability but also acquires a symbolic status, enriching the overall figurative vision of Beckettland.

Waiting for Godot, Beckett's first play to be published (1951) and staged (1953), has puzzled critics, viewers and readers alike for more than sixty years now. This astonishing drama, in which "nothing happens, twice" (Mercier 145), introduces a great number of different deficiencies and disabilities. Vladimir has problems with his bladder and prostate; he eats garlic which is good for his kidneys yet makes his breath bad. In the case of Estragon, it is his feet that stink and his foot seems to have shrunk during the night separating the two acts. All characters seem to suffer because of memory failures which afflict a great number of other Beckett characters. Furthermore, two of the characters undergo a rapid, overnight change: Lucky turns dumb and Pozzo becomes blind. The speed with which they become invalids is shocking yet may be explained by examining the specific double-scale of time in Beckett's output. There are, as it were, two different kinds of time in this drama and in Beckettland in general.¹ On the one hand, there is the dominant psychological, subjective time of the two tramps, who often complain: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody

¹ For a discussion of this issue, see Uchman 1987.

goes, it's awful" (41). They are at a standstill, as it were, as no significant change in their life situation takes place; they are there, waiting for Godot, who will, most probably, never come. For them—stuck, as it were, in the eternal present of waiting—physical time, characterized by change, does not seem to exist. Sometimes they make references to it, though: "We should have thought about it a million years ago, in the nineties" (10). Even then, however, psychological time (a million years) is dominant over physical time (the nineties).

The drastic change that Pozzo and Lucky undergo overnight is accompanied by other unexplainable sudden alterations which happen simultaneously: a completely bare tree, even with no sign of buds, acquires a few leaves, and Estragon's shoes, which were too small for him at the end of Act I, now fit. It could be argued that the great speed at which all these transformations occur is indicative of the fact that, in spite of the accelerated physical time, the basic situation of the two tramps remains unaltered. Taking into account Pozzo's rapid blindness, it can be noticed that his unexpected disability in a way symbolizes his abandoning the real, objective, physical world and entering the realm where subjectivity is most important.

In Act I, Pozzo, the absolute master of Lucky—his slave, is confident, self-assured and dominant even over Vladimir and Estragon, as well as proud and threatening. While on the stage, he is, most of the time, one might say, the centre and focus of the action, dominating the other characters and also, simultaneously, playing the role of the leading actor. He seems to be aware of the flow of physical time, this being indicated by his repeatedly consulting his watch. Is he, however, really fully aware of what physical time is? There are strong reasons to doubt it. He takes out his watch on three occasions. In the first case, there is nothing extraordinary about the action because he checks how long his journey has lasted and states that it has been six hours (24). In the second instance, he uses it, again, to specify the passage of time and argues that the event took place "nearly sixty years ago" (33). One can only wonder whether a timepiece alone can be really helpful in this case. The third occasion of Pozzo's looking at his watch deserves more attention. He is about to leave the tramps yet, hesitating to do so, makes Estragon ask him to sit down:

POZZO: [. . .] (He sits down.) Done it again. (Pause.) Thank you, dear fellow. (He consults his watch.) But I really must be getting along, if I am to observe my schedule.

VLADIMIR: Time has stopped!

POZZO: (*cuddling his watch to his ear*). Don't you believe it, sir, don't you believe it. (*He puts his watch back in his pocket.*) Whatever you like, but not that. (36)

Taking into account the above quoted scene two things must be considered. On the one hand, Pozzo argues that he should stick to his timetable, to the rules of the flow of the objective, physical time. On the other hand, however, even though voicing such a need, soon afterwards he postpones his departure, behaving like an actor and delivering a lyrical speech about the sudden coming of the night during which, once more using his watch, he checks the passage of time (37). Still later in Act I, just before the departure, fumbling in his pockets for some time, Pozzo discovers that he cannot find his watch and the following dialogue ensues:

POZZO: [. . .] . . . what have I done with my watch? (*Fumbles.*)

A genuine half-hunter, gentlemen, with deadbeat escapement! (*Sobbing.*) 'Twas my grandpa gave it to me! (*He searches on the ground, Vladimir and Estragon likewise. Pozzo turns over with his foot the remains of Lucky's hat.*) Well now, isn't that just—

VLADIMIR: Perhaps it's in your fob.

POZZO: Wait! (*He doubles up in an attempt to apply his ear to his stomach, listens. Silence.*) I hear nothing. (*He beckons them to approach. Vladimir and Estragon go towards him, bend over his stomach.*) Surely one should hear the tick-tick.

VLADIMIR: Silence!

All listen, bent double.

ESTRAGON: I hear something.

POZZO: Where?

VLADIMIR: It's the heart.

POZZO: (*disappointed*). Damnation!

VLADIMIR: Silence!

ESTRAGON: Perhaps it has stopped. (46)

It seems that in Act I Pozzo is desperately trying to stick to the symbolic representation of the passage of physical time, that is the moving hands of his watch. He uses words connected with the time-flow—hours, days, years—yet, while trying to verify their validity by means of his watch, he does not notice how ridiculous his actions are. Not having found his watch, he is deeply disappointed because he will no longer be able to verify his subjective feelings by means of an objective mechanism. Estragon's remark "Perhaps it has stopped" refers to the watch but is simultaneously an exact repetition of Vladimir's earlier statement concerning time. It may be argued, therefore, that the loss of the timepiece is indicative of Pozzo's having entered the world of subjectivity. Objective, physical time can no longer be verified and any belief in the possibility of evaluating and describing objective reality, however imperfect, is gone. Objective reality, along with one of its constituents—physical time—has been replaced by

subjective, existential reality and the psychological time characteristic of it. The tick-tick of a watch has been replaced by the tick-tick of an individual heartbeat. Harvey comments on this situation, conceding: “Chronometric time has been replaced by existential time” (148). Writing about the two couples, Torrance contends:

These are the two opposed modes of being which cross paths in Godot: that of waiting, where time is a series of disjointed presents and there is no history because there is no true sense of past and future, the mode of sameness and ennui; and that of a chase, where time is a downward plummeting through history towards darkness, the mode of retrogressive change and senseless suffering. (89)²

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These remarks are undoubtedly true of Act I, yet, when Pozzo and Lucky enter in Act II, we can notice a number of changes both of them have undergone during a single night, all of which may be indicative of the growing similarity of the predicament of the travellers and the tramps.

The most obvious of the alterations in the travellers in Act II are Pozzo’s blindness and Lucky’s becoming dumb. Their relationship has altered slightly as well. In Act I Lucky’s rope was “*long enough to allow him to reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears*” (21). In Act II the rope is “*much shorter, so that Pozzo may follow more easily*” (77). Even though they are still a master and a slave, the stage image indicates a change in their mutual correlation. In Act I, Lucky’s position was reminiscent of a dog on a leash, the rope being meant to keep him with his master, to prevent his possible attempt to free himself. Now, the piece of string has yet another function to fulfil—Lucky is needed by the blind Pozzo as a guide. That is probably why Pozzo does not mention his wish to take Lucky to the market to sell him, which was his plan during the previous visit.

In Act II, when asked whether he recognizes Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo answers that he is blind, which makes Estragon wonder whether he “can see into future” (84). Slightly later on, Vladimir having asked about Pozzo’s blindness, the following dialogue ensues:

VLADIMIR: I’m asking you if it came on you all of a sudden.

POZZO: I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune.

(*Pause.*) Sometimes I wonder if I’m not still asleep.

² The tramps’ originally being subjected to physical, objective time has been also stressed by Gilman (248). Being emissaries of the society (consider their master-slave relationship and Pozzo’s arguing that he is a landowner, for instance), they are entirely subjected to the laws of time characteristic of socio-historical situation.

VLADIMIR: And when was that?

POZZO: I don't know.

VLADIMIR: But no later than yesterday—

POZZO: (*violently*). Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time.

The things of time are hidden from them too.

VLADIMIR: Well just fancy that! I could have sworn it was just the opposite. (86)

The above dialogue is worthy of attention for two reasons. Firstly, it is now Vladimir who expresses the idea voiced earlier by Estragon, namely that the blind have a specific gift of foreseeing the future. In addition, Pozzo insists that he does not know when his disability struck him. He thus explicitly states that his blindness is the reason for his having lost contact with the objective, external reality. The second issue becomes the basic point of Pozzo's outburst which follows soon afterwards:

POZZO: (*suddenly furious*). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we will die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer*.) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (89)

Surprisingly, while becoming blind Pozzo has started being aware of the meaning of human existence in the context of its subjective quality. According to his opinion, human life, which spans the moment of birth and that of death, is just an instant compared to the limitless existence of the universe. While Pozzo concentrates on the meaninglessness of the relatively short human existence within the context of eternity, the point of reference taken by Vladimir when he paraphrases the speech is completely different: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. (*He listens*.) But habit is a great deadener" (91).

Both speeches unite, as it were, the moments of birth and death, in Pozzo's speech birth being given astride of the grave, while in Vladimir's it is the gravedigger who uses forceps to help during a difficult birth. The time span is distorted in both utterances. In Pozzo's speech it seems contracted ("an instant"), while in Vladimir's—extended ("we have time to grow old"). This contradiction may be, perhaps, explained by the fact that no matter how long one's life actually is, or is individually perceived, measured by the standards of and compared to the history of mankind or

the universe—and thus to macrocosmic time—it is an affair of a moment. Birth and death seem to be separated by a mere instant, except for those who have to live through that instant as an interminable wait for Godot. For one concrete period of physical time the two characters have substituted two different distortions typical of psychological time.

Pozzo concentrates on man's relationship with eternity. Vladimir puts the stress on the individual suffering, consistent with Beckett's vision of human existence. On the one hand, the playwright's vision of human fate seems to be reminiscent of Martin Heidegger's views and the notions of *Geworfenheit*, *Dasein* and *Sein zum Tode*. On the other, it is an artistic representation of the ideas concerning time expressed by Beckett in his *Proust* essay. Lee writes: "Beckett's *Proust* has the double fascination of throwing light on Proust while revealing Beckett himself. . . . *A la Recherche du temps perdu* serves as a kind of Rorschach test in which the young critic discovers his own fetishes and his own *bêtes noires*" (196). This essay is, in fact, to a greater extent the artist's presentation of his own views concerning time rather than an actual analysis of the French writer's work, the latter being, though, a shrewd critical insight into Proust's novel. In this seminal piece of writing, Beckett introduces the concepts of "the double-headed monster of damnation and salvation—"Time" (11), which he elsewhere calls "cancer," its attributes, "Habit and Memory" (18), as well as life described as a succession of moments of "boredom of living . . . replaced by the suffering of being" (19), the latter being a punishment for "the eternal sin of having been born" (67).

In *Waiting for Godot* the symbolic meaning of blindness is related not only to the gradual deterioration characteristic of most of his "people," as Beckett calls his characters (Shenker 1), but also to the artist's specific treatment of time. Losing his watch in Act I and then, during the interval of the drama, becoming blind, Pozzo has abandoned the objective world characterized, among other elements, by physical time, and entered the subjective world governed by psychological time. Both losses are, as Hayman argues, "symbolical of entering a world in which time and space do not have their normal significance" (Hayman 19). The situation in *Endgame* (1957) and *All That Fall* (a radio play, written in 1956, first produced and published in 1957) is slightly different. Firstly, the two characters, Hamm and Mr Rooney, are already blind when these plays begin and do not become disabled in the span of time covered by the dramatic action. Secondly, unlike the travellers in *Godot*, who enter the existential world of Vladimir and Estragon, they do not cross the threshold of Beckettland, but are already there the moment we get the first glimpse of them.

"The end is in the beginning and yet you go on," Hamm says (44). Beckett himself has commented on this aspect of *Endgame*: "Between the beginning and the end is just that bit of difference there is between

beginning and end” (qtd in Hasselbach 29). Despite the repeated occurrences of the words “finished,” “ended,” “the last” and the phrases “there is/there are no more,” still “Something is taking its course” (26). The basic motif of the play is introduced at its very beginning when Clov says: “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (*Pause.*) Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s a heap of time, a little heap, the impossible heap” (12). The characters of this drama keep waiting: not for Godot but, most probably, for their own deaths, as can be deduced from Hamm’s speech towards the end of the drama “Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to life” (45). The Zenonian heap, consisting of grains of sand, may never be completed, finished, just as a life made up of numerous days characterized by suffering seems everlasting. It seems that the heap of time, which is mentioned in this play and which becomes the theatrical presence of the mound of sand, in which Winnie is buried up to her waist in Act I and up to her neck in Act II of *Happy Days*, will never be finally terminated. The suffering, which is a common lot of people inhabiting Beckettland, appears to be their never-ending fate, or curse.

All four characters in *Endgame* suffer because of some kind of limitation or disability. Hamm’s legless parents, Nagg and Nell, imprisoned in ashbins (a reference to “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” a phrase from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer burial service), can “hardly” see, as their “sight has failed” (18). While they claim their hearing has not weakened yet, their dialogue seems to indicate the opposite (18). Furthermore, their mobility has been drastically restricted, they are forced to live in the bins and wait patiently for their sawdust to be changed. Hamm’s parents seem to illustrate the opinion verbally expressed by Nell: “Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that” (20). In her book, *Beckett and Decay*, Kathryn White comments on this aspect of the play:

The Nagg/Nell partnership is representative of how we are physically reduced by time. From the vigour of youth through the slowing down of middle age and on to the indignity of old age, our physical story is one of decay and degradation. Each stage of life represents a stage of deterioration, and Nagg and Nell perhaps represent the most advanced phase, as the grotesqueness of their appearance forces us to acknowledge the futility of human condition, and the unattractiveness of the aged physical form. Through them Beckett successfully captures the comic/tragic nature of life and drama. (13)

The main couple of the play, Hamm and Clov, resemble Pozzo and Lucky as theirs is also a master-servant relationship. They seem to

adequately represent Hamm's statement: "Every man his speciality" as Clov "cannot sit" and Hamm "can't stand" (16). Furthermore, Hamm is blind, this being indicated by his wearing black glasses, while Clov's eyes being fixed on Hamm, his looking up to and out of window and his fixed gaze are dominant in the initial stage directions of the printed text and the opening moments of the theatrical production. Clov is necessary for Hamm to exist because he is the one who can go to the larder to bring some food for his master. But Hamm is also necessary to Clov's survival—he is the one who knows the combination to the larder so that, without him, Clov would starve. Thus, despite Clov's repeated threats that he will leave his blind partner, it seems that they will continue staying together, being, in a sense, bound by their limitations and thus forced to co-exist. All the same, Hamm seems to hope that sooner or later, Clov's eyes and legs will fail him. Already in the initial moments of the play, he asks his servant how his eyes and legs are. On getting the reply that they are bad, he notices "But you can move," and, having got a positive answer, shouts "*(violently.)* Then move!" (14). A similar exchange takes place slightly later on and is followed by Hamm's ensuing monologue and their dialogue:

HAMM: [. . .] (*Pause. With prophetic relish.*) One day you'll be blind, like me.

You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me.

(*Pause.*) One day you'll say to yourself, I'm tired, I'll sit down, and you'll go and sit down. Then you'll say, I'm hungry, I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up. You'll say, I shouldn't have sat down, but since I have I'll sit a little longer, then I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up and you won't get anything to eat. (*Pause.*) You'll look at the wall a while, then you'll say, I'll close my eyes, perhaps have a little sleep, after that I'll feel better, and you'll close them. And when you open them again there'll be no wall any more. (*Pause.*) Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. (*Pause.*) Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone and because there won't be anyone to have pity on you.

Pause.

CLOV: It's not certain. (*Pause.*) And there is one thing you forget.

HAMM: Ah?

CLOV: I can't sit down.

HAMM: (*impatiently.*) Well. You'll lie down then, what the hell! Or you'll come to a standstill, simply stop and stand still, the way you are now. One day you'll say, I'm tired, I'll stop. What does the attitude matter? (28–29)

The above dialogue deserves a few remarks. Firstly, Hamm foretells that Clov's future will be the same as his own. If so, this means that Hamm will disappear (die) and his place will be taken by Clov who will be blind and unable to stand up; Clov, in a way, will replace him. This is equivalent to saying that the fate of Hamm, Clov and, by extension, of all people is the same, this being a characteristic of Beckett's whole *œuvre*. Secondly, Clov mentions the possibility that he will not be alone, thus, perhaps, referring to the past, when he joined the solitary Hamm. Such a reading is possible if one accepts the idea that, as is the case with many narratives of Beckett characters, the story told by Hamm may be, in fact, not a mere fiction but an account of his own experiences in the past. And, thirdly, this scene, though tragic, is simultaneously comic, the specific use of the grotesque being a trademark of Beckett's output.

The use of the grotesque also characterizes *All That Fall* which is best exemplified towards its end when Mr Rooney asks his wife whether the preacher has announced his text for the next day and gets the answer: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raises all those that be bowed down." What follows in this radio play are the stage directions, which, in the production, are meant to materialize as concrete sounds or their absence: "[*Silence. They join in wild laughter. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc.*]" (38). The childless Mr and Mrs Rooney go on living and suffering, occasionally falling down to rise (actually not being "raised") again. In this context, the title of the play is indicative, a point noticed by Knowlson:

In spite of the apparent comic texture of the play, human misery and suffering emerge as so overwhelming that, when Psalm 145, verse 14 is quoted . . . it is greeted by the lame, seventy-year-old Maddy Rooney and her blind husband, Dan, with wild laughter at its bitter irony. (387)

It should be noticed that in the world of gradual and inescapable deterioration and transience presented in this radio play, its very beginning and end are very telling as a concrete musical piece accompanies them. Beckett chose Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* because it was his favourite, but also, more importantly, because, as he himself argued, he knew of no other "music so heavily imbued with such sorrow."³ Furthermore, the title of the musical piece unites two ideas, namely youth and death, which usually do not go together. The drama combines many contradictory ideas as indicated by the title of my article "In a World Characterized by Transience and Doomed to Extinction Some Old Women Still Need Love—Mrs

³ Samuel Beckett to John Montague, Maurice Sinclair, Marion Leifh and Bettina Jonic (qtd. in Bair 477).

Rooney from Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall*." As argued in this article, Mrs Rooney, at seventy, still longs for love, and the play is saturated with sexual innuendos. Thus it may be argued that this drama deals with a longing for happiness despite the tragic circumstances of general deterioration, decay and inevitable death. Divergent ailments, limitations and disabilities characterizing most of the inhabitants of Boghill are also the tragic lot of Maddy's husband, Dan. Mr Rooney, blind and ill, twice tells Jerry to come for him on Monday, adding, on both occasions, the same sentence: "if I am still alive" (28, 39). On being asked by Maddy whether he is not well, he answers:

Well! Did you ever know me well? The day you met me I should have been in bed. The day you proposed to me the doctors gave me up. You knew that, did you not? The night you married me they came for me with an ambulance. You have not forgotten that, I suppose? [*Pause.*] No, I cannot be said to be well. But I am no worse. Indeed I am better than I was. The loss of my sight was a great fillip. If I could go deaf and dumb I think I might pant on to be a hundred. Or have I done so? [*Pause.*] Am I a hundred, Maddy? (31–32)

The blindness of Dan is not dwelt much upon—all we know is that he lost his sight in the past and, surprisingly enough, that it was an incentive, spur and stimulus for him. It may be presumed that he treats this disability as an advantage, because, just like the deafness and dumbness he is hoping for, it is a sign of gradual extinction, of the approaching end. His longing for death, the terminus of "suffering of being," is expressed verbatim by him when he asks Maddy:

Did you ever wish to kill a child? [*Pause.*] Nip some young doom in the bud. [*Pause.*] Many a time, in winter, on the back road home, I nearly attacked the boy. [*Pause.*] Poor Jerry! [*Pause.*] What restrained me then? [*Pause.*] Not fear of man. [*Pause.*] (31)

Steward rightly contends that "the replacement of 'bloom' by 'doom' strongly suggests that it is in blooming that one is doomed, that life itself is the disaster that one should wish to avoid" (84). The thought of killing a child, as Dan himself acknowledges, has haunted him for some time and it seems almost certain that on this very day he has made his dream come true. There are quite a few hints in the play indicating that he is responsible for the death of the boy on the railway track (Uchman, "World of Transience" 111–12). Such an opinion is also voiced by White, when she writes: "Mr Rooney abhors the idea of continuance and would therefore view the death of a child as a welcome alternative to the suffering

of being. Perhaps he terminated the life of his own [sic] child, unable and unwilling to witness her ‘lingering dissolution’” (29). On the one hand, it may be asked why the critic assumes that Dan might be responsible for his daughter’s death, as the issue of when and why their daughter, Minnie, died is not raised in the play. The only information we get about her comes from Maddie, who says: “[*Brokenly.*] In her forties now she’d be, I don’t know, fifty, girding her lovely loins, getting ready for the change. . . .” (16). If, then, Maddie had survived and were alive now she, too, would be past her procreation age, slowly approaching death. On the other, “the lingering dissolution” mentioned by the critic, is a phrase used by Maddie herself: “It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution” (15). As she argues slightly later, she is “not half alive nor anything approaching it” (16), heading towards death but not yet reaching it, imprisoned, as it were, in the stasis of her “suffering of being,” expiating “for the eternal sin of having been born.”

The blindness of the three characters described above, though different (Pozzo’s case being unlike the other two as he becomes blind *during* the course of the play’s action and *not before*) is, undoubtedly, highly symbolic. Writing about *Endgame*, White notices: “Hamm’s blindness corresponds to the metaphorical blindness that many Beckett characters endure, as they often appear lost, endeavouring always to find their way in a world devoid of meaning” (14). Fully accepting this opinion, one can only add that blindness, along with the other limitations, restrictions, illnesses and disabilities experienced by Beckett’s characters, are a distinctive feature of Beckettland, a cruel place inhabited by “his people.” Therefore it seems impossible to accept the ideas voiced by Guru Charan Behera in the article significantly entitled “Disabling the Disabled: Samuel Beckett and the Plight of the Handicapped”:

While scholars have explored degradation, degeneration, and decadence in the works of Samuel Beckett, they seem to have overlooked the contemptuous treatment disabled characters experience in his plays. Beckett demonizes the handicapped, thus taking away the empathy the audience has for them. He also weakens these characters’ ability to wrestle with the infirmities he imposes on them. Beckett’s world, especially as seen in *Waiting for Godot* (1954) [sic] and *Endgame* (1958) [sic], is one with no signposts for the disabled, a world where Beckett exposes the helpless to the menacing sternness of other characters. . . .

[H]is horrendous treatment of the disabled characters also seems a consequence of his own blighted life. . . . Since life was not “fair” to Beckett, the vulnerable that constitute part of the jungle, but often enjoy the privileges [sic] must, as Beckett seems to imply, experience the bitterness of an unfair life too. (13, 14–15)

Contrary to this critic's opinions, expressed in a very short and disorderly article which presents his basic assumption concerning "Beckett's bias against characters with disabilities" (14), one should conclude that Beckett is not "disabling the disabled" but presents a specific artistic and, one may argue, philosophical vision of Beckettland, where his lost, bewildered "people" are hopelessly waiting for death which will end the life-long period of expiation for the "eternal sin of having been born." Most, if not all, of Beckett's characters share the same fate, as Vladimir who argues, the word "*sententious*," included in the stage directions being very significant and telling: "To every man his little cross (*He sighs.*) Till he dies. (*Afterthought.*) And is forgotten" (*Godot* 62). Everything they can long for is to be allowed to live where Christ lived, where it was warm and dry "[a]nd they crucified quick" (*Godot* 52). There is a scene in "Dante and the Lobster," one of the stories in the volume *More Pricks than Kicks*, when Belaqua, watching a cook putting a lobster into boiling water, ponders: "It's a quick death. God help us all." These words are followed by a short statement assigned to none of the characters present: "It is not" (22). One may argue that it is Beckett himself speaking, without the formalities of an official introduction. The effect thus achieved is one of disturbing authority.

Many of Beckett's characters long for a "quick" death yet it is always denied to them and it is Mrs Rooney who expresses this wish verbatim while commenting the death of a hen run over by Mr Slocum's car:

Oh, mother, you have squashed her, drive on, drive on! [*The car accelerates. Pause.*] What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath, and then—bang!—all her troubles over. [*Pause.*] All the laying and hatching. [*Pause.*] Just one great squawk and then . . . peace. [*Pause.*] They would have slit her weasand in any case. (*All That Fall* 19)

The use of the word "bang" may bring to one's mind T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and the poem's last stanza:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper. (86)

In Beckettland nearly all the characters, whether actually disabled, according even to a very broad definition of the term, or not, cannot really hope for a "quick death," "a bang"—they must go on living, experiencing "the suffering of being," the punishment for "the eternal sin of having been born." They may either whimper or, at times, laugh bitterly but their cruel predicament always remains the same.

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Defying Maintenance Mimesis: The Case
of *Somewhere over the Balcony*
by Charabanc Theatre Company

ABSTRACT

Making reference to Luce Irigaray's definitions of mimesis and mimicry, and the ways in which these concepts respectively reinforce and challenge the phallogocentric order, this article investigates the representation of the Troubles in the play *Somewhere over the Balcony* by Charabanc—a pioneering all-female theatre company which operated in Belfast in the 1980s and early 1990s. The article discusses the achievement of the company in the local context and offers a reading of *Somewhere over the Balcony*, Charabanc's 1987 play which depicts the lives of underprivileged working-class Catholic women in the infamous Divis Flats in Belfast. Showing the protagonists' struggle with the everyday reality of sectarianism in Northern Ireland, it celebrates female creativity and *jouissance*. The article argues that the characters challenge the masculinist order by means of mimicry. Irigaray defines this strategy as a deliberate assumption of prescribed female roles, which involves a playful attitude to "mimesis imposed"—in other words, to the programmed repetition of socially sanctioned patterns (*This Sex* 76). Mimicry, as well as other productive strategies help the female characters in the play to transform the balconies of their flats into an area of creativity and empowerment, which challenges binary thinking about the division into private and public space. Such a geopolitical reading of the play corresponds to the artistic agenda of the company, communicated by its very name. It also sheds light on Charabanc's attempt to create a more inclusive and varied cultural space that would reach beyond gender, sectarian, and class divides in Northern Ireland.

Keywords: Northern Irish drama, Charabanc, Luce Irigaray, mimicry, mimesis, *Somewhere over the Balcony*.

The founding of the all-female Charabanc theatre company in 1983 can be seen as a breakthrough for women in Northern Irish theatre. Three years earlier, in 1980, another influential theatre company, Field Day, was established by two prominent figures in Irish culture: dramatist Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea. Apart from the contribution they made to Irish theatre, one of the company's major achievements was the publication of a comprehensive anthology of Irish writing which, as its editor, Seamus Deane, explains in his introduction, sought to envisage "the forces and ideas that have governed the development of the always putative subject 'Irish writing' over 1,500 years" (xx). The scope of the project was unprecedented, as this was the first attempt to systematize Irish writing from a historical perspective in such a thorough way. It is no wonder that once the anthology saw the light of day, the choice of the texts selected and left out generated a heated debate. One of the major accusations that Field Day faced concerned the gross underrepresentation of Irish female writers in the three volumes. The unfortunate "oversight" was soon amended. In 2002, volumes four and five of the anthology, dedicated exclusively to female writers, historians, theologians, journalists, political activists, and the like were released in print. Although this does some justice to the women whose voices were silenced in 1990, their texts were not incorporated into the all-male anthology but were collected in separate volumes, which somewhat reinforced the male/female binary rather than creating a more inclusive forum for literary expression that would go beyond gender polarity. The rigid division, reflecting the sharp male/female dichotomy visible in Northern Irish society, was playfully explored by Charabanc in a number of their plays. As my analysis of *Somewhere over the Balcony* will show, their dramatic texts often achieve this aim by the conscious use of mimicry rather than adherence to the conventions of "maintenance mimesis" (Robinson 27) which Luce Irigaray defines as automatic, repetitive copying of the male standards that have dominated female expression in patriarchal, Western societies (*This Sex* 131).

The exclusion of women from the canon of Irish literature by Field Day mirrored the situation in Northern Irish theatre in the early 1980s, where female actors stood little chance of professional success. Charabanc was founded by five Irish actresses: Marie Jones, Carol Scalan, Eleanor Methven, Maureen Macauley, and Brenda Winter, distressed by the lack of opportunities for professional development in Belfast. As Methven explains,

When we weren't unemployed, the work we got wasn't good quality—the wife, the mother, the usual sort of roles actresses get, or the background for some guy on stage. So the company was born out of frustration and boredom and the desire to do good work. (qtd. in Martin 89–90)

Although there are similarities between the two companies, in certain respects Charabanc defined themselves in opposition to the mainstream Field Day.¹ The main difference consisted in the fact that their plays adopted a working-class, female perspective on the Northern Irish present and past.

Interestingly, Charabanc was not even intended to be an all-female ensemble, and it was purely economic circumstances that determined the composition of the company. As DiCenzo remarks,

They [Charabanc] were on a social welfare scheme designed to deal with long-term unemployment, whereby the government paid eighty percent for their wages for the year, based on the Equity minimum. But to qualify for the scheme one had to have been unemployed for a certain number of months and even though Charabanc had created parts for men in the play [*Lay Up your Ends*], they could not find any actors who had been out of work for that long. (179)

Despite the fact that the female perspective is one of the hallmarks of Charabanc, its members were reluctant to label the company “feminist.” As Marie Jones explains, this would significantly weaken their social agenda. She states:

At the time when Charabanc started . . . there were a lot of English theatre companies, trendy, middle-class and presenting feminism, and calling themselves feminist. It could be alienating and we were trying to encourage people to go to the theatre, people who had never been before, and we didn't want to put them off by having any kinds of labels, we just wanted to say that this is a play about ordinary people. (qtd. in Foley 30)

Carefully avoiding sectarian or gender polarities, Charabanc preferred to define themselves along the lines of social class as a working-class theatre company, deeply rooted in the working-class theatre aesthetics. Most of their early plays are characterized by the nine elements playwright and theatre theorist John McGrath considered as typical of working-class theatre: the direct treatment of the problem, sharp comedy, the use of music, openness to emotion on the stage, elements of variety entertainment, “a moment-by-moment effect” (rather than “a slow build-up to great dramatic moments”), immediacy, strong localism, and the audience's sense of identity with the performer (54–61). The members of Charabanc did not position themselves

¹ An interesting comparison between Field Day and Charabanc can be found in Lojek.

against the working-class theatre tradition broadly defined by McGrath, but claimed a legitimate part in it and pushed its boundaries to include the marginalized female perspective and the company's novel aesthetics.

One of the means to achieve this aim was to reconsider the production process. As DiCenzo puts it, Charabanc was a "theatre that has not conformed—and does not wish to conform—to an intellectual and organisational establishment" (184). Even though Marie Jones played a major role as the company's playwright, their productions frequently involved collective research into a given topic and a considerable amount of devising strategies, while the further creative process "reverse[d] the traditional writer/director dominated power structure" (Martin 89), since directors for their performances were commissioned by the actresses themselves.

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The name of the company derives from the tradition of working-class women from Belfast who would occasionally hire a charabanc, a holiday bus, and together go on a tour outside the city (Methven and Moore 278). Such a form of entertainment gave them a temporary relief from daily chores and helped them distance themselves from everyday problems. This new, female, working-class perspective on everyday life in Northern Ireland became the hallmark of Charabanc's productions. Endowed with a large dose of carnivalesque humour, such a distanced approach can, for instance, be found in Charabanc's 1987 play *Somewhere over the Balcony*, written by Marie Jones in collaboration with other members of the company and lauded by Claudia W. Harris as "the creative culmination of the best qualities of Charabanc's early work" (xlili). Taking its audience on an engaging tour of one of the deprived areas of the Northern Irish capital, the play focuses on the lives of three Catholic women: the industrious widow Ceely Cash, who runs a souvenir shop with military equipment found in the streets of Belfast and who unites the local female community sharing local news and running bingo games via her illegal pirate radio station; pious Kate Tidy, who lives in her dilapidating flat with her son, a dog, and a collection of saint figurines; and Rose Marie Noble, an overprotective mother of twins.

The protagonists live in the infamous Divis Flats in Belfast. Built in the 1960s in the Falls neighbourhood, which has been the centre of Republican activity, and mostly demolished by the end of the 1980s, Divis Flats came to be known as a Catholic ghetto which provided very poor housing conditions. Surrounded by poverty and the raging sectarian conflict, the women perform the traditional roles of caring mothers and homemakers. At the same time, the female micro-society they create on the balconies of their flats helps them perform these roles consciously with a large dose of mockery and irony, and thus, manifest their resistance to the dominant patriarchal stereotypes of femininity.

In order to explain the subversive strategies used by the protagonists of the play, it is useful to explore Luce Irigaray's concept of mimesis, which is based on the distinction between the two forms of mimesis postulated by Plato. Irigaray explains that "there is the mimesis that would be already caught up in a process of imitation, specularization, adequation, and reproduction" (*This Sex* 131). It is an imitation of an imitation, which only increases the distance from the true nature of things. The other repressed form of mimesis is associated with production, rather than reproduction. "[C]onstituted as an enclave within a 'dominant' discourse" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 131), it is envisaged as a source of female creativity. Irigaray associates productive mimesis with the domain of music. Ladelle McWhorter aptly explains its nature by making a comparison to a performance of a musical score, which "is never adequation or mere reproduction; it is always open to difference," and to the music of a mockingbird (161). This suggests that productive mimesis always involves a departure from a given model, which reveals the artificial construction and performative character of this model. One way to achieve such an aim is to take recourse to Irigaray's concept of mimicry, a playful imitation which challenges the meaning, nature, and significance of the original model. Involving a playful attitude to maintenance mimesis, its goal is to denaturalize and bring to light "what was supposed to remain invisible" (*This Sex* 76) and is just a fake construct. In its strife to articulate what is not supposed to be exposed, mimicry not only reveals the social performativity of gender roles, but can give voice to female pleasure as well. This highlights the subversive nature of such a strategy since, as Irigaray notes, "what is most strictly forbidden to women today is that they should attempt to express their own pleasure" (*This Sex* 77). Mimicry, as an instance of productive mimesis, is the opposite of assimilation and docility. It involves constant tension with the "mimesis imposed" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 59–61). It also facilitates the development of a processual identity which avoids fixity and is based on constant reinventing and pushing the boundaries of female gender roles. As will be shown, the protagonists of *Somewhere over the Balcony* have mastered various productive mimetic strategies which help them challenge gender, as well as sectarian divisions antagonizing Northern Irish society.

As its title suggests, the play is set on the balconies of Divis Flats, a location whose symbolic and social significance in the play corresponds to the key ideas implicit in the name of the company. Historically speaking, going on a charabanc tour entailed a crucial change of perspective and created a distancing effect. It was a form of entertainment which allowed working-class women to temporarily resign from their role as participants in everyday life and become more objective observers. It created a sense of distance and detachment which is necessary to interpret and mimic the

whole reproductive “economy of representation” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 152). The same is true for the protagonists of the play under discussion, who eagerly escape the narrow domestic space whose vulnerable walls literally fall apart under the pressures of the sectarian conflict raging around it. When Mary Rose is arrested and taken away for interrogation under the suspicion of being involved in Republican terrorism, Ceely comments: “She’ll love it. Isn’t it getting her out of the house for a couple of hours?” (Jones 202). Similarly, Kate revels in her moments of peace and quiet while emptying her dustbin in the morning and thus stubbornly resists the idea of using the rubbish chute.

Islanded among raging chaos, the protagonists of the play spend most of their free time on the balconies—in a no man’s land between the two warring factions, the British military forces stationed at the top of the nearby Divis Tower and a group of Irish Republicans wreaking havoc in the streets. They are presented as witnesses of the absurd sectarian spectacle taking place in front of their eyes, and their engagement in these manic events can often be seen as similar to that of an audience commenting on a sporting match. Like Claudia W. Harris, one could also compare the women to “a surreal Greek chorus” (xliv), or to theatre spectators.

In fact, the balconies serve as a metatheatrical device which facilitates a reversal of the critical gaze of the audience. The events described by the protagonists happen just outside the flats, as if in the auditorium, which accentuates the engagement of the spectators in the absurdities of sectarianism. Most importantly, though, the specific location of the play reinforces the distanced attitude of the characters to the surrounding chaos and violence, on which they comment with a large dose of humour and irony. Examining the way of experiencing the world below by a person standing at the top of the World Trade Centre, Michel de Certeau writes:

Elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. (92)

A similar sense of empowerment deriving from the change of perspective can be found in *Somewhere over the Balcony*. Yet the balconies of Divis Flats are not only a site of observation, interpretation and commentary, but also of intervention. The women do not hesitate to interfere in the mad spectacle taking place outside when its participants fail to perform their roles properly, as in the case of the priest who orders the people barricaded in the nearby chapel to surrender to the British military forces and is immediately silenced by the protagonists, who hit him, using a toy catapult.

At times, the balcony gives the protagonists a possibility to influence the absurdly chaotic reality that surrounds them. Yet most often it serves as a site where they exercise imaginary control, which accentuates the parodic aspect of their performance. Seeing a British army chopper landing on the top of the nearby Divis Tower, “KATE and ROSE pretend to bring [it] down to land” (Jones 184). This gesture is an example of what may be called “counter-mimicry”—a deliberate, theatricalized performance of the opposite role to that expected of a woman (an underprivileged Northern Irish Catholic and a working-class member), which exposes the protagonists’ powerlessness. Although Ceely, Kate and Rose often attempt to bring some order to the world around them, the commands that they shout at their husbands, children and dogs are rarely heard or followed.

As in the times of the Troubles, the women presented in the play are still bound to play supporting roles in their men’s struggle against British invaders. Yet, again, to use Irigaray’s words, they do “not will to be their [men’s] equal[s]” (*This Sex* 152), but use their exclusion and marginality as an asset which facilitates productive mimesis. During the Troubles, one of the roles given to women consisted in keeping a look-out and warning men against the approaching British forces by banging bin lids. Comically distorted, the legacy of the Troubles is still alive in the play. The women keep a look-out in order to warn their unemployed husbands against “dole snoopers,” which is but another instance of mimicry effectively replacing sectarian pathos with subversive bathos.

Furthermore, in *Somewhere over the Balcony* the perspective according to which the role traditionally attributed to Northern Irish women was to support their partners in their sectarian strife is reversed—the so-far nameless helpers are individualized and brought to the fore, while the men constitute a rather homogenous background for their actions. Most of them are named Tucker (“a pet name for Thomas”), “according to Marie Jones, used consistently in the text to suggest the alliterative effect of the constant *tuc tuc tuc* of overhead British Army surveillance helicopters” (Foley 43). The application of this common “generic” name suggests entrapment in the narrow confines of Irish masculinity. Male sectarianism is further ridiculed by the protagonists, who perceive their husbands as lazy idlers. Therefore, the women grant the status of local heroes not so much to their men, but to their dogs whose deeds they commemorate in a song performed to a traditional Irish shanty tune, “The Holy Ground”:²

² In general, the sense of joy and playfulness permeating the female community is particularly conspicuous when the characters sing their songs, in a Brechtian fashion commenting on the problems they experience in their everyday lives.

Oh, Rambo McGlinchey, you've only got one eye.
 You're fearless and brave, and for us you would die.
 You take on the British with no weapons at all,
 And when Ireland at last is free you will hang on our wall. (Jones 186)

A curious and grotesque mixture of popular culture and Irish Republicanism, the one-eyed poodle who “ate more soldiers’ legs than dog biscuits” (Jones 186) combines the features of the protagonist of the American action film series and the head of the illegal Irish National Liberation Army and thus ridicules the local die-hard nationalism and male-dominated sectarianism as a whole. The song also suggests the inadequate nature of the male role models which in real life are never fulfilled.

In general, apart from the occasional moments of threat and menace, when gathered on their balconies, the protagonists seem to enjoy watching the havoc on the ground. They act as mockingbirds, presenting the audience with an image of the sectarian conflict which resembles a comedy of errors and a lively masquerade. Thus, the balconies can be perceived as a stronghold of the women’s creative and expressive power, as they offer a convenient perspective to examine sectarianism, the working-class ethos, and conventional gender roles in a playful manner, revealing their performative nature.

Traditionally, a balcony often reflected the marginal role of women in public life.³ It has frequently been defined as a female space, a substitute for a garden and an extension of the domestic sphere, indicating a sense of entrapment within narrowly-defined gender roles. At the same time, a balcony may be seen as a liminal space—a borderland between male-dominated, public and stereotypically female, private space. Suspended between these two gendered areas, it serves as a perfect “outside” or “third” space (to borrow the phrase from Homi Bhabha⁴) where mimicry and counter-mimicry can be practised. In Charabanc’s play the balcony is envisioned as a carnivalesque space of female laughter, pleasure, and subversion. This is where the protagonists create their own community, which to some extent fits into Julia Kristeva’s definition of

³ An interesting example taken from a different cultural context is the ballroom of the National Press Club in Washington, where the state authorities frequently gave their addresses. Since women were not allowed inside, female reporters had to cover these speeches from a balcony above the ballroom.

⁴ Bhabha explains the concept of the “third space” in the book *The Location of Culture*, where he states that it is “the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (38) and adds that “by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (39).

“countersociety”—“a sort of an alter-ego of the official society, in which real or fantasized possibilities for *jouissance* take refuge [and which is] imagined as harmonious, without prohibitions, free and fulfilling” (870). Still, as Kristeva further asserts, countersociety “generates . . . its essence as a simulacrum of the combated society or of power” (871). By employing productive solutions, the female community presented in the play does not fall into the trap of simulacra, i.e. the trap of maintenance mimesis. As Robinson notes, “in productive mimesis . . . the aim is to develop, add to or exceed a given situation that has been found insufficient to allow for the articulation of subjectivity” (39–40). I believe that one of the ways in which this concept may be realized is through creative recycling.

For instance, this process is visible when the female characters appropriate objects belonging to the male world to their advantage. One example of such a strategy is the recycling of sectarian war paraphernalia. Like *Mother Courage* from Bertolt Brecht’s famous play, the women feed on war, trying to transform its downsides into a source of material profit which will improve the poor financial situation of their families. By doing so, they also participate in the local economy. They enjoy this privilege, yet approach it with a large grain of mockery targeted at so-called “Troubles tourism.” Kate, for instance, attempts to sell a bin lid as a souvenir to a German journalist for two hundred pounds, claiming that it is “the first bin lid ever banged on internment morning” (Jones 188).⁵ The industrious Ceely opens her own small souvenir shop with rubber bullets, riot gear, and gas masks gathered in the streets of Belfast. In a sense, this idea of re-appropriation and re-exploration of the objects belonging to the male-dominated sphere corresponds to what Charabanc strived to achieve when they entered the Northern Irish stage and adapted it to the new perspective they offered.

A crucial element that reinforces the bonds in the female alternative society depicted in the play is the stolen radio transmitter that Ceely uses to run her own local pirate station. In a chatty, conversational manner, she shares the local news and announcements with her neighbours. The radio provides the female community in Divis Flats with bingo gaming and, in the case of trouble, an emergency means of communication. From the male, sectarian perspective, the radio is a “*suspect device*” (Jones 203) the British security forces want to confiscate from the flats when they ask the inhabitants to leave their homes. For Belfast audiences, the scene would have echoed the tragic story of Jean McConville, an inhabitant of Divis Flats, accused of informing to the British and put to death by the

⁵ As has been mentioned, during the Troubles, Republican women used to bang their bin lids to warn their neighbourhood about upcoming danger. The role of bin lids in the play has been discussed in detail by Eleanor Owicki (56–66).

Provisional IRA in 1972. Brendan Hughes, the Officer Commanding of the Belfast Brigade of the IRA, explains the rationale behind the execution in the following way:

I'm not sure how it originally started, how she became . . . an informer [but] she was an informer; she had a transmitter in her house. . . . We received information from—that—had something in the house. I sent . . . a squad over to the house to check it out and there was a transmitter in the house. We retrieved the transmitter, arrested her, took her away, interrogated her, and she told [us] what she was doing. We actually knew what she was doing because we had the transmitter. . . . And because she was a woman . . . we let her go with a warning [and] confiscated the transmitter. A few weeks later, I'm not sure again how the information came about . . . another transmitter was put into her house . . . she was still co-operating with the British. (qtd. in Moloney 128–29)

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This story reinforces the idea of a radio transmitter as a “suspect device,” largely associated with male-dominated, public space and the sectarian conflict. In spite of the possible danger connected with using such a device in Divis Flats, Ceely’s radio has been transformed into a tool for expressing female communal spirit. As in the case of war paraphernalia or the dustbin lid, the women use the device for their own, non-sectarian purpose, which helps them create an alternative social space according to their own agenda.

The perspective offered in the play ridicules the concept of male, public space as a domain of reason. One day in the lives of the denizens of Divis Flats is presented through the eyes of the protagonists in an absurd and exaggerated fashion. The public space surrounding the balcony is a site of chaos and anomie with children and dogs joyriding in an ambulance, wedding guests barricading themselves in a chapel surrounded by the British, exploding cars, hijacked helicopters, and local youngsters burning Union Jacks on the roof of a chapel. As Methven explains, “parameters of normality have stretched so much, that no matter what you put in [the play], you will find a parallel for it in everyday normal life” (qtd. in DiCenzo 181). The drama suggests that in sectarian, conflict-ridden Northern Ireland the notions of rationality and social progress are to be found not so much in the male-dominated, violent and dysfunctional public space but on the fringes of the domestic and the public, on the balcony—a site of productive mimesis and *jouissance*.

In Charabanc’s play, the balcony is where one may both exercise and be subjected to close observation, the latter being facilitated by the opening of an observation post on the top of the nearby 61-meter-tall Divis Tower. As Kate describes it,

I remember when the British army moved into that Tower block . . . my Frank says "Them bastards are watching us." Says me, "They must have bloody good eyesight cos they are fifteen floors up." "Cameras," he says. "Close-up cameras." And lo and behold that very next day there was five soldiers hokin' around in my rubbish . . . but I don't care cos I never done nothin' as long as I can't see them looking at me. So I just bought myself a new dressing gown and ignored them. . . . "They can hear you too," says he. . . . "Big deal," says me, "sure them English can't understand us anyway." (Jones 183)

The panoptical character of the surveillance seems to be much more successful in relation to men, such as Granda Tucker, who for twelve years has not left his flat nor spoken a word for fear of being seen or heard by the British. The women, by contrast, attempt to preserve the façade of normality, trying to ignore the oppressors or challenging their power and authority. They do not let themselves be confined within the four walls marking the boundaries of the domestic area, and they defend the communal space they have created for themselves on the balconies, where they are both objects of observation, remaining under the watchful eyes of the British army, and observers subverting the gaze of the British soldiers. They consciously and playfully respond to political surveillance to which they have been exposed by envisioning it as an instance of male gaze and performing a traditional masquerade of femininity. Kate, for instance, in a mocking fashion presents herself as an attractive object of male desire by clothing herself in a new dressing gown and Ceely strikes several provocative, sexy poses for the British voyeurs stationed at the top of the tower (Jones 187). The women from Divis Flats take pleasure in a temporary reversal of gendered models of behaviour. What particularly attracts their attention are soldiers, "all hot and sweaty" (Jones 185), jogging at the top of the tower, about whom they share their erotic fantasies with the audience. In this way, the protagonists reverse the objectifying gaze and direct it at the male surveillant. They mimic the male gaze, playfully reclaiming the right to derive erotic pleasure from the act of gazing at the object of their desire, subverting the vertical hierarchy, and transforming the panoptic system of male surveillance into a female synopticon.

Although the protagonists mostly approach the rigid gender roles that prevail in the local community from a distanced, playful perspective, there are times when desperate to have some control over the raging chaos, they fall into the trap of hysteria. In her analysis of Irigaray's writing, Robinson describes the concept of "hysterical mimicry" as informed by a woman's "wishes to regain and retain her subjectivity through absolute control of that 'femininity,' exceeding it through becoming the

best at it” (40). Such a strategy is essentially unproductive. Robinson explains that “the mimesis of the hysteric is doomed to be a mimesis of powerlessness, mimicry of a ‘femininity’ that was never ‘hers’” (40). In *Somewhere over the Balcony*, such an instance of overcompliance can be found when abandoned by her husband, Kate desperately tries to make her flat a decent place to live in for her young son. Her economic situation, however, does not give her any hope for a bright future. In the past blamed by her now absent husband for their daughter’s untimely death and every, even minute, misfortune or inconvenience that they had encountered, Kate has turned to religion and assumed the role of a God-fearing Catholic housewife. Having internalized the sense of guilt, she hopes to atone for her sins and be rewarded for her devotion—to break the vicious circle of misfortune. Her excessive religious behaviour does not, however, lead to the desired effect. The walls of her flat eventually crumble down and the ceiling seems to be about to collapse. Kate’s strong eagerness to fulfil the given social role of a dutiful wife, caring mother, and devout Catholic only leads to the escalation of self-blame. Most of the time, however, the protagonists of the play avoid overcompliance and replace it with mimicry and counter-mimicry.

To conclude, by effectively using the setting of the play as a site of productive mimesis, which operates outside the traditional male/female, public/private binary systems, Charabanc’s *Somewhere over the Balcony* examines the possible strategies of pushing the narrow boundaries of the social roles that the female protagonists have been made to perform. To use Irigaray’s words, the characters “play with mimesis” and bring “new nourishment to its operation” (*This Sex* 76). Their strategies of resistance against maintenance mimesis include both mimicry, which involves a deliberate assumption of “the feminine style and posture assigned to her by [patriarchal] discourse” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 220), and what may be called counter-mimicry, which denotes a deliberate assumption of the unfeminine style and posture not so much to embrace them, but to examine them in a playful way and reveal the artificiality of the social constructs to which they belong. In the play, this is possible thanks to the distancing effect of the balconies. They serve as a counterspace which does not simply reproduce the arrangements governing the official space, but rather seeks to creatively expand and transform it by laying bare its constructedness. In this respect, the play offers a metacommentary on Charabanc’s own creative practice which sought to expand the scope of voices and perspectives represented in Northern Irish theatre by introducing a new working-class aesthetics and a more collaborative, open and democratic creative process to the Northern Irish theatre tradition.

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“The Heart of this People is in its right place”: The American Press and Private Charity in the United States during the Irish Famine

ABSTRACT

The potato blight that struck Ireland in 1845 led to ineffable suffering that sent shockwaves throughout the Anglosphere. The Irish Famine is deemed to be the first national calamity to attract extensive help and support from all around the world. Even though the Irish did not receive adequate support from the British government, their ordeal was mitigated by private charity. Without the donations from a great number of individuals, the death toll among the famished Irishmen and Irishwomen would have been definitely higher. The greatest and most generous amount of assistance came from the United States. In spite of the fact that the U.S. Congress did not decide to earmark any money for the support of famine-stricken Ireland, the horrors taking place in this part of the British Empire pulled at American citizens' heartstrings and they contributed munificently to the help of the Irish people. Aiding Ireland was embraced by the American press, which, unlike major British newspapers, lauded private efforts to bring succour to the Irish. Such American newspapers as the *Daily National Intelligencer*, the *New York Herald* and the *Liberator* encouraged their readers to contribute to the relief of Ireland and applauded efforts to help the Irish. The aim of this essay is to argue that the American press, in general, played a significant role in encouraging private charity in the United States towards the Irish at the time of *An Gorta Mór* and, thus, helped to save many lives.

Keywords: Ireland, Famine, 19th century, American press, private charity.

The Great Irish Famine (1845–52) was a terrible tragedy that resulted in the loss of many lives and transformed Irish society irrevocably. The mass starvation on the shores of Ireland triggered an exodus of the Irish, the majority of whom chose to set sail to North America. The crisis in Ireland sent shockwaves throughout the Anglosphere and evoked sympathy in different corners of the world. Due to the mass emigration of the Irish to the United States the failure of the potato crop in Ireland impacted profoundly American society. Furthermore, the misery of the inhabitants of Ireland tugged at Americans' hearts and they responded to the Famine showing their sympathy and magnanimity. This was possible due to the fact that the crisis in Ireland was widely covered in the American press and American newspapers praised and encouraged Americans in their efforts to bring succour to the Irish. This essay examines the role of three American newspapers: the *Daily National Intelligencer*, a prominent conservative newspaper published in Washington, DC, the weekly abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator* and the penny paper the *New York Herald*.

Many publications dealing with the Irish Famine focus on the role of the British government and the measures it undertook to alleviate the crisis. By and large, historians point out that the British establishment did not do enough to help the sister island, which since 1801 had been an integral part of the United Kingdom.¹ The failure of the British politicians was acknowledged in 1997 by Tony Blair, who at the 150th anniversary of the Great Hunger apologized for British government's inertia in the time of need (Marks). Another culprit that allowed this humanitarian crisis to take place on the doorstep of the mighty British Empire was the British press. The British periodicals, such as the *Times* and *Punch*, did not empathize with the Irish, but preferred to emphasize their alleged indolence and ingratitude (Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine* 130–34). Unlike the British journals, many American newspapers sympathized with the misery of the Irish, which must have contributed to the fact that the Society of Friends, which was actively engaged in fund-raising for the victims of the Famine in Ireland, reported that “[t]he supplies sent from America to Ireland were on a scale unparalleled in history” (qtd. in Bruce 16).

There were a few differences between the British and American periodicals. In order to inform their readers about the crisis in Ireland the American journals relied heavily on the British and Irish periodicals, which

¹ See Ciarán Ó Murchadha, *The Great Famine: Ireland's Agony 1845-1852* (London: Continuum, 2011); Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800–1850* (London: Routledge, 2006); Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845–52* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994).

were brought on steamers crossing the Atlantic loaded with passengers and European newspapers. To ensure that American readers were supplied with up-to-date developments in the United Kingdom American publishers gleaned news items from foreign newspapers. The newspapers published in remoter places, which, as a result, found it harder to access European newspapers relied, in turn, on the major American titles. To be more competitive some of the American newspapers had correspondents who delivered firsthand accounts. Sometimes information was taken from government officials, who were likely to portray the calamity in Ireland in a rather subjective way. There were also correspondents who accosted Irish newcomers and provided reports based on their perspective of the Famine. The story of the Famine was also disseminated through the letters to the editor, which were sent by the Irish, people who visited Ireland at that time, and those who witnessed the ordeal of the Irish immigrants (Hogan 155–79). Despite being dependent on information from the European titles, the American press offers an additional and valuable insight into the Irish Famine and a different perspective on the tragedy in Ireland.

Due to the fact that information about the potato blight that struck Europe in 1845 was taken from the European press, there were contradictory reports concerning the imminence of the famine, as it was believed that the Irish were exaggerating the extent of the damage. On 6 October 1845 the *Daily National Intelligencer* reported that the potato crop in Britain and the Continent was considerably injured (“Fifteen Days Later from Europe” 3). In early December, the *New York Herald* noted, however, that “the *Dublin Evening Mail* contends and quotes respectable proofs for the correctness of the assertion, that the cry about the injury done to the potato crop has been greatly and wilfully exaggerated” (“Further Extracts from the Foreign Papers” 1). In December the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a letter from an Irishman, dated 30 November 1845, in which he states that

[a] great deal of the potato crop has rotted; but even if one-fourth of the whole was lost, (which I doubt,) there is yet an average one remaining sound, as, in the memory of man, there has never been such an abundant one, both as to the quantity planted and the return from the planting. (“The Potato Crop in Ireland” 3)

What is more, some American publishers tried to take advantage of the crisis and make a profit. For example, James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* was criticized for not publishing news about the potato failure immediately in order to sell it to speculators (Hogan 159). Some papers also underlined the fact that the Famine was an opportunity to

sell grain to the British and make a profit (Farrell 4-5). The contradictory nature of the reports about the state of Ireland and the belief that the Irish were not trustworthy were disadvantageous to the Irish in Britain, as well as in America (Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine* 34).

Even though the potato crop failure proved partial in 1845, the crisis galvanized people to collect money for the Irish in such far-flung places as Calcutta and Boston, Massachusetts. In India, the Calcutta Relief Fund, spearheaded by British-born residents, had collected an amount in the region of £14,000 by the end of 1846 (Kinealy, *Charity* 45). In Boston, local Repealers, the supporters of Daniel O’Connell and the abrogation of the Act of Union, formed a committee to raise funds. The committee convened a meeting in December

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to take into consideration the awful calamity that threatens the Irish people, by the shortness of the crops in that unhappy country at the present time, and to devise means towards the relief of the suffering thousands who will inevitably perish from starvation in case aid is not sent them. (“Meeting for the Relief of the Irish” 3)

The Bostonians managed to collect \$750 at a meeting held in December 1845. Because it was organized by a politicized group, Britain was denounced as the culprit responsible for the tragedy in Ireland. The Boston initiative was, however, brief and petered out in early 1846 due to the widespread belief in the exaggerated nature of the reports from Ireland (Kinealy, “Saving the Irish Poor”).

With more and more reports on the havoc wreaked by the potato blight the British papers devoted a considerable amount of space to texts discussing possible ways of salvaging diseased potatoes.² Due to the fact that the cause of the potato rot was not established until the 1890s, these deliberations were futile.³ In addition, many articles were devoted to the question of the repeal of the Corn Laws, which was supported by the British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, and what measures should be taken to mitigate the situation in Ireland. The British press, by and large, was against any direct relief and underlined the responsibility of Irish landlords for the crisis (Hamera 65–81). Conversely, the *New York Herald* censured Britain for the handling of the disaster in Ireland and stressed that saving people’s lives should be a priority. In one of its features the journal states that

² See “The Potato Disease,” *The Times* 18 Nov. 1845: 7; “The Potato Disease,” *The Times* 21 Nov. 1845: 6.

³ See Miller (444-62).

[t]he Irish must eat. They cannot wait for the end of the discussion. Six million of people cannot be allowed to perish while a committee of doctors of political economy arrive at a conclusion that the laws, which deprive them of food, ought to be suspended. Feed them first, and discuss afterwards. (“The Crisis in Affairs on the Other Side of the Atlantic” 1)

Apart from the initiatives in Boston and Calcutta the incomplete crop failure in 1845 did not evoke too much sympathy towards the Irish. As a result, there were no major efforts to bring relief to Ireland. This started changing in 1846, especially when reports detailing the ordeal of starving Irish families were becoming omnipresent. News items underling the despair and suffering of the Irish were also printed in the American papers at the time.⁴ Although accounts of the plight in famine-stricken Ireland were published quite frequently in the press in 1846, in November the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a letter from a person from County Roscommon in Ireland to a citizen of Washington, DC upbraiding Americans for their callousness. The author of the letter shames Americans stating that

[n]ever had we such accounts to send as in this present year. Ireland is visited from north to south, from east to west, with a most direful famine; the poor are living in many parts on cabbages and salt, and many of them dying on the highroads, in the fields, and in the towns, of Irish cholera and various other complaints, in consequence of such food, and very many have not even much of that sort, bad as it is. The potatoes *in toto* perished; indeed, they are totally extinct in Ireland. . . . I am astonished that the Americans, mixed with Irish as they are, never manifested the least sympathy for us in our present deplorable condition, more especially as in India the Irish there entered into the matter very cordially, and made up a considerable sum in Calcutta, say £11,000, towards the relief of the poor Irish, which was remitted to Dublin, and they are still adding to it their contributions monthly—many, very many a poor man was relieved from the Calcutta fund. (“Deplorable Picture” 3)

The letter did not fall on deaf ears and drew interest. A few days later the *Daily National Intelligencer* reprinted a commentary from the *Pittsburgh Gazette and Advertiser*. The Pittsburgh paper refers to the letter saying:

We blushed when we read the last paragraph in the above article, to think that nothing had been done in Pittsburg [sic] to relieve our suffering

⁴ See “The Suffering in Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 8 May 1846: 4; “Arrival of the Hibernia,” *The Liberator* 27 May 1846: 3.

fellow-men, and, thousands here may say, their suffering fellow-kindred, from absolute starvation. Where are our bowels of compassion? How can we sit down at our tables ladened [sic] with the bounties of Providence, and not reflect hundreds of thousands of Irishmen are pinning in hunger, dying, yes, absolutely *dying of starvation?*. . . . Let a meeting be called at once, and a ship load of flour and corn be sent from Pittsburg [sic] before the canal closes. (“Washington” 3)

The letter published in the *Daily National Intelligencer* called for Americans’ goodwill and made an impression in America. Moreover, there were other letters and features on the predicament of the Irish that evoked sympathy and spurred Americans to help Ireland. The *Liberator* published a letter from William Lloyd Garrison, the famous abolitionist who was at that time visiting Great Britain, in which he comments on his visit to Ireland. Garrison makes an indelible description of the situation in Ireland stating that

I was frequently melted to tears, and for the first time in my life saw human beings, especially women and children, in a situation that made me almost lament their existence. Yet I was assured that I saw the best portion of the laboring poor in Ireland! Alas! for them, with the famine which is sorely pressing them, in consequence of the entire failure of the potato crop—the food on which they have subsisted from time immemorial. Multitudes, beyond a doubt,—in spite of all that the government can do to give relief,—will miserably perish for the want of the absolute necessaries of life. O, the poor women! O, the poor children! O, the poor babies! Heaven send them speedy succor! (“Letter from Mr. Garrison” 3)

The question of whether to help Ireland was raised on the floor of the U.S. Senate. It was Senator Samuel Chase who for the first time referred to the plight of the Irish in the U.S. Congress on 2 June 1846. He suggested a less restrictive tariff policy claiming that England was in need of American goods. Arguing for a less stringent tariff policy he quoted excerpts from the *Daily National Intelligencer* in which it was noted that “[i]n many places there are no potatoes left . . . the wretched sufferers are in vain endeavouring to get provisions in time that their children may not die” (“The News by the Cambria” 3; Sarbaugh 8). After Chase’s speech the Irish Famine had not been discussed in the U.S. Capitol for a few months (Sarbaugh 10). Then on 8 February 1847, Congressman Washington Hunt from New York proposed a bill requesting \$500,000 for food and its transportation to Ireland. The *Daily National Intelligencer* published an appeal to Congress, whose author points out that the proposed sum is

too small and calls for greater benevolence towards the hapless Irish. The author also tried to appeal to readers' emotions underscoring that

[e]ven while I am writing children are dying in their mothers' arms for want of sustenance; and the dead bodies are unburied through stress of poverty, disease, and famine among the surviving. . . . They are our friends; they look to the people of the United States as their benefactors. Let them not cry to us in vain! ("An Appeal to Congress" 2)

Despite the author's conviction that the bill would be passed easily, the popular proposal, eventually, died in a committee (Kinealy, *Charity* 120).

A similar bill demanding the same amount of money was proposed on 26 February 1847 by Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky. Despite vociferous opponents of the bill, who emphasized that it was the duty of the British government to help Ireland, the Senate passed the bill and sent it to the House of Representatives. In the House some Congressmen raised objections to the bill and it was directed to the Ways and Means Committee (Sarbaugh 11–13). Crittenden's bill was generally supported by the Whigs, the American political party, but came into the cross hairs of some politicians and the public, as they viewed it as a stratagem to win the Irish vote (Kinealy, *Charity* 121). In addition, President James Knox Polk, who deemed the bill unconstitutional, made it clear that if the bill had made it out of the committee he would have vetoed it. In the end, the bill, as in the case of the previous one, did not come out of the committee (Sarbaugh 13). To redeem itself, the American government passed a bill providing two men-of-war to transport donations to the shores of Ireland. President Polk, possibly in order to avoid alienating Irish Americans, spurred U.S. citizens to make private donations and personally contributed \$50. Despite the fiasco of the bills allocating money to bring relief to Ireland, Americans answered Polk's call and gave magnanimously to the relief of the famished Irish (Sarbaugh 13–14).

Bringing help to the Irish was embraced by the American press, which, unlike the British newspapers, lauded private efforts to bring succour to Ireland. The London *Times*, for example, tried to convince its readers that the Irish were taking advantage of the benevolence of the British. In one of the editorials it is noted, for example, that the Irish "find it pleasanter to live on alms than on labour" (*The Times*, 26 Mar. 1847: 4). In 1849, when the situation in Ireland was deplorable, the *Times* portrayed charitable efforts to raise funds to help the Irish as another attempt to fleece the British. The English journal states that

the begging-box will soon have to be sent round the country to abate the mortality and famine of Ireland. . . . The ears of women are to be stimulated by the most touching appeals to mercy, charity, and religion.

Scenes of horror are to be conned by rote, and then dressed up according to the tact of orators and the taste of audiences; and a handsome return is calculated on. (*The Times*, 15 May 1849: 5)

The American periodicals, on the other hand, highlighting the distress in Ireland encouraged Americans to be generous.⁵ In November 1846 the *Daily National Intelligencer* addressed its readers stating

[a]nd should we, as fellow beings of this same people, remain insensible to so much suffering; or shall we not “feel another’s wo,” because we do not hear his cries of distress? No; this would be to belie the generous humanity which has ever marked the American character. (“Distress in Ireland” 3)

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In late 1846 the first committees and meetings to collect money and other goods for the Irish started to be convened in such cities as New York, Boston, Washington and Philadelphia (Kinealy, *Charity* 222). A gathering organized in the City Hall in Washington was, for example, supported by the *Daily National Intelligencer* which expressed hope that “those who have the means will also have the disposition to contribute to the relief of a people whose sufferings are so appalling and whose wants are so urgent and universal” (“City News” 23 Nov. 1846: 1).⁶ The efforts to give assistance to the Irish intensified in 1847. The *Daily National Intelligencer* notes in a piece dated 17 February 1847 that “[m]ovements are being made in various sections of the Union with a view to administer relief to the starving population of Ireland” (“Relief for Ireland” 4). Throughout 1847 articles reporting on meetings for the relief of the suffering Irish were ubiquitous.⁷ They were intermingled with reports on the horrors and hardships that people in Ireland had to endure (“Ireland,” 2 Feb. 1847: 3).

The American papers extolled endeavours to bring relief to Ireland. The *Daily National Intelligencer* praised Irish labourers who remitted money to their countrymen (“The Suffering Poor of Ireland” 3). On

⁵ See also Farrell (13–16).

⁶ See also “Young Men’s Ball for the Relief of the Sufferers in Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 23 Dec. 1846: 1.

⁷ See “Great Meeting for the Relief of Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 11 Feb. 1847: 3; “Public Meeting for the Relief of the Suffering Poor in Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 12 Feb. 1847: 3; “Collections for the Relief of Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 13 Feb. 1847: 3; “The New Orleans Tropic,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 15 Feb. 1847: 3; “The Relief of Sufferers in Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 20 Feb. 1847: 3; “Food for Suffering Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 25 Feb. 1847: 3.

11 January 1847 the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a short text entitled “Praiseworthy” in which it is underlined that a correspondent of the *New York Courier and Enquirer*

has ascertained that the immigrant Irish population have remitted during the year 1846 *eight hundred and eight thousand dollars!* Of this sum \$175,000 have been remitted within the last two months. A prouder testimonial of the intensity and permanency of home affections could not be raised on behalf of any people in the world. (“Praiseworthy” 4)

The newspapers in America made an effort to emphasize the contributions of American citizens. The *Daily National Intelligencer* applauded two Washingtonians, an owner of a theatre, as well as an owner of a Bowling Saloon, who decided to donate some of their proceeds to “the relief of the sufferers by famine in Ireland” (“Praiseworthy and Deserving of Imitation, Also Praiseworthy and Worthy of Imitation” 1).⁸ The journal praised and acknowledged the contribution of \$5 by the pupils of Wayne Lyceum school in North Carolina, the Reporters in Congress, and the officers and cadets of West Point (“From the City of New York” 3; “Multiple News Items,” 12 Feb. 1847: 4; “Multiple News Items,” 19 Feb. 1847: 3). Furthermore, the *Liberator* published lists with names of people who donated money for the starving people of Ireland and sometimes excerpts from donors’ letters were included as well.⁹ For instance, in one of them it is written that “[m]y four children, after hearing the account of the suffering Irish in the last *Liberator*, at their own request, send [sic] four half dimes” (“Donations for the Starving People in Ireland,” 5 Mar. 1847: 3).¹⁰ The American press took pride in charity towards Ireland, especially because, as noted by the *Daily National Intelligencer*, it was an occasion to show people around the world that Americans were generous and concerned about the suffering of other people. The newspaper states in one of its articles:

Whatever in our country, may be the occasional faults of our General or State Governments, or the errors or excesses of party, the Heart of this People is in its right place, and throbs in unison with that of

⁸ See also “City News,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 24 Feb. 1847: 1; “City News,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 26 Feb. 1847, 1.

⁹ See “Donations for the Starving People in Ireland,” *The Liberator* (26 Feb. 1847: 3, 5 Mar. 1847: 3, 12 Mar. 1847: 3, 19 Mar. 1847: 3, 26 Mar. 1847: 3, 2 Apr. 1847: 3, 9 Apr. 1847: 3, 30 Apr. 1847: 3, 7 May 1847: 3, 21 May 1847: 3, 4 June 1847: 3, 18 June 1847: 3, 25 June 1847: 3, 25 July 1847: 3).

¹⁰ See also “A Generous Donation,” *The Liberator* 12 Mar. 1847: 2.

suffering humanity, whenever and wherever (as in the case of Ireland) that suffering is intelligibly communicated to it. . . . We rejoice in all this, not merely as adding to our already unfeigned respect and affection for our countrymen, but because we are proud of the answer which affords to those persons in foreign lands whose habit it is to represent Brother Jonathan (as they style us) as a sordid and mercenary personage. (“The Famine in Ireland” 3)

Furthermore, the American journals emphasized the gratitude of the recipients of their generosity, which was “warmly expressed with all the exuberance of the Irish heart” (“The Gratitude of Ireland” 3). The *Daily National Intelligencer* reprinted from the *Albany Evening Journal* a letter by Father Theobald Mathew, the Irish leader of the Temperance Movement, in which it is underscored that “[t]he magnificent humanity evinced by our beloved brethren in the States for the suffering Irish has inspired every heart in this Island with ardent gratitude. We shall ever regard America as our deliverer in the hour of bitter calamity” (“A Letter from Father Mathew” 3).¹¹ The *Daily National Intelligencer* published also a lengthy account of a public dinner organized in gratitude to American captains in charge of the U.S. man-of-war *Jamestown*, which was leased by the U.S. Government to bring relief to Ireland (“Kindness Reciprocated” 2). The journal also acquainted its readers with an address from the Dublin authorities thanking for sympathy and help coming from the United States (“Irish Gratitude for American Kindness—Address of the City of Dublin” 3).¹² The British press, on the other hand, highlighted the ingratitude of the inhabitants of the sister island. The London *Times*, for instance, in an editorial published in August 1848 stresses that Ireland will again require help from England and “all she [England] is likely to get in return is railing, curses, and ingratitude” (*The Times*, 29 Aug. 1848: 4).

By and large, the private charity efforts in the United States fizzled out by the end of 1847 (Kinealy, *Charity* 222). Similarly, in Britain the sympathy towards the ordeal of the Irish was short-lived. Some Famine scholars point out that compassion fatigue, that is the lessening of compassion due to the omnipresence of reports about tragedy and misery, took hold among the British (Ó Gráda 43). It seems that also in the case of

¹¹ The letter was published in many other American papers, see also “Letter from Father Mathew,” *The Boston Daily Atlas* 27 Apr. 1847: 2; *The Cleveland Herald* 28 Apr. 1847: 2; “Letter from Father Mathew,” *Daily Sentinel and Gazette* 4 May 1847: 2; “Domestic,” *Vermont Chronicle* 5 May 1847: 3.

¹² See also “Tribute of Gratitude from Ireland,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 30 Oct. 1847: 3; “Tribute of Gratitude from Ireland,” *The New York Herald* 30 Oct. 1847: 1.

the American newspapers and American public opinion the efforts to help the Irish waned as the papers generally ceased publishing accounts of the contributions to the relief of Ireland by the end of 1847. Over the course of 1847 the lists with the names of donors published in the *Liberator* were becoming shorter. An author of a letter published in the *New York Herald* in October 1847 observes giving an account of a public meeting held to procure help for Mormons in Iowa that “prejudice was strong and public charity had well nigh exhausted itself in the relief of the famine stricken Irish, and in assistance to the poor around us” (“The Destitute Mormons in the Far West—The Ladies’ Tea Party for their Relief” 3–4). In addition, the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a report stating that over a million of dollars was spent for the relief of the starving in Ireland (“Donations to Ireland” 3). News items such as these probably allowed American citizens to be content with their efforts and to feel complacent that they did what they could. Moreover, the correspondent of the *New York Herald* complains in a letter published in the paper that “America has done her share, for which she has received only hard words, threats and curses, from the [British] press and ministry” (“Herald Foreign Correspondence” 1). Thus, the journal indicated that the British government should finally shoulder its responsibility and look after its people.

Even though the British government proclaimed the Famine to be over in 1847, the crisis continued till the early 1850s. The prevailing suffering in Ireland was acknowledged by the American papers. In February 1848 the *New York Herald* notes, for example, that “[t]he condition of Ireland seems not to improve in the slightest degree. On the contrary, her fortunes seem to be getting dimmer and dimmer” (“Condition of Ireland” 2). The *Liberator* reprinted a letter from the Dublin *Evening Packet* in which it is underlined that “[t]he famine years of 1846, 1847 and 1848, were halcyon years when contrasted with the dismal year of 1849! The sandbanks about me are studded with the bodies of the dead!” (“State of Ireland—Famine in Mayo” 4). The *Daily National Intelligencer* defended its publication of pieces on the suffering of the Irish by pointing out that “such details should be submitted to the reader, as well to excite a due degree of sympathy as to make him appreciate by contrast the many blessings he enjoys” (“Destitution of Ireland” 3).

In spite of such reports highlighting the prevalent distress in Ireland American society no longer felt compelled to go to great lengths to help the Irish. Christine Kinealy states that this change of heart in America might be attributed to the false belief that the Famine was over, the belief that sending relief to Ireland was futile, and to the incessant influx of the Famine Irish (Kinealy, *Charity* 222). Taking into account the fact that the newspapers kept on informing their readers about the plight of the Irish, it is very likely

that the reason behind the cessation of charity efforts in America was that Americans became inured to the accounts on the suffering of the Irish. This is evinced in a report from Ireland published in the *New York Herald*, in which it is noted that “[f]rom Ireland we have the usual quantity of misery and crime, but there is nothing of special importance” (“Ireland,” 5 May 1849: 1). James M. Farrell has also shown that many American periodicals stressed the unceasing arrivals of diseased Irish, who were portrayed as a threat which might pauperize and demoralize American society (28–34). Such reports definitely brought about hostility towards the victims of the Famine. There were, however, papers such as the *New York Herald* which actually welcomed unfortunate Irish newcomers (“Emigration” 5).

Even though the charitable spirit towards the Irish people was not sustained throughout the whole period of the Great Irish Famine, the American papers, unlike the British journals, in general, exhibited great sympathy towards the Irish. Stressing the suffering of the Irish and praising efforts to donate to the relief for Ireland the American press contributed to the fact that, through private endeavours, the United States gave more than any other country to famine-stricken Ireland and American donations saved many lives. It is worth noting that the United States was engaged at that time in the Mexican-American War, which was an extremely newsworthy event. Nonetheless, the American press devoted a considerable amount of space to the tragedy in Ireland. One can only hypothesize that if the British papers, especially *The Times*, had shown as much sympathy as the American periodicals, the Irish Famine would not have been so disastrous.

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CONTINUITIES

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The Conflicting Traditions of Portraying the Jewish People in the Chester Mystery Cycle

ABSTRACT

The article seeks to analyze the portrayal of the Jews in two plays from the Chester mystery cycle: “Trial and Flagellation” and “The Passion.” The analysis acknowledges that the cycle is a mixture of, and a dialogue between, the universal standpoint emerging from the presentation of the biblical story of humankind and a contemporary perspective, pertaining to the reality of the viewers. Therefore, while pointing to the unique formal and structural uniformity of the cycle, which strengthens the idea of continuity between the Old and the New Covenant and the role of the Israelites in the history of salvation, it also recognizes the potential of the plays to engage in the current stereotypes. The article examines how the Gospel account of Christ’s trial and death is modified through presenting the Jews as torturers, whitewashing the non-Jewish characters, and placing special emphasis on the question of Jewish ignorance. It is demonstrated how different theological and popular stances concerning the Jewish people are merged and reconciled in the Chester representation of the passion of Christ and it is argued that the plays in question retell the biblical story in such a way that the justification for the expulsion of the Jews from England could be derived from it.

Keywords: The Chester Mystery Cycle, Chester Passion, anti-Judaism.

The relation between Christians and the Jews in early-medieval England could be described as relatively harmonious. The differences and distinct identities were recognized, but it did not result in the oppression of the minority at the hands of the Christian majority. The gradual marginalization of the Jews and the increase of hostility towards them in the Middle Ages, with its apogee in the form of their expulsion from England in 1290, was “accompanied by the changing theological and anthropological understanding” of the Hebrew people (Frassetto xiii). Most significantly, the blame for Christ’s death came to be more commonly ascribed to them. This shift is reflected in the approach to the theme of Christ’s crucifixion in devotional treatises, poetry and drama of the time. The present article analyzes the portrayal of the Jews in two episodes from the Chester mystery cycle: “The Trial and Flagellation” and “The Passion.”¹ It seeks to address the question of the extent to which the tradition of depicting the Jews as playing their part in the divine plan for humanity’s salvation is overshadowed by the stereotypes and the hostile attitude towards the Jews that had already been developed in the times when the cycle was composed and staged.

THE CHESTER CYCLE AND ITS UNIVERSAL PERSPECTIVE

A. THE STATUS OF THE JEWS IN THE POST-BIBLICAL HISTORY OF SALVATION: AUGUSTINIAN AND MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY²

The theological grounds for the acceptance of and respect for the Jewish people and their tradition were provided in the doctrine of Jewish witness, developed by Saint Augustine of Hippo and adapted by most major

¹ Quotes from the plays in the present article come from Lumiansky and Mills’s 1974 edition. The titles of the plays used there are editorial choices. Following that choice, 16A is referred to in the main body, as well as the parenthetical notes in this article as “Trial,” 16B—as “Passion.” Numbers provided in parenthetical reference refer to verses quoted. As Mills explains elsewhere, “[t]he 1607 manuscript presents this action of *The Trial and Flagellation* and the following action of *The Crucifixion* as a single play the other manuscripts present them as two separate plays but do not assign a number to *The Crucifixion*. In the EETS edition [i.e. R. M. Lumiansky & D. Mills’s 1974 edition], *The Trial and Flagellation* is numbered 16 and *The Crucifixion* 16A” (Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition* 268). In his modernized spelling edition of the cycle from 1992, Mills presents the episodes as parts one and two of play 16.

² An in-depth analysis of Augustine’s teachings on the Jews, presented against the background of the historical context and the context of Augustine’s

theologians dating from the fifth century (Turner 197). The doctrine, as summarized by Turner,

asserts that Jews play a necessary, even vital function in God's plan for human salvation and Christian faith; thus, Jews must not be killed or converted by Christians but rather be protected and preserved within a larger Christian society. Augustine explains in his *De civitate Dei* that God had a clear purpose in allowing Jews to continue to live and practice their faith after the arrival of Christ; namely, their observance and thus preservation of the teachings of the Old Testament provide testimony to the truth of the prophecies concerning Christ. (197)

Thus, the Augustinian model of toleration, though based on juxtaposition and not free from hierarchizing, acknowledged the Israelites' role as the carriers and propagators of the Holy Scriptures. The Old Testament was perceived as illuminating and authenticating the New Covenant, and, following from that, the role of the Jews in the history of salvation, both biblical and post-biblical, was clearly defined.

The theological shift came only in the twelfth century (Chazan 222; Cohen, *Living Letters* 150–66), and was spread, especially with the teachings of Dominican and Franciscan friars, in the century to follow (Cohen, "The Jews as the Killers of Christ" 24). For hundreds of years the basis of Christian-Jewish relations, Augustine's doctrine started to give way to a view that post-biblical Judaism had little to do with the religion described in the Bible and thus the medieval Jews could no longer be treated as bearing witness to the truth of Christian faith (Cohen, "The Jews as the Killers of Christ" 23–24).³ The representative of the most

own intellectual and spiritual development, is provided in Fredriksen. For a detailed study of the Jew as constructed by medieval Christian theologians, see Jeremy Cohen's *Living Letters of the Law*. The historical account of the actual Jewish people in the British Isles in the Middle Ages can be found in chapters i to vi of Roth.

³ This is not to say that such views had never been voiced before—while the Augustinian approach dominated Christian thought for several centuries, "*Adversus Iudaeos* polemic (arguments 'against the Jews') of many church fathers—Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ephrem the Syrian, Aphrahat, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan" (Cohen, *Living Letters* 9) might be seen as closer to the later, more hostile medieval tradition. On the other hand, Wilken's analysis of John Chrysostom's sermons reveals that the presentation of the Jews in them was in line with the tradition of ancient rhetoric and the practice of *psogos* ("invective") (112) rather than with the spirit of later anti-Judaism, the latter interpretation of Chrysostom's letters being, according to Wilken, a projection of "the later unhappy history of Jewish-Christian relations . . . onto the early Church"

extreme stance within that new tradition was Duns Scotus, an influential theologian living at the turn of the fourteenth century. In his teachings on the Jews he went as far as to propagate forced conversions of both adults and children to Christianity (Turner 183). This is because he believed that the desired, ideal state would be people's complete unity in Christ—he claimed that Christianity was created by God to be a universal religion uniting and embracing all humanity (Turner 192). As he argued,

it was better for the seed of Abraham to cross over to the common pact than to remain under the sign of a special pact. [This is] because it is better to be a part in the whole, for which it would simply be better, than to be distinct from the rest of the part, so that in some way or other it would be good for themselves and bad for others. (qtd. in Turner 192; modifications original)

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The special pact, that is the Old Covenant made between God and Jews, was limited and temporary, of which Jews, according to Scotus, were perfectly aware. Nonetheless, out of selfishness and, as Turner summarizes Scotus' teachings, out of "anger over their reduced status under the New Law," they decided to stick to the Old Law (192). This redefinition of the role of the Jews was fraught with consequences for the biblical exegesis, especially the interpretation of the passion of Christ.

B. THE CYCLE'S STAND ON THE ROLE OF JEWS IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

Few works of art express a stance on the role of the Jews in the Christian history of salvation as fully as a mystery cycle, where the whole biblical story of humankind is captured in a number of plays constituting one narrative. The events from the Old and the New Testament form a continuum there and together they comprise universal history. The Chester cycle reveals a unique formal and structural uniformity, which, as Mills sees it, is exceptional when compared to other English mystery cycles and thus puts an additional emphasis on the continuity (*The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition* xx). What contributes to this unity are formal and structural elements such as the Chester stanza: an eight-line stanza with a particular rhyming and rhythmic pattern; framing speeches—of God at the beginning and of four evangelists at the end of the cycle—which shape the whole and present the story of humankind as a divine plan; as well as cross-references, for example when John sleeps on Christ's bosom during

(xvi). In fact, one can go back to as early sources as the Gospels themselves in the pursuit of the first anti-Jewish Christian attitudes.

the last supper scene and states several plays later that he had a vision of the Apocalypse back then (Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition* xxiii). What connects particular plays with each other are also prophecies, first delivered and then fulfilled in subsequent pageants. They “are carefully selected so that the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension and Sending of the Holy Ghost, are all prophesied and explained in advance, just as the Three Kings in presenting their gifts foretell the Babe’s full career” (Kolve 203–04).

The division of Chester into three parts performed on three separate days, which took place around 1530, had “artistic implications, for the tripartite division changes the audience’s perception of cyclic cohesion. Each day’s production becomes a distinct unit moving towards its own affirmative conclusion” (Mills, “The Chester Cycle” 117). The first part of the cycle contained the stories from “The Creation and Fall of Angels” to “The Magi’s Gifts,” the second day opened with infanticide committed by Herod in an attempt to kill the newborn Jesus, and culminated in Christ’s actual death and his descent into hell. The third day told the New Testament story from the resurrection of Christ to Doomsday (Mills, “The Chester Cycle” 117). The dividing lines, particularly that between the first and the second day, had a significant bearing on the role of the Jews in the events unfolded in the plays. Mills argues that the division between parts one and two constitutes a distinct caesura between the times when the Jews were the “chosen vehicle of God’s grace” (“The Chester Cycle” 119) and the moment when they fell into disfavour—foreshadowed on day one in Mary’s vision (in play six, “The Annunciation and the Nativity”) and finding its fulfilment in the pageants following the story of the three Magi (Mills, “The Chester Cycle” 119–20).

To view Jewish history as a “coherent and meaningful narrative” only to the point of Christ’s incarnation was one way of understanding the Jews’ role in God’s divine plan (Elukin 3). This approach was developed by the early Church Fathers, who on the one hand wanted to substantiate the departure from the observance of Jewish law, which was still a common practice among early Christians and who, on the other hand, tried to convince Greco-Romans, who respected the Jews and their ancient tradition, that “Christianity was not a recently contrived distortion of biblical Judaism but the genuine continuation and fulfillment thereof” (Cohen, *Living Letters* 10). According to such interpretation of Jewish history, “God had . . . disowned the Jews, annulled their ritual law, and transferred their inheritance to the church, which now constituted the only true Israel, not a recently arrived impostor” (Cohen, *Living Letters* 11). This was still an Old Testament vision of the relation between God and his people, wherein God readjusts his plans concerning humanity in response to their disobedience.

The Chester cycle stresses both the division and the continuation, but it does so from the position and through the prism of the already dominant Christian religion and the self-assured theology of the church which succeeded in attracting the Gentiles, gained the support of emperors and “no longer had to justify itself to the Jewish community” (Cohen, “The Jews as the Killers of Christ” 21). Augustine adopts this Christological point of view overtly when he states that the Old Testament “is in its entirety nothing other than the image of the new people and the New Testament, promising a heavenly kingdom” (qtd. in Cohen, *Living Letters* 26). As he explains, “[a]ll that Moses wrote is of Christ—that is, it pertains completely to Christ—whether insofar as it foretells of him in figures of objects, deeds, and speech, or insofar as it extols his grace and glory” (qtd. in Cohen, *Living Letters* 27). This understanding of the Old Testament was then propagated by subsequent theologians, including Scotus, who thought that “the Old Law’s ceremonies retain significance and sanctity in the post-biblical world only in what they signify concerning Christ and the Christian sacraments that followed—that is, in what they prefigured about the future offerings of Christ” (Turner 190). Chester shares this understanding of the history of the chosen people and presents it as meaningful only from the Christian perspective. The cycle introduces the figure of the Expositor, who explains the parallels between the New and the Old Testament and who presents stories from the Old Testament as heralds of the events from the Gospel—for example he interprets to the audience three episodes from Abraham’s story as the prefigurations of God’s sacrifice of his son and of the sacraments: baptism and Eucharist (Mills, “The Chester Cycle” 122; *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition* xxi–xxii). As the Chester cycle sees the events from the Old Testament in the Christological perspective, the plans and actions of God are there prior to, and not resultant of, people’s misconduct, and the very misconduct is an anticipated part of these plans.

THE CHESTER CYCLE AND ITS CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

While mystery plays do not treat of contemporary times, the traits of the present permeate through them in various forms. The very discussion over the etymology of the term “mystery” as used in “mystery play,” though now admittedly outdated,⁴ neatly reflects the two perspectives that the

⁴ *OED* provides two entries for “mystery”—MYSTERY¹ embracing theological and non-theological uses connected with the mystical or with secrecy and MYSTERY² including meanings such as service, occupation, craft, trade, profession, trade guild. According to *OED*, “mystery” in “mystery play” (as

cycles simultaneously assume—the timeless one and the one set in the reality of its viewers. Obviously, these two perspectives or levels are not disconnected and independent of each other. The specific, contemporary level might surface and reveal itself only through influencing and reshaping the universal, seemingly stable one.⁵

During the times when Chester was composed, staged and re-written into subsequent manuscript versions, Jews were literally non-existent in the English reality. Still, the stereotypes and the hostile attitude towards them had already been developed. Jews were to be absent from England for five centuries after the expulsion, but they were still, and even more visibly, present in the teachings of the church, as well as in the English literature of that time. Julius goes as far as to suggest that “England was the principal promoter, and indeed in some sense the inventor, of literary anti-Semitism” (153). According to Pearsall, “Chaucer’s Prioress’s Tale and other anti-Jewish stories of the fourteenth century express something of the virulent hatred of the Jews that persisted, but, in the absence of actual Jews to vent it on, it was in many ways a form of rhetoric” (56). Julius observes that the conception of the Jews that emerged from the English literary works written when Jews did not live in England was “ultimately theological in character” (154). It was not so much the ideas of contemporary Jews, but rather of the biblical figures, as interpreted by the church, that formed the basis for the literary representations.⁶ Tomasch refers to this construct as “the virtual Jew” and argues that it “was central not only to medieval English Christian devotion, but to the construction of Englishness itself” (69).

explained under MYSTERY¹) is used after French “mystère”/medieval Latin “mysterium” “as a name for the miracle-play,” but “this sense is often erroneously referred to MYSTERY² [i.e. derived from middle Latin “misterium” as an altered form of “ministerium”] on the ground of the undoubted fact that the miracle-plays were often acted by the mysteries or trade guilds” (“Mystery”). For an explanation of the development of the two senses of “mystery” in English and the complex relation between their etymologies, see Durkin’s *The Oxford Guide to Etymology*, where the word “mystery” is used to illustrate the phenomenon of merger (80–81).

⁵ An example of a direct and particularly conspicuous interference in “Trial” is one of Christ’s torturers stating that: “No lade unto London / such lawe can him lere” (321–22).

⁶ The question remains whether theological shifts are themselves the reaction to changing social and political circumstances. The issue of the interrelations between theological stances on the Jews and their historical contexts is addressed from various perspectives in Frassetto. To determine unambiguously the cause-effect relation between the shifts in these planes, if possible at all, is beyond the scope of the present study.

The conception of the Jews manifested in literature which is grounded in the teachings of theologians and preachers reaches its fullest expression in the literary representations of Christ's passion—the works which emerged as a direct consequence of the medieval theological shift from *Christus Victor* to Christ as a figure of suffering.⁷ As Bestul observes, when Christ's torture and agony became the focal point of religious meditations and deliberations, his oppressors naturally came to the fore and became the subject of interest as well, their cruelty being exaggerated to evoke an even stronger emotional response (71). In the passion plays the emphasis is even greater for a practical reason—as the fastening of an actor to a cross, which had to be presented on stage, was time-consuming, the dialogue between the crucifiers was a necessary accompaniment to that action while it was being accomplished (Kolve 178).

A. WHAT ARE THE JEWS DOING THERE? JEWS AS CULPRITS

Whereas the cultural, social or political context might be needed to account for what Tomasch terms “the paradox of Jewish absent presence” (70) in, for example, Chaucer, the question of the legitimacy of the use of Jews as characters in the passion narratives and mystery cycles might seem rather absurd—obviously, the source material requires them to be there. Only not quite. In the case of Chester some surprising alterations are introduced to the biblical account of the events that are central to the theological problem of the guilt for Christ's death. While in the Towneley cycle the characters that torture and crucify Christ are referred to as “tortors” and in the York “Crucifixion” they translate as “soldiers,” in N-Town, as well as in Chester plays, the Jews are substituted for the Roman soldiers and become torturers and executioners. In other words, it is the Jews that literally, in the physical sense, crucify Christ. Moreover, unlike in the Bible, it is the Jews that throw the dice to win Jesus' garment. Such substitution is the plainest illustration of the shift in the approach to the crucifixion. Symbolically, Romans are cleared of responsibility and they give way to the new torturers.

⁷ As Happé explains it, “[f]rom the twelfth century there was a shift in attitudes to Christ, as there developed a greater concentration upon him as a figure of suffering—the Man of Sorrows—rather than the figure of triumph perceivable in earlier art and theology. The Cross of Victory became the Cross of Salvation” (23). This shift led to the development of affective piety—a form of religiousness grounded in the reflection upon Christ's life, most significantly his suffering on the cross which was to evoke an emotional response that would have been produced had the person him- or herself witnessed the events he or she meditated upon.

The moments when the violence is presented are extended if compared to the short mentions from Scripture—both the scene of beating and that of nailing Christ to the cross are prolonged (the latter also for the practical reasons already mentioned), the cruelty of the oppressors being emphasized. As observed by Bestul in his analysis of medieval devotional writings on the last hours of Christ, such a portrayal of the Jews is characteristic of the reflections upon the passion from about the middle of the twelfth century. While earlier texts usually devote “scarcely any attention . . . to identifying the tormentors of Christ specifically as the Jews, or to calling attention to or elaborating upon their part in the Passion” (70), from then on their role becomes enlarged and they are “increasingly seen as the mockers, the torturers, and finally the murderers of Christ” (69–70). The sustained torment, which involves spitting (cf. “Trial” 76), filing (i.e. sullyng) (cf. “Trial” 80–81), and one of the Jews blowing his nose onto Christ (cf. “Trial” 347–50), conforms to the depictions of tortures inflicted on Christ by the Jews in devotional writings of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in which, as Bestul argues, what adds to the horror of the brutal scenes is the depiction of the “contamination by physical contact” with the Jews (85), thus a physical and ritual defilement—a threat which was resonant especially after the Black Death strengthened the irrational accusations against the Jews of the great conspiracy consisting in poisoning wells (104–05). Apart from presenting the Jews as mindless and cruel torturers, Chester also introduces more subtle shifts in emphasis, and the interplay of the pageants with the scriptural sources is the subject of further analysis here.

B. SHIFTS IN EMPHASIS: WHITEWASHING OF OTHER BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

The most obvious candidate for the accomplice in the crucifixion of Christ is Pontius Pilate, yet in Chester the prefect is presented in a rather favourable light. He does not reveal any cruelty or willingness to condemn Jesus at any point—on the contrary, he attempts to defend him. Such a presentation follows one of the two traditions of presenting Pilate. As David Mills states, “Pilate had two reputations in the Middle Ages—as an evil man who condemned Jesus, and as a well-intentioned man who tried to save him” (*The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition* 270). The latter tradition is taken to the extreme in, for example, the Gospel of Nicodemus, where Pilate sends a letter to the emperor in which he reports the true story of Jesus, thus becoming a witness of the Christian faith. Chester does not go to the lengths of making the prefect the pillar of Christianity, but, in accord with John’s Gospel, it makes him

the only character willing to engage in a conversation with Christ, which gives Jesus an opportunity to answer the question of what truth is. To underline his distance from the verdict, Pilate washes his hands and states openly in front of the Jews that he is “cleane and innocent” and has no intention of shedding Christ’s blood (“Trial” 240–42), the scene to be found only in Matthew. On the other hand, another episode present only in Matthew, that is the dream of Pilate’s wife, which is to make the prefect aware of who Jesus is and thus warn him against condemning Christ, is absent from the play. In fact, he does not even pronounce the verdict in the play. He just allows the Jews to take Jesus with them and punish him as they wish: “Take him to you nowe, as I saye, / for save him I ney maye, / undonne but I would bee” (368–70).

Another character who shifts blame onto the Jews is Longinus, a blind soldier who is to check whether Christ is still alive by piercing his heart. He states in the play that he will follow the orders, but it is the Jews that are to take responsibility and run the risk for such an action as he does not know himself whether what he does is good or evil:

I will do as ye byd mee,
but on your perill hitt shalbe.
What I doe I may not see,
whether yt be evell or good. (“Passion” 380–83)

Longinus’ literal and metaphorical blindness is healed once the water from Christ’s heart streams down onto his eyes, but the Jews, who earlier provocatively demanded a miracle from Christ as a sign of his divine nature, seem to have now disappeared from the stage as they do not say anything till the end of the play.

The third figure used in the Chester “Trial” and “Passion” sequence to underline the guilt of the Jews is Simon of Cyrene. Being most probably a Jew himself, he is, however, put in opposition to the Sanhedrin, as well as distanced from the crowd of ordinary Jews. He says: “Would God I had bynne in Rome / when I the waye hither come” (“Passion” 34–35), thus suggesting his position of a stranger. He initially opposes the High Priest but is threatened by him, which is why he makes a statement of his innocence, in an analogous manner to Pilate and Longinus:

To beare no crosse am I entent,
for yt was never myne assent
to procure thys profettes judgment,
full of the Holy Ghoost. (“Passion” 25–28)

C. THE TRADITION OF JEWISH IGNORANCE IN THE CYCLE

The statement made by Simon is crucial to the understanding of the theological stand of the play for one other reason. An important reinterpretation of the Bible and of the tradition takes place here when it comes to the figure of the Cyrenian. While the Scripture provides hardly any information on him and traditionally his hesitation is ascribed to him being preoccupied with his own matters and not wanting to be troubled—the Bible mentions that he is on the way from the fields—the play presents a whole new justification of Simon’s resistance. He opposes the killing as he is aware of Jesus’ divine, or at least messianic or prophetic, nature. This refers us back to the role of the Jews in the killing of Christ. It is clearly visible that the Jews are presented as the killers in the pageant, but even if the murder is ascribed to them, this alone is not tantamount to them being guilty of deicide. The issue to be considered is the awareness (or ignorance) of what kind of crime they actually commit.

Again, conflicting theological stances on this question might be singled out, and the play adopts one of them. Cohen (“The Jews as the Killers of Christ” 9–20), and later Turner, summarize the development of different theological traditions as follows: on the one hand, there was a line of reasoning represented most famously by Augustine and later by, among others, Peter Abelard, as well as Anselm of Canterbury, who claimed that “no person could ever desire, at least knowingly, to kill God” (qtd. in Turner 192). Jews were unaware of Christ’s divine nature, so they were not guilty of deicide. With the exception of isolated exegetes, among them the Venerable Bede—who first suggested the willingness of the Jews to kill the Son of God out of envy—the tradition of Jewish ignorance was the dominant one until the twelfth century. The opposite stance was adopted by Nicholas of Lyra and Duns Scotus; the latter responded to Anselm’s argument quoted above thus: “This, I do not believe, but I believe that even if they had known him to be God by [the] union [of Son and Father in God], still they would have been able to have killed him” (qtd. in Turner 192; modifications original). Both Nicolas and Scotus believed that the Jews recognized Jesus as divine, but their knowledge failed “to withstand their malice and ultimately govern their actions” (Cohen, “The Jews as the Killers of Christ” 20). The position in between these two, represented most notably by Thomas Aquinas, assumed that a differentiation needed to be made between the ignorant masses and the well-informed leaders of the Jewish community, as well as between the recognition of Jesus as God as distinct from his recognition as the prophesized messiah—the Jews being able to identify only the messianic, but not the divine nature of Christ (Cohen, “The Jews as the Killers of Christ” 19–20).

The Chester “Trial” and “Passion” plays seem to adopt the early tradition insofar as they are consistent in promoting the stance that the Jews were in general unaware of Christ’s divine nature. While the cycle definitely presents the Jews as guilty of condemning, torturing and murdering Jesus, it also hints at them being ignorant of the weight of their deed.⁸ According to Kolve, mystery cycles, “alone among medieval religious writings, sought to reveal as much about the men who scorn and kill Christ as about the pathos and dignity of His suffering” (180). At the same time, Travis notes that Chester is an exception to this rule, inasmuch as Christ’s prosecutors—Annas, Caiphas and two other Jews—speak with a uniform voice and are indistinguishable as characters (277–78). Chester uses the technique of the individuation of characters selectively, or rather treats the Jews as a collective character. It has to be said that the differentiation between the leaders and common Jews is not entirely absent from the plays. As the overseer of the crucifixion, Caiphas is more eager for Christ’s death than the crucifiers, who suspend their work at some point to divide between themselves Christ’s garment. While the Jews accuse Christ of disrespecting their Law, only Caiphas seems to be fully aware of the threat that this entails for their power and the dominance of their Law—he says to Annas at one point: “This man hase served to be dead, / and yf hee lightly thus be lead, / our lawe cleane will sleepe” (“Trial” 110–13).⁹ In this respect, his motivations resemble those of Pilate,

⁸ Both Kolve and Travis identify the issue of recognition or non-recognition of Christ’s divinity as central to the Chester passion plays and they both analyze it in the context of its structural function in the pageants. Kolve recognizes the tendency to fail to realize Christ’s identity as the Son of God by his judges and torturers in all English mystery cycles and interprets it as a result of imposing on the events connected with crucifixion a structure of a game. Once the perpetrators engage in the tasks assigned to them in the form of a game (either competitive or played just for amusement’s sake), the focus of attention shifts and the roles played by them are redefined, that is their identities are suspended as they assume the roles of the participants in the game (Kolve 181–82). However, it seems that the lack of awareness of Christ’s deity is a prerequisite to get engaged in the game, not the consequence of it, which can be illustrated with an example from *Ordinalia* cited by Kolve—while a blacksmith’s wife joins the executioners in a game to produce the best nails needed to crucify Christ, the blacksmith himself refuses to help them as he recognizes God’s son in Jesus (187). Travis observes a “pattern of recognitions” of Christ’s divinity (286) and interprets it as a device used to “alleviate part of the horror of his dying” (286).

⁹ The differentiation is also pointed to later, in the play “Christ on the Road to Emmaus; Doubting Thomas,” where Lucas says “To God and man wyse was hee, / but bushoppes—cursen motte the bee— / dampned him and nayled him on a tree, / that wronge never yett wrought” (49–52).

who is afraid of losing his office. On the other hand, the Jews who torture Christ seem to become so preoccupied with their task that they gradually distance themselves from the actual purpose of their actions, substituting it, as Kolve argues, with games, like the one consisting in stretching Christ's arms so that they fit the earlier-prepared holes (189). And when their purpose is to punish Christ, they think they punish him for his pride—they are “simply teaching a braggart a country lesson in humility” (Kolve 215). The speech of the Jews who torture Christ and nail him to the cross is formally distinguished from the standard Chester stanza. The rhyming pattern is retained but the lines are shorter and thus more dynamic in order to meet the pace of physical torture inflicted on Christ. According to Travis, “[b]y formalizing to the point of primitive ritual the words and actions of Christ's prosecutors, Chester suggests that they are agents involved in a rite whose movements are ultimately controlled by the power beyond their comprehension,” that is the power of God (282).

Those differences notwithstanding, both the Sanhedrin and ordinary Jews are unanimous in regarding Jesus as a “false man” (“Trial” 150). Their lines are at times sarcastic, at times outspokenly aggressive—even Caiphas resorts to a physical threat when he triumphantly opens “Passion” saying:

Nowe of this segger we binne seker.
 Agaynst us boote he not to beker.
 Though he flyre, flatter and flycker,
 this fiste shall he not flee. (1–4)

Still, regardless of the form, the underlying assumption is always the same: Jesus has committed blasphemy in calling himself king and the Son of God and this is why he deserves to be punished. Christ tries to explain his status when he is asked to do so, even though the questions are overtly provocative and sarcastic. Interestingly, the text of the play contains all but two fragments in which Christ speaks in the four Gospels. One of the lacking lines is a response to the Jews spitting and striking his face. Significantly, Jesus' interaction with Caiphas is present in the text. The Christ from Chester does not get involved in a discussion when he faces the act of mindless violence, but at the same time he tries, till the last moments, to make the Jewish people understand who he really is. The Jews, however, reject this revelation from the start, regarding it as blasphemous, and this is why, from their perspective, the testimony of Christ and his followers can only be ridiculed or silenced by the use of physical violence. The play seems to account for the blindness of the Jews by suggesting that they are too strict and hang on too tightly to their Old Law to become open to the New Law proposed by Jesus. The accusations of Christ

violating the Law reappear in the play a few times (cf. “Trial” 3, 61, 73) and they are fundamental to the determination to punish Christ exhibited by Annas, Caiphas and other Jews. As has already been mentioned, Caiphas is afraid that the value of the Jewish Law is going to decline unless Christ is severely punished.

The omission of the episode with Pilate’s wife hints at Chester’s consistency in arguing that no one can knowingly want to kill God. The lack of awareness of the characters who condemn Christ and carry out the sentence is contrasted with the attitude of Simon. Also the three Maries remind the audience of Christ’s divinity when they lament at the foot of the cross over what they understand to be the inability of Jesus, “God and man” (“Passion” 284), to free himself and come down. Another character whose illuminated observation stands in opposition to the blindness of the Jews is a centurion who recognizes God in Jesus. Caiphas’ response to the centurion’s revelation, “Centurio, as God me speede, / thou must be smutted; thou canst not read!” (“Passion” 368–69), is dismissive, but also ironic, as the audience realizes that it applies to Caiphas himself rather than to the Roman soldier. What seems to have been added to the “Trial” as another prophecy ironically made by Annas (or Caiphas, depending on the manuscript) is his justification for why Jesus should be executed (a fragment transferred to “Trial,” although the remaining part of the dialogue taken from John can be found in play fourteen):

Syr, yt is needfull—this saye I—
that one man dye witterlye
all the people to forbye
so that the perish nought. (“Trial” 17–20)

What might appear to be a sudden acknowledgement of Christ’s divinity and of the redemptive character of his passion is in fact a paraphrase of the biblical dialogue in which Caiphas responds to some Pharisee’s concern that if more people believe in Christ, Romans “shall come and take away both our place and nation” (J. 11.48). In the Gospel, Caiphas’ suggestion is that one man shall be sacrificed so that “the whole nation perish not” (J. 11.50). John suggests, however, that these words were in fact a prophecy: “And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation” (J. 11.51). A less self-evident instance of this kind of irony might be traced in the scene of throwing the dice for Christ’s garment. The substitution of Roman soldiers with Jews in this scene adds an additional emphasis to it, especially because it takes place in front of Caiphas and his only reaction is urging the crucifiers to come back to work and not let Jesus

stand naked for so long. Neither common Jews nor their leader are able to recognize the words of their psalm (cf. Psalm 22.18) becoming reality before their eyes.¹⁰

The characters who till the end of Jesus' life do not recognize him as the Son of God and the saviour are, apart from the Jews, Satan and the devils. As Kolve observes, in the passion sequences of York and N-Town the devil who initiates the events leading to Christ's crucifixion learns from other demons that Christ is the saviour and his death is ultimately going to bring an end to their reign over people's souls. This is why he tries to hold back what he has inspired, though to no avail (228–30). In Chester, Satan—who does not appear in the “Trial” and “Passion” sequence, but boasts of his part in it later (cf. “The Harrowing of Hell 129–33)—becomes aware of the consequences of Christ's passion only after Jesus descends into hell to defeat him, when David opens his eyes to the truth about the divine nature of Christ through interpreting his own Old Testament prophecies (cf. “The Harrowing of Hell 185–204). In their lack of awareness and blindness to the prophecies, the Jews are put on the same side as Satan. This is because Chester makes a very clear distinction and juxtaposition—unlike St. Thomas Aquinas, who wrote that “[t]he educated, who were called their [i.e. the Jews'] rulers, knew, as did the demons, that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Law” (Turner 194), Chester stresses that one cannot at the same time believe in Christ and be his enemy.

D. THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS AND THE JEWISH
“SELF-EXCLUSION”

Chester is also exceptional in that it does not include “Christ's Testament,” that is, Jesus' monologue in which he “interrupts the progress of his crucifixion and forces the spectators to share the guilt of those who allowed the passion to occur” (Travis 288). Travis argues that Chester, unlike other mystery cycles, does not put special emphasis on the theme of “the shared guilt of the spectators watching Christ's death” (276) but rather “requires of its audience a communal assertion of awakened faith in the divinity of Christ's Person” (276). The portrayal of the Jews as a group excluding

¹⁰ The fact that Jesus is stripped of his garments by the Jews, that is by his brothers, might have served as another link between the Old and the New Testament—in this light, the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was stripped of his clothes and thrown into an empty cistern by his jealous brothers, becomes a herald of the passion of Christ. As Bestul remarks, the story of Joseph was interpreted as prefiguring Christ's passion in famous twelfth- and thirteenth-century treatises: *Stimulus amoris* by Ekbert of Schönau and *Lignum vitae* by Bonaventure (96).

themselves from the community of believers is in line with such an overall message and purpose of the play. At the same time, it provides a justification for the approach that England adopted towards the Jews and maintained in the times when the cycle was staged. Those that exclude—the English people—are absolved of responsibility for the expulsion and, at the same time, through this act of othering, they strengthen and empower their own community of those who had recognized Christ as God. The act of self-exclusion is predicted or even pre-planned by God. Jesus, when he responds to Pilate’s question of what truth is, states—and this is an addition not to be found in any of the canonical Gospels—that there is no truth on Earth now. The overall message of the cycle is that the reunion and inclusion in the community of those enlightened by the New Law is possible as soon as the truth is acknowledged. The model for that is provided in “Passion” itself, which, unlike in any other cycle, concludes with the conversion of two Jews—Joseph of Arimathea and Nichodemus—and their credo.

CONCLUSION

The Chester “Trial” and “Passion” plays undertake the challenging task of reconciling two rather contradictory positions. On the one hand, they present in a theologically consistent manner that the Jews are the killers of Jesus, but as they were unaware of the gravity of the deed, they cannot be accused of deicide and eternally condemned—Christ himself, paraphrasing Luke’s Gospel, asks God to forgive his oppressors since they do not know what they are doing (“Passion” 297–300). As it is the Jews that crucify Jesus, the statement concerns them directly. What is more, their actions seem to be beyond their control, as they are the fulfillment of God’s plan. On the other hand, the contemporary reality in which the Jews were expelled from England, as if they were indeed condemned, stands in opposition to the former conclusion. However, an explanation emerges from the plays—the Jews, focused on the Old Law and blind to the New Law, have excluded themselves from the wider community of the New Covenant. The fact that they are now rejected is a direct consequence of their rejection of Christ as God. The message of these particular pageants and the whole cycle is coherent as far as the status of the Jews is concerned. The theological understanding of the Jews seems here to be closer to the older, Augustinian tradition, but the later, more negative tradition harmonized better with the contemporary English reality and could account for it more effectively. The Chester “Trial” and “Passion” plays might not be as coherent as the teachings of particular exegetes. Yet the portrayal of the Jews as sketched in the cycle is compatible with the internal and external context of the

plays. The Jews were presented as the Other to both the believers from the plays and the Christian audience. This facilitated the delineation of their underprivileged position in the social reality of the viewers and at the same time it conformed to the overall message of the cycle, which seems to be that the successful act of recognition of Christ's divinity is of utmost, primary importance for one's salvation.

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The Whittrick Play of *No Nothing*:
Alan Spence, Edwin Morgan,
and Indra's Net

ABSTRACT

The article will attempt a reading of Alan Spence's play *No Nothing* (2015). Special attention will be given to the issue of literal and metaphorical space(s), a peculiar, liminal setting of the play, and the ways it determines the flyting between the two characters, two iconic Glaswegians: Edwin Morgan and Jimmy Reid. It seems that in this theatrical space history, politics and poetry inter-are. We may notice how two completely different masters of speech (a poet and a trade union leader) exchange their views on life, how they reflect upon the meaning of their achievements, and how they find a space of convergence in their affirmation of life. As their flyting is "about life, the Universe and everything—from Glasgow to Infinity and beyond," the article will also address the space of dialogue between Spence's and Morgan's poetry. The metaphor of Indra's net will serve as a useful tool in exploring spatial dimensions of the play and the issue of interconnectedness.

Keywords: Alan Spence, Edwin Morgan, dialogicality, trickster play, Indra's net.

*Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with stars and cunningly wrought
with myriad-coloured jewels.*
(Tagore 73)

*To know the spirit of a place is to realize that you are a part of a part
and that the whole is made up of parts, each of which is whole.
You start with the part you are whole in.*
(Snyder 38)

A SUNBURST OF HOPE AND POSSIBILITY

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Set in a kind of afterlife, in a space of betwixt and between, the 2015 play *No Nothing* by Alan Spence is a homage to two great Glaswegians: the first Makar of modern times, Edwin Morgan, and trade unionist (leader of the “work-in” on the Clyde Shipyards) and parliamentarian Jimmy Reid. Morgan and Reid died within a couple of days of each other, and as Joyce McMillan notices, “it seemed like an odd synchronicity, the passing of two key figures in a great generation who had worked all their lives—through art and politics—to create a new Scotland for the 21st century, passionate, confident, outward-looking, and eloquent” (“On *No Nothing* at Oran Mor, Glasgow”). In her review of *No Nothing*, she says that Spence “seeks to capture that oddness” in his play, set in “some post-death limbo where Reid and Morgan meet and talk” (“On *No Nothing* at Oran Mor, Glasgow”). In an interview published on YouTube on 20 April 2015 (the day of the first staging of the play at Oran Mor, Glasgow), Spence himself admits that even though Morgan and Reid did not necessarily meet in real life, they are having a conversation “in the worlds between” (“No Nothing”).

The blurb on the cover introduces the play as “a flying about life, the Universe and everything—from Glasgow to Infinity and beyond (with meditations on post-referendum Scotland” (*No Nothing*), which immediately places us in the context of Morgan’s immanent poetics, and the way Spence sums up his master’s importance in the article “Edwin Morgan: A Sunburst of Possibility Amid the Grey” published on 22 August 2010, a few days after Morgan’s death: “In grey postwar Glasgow, his work was a sunburst of hope and possibility. He wrote about the world we inhabited, but placed it in a global, even a universal, context—*From Glasgow to Saturn*.”

In a presentation he gave at a *Scottish Left Review* event at the Edinburgh Festival in 2002, Morgan himself addresses the issue of the link between the poetic and the political. He speaks of the 1960s, the 1979 referendum, and its failure to deliver a Scottish assembly; then he moves on to discuss his *Sonnets from Scotland*:

There has always been argument about whether cultural change should precede, accompany, or follow political change. In this case, the outburst of good writing in the 1980s (which spilled over into the 1990s) clearly presaged the 1997 referendum with its overwhelming endorsement of a Scottish Parliament. Looking back now, I can see how my own book *Sonnets from Scotland* (1984), which began as a sort of defiant non-acceptance of the failed referendum, fits into an evolving pattern of Scottish culture as wide-ranging, risk-taking, internationally aware. Although it was in a sense a history of Scotland, an alternative history, I gave it a science-fiction setting, with mysterious visitors to the earth commenting on events and experiences in an oblique way, as in the poem called "The Coin":

We brushed the dirt off, held it to the light.
The obverse showed us *Scotland*, and the head
of a red deer; the antler-glint had fled
but the fine cut could still be felt. All right:
we turned it over, read easily *One Pound*,
but then the shock of Latin, like a gloss,
Respublica Scotorum, sent across
such ages as we guessed but never found
at the worn edge where once the date had been
and where as many fingers had gripped hard
as hopes their silent race had lost or gained.
The marshy scurf crept up to our machine,
sucked at our boots. Yet nothing seemed ill-starred.
And least of all the realm the coin contained. ("Scottish Fiction")

Morgan juxtaposes his sonnet with a poem by Tom Leonard which in his view touches upon the same issue. Quotes from Morgan's *Sonnets* will reappear throughout *No Nothing*, and it is no surprise that Leonard's poem also features in the play:

Scotland has become an independent socialist republic.
At last.
Eh?
You pinch yourself.
Jesus Christ. You've slept in again! (Morgan; Spence, *No Nothing* 15)

The number of quotes from and allusions to *Sonnets from Scotland* in *No Nothing* might point to surprising, and quite disturbing, parallels between 1979 and 2014, and the disappointment mixed with frustration following the referendum of 2014 (it would be difficult to imagine the shock on the part of Morgan and Reid if they had learned about the Scottish people's choice). Still, 51 sonnets in Morgan's collection also show what

could be done, “depicting the country from a number of perspectives including the prehistoric, the Neolithic, the biblical, the Enlightenment, the Victorian and the futuristic” (McGuire and Nicholson 101). Morgan’s futuristic vision is something that Spence decides to explore dialogically, touching firstly upon Makar’s fascination with Mayakovsky, socialism (reflected in his poem on Glasgow titled “Clydegrad”), and his playful poems such as “Outward Bound” in which Scotland is literally moving into new spaces (Bell 117). Passages from *Sonnets from Scotland* are often juxtaposed with those from *The Second Life* (1968), especially “The Flowers of Scotland,” “Caledonian Antisizygy,” which stress the idea of Scotland as a “place divided against itself” (Spence, *No Nothing* 17), and “The Second Life,” in which, as MacGuire and Nicholson notice, Morgan “invites us to consider the past as not always something to be embraced and held close, but also as a skin to be shed”; they add that the poem “calls the city and its inhabitants forward, out of the darkness and into the light of the here and now” (117):

The caked layers of grime
 Grow warm, like homely coats.
 But yet they will be dislodged
 And men will still be warm.
 The old coats are discarded.
 The old ice is loosed.
 The old seeds are awake.

Slip out of darkness, it is time. (Morgan, *Collected Poems* 181)

Spence seems to follow his poetic master, and in his play he stresses the need to go beyond limitations, to challenge the status quo; he affirms the power of “hope and possibility” in the world we inhabit, and the importance of (cross-cultural) dialogue, of vision, adventure, invention, action and discovery, but also points to solidarity and oneness; it is also worth noticing how the concept of interbeing informs his writing. In my article I will try to discuss these issues, but I will also point to an intriguing multilevel dialogue that *No Nothing* initiates with Morgan’s *The Whittrick: A Poem in Eight Dialogues* (1961, first published as a whole in 1973); it could be argued that the space of dialogue and the potential to pose metaphysical questions (obviously without providing answers) is the feature that the two texts have in common. My reading of the play will emphasize the dialogical nature of the relationship between the two texts.

“AND THEY BLETHER AND BANTER, FLYTE AND PHILOSOPHISE,”
OR *THE WHITTRICK*

The Whittrick: A Poem in Eight Dialogues was one of Morgan's earliest books of poetry; it was a trickster poem, both in the sense of containing trickster figure, and as an example of trickster discourse. Morgan recalls that in his childhood he would often hear the Scottish phrase: “as quick as a whittrick,” where whittrick is understood as a weasel moving so quickly you don't know whether you've seen it or not (McGonigal 16). In a letter to Erica Marx, Morgan explains what that sequence signifies to him:

The Whittrick in general stands for truth or reality, but seen especially under its fleeting or revolutionary aspect, which is in any case how it impresses itself in most people's mind (say when they fall in love or have something happen to them which they cannot forget), and also how it tends to appear in the arts, each work of art being like a “flash” of something passing. (Glasgow University Special Collections Acc 4574/Box 26)

The Whittrick and its eight dialogues includes strange encounters from the history of culture, literature and history (in the order of appearance): MacDiarmid and Joyce, Bosch and Faust, King Shahriyar and Queen Shahrazad, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Marilyn Monroe and Galina Ulanova, Lady Seaforth and The Brahan Seer (Conneach Odhar), Zen master Hakuin and the playwright Chikamatsu, Dr Grey Walter (the author of the 1953 *The Living Brain*) and Jean Cocteau. In Robert Crawford's view, *The Whittrick* celebrates “an elusive, mercurial essence imagined in Scots as the ‘whittrick’ or the weasel—the spirit of creativity” (13). For him, each of the poem's dialogues can be seen as a temporal and geographical translation of the preceding dialogue (13). But one might equally see the subsequent dialogues as peculiar examples of palimpsests where the spaces of other texts (of culture) merge, and where their original meanings/structures become de-/re-constructed (Kocot 129).

Spence's *No Nothing* seems to be a “flyting” homage to Morgan and Reid. Just like in *The Whittrick*, the two characters engage in a lively conversation about the meaning of life, space and time, the real and imagined past, present and future(s). At some point, they even make a brief reference to *The Whittrick*—Eddie says that in the poem the characters “blether and banter, flyte and philosophise” (Spence, *No Nothing* 51), and this is precisely what happens in *No Nothing*. Let us recall this scene. When Jimmy asks about the actions of the trickster, Eddie responds by seeking connection between Morgan's poem and the here-and-now of the play:

JIMMY And where does the Whittrick come in? Fit about the futrick?
 EDDIE It flits in and out of the dialogues. It's truth, or reality, call it what you will. But glimpsed, in flashes—there a moment, not there. Vivid and instant, then gone, a bright flash of vitality and unexpectedness, . . . revolutionary.
 JIMMY A flash, then gone.
 EDDIE And that's us, done. (Spence, *No Nothing* 51)

In *The Whittrick*, the trickster manifests itself on three levels: as a character endowed with fluid identity, as a narrative structure (trickster-relation, trickster-timespace), and as an incessant movement/process (or processuality, both on the level of plot and narration). Those three areas of the trickster's actualization create "trickster aesthetics," which manifest themselves by merging the fictional worlds and exploring their boundaries, by intertextuality and intratextuality, by dialogicality, multiperspectivity, and fluidity of meaning (Kocot 129). In *No Nothing*, we might speak of a trickster dialogical narrative structure (trickster-relation, trickster-timespace), and an incessant process and/or processuality, both on the level of plot and rhizomatic narration. As in Morgan's sequence, the lack of linear links between subsequent threads of narration is substituted here with an arrangement based on associative thinking. In my reading of Spence's drama, special attention will be given to the issue of literal and metaphorical space(s), a peculiar, liminal setting of the play, and the ways it determines the "whittrick" (rhizomatic in nature) flyting between the two characters; however, the space of dialogue between the poetic and political, and between Spence's and Morgan's poetry will also be addressed. The metaphor of Indra's net, introduced in the latter part of the article, will serve as an alternative but useful tool in exploring philosophical dimensions of the play and the issue of interconnectedness and interbeing.

THE PLAY. NOWHERE. NOW HERE

The title of the play, *No Nothing*, seems to be the first of many riddles. The game of finding the answer to the question of what "nothing" might relate to begins on page one and, interestingly enough, it actually continues beyond the last page of the play, accompanied by the music of 'The Beatles' "Here, There and Everywhere." For Kevin McMonagle (who played Eddie in the staging of the play at Oran Mor), the title relates to the setting of the play: "The play is called *No Nothing* for a reason, and that's the conceit," he notes. "It's about the idea when we leave this life there is nothing . . . or is there?" (Beacom). In his view, the characters didn't have a particularly strong belief in the afterlife, but "that makes for an even more interesting

discussion about why they are there” (Beacom). If we think about the setting of the play, the question of whether it is a literal space/place, or a metaphorical space/place will depend on the individual. Cockburn sees it as a “timeless limbo, a way-station en route to an afterlife,” Beacom writes that the characters meet “on the other side,” McMillan uses the phrase “post-death limbo” (“On *No Nothing* at Oran Mor, Glasgow”). Perhaps all options are possible, depending on the reader? In my view, we are entering a peculiar, liminal space, the space of in-between, or as Victor Turner would put it, the space of “betwixt and between,” the abode of the trickster. The figure of trickster seems quite an obvious reference: while the characters of Spence’s drama engage in (let us return to the cover again) “a flyting about life, the Universe and everything—from Glasgow to Infinity and beyond,” we are moving in a trickster-like manner between and through the cultural and historical narratives. All these threads are interwoven with numerous intertextual literary references to Morgan’s but also Spence’s poems. The “no nothing” then might be interpreted as a game with one of the keywords in Morgan’s poetry.

Just like in *The Whittrick*, the language of the two masters of speech in *No Nothing* is idiosyncratic, embedded as it were in their own frameworks of historical and/or literary narration. In the interview, Spence juxtaposes Morgan, who “used poetry like a magician, like a shaman,” with Reid, the great orator who used language to move people. These two very distinct ways to stir and move people, the two different uses of language come together in the form of a flyting which foregrounds and celebrates the idea of tricksterism, playful transgression of limits and limitations of language. Spence initiates the game of writing-through in that he re-writes Morgan’s poems and Reid’s speeches.

One might argue that it is not accidental that the drama begins with a playful variation on one of the most known of Morgan’s and Reid’s quotes:

EDDIE Nothing . . . Nothing is not . . . Nothing is not giving . . . Nothing
 is not giving messages.
 JIMMY Not a damn thing.
 EDDIE Nothing.
 JIMMY No hooliganism. No vandalism. No bevvyng. (*Startled,*
remembering). I said that!
 EDDIE You did. Memorably.
 JIMMY Where the hell are we?
 EDDIE Not hell, I don’t think. Not yet. (Spence, *No Nothing* 1)

Even though Reid’s admonition from his famous Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in speech “There will be no hooliganism. There will be

no vandalism. There will be no bevvying . . . because the world is watching us,” and Morgan’s poetic credo “Nothing is not giving messages” are from two apparently opposite realms of speech, it could be argued that, quite surprisingly, they both point to the issue of mindful being in the world, of being responsive to the surrounding reality of the here-and-now. Let us have a look at the original quote from Morgan which comes from the interview with Robert Crawford. It is worth noting here that the motif of receiving messages introduced in the first scene will resurface, in various forms, throughout the play.

Who knows what an apple thinks! We don’t really know—it doesn’t give signs of thinking, but because we don’t get signs of what an animal or a plant or a fruit is really thinking, I don’t think we are entitled to just switch off and say it’s not feeling or thinking. I like the idea particularly that we’re surrounded by messages that we perhaps ought to be trying to interpret. I remember in “The Starling in George Square” I brought in the bit about “Someday we’ll decipher that sweet frenzied whistling,” which in a sense I suppose I believed actually—although it seems just a fantastic idea.

Messages from the past and future also?

I think probably also. Yes, yes, yes. The writer or the poet being in *receipt*, if you like, of messages, just like people listening for stars’ messages, astronomers listening for that. I think the writer too does that kind of thing. He does his best. He tries to decode, if you like, the messages that he thinks he gets from everything that surrounds him. Nothing is not giving messages, I think. (Morgan, *Nothing Not Giving Messages* 131)

In his “Morgan’s Words,” partly devoted to “Message Clear,” W. N. Herbert emphasizes that Morgan’s work as a whole “exhibits a concern to find those messages in things which have been overlooked because of the status of those things” (73); Herbert wants to see Morgan’s poetic insight as something Scottish, but also “something of the kabbalist” (73). The issue of messages and various ways of receiving them is certainly one of the themes explored in *No Nothing*. Near the end of the play, Reid and Morgan discuss one of the most well-known of Morgan’s concrete poems, “Message Clear.” Despite its title (which can read as “message received,” “message checked”), the poem is not that easy to grasp, and quite interestingly, it provokes various, apparently divergent readings. In Spence’s play, Morgan speaks of his emergent poem, and describes his experiment as “[p]laying with form. But more than that. Unscrambling. Breaking the code. The code being language”:

EDDIE Took the line *I am the resurrection and the life* . . . Saw what other words and phrases were in there, hidden. Like, *I am here* . . . *I act* . . . *I run* . . . And they flow down the page and come together in the original line, the starting point.

JIMMY Rearrange the following into a well-known phrase or saying . . .

EDDIE It's easy to be reductive.

JIMMY It just all sounds a bit technical, you know. Clinical. Analytical. And just, ever so slightly up itself.

EDDIE I know all that. But when I wrote it, it felt *given* . . . I was on the bus, on the way home from Robroyston Hospital where my father was dying. . . . And the words just came. I saw them, emerging, flowing together into that one line, that mantra. I am the resurrection and the life. (Spence, *No Nothing* 47).

Even if a given text, be it a concrete or science-fiction poem, seems a bit technical, or analytical, we must never forget that at the core of Morgan's writing there is a vibrant radiance that speaks directly to the heart, but the message is clear only when our hearts are ready to welcome the beams. In my view, part of the game of reading *No Nothing* is about being in *receipt*, being able to take a lateral perspective of looking at the dialogues between Eddie and Jimmy, being responsive to the spaces of convergence between the messages of two seemingly distant figures. In his review, Paul F. Cockburn seems to point to the same issue, his focus being on the transformative, creative power of words; for him, it is clear that Spence "firmly believes that both men considered ideas—and 'the right words' used to express them—as very important." "Of course," he adds

Spence can't resist playing with the idea that Reid might slightly resent having to be a man of the people on the front line of social and class struggle while Morgan sat safe and comfortable in his poetic ivory tower, but it soon becomes clear that both men understand the need for the other in terms of imagining—and subsequently creating—a different, better future. (Cockburn)

At some point, Reid suggests that "some things are no laughing matter. But mostly, humour's a hell of a weapon," and after a little bit of a flying between the two he tells a joke about a landlord and a poacher, to which Morgan responds: "You missed your calling. Could have made a career doing stand up" (Spence, *No Nothing* 11). The underlying sarcasm of their exchanges often turns into a playful affirmation of the other.

EDDIE Worked the crowd.

JIMMY Bit of the old rhetoric goes a long way.

EDDIE For the right cause. Can be a force for the good.

JIMMY Make folk stop and think. (*He stops and thinks, looks at his hands, turns to E.*) I don't think I was ever glib. (*momentarily unsure*) Was I?

EDDIE Manipulative maybe. Persuasive.

JIMMY Like a poet?

EDDIE (*laughs*) Like a poet!

JIMMY My Rat Race speech was a beauty.

EDDIE It was.

JIMMY (*quotes himself, from memory, addressing audience*) A rat race is for rats. We're not rats. We're humans. Reject the insidious pressures that would blunt your critical faculties to all that is happening around you, that would caution silence in the face of injustice lest you jeopardise your chances of self-advancement. This is how it starts, and before you know where you are, you're a fully paid-up member of the rat-pack. (*Pauses, looks round*) The price is too high. It entails the loss of your dignity and human spirit. "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?"

EDDIE You were right up in your pulpit there, quoting scripture.

JIMMY They were the right words. The best words.

EDDIE It was good. And heartfelt.

JIMMY It was printed verbatim in the *New York Times*.

EDDIE I can understand why.

JIMMY They called it the great speech since the Gettysburg Address.

EDDIE (*quotes*) Government of the people, by the people, for the people.

JIMMY Now there's something to work for, eh? (*Spence, No Nothing 12–13*)

This is one of the passages where Spence suggests that Reid was not only a brilliant trade unionist and orator, but also, in a way, a poet, a preacher, and a man of wisdom; someone who believed that dignity and human spirit were more important than succumbing to the rules of the rat race. And similarly to Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, delivered on the site of one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, Reid's speech, delivered upon his election as Rector of Glasgow University, marked an important moment in the fight for the students' minds. Addressing the students of Glasgow University, Reid says:

Government by the people for the people becomes meaningless unless it includes major economic decision-making by the people for the people. This is not simply an economic matter. In essence it is an ethical and moral question, for whoever takes the important economic decisions in society *ipso facto* determines the social priorities of that society. (Reid 8)

Spence also stresses that aspect in his talk at the Scottish Parliament which I will discuss in the latter part of the article.

But let us come back to the beginning and see how the two negotiate a better future, and how they define their here-and-now.

JIMMY So here we are.

EDDIE Indeed.

JIMMY Eh. . . where exactly?

EDDIE There is no other life and this is it.

JIMMY This is it. (Spence, *No Nothing* 2)

The repeated phrase “this is it” might remind us of one of Spence’s *Glasgow Zen* poems, particularly the one entitled “*On the suchness of things*”

AYE, 'THIS IS IT'

'THIS IS THE THING' (Spence, *Glasgow Zen* 1)

This could be seen as the first suggestion that we might be entering an intertextual space. And if we take a look at the two poems which precede it, then it becomes clear that my suggestion is not that far-fetched:

On the oneness of self and universe

IT'S AW WAN

TAE ME (Spence, *Glasgow Zen* 1)

*On the ultimate identity of
matter and spirit, form and void*

WHIT'S THE MATTER?

NUTHIN! (Spence, *Glasgow Zen* 2)

It is worth pointing out here that that the theme of *Glasgow Zen*: Voidness, Emptiness, nonduality, is given in English titles whereas the minimalistic, and at times dialogical, message of the poems is rendered in Glasgow speech. As Liz Niven aptly notices, the poems capture “the philosophical bent of much Glaswegian banter, the concise brevity of Glasgow speech, and the incisive wit often found in a passing street conversation” (134). The poems seem very light and simple, but their humour and their message result from the subtle and sophisticated connection of Glaswegian everyday speech and the philosophy of Zen, the philosophy of Emptiness (Skt. *Śūnyatā*) which refers specifically to the idea dependent origination, to the absence of inherent existence. The motif of “no nothing” might then also be understood as a game with the notion of Emptiness, or Void in the Buddhist sense. It should be noted here that in Zen philosophy attaining a realization of emptiness of inherent existence is key to liberation from suffering.

No Nothing seems a long variation on the theme of suchness of things and nothingness; the characters move swiftly from one motif to the other, through a kind of rhizome of associations. The motif of reaching a different level of existence in this strange nowhere land is linked with what Spence calls Morgan's credo: "The not quite nothing I praise it and I write it" from the poem "Fires"; in Spence's drama, it turns into "The not quite nothing. I sing it and I praise it":

EDDIE No ceremony.
 JIMMY What did you expect?
 EDDIE Nothing.
 JIMMY Like you said.
 EDDIE Either that or a ferryman, a porter at the gates.
 JIMMY Nope.
 EDDIE An angel with a sword of fire, barring our way.
 JIMMY Zilch. Nada. I just snuffed it and woke up here.
 EDDIE Came to yourself.
 JIMMY Myself, aye.
 EDDIE Me too.
 JIMMY Straight from the oven.
 EDDIE A roar . . . smoke . . . light . . . almost nothing.
 JIMMY (*Uncontrollable*) I must have blanked that bit.
 EDDIE (*Remembering, quoting himself*) The not quite nothing. I sing it and I praise it. (Spence, *No Nothing* 3)

As the characters try to make sense of where and when they are, another instance of peculiar intertextuality takes place.

EDDIE And here we are.
 JIMMY Here we are.
 EDDIE Some kind of way station. Halfway house.
 JIMMY Halfway to where?
 EDDIE Good question.
 JIMMY (*looks round and at audience*) I mean. We're not really in the 70s, are we?
 EDDIE We're not really anywhere. No time no place.
 JIMMY Nowhere.
 EDDIE *Nowhere* can be read *Now Here*.
 JIMMY Is that one of your concrete poetry efforts?
 EDDIE Could be. (Spence, *No Nothing* 6)

Quite obviously, even though it "could be," that concrete poem is not written by Morgan. It is entitled "Touching the Void" (46) and it comes from Spence's *Glasgow Zen*. This time the reference to Zen Buddhism is very clear:

NOWHERE
NOW
HERE

For me, the poem is one of the key elements in the message of the whole play. While keeping with Morgan's concrete poetics, with all its visual clarity and apparent semantic simplicity, Spence brilliantly captures the importance of the here and now in the "nowhere" Eddie and Jimmy inhabit. It looks as if "now" and "here" were metaphorically "present," or better still inherent, in the emptiness of "nowhere," just like all the utterances were metaphorically and literally "hidden" in Jesus' "I am the resurrection and the life" in Morgan's "Message Clear." The importance of mindful being in the here-and-now is further emphasized (even italicized) in the fragment which follows:

JIMMY That's weird. I'm getting a kind of déjà vu.
EDDIE That's what it's like, being here.
JIMMY *Here*. That's the thing. You said we're outside time?
EDDIE I think so, yes.
JIMMY But when did we get our jotters?
EDDIE Sorry?
JIMMY When did we check out? Kick the bucket? Pass away?
EDDIE 2010.
JIMMY And it feels like we've been here about five minutes.
EDDIE That seems to be how it works. Time out there moves faster.
JIMMY So we've been here a wee while.
EDDIE A good few years.
JIMMY Feels like nothing.
EDDIE No time at all.
JIMMY And we can look back, like this. Rewind.
EDDIE And fast forward. Up to a point.
JIMMY The point being?
EDDIE Now, I suppose. Whatever *now* is out there.
JIMMY So no time travel into the future?
EDDIE Unless we want to imagine it. (Spence, *No Nothing* 33)

Interestingly, the relativity of time is juxtaposed here with the significance of the "now" understood as a potentiality to be realized, as a space for action. This motif is further explored in the scene where Eddie and Jimmy discuss the Japanese film tellingly titled *Afterlife*. The film characters are to choose a moment to cherish, and then they make a film of that moment, and that is where they live, "in that film, in that moment" (Spence, *No Nothing* 44). The story in the film makes them remember their moment to cherish. Jimmy is revisiting his glory days as one of the leaders in the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders dispute, "the rousing rhetoric of his famous speeches rolling

forth with pride and passion” (Brennan). He remembers selected sentences from his famous Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in speech (“There will be no bevvyng. . .”), and also the already quoted “rat-race speech” which he gave as Rector of the University of Glasgow and which was printed in full in the *New York Times* and described as “the greatest speech since President Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address”; but he eventually chooses the scene when he meets his future wife and asks her for a dance. Eddie affirms the choice of the moment and begins to search for “the moments when the light got in” (Spence, *No Nothing* 45). He then recalls a number of these, and as we read closely, we recognize the fragments of one of the most well-known and most cherished of Morgan’s love poems (“From a City Balcony,” “One Cigarette,” “When You Go,” “Strawberries”), where the emphasis is (gently) placed on the celebration of fleeting moments.

EDDIE The cigarette in the non-smoker’s tray.

That day in Glen Fruinn we jumped into the sun.

Or the darkening room, the new rain . . . turning, half asleep, to say
I love you.

Or yes, the sultry afternoon, the taste of strawberries. The blue
plates laid outside on the step. Summer lightning on the Kilpatrick
Hills. Let the storm wash the plates. (Spence, *No Nothing* 46)

The importance of love and living for the other will be further emphasized at the end of the play in the form of ‘The Beatles’ “Here, There and Everywhere” (which was also played at Morgan’s funeral). But one may wonder why Spence chooses these and not some other (for instance, socially engaged) poems. The answer may be found in Spence’s article on Morgan. Once again, we may note the importance of a complex relationship between the given moment, specific time and place, and the timeless, universal meaning it carries for the reader.

His love poems in particular ring in the heart as well as the mind—perfect little lyrics that resonate. This is all the more amazing since he revealed at the age of 70 that he was gay. It hadn’t been too hard to work out! But in a country where homosexuality was not decriminalised until 1980, he had to be circumspect. In fact, perhaps it was the fact that the poems were coded that gave them their extra charge and intensity. They are in the moment, the specific place and time, and yet they are transcendent, timeless, universal.

We may notice how Jimmy, slightly puzzled by Eddie’s emotional response, subtly asks him about his ultimate goal in life, and this in turn will lead us again to the realm of “nothing”:

JIMMY So when you get right down to it, it really is . . . really was . . . all about love?

EDDIE Nothing else.

JIMMY Nothing.

EDDIE Each one believing that love never dies.

Watching their eyes and hoping I'm always there . . .

JIMMY (*nods*) Aye.

EDDIE And the moment is eternal. (Spence, *No Nothing* 46)

Almost at the end of the play, we find a peculiar incantation of negations. The more negations Eddie and Jimmy create, the more positive, affirmative and celebratory messages they eventually discover. We move from the absolute No of “nay,” “never,” “the no of all nothing” to solidarity, oneness and Yes to life. Interestingly enough, these incantatory exchanges might make us wonder about the issue of interconnectedness and inter-being:

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JIMMY No nay never. Never no more.

EDDIE The no of all nothing.

JIMMY No day no night.

EDDIE No past no present no future.

JIMMY No nothing.

EDDIE No nothing.

JIMMY No Reid.

EDDIE No Morgan.

JIMMY Amounting to what?

EDDIE Not a hill of beans.

JIMMY And yet.

EDDIE Notwithstanding.

JIMMY Nevertheless.

EDDIE We did what we could.

JIMMY We did what we did.

EDDIE Over and out.

JIMMY Over and out.

(*They look at each other. E. turns to the audience*)

EDDIE They do not move. That's the stage direction at the end of Godot.

JIMMY Again? Not my favourite play.

EDDIE There's a great line where Vladimir says, One of the thieves was saved. Then there's a wee pause, and he says, It's a reasonable percentage.

JIMMY But there's two of us.

EDDIE In it together, right?

JIMMY Right. Solidarity.

EDDIE Oneness.

JIMMY Yes.

EDDIE Yes.

E&J (*together*) Yes! (Spence, *No Nothing* 54–55)

INDRA'S NET?

Ever since my first reading of the play I have been fascinated by its title and the recurring theme of nothing, nothingness and emptiness, as well as the issue of the interconnectedness of things, the game of dynamic shifts of meaning, and switching from one narrative to the other. In my view, those familiar with Spence's writing might see the play as a processual meditation on the metaphor of Indra's net. In Buddhist philosophy, so important in Spence's writing and life, Indra's net is a metaphor for the interconnectedness of all reality. It could be argued that the net may serve as a tool for exploring the spatial and thematic dimensions of the play, and the issue of interconnectedness and inter-being, understood as the space of dialogue between Spence's and Morgan's poetry, as well as that between Morgan's poetry and precise moments of Scottish history. Indeed, history, politics and poetry inter-are in this liminal, theatrical space. We may notice how two completely different masters of speech (a trade union leader and a poet) meet and how they exchange views, how they see each other's achievements, how they reflect upon the meaning of their actions, and how they find a space of convergence in their affirmation of life, in saying "Yes!" to life. Significantly, all of this is manifested in the form of a constant, never-ending, dialogical creation and exchange of meaning:

EDDIE You saved the shipyards, you and the workforce.

JIMMY For a while.

EDDIE It was quite something.

JIMMY Shook things up. (*remembering*). They reckoned a quarter of Scotland's workforce downed tools to support us. 80,000 folk marched through Glasgow. It was glorious.

EDDIE I remember seeing it on the news.

JIMMY Made an impact, all over the world. Here, John Lennon and Yoko Ono sent us a bunch of red roses and a cheque for five thousand quid.

EDDIE Nice gesture.

JIMMY It was. It helped a lot. Especially the five grand!

EDDIE So not all hippies were a waste of space.

JIMMY Not at all. They'd been talking to Tariq Ali. They'd become quite politicised.

EDDIE Power to the people, right on.

JIMMY They did their bit. Advanced the struggle.

EDDIE For me the struggle was personal. And the personal *was* the political.

JIMMY It's always both.

EDDIE There was that hope, the stepping into the light. But being gay . . . it was dangerous. There was the threat of real violence. Or imprisonment. I could have lost my job. And then what? (Spence, *No Nothing* 21–22)

By association, the issue of homosexuality, with references to Morgan's famous "Glasgow Green," leads them to the theme of love, Ginsberg, and work (or creation) understood/practiced as a way to overcome despair:

JIMMY Lovestruck.

EDDIE Yes! And more. It was just knowing, being reassured, being told it was all right. (*laughs*) You know Ginsberg came to Glasgow in the 70s.

JIMMY Must have missed that.

EDDIE The old Third Eye Centre in Blythswood Square. The room's full of resolutely hetero male Scottish writers. And there's Ginsberg in his blue dungarees, and he plays a wee harmonium and sings. (*sings, tuneless*) Everybody's just a little . . . bit . . . homosexual, whether they like it or not . . . Everybody's just a little bit . . . homosexual, even though they almost forgot.

JIMMY Definitely missed that.

EDDIE But for me it was still unspoken. (*quotes*) So much is unspoken in the life of a man.

JIMMY The love that dare not speak its name.

EDDIE It had to be coded, encrypted. But to some folk it was clear enough. Some of the younger poets got it. So the words were out there, doing their work.

JIMMY Work.

EDDIE Ginsberg read another poem at that reading, an elegy for Jack Kerouac. (*recites*) So while I'm here I'll do the work. And what's the work? To ease the pain of living. Everything else, drunken dumbshow.

JIMMY A bit thin as a manifesto. But a good place to start.

EDDIE A credo. (Spence, *No Nothing* 22–23)

Various kinds of dialogism are visible in Spence's imagery building, in the structure of the play, and also in the philosophy that it inexplicitly makes references to. According to Bakhtin, the fundamental a priori of the dialogical approach is

that nothing *is* in itself. Existence is *sobytie sobytiya*, the event of co-being; it is a vast web of interconnections each and all of which are linked as participants in an event whose totality is so immense that no single one of us can ever know it. (qtd. in Holquist 40)

In his *Resonances of Emptiness: A Buddhist Inspiration for a Contemporary Psychotherapy* Gay Watson notes that Bakhtin's description might be that of a Buddhist notion of dependent origination. The idea of the relationship and interconnectedness, and the Buddhist doctrines of

dependent origination and emptiness, is most fully expressed in the school of Hua-yen Buddhism, with its concept-image of the net of Indra.

In his illuminating book entitled *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*, Francis H. Cook provides the following description, calling it the favourite Hua-yen method of exemplifying the manner in which things exist:

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each “eye” of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring. The Hua-yen school has been fond of this image, because it symbolizes a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos. This relationship is said to be one of simultaneous *mutual identity* and *mutual intercausality*. (2)

Robin Robertson makes an observation that the message of this image for us as individuals is that “each of us, through our own process of growth and transformation, affects everyone and everything” (7). I would like to follow his argument and quote one more passage from Cook’s *Hua-yen Buddhism*. In my view, it briefly sums up the life message of both Edwin Morgan and Jimmy Reid, and it certainly *reflects* the uplifting power of Spence’s writing: we are here and now for the other, we inter-are, we are one:

Someone once made the observation that one’s skin is not necessarily a boundary marking off the self from the not-self but rather that which brings one into contact with each other. Like Faraday’s electric charge which must be conceived as being everywhere, I am in some sense boundless, my being encompassing the farthest limits of the universe, touching and moving every atom in existence. The same is true of everything else. The interfusion, the sharing of destiny, is as infinite in scope as the reflections in the jewels of Indra’s net. When in a rare moment I manage painfully to rise above a petty individualism by knowing my true nature, I perceive that I dwell in the wondrous net of Indra, in this incredible network of interdependence. It is not just that “we are all in it” together. We all *are* it, rising and falling as one living body. (Cook 122)

WE LIVE IN HOPE

Commenting on the significance of the numerous quotes and quasi-quotes that we find in the play, McMillan notes that “the texture of the writing becomes increasingly powerful, as Spence hones and develops the two characters, and uses the two men’s own words to flesh out the meaning of their lives” (“On *No Nothing* at Oran Mor, Glasgow”). One could add that it is not only about the meaning of “their lives,” but the impact of their words (Morgan’s writing and Reid’s speeches) on the lives of those who gathered around them; in this sense, *No Nothing* might be seen as an affirmation of the transformative power of language, and the power of hope (as in the already quoted passage from Ginsberg’s “The Fall of America”). At the end of the play, we see how Morgan’s and Reid’s seemingly divergent narratives gradually converge and become one grand narrative of hope.

In his *Rectorial Address*, Reid re-affirms what he hopes to be the spirit of his address, namely the “affirmation of faith in humanity.” He says “[a]ll that is good in man’s heritage involves recognition of our common humanity, an unashamed acknowledgement that man is good by nature” (11), and he refers to Robert Burns’s poem “Why Should We Idly Waste Our Prime. . .” which in his view expresses this affirmation:

The golden age, we’ll then revive, each man shall be a brother,
In harmony we all shall live and till the earth together,
In virtue trained, enlightened youth shall move each fellow creature,
And time shall surely prove the truth that man is good by nature. (qtd
in Reid 12)

Reid concludes his speech by saying: “[i]t’s my belief that all the factors to make a practical reality of such a world are maturing now. I would like to think that our generation took mankind some way along the road towards this goal. It’s a goal worth fighting for” (12).

The significance of the message of hope is emphasized in the preface to the play which is a reprint of McMillan’s article dated 21 August 2010, published a few days after Reid’s and Morgan’s death:

And if there is one thing these two men had in common—apart from a Glasgow upbringing, a love of learning and a deep sense of belonging to the ordinary people of Scotland—it is their humour, their kindness, and their deep and optimistic belief that humankind, at heart, tends towards good rather than evil.

Like many of the finest men and women of their generation—Morgan was born in 1920, and Reid in 1932—they tended to express that belief

and hope through a kind of socialism that is out of fashion today; you will travel a long way, now, before you will find an MP, an MSP or a trade union leader who talks in public about a universal “right to work,” as Jimmy Reid did in his legendary rectorial address, given at Glasgow University in 1972.

The message of hope in the play was also stressed by Spence himself in his “Time for Reflection” talk at the Scottish Parliament on 25 October 2016. In it, he addresses one of the final scenes of *No Nothing*, where the two characters emphasize the power of hope in their philosophies of being for the other, in their desire to affirm hope and its power to change the status quo: “We did what we could,” “We did what we did,” “You live in hope,” “We lived in hope” (Spence 48). But more importantly, Spence goes on to link the importance of hope in the play in the context of the work of the present government: “If this building and your work here are about anything, they are about hope, a sense of possibility . . . a belief that we can work towards a better world” (Spence, “Time for Reflection”). And this is where he introduces the figure of his teacher, Sri Chinmoy, a poet, a philosopher, a musician, and most of all a world-renowned Peace Visionary, and the way he praised the qualities he saw manifest in Scotland: invention, action, discovery. We can obviously link these qualities with Morgan and Reid, as they seem to epitomize all three of them. And quite naturally we can link the qualities with the positive message of hope in the play. In her article “Legacy of our Lost Titans is their Belief in Human Worth,” McMillan suggests that if we do want to honour the legacy of Reid and Morgan, we should “no longer accept, vote for or nod our passive assent to, policy that is based on a negative and reductive view of human beings, and of their vision, capacity and power.” She also adds that as

we move towards a resource crisis beyond anything humankind has known before, we should understand that nothing will get us round this tightest of corners except our optimism and courage, our richness of imagination, and our love for other people. . . . And that means that we should consign to the dustbin of politics all those petty, mean-minded mantras that invite us to hate, to blame, to fear and to punish those worse off than ourselves. We should re-dedicate ourselves instead to the ideals of equality, fraternity and love embraced by Jimmy Reid and Edwin Morgan in their heyday. And we should do it not because we are starry-eyed fools; but because we have before us the powerful example of two great men who lived by those values, and who, in giving so much of themselves to others, also gave themselves lives that were rich beyond measure, in everything that matters.

McMillan's argument may become even stronger when juxtaposed with the quote which serves as a conclusion to Spence's talk at the Scottish Parliament. Spence refers here to Sri Chinmoy's teaching on the power of hope, and the way it inspires us to create new things, but most of all to deepen one's awareness:

Every day must come to you as a promise, a new aspiration, a new energy. . . . Hope is our inner effort; it inspires us to see something new, to feel something new, to do something new and, finally, to become something new. Let us not underestimate the power of hope. No matter how fleeting its life, it offers to us the most convincing and fulfilling power. (Chinmoy 57–58)

We could obviously add to this two quotes that Spence uses in his play: Morgan's call from "The Second Life": "Slip out of darkness, it is time" (*Collected Poems* 181; Spence, *No Nothing* 17), and a passage from a song by one of Scotland's leading singer-songwriters, the author of folk and social protest songs, Dick Gaughan:

Keep looking at the light.
Keep your eyes on the road ahead.
Keep working for the change that has to come.
Keep looking at the light. (Spence, *No Nothing* 23)

Both quotations affirm the need to change the world we live in, and the courage we must feel in order to make that change possible; they also point to the fact that there is no time to lose. Our here and now, hence our future, depends on our ability to enter into the light, but also our mindful, firm decision to stay there.

Spence finishes his talk with a sentence which best sums up the message of *No Nothing*, the credo of trade unionist Jimmy Reid, the motto of the first Makar of modern times, Edwin Morgan, and all those who follow their vision, including, of course, Alan Spence himself: "We live in hope."

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Boundaries and Otherness in Science Fiction: We Cannot Escape the Human Condition

ABSTRACT

The article explores the construction of boundaries, alterity and otherness in modern science-fiction (SF) films. Boundaries, understood as real state borders, territoriality and sovereignty, as well as the construction of the *other* beyond an imagined border and delimited space, have a significant meaning in the dystopian settings of SF. Even though SF topics are not bound to the contemporary environment, be it of a historical, technical or ethical nature, they do relate to the present-day world and transcend our well-known problems. Therefore, SF offers a pronounced discourse about current social challenges under extreme conditions such as future technological leaps, encounters with the alien other or the end of the world. At the same time the genre enables us to play through future challenges that might really happen. Films like *Equilibrium* (2002), *Code 46* (2003), *Children of Men* (2006) and *District 9* (2009) show that in freely constructed cinematic settings we are not only unable to escape from our border conflicts, but quite the contrary, we take them everywhere with us, even to an alternative present or into the future, where new precarious situations of otherness are constructed.

Keywords: international relations, emotions, body politics, alien encounter, world state.

INTRODUCTION

Science-fiction (SF) films are so fascinating because they show us in a comparatively short time a technically advanced possible future that serves as a mirror for our desires and anxieties. What makes SF films—and the whole SF genre in general—interesting for action enthusiasts, tech nerds and social researchers alike is the fact that they are neither formally nor conceptually bound to the (technological) limitations of our real world but offer a potential alternative. However, the authors and directors of SF, in addition to the scientists and experts whom they ask for information and advice, are, naturally, part of our real world. This means that problematics being discussed in SF always relate to contemporary human experiences while transferring them to extreme, alternative settings. Such contexts as future technological leaps, encounters with the alien other, or the end of the world open up a discourse where both current and timeless social-political challenges emerge as if viewed under a magnifying glass. One important recurring topic in SF is that of geographical, political and social boundaries, be it state borders, territoriality and sovereignty in general, as well as the other beyond an imagined border and delimited space. The construction of borders, new frontiers and otherness and their political implications can be seen very clearly in *Star Trek: Original Series*, as well as *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, where it is precisely the task of the crew of the Spaceship Enterprise to explore “new frontiers” (Buzan; Neumann).

Thus, dealing with borders and otherness—physically existent or constructed and imagined—are crucial topics in SF films echoing how we think about ourselves and our society. I call this discourse on social-political challenges which is opened up by the genre *boundary management*, with the boundary being precisely the area where material, social, ethical or ideological borders overlap and thus have to be dealt with.

Referring to four modern, dissimilar and rather non-commercial SF movies, I will show how these films try to manage old and new boundaries and how they are connected to our current reality. As such, the paper argues that we are not only unable to escape from our boundary conflicts, but, quite the contrary, that we also carry them everywhere with us, even to an alternative present or to the future, and construct precarious new situations of restriction and otherness. We are in an ongoing process of boundary management. The paper is divided into three sections. In the first, I will elucidate the rather descriptive research approach which explores SF as a representation of reality, in addition to what I understand by modern SF. The second and main section deals with the dominant topics of boundary-management by means of an individual analysis of

the SF films *Equilibrium* (2002), *Code 46* (2003), *Children of Men* (2006) and *District 9* (2009). Finally, the conclusion will summarize the findings, arguing that SF can be seen as a way to be inspired to discuss and solve future problems.

SF AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

There are many ways to analyze SF. Generally, SF can be defined as a genre where some scientific technological progress has taken place which then exerts influence over our social and political life. Therefore, SF films are often set in the future. However, the real or merely imagined scientific plausibility differentiates SF from the genre of fantasy which is located in a rather magical world or universe without necessarily having a connection to our current reality. In SF, the future technological innovations enable the audience in general, and social researchers in particular, to critically examine and think through social-political problematics that are at the point of occurring or have not happened yet but that might happen in the future (Kiersey and Neumann 7). Therefore, SF is often inherently political since social and political problematics are not only dealt with implicitly as side-effects of an action-laden story, but the genre also “concerns itself quite self-consciously with political issues future and present” (Weldes 10).

As part of popular culture, one might view SF as a mirror of reality, “as evidence about dominant norms, ideas, identities, or beliefs in a particular state, society or region” (Nexon and Neumann 13). This means that I make a distinction here between “in-world” and “in-show”; thus between the “real world” and what happens in the movies (Kiersey and Neumann 5–10). My claim is then to show how the films analyzed deal with border and boundary problematics with the aim of finding out more about the conditions of our society and how we are trapped in them. Consequently, my interest is to show how these films represent and transcend current real-world problematics of borders and boundaries.

In order to show a variety of different boundary constructions, the article deals with four contemporary SF films made after 2000. The date of 2000 was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, the magical date of 2000 is in itself an indicator of modernity and SF having finally come true. Since the setting of many SF films of the 20th century takes place after 2000, this date is inherently connected with a move into the modern age or a “jump into the future.” The most prominent example is Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* from 1968, where the title already indicates a modern and technologically advanced world right after the

turn of the millennium. Secondly, the 9/11 attacks of 2001 meant a real change of political paradigm, exposing the vulnerability of the U.S. and the Western liberal democratic model. Apparently Fukuyama's *End of History* (1992) was only a dream and it seems that we might rather head towards Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996). Congruent with the realization that the turn towards Western liberal democracy was not the desired progress of global society, a shift took place from the fun patriotic U.S. movies of the 1990s, such as *Stargate* (USA/France 1994), *Independence Day* (USA 1996), *Men in Black* (USA 1997), or *Armageddon* (USA 1998), to rather dire and/or critical ones after 2000, including *Minority Report* (USA 2002), *I, Robot* (USA 2004), *The Island* (USA 2005), *I Am Legend* (USA 2007), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (USA 2008), *Ender's Game* (USA 2013), *Elysium* (USA 2013), and *Snow Piercer* (USA/South Korea 2013)—not to mention the new version of the TV series *Battlestar Galactica* (Canada 2004–09).¹ While serious SF films were also made in the 1990s, and lighter ones after 2000, a certain trend is nonetheless clearly observable.

Being aware that the analysis of films contains an entire methodological toolkit of its own, I concentrate here on the text and narrative of the films in order to establish their connections to current political problematics (Kuhn, *Alien Zone 9*). SF is of course defined as a film genre also by aesthetics of destruction and disaster (Sontag), as well as by technical innovations in terms of special effects (Kuhn, *Alien Zone II* 1–8). However, this is of rather less importance for the sake of this contribution. I do not engage in a film analysis but make the point that SF deals with everlasting political problematics.

BOUNDARY ISSUES IN MODERN SF

For the analysis, I chose the films *Equilibrium* (USA 2002, dir. Kurt Wimmer), *Code 46* (UK 2003, dir. Michael Winterbottom), *Children of Men* (USA/UK 2006, dir. Alfonso Cuarón) and *District 9* (USA/New Zealand/Canada/South Africa 2009, dir. Neill Blomkamp). They were selected for three reasons: firstly, because they self-consciously deal with political issues, preserving the researcher from overinterpretation; secondly, because they all broach very different issues of boundary management, demonstrating

¹ This also includes the new film versions of comics presenting the heroes as torn and vulnerable individuals like in *X-Men* (USA 2000), *Spider-Man* (USA 2002), *Daredevil* (USA 2003), *Hellboy* (USA 2004), *Batman Begins* (USA 2005) or *Iron Man* (USA 2008), and their numerous sequels.

the whole variety of thought experiments that SF can provide; and thirdly, because all of them have a clear and comprehensible link to our real world and current problems, in spite of the diversity of boundary management topics.

Quite unsurprisingly, most of the SF films produced post-2000 are dystopias. Generally, a dystopia signifies a negative and alarming political vision understood as the opposite of Thomas More's utopia which has become proverbial today for a perfect but unattainable social-political community (see Arnswald and Schütt). Dystopias are generally designed as autocratic or dictatorial regimes being characterized by open, or rather concealed, authoritarian or totalitarian traits. Therefore, dystopias in science fiction are a way to critically analyze and question negative real or potential distortions of our political systems. Embedded in dystopian settings are the political problematics of *body politics* and how to develop a common human identity or become a world state respectively. The former term—*body politics*—refers to the policies and practices of how the political/social elite rules over the human body, thus indicating a battle between individual and public control over ourselves and physical integrity (Grosz). This comprises discussions about birth control and abortion, cloning, the use of drugs, viruses, or implants, as well as the development of cyborgs, androids and artificial intelligence. A good example, which will not feature in this article, is the 2009 film *Moon*, which deals with the fundamental ethical difficulties, including the right to self-determination, involved in cloning.

The other thematic centers include discussions about the possibilities of founding a world state and common human identity. According to social psychological research we are always in need of an *Other* in order to define our own social and group identity (Tajfel; Tajfel and Turner). The boundary between in-group and out-group can be set in two different ways, namely in the form of enmity or competition. Concerning the first, the in-group identity is strengthened by defining the out-group as a common menace to be collectively disdained or destroyed. In the two *Independence Day* films, humanity was united across state, cultural and religious borders by the joint fight against the alien menace. Concerning the second, the othering process happens in the more constructive manner of a competition in which one group might be the winner or the best according to certain standards. The out-group might even be perceived as ideal to follow suit. In *Star Trek*, humanity only developed a common identity after contact with the technologically and socially advanced Vulcans, an alien race having overcome war and violence. As such, the in-group identity is always constituted and strengthened by projecting a certain image of the out-group, be it positive or negative.

EQUILIBRIUM

The film *Equilibrium* is set in a future world which has been devastated by World War III. From the ruins of war the totalitarian state Libria has emerged, where the people are prohibited by the state/government from engaging in any cultural activity such as art or music which might bear the danger of causing emotions. Moreover, people are obliged to take a substance in order to suppress emotional reactions, which is a clear case of severe body control by state authorities. Conformity with the system is assured by a sophisticated monitoring mechanism headed by a dictator called “Father,” a reference to George Orwell’s “Big Brother” in 1984. Nonetheless, an underground resistance group has formed whose members—while pretending to take the substance—secretly indulge their emotions in the form of collecting art, listening to music, dancing, and falling in love of course. The story ends up in a huge showdown in the monumental buildings of the totalitarian regime.

Of major political relevance in the film is the postulated contrast between rational and irrational behavior. Obviously, the state government in *Equilibrium* considers emotions as detrimental to rational thinking and decision-making, having even caused World War III and endangering international peace. However, there is in fact no need to go as far as evoking an ominous World War III. We know from World War I and II and many other violent historical conflicts that misguided emotions, such as excessive nationalism and chauvinism, have been identified as one of the key instigators of violence and suffering (Hobsbawn). For the sake of peace it may therefore seem necessary to suppress those anarchic features of human biology. However, in addition to many daily joys, by blocking emotions and destroying all material that might generate them we lose not only our negative incentives to start war but all our other cultural achievements as well. So as in a Greek tragedy we paradoxically lose what we want to preserve by trying to preserve it: our humanity.

Interestingly enough, according to social psychological common sense knowledge, social life cannot work without emotions (Stein). Along with other psychological and cognitive facts, emotions contribute to the making of good and bad decisions, or “rational” and “irrational” ones. But it is not emotions *per se* that distract the human being from coming to valid decisions. Rather, it is the other way around: without emotions there would be no decisions at all. However, in political science and above all in International Relations when analyzing the behavior of decision-makers, emotions were and continue to be explored not as a natural part of social life but rather as factors to explain a deviation from rationality—notwithstanding that such a rational baseline needs to be defined in the first

place.² Thus, while on the one side rational choice theorists try to come to a predictive power by using rational assumptions, psychologists might even find it absurd that anyone would assume that individuals are rational (McDermott 12–13). This has only started to change within the last 15 years or so with the so-called *emotional turn* in International Relations.

Hence, in relation to managing the boundary between “rationality” and “irrationality”—or let us say between good or bad decisions on the political level—emotions can contribute to either. *Equilibrium* makes it apparent that, when it comes to social peace, the problem of Libria is not emotions but rather the systems that are trying to oppress emotions, namely the dictatorial regime. To avoid a World War III and a negative influence of emotions on politics as has happened in the setting of the film we need strong political institutions and protective mechanisms. This is the boundary between good and bad political decisions and not emotions. Against this background, *Equilibrium*, made in 2002, must be seen as a critical forerunner of the importance of the topic for the political sphere. After all, the “Father” dictator is of course not taking the emotion-suppressing drug—otherwise he probably would not have been capable of making the “rational” decisions necessary to govern his country Libria.

CODE 46

Like *Equilibrium*, *Code 46* also imagines a frightening future with a totalitarian government. However, here this is presented not in the form of a stylish action spectacle but as a poetic science-fiction romance with intense images and music. However, the dystopian setting has quite a different character since it is not as obvious as in *Equilibrium* but far more implicit, if not even unknowable. The world presented at the beginning of *Code 46* might even look rather positive, as a dream of many political scientists, international analysts and global activists come true: the world is organized as a quasi-world-state with a global supranational authority. People are living independently of ethnic or cultural affiliation all over the globe. The movie is shot in English but there are permanently and naturally embedded all kinds of references to Spanish, French, Italian, Arabic and Farsi which are well understood by everyone in this future world. The movie mainly takes place in the “megacity” Shanghai, which has not much in common with the Chinese city as we know it, but serves rather as a metaphor for a global melting pot resulting in a common human identity. How this global rapprochement has taken place is not stated openly, yet the audience

² This is criticized by Mercer (79), among others.

understands that scientific leaps in the fields of reproduction technologies apparently occurred and that cloning played a major part. According to the logic of the film, this technological advancement obliges the state authorities to regulate the global community with diverse body-politics. The world is ruled by certain codes restricting self-determination and one's own physical integrity. Since obviously there are so many clones, couples planning to have a child need to get official approval for their wish so as to preclude potential incest. If there is some familial relation between the future parents then the pregnancy will not only be terminated but the parents will also be treated with memory liquidation or infection with personalized viruses in order to avoid further sexual contact between them.

Other alarming facts are the damaged ecosystem. People are prohibited to go out during daytime to avoid solar irradiation. Even more, travels are regulated by restrictive visa policies to protect people from going to regions where they lack immunity against certain diseases. A young researcher dies after being infected with a deadly virus traveling with a counterfeit visa to "Delhi" because he was not issued a legal one. Visas are issued in a centralized way by the authority "Sphinx" which literally indicates two facts: firstly that, like the mythological sphinx, the official authorities know a lot more about every individual person than the person themselves; secondly, that by keeping this information the official authorities secretly exert some arcane power over the citizens with the aim of controlling them. In this sense, *Code 46* appears to be more disquieting than *Equilibrium*, because the stark regulations of the global community do not attract suspicion at first sight. The protagonists—two lovers who will violate code 46—can hang out in bars and clubs and have fun the entire night in Shanghai without trouble. Moreover, the regulations seem necessary to protect the humans from their own genetic incompatibilities and deficiencies. Yet the means are questionable, stretching from surveillance to surgical procedures carried out without the knowledge or even the approval of the person concerned.

The film shows how the boundaries of our international system are not lifted but rather shifted from being state borders to being new hyper-individual ones defined by our genome. The main characteristic of identifying a person is not the national passport anymore as it is now, but the genes. The places where people are allowed to travel are no longer prescribed by the passport, but by a superior authority based on individual characteristics of the body. Even having children needs to be approved officially since a couple might be related unknowingly—an aggravation of Western laws according to which brothers and sisters are not allowed to have children. In *Code 46*, national politics as the social-political organization by the state was thus not substituted for a liberal global hierarchy as desired

but for a restrictive globalized body politics control mechanism. However, even worse, participation in this globalized world is again not open to all people since there is another new boundary of the ones living inside the megacities and the marginalized and excluded living outside of them in slums and dangerous daylight without chances of social mobility. The film demonstrates that, even if restrictions given by nationality and passport might be overcome, humans always create new precarious constraints, one between inside and outside, and one defined by the genome.

CHILDREN OF MEN

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Children of Men is also a dystopia; however, in contrast to the two films discussed above, it is characterized by a strong “reality fiction” element locating the story within a quite realistic setting. Thus, after having accepted an initial rare event paving the way for extreme circumstances, the plot advances in comprehensible ways, yet allowing our current political and social problems to clearly resonate. The reality fiction element is strengthened by the use of long and complex tracking shots giving the impression that we are in the scene as a participant, not as a mere spectator.³

The movie is set in the near future England of 2027. The initial event starting the storyline is that 20 years ago humanity was overcome by a global epidemic of infertility reminiscent of a biblical plague. The film kicks off with the bad news that 18 year-old “Baby Diego”—until then the youngest person on earth—has been shot dead by a fanatical fan. Following the camera from the news-monitor of a fast-food-restaurant to the streets of London demonstrates that major technological leaps have not occurred, so life as we know it has not changed fundamentally. However, the city looks extremely dilapidated. Clearly, London is no longer a popular tourist destination. The global menace of infertility has not united humanity; quite the contrary, it was the final straw in the collapse of any cooperation on the global level.

The permanent threat of terrorist acts by international Islamic fundamentalists or domestic resistance groups, and the danger of ecological decline, as well as a demographic development working towards an extremely ageing population—which authorities try to manage by means of legal suicide pills for the elderly—lead to ongoing riots and revolts. Great Britain finds itself in a continuous state of emergency, but it still seems to be the only more or less functioning state left. This causes

³ This was further elaborated by director Alfonso Cuarón with his Academy Award-winning *Gravity*.

enormous migration fluxes to the country which the government tries to combat with vast reception centers. All the scenes are directly reminiscent of grievances of today and indeed even more in the year 2018 than when the film was released in 2006: first and foremost, the sealing off of Western states from illegal immigrants with Great Britain's decision to leave the European Union made in the 2016 referendum. But there are also links to the detention camp in Guantánamo and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

The scenario legitimizes, or at least gives rise to a repressive “police state” apparatus desperately trying to maintain law and order: the last state helplessly fights for internal and external sovereignty to preserve the borders as we know them. The film suggests that when it comes to a comprehensive international crisis the boundary being managed might actually be reduced to a mere state border. Obviously, there is no functioning inter- or supranational cooperation anymore; rather, each state is fighting for its own survival. All other ethical and moral values are subordinated to that objective. The initial assumption of neorealism that the international anarchical order determines a self-help-system where international cooperation is only of temporary duration has come true (Waltz). *Children of Men* unmask all our existing international agreements as mere illusions belying the true mechanisms of our system: the war of all against all.

But perhaps there is hope for humanity, since in the end there is a pregnant woman. With her dark skin the movie—being full of all kinds of historical, political and religious references—makes the point that Africa was in fact the cradle of humanity. The West might thus reassess its restrictive immigration policies. She makes her way to the “Human Project,” a research facility in the Azores which is trying to find a treatment for global infertility, and which is apparently the last remnant of international cooperation.

DISTRICT 9

Like *Children of Men*, *District 9* is an example of reality fiction. However, the plot is not set in the future but takes place in an alternative present. Again, a rather odd initial event allows for a new perspective through which to think about our political order: the classical alien encounter. The authentic appearance of the film is enforced by the use of hand cameras making the watcher feel embedded as if following a documentary rather than a fiction film.

The story begins in the year 1982 when an alien spaceship comes down to earth and, after having suffered some technical defect, ends up hovering right above the city of Johannesburg in South Africa. After a while the

humans decide to enter the spaceship and find thousands of injured, sick and frightened alien creatures. Like humans, they possess four extremities and walk upright, but they are much bigger and have an appearance between an insect and a reptile; around their mouths they have even fish-like barbells. This kind of perverse and distorted proximity to human appearance is quite unsightly from a human viewpoint and makes it easier to segregate them. Nobody knows what to do with the large number of uninvited, but intelligent, guests, so the “prawns”—as they are pejoratively called—are settled in the provisional “District 9” camp. After this prologue the actual storyline takes place more than 25 years later in the then present of 2009. The aliens still living in District 9, which has turned into a neglected and precarious ghetto-like place, eke out a miserable and degenerated existence. Their life is marked by the criminal and black market activities of South Africans who exploit their desperate situation. Order is maintained more or less by “Multinational United” (MNU), a not further specified private organization/corporation permeated by xenophobic staff. They are preparing a resettlement of the aliens to District 10 which is located 200 kilometers outside of Johannesburg. Naturally, MNU pursues more lucrative objectives by trying to access the modern weapon technologies of the aliens which only work in combination with their alien DNA.⁴

The parallels being drawn with the help of the extreme image of the alien other are apparent: the ruthless MNU reminds us of the highly criticized private security providers engaged by the U.S. during the course of the 2003 Iraq War and not abiding by international law. Obviously, in the movie, there is neither an international outcry nor an inclusive international organization taking care of this problem. Has the UN been substituted for an agency without scruples? Or is it simply uninterested, powerless or riveted by the disagreement of its members? In any case this makes us think about the fatal inactiveness of the UN in Rwanda in 1994, or currently in Somalia and Syria and many other places, leading to unspeakable atrocities. Setting the story in South African Johannesburg alludes not only to the crimes committed by the Apartheid Regime; it also shows that history is just repeating itself like a vicious circle: according to the film, the South African Apartheid System between humans was just replaced by a new one between humans and aliens. Is it just an inherent part of human nature to always discriminate against an out-group? The aliens are thereby a metaphor for all the excluded and marginalized people worldwide, and very concretely for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living in huge refugee camps in Yemen or Jordan with little

⁴ Why the aliens do not use their weapons for an uprising will remain the central flaw of the movie.

prospect of a better future. Remarkable in this sense is a scene in the movie of human activists protesting for “human rights” for the intelligent aliens which raises questions about what it means to be human, as well as where humanity begins and ends. Consequently, the genetic humans act inhumanely, whereas the main character, Vikus van der Merwe, after being infected with a virus that transforms him into an alien, appears even more humane in his metamorphosis.

Of crucial importance is also a point which is not even mentioned in the film, but which conveys a hopeless message for humanity in its banality: *District 9* lacks the global impact of a possible alien contact which could have at least united the humans and led to the establishment of a common human identity.⁵ Contrary to the utopian setting of *Star Trek* where the first contact with the Vulcans united the “human race,” the alien contact in *District 9* is absolutely limited to South Africa. In this country and, by extension, the rest of the world, suppression between humans is going on as ever, independent of the spectacular spaceship hovering above the city of Johannesburg. The direct contact with the alien other has not provoked any effect for a positive development of humanity; on the contrary, it has made humans look all the more brutal and savage.⁶

CONCLUSION

This paper argued that boundary management and dealings with otherness were fundamental themes in SF films providing, at the same time, a mirror of our current social and political problematics. As one can see, the analyzed films project our fears into a future or alternative setting where theoretically anything could be possible. However, the films are a critical discourse about our current political reality and problematics against the backdrop of “a new age” dating back to 2000 and the new political global setting after the attacks of 9/11. In *Equilibrium* we see absolute surveillance in a totalitarian system creating an artificial divide between emotions and rationality. In *Code 46* an apparently liberal world-state has developed but it is one with disturbing totalitarian distortions substituting the national border for an even more precarious genetic one. *Children of Men* confronts us with a demographic and ecological collapse leading to the breakdown of international cooperation and an

⁵ Alexander Wendt claims that an alien contact might be a way to develop a common human identity (389).

⁶ Interesting in this regard is the book by Albert A. Harrison about possible human responses to an alien contact.

overemphasizing of national borders, while in *District 9* a seemingly independent and non-legitimized organization exploits and marginalizes an out-group of aliens.

Each of these films presents a different dystopian setting where questions of human identity and body politics play an important role showing up in the form of current national and international problematics as, for example, total surveillance and segregation. However, these are not only the fears of our current reality, but also those of the human political and social condition in general. We always were and always will be concerned about the other beyond the known border or be afraid of an authority exerting absolute power. In this way, since SF serves as a looking glass magnifying our problems, it invites us to think about and discuss as yet unarticulated issues, making it possible to find ways to deal with real potential problems in the future. Geoffrey Whitehall appropriately summarizes this perspective when describing SF as the “genre of the beyond” (172). Hence, SF enables us as social scientists to think out of the box when discussing current and future challenges initiated by social developments and technological progress. SF can also be an inspiration for policymakers aiming to create a better world by implementing necessary regulations, fighting inequality, and, finally, trying to overcome our real and imagined boundaries.

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ENGAGING AMERICAN IDENTITIES

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Art (and) Criticism: Hart Crane and David Siqueiros

ABSTRACT

The article focuses on an analysis of Hart Crane's essay "Note on the Paintings of David Siqueiros." One of Crane's few art-historical texts, the critical piece in question is first of all a tribute to the American poet's friend, the Mexican painter David Siqueiros. The author of a portrait of Crane, Siqueiros is a major artist, one of the leading figures that marked the history of Mexican painting in the first half of the twentieth century. While it is interesting to delve into the way Crane approaches painting in general and Siqueiros' *œuvre* in particular, an analysis of the essay with which the present article is concerned is also worthwhile for another reason. Like many examples of art criticism—and literary criticism, for that matter—"Note on the Paintings of David Siqueiros" reveals a lot not only about the artist it revolves around, but also about its author, an artist in his own right. In a text written in the last year of his life, Hart Crane therefore voices concerns which have preoccupied him as a poet and which, more importantly, are central to modernist art and literature.

Keywords: Hart Crane, David Siqueiros, painting, art criticism, poetry.

One of the final scenes of *The Broken Tower*, the biopic about Hart Crane, directed by and starring James Franco, shows the poet of *The Bridge* attacking his own likeness in a house he inhabited in Mexico. The author of the painting in question is David Alfaro Siqueiros, a Mexican artist and friend of Crane's. The biographical context makes it clear why Franco chose to include this incident, dramatic but by no means exceptional in the life of a troubled and tormented man who was one of America's prime *poètes maudits*, in his film. Crane's ominous Dorian Gray-ish gesture, made in the last month of his life and preceding his suicidal death, which occurred three months short of his thirty-third birthday, must inevitably be read as "self-destruction by iconoclasm" (Fisher 495). The poet's biographer recounts the event in terms which would not be out of place in the script of Franco's biopic: "suddenly he was before them [Peggy Cowley, Mary Doherty and Louise Howard], ravaging in fury at the portrait by Siqueiros, the surface of which had begun to flake, and before anyone could stop him he slashed the canvas repeatedly with a razor" (495). Another piece of information is added by one of Crane's monographers, Paul Giles, commenting on the poet's word choice in *The Bridge*: "We know Crane used 'gull' in this way because in one of his drunken rages he spurned the portrait of himself by David Siqueiros, saying he wouldn't be 'gulled into buying that piece of junk'" (152).

Brian M. Reed's observation that "Crane was an avid proponent of such contemporaries as Walker Evans, David Siqueiros, Joseph Stella, and Alfred Stieglitz" (199) finds confirmation in the numerous occasions on which Crane refers to the visual arts in general and to Siqueiros in particular in his correspondence. However, the connections between the American modernist and the fine arts are not limited to epistolary expressions of his admiration for certain painters, photographers or sculptors. As the current state of research on Crane shows, the importance of these connections has been noted by the poet's scholars. A review of the literature on Crane published in the last decade reveals the existence of several sources which situate the poet's *œuvre* within the context of the *beaux-arts* and visual representation. One particularly relevant example is John T. Irwin's extensive and illustrated 2011 monograph on Crane, which draws on references to the painterly tradition and the Old Masters, with particular emphasis on medieval and Renaissance art. More recently, Niall Munro included a chapter devoted to ekphrasis and abstraction in his 2015 book-length study *Hart Crane's Queer Modernist Aesthetic*. To these may be added scholarly articles, such as Langdon Hammer's 2009 "Lost at Sea: Jasper Johns with Hart Crane" or Brian M. Reed's 2010 "Hand in Hand: Jasper Johns and Hart Crane," both concerned, as their titles suggest, with the inspiration the American Pop artist found in his compatriot's poetry.

Unlike Hammer and Reed, who explore the way in which a painter of the next generation refers to Crane's legacy, I propose to look closely at Crane's perspective on the work of Siqueiros, his contemporary and friend. This perspective is worth examining for at least three reasons. Firstly, it gives us an insight into Crane's approach to the visual arts and presents his lesser-known facet, which is that of an art critic. Secondly, it sheds light on Crane's "Mexican" period, which, with some exceptions, such as Susan E. Hall's 2013 article "Hart Crane in Mexico: The End of a New World Poetics," has not attracted much scholarly interest, recently prompting the Hart Crane Society to encourage exegetes of the poet's work to change this state of affairs. Thirdly, Crane's take on Siqueiros uncovers the poetic concerns which preoccupied the author of *The Bridge* and shaped his own art.

Despite what Crane's destruction of his portrait by Siqueiros may suggest, the American poet did in actual fact admire the Mexican painter's work. Siqueiros is mentioned on numerous occasions in Crane's correspondence; so is the painting the American poet was eventually to annihilate. For some time, in Crane's Mexican abode, "hanging from a wall, serene yet disturbing above the *ménage*, was the portrait the poet had commissioned from Siqueiros" (Fisher 481). As the biographer is quick to add, in the words of Peggy Cowley, Crane's last life partner, the only woman he had a romantic and sexual relationship with and his travel companion on the journey which turned out to be—both literally and metaphorically—his last one, the painting "showed him reading, the luminous light focussed on his silver hair" (qtd. in Fisher 481). Crane's own comments seem even more appreciative and enthusiastic. In October 1931, the poet writes to Solomon Grunberg: "David Siqueiros, a Mexican painter, whom I regard as superior to both Rivera and Orozco, has painted a magnificent portrait of me, that I'm sure you'll like. But as it hasn't been photographed yet, I can't send you a reproduction" (698). Around the same time, in an undated note, he urges Peggy Cowley to "come out and see [his] Siqueiros portrait before [he has] to take it away to the photographer!" (699). In a letter to Samuel Loveman written in Mixcoac, a neighborhood of Mexico City, in November of the same year, Crane calls Siqueiros "certainly the greatest painter in Mexico" (701) and devotes an entire paragraph to his friend's *œuvre* and his own penchant for local art:

I bought two fine paintings of S. which I hope someday you will see. I guess I wrote you that he painted a portrait of me (about 4 by 2½ ft) which is causing much favorable comment. Besides which I have a splendid watercolor of an Indian boy's head. You have never seen anything better by Gauguin, which, however, doesn't describe the

originality and authenticity of these works. Then I have about a dozen small watercolors, mostly landscapes, painted by Mexican children none of whom are older than eight—these for about 20 apiece! (702)

Three months later, Crane starts enclosing photos of the portrait to letters he sends to friends, rhapsodizing about both the artwork and the artist behind it.

Contrary to Crane's predictions, David Siqueiros has not made his way into popular consciousness—at least not outside of his native Mexico—to the same extent as some of his better-known fellow artists who were both his compatriots and contemporaries. He has not managed to outshine Diego Rivera, commonly regarded as the greatest Mexican painter of the twentieth century. Nor is he as easily identifiable by laymen as Frida Kahlo, who, despite being by definition at a disadvantage because of her sex, has enjoyed a revival in recent decades, riding the wave—and deservedly so—of feminist criticism and scholarship. From October 5, 2016, to January 23, 2017, a hundred and twenty years after Siqueiros' birth, a major exhibition of Mexican art of the first half of the twentieth century was held at the Grand Palais in Paris. Though it comprised Siqueiros' work, his name was not mentioned in its title, *Mexique 1900–1950—Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco et les avant-gardes*. The poster for the exhibition included a reproduction of a fragment of Diego Rivera's *Río Juchitán*, while the write-up advertising it referred to the event as an opportunity to view “a panorama of *famous artists* such as Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo or Rufino Tamayo” (*Mexique 1900–1950*, translation mine, italics mine).

Nevertheless, Siqueiros' place in art history is more than secure. Officially recognized as “one of the three founders of the modern school of Mexican mural painting (along with Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco)” (“Siqueiros”), commonly known as “los tres grandes” (Cumming), he is also described as one whose aim was “to dynamize and renew the visual arts” (*Mexique 1900–1950*, translation mine). Siqueiros was three years Crane's senior, but outlived him by over forty years. A colorful character, the painter led an accordingly colorful existence, marked and determined by his extreme leftist views. He defended his convictions with a gun in his hand, taking part in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and, two decades later, in the Spanish Civil War, during which he, predictably, supported the Loyalist faction. In addition to armed combat, Siqueiros' radical activism encompassed unionism, journalism and, most importantly perhaps, the art theory he promulgated (“Siqueiros”; Fisher 466). Larger-than-life, the artist “was later rumoured to have been involved in an attempt to assassinate Trotsky” (Fisher 466). “[A] life of protest and dissent” (466) inevitably resulted in spells of imprisonment and forced

emigration, but, most importantly, in the creation of an *œuvre* which was in keeping with his political, social and economic views:

the work which made him internationally famous spoke with gaudy palette of the passions of the man: tirelessly experimenting with new media and techniques, Siqueiros produced canvases and murals which exalted the suffering poor and the downcast Indian and constituted a body of New World proletarian art unrivalled by any other painter. (466)

As Crane's biographer speculates, the American poet may have seen something of himself in Siqueiros, a "volatile and flamboyant man" (Fisher 466), at once difficult and charismatic: "With his New World ardour and pedigree artistic temperament, he certainly delighted Hart" (467). The sense of kinship the author of *The Bridge* felt with the Mexican artist did not limit itself to the personal level; it translated into his critical writings. In the middle of his stay in the Mexican capital as a Guggenheim fellow, in October 1931, the month when he mentioned his portrait by Siqueiros in his correspondence with Grunberg, Crane produced an essay entitled "Note on the Paintings of David Siqueiros." As Langdon Hammer, the editor of an authoritative collection of the poet's works, explains in a note, it was "written for an exhibition of Siqueiros' paintings in Mexico City" (773). In Fisher's words, Crane "contribute[d] to a pamphlet published by the Salon Espagnol to mark its exhibition in honour of Siqueiros, thus joining Elie Faure and Sergei Eisenstein, among others" (482). Out of the fourteen texts included in the "Selected Prose" section of the aforementioned volume edited by Hammer, only two are devoted to the visual arts, the other being a brief comment on the work of photographer H. W. Minns. The critique of Siqueiros' art is not, however, the only instance of Crane exploring the *œuvre* of an artist whom he also happened to know personally and be on friendly terms with: elsewhere I have written about Crane's poetic ekphrases, one of which was inspired by Gaston Lachaise's work (Piechucka, "Women and Sculptures" 35). Both the poems and the essay prove the validity of Reed's point that "Crane, like O'Hara, took a partisan interest in the visual arts of his era" (199), made in a monograph chapter which examines the connections between the two poets.

It was also in 1931 that Siqueiros, himself a participant in the Mexican Revolution, painted a bust portrait of one of the revolt's key figures, the legendary Emiliano Zapata. Now in the Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum's permanent collection, the canvas depicts a close-up of the peasant leader, shown full face, but looking up rather than establishing eye contact with the viewer. Wearing a dark sombrero, a dark suit, and a white shirt, buttoned

to the neck but tieless, the Mexican revolutionary, with his unseeing eyes and his upper lip covered by a characteristic moustache, strikes us as somewhat stiff or, in the words of one critic, “hieratic as an Aztec statue” (Cumming). The sitter being presented in a drab interior, with a brick wall in the background, this darkly hued oil painting, dominated by black, brown, beige, russet and golden tones, is “a . . . potent image of Zapata walled into a cell” and emphasizes the “strong sense . . . of the new wave of Mexican art emerging out of a strange fusion of modernism and pre-Columbian art” (Cumming). While we cannot be sure that Crane was familiar with that particular painting by Siqueiros, it is highly probable, since the portrait dates from the period during which the poet lived in Mexico and socialized with the artist. Nevertheless, what Crane says of his friend’s sitters in “Note on the Paintings of David Siqueiros” is largely applicable to “Zapata”:

Soil mingles with expression in the pigment of their skins. The contour of a cheek, though only the head need be shown, can adequately imply the flexions and natural movements of the body they surmount. A very elusive and difficult feat, but one that particularly distinguishes Siqueiros. It is hard to explain all the inferences of latent drama that Siqueiros’ brush can indicate beneath the closed eyelids of a sleeping Indian mother, painted withal in colors so suave and sombre and against a background so dark that such dramatic contexts would seem anything but obviously proffered. (174)

As is evident from the passage *loco citato*, Crane sees Siqueiros’ color scheme and his frequent use of earth tones as a vitally important visual characteristic of his *œuvre*. Earth and “soil” are crucial to his perception of the Mexican artist’s work: at one point in his correspondence, Crane remarked that “the very soil of Mexico seems spread on his canvases” (qtd. in Fisher 467). In the essay central to the present article, he refers to Siqueiros’ work as “ground[ed] on those persistent earth-problems” (Crane 173). Knowing him closely, the American poet must have been aware of the essence of Siqueiros’ artistic program, focused on “an art of the New World in which painters would exploit indigenous cultures and traditions” (Fisher 466). The portrait of Zapata, a man of the people and a half-Amerindian whose motto was “Tierra y Libertad,” is symbolic in this respect.

Another quality of Siqueiros’ style that Crane points out is due to the artist’s ability to take painting, a two-dimensional art, to another level: that of three-dimensional, sculptural forms. In that, the poet anticipates modern-day commentators of Siqueiros’ legacy, who observe that he “relies on solid drawing, oversized volumes and on motion rendered through the use of perspective” and that “[h]e also uses his own ‘polyangularity’

approach, which takes account of the movement of the viewer observing his murals,” and does so “not only in his murals, but also in his numerous portraits” (*Mexique 1900–1950*, translation mine). This is undoubtedly what Crane has in mind when he states that “[r]eticence amplifies accent in the magnificent plastic control and finesse of a hand and eye that seem to create statically, certainly sculpturally, —but with this presumable advantage—that the brush permits a greater play of dynamic inference within the confines of a rigidly defined design than stone does” (174). The fact that Siqueiros’ representations of his sitters—and thus representations of the human body—are not flat makes them more life-like. This, in turn, makes the bodily aspect of his painting, so to speak, more palpable. It is the same palpability—for want of a better word—that strikes the American poet when he writes of the way the sitters’ facial features “imply the flexions and natural movements of the body they [the heads] surmount” (174). The metonymical nature of the fragment from “Note on the Paintings of David Siqueiros” quoted in the previous paragraph confirms that Crane pays attention to the corporeal dimension of the Mexican artist’s work. The poet turned art critic—albeit for the sake of one critical piece—perceives the sitters in terms of the parts their bodies consist of. What strikes him are the “skins,” “a cheek,” “the head” and “the closed eyelids.”

In addition—and most importantly—Crane draws a parallel between the land and its inhabitants, who seem to grow out of their “soil,” and almost literally so. Earlier in the essay, the American poet refers to Siqueiros as “organic” (173). Though he does so in a slightly different context, to which I shall return, the other possible meanings of the adjective are also applicable to the points he makes about his friend’s art. Like the earth, the body is “organic”: living, breathing and growing. A natural bond unites the macrocosm and the microcosm, the land and the human beings on Siqueiros’ canvases: in Crane’s words, “Throughout his murals, portraits, aquarelles and lithographs there speaks the same prophetic sense of humanity—the Mexican masses—in permanent and elemental relationship to their mountains, burros, misery, their elation and resignation. . .” (174). In Siqueiros’ paintings as viewed by Crane, the earth is maternal. Appropriately, of all the themes and motifs that recur in the artworks in question, the author of “Note” selects motherhood and iconography related to it: to him, the Mexican artist is the portraitist of the “sleeping Indian mother,” of “unspectacular [sic] madonnas” and “pensive children” (174). Together with Siqueiros’ other subjects, of whom Crane mentions “miners, [and] workmen,” the mothers and offspring are the sources of “profound commentaries,” of “real emanations, deeply racial, rockbound in the past of Mexico and ‘shadowed forth’ into the future, far beyond the mere superficies of ordinary action” (174).

When Crane speaks of his Mexican friend's "organicity," he means first and foremost a general quality of his painting, namely its completeness and integrality. This may be Siqueiros' claim to greatness, about which Crane has no doubts. The poet's reflections on the subject are important because they bring up an issue central not only, as Crane points out, to Siqueiros' *œuvre*, but also to modernism as a whole: the state of being suspended between figurative and nonfigurative art, or, in other words, between representation and abstraction. Therein lies a dilemma common to both painters and poets. Maurice Samuels' comments on Mallarmé's contribution to modernism, among whose forerunners the French symbolist counts, are a good illustration of this problem:

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Hérodiade ends with a lyric fragment entitled "The Canticle of Saint John," told from the perspective of the Baptist's head at the very moment it is severed from the body. Critics have read the poem as a manifesto for a kind of abstract or pure poetry that would detach itself—like John's head—from the mundane task of representing objects in the material world. And indeed, the dense syntax and abstruse imagery of much of Mallarmé's poetry frustrates any form of mimetic reading.

Nearly all of Mallarmé's poems lend themselves to such allegorical readings: poetry itself becomes his primary subject even when the surface of the poems contain [sic] references to nature or history. This turning inward, wherein art concerns itself with the conditions of its own production, is a typical modernist gesture. (20)

In his text on Siqueiros, Crane, whose relationship with Mallarmé is among the important connections that bound him to other literary masters, past and present, makes it clear that one had better beware of art which, to borrow Samuels' expression, "detach[es] itself . . . from the mundane task of representing objects in the material world." The American poet begins by placing the Mexican painter in the larger context of modernist visual art on the other side of the Atlantic, with particular focus on the achievements of abstractionists. Crane cites Spanish, French and Italian artists such as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Giorgio de Chirico respectively, only to confirm Fisher's statement that "[w]andering the great museums, he [Siqueiros] saw how European art both inspired and constricted the painting of the Americas" (466). As Crane sees it, faced with a potentially overwhelming, intimidating and paralyzing influence, Siqueiros emerges victorious in the battle between the authority of European luminaries and his creative individualism, "his own essential vision and ultimate mastery" (173).

While dismissing "[p]ure abstractionism" as "a species of mechanics" (Crane 173), the poet of *The Bridge* is, however, careful not to throw the

baby out with the bath water. The Mexican painter's approach to his art, his views and the way he puts them into practice are remarkable precisely because Siqueiros may rely on figurativeness, but not at the expense of cutting himself off from nonfigurativeness altogether:

Painting need not become mere illustration, he [Siqueiros] said practically, in order to convey a rich and human concept in direct and natural forms, terms and arrangements. Nor by incorporating these "documentary" elements consistently need any of the underlying abstract beauty of design be relinquished. Siqueiros is organic enough to convey them both in a single impact. And some ideas besides. (173)

Given its wide spectrum of meanings, the word *organic* may be synonymous not only with "living," as well as "simple" or "close to nature," but also with "fundamental" and "interconnected" ("Organic," ahdictionary.com) or "having systematic coordination of parts" ("Organic," merriam-webster.com). It seems that what Crane especially admires about Siqueiros is precisely a capacity for interconnectedness: earlier in his text, the poet praises the visual artist for the way he combines "a coordinated human content and a spiritual axis" (173) in his *œuvre*. By expressing his appreciation for a painter in whose work reality is represented without being simply reproduced, the more realist aesthetics do not exclude the aesthetics of abstraction and the visual is not devoid of the conceptual, the author of "Note" may be voicing a yearning for a kind of artistic expression that is multifaceted and multidimensional, all-encompassing and all-inclusive. The task undertaken by the Mexican artist appears to be larger than life: it is, as Crane observes, "[a] very elusive and difficult feat, but one that particularly distinguishes Siqueiros" (174). Importantly, as the poet points out, his friend's art is far from being straightforward and literal. Having listed the crucial elements of Siqueiros' iconography and his artistic DNA, Crane adds: "And all this implicitly; not in a pictorial way" (174). The painter may rely on "direct and natural forms," but behind them is "a rich and human concept," which is to be "convey[ed]" or "impl[ied]." Siqueiros operates by suggestion rather than explicit statement in order to create an *œuvre* whose "inferences" are "hard to explain."

Reflections on the aesthetics of abstraction are crucial not only to modernist—and, for that matter, modern—painting, but also to the poetry of the period, not least the imagist school. Eighteen years before Crane wrote his art-critical piece on Siqueiros, Ezra Pound had published his celebrated essay "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," warning poets that they should "[g]o in fear of abstractions" (Pound). A mere five years earlier, in 1926, William Carlos Williams, another exponent of high modernism, had

started working on his poem *Paterson*, eventually published in the 1940s and 1950s and arguing for “no ideas but in things” (Williams 6). Inevitably, Crane himself was no stranger to similar preoccupations, though not necessarily leading to identical conclusions. The various meanings and implications of the term *abstract* are important to an examination of Crane’s poetics for the same reason that “Note on the Paintings of David Siqueiros” is: because they point to dilemmas which transpire in his own poetry and his own thinking about poetry.

In his discussion of the parallels between Crane’s poetics and the visual arts, Niall Munro undertakes the topic of abstraction, looking mostly at *White Buildings*, the collection of poems Crane published prior to *The Bridge*. Focusing on two ekphrastic poems, “Sunday Morning Apples” and “Interludium,” inspired by the work of two friends of Crane’s, the painter William Sommer and the sculptor Gaston Lachaise respectively, the scholar argues that both ekphrasis and abstraction are part of “Crane’s queer project” and as such they are “to challenge normative representation” (Munro 41). Munro notes analogies to imagism in the former poem, as well as Crane’s treatment of the motif of fertility in both lyrics, seeing in it “a challenge to normative versions of fertility” (48) and a way of “question[ing] heteronormative reproduction” (50). Analyzing the use of abstraction in “Sunday Morning Apples” and “Interludium,” Munro points to Crane’s reliance on fragmentation on the level of both imagery and language, and links it to cubism: “Crane takes the sense of Cubism further than just the perspectives that can be seen, and offers his reader access to the unseen—at times spiritual—dimensions of the object” (51). At the same time, “Crane’s attraction to techniques of abstraction like ekphrasis—literally a ‘speaking out’—and his connecting of abstraction with ecstasy—a state outside oneself—suggests an attempt by Crane to step outside his work and connect with his reader” (51). This brings the author of *Hart Crane’s Queer Modernist Aesthetic* to the notion of intersubjectivity. Munro shows that because “in aspiring towards ‘absoluteness,’ the poem becomes hermetically sealed and fixed, incapable of evolution” and “total subjectivity would render any dissidence resulting from his impression, and any affirmation of Crane’s sexuality, meaningless, since it would have no connection to the ‘outside’ or the normative world” (56), “Crane actually proposes a far riskier poetics: just as his abstract style sought intimacy with the unknown reader, so here he makes a deliberate attempt to relate his own subjectivity to his reader’s, by fusing his own ‘experience’ with that of his reader” (57).

“In doing so [using ekphrasis and abstraction], Crane highlighted the process of creation and echoed other modernists’ concerns with *representation* and the limits of language. In his use of ‘metaphysical,’ Crane

intended to suggest that poetry seeks to represent something beyond our comprehension of reality,” Munro points out (42), referring to a fragment of “Modern Poetry,” an essay by Crane, in which the poet mentions impressionist and cubist painting, as well as French symbolist poetics. The emphasis Crane puts on indirectness and suggestiveness as a quality that characterizes great art inscribes itself into the affinity he felt with the symbolist school, a subject which I have discussed in several essays and articles on the connections between the American poet’s *œuvre* and the legacy of French symbolism. The question of poetic heritage inevitably entails the Bloomian notion of “anxiety of influence,” to which Crane had been exposed a half-century before the term was coined. The author of *The Bridge* looked towards the great masters, American and otherwise. Among them were the aforementioned French symbolists, including, but by no means limited to Arthur Rimbaud and Stéphane Mallarmé, and—or perhaps, given the intensity of the “nativist” aspect of “the anxiety of influence,” first and foremost—Walt Whitman, the unquestionable giant of nineteenth-century U.S. poetry, and T. S. Eliot, the über-modernist, whom American poets—regardless of their attitude to his work—found virtually impossible to ignore or circumvent for at least the first half of the twentieth century. The list of “influencers” is, of course, longer, and could be extended to include other modernists, such as William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound or Wallace Stevens, as well as Edgar Allan Poe, the romantic precursor of both symbolism and modernism. This tendency to look up to poetic mentors came up against Crane’s desire to become a major national poet and the author of a *tour-de-force* epic, referred to by one scholar as “his ambition to create the ‘Great American Poem’” (Baym 1647):

He defined himself as a follower of Walt Whitman in the visionary, prophetic, affirmative American tradition. His aim was nothing less than to master the techniques of modernism but also to reverse its direction—to make it positive, celebratory, and deeply meshed with contemporary American life—without sacrificing technical complexity or richness. For him as for the somewhat older William Carlos Williams, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* was both threat and model. That poem could become an “absolute impasse,” he wrote, unless one could “go *through* it to a different goal,” leaving its negations behind. This was the task he attempted in *The Bridge*. (1648)

In this context, Crane’s statement about the extent to which Siqueiros could have been influenced by the colossi of modernist visual art acquires a new dimension: “Perhaps the abstract preoccupations of Picasso, Braque and others taught him considerably; but it is quite certain that they can have contributed but little to his own essential vision and

ultimate mastery” (173). It is not only Siqueiros’ possible dilemmas, but his own that Crane most likely had at the back of his mind when writing the sentence *loco citato*.

Similarly, the nativism of the Mexican painter’s work, his particular relationship with the land, understood broadly as the realm of nature, a macrocosm of which the human body is a microcosm and a motherland, must have resonated not only with Crane the art critic, but also—and perhaps more importantly—with Crane the poet. Corporeality is an important aspect of Crane’s *œuvre*, as are the motifs of maternity and femininity in general. All three—the land, motherhood and womanhood—are encompassed by America, the woman-continent, central to Crane’s *opus magnum*:

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The Bridge is a visionary poem made up of fifteen individual sections of varying lengths. It encapsulates a heroic quest, at once personal and epic, to find and enunciate “America.” Like Walt Whitman’s *Song of the Open Road*, which also focused on a symbol of expansion and dynamism, *The Bridge* moves westward in imagination from Brooklyn to California. It also goes back into the American past, dwelling on historical or legendary figures like Columbus, Pocahontas, and Rip Van Winkle. It moves upward under the guidance of Whitman; down in *The Tunnel* it meets the wandering spirit of Edgar Allan Poe. . . . Like his model Whitman, Crane wrote from the paradoxical, conflicted position of the outsider claiming to speak from and for the very center of America. (Baym 1648)

To paraphrase his own remark on Siqueiros’ art, made in a letter and quoted earlier in the present article, Crane’s aim in writing *The Bridge* is to make sure that the very soil of the United States seems spread on his pages.

Commenting on the formal features of Crane’s best-known poem, Baym mentions that “the syntax [is] complicated and often ambiguous,” while “the references [are] often dependent on a personal, sometimes inaccessible train of thought” (1648). When, in his essay on Siqueiros, Crane reflects on how his painter friend positions himself vis-à-vis abstraction, he clearly has in mind not only the visual, but also the philosophical sense of the term: “the . . . abstract beauty of design,” as well as “ideas.” In fact, it turns out that the numerous meanings of *abstract* which a dictionary entry for the word customarily lists may nearly all be applicable to the American poet’s understanding of it: “disassociated from any specific instance,” “difficult to understand” or “abstruse,” “insufficiently factual” or “formal,” “expressing a quality apart from an object,” “dealing with a subject in its abstract aspects” or “theoretical,” “impersonal” and “detached,” and, inevitably, “having only intrinsic form with little or no attempt at pictorial representation or narrative content” (“Abstract”).

It is true that Crane's poetry is deliberately difficult and demanding, a quality which he shares with, for instance, Mallarmé. As I have argued elsewhere, the American poet and his French symbolist predecessor "produced verse whose nature is often challenging, ambiguous or downright hermetic," "opted for idiosyncratic lexis, grammatical structures and syntax," and "set themselves unrealistic, larger-than-life poetic goals: the 'Book' to end all books in Mallarmé's case, the über-epic poem in Crane's case" (Piechucka, "The Sound" 25). Like Mallarmé, Crane was involved in "chasing often impossible poetic ideals" and in "the painful pursuit of the Absolute" (25). However, unlike the French poet, whose "Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard" ['A Dice-Throw Will Never Erase Chance'] (1897), carries the idea of a pure, non-representational poetry to its logical extreme: nominally about a shipwreck, [it is] the almost abstract poem" (Samuels 20), Crane does not go so far into the realms of self- and non-referentiality, abstraction and pure poetry.

In an article-length study which set Hart Crane against André Gide, a French writer who also gravitated towards symbolist aesthetics, I observed that, in the American poet's view, poetry was "to communicate some deeper truths" rather than stop at "a surface created by language or preconceived notions" and the poet was supposed "to reveal the truth and spread the word rather than be content with merely arranging words" (Piechucka, "Images and Ideas" 15). Drawing on Gide scholarship and scholarship dealing with the connections between Crane and imagism, I concluded that both Crane and Gide were careful not to let images and symbols take precedence over ideas and the truth or to reduce symbols to the level of pure decoration. Gide's and Crane's wariness when it comes to the fact that "[i]n modernist literature, the focus often shifts from content to form, and from the reality referred to by language to language itself" (15) resurfaces in the latter's essay on Siqueiros' *œuvre*, in particular in its preoccupation with abstraction, mimesis and conceptuality, as do its author's other poetic concerns.

"Note on the Paintings of David Siqueiros" confirms that there is often a thin line between art criticism and art *tout court*, especially when the art critic happens to be an artist in his own right and remains so even when producing critical writings. In February 1932, two months before his suicide, Crane wrote to Grunberg:

Under separate cover I'm sending you a photo of the portrait that David Alfaro Siqueiros painted of me recently. He's having a one-man show now in the Sala Española here, and I've never seen such a show before. The picture I'm sending you is a sensation—and, I think, deserves to be. Not only is it a marvelous likeness of me—it's besides, a tremendously

powerful piece of work, that Picasso would—and well might envy. The head is about 2 ½ times life-size, so you can imagine the dimensions. (715–16)

To the letter Crane attached a transcription of the opening stanzas of the first version of “The Broken Tower.” It is the last poem he ever composed, to which the biopic directed by James Franco, mentioned at the beginning of this article, as well as Crane’s biography by Paul Mariani, on which Franco’s film is based, owe their identical titles. For both chronological and artistic reasons, “The Broken Tower” is a textbook example of a poetic *chant du cygne*. It is customary to give considerable attention and attribute particular significance to poets’ swansongs. It is also tempting to regard them as poetic testaments. Unlike “The Broken Tower” and like much of Crane’s “Mexican” output, “Note on the Paintings of David Siqueiros” receives little critical attention in Crane scholarship. While it would be farfetched to overestimate the importance of Crane’s criticism of Siqueiros’ art, one of the last texts the poet of *Voyages* produced, it may be argued that the essay with which the present article is concerned is worthwhile because it sums up not only the Mexican painter’s artistic accomplishments, but also the author’s. In it are reflected the lifelong concerns of an ambitious poet who wanted to make a significant contribution to the literature of his country, the questions concerning poetry which preoccupied and tormented him, and the inevitable awareness of the existence of great masters, of poetic Picassos, a source of fascination, as well as fear.

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The First Constitutional Government of the Minnesota Anishinaabeg¹

ABSTRACT

In this paper I trace the development of Native American constitutionalism in the early twentieth century. Specifically, I focus on the first constitutional government of the White Earth Nation, located in northwestern Minnesota, which in the period from 1913 to 1927 was part of a larger confederative arrangement, called the General Council of the Chippewa. The purpose of this paper is to show the importance of this inter-reservation government for the preservation of White Earth Anishinaabe cultural continuity from which revitalization efforts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century grew. Using archival resources, I pay attention to Anishinaabe governing practices and their ethical dimension that can be understood in the light of Anishinaabe philosophy which was an integral part of everyday life. My findings suggest that the course of institutional development set by the creation of the General Council in 1913 influenced the path of White Earth governance for the rest of the century.

Keywords: White Earth Nation, General Council of the Chippewa, Indian Office, Indian policy, governing practices.

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There is a surprisingly long history of Native American constitutional governments on the North American continent. Some Native nations had a constitutional form of government even before the European arrival. The Iroquois League, which was formed between A.D. 1000 and 1500 in present-day upstate New York and part of Canada, was one of the most sophisticated Native governments with “the first Federal Constitution on the American Continent” (Cohen 128). In the south of the United States, the so-called Five Civilized Tribes gradually formed functioning constitutional governments in the period from the 1820s to the 1860s. After the Civil War, the Five Civilized Tribes were deprived of their governing powers as a result of repressive assimilation policy. The goal of the Indian policy of allotment and assimilation in the period from the 1860s to the 1930s was the elimination of tribal governments. Therefore, there was a widespread belief that only a few or none Native governments existed before the adoption of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.² *Felix S. Cohen’s Handbook of Federal Indian Law*, first published in 1942, lists about seventy tribal nations that had constitutions or constitution-like documents in the pre-reorganization period. Archival documents about the operation of the early constitutional governments are fragmentary, yet they provide valuable evidence of how Native nations strove to adapt to changed social and political conditions and preserve their cultural distinctiveness at the same time.

In this paper I focus on the first constitutional government of the White Earth Nation (1913–27) as part of a larger confederative arrangement, called the General Council of the Chippewa. I reconstruct this little known history from archival documents in order to gain insight into the world of Anishinaabe³ governing practices that in the early twentieth century

² The Wheeler-Howard Act (The Indian Reorganization Act), 48 Stat. 984–988 (1934) (codified as amended at 25 U.S.C. § 461 et seq.). The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 was a watershed in the U.S. government’s approach to Native nations. Beside ending the allotment policy, the main contribution of the new legislation was its acknowledgement of the inherent right of Native nations to self-government. Unfortunately, the IRA’s conception of Native self-government did not reflect sociohistorical realities of most Native communities and disregarded Native traditions and political experience.

³ In this paper, I use the term Anishinaabe (noun sg and adj) and Anishinaabeg (noun pl) which can be translated into English as “the original people” or “the Indian people.” In the 1990s, the White Earth Nation citizens returned to their traditional name Anishinaabeg, replacing the anglicized corruption Chippewa derived from the word Ojibway/Ojibwe/Ojibwa used by French traders. However, the term *Chippewa* has not completely disappeared. It is officially used by the federal government and remains in the name of the present-day Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, the umbrella organization of the six Minnesota Anishinaabe bands.

reflected a clash of Western and traditional Anishinaabe views of political authority and decision making. In the first part of this paper I provide a brief historical background of the beginnings, development, and decline of the White Earth Reservation in the context of federal allotment policy and its impact on political organizing of Minnesota Anishinaabe reservations. In the second part I analyze a fourteen-year period of the General Council of the Chippewa, an inter-reservation constitutional government of the Minnesota Anishinaabeg. Archival data from the early twentieth century are incomplete, yet they provide a more or less faithful picture of how factionally divided White Earth Anishinaabeg strove for asserting their treaty rights in the limits of their ward/guardian status. Focusing on practices reveals Anishinaabe meanings behind their decision making and actions. The third part discusses the significance and implications of the General Council in regard to the later formation of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe in 1936. I argue that the Nelson Act of 1889 and the creation of the General Council in 1913 represent the first critical juncture⁴ that directed the later institutional development of Anishinaabe reservations toward federalized arrangement.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN BRIEF

The Anishinaabeg who currently live on the White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota are part of a nation that according to Anishinaabe tradition occupied the Atlantic coast north of St. Lawrence River in the period around the mid-fourteenth century (Warren 76). From here they migrated through a vast geographic region of the United States and Canada from the Great Lakes to the prairies of North Dakota. At the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, some of the Anishinaabeg arrived in northern Minnesota. In 1868, the Anishinaabe groups dwelling along the upper Mississippi River were relocated over a hundred miles westward to the White Earth Reservation which the U.S. government had established under the 1867 Treaty with the Mississippi bands.

The White Earth Reservation became a new home both for the Anishinaabe Mississippi bands, as well as for an ethnically and linguistically diverse population that by the early 1800s arose from mixed marriages

⁴ Critical juncture is a term used by historical institutionalists to refer to an event or a decision that initiates a path-dependent process, which perpetuates the course set during the critical juncture. According to Ruth and David Collier, critical junctures are “major watersheds in political life” that “establish certain directions of change and foreclose others in a way that shapes politics for years to come” (27).

between Euroamerican fur traders and the Anishinaabeg in the Western Great Lakes area. Both Anishinaabe ethnic groups accepted the White Earth Reservation as their homeland with which they connected their identity. Social and political structures that came into being on the reservation reflected a clash of economic ethics of the more market oriented mixed-blood Anishinaabeg and traditional oriented hereditary leaders of full-blood Mississippi bands who were cautious in their approach to economic changes. Nonetheless, the nascent economic structure based on a combination of traditional subsistence patterns and elements of market economy had a potential to satisfy the living needs of residents with different ways of life (Meyer 226).

In the last decades of the nineteenth century the life of people on the White Earth Reservation and other Minnesota Anishinaabe reservations was affected by expansion of market capitalism accompanied by increasing pressure on opening reservation lands to Euroamerican settlers' business interests. In compliance with the then nation-wide assimilation policy under the Dawes Act of 1887, the White Earth Anishinaabeg were supposed to become independent farmers on allotted plots of 80 to 160 acres. Apart from agricultural lands, the White Earth Reservation comprising 829,440 acres had pine forests which attracted interest of lumber companies. Forested Anishinaabe reservations represented a special situation for the allotment system. The Nelson Act, passed in 1889, was designed to preserve the integrity of the White Earth Reservation landbase. For that reason, there was an effort to concentrate all Anishinaabeg from various reservations, except for those at the Red Lake, on the White Earth Reservation. There, they were supposed to get allotments protected from sale or alienation for twenty-five years. At last, however, this plan was not carried out completely and many Anishinaabeg stayed on their home reservations (Meyer 56). Surplus agricultural land left at White Earth after the allotments was not retained for future needs of Native people but sold to white settlers. With the exception of the unallotted Red Lake Reservation, similar land situation prevailed on all Minnesota Anishinaabe reservations. The breakup of the White Earth landbase was completed under legislative amendments of 1906 and 1907 which removed protective restrictions of the Nelson Act. These amendments opened up a path to illegal land transactions and land frauds which deprived the White Earth Reservation of more than ninety percent of its land base.

The continuing pressure of entrepreneurial interests of lumber companies for exploitation of Anishinaabe resources had an impact on reservation government. The Anishinaabe leaders of mixed descent supported the policy of lifting restrictions on allotted lands. Some of them, as lumber companies agents, were involved in illegal land transactions. Conservative leaders saw

their exploitative behavior as a threat to Anishinaabe conception of equity and collective reservation interests. Consequently, these ethnic differences that formerly did not play a substantial role in community relationships gained political meaning, leading to deep division among leadership factions not only at White Earth but also at the inter-reservation level. The only shared interest of both factions was the need to preserve the remaining land resources in common ownership of all Anishinaabeg in Minnesota.

On the basis of the Nelson Act, the United States recognized all Anishinaabe bands scattered on reservations in northern Minnesota as one tribe having a share in common property. A provision of the Nelson Act established the Chippewa in Minnesota Fund where money obtained from the sales of ceded land and timber was deposited. The U.S. government as a guardian of all Anishinaabe assets mismanaged the Chippewa in Minnesota Fund and the Indian Office's policy⁵ barred the Anishinaabeg from controlling the expenditures from their common fund. To protect themselves against the mismanagement of Anishinaabe assets, in 1913 Anishinaabe leaders created a loose inter-reservation alliance, called the General Council of All the Chippewas in Minnesota.

GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF THE CHIPPEWA

In this section, I focus on the short period of the General Council's existence (1913–27) and explore how this inter-reservation governing body worked. This institutional arrangement was created as a means of coping with consequences of the implementation of allotment policy on Anishinaabe reservations. From the perspective of the White Earth rebuilding process a crucial turn in governance lay in the connection of two different governing approaches. The General Council combined elements of traditional Anishinaabe governance with American-style representational system. Nonetheless, the General Council was a relatively open system with flexible governance practices. Studying traditional cultural practices exercised by the General Council is promising in two key areas. First, this focus helps to uncover Anishinaabe beliefs, ideas, norms and values that guided decision making and actions. And second, it gives causal meaning to practices because their preservation played an essential role in later White Earth revitalization efforts.

⁵ The Office of Indian Affairs (Indian Office), renamed to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1947, has been the main institution in American Indian affairs responsible for the way federal Indian policy is implemented.

Textual analysis of archival documents uncovers historical practices of Anishinaabe governance exercised by the General Council in the social and political conditions of the pre-Indian reorganization period. Even though the documents from this period are incomplete, the General Council's activity left sufficient evidentiary traces in the form of correspondence, proceedings, resolutions and notices. These archival documents disclose to what extent traditional practices of governance survived the erosive effects of assimilation policy. Of course, these documents were not meant to present Anishinaabe perspective. But after filtering out the views and bias of Indian Office officials, there emerge concerns and fears of the White Earth Anishinaabeg confronted by consequences of enormous land loss and dwindling opportunities to practice their traditional subsistence.

The concept of the general council was well known to Anishinaabe bands since long before the reservation period. The pre-reservation Anishinaabe governance was primarily centered on activities within each band but matters concerning all bands were discussed at general councils held for that purpose (Jones 105–10). This feature of traditional Anishinaabe governance passed to the later transitional form of the General Council. Another important element of traditional governance that found its way into the transitional structure was consensual decision-making which followed a process of time-consuming deliberation open to diverse points of view. The preservation of traditional cultural practices has been crucial for Native American self-determination, the idea by no means supported by Indian policy of the period.

The General Council of the Chippewa, established in 1913, differed substantially from the traditional political arrangement and due to external and internal obstacles it failed to achieve its efficiency. Nonetheless, this inter-reservation government affected the later formation of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and preserved certain traditional governance practices that held Anishinaabe community together. The emergence of the first inter-reservation constitutional government was accompanied by deep political division that plagued not only the White Earth Reservation but went across all Anishinaabe reservations. Conservative leaders (“full-bloods”) challenged the right of the so-called progressives (“mixed-bloods”), founders of the General Council, to represent the White Earth Reservation in the General Council because of their past involvement in land fraud. To weaken the hereditary leadership lines and traditional community ties, the Indian Office began to recognize elected councils at White Earth where “mixed-bloods” predominated (Meyer 177–78).

In agreement with the requirements of the Indian Office and its willingness to tolerate elected structures resembling U.S. institutions, the General Council of the Chippewa followed a constitutional model and its

elective council system operated under a written constitution adopted in May 1913.⁶ The General Council was a decentralized form of government maintaining substantial autonomy of constituting reservations.⁷ Delegates to the General Council were elected by the local councils of the individual reservations, one delegate for each one hundred residents.⁸ The General Council elected an Executive Committee consisting of one member from each reservation. The officials were elected for a one year-term at annual meetings. Their names were taken over from Western terminology, being called president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, interpreter, and assistant interpreter.

From the perspective of the relationship to the U.S. government, the Minnesota Anishinaabe bands, as political entities joined in the General Council of the Chippewa, had a ward to a guardian status.⁹ This guardianship of the federal government was realized through the Indian Office, which in the period before 1934, typically interfered in the majority of Native affairs. In spite of the fact that Indian Office officials formally tolerated the General Council's elective structure, they rarely recognized this Council's actions. The attitude of the Indian Office is best summed up by a sentence in a letter written by P. R. Wadsworth, the Consolidated Chippewa Agency Superintendent, to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Charles Burke, on 2 July 1923: "If we are to give attention to a council by the Chippewas it should be a council called and controlled by us" (Wadsworth, Letter dated 2 July 1923). These words reveal the extent to which external influences of federal Indian policy restricted Native political activities.

The General Council was supposed to represent the constituting reservations before the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Congress in matters concerning all Anishinaabeg in Minnesota as a whole. Different cultural orientations among full-bloods and mixed-bloods strengthened factional division which made the representative function of the General Council increasingly difficult. In the first few years after establishing the

⁶ Constitution of the General Council of All the Chippewas in Minnesota (1913).

⁷ The General Council represented the White Earth Reservation, the Red Lake Reservation, and the several reservations ceded under the provisions of the Nelson Act of 1889. The ceded reservations were the Winnibigoshish, Cass Lake, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, Fond du Lac, Bois Forte, Grand Portage, White Oak Point, Sandy Lake and other small bands. In 1918 the Red Lake Reservation separated from the General Council and formed its own government.

⁸ In the 1920s the White Earth Reservation had 70 delegates to the General Council with membership of about 7000 Anishinaabeg (General Council Meeting of 31 October 1922).

⁹ *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1, 2 (1831).

General Council a single council was in operation but from 1919 individual factions held councils separately. Mixed-blood leaders were more familiar with the political situation than full-blood leaders and thanks to their experience with U.S. institutions they had a better position in negotiating with Indian Office officials. Even though the Indian Office recognized the mixed-blood council as a “regular council,” it rarely recognized its resolutions. One of the reasons was that mixed-blood leaders criticized past and present activities of the Indian Office as illegal, inefficient and dishonest. They accused the Indian Office of abuse of power because its services in Minnesota were financed out of the Anishinaabe trust fund and they were “primarily for the benefit” of this institution “with only incidental benefits to the Indians” (Mixed-Blood Council). They asked the U.S. President and the Secretary of the Interior to reorganize the Indian Office but these requests were not dealt with (Mixed-Blood Council).

Indian Office field officials did not understand factional disputes inside Anishinaabe communities and their interference was rather disruptive. They used factionalism as a pretext to claim that none of the factions represented the whole tribe. This approach to the General Council’s governance reflected the nationwide Indian policy striving for abrogation of Native governing systems. The BIA followed an assimilation strategy devised by former Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas J. Morgan. The goal of this strategy was breaking up tribal relations and making Indians “conform to ‘the white man’s ways,’ peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must” (Morgan 3).

Political divisions within the General Council were overblown by government officials. Factional disputes were not so divisive as Indian Office officials perceived them. Both factions fully realized that they must join together and cooperate in order to have at least some voice in the management of their funds and affairs (Beaulieu and Beaulieu). But the Indian Office did not support these unification efforts. Mixed-blood leaders were of the opinion that the Indian Office deliberately kept the Anishinaabeg divided so that the General Council was not officially recognized by the central office in Washington (Mixed-Blood Council).

Throughout the pre-Indian reorganization period, the Indian Office effectively managed to prevent the Anishinaabeg from exercising any control over their trust funds. Had the Indian Office allowed such authority to Native people, it would have been a step to real self-government, which definitely was not a goal of assimilation policy. Contrary to the provisions of the Nelson Act of 1889, the Anishinaabe trust fund was used mainly to finance the operation of the Indian Office while the actual needs of reservation Anishinaabeg were neglected. Unbearable social conditions on the White Earth Reservation triggered a wave of protests of poverty-

stricken people who were starving, unemployed, and without adequate housing. The Indian Office was unwilling to face the protests and in July 1922 solved the situation by moving the agency office from White Earth Village to Cass Lake on the Leech Lake Reservation (Wadsworth, Letter dated 9 October 1923).

Within this contextual milieu, full-blood and mixed-blood factions strove to protect Anishinaabe rights and the remaining land base which they perceived as their homeland. Mixed-bloods always identified themselves as “Indians” but their entrepreneurial activities distracted them from daily struggles and troubles of reservation community. They did not have as strong ties to land as full-bloods who still depended on a modified seasonal round.¹⁰ For full-bloods, dependence on land, connected with the practices of wild rice harvesting, making maple sugar, berrying, trapping, hunting, and fishing, was not merely a strategy to survive. It was part of the “circle of life,” which did not only relate to material interest in subsistence but had a deeper spiritual meaning. The “circle of life” is one of the translations of the Anishinaabe word *bimaadiziwin* which, in the sense of “good life,” encompasses aesthetic, moral and natural meanings, and also a mastery of right relations with human and other-than-human beings (McNally, *Honoring Elders* 24–25). The Anishinaabeg do not understand *bimaadiziwin* as a religion for which they lack a corresponding word in their language. They see *bimaadiziwin* as a “way of life.” Even though the world around them changed, their worldviews remained even after the Anishinaabeg added elements of Christian religion into their value systems (McNally, *Ojibwe Singers* 61–63).

Obtaining subsistence from the land through the seasonal round was for the Anishinaabeg not only in ethical balance with *bimaadiziwin* but it was traditionally a basis of their independence. From the first decades of the twentieth century, seasonal activities were no longer a backbone of Anishinaabe subsistence. After allotment, the White Earth Reservation became checkerboarded with plots owned by Anishinaabeg and Euro-Americans. Subsistence-oriented Anishinaabeg had limited access to areas containing seasonal resources. In spite of that, they did not give up practices connected with the seasonal round because asserting the continuity of their way of life in relation to land gave them a sense of a semiautonomous space even in conditions that were unfavorable to them. It is therefore

¹⁰ The Anishinaabeg had to adapt their subsistence strategies to allotment and reservation conditions because complete seasonal subsistence was no longer possible due to the diminished land base. They practiced a modified seasonal round that was composed of hunting, fishing, gathering seasonal plants, horticulture, and wage labor.

not surprising that the main concern of full-blood leaders was related to land and the Anishinaabe right to use renewable resources for subsistence in accordance with treaties. They stressed that the Anishinaabeg retained usufructuary rights to hunting, fishing, and gathering on the ceded land under the 1837 Treaty.¹¹ These treaty rights were violated by the State of Minnesota, which established seasons for hunting, and by non-Indian owners who restricted access to lakes and forests (General Council Meeting of 19 July 1922).

Topics that full-blood leaders discussed at their council meetings pertained mainly to their concern over ensuring basic material needs of their community so that life on the reservation was at least bearable. The *bimaadiziwin* ethics pervaded these matters. Sharing day-to-day existential struggles and helping those in need were regarded as a virtue. Therefore, full-blood leaders were very cautious about the rights guaranteed by the Nelson Act of 1889. They did not want to waste all the benefits before the end of the fifty-year period during which money from land and timber sales was deposited in the U.S. Treasury and the Anishinaabeg were paid five percent interest as annuities (General Council Meeting of 10 July 1922). Decision making and actions of full-blood leadership was governed by the sense of responsibility not only to present but also to future generations. Applications of *bimaadiziwin* principles, such as responsibility to the community, ethical human relationships, and proper individual conduct were reflected in governing practices of full-blood leaders. Consensual decision making was well-established and commonplace. Convergence of council members on a common issue helped in generating majority approval of decisions made. Council meetings were open to a plurality of standpoints where every participant had a right to speak and be heard. Protracted deliberations caused that meetings were often lengthy, at times lasting even a few days (Proceedings of the General Council of 9 July 1918). Generally, the council did not reach a decision after a single meeting and delegates would return to their reservations to discuss matters in their local councils. Leaders' authority was based on their ability to represent the will and attitude of the people they spoke for. It was a simple and effective democratic process.

Beginning in 1921, the Congress refused to appropriate money from the trust fund for the expenses of the General Council. In spite of this, the factionally divided General Council continued to meet until 1927 when

¹¹ The usufructuary right to land means using the land for survival purposes. Collins English Dictionary defines "usufruct" as "the right to use and derive profit from a piece of property belonging to another, provided that the property itself remains undiminished and uninjured in any way." See *Collins English Dictionary*. See also Treaty with the Chippewa, 29 July 1837 in Kappler.

it was dissolved. Local community and reservation matters remained in the hands of local councils which held their meetings until the mid-1930s when they were replaced by the new tribal organization under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

The General Council of the Chippewa did not come into being simply from the wish of individual reservations to be represented in a joint governing body. It was rather a reaction to Indian policy and an effort to defend themselves against violations of the Nelson Act by the Indian Office. For mixed-bloods the General Council embodied a hope for reinstating justice and lawfulness to the Anishinaabeg. They felt uncomfortable with their position as wards of the federal government, whose guardianship role was carried out by the Indian Office. They had little or no voice in the management of their affairs and they were convinced that they were capable of taking care of themselves without the encroachment of the Indian Office. Conservative oriented leaders saw their participation in this political arrangement in agreement with *bimaadiziwin* principles as *nwenamdanwin* (choice making) and *n'dendowin* (responsibility taking).¹² Their responsibility to the community was manifested in fostering ethical and cooperative relationships. In this way, they exercised internal sovereignty in the process of community building.

The transitional form of the General Council reflects the effort to adjust to the changed political, legal, territorial and cultural conditions, and underpin this governing body by Anishinaabe value system. Considering the later political development of Anishinaabe reservations, the Nelson Act and the establishment of the General Council represent a watershed that I understand as the first critical juncture. This critical juncture established the direction of institutional development of Anishinaabe reservations toward federalized arrangement. On this trajectory, the creation of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe in 1936 under the Indian Reorganization Act provisions was another critical juncture that has shaped political development of constituting reservations for following decades and effectively prevented change.

The failure of the General Council was not caused simply by internal division among the Anishinaabeg. A great share of responsibility for the

¹² The Anishinaabe terms *nwenamdanwin* and *n'dendowin* are taken over from the glossary in D'Arcy Rheault's book *Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin: The Way of a Good Life* (158–59).

failure can be attributed to Indian policy implemented by the Indian Office—a rigid institution that was maintained by self-reinforcing processes aimed at cultural transformation of Native people. The hostility of Indian Office officials to the General Council could also be caused by the fact that this governing body was not organized as a business council, which the Indian Office preferred, but as a general-purpose government suggesting a certain continuity with traditional Anishinaabe governance. Despite its short existence, the General Council affected the future direction in the development of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. The General Council’s significance can be summed up as follows: first, this inter-reservation government preserved certain Anishinaabe governance practices, which would not be entirely forgotten and served as an inspiration and guidance in future reform efforts. Second, the Anishinaabe experience with this form of government created a specific trajectory of institutional development that fundamentally affected the future way of organizing the Anishinaabe reservations under the Indian Reorganization Act. Third, the General Council represented the beginning of the White Earth Nation’s path to modern constitutional government.

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Oppressive Faces of Whiteness in Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress*

ABSTRACT

Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* contributes significantly to the literary debate on the definition of whiteness. The socio-historical construction of whiteness emerging from the novel is amplified by white imagery dovetailing with the claims made about white people directly. For the African American first person narrator, Easy Rawlins, living in post-World War II Los Angeles, whiteness mostly spells terror. The oppressive faces of whiteness consist in the following trajectories: property relations, economic exploitation, labour relations, the legal system, different miens of oppressive white masculinity denigrating blackness, spatial dynamics of post-World War II Los Angeles and the white apparatus of power that the narrator needs to confront throughout the novel. White imagery carried to the extreme magnifies the terrorizing aspect of whiteness in the narrative. Like many authors of colour, Mosley associates whiteness with death. Whiteness inundates Easy Rawlins from all sides, entailing insincerity, dishonesty, interestedness and hypocrisy.

Keywords: Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, whiteness, white oppression, white imagery.

Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* contributes significantly to the literary debate on the definition of whiteness. The socio-historical construction of whiteness emerging from the novel is amplified by white imagery dovetailing with the claims made about white people directly. For the African American first person narrator, Easy Rawlins, living in post-World War II Los Angeles, whiteness mostly spells terror. The oppressive faces of whiteness consist in the following trajectories: property relations, economic exploitation, labour relations, the legal system, different miens of oppressive white masculinity denigrating blackness, spatial dynamics of post-World War II Los Angeles and the white apparatus of power that the narrator needs to confront throughout the novel. White imagery carried to the extreme magnifies the terrorizing aspect of whiteness in the narrative. Like many authors of colour, Mosley associates whiteness with death. Whiteness inundates Easy Rawlins from all sides, entailing insincerity, dishonesty, interestedness and hypocrisy.

The literary debate on whiteness in American literature, in which Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* inscribes itself, was initiated long before whiteness studies became established as a scholarly discipline. American writers who incorporated the analysis of whiteness in their works as a trope date as far back as early African American slave narratives, for example Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), and later African American slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass's *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself* (1861), as well as Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868). It is even more essential to acknowledge those African American authors who can be credited with setting the foundations of the discipline before whiteness studies emerged as a separate field of study. This is a selected list of works by African American authors who were the first to consciously reflect on the construction of whiteness: Charles Waddell Chesnut's "What Is a White Man" (1889); W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Souls of White Folk" (1920) in which he declares himself "singularly clairvoyant" of white souls: "I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. . . . I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. . . . I see them ever stripped—ugly, human" (923); Du Bois's "The White World" (1940); Richard Wright's "Introduction" to *Black Metropolis* (1945); James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* (1955); Ralph Ellison's essays collected in *Shadow and Act* (1964); Black nationalists' writings, for example those by Sam Greenlee, George Jackson, Amiri Baraka, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael. All of the authors named above look at a whole myriad of issues involving whiteness, such as the hypocrisy of whites, the financial motives behind the persisting colour line, the fear of miscegenation, the absurdity of anti-miscegenation laws,

and the double consciousness of white people, to mention only some of the themes recurring in the works cited above.

In 1992 Toni Morrison inaugurated contemporary North American literary whiteness studies with her seminal work *Playing in the Dark*, in which she examines the construction of whiteness and blackness in canonical and non-canonical works of American literature. Expounding the purpose of her study, Morrison states: “My project is to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject, from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers, from the serving to the served” (90). The reversal of the gaze was simultaneously performed in sociology, history, legal studies and film studies. One year before the publication of Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* David Roediger published *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991), analyzing the white working class mentality and its policies. Other whiteness scholars to whom I am particularly indebted in the research on whiteness in American ethnic literature are Ruth Frankenberg, Cheryl Harris, Robyn Wiegman, George Lipsitz, Linda Frost, Valerie Babb and Gary Taylor. All of them underscore the socio-historical construction of whiteness, exposing white people’s attachment to the privileges accruing to their whiteness.

The following exploration of whiteness in Walter Mosley’s *Devil in a Blue Dress* delves into different facets of white oppression in relation to such spheres as the law, the economy, space, white imagery and white masculinity. The terror of whiteness comes to life for the first person narrator of the novel, Easy Rawlins, in the figures of a white gangster, DeWitt Albright, a white policeman, a white employer, Benny Giacomo, a white businessman, Carter and racist white youths, who see Easy Rawlins as a threat to white womanhood. Almost all of these figures represent a different face of white terror, posing a threat to Easy’s integrity. Whiteness displays its most brutal faces during Easy’s confrontations with the law—both its white guardians and its trespassers. The white gangster, DeWitt Albright, is an embodiment of brutal white power that demands unquestioning obedience. His emblematic whiteness is accentuated by the colour of his skin, his complexion, eyes and dress:

It’s not just that he was white but he wore an off-white linen suit and shirt with a Panama straw hat and bone shoes over flashing white silk socks. His skin was smooth and pale with just a few freckles. . . . He surveyed the room with pale eyes; not a color I’d ever seen in a man’s eyes. . . .

There was a *white leather shoulder holster* under his left arm. . . . (17)

The butt and the barrel [of the gun] were black; *the only part of DeWitt’s attire that wasn’t white*. (1,18, emphasis added)

Easy draws the above portrayal of DeWitt Albright at the very beginning of their acquaintance, sensing an air of danger around the white man who suddenly enters his life. The opening passage of the novel is dedicated to Albright's depiction, as if setting the stage for the development of the plot based to a great extent on the ramifications of Easy's and Albright's liaison. A significant detail of Easy's portrayal of Albright is the moment when Easy reflects on Albright's pale eyes, noting that he has never seen such colour "in a man's eyes" (1). This subtle observation on the non-human colour of Albright's eyes sets him apart from the rest of humanity, foreshadowing his brutal, unscrupulous character that becomes apparent in the unfolding narrative. After being proved right in his premonitions about DeWitt Albright, Easy observes that "his dead eyes turned colder" (100). This metonymic approach to whiteness appears again in the novel when Easy states that he is tired of "strange white men with dead blue eyes" (63). Beyond the most obvious associations of death, "dead blue eyes" conjure up a lack of depth, coldness, lack of involvement and a kind of dehumanization, if one assumes that eyes are the mirror of the soul. Most of these associations of whiteness are grounded in Easy's own experiences with white people or the experiences of other African Americans with whom he interacts. In "Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins: The Detective and Afro-American Fiction," Theodore Mason calls Albright "a real white devil" (174). The phrase "devil" was often applied to whites by black nationalists, but African Americans were by no means the only racial group to use the term. So did Asian Americans, interweaving "devils" with "demons," "barbarians" and "savages."¹

While Albright immediately instils a sense of trepidation and extreme caution in Easy, he does not initially reveal his unscrupulous demeanour, even going to the point of sympathizing with Easy when he learns about the loss of his factory job and an unpaid mortgage instalment:

These big companies don't give a damn about you. The balance doesn't balance just right and they let ten family men go. . . . The only thing that's worse than a big company is the bank. They want their money on the first and if you miss the payment, they will have the marshal knocking down your door on the second. (3, 4)

¹ I discuss the problem of the representation of white people in Asian American literature in *Visions of Whiteness in Selected Works of Asian American Literature*. In the chapter devoted to Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, I trace the application of metaphysical condensation, metonymic displacement and colour coding to at least some whites featuring in Kingston's work. All of the above mentioned techniques were discussed by Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark*.

Albright's later interaction with Easy reveals that he approximates big companies and banks in their unswerving expectations to deliver results and his punishment for failure is death.

Another face of terrorizing whiteness operating outside the perimeter of the law is revealed during Easy's casual encounters with whites in the rich neighbourhoods in which he feels uncomfortable because they are inhabited exclusively by white people and as a black man he is not supposed to be there although he is not legally excluded through any legal ordinance. His very presence in exclusively white districts of Los Angeles suffices to produce in whites anxiety and suspicion of mischief on the part of an uninvited black interloper. Easy encounters the reaction of pronounced hostility from white youths when they see him talk to a white woman in Santa Monica. Although Barbara is the initiating part in the conversation and she vociferously takes to Easy's defence, white aggressive youths perceive him as a predator encroaching upon white womanhood defined as the exclusive domain of white men. They refer to white women as if they were their possessions, reducing them to the position of mute objects incapable of interpreting reality: "We don't need ya talking to *our* women. . . . Nigger's trying to pick up Barbara" (53, 54, emphasis added). At one point the offending youth addresses Easy as "boy," while Easy calls him "man" (54). An insight into Easy's thoughts shows that he refrains from responding to threats of violence with violence despite physical superiority over the belligerent youths, "white kids" as he designates them. In his portrayal of one of the youths Mosley reaches for the strategy often employed by white authors depicting African American characters, the strategy characterized by Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* as metonymic displacement or colour coding (80). Under this strategy African Americans were seen almost exclusively through the prism of their racial difference. Depicting the white youth, Easy draws the reader's attention to various elements of the youth's physicality, but all of them play second fiddle to his essentialized whiteness: "His eyes, nose, and mouth were like tiny islands on a great sea of white skin" (Mosley 54). While colour coding in white American authors' narratives discussed by Morrison did not have its grounding in any oppression encountered from African Americans but rather in a sense of their insignificance or in the stereotypes passed from generation to generation, what Morrison terms the "economy of stereotype" (67), Easy's portrayal of the verbally aggressive young man is dictated by his own oppression suffered at the hands of whites and by the fact that the offensive youths reduce the unfolding conversation to the question of racial difference as the crux of the problem that Easy presents to them.

The most graphic revelations of whiteness come during Easy's interactions with the police. This is because the whiteness in question is

the whiteness sanctified by the law and ironically those who are supposed to represent the law and be paragons of justice commit the most flagrant and violent acts against the African American subject's mental and bodily integrity, blatantly floundering all rules of fair investigation and interrogation, as well as openly declaring to Easy that he is helpless in confrontation with the United States system of justice because whatever they decide is sacred and Easy has no formal legal recourse that he can rely on. The following citations demonstrate the helplessness of an average African American man at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s faced with the legal and penal machinery:

"I've got the right to know why you're taking me." "You got a right to fall down and break your face, nigger. You got a right to die," he said. Then he hit me in the diaphragm. . . . "Means we can take your black ass out behind the station and put a bullet in your head." (68, 72)

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The violence cited above is only a part of the brutal treatment that Easy receives during the interrogation. Meditating the killing of the policemen, he does not fight back, using only the evasion tactics that partly mitigate his injuries, still leaving him in a pitiable condition. Hitting back is not an option if he is to remain a free black man and a man of property, which Easy clearly cherishes above everything else. The other option is to enter his car and drive away from Los Angeles, the option that he does not choose because this would mean running away, starting anew, parting with his beloved house. In Easy's eyes, leaving would compromise his manhood, as well as cast a shadow of doubt upon his courage and resourcefulness: "Leave! Leave? You gonna run away from the only piece'a property you ever had? . . . Better be dead than leave" (96). Thomas Michael Stein looks at Easy's reticent subjection to the violent police interrogation through the prism of capitalist relations: "This kind of violence . . . also teaches Rawlins to accept the principles of capitalism" (201). As an African American man in debt and with no connections to white people in positions of power at the time when he is interrogated, Easy is in no position to physically resist.²

² Capital may still play a lesser role than the question of racial difference if one considers a similar case of police brutality taking place in the *Black Betty* sequel of the Easy Rawlins series. Although by then Easy has managed to amass vast capital, he still remains vulnerable to police violence: "Six men! Policemen. There were around the car and in the doors before I could even think. I was dragged from the front seat and thrown to the asphalt. . . . 'Hey, man! What'd I do,' I shouted. That got me a nightstick pressed hard across the back of my neck. . . . A big knot had swollen up above my diaphragm and my side ached awfully. He must have hit me after I was out. That's the only way I could understand it, all those bumps and

An equivalent situation of helplessness in confrontation with the police occurs in one of the final scenes of the novel when Easy's momentary elation at being free is once again crushed by the police threats that unless he provides them with information they can shift blame to him by planting evidence.

As limited as Easy's physical response to the racial profiling by the police can be, no one is able to in any way control his mental reaction to the restriction of his freedom and the ensuing police violence. Looking around the bare, scruffy cell, he realizes that whatever evidence the police have against him, he could do barely anything to challenge it: "it didn't matter as long as they thought they were right" (70). It is not accidental that, reflecting on his own circumstances, Easy suddenly starts to ponder on the fate of a dead mouse that he can see on the other side of the cell in a corner. The analogies between his own situation and that of the dead mouse are all too apparent. He too is cornered like a dead mouse with limited possibilities of escape.³ The prison scene highlights what whiteness studies scholar Robyn Wiegman calls the "panoptic power of whiteness" (119). This panoptic power of whiteness becomes conspicuous to Easy when he can hear the cell door being opened. It is then that he chastises himself for not checking if the door was locked: "I was angry at myself because I hadn't tried to see if the door was locked. Those cops had me where they wanted me" (Mosley 70). The dynamics change after the violent police interrogation. Easy no longer identifies with the mouse but imagines that one of the police officers is the mouse that he crushes to death: "This time, though, I imagined that I was the convict and the mouse was officer Mason. I crushed him so that his whole suit was soiled and shapeless in the corner; his eyes came out of his head" (74). During his incarceration, whiteness has a bipolar relation to blackness. On the one hand, Easy is assailed by whiteness represented by white cops, while on the other hand, in his cell he is surrounded by all-encompassing blackness with which he would like to merge in order to escape his captors. Blackness is represented by the nighttime:

bruises" (*Black Betty* 125). Although the action of *Black Betty* published in 1994 unfolds in the 1960s, several decades before the Rodney King violent police action of 1991 and the acquittal of four white policemen in 1992, the above cited passage bears close reminiscence to the so-called "Rodney King incident."

³ In *Native Son* Richard Wright applies a similar metaphor to render Thomas Bigger's frustration and his sense of being cornered. The animal illustrating Bigger's state of mind is a rat. Still, unlike the first-person narrator, Easy Rawlins, Thomas Bigger is not an articulate or fully conscious character. The third-person narrator needs to translate his thoughts to the reader.

All I did was sit in darkness, trying to become the darkness. I was awake but my thinking was like a dream. I dreamed in my wakefulness that I could become the darkness and slip out between the eroded cracks of the cell. If I was nighttime nobody could find me; no one would even know I was missing. (74)

The passage clearly establishes an intertextual connection to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, in which the protagonist is often suspended between dreaming and wakefulness and at a certain point he also starts to utilize both the shielding power of his invisibility and the cover of darkness to protect himself. Easy overtly employs the term "invisibility" while relishing the fact that he is an invisible detective because no one knows that he investigates the case:

Nobody knew what I was up to and that made me sort of invisible; people thought that they saw me but what they really saw was an illusion of me, something that wasn't real. . . . I never got bored or frustrated. I wasn't even afraid of DeWitt Albright during those days. I felt, foolishly, safe from even his crazy violence. (128)

Both the "nighttime" invisibility and the invisibility of his investigation provide Easy with a clear sense of protection.

In the light of the tribulations that Easy and other African Americans endure with the executive branch of the legal system, he concludes that there is no justice for African Americans at the turn of 1950. The only justice they can procure is the justice that they can purchase:

I got the idea, somehow, that if I got enough money then maybe I could buy my own life back. But I didn't believe that there was justice for Negroes. I thought that there might be some justice for a black man if he had the money to grease it. Money isn't a sure bet but it's the closest to God that I've ever seen in this world. (121)

Mouse's (Easy's black friend) innuendo to the police parallels the above statement. According to Mouse, any poor black man is likely to fall prey to the American penal system. Ironically, African American views on the American system of justice are seconded by its chief trespasser in the novel, DeWitt Albright, one of the most terrorizing faces of whiteness drawn in the narrative. According to Albright, rich people construct the law in such a way that poor people cannot advance socially: "The law . . . is made by the rich people so that the poor people can't get ahead" (20).

The most serious charge levelled at the American justice system comes from Easy when he notes that no one displays any concern for

non-white victims of crime, suggesting that the lives of people of colour are not highly valued by the rest of society: “The police didn’t care about crime among Negroes. . . . The papers hardly ever even reported a colored murder. And when they did it was way in the back pages” (160). What remains unstated directly by the first-person narrator of *Devil in a Blue Dress*, yet what is clearly implied to the reader is the conclusion that the law presented in the narrative world of the turn of 1950 is the white law. Walter Mosley’s characterization of the American justice system corresponds to his wider portrayal of socio-historical problems and is best summed up in Marilyn C. Wesley’s words: “Walter Mosley represents rather than resolves complicated historical issues of the multiracial society Easy uncomfortably inhabits” (114). Mark L. Berrettini observes that eponymous Daphne Monet brings up the echoes of a real-life woman, Elizabeth Short, murdered in Los Angeles in 1947. The police nicknamed Ms Short “Black Dahlia,” reducing her to a loose woman whose tortured death was not worth investigating (Berrettini 76).

The oppressive face of whiteness does not only assume the form of physical aggression in the novel, but also of economic hegemony which is equally arduous to people of colour. The Los Angeles aircraft company from which Easy is fired highlights the position of African Americans in the American economy, replicating the Southern plantation system and, to some extent the ideology, of chattel slavery. Easy compares his Italian American boss, Benito (Benny) Giacomo, to the white plantation owner, who looks at the workers as at potentially disobedient, lazy children lacking responsibility and therefore in constant need of censure and supervision:

A job in a factory is an awful lot like working on a plantation in the South. The bosses see all the workers like they’re children, and everyone knows how lazy children are. So Benny thought he’d teach me a little something about responsibility because he was the boss and I was the child. (Mosley 62)

Like slave masters, white supervisors expect African American gratefulness and obsequiousness (65). The above cited passage bears striking correspondence to Charles Waddell Chesnut’s characterization of southern paternalism in “The Passing of Grandison.” This is how the third person narrator of Chesnut’s story eulogizes southern paternalism, focalizing the narration through Colonel Owen’s point of view:

[Colonel Owen’s] feudal heart thrilled at such appreciative homage [from Grandison]. What cold-blooded, heartless monsters they [abolitionists] were who would break up this blissful relationship of kindly protection on the one hand, of wise subordination and loyal dependence on

the other!. . . [Grandison] so sensibly recognized his true place in the economy of civilization, and kept it with such touching fidelity? (Chesnutt 5, 8)

While Grandison ostensibly “recognized his true place in the economy of civilization” and therefore managed to trick his credulous slave master, Easy Rawlins refuses to accept his true place in the economy of the end of the 1940s United States and therefore loses his job in the aircraft manufacturing company and needs to reach for extra-legal means to gain the funds for the repayment of his mortgage. Staying within the bounds of strictly legal activity, Easy has practically no economic agency. He can only be an overworked labourer straining his physical capacities in order to pay off the mortgage and keep the house. As his redundancy on the white boss’s whim demonstrates, this insignificant position in the American economic ladder is by no means guaranteed. Like a slave owner, Giacomo expects Easy to cower before him: “He [Giacomo] needed all his children to kneel down and let him be the boss. He wasn’t a businessman, he was a plantation boss; a slaver” (Mosley 66). Nicole King observes that “without compromising his racial integrity and pride, Easy cannot even keep his job in the factory” (221). King goes on to say that although Easy’s ancestors, both slaves and sharecroppers, as well as Easy himself, a former soldier and factory labourer, significantly contributed to “generat[ing] and multipl[y]ing the nation’s wealth,” Easy, as a black American citizen, reaps very meagre economic rewards from the capital that African Americans helped to produce (221). Stereotypes about African American laziness and their professional inaptitude surface in Giacomo’s disparaging comments about African American workers: “‘And he had the nerve to tell me that *my people* have to learn to give a little extra if we wanna advance.’ . . . I told him that my people been givin’ a little extra since before Italy was even a country” (Mosley 29, emphasis original). The application of the term “[your] people” by Giacomo exemplifies ethnocentrism and conventional identity politics prioritizing the experience of one racial or ethnic group over that of another. Easy’s accentuation of the term “*my people*” underlines his indignation at Giacomo’s remarks and is further amplified by his terse rejoinder.

Giacomo’s antagonistic attitude towards African Americans exposes other aspects of the ideology of whiteness. First of all, Giacomo’s own status as a white man underscores the constructedness of all racial categories. Despite having a fairly dark complexion, he is still classified as white: “His salt-and-pepper hair had once been jet black and his skin color was darker than many mulattos I’d known. But Benny was a white man and I was a Negro” (65). As a second-generation Italian American,

Giacomo rises to the position of a foreman on the factory floor, but his whiteness is not nearly so well established as that of Anglo-Americans. As Ruth Frankenberg notes, “there are two kinds of whites, just as there are two kinds of Americans: those who are truly or only white, and those who are white but also something more—or is it something less?” (68). In light of Giacomo’s peripheral status within the domain of whiteness, his hostility towards African American workers may be underlain not only by a stereotypical perception of black people, but also by the fragility of his own social status and reverse power dynamics that to some extent psychologically compensate for his own marginalization as an Italian American working class man. Giacomo’s animosity towards African Americans could be classified as “compensatory wages of whiteness” of which W. E. B. Du Bois speaks in *Black Reconstruction* (700). Du Bois argues that the discrimination against black people not only gave members of the working class comparatively higher wages, but also significantly boosted their own egos. Working class whites derived ample comfort from the fact that there was still someone beneath them in the hierarchy. Exposed to class oppression, white workers were free of racial oppression and apparently that was enough to keep many of them from identifying and targeting those responsible for their exploitation and drawing the largest dividends. The result of such a reasoning on the part of the white working class was that “the wages of both classes could be kept low, the whites fearing to be supplanted by Negro labor, the Negroes always being threatened by the substitution of white labor” (Du Bois 701). Cheryl Harris observes that the white working class was much more likely to identify with the bourgeoisie than with fellow black workers, playing up their racial status rather than class identification (1741). Elaborating on Du Bois’s concept of the compensatory wages of whiteness, David Roediger declares that the “status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships, North and South. White workers could, and did, define and accept their class positions by fashioning identities as ‘not slaves’ and as ‘not Blacks’” (13).

The aspect which also arises in the context of the labour relations in the aircraft factory from which Easy is fired is the question of black and white masculinity. As a result of discrimination against black workers, black masculinity suffered and white masculinity received a significant boost. Discrimination against black males also fostered a bond between white workers. Easy observes no cross-racial bond between African American and white employees. He is emphatic about the fact that no white worker would be fired for standing up to Giacomo because of exhaustion:

The white workers didn't have a problem with that kind of treatment because they didn't come from a place where men were always called boys. The white worker would have just said, "Sure, Benny, you called it right, but damn if I can see straight right now." And Benny would have understood that. He would have laughed and realized how pushy he was being and offered to take Mr. Davenport, or whoever, out to drink a beer. But the Negro workers didn't drink with Benny. We didn't go to the same bars, we didn't wink at the same girls. What I should have done, if I wanted my job, was to stay, like he asked, and then come back early the next day to recheck the work. If I had told Benny I couldn't see straight he would have told me to buy glasses. (Mosley 63)

Ironically, not being able to see straight has a broader implication in the novel. While Easy literally cannot see straight because of arduous labour conditions, Giacomo is figuratively blind, rendering African American workers metaphorically invisible, subjecting them to the process of exploitation and emasculation. Easy's invisibility to Giacomo once again echoes Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and *Invisible Man*'s reflections on his own invisibility to white people: "That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality" (3, emphasis original).

Walter Mosley juxtaposes the oppressive face of whiteness represented by the management in the aircraft factory with the oppressive face of whiteness represented by DeWitt Albright. The plot of the novel is constructed in such a way that in order to remain a man of property, a house owner, Easy needs to choose between white oppression embodied by Giacomo and that personified by Albright. Sickened by Giacomo's expectations of obsequiousness and unquestioning obedience, Easy remembers his interaction with Albright, who, despite instilling in him a sense of terror, initially seems to be much more direct and open:

I tried to think about what Benny wanted. I tried to think of how I could save face and still kiss his ass. But all I could really think about was that other office and other white man. DeWitt Albright had his bottle and his gun right out there in plain view. When he asked me what I had to say I told him; I might have been a little nervous, but I told him anyway. Benny didn't care about what I had to say. (Mosley 66)

Undertaking cooperation with Albright, Easy gains financial resources to pay the mortgage instalment, but he does not succeed in running away from the chattel system of property in which he is approached as the object of property. The employment and management structure in the aircraft

factory may resemble the plantation system to Easy, but there is one marked difference. Slaves were not able to opt out of the system, whereas Easy can walk out of the aircraft factory a free man, limited as his spectrum of possibilities is. In the case of the cooperation with Albright, there is no walking away. When Easy offers to return Albright's money in order to terminate their cooperation, he finds out that he is reduced to an object of property belonging to Albright, who grudgingly watches his property lest it slip away: "You take my money and you belong to me" (101). Much of the critique of whiteness in the novel occurs through the exposure of racialized property relations.

Virtually all of the novel is driven by Easy's quest to defy the law-enshrined dynamic of whites as the subjects of property and African Americans as the objects of property. Easy directs most of his energy to saving his mortgage-threatened house and his own status as the subject of property and a proud property-owner, modest as his property initially is. It is hardly surprising that the white people encountered by Easy try to frustrate him in his quest to defy skewed, racist property relations of the post-World War II period, considering the socio-historical entanglement of whiteness with property. In her seminal study of racialized property relations in the United States, "Whiteness as Property," Harvard law professor Cheryl Harris argues that, historically, whiteness cautiously guarded access to property. Harris goes so far as to claim that whiteness itself has been elevated to the status of property by whites, property closely protected by its bearers. Hedging privileges reserved for whites, white people created an "exclusive club," afraid lest uninvited intruders compromise its exclusivity (Harris 1736). In a similar vein, George Lipsitz speaks of whiteness in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* in terms of a "possessive investment" in the privileges that accrue to their whiteness (1).

The dispossession of African Americans from property may at least partly account for the unique importance that Easy attaches to property ownership and wealth aggrandizement. For Easy, the son of sharecroppers, property ownership becomes a significant status marker, a benchmark according to which he calibrates his own value and manhood:

The thought of paying my mortgage reminded me of my front yard and the shade of my fruit trees in the summer heat. I felt that I was just as good as any white man, but if I didn't even own my front door then people would look at me like just another poor beggar with his hand outstretched. (Mosley 9)

Time and again he calls himself a homeowner or a man of property, spinning dreams of one day being able to live out of property lease. Easy

admits that wealth has a mesmerizing effect on him: "The wealth made my heart beat fast" (114). As sequels to *Devil in a Blue Dress* reveal, financial success comes at the cost of a personal, family life and brings about the loss of a family. Still, I take issue with Liam Kennedy's claim that Easy "mortgage[s] his black identity," entering the "system of capital exchange and control" (234). Although he definitely pays the price for his aspirations, he attains financial success at the sacrifice of personal life, but not at the sacrifice of personal pride, honour or freedom. The latter is visible in his confrontation with Giacomo when he refuses to cower to him in order to save his job and in his verbal and mental repartee with Albright. To Albright's "You belong to me," he retorts "I don't belong to anybody" (Mosley 101). On another occasion he mentally asserts that "if [Albright] wanted to shoot me he'd just have to do it because I wasn't going down on my knees for him or for anybody else" (57). Part of the glee that Easy exudes at being a property owner may be related to the sense of freedom that it entails:

My chest was heaving and I felt as if I wanted to laugh out loud. My bills were paid and it felt good to have stood up for myself. I had a notion of freedom. . . . I had two years' salary buried in the back yard and I was free. (67, 212)

The epitome of owning oneself, of being one's own man is for Easy in particular home ownership. He personifies the house, approaching it as if it was a woman, employing the personal pronouns "she" and "her" to speak of the house and even prioritizing the house over any woman he has ever known:

But that house meant more to me than any woman I ever knew. I loved her and I was jealous of her and if the bank sent the county marshal to take her from me I might have come at him with a rifle rather than give her up. (11)

Attached as he is to his property, he cannot protect it from unwanted intrusions by uninvited strangers: Albright and his fellow gangsters, the police, and Frank Green. The recurrent encroachments on his property render its fragility and its affinity to its owner. Both are frail, insecure and dependent on each other.

A seemingly innocuous face of whiteness, yet one that is sinister in its own way, is represented by Todd Carter, a white businessman. Carter is a good illustration of Slavoj Žižek's term "racism with a distance" (qtd. in Prashad 61). Ensclosed in his white privilege and lamenting his unfulfilled love for Daphne, Carter does not see differences in the socio-historical

standing between people. Easy classifies Carter's as "the worst kind of racism" because "the fact that he didn't even recognize our difference showed that he didn't care one damn about me" (Mosley 119). Carter could also fall under the category of Vijay Prashad's "benevolent multiculturalist" who "treats the concept of culture as a homogeneous and ahistorical thing that can be appreciated, but that remains far outside the enclosed ambit of one's own cultural box" (61). What Prashad categorizes as "benevolent multiculturalism" resembles the definition of liberal multiculturalism that reduces differences between people to the question of different customs and underplays the economic and socio-historical differences.⁴ Apart from labeling Carter as the worst kind of racist, Easy questions his masculinity, labelling him a "boy" and a "child" (Mosley 115).

The racist face of whiteness is also conspicuous in the spatial dynamics depicted in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, both the topography of Los Angeles and the Texas-Los Angeles dichotomy, to which Mosley reverts in the narrative while discussing the characters who, like Easy, migrated from Texas to Los Angeles. Colour lines clearly mark the topography of the post-World War II Los Angeles. As already mentioned, some areas of Los Angeles are presented in the novel as de facto forbidden zones to African Americans. Venturing into those areas, especially after dark, they run the risk of being physically attacked by racist whites or being singled out by the police as potential thieves or burglars. Therefore, Easy is emphatic about entering those areas with extreme caution:

I wasn't used to going into white communities, like Santa Monica, to conduct business. The plant I worked at, Champion Aircraft, was in Santa Monica but I'd drive out there in the daytime, do my work, and go home. I never loitered anywhere except among my own people, in my own neighbourhood. (51)⁵

On another occasion, while finding himself at night in a predominantly white district after being interrogated by the police, Easy wrestles with anxiety, refraining from running because "a patrol car would arrest any sprinting Negro they encountered" (76). The scene once again highlights the panoptic power of whiteness, no less ubiquitous in the open space than in the enclosed space of the prison cell.

⁴ For more on different types of multiculturalism: conservative, liberal and critical multiculturalism, see Peter McLaren's "White Terror and Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism."

⁵ At this point Easy applies the identity politics term "my people," earlier employed by the aforementioned Giacomo. It is interesting that he chooses to do so while speaking about the invisible walls between people.

That colour lines mark the topography of the post-World War II Los Angeles is visible not only in African American anxiety about being in almost exclusively white districts, but also in white tentativeness, if not open fear, about venturing into black districts. Aware that they are intruders in black districts or that they would not be able to enter black clubs, let alone befriend any informers, Albright and Carter need Easy to be their intermediary in the places which are off limits to them. Drawing attention to the mirror scenes of the novel, in which respectively whites and African Americans are portrayed as unwelcome in predominantly white or black spaces, Liam Kennedy notes that even if Mosley's ghetto is dystopian, it still provides refuge to black people, sheltering them at least partly from the menace posed by the white world: "[Mosley's ghetto] has its own distinctive history and patterns of life" (232). In line with Kennedy's claim, Roger A. Berger argues that Mosley reappraises the black Los Angeles, which, unlike Harlem, had been largely neglected in American culture (285).

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The unique character of Mosley's ghetto stems from the fact that most of the African American characters inhabiting the black Los Angeles neighbourhood and featuring in the novel have migrated from Texas and they knew each other before moving to Los Angeles. Composing in Texas a fairly closely-knit community woven out of the similar dreams, vicissitudes and traumas, they show more fissures and estrangement from each other in Los Angeles, but they are still bound together by a sense of rootedness and mutual past. California falls far short of the visions they spun while still in Texas. African American wages in California may be higher than in Texas and there may be more profit-making opportunities, but a slightly higher standard of living comes at the cost of loosening community and family ties and African Americans still find themselves at the bottom of the economic ladder:

California was like heaven for the southern Negro. People told stories of how you could eat fruit right off the trees and get enough work to retire one day. The stories were true for the most part but the truth wasn't like the dream. Life was still hard in L.A. and if you worked every day you still found yourself on the bottom. . . . (27)

No matter where you live in a southern city . . . you see almost everybody you know by just looking out your window. Every day is a parade of relatives and old friends. . . . That's why Sophie Anderson went back home. . . . She liked the slower pace of life of the South. . . . In Houston and Galveston, and way down in Louisiana, life was a little more aimless. People worked a little job but they couldn't make any real money no matter what they did. But in Los Angeles you could make a hundred dollars in a week if you pushed. . . . There's no time to walk down the

street or make bar-b-q when somebody's going to pay you real money to haul refrigerators. (Mosley 49)

The aforementioned Sophie Anderson returns to Texas because she concludes that "L.A. is too much" (107). Easy himself has a love-hate relationship with Los Angeles. At times of intense pressure he is ready to concur with Sophie that "L.A. is too much," but on the whole for him L.A. symbolizes empowerment, advancement to middle class status and proprietorship: "Just to look out on Los Angeles at night gave me a sense of power" (92).

African Americans hoped to find a similar sense of empowerment by serving in the American armed forces during World War II. Facing constant questioning of his manhood in Texas, Easy joins the army to prove to himself more than to others that he is a man. His war-time experience exposes the concept of "white blood" and the various fears of white people. Rather than allow African American soldiers to participate in real combat, white commanders make them perform adjunct activities such as typing, afraid that African Americans will discover that they are capable of fighting and feel encouraged to fight for their own rights on their home turf in the United States. Easy also suspects that whites keep black soldiers away from actual combat because they want to deter black soldiers from "spill[ing] white blood" (98). Those whites who follow this kind of logic choose racial over national identification, clearly setting African Americans apart from other Americans. While Easy seeks the assertion of his manhood in the army, most black people joined the army in the hope of being fully integrated into the fabric of society. The participation of African Americans in World War II increased their hopes of enfranchisement, hopes that were dashed immediately after the war.

Easy's wartime experience prepares him for his future interactions with white people, but it does not eliminate an essentially physiological response that most of the encounters with whites elicit in him. This is how he responds to Albright before finding out that Albright is someone to dread: "When he looked at me I felt a thrill of fear, but that went away quickly because I was used to white people by 1948" (1). A very similar reaction to whiteness is at play when Easy declares that in the presence of white people he habitually "empt[ies] [his] head of everything" because "the less you know the less trouble you find" (13). Apart from blaming whites for the enforced silence, he also blames himself and the black community: "I hated myself for it but I also hated white people, and colored people too, for making me that way" (13). Shifting part of the blame for his silence or his fact-twisting in the presence of whites to the black community indicates that the distrust of whites is not only derived from

his own experience, but also from the communal knowledge passed from generation to generation. Whites are approached as a separate tribe, which is probably most evident in the passage depicting Albright's treatment of racist white youths. Easy's primary fear is that if Albright treats a white person with no scruples, he will be capable of even greater cruelty towards an African American: "I cared that if Albright could do something like that to one of his own then I knew he could do the same, and much worse, to me" (57). The phrase "his own" resounds the term applied by Easy's racist employer, Giacomo, who tells Easy that "[his] people should learn to give a little extra if [they] wanna advance" (29). In both cases identity politics are at play, but power dynamics are also different in both cases because unlike Giacomo, Easy does not speak from a position of power.

Like other so-called ethnic American authors, Walter Mosley closely associates whiteness with death, not only by portraying white characters as avatars of death for African American characters, but also by directly ascribing death-like features to white characters in the novel. Easy's friend, Mouse, identifies the face of death which he claims to see in his drunken stupor as white (34). Apart from looking down on "white men with dead blue eyes" (63), Easy defines a phenotypically white character of biracial origin, Daphne Monet, as strongly evocative of death and therefore not worthy of emotional attachment: "I didn't really want her to stay. Daphne Monet was death herself. I was glad that she was leaving" (204). The white character mentioned above, Todd Carter, even has death hidden in his name, since in German "Todd" means death.

Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* offers a multifaceted critique of the oppressive faces of whiteness, including the criticism of whiteness operating outside the fringes of the law, whiteness representing the law and the penal system, whiteness organizing labour relations in the United States, as well as mapping out the urban landscape of Los Angeles. Easy's encounters with representatives of each of these groups mark him negatively, either leaving an imprint on his body or posing a threat to his life, economic security and his mental integrity. The sinister faces of whiteness recurring throughout the novel inevitably lead to the scathing portrayal of whiteness that emerges from the narrative, both on the diegetic level and the level of the imagery suffused mostly with pejorative associations of whiteness.

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The New Sentence: June Jordan and the Politics of Parataxis

ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to compare and contrast a few select ways in which the poetic use of parataxis can convey a specific political message. Parataxis is understood here broadly, as a certain organizational principle based on a cycle of denarrativization and renarrativization.

The first part of the paper reflects on the role the paratactic technique has played within the language of the reactionary populists, both historically and in the recent years. Then, building on the observation that the denarrativized, seemingly „straightforward” nature of the paratactic speech makes it particularly useful for the purposes of right-wing populism, I ask whether parataxis can be reclaimed as a progressive force. In order to answer this question, I go back to some of the issues discussed by Ron Silliman, Fredric Jameson and Bob Perelman in the context of the Language movement and the so-called New Sentence. Here, the work of de- and renarrativization performed as a consequence of the paratactic loosening of conventional textual links and structures is seen as a direct response to the denarrativized nature of everyday life under late capitalism.

In the final part of the paper, I contrast the New Sentence parataxis with a more practical, more spontaneous (albeit more conventional) approach embodied by June Jordan. The paratactic structures of her writing remain focused on denarrativization in all of its disruptive and provocative potential, allowing for a certain kind of immediate political intervention.

Keywords: parataxis, New Sentence, June Jordan.

The recent rise of right-wing populist politics on both sides of the Atlantic—Brexit, the electoral victory of Donald Trump, the rise of the Front National and the subsequent close electoral shave in France etc.—has caused many journalists and pundits to reevaluate their approach to the language of the far right. Whereas in the time of politics-as-usual those interested in right-wing populism were primarily focused on the ways in which extreme ideologies reproduce themselves (“how does the far right mobilize and radicalize their own followers?”), the rise of Trump has necessarily shifted everyone’s attention towards more general questions about the persuasive force of the populist language (“why is the far right able to sway ordinary voters?”).

Mark Thompson, the current CEO of The New York Times Company and a former Director-General of the BBC, is among those trying to explain the new wave of far-right populists through the means of what we may call a common sense linguistic analysis. In his widely discussed op-ed piece for *The New York Times* (and, subsequently, in chapter 4 of his book *Enough Said: What’s Gone Wrong with the Language of Politics?*), Thompson links Trump’s success to his deployment of the so-called “anti-rhetoric”: a series a rhetorical techniques and strategies that aim to portray its user as a “common man” oblivious to the complexities of traditional rhetorics, someone who “tells it like it is” and definitely did not take any advice from PR professionals.

Of course, it doesn’t take an experienced journalist to notice Trump’s various attempts at presenting himself as a “blue-collar billionaire,” a political outsider etc. What’s interesting about Thompson’s piece is that among various tricks and techniques core to the anti-rhetorician’s strategy he mentions the extensive use of parataxis:

Short sentences (“We have to build a wall, folks!”) that pummel the listener in a series of sharp jabs. This is the traditional style of the general (“I came, I saw, I conquered”) or the chief executive, a million miles from the complex and conditional—and thus intrinsically suspect—talk of the lawyer/politician. Students of rhetoric call it parataxis and it’s perfect, not just for the sound bite and the headline, but for the micro-oratorical world of Twitter. . . .

The super-short sentences emphasize certainty and determination, build up layer upon layer, like bricks in a wall themselves, toward a conclusion and an emotional climax. It’s a style that students of rhetoric call parataxis. This is the way generals and dictators have always spoken to distinguish themselves from the caviling civilians they mean to sweep aside. Wikipedia aptly quotes Julius Caesar’s famous summary, not of his invasion of Britain, but of his victory in the Battle of Zela—“Veni, vidi,

vici,” “I came, I saw, I conquered”—as a classical example of parataxis. Today listeners are more likely to associate it with the successful entrepreneur or CEO. (Thompson)

For Thompson, parataxis equals brevity, lack of complexity, and straightforwardness. But those interested in the history of twentieth-century literature—poetry in particular—may instinctively associate parataxis with some quite different features and values. And if, as Thompson seems to suggest, it is true that the contemporary populists’ language remains rooted in a certain attitude towards syntax, then we should look to poetry to learn why—and how—parataxis could be repurposed as a part of a more progressive politics of language. Because even if Trump, Le Pen or Boris Johnson rely on paratactic structures to radicalize and deceive their voters, there is no reason to assume that all parataxis is inherently and universally reactionary.

There are two relevant traditions of parataxis in twentieth-century poetry. The first one is derived from Adorno and his “Parataxis: On Hölderlin’s Late Poetry,” an interesting and well-argued insight into the work of the great Romantic poet. However, for all its philosophical impact, Adorno’s idea of parataxis—a phenomenon or a linguistic force he eventually decided to name “parataxis”—does not really have much to do with any particular use of syntax, any tangible linguistic technique or a mode of speech. Although specific enough when read as a commentary on certain aspects of the post-Heideggerian philosophical discourse, Adorno’s vision is ultimately quite abstract when seen from a more literary (and practical) point of view; and, as is too often forgotten, it requires the reader to assume a hard non-intentionalist perspective in order for the whole concept to make any intelligible sense.

However, parataxis was also listed among the core components of the so-called “New Sentence”—a concept coined by Ron Silliman in 1987 in an essay of the same title, which quickly became one of the defining texts of the whole Language movement. The “New Sentence” refers to a certain type or mode of writing (invented, according to Silliman, in the Bay Area in the 1970s/1980s) that focused strongly on the sentence as a basic unit of meaning (rather than a word, a phrase or a whole paragraph) and favoured prose poetry over both “traditional,” verse-based poems and more traditionally narrative prose. The structure of New Sentence writing was necessarily paratactic; and Silliman’s understanding of the role of parataxis remained firmly rooted in a progressive, anti-capitalist sensibility. His manifesto constituted one of the first comprehensive, philosophically and linguistically informed attempts at finding a common denominator for the work of the Bay Area poets of the 1970s and 1980s; well-received by the poets themselves, its consequences were to prove quite far-reaching.

Let us recap the key points of the original essay. Silliman begins by noting that neither modern linguistics nor literary theory were able to put forward a coherent “theory of the sentence”: a systemic definition of what a sentence actually *is*, how it works and what separates it from the other units of meaning. Silliman comments on quite a few existing definitions of the “sentence,” rejecting each one as either too abstract or simply impractical from a writer’s point of view. He notes that modern linguistics—represented here by de Saussure, Bloomfield and Chomsky—have largely relegated sentence to the realm of *parole*. He then states that the New Critics have tended to “avoid the discussion” about the differences between the “utterance of speech” and the sentence “as a unit of prose.” Finally, he gives some credit to structuralism, referencing Barthes as one of those who came relatively close to a “recognition of the need for a theory of the sentence” (Silliman 76). But ultimately the roots of the New Sentence lie somewhere else: in the works of Gertrude Stein and in the tradition of Anglo-American prose poetry—Silliman references in particular Edgar Lee Masters and Fenton Johnson’s *The Minister*.

The New Sentence has no direct connection to the Surrealist prose poems, as the latter “manipulate meaning only at the ‘higher’ or ‘outer’ layers, well beyond the horizon of the sentence” (Silliman 87). Meanwhile, the main feature of the New Sentence writing is that it keeps the reader’s attention precisely at the level of the sentence; and any particular sentence directs his focus towards another particular sentence rather than a singled out phrase (word, clause etc.) or a whole paragraph. The latter remains, in fact, only a unit of measure rather than meaning—as Silliman explains in the context of Bob Perelman’s *a.k.a.*:

The paragraph organizes the sentences in fundamentally the same way a stanza does lines of verse. There are roughly the same number of sentences in each paragraph and the number is low enough to establish a clear sentence: paragraph ratio. Why is this not simply a matter of the way sentences are normally organized into paragraphs? Because there is no specific referential focus. The paragraph here is a unit of measure—as it was also in “Weathers”. . . .

The sentences are all sentences: the syntax of each resolves up to the level of the sentence. (Silliman 2, 89)

Later, Silliman offers a more comprehensive definition of the New Sentence writing:

- 1) The paragraph organizes the sentences;
- 2) The paragraph is a unity of quantity, not logic or argument;
- 3) Sentence length is a unit of measure;

- 4) Sentence structure is altered for torque, or increased polysemy/ambiguity;
- 5) Syllogistic movement is: (a) limited; (b) controlled;
- 6) Primary syllogistic movement is between the preceding and following sentences;
- 7) Secondary syllogistic movement is toward the paragraph as a whole, or the total work;
- 8) The limiting of syllogistic movement keeps the reader's attention at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often at the sentence level or below. (Silliman 91)

“The syntax of each [sentence] resolves up to the level of the sentence” and “syllogistic movement is . . . limited”—those two phrases seem to sum up some of the crucial intuitions behind the concept of the New Sentence: the text does not provide an obvious, grammatically supported narrative for the reader to easily bind its sentences into a larger whole; sentences appear to have their own, separate referents rather than a single shared one; and the meaning is derived from a collection of sentences rather than a larger unit of meaning. In other words, everything that's really important happens at the level of the sentence; the New Sentence is an “ordinary” sentence presented in a particular, *elevated* way. As Silliman himself admits when discussing Clark Coolidge's “Weathers”: “In other contexts, any of these could become a new sentence, in the sense that any sentence properly posed and staged could” (88).

It is worth remembering that in his original essay Silliman never used the word “parataxis”; which seems rather surprising, considering that a) all the examples of the New Sentence that he provides are quite self-evidently paratactic, and b) the structural core of the New Sentence, as described by Silliman, necessarily favours the use of parataxis over syntaxis or hypotaxis. In other words, it is no accident that all the examples of New Sentence poetry are so enthusiastically paratactic; the paratactic element is obviously intrinsic and necessary rather than incidental or contingent.

Nonetheless, it was another Language author, Bob Perelman, who, in his response to some of the accusations made against Language poetry by Fredric Jameson, explicitly stated that parataxis was a core element of the New Sentence:

The new sentence is a term coined by Ron Silliman to describe certain prose works by various language writers, including himself, in the late seventies and early eighties. To simplify his wide-ranging discussion, a new sentence is more or less ordinary itself but gains its effect by being placed next to another sentence to which it has tangential relevance. New sentences are not subordinated to a larger narrative frame nor

are they thrown together at random. Parataxis is crucial: the internal, autonomous meaning of a new sentence is heightened, questioned, and changed by the degree of separation or connection that the reader perceives with regard to the surrounding sentences. (Perelman 313)

Being essentially a response to Jameson, Perelman's essay deals first and foremost with the political aspects of New Sentence-style parataxis. Jameson (who, by the way, also never used the word "parataxis") famously accused the Language writers, Perelman in particular, of adapting a somewhat carelessly enthusiastic approach towards the aesthetics of the postmodern:

Jameson does not intend an easy moral denunciation of postmodern practices, but in discussing the parataxis in "China" his vocabulary registers significant alarm: when the "relationship [of signifiers to each other] breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers." (Perelman 314)

By aligning themselves with the principles of postmodern aesthetics, the Language writers were allegedly aiding late capitalism in its attempts to further suppress the affects of alienation and anxiety, making them ever more elusive, harder to consciously reflect upon and openly discuss:

But I mainly wanted to show the way in which what I have been calling schizophrenic disjunction or *écriture*, when it becomes generalized as a cultural style, ceases to entertain a necessary relationship to the morbid content we associate with terms like schizophrenia and becomes available for more joyous intensities, for precisely that euphoria which we saw displacing the older affects of anxiety and alienation. (Jameson 29)

In other words, Jameson believed that at the end of the day the paratactic mode of Language writing remained essentially a form of mimicry; it reproduced the same mechanisms that had caused the postmodern experience to break down into fragmented, "compartmentalized" parts in the first place. Theirs was neither a self-aware critical project nor an innocent representation: Language poets were complicit in the capital's actions. Therefore, for Perelman, it became of utmost importance to prove that New Sentence-style parataxis went further—or deeper—than a simple affirmation of the dispersive forces of capital:

By keeping free from fictitious totalization, each new sentence represents an enclave of unalienated social work. Where Jameson sees signifying chains snapping, Silliman sees the cobwebs of the reified narratives of

false consciousness being swept away. But I want to emphasize that continual possibilities of renarrativization are offered alongside such de-narrativization. . . .

By refusing to construct larger narrative wholes beyond the provisional connections made at the time of the reading (or to put it another way, by making the reader renarrativize), Silliman allows air into the sealed chambers Jameson mentions. (Perelman 317)

The key word here seems to be “renarrativization.” The abolishing of the superfluous narrative order—made possible by the introduction of parataxis—is required in order for the poem to shed the pretense of a “totality,” to deprive the reader of the dangerous comfort of hastily made assumptions and obvious conclusions. But only when forced to reestablish some kind of a narrative does the reader actually pay attention to the hidden orders of meaning and the subtle meta-narratives (the “non-literary,” ideologically determined narratives of the capitalist economy, neoliberal politics and so on). The traditional forms, narrative and syntagmatic structures act as a surrogate or a tranquillizer of sorts: they serve to convince the reader that all the information she needs in order to understand a certain “work” is actually contained *within* said work. Meanwhile, the extensive use of parataxis forces her to establish a deeper, more conscious connection between the text and the everyday experience. In other words, the liberating potential of the parataxis lies not in some sort of primitive linguistic anarchism—the abolishing of *all* narrative order—but in exposing, via renarrativization on the reader’s part, the continuities and connections that are far more important than the reified forms of a traditional narrative. “Pay attention,” the New Sentence seems to say, “there is a certain order there, and this order may well be far more important than the ones you’re used to, but I won’t help you find it, you have to do it yourself.”

For all of Perelman’s enthusiasm for paratactic writing, he did realize—in line with Thompson’s analysis—that within the realm of everyday life parataxis is often exploited by the forces of capital (or Spectacle) as a tool of ideological manipulation, deception and disinformation. In fact, his essay begins by noting exactly that:

Parataxis is the dominant mode of postindustrial experience. It is difficult to escape from atomized subject areas, projects, and errands into longer, connected stretches of subjectively meaningful narrative—not to mention life. As objects of the media, we are inundated by intense, continual bursts of narrative—twenty seconds of heart-jerk in a life insurance ad, blockbuster mini-series ten nights long—but these are tightly managed miniatures set paratactically against the conglomerate

background that produces them. Some language writers have attempted to use parataxis oppositionally in the form of “the new sentence”; but AT&T ads where fast cuts from all “walks of life” demonstrate the ubiquity and omniscience of AT&T are also examples of parataxis. Clearly, the nature of the units and the precise ways they are placed together need to be considered before useful political judgments can be made. (Perelman 313)

And then, in the last paragraph:

Let me conclude by reiterating that Jameson and Silliman both make wide theoretical claims; both are trying to fight reified parataxis-commodification—with a more committed, critical parataxis—the finding of hidden categorical similarities. Denarrativization is a necessary part of the construction of these wider paratactic arguments. But in both cases this process needs to be seen for the combined reading and writing practice that it is: renarrativization is also necessary. (Perelman 323)

This vivid contrast between the “reified” parataxis and its “critical” counterpart only stresses the fact that they are *both* politically radical—they just occupy the opposite sides of the political spectrum. The reified parataxis is the pattern by which the whole experience of everyday life under late capitalism is shaped; it is a tool of exaggeration and disinformation, through which the Spectacle presents itself as “ubiquitous” and “omniscient.” It encourages the compartmentalization (“breaking down”) of the daily life and presents various strands of capitalist ideology as separate, autonomous, self-justified “facts.” As an answer to the radicalism of this “reified” parataxis, its “critical” counterpart has similarly grand ambitions: it strives to reshape both the frames of the experience of reading *and* this experience’s relation to the everyday life. But even more importantly, it seeks to disenchant the reified capitalist parataxis by proving that it is not, in fact, possible to have a consequence-free denarrativization of experience; that some meta-narratives are always there, that the act of renarrativization can be performed under any circumstances and that the compartmentalization of everyday life under late capitalism is ultimately just an illusion.

In other words, parataxis as a whole (in both its “critical” and “reified” form) is a battleground for two opposing, equally radical forces: the avant-garde of the Spectacle and the (anti)narrative radicalism of the new poetry.

Both *The New Sentence* and “Parataxis and Narrative,” although indeed brilliantly argued and certainly influential, are nonetheless likely to leave the reader with a few crucial yet unanswered questions. First, it is not entirely clear whether Perelman actually managed to disprove some of

Jameson's most serious accusations. He tried to defend Language writers by showing that New Sentence-style parataxis is fundamentally different from the parataxis of "the postindustrial experience." At the same time, the only significant difference between the "critical" parataxis and its "reified" counterpart—as described in Perelman's essay—is that while the former forces the reader to eventually discover or establish *some* sort of a narrative order (thus exposing the hidden truths of the capitalist ideology), the latter is embraced by those experiencing it "as is," in a fundamentally unreflective fashion. But does this difference really stem from the structural uniqueness of the New Sentence, or is it rooted in a very traditional vision of the role of the reader? After all, renarrativization takes place only because the reader's learned instincts tell her that there must be *some* order and continuity in any given literary text (particularly in a piece of prose); and those instincts, in turn, are shaped by her memory of various more traditional narratives (perhaps novels she had to read in school etc.) rather than the New Sentence itself. It is true that paratactic writing deprives us of the deceptive comfort of known forms and techniques; but in the end it is our experience of those traditional narratives that pushes us to "renarrativize." Thus, it could be said that the only real difference between the "reified" parataxis and the "critical" one is the context in which they appear—it is always the "reified parataxis" when we're forced to watch an AT&T ad, and it is always (or at least usually) the "critical parataxis" when we read a book of poetry. That is not to say that this is the only logical conclusion to Perelman's essay; it is just worth pointing out that by not elaborating on any specific purposes for which parataxis may be employed (what, specifically, does it say about the neoliberal politics of culture? what does it say about the class structure in the late capitalist society? etc.), both Perelman and Silliman come dangerously close to suggesting that the "critical" aspect of the New Sentence-style parataxis could be in fact reduced to the very traditional notion of "literariness."

The second issue is arguably much less important; however, it is still worth noting that Perelman's essay focuses entirely on parataxis as it pertains to a relationship between sentences. Although quite understandable—Perelman was, after all, commenting on a certain writing technique as it was developed historically by a specific group of poets, entirely within the context of the New Sentence—it might seem rather surprising that the critic was not at all interested in the relationship between the sentence-level parataxis and various other paratactic or semi-paratactic structures. Take the enumeration, for example: it has the power to force the reader to renarrativize in much the same way as parataxis, but it is usually accompanied by either some kind of gradation or at least a suggestion of a certain "whole" (of which the listed elements are only

parts). Is it possible that enumeration may affect the narrative of a literary work in much the same way as the “proper” parataxis (although without putting the focus on the sentence-level)?

This potential distinction between parataxis as such and more broadly understood *paratactic structures* or *techniques* leads inevitably to yet another question that remains unanswered by Perelman; namely, is there a substantial difference of effect or function between the “pure,” “proper” parataxis and its various imperfect instances? The critic seems to imply as much when he maintains that anaphoric sentences cannot be “purely paratactic” (Perelman 321); and then again, when he appears to question the radicalism of Whitman’s parataxis: “The parataxis of Whitman’s catalogs that seemed bizarre and discontinuous to most of his contemporary readers is much more likely to denote, for this century’s readers, connection and a totalizing embrace of society” (Perelman 321–22). According to Perelman, the politically radical potential of paratactic writing may be realized only when, on the superficial level of a traditional narrative, parataxis remains “pure”: there is no obvious continuity, no self-evident order, and the “renarrativized” meaning can emerge only *after* the poem has been completely denarrativized. In other words, although denarrativization is not parataxis’ ultimate goal, it must always come first and *embrace* the whole text before any renarrativization can even begin. Denarrativization might be superficial and temporary, but it is nonetheless total and complete in its own way; and in this totality it once again reflects—from the opposite side of the political spectrum, if you will—the regressive radicalism of the “reified” capitalist parataxis.

In classical rhetorics, however, parataxis is understood much more broadly. The examples provided by Thompson in his piece for *The New York Times* are certainly not “purely” paratactic, but they are openly paratactic nonetheless: Caesar’s “Veni, vidi, vici” is based on a repetition, but there is no direct grammatical or syntagmatic connection between the three statements. In fact, this is precisely the point: the three facts (he came, he saw, he conquered) are obviously connected, but they all stem directly from Caesar’s position of power (or his personal agency) rather than from one another, which reinforces the idea of Caesar being “above” all the ordinary hierarchies and structures. In other words, the order as such is *still there*—it’s just been somewhat weakened in order to emphasize the strength and sovereignty of the ruler.

From this point of view, the classical rhetorics and the language of contemporary populist politics are very much alike—some of President Trump’s more egregious “word salads” aside, his speeches usually have a clear common theme, subject and message (however obnoxious this message may be); what is rejected is not the narrative or continuity as such,

but the complex requirements, taboos and caveats of a more traditional political debate. And so, for Thompson (who employs the classical approach), parataxis refuses only to directly subjugate one sentence unto another, or to connect them in a grammatically strict fashion; Perelman's parataxis—both in its reified and critical form—opposes *any* traditional narrative order. In other words, while classical parataxis rejects the *hierarchy*, New Sentence-style parataxis rejects the *continuity* as such.

Of course, the New Sentence requires this kind of radicalism in order to oppose the radicalism of the “reified,” capitalist parataxis; as we have already pointed out, the denarrativization must be total in order for the renarrativization to be able to focus entirely on the previously hidden, ideological meta-narratives. We could say that the “critical” parataxis needs to go as far as its “reified” counterpart and then *even further*, thus subverting the illusion of fragmentation.

This, however, poses another question: is the radical New Sentence-style parataxis enough to criticize the whole spectrum of the regressive, reactionary paratactic forms? After all, even if the reified parataxis remains a pattern for the whole post-industrial experience, not all of its instances will be taken to their natural extremes; the paratactic structure of a populist speech differs slightly from the paratactic structure of a TV commercial break (which in turn differs slightly from the paratactic organization of space in a gentrified neighbourhood and so on). In other words, even if New Sentence-like parataxis—New Parataxis?—is capable of fighting the whole system *at once*, is it able to participate in more specific and more immediate interventions in an equally efficient manner? Is its radicalism *practical* today?

After all, no matter how often Donald Trump's or Boris Johnson's speeches may resemble a political “word salad”—a collection of soundbites, code words, dog whistles and unintelligible ramblings with no discernible message—they still cannot be criticized in the same way one would criticize, for instance, such broad and relatively abstract constructs as “the Spectacle,” “capitalist consumerism” or “the Establishment” (even if those particular politicians clearly belong to the latter). These people are not, whatever one may think of their personal history, Spectacle personified—no one is. Populist politicians are, at the end of the day, specific individuals with a specific (even if terrifyingly unclear or ridiculously flexible) agenda, specific political goals, specific political base etc. This does not mean that their use of parataxis does not require a progressive response—it just means that this response might need to be more direct, more pragmatic and immediate than the systemic response offered by the New Sentence.

Thus, even though the New Parataxis may well be invaluable as a criticism of late capitalism *as such*—a criticism of its most fundamental

patterns and strategies—there will always be some room left for *other* varieties and subtypes of parataxis: ones that may seem less radical in a formal sense, but that are nonetheless just as necessary whenever a poet seeks to make a more urgent, more immediate political intervention.

At this point I would like to contrast the New Parataxis with the paratactic structures found in the poetry of June Jordan. The reason for this comparison is threefold. Firstly, Jordan’s use of parataxis was almost as extensive as that of the New Sentence writers; some of her best-known poems are built around various paratactic structures. Secondly, Jordan was at least as politically radical as the Marxist-inspired left wing of the Language movement: a lifelong activist on the issues of race, gender and (post)colonialism, she also constantly expressed a deep understanding of the class-based inequalities in the West. Thirdly, although politically quite radical, Jordan may be considered by some readers—not least by those with particular interest in post-Language writing—to be quite conservative when it comes to issues of poetic form. Admittedly, formal innovation was rarely at the very top of her list of literary priorities or intellectual responsibilities; and although formally complex, her poems are not very “experimental” in the usual meaning of the word.

In other words, Jordan is a perfect example of a poet who emerged in the U.S. at roughly the same time as the Language writers, who “used” parataxis extensively, but who didn’t necessarily see this particular technique as a means of subverting the very foundations of late capitalism.

Let us take a closer look at just a few of Jordan’s poems. “Poem about My Rights” is an account of an internal monologue during an evening stroll. We see the poet in a state of frustration or shock; we can only suspect that something is not right, that some important event has just taken place, perhaps some sort of an accident that made her reflect—once more—upon the various ways in which modern America discriminates against a black woman:

Even tonight and I need to take a walk and clear
my head about this poem about why I can’t
go out without changing my clothes my shoes
my body posture my gender identity my age
my status as a woman alone in the evening/
alone on the streets/alone not being the point/
the point being that I can’t do what I want
to do with my own body because I am the wrong
sex the wrong age the wrong skin and
suppose it was not here in the city but down on the beach/
or far into the woods and I wanted to go
there by myself thinking about God/or thinking

about children or thinking about the world/all of it
disclosed by the stars and the silence:
I could not go and I could not think and I could not
stay there
alone
as I need to be. (Jordan 309)

This feverish meditation on the idea that some identities—particularly female ones—may be considered “wrong” by the society or the state remains so moving not only because of the poem’s subject and the deeply personal, almost confessional tone, but also because of its efficient use of the paratactic style and specific paratactic structures (lists/enumerations). The phrases and clauses seem juxtaposed, almost accidentally put together, with no obvious, direct connection between them; the train of thought shifts and veers off, almost as if the poet struggled to keep it on track (“alone in the evening / alone on the streets / alone not being the point / the point being . . .”). The paratactic effect is only strengthened by the use of strokes (slashes), which seem to suggest that certain parts of the poem should be read simultaneously rather than sequentially; different thoughts are “happening” all at once rather than in an orderly, linear fashion.

However, parataxis does not only add to the effect of feverishness or frustration; more importantly, it also stresses the fact that the order the poet struggles to describe—the ideological rationale which determines a certain identity to be “wrong”—is completely arbitrary. There is no coherent narrative; there’s just a collection of racist (sexist etc.) prejudices, laws, behaviours. By refusing to narrativize the discrimination, Jordan rejects its pretense to rationality.

In “The Bombing of Baghdad” the paratactic structure plays a similar role:

we bombed Iraq we bombed Baghdad
we bombed Basra/we bombed military
installations we bombed the National Museum
we bombed schools we bombed air raid
shelters we bombed water we bombed
electricity we bombed hospitals we
bombed streets we bombed highways
we bombed everything that moved/we
bombed everything that did not move we
bombed Baghdad
a city of 5.5 million human beings
we bombed radio towers we bombed
telephone poles we bombed mosques
we bombed runways we bombed tanks

we bombed trucks we bombed cars we bombed bridges
we bombed the darkness we bombed
the sunlight we bombed them and we
bombed them and we cluster bombed the citizens
of Iraq and we sulfur bombed the citizens of Iraq
and we napalm bombed the citizens of Iraq and we
complemented these bombings/these “sorties” with
Tomahawk cruise missiles which we shot
repeatedly by the thousands upon thousands. (Jordan 535–36)

Of course, by Perelman’s standards, this excerpt is not “purely” paratactic, as it is also clearly anaphoric. However, each consequent simple sentence does not offer a direct grammatical connection to another; and all the sentences are bound together only by the theme (the text as a whole) rather than through any intermediate units of meaning. And if we were to once again refer to Caesar’s “Veni, vidi, vici” as a classic example of political parataxis, then “The Bombing of Baghdad” would have a strikingly similar overall structure: “we bombed, we bombed, we bombed.”

In fact, if Caesar’s words are the ultimate statement of power and political will, Jordan’s poem presents us with a somewhat grotesque version of the same gesture: the military actions undertaken by the U.S. forces in Iraq are presented not as parts of a causal, logical narrative, but as fundamentally separate—and thus stemming directly from the will or might of those who speak (in this case, the United States, its government or the American citizens in general). “[W]e bombed the National Museum / we bombed schools we bombed air raid / shelters we bombed water we bombed / electricity.” Such laconic statements provoke an almost naive question—*why?*—which, in turn, can be answered only with the most laconic of responses: we don’t know. Or maybe: no one cares. Or maybe: no reason is good enough. The only narrative that binds those linguistic acts together is the one of the U.S. military might: one which simply *asserts* its supremacy rather than seeks to justify or legitimize it.

What Jordan achieves through her paratactic presentation is a “de-rationalization” of the U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East; she refuses to acknowledge it not only as an ethical action, but as a coherent, credible narrative. There is no narrative; there is no logic. It is all just a series of absurd missteps bound together by the sheer military capability of the U.S. The image of the United States in “The Bombing of Baghdad” is ultimately one of a grotesquely Nietzschean bully with too many disposable bombs: why did we do it? Because we could.

The third poem I would like to focus on, “Kissing God Goodbye” from 1994, is a long, passionate monologue in which Jordan argues with and against some of the basic doctrinal and cultural tenets of Christianity. The

poem itself is actually composed as a chain of enumerations and paratactic sequences, in which Jordan quotes short pieces from the Bible, lists some of the traditional personal traits of the Christian God, and points out various doctrinal inconsistencies and absurdities. The poem is divided into two parts, the first more critical and the second more performative; seeing as it is far too long to be quoted here extensively, I would like to provide at least a short series of excerpts, so as to invoke its general emotional tone or atmosphere:

You mean to tell me on the 12th day or the 13th that the Lord
 which is to say some wiseass
 got more muscle than he
 reasonably
 can control or figure out/some
 accidental hard disc
 thunderbolt/some
 big mouth
 woman-hating/super
 heterosexist heterosexual
 kind of guy guy
 he decided who could live and who would die?

....

And wasn't no woman in the picture of the Lord?
 He done the whole thing by himself? The oceans and the skies
 the fish that swim and the bird
 that flies?
 You sure he didn't have some serious problems of perspective
 for example
 coming up with mountains/valleys/rivers/rainbows and no
 companionship/no coach/no midwife/boyfriend/girlfriend/
 no help whatsoever for a swollen
 overactive
 brain
 unable to spell
 sex

....

And after everything he said and done
 the floods/famines/plagues
 and pestilence

the invention of the slave and the invention of the gun the worship of
war (especially whichever war
he won)
And after everything he thought about and made 2 million
megapronouncements about
(Like)
“Give not your strength to women”
and
“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman” and
“An outsider shall not eat of a holy thing”
and
“If a woman conceives and bears a male child then she shall be unclean
seven days . . . But if she bears
a female child, then she shall be unclean
2 weeks . . .”
and

. . . .

That guy?
The ruler of all earth
and heaven too
The maker of all laws and all taboo
The absolute supremacist of power
the origin of the destiny
of molecules and Mars
The father and the son
The king and the prince
The prophet and the prophecy The singer and the song
The man from whom in whom
with whom
of whom
by whom
comes everything without the womb without that unclean feminine
connection/
that guy? (Jordan 565–70)

Here, too, the extensive use of parataxis (once again, stressed and strengthened by the use of mid-verse strokes) serves primarily to underline the arbitrariness of various ideological categories and concepts: the conservative, patriarchal religious mentality becomes denarrativized and thus prone to subversion; it is no longer able to imply its own rationality and its “natural” character through linguistic means. And once again there is no renarrativization: Jordan is not interested in reclaiming Christianity

for herself, she is not trying to find a version of it that could be embraced by a black feminist; her goal is simply to emphasize the absurdities and the doubtful logic of this particular ideological narrative. There's no "positive vision," no suggestion of a "right" narrative to replace the "wrong" one. (There *might* be, in the final part of the poem, but it stands in a stark and open opposition to the whole Christian mindset.)

That is not to say that Jordan explicitly rules out the possibility of reclaiming some elements of Christian spirituality for progressive politics. In "Kissing God Goodbye" she simply chooses not to reflect on this possibility at all—such an idea never seems to appear within the poem's general framework.

We can now see quite clearly various aesthetic and political similarities and differences between New Parataxis and the paratactic technique as deployed by Jordan. They both serve as a critical tool; their immediate goal is to denarrativize a certain ideological narrative. Both New Sentence-style parataxis and Jordan's parataxis allow for a stripping away of the obvious, superficial narratives and languages. However, what the former is actually trying to do, in political and performative terms, is to force the reader to find a hidden order beneath the now-denarrativized surface of the text; its indirect, but ultimately more important goal is to "kickstart" the work of renarrativization. Meanwhile, Jordan's parataxis stops at emphasizing the very fact of denarrativization. New Parataxis reveals the hidden logic of various narratives and discourses, while Jordan's parataxis points out their sheer absurdity and arbitrariness.

This is not to say that Jordan's use of parataxis does not have a performative aspect or does not provoke any specific reactions on the part of the reader; it is actually just as provocative as the parataxis of the Language poems. Whereas a traditional non-paratactic text imposes a certain narrative order on the reader, and the radical New Sentence parataxis forces the reader to look for this order on her own (and outside the text), Jordan's parataxis—let us call it a *practical* or *pragmatic* parataxis—provides just enough self-evident, clearly intentional order to emphasize how deficient, how lacking in reason or rationality this very order is: "we bombed schools, so we could just as well bomb hospitals, who cares." By introducing an obviously rudimentary, insufficient narrative, Jordan points the reader towards this narrative's frustrating, even unbearable, status as something both complete and obviously unfinished or faulty, almost as if asking: what are you going to do about it?

As such, unlike the traditional non-paratactic narrative—and in line with Silliman's concept of radical parataxis—Jordan's *practical* parataxis does not expect the process of narrativization to end when the last word of the poem is uttered. Very much like a slam poet, her paratactic structures

strive to provoke a reaction in their audience, they *want* to initiate some sort of a resistance to the obviously deficient narrative: “do you think there’s anything left to be said? You do? Well, go on then.” Yes, this type of parataxis tends to emphasize a certain narrative lack or break, a certain feeling of finitude or definiteness—“that’s it, there’s nothing else to be said”—but it does so in an act of provocation, for the sole purpose of taunting an initially passive reader. In other words, Jordan’s parataxis is a syntactic equivalent of a mic drop. (Which might partially explain why Jordan’s poems so often sound or *feel* like spoken word pieces.)

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Outside the Magic Circle of White
Male Supremacy in the Jim Crow South:
Virginia Foster Durr's Memoirs¹

ABSTRACT

Virginia Foster Durr was born in 1903 in Birmingham, Alabama in a former planter class family, and in spite of the gradual decline in the family fortune, she was brought up as a traditional southern belle, utterly subjected to the demands of the ideology of white male supremacy that ruled the Jim Crow South. Thus, she soon learnt that in the South a black woman could not be a lady, and that as a young southern woman she was desperately in need of a husband. It was not until she had fulfilled this duty that she began to open her eyes to the reality of poverty, injustice, discrimination, sexism and racism ensuing from the set of rules she had so easily embraced until then. In *Outside the Magic Circle*, Durr describes the process that made her aware of the gender discrimination implicit in the patriarchal southern ideology, and how this realization eventually led her to abhor racial segregation and the ideology of white male supremacy. As a consequence, in her memoirs she presents herself as a rebel facing the social ostracism resulting from her determination to fight against gender and racial discrimination in the Jim Crow South. This article delves into Durr's composed textual self as a rebel, and suggests the existence of a crack in it, rooted in her inability to discern the real effects of white male supremacy on the domestic realm and in her subsequent blindness to the reality behind the mammy stereotype.

Keywords: Virginia Foster Durr, white male supremacy, mammy, Jim Crow South, life-writing.

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When Virginia Foster Durr was born in 1903, her paternal family still owned a plantation in Union Springs, Alabama, where former slaves and their descendants worked and lived at the service of Granny Foster, whom Durr describes in her memoirs as a perfect incarnation of the antebellum plantation lady. In spite of the decline in the family fortune and the subsequent loss of the family plantation after her grandmother's death when she was eight, Durr was brought up as a true descendant of the former planter class, which in Alabama in the first decades of the twentieth century meant that she was trained to support and share the white male supremacist ideology that characterized the New South in the segregation period. Fortunately, Durr's later experiences in the 1930s and 1940s among the New Dealers in Washington, DC, as well as her active involvement in the fight against the poll tax had an everlasting effect on her ideological development, since they made her aware of the gender and racial injustice ensuing from the ideology of white male supremacy in the South. As a consequence, after her return to Alabama in 1951 she became an active supporter of black people's struggle for their civil rights. In *Outside the Magic Circle. The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr* (1985)² Durr records the events that determined this ideological development from her early blind acceptance of the white male supremacist doctrines to her final involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

In his foreword to this volume, Studs Terkel recalls Durr's conviction that "there were three ways for a well-brought-up young Southern white woman to go":

She could be the actress, playing out the stereotype of the Southern belle. . . . If she had a spark of independence or worse, creativity, she could go crazy. . . . Or she could be the rebel. She could step *outside the magic circle*, abandon privilege, and challenge this way of life." (xi, emphasis added)

According to Terkel, "[i]t is the third road Virginia Durr travelled" (xi), and in fact in her autobiography Durr consciously aligns herself with this model, as the title of the volume makes clear. The present study distinguishes several stages in Durr's ideological development: I suggest that Durr's realization of the poverty and misery around her at the outset of the Great Depression did not destabilize her regional allegiance to the traditional southern mores immediately; such an allegiance was not disturbed until she began to glimpse the pernicious effects of the southern tradition and laws on southern white women's (political) rights, and then it was violently

² Hereafter cited as *OMC*.

shaken when she discovered the tacit collusion between many “respectful” southern gentlemen and the big corporations to exploit workers. But Durr’s definitive step out of the magic circle was still to come: she was a descendant of the old planter class and the South could tolerate her “eccentricities” as far as she did not cross the color-line, which she literally did when she began to side with those that opposed segregation. This eventually led her to “ostracism, bruises of all sorts, and defamation” (xi) as befits the role of rebel according to Terkel in his foreword. Thus, most of the events and information recorded in Durr’s autobiographical account contribute to her personal construction of a self that fits this rebel model almost to perfection. But inevitably, as Paul John Eakin has suggested, “the self that is at the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure” (3; qtd in Rueda-Ramos 26), and Durr’s autobiography is no exception.

Modern scholars on life-writing usually agree that writing an autobiography constitutes not only an act of self-discovery, but also one of self-(re)creation, self-invention or self-construction. In Prenshaw’s terms, “an autobiography is not a life. It is a text, a product of memory and imagination, the effort of one storyteller to fashion a coherent plot from the episodic events that make up a life” (“Memoirs’ Characters” 149).³ As suggested above, in Durr’s autobiography the composed textual self is mainly that of a rebel southern woman, but there is a crack in this constructed rebel self which scholars such as Fred Hobson or Peggy Whitman Prenshaw have also noticed:⁴ the present study explores the possibility of locating this crack revealing the “more diffuse self” “shadowing behind . . . [Durr’s]

³ In the case of Durr’s memoir, such an effort had to be supplemented by the careful editorial work accurately described in the “Editor’s Note”: Durr’s autobiography results from the complex interaction of her oral autobiographical accounts in several interviews, filtered through her memory and imagination and shaped according to her skillful resources as a storyteller, and the choices, selection and organization of this material by a set of interviewers and editors who, as Barnard claims, made strong efforts not to “[edit] out the twinkle in her eye and the hearty chuckle freely given” (xix). Since the purpose of this study is not to explore the interstices of editorial work, I will assume that, as Barnard states, “[t]he book is Virginia’s own telling” (xviii), and the resulting composed self is mainly her creation.

⁴ Hobson and Prenshaw show reticence when analyzing the actual extent of Durr’s ideological turn. From Hobson’s perspective “in her adherence to manners she still belonged to the world of her fathers and mothers,” and she remained to the end a “racial paternalist, to some extent” and “a firm believer in breeding” (125); Prenshaw agrees when she states that “*Outside the Magic Circle* is arguably mistitled, for Virginia Durr never really feels herself outside the circle of those who ‘run the country,’ as she admits” (*Composing Selves* 162).

textual self” as a rebel (Prenshaw, *Composing Selves* 29) in her “clinging to mammy”; or in other words, in her actual inability to fully overcome one of the features which, according to Terkel, she herself identified as essential in the stereotype of the southern belle: being “gracious to ‘the colored help’” (xi). In spite of Durr’s sincere abhorrence of segregation, in her autobiography she never considers the effects of racism and white supremacy on the domestic realm and as a result she remains to the end blind to the truth behind the mammy myth. Even so, Durr’s ideological evolution was more than remarkable, and her contribution to the fight for the Civil Rights of African Americans deserves recognition.

As Durr herself acknowledges in her autobiography, the period of time that she spent living in Washington, DC with her family between 1933 and 1949 represented a turning point in her ideological development. She and her husband, Clifford Durr, moved there in April 1933 almost immediately after F. D. Roosevelt had taken office in March (*OMC* 89), and it was then that she became gradually aware not only of the effects of the Great Depression all over the country but also of the effects of the pervasive ideology of white male supremacy in the South. In his analysis of Durr’s autobiography as one of racial conversion Fred Hobson affirms that she found “segregation altogether unacceptable as early as the 1930s” (124) and explains her awakening to the evils of racism and segregation just by referring to the shocking effects of her realization of the poverty and misery caused by the Depression. But reading Durr’s own words one notices that she experienced her “racial conversion”—to use Hobson’s terms—not as such an immediate reaction to the effects of the economic situation, but as the consequence of a gradual process comprising a series of stages related not only to race issues but also to gender, regional, and political ideologies. In fact, her first reaction to the horrors of the Great Depression did not even disturb her southern racist ideology at all.

As Durr recollects, before moving to Washington, “I still wasn’t really in contact with the terrible poverty, hunger and distress around me, but I was beginning to see it” (*OMC* 78). In fact, she had started to open her eyes to the misery around her while in hospital in Birmingham after she suffered a miscarriage in 1931, where horrified she could witness the effects of the lack of calcium on children (*OMC* 76–77). From this period Durr bitterly remembers how poor people blamed themselves for their misery instead of the corporations which had caused their ruin: “What bothered me most was that these poor people blamed themselves for their situation. They never said, ‘We are destitute because U.S. Steel doesn’t treat us well as they treat mules’” (*OMC* 79). Just before moving to Washington, Durr attended the Junior League Convention in Philadelphia as vice-president of the Junior League in Birmingham, and there she was again enraged by the same generalized attitude:

That was a great word people used—improvident. You hadn't provided for the future, you see. You were poor and it was your own fault. No one in Birmingham blamed the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company. Even the people out of work didn't blame them. Now, I did. By that time, I was getting furious at these Yankee corporations. (*OMC* 89)

Durr's reference to her youthful anger at "these Yankee corporations" is probably sarcastic, but it is especially meaningful since it suggests that her process of initiation into the socioeconomic problems affecting so many people around her in the South was deeply rooted in her feeling of allegiance to her region: like her contemporaries, the Nashville Agrarians, at this stage of her life Durr seems to have blamed mainly the northern industrial system for the socioeconomic injustice she was beginning to witness around her, regardless of the racist and sexist effects of the prevailing ideology of white male supremacy in the South. By laying all the blame on "these Yankee corporations" she somehow aligned herself with those who saw the situation mainly in regional terms, and thus she seems to have considered that the ultimate cause for the surrounding misery in the South was the spread of northern industrialism. Durr's adoption of such an ideological stand at this stage in her life is a natural effect of her having been brought up as a descendant of the old planter class under the auspices of the ideology of white male supremacy.

Durr's depiction of the first thirty years of her life in Part One of her autobiography hardly deviates from other traditional accounts of growing up as a white girl in a former planter class family in the segregated South. She describes her childhood memories of the holidays spent in the family plantation in Union Springs, Alabama, presided over by her grandmother and her faithful former slave Easter; she recollects a state of racial innocence when she could freely play with Sarah—the daughter of her beloved mammy, Nursie—and other black children; she remembers the painful experience of losing Nursie, her mammy, as a symbolical manifestation of the end of this period of racial innocence and the beginning of her blind adoption of the ideology of white male supremacy, which taught her on the one hand that "you can't call a black woman a lady" (*OMC* 19) and on the other that as a young woman she was desperately in need of a husband (*OMC* 66). As she herself acknowledges,

[w]hile I was being brought up to be attractive and to have a lot of beaux and get married, all around me things were happening—antilynching fights and child labor fights and the suffrage movement. It was only after I was safely married that I could really be interested in anything else. (*OMC* 66)

It was in the early years of her marriage to Clifford Durr, while she was “leading the life of a young married woman in Birmingham,” that she became “more and more aware of the terrible state of the economy” (*OMC* 74), for which she blamed the “Yankee corporations,” as suggested above. Eventually, she moved to Washington after Clifford had been offered a job there, which gave her the opportunity of meeting a lot of people who were actively involved in the New Deal, so she “decided [she] wanted to do something, too” (*OMC* 99). And her first option was volunteering for the Women’s Division of the Democratic National Committee, since Mrs Roosevelt, whom Durr deeply admired, worked for this Committee. Durr enjoyed working as a volunteer for the Women’s Division, and this proved an ideologically fruitful experience for her, since it gave her the chance to cast a glance over the political situation of women in the South. As she explains, “[t]he people in the Women’s Division were particularly worried about the South because there were no Southern women in any Democratic committees—local, city, or state,” so they “made quite a study of the South and decided the problem was the poll tax” (*OMC* 101). The poll tax caused serious restrictions on women’s political rights in the South, since in practice it limited their access to their voting rights, and Durr became gradually engaged in the struggle against this discriminatory tax. In her autobiography she identifies this early attitude as proof of her growing concern with the conditions of life of white women in the South, and even of her “becoming something of a feminist” (*OMC* 103). As she explains:

I had had a great resentment, I now realize, of the role that Southern girls had to play. Nice Southern girls were supposed to try to get husbands, and so they were always fooling the men and being pleasant and putting up with almost anything to be popular. My resentment hadn’t come to the surface yet. It was still gestating inside of me. But I must have felt it, because I plunged into the fight to get rid of the poll tax for the women of the South with the greatest gusto. I began to go to the headquarters every morning. (*OMC* 103)

With these words Durr describes her ideological position as that of a proto-feminist who after having experienced in her own flesh and bone the demands of southern womanhood and having successfully fulfilled the expectations placed on her as a white middle-class girl, begins to open her eyes to the mutilating effects on women of the male supremacist ideology which until then she had embraced without question.

This stage in Durr’s development is especially relevant because it was then that her blind regional allegiance was put seriously into question for

the first time in her life. Her earlier awareness of the socioeconomic ruin around her in the early 1930s had awakened her social restlessness, but it had not shaken the foundations of her loyalty to the traditional southern ideology. In contrast, when Durr aligns herself with the Women's Division to vindicate women's political rights, she can no longer lay the whole blame on the "Yankee corporations" representing modern northern industrialism; quite on the contrary she is forced to point to the old southern tradition as the actual source of "the role that *Southern* girls had to play" (*OMC* 103, emphasis added). The South, its institutions, its customs and its ideology are now put under serious scrutiny in Durr's mind, which causes an incipient fissure in her faith in the sacrosanct southern order. This fissure, which was "still gestating inside of [her]" then, will reach its true magnitude when Durr completes her vindication by adding the race parameter to the gender one, thus transforming her original repudiation of the *male* supremacist ideology into a repudiation of the *white male* supremacist ideology pervading the South.

But when Durr started fighting against the poll tax she was just thinking of the rights of the white women in the South since, as she admits, "[t]here was no mention in the Democratic Committee at that time of black people. And there were no Negroes around the Women's Division" (*OMC* 102). Although years earlier as a student at Wellesley Durr had seen herself forced to "[break] the Southern taboos" by eating at the same table with a Negro girl, an experience which, as she confesses, "had a tremendous effect on [her]" (*OMC* 58), her confrontation with Clark Foreman on the question of racial equality in the 1930s—just after having declared herself "something of a feminist"—gives proof of her absolute lack of interest in the defense of the rights of black people, and her still strong adherence to the white supremacist ideological standards of her region:

Clark is not tactful at times. He said, "You know, you are just a white, Southern, bigoted, prejudiced, provincial girl." Oh, he just laid me out. I got furious and I said, "You are going back on all the traditions of the South. You, a Howell of Georgia, going back on all of it. What do you think of the Civil War? What did we stand for?" White supremacy, of course. (*OMC* 104)

As Durr herself explains, both she and her husband had been "brought up to think that all black people were inferior" even if both had been raised by black women whom they "adored" and "trusted" and "on whom [their] lives depended" (*OMC* 104). As her reaction to Clark Foreman's proposals on racial equality makes evident, she was still far from abandoning her white supremacist ideology.

Surprisingly, after this “stormy beginning” the Durrs kept meeting the Foremans, and partly thanks to her relationship with them, Virginia began to meet more and more black people in Washington. As a prototypical southern girl and woman, Durr was used to having black people around since her early childhood in Alabama, but they were all servants whose apparently submissive attitude could only confirm her white supremacist perspective.⁵ In Washington, the situation was different since she began to meet African Americans who excelled in different kinds of jobs and in activities from which black people had been traditionally barred in the South because of their alleged lack of intellectual refinement and sophisticated artistic skills. In her memoir, Durr recalls Mattiwilda Dobbs’s success as an opera soprano singer in Washington years before she sang at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1956, and she remembers how on that occasion she herself “served the tea to this black family—quite a reversal of roles for me, as you can imagine” (*OMC* 105). But in spite of experiences like this, Durr was still mainly concerned with the socioeconomic effects of the Great Depression and the rights of white women in the South.

After the tragic death of her three-year-old son in 1938, Durr started attending Bob La Follette’s Senate subcommittee hearings on civil liberties where she was terribly upset to discover that “some of the leading men of Birmingham,” who were “[her] father’s friends and [her] friends’ fathers,” who “had been so sweet to [her] all [her] life” and whom she “had been brought up to think highly of” (*OMC* 110), were actually guilty of the crimes they were accused of, such as “holding people incommunicado or having them beaten up and disappear” (*OMC* 110). She was thus forced to assume that even concerning socioeconomic conditions, the blame could not be blindly laid on the “Yankee corporations,” since some of the most respectable members of the social southern elite had conspired with them, thus contributing to the ongoing spectacle of misery, labor repression and brutality in the South. This is the reason why Durr declares that the hearings were the place “where [she] got [her] education” (*OMC* 108), since there she was brutally exposed to a truth she had never envisioned before: the evidence that the pillars of the southern social order that until then had remained unquestionable for her were as rotten as the purely capitalistic interests of the Yankee corporations. Meanwhile, she kept working on the 50–50 plan of the Women’s Division and against the poll

⁵ The practice of dissemblance as a means to obtain benefits from their masters had characterized the attitude of some black servants since the antebellum period: “slaves constructed masks of simplemindedness and sycophancy, loyalty and laziness to play to their owners’ fantasies and desires while securing very material benefits . . . in return” (Hale 16).

tax, but not on behalf of the rights of the African American people yet; as she herself admits: “The race issue was not my primary interest at that time” (*OMC* 114).

Surrounded by New Dealers in Washington, Durr could never partake of the generalized feeling of antipathy that most southerners manifested towards Roosevelt’s program, which marked for her another point of departure from the mainstream southern ideology. For this reason, when she learnt that Joe Gelders and Lucy Randolph Mason with the President’s support were organizing a meeting that would bring together “the New Deal elements in the South, the labor unions, the people who were benefiting by the New Deal, like the WPA people” (*OMC* 119), she decided to join efforts with them and thus became a participant in the first meeting of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare held in Birmingham, Alabama, in November 1938, where black people also had representation: “I understand the Mrs. Roosevelt was the one who insisted that blacks be included, and Mary McLeod Bethune was her emissary” (*OMC* 120). Eleanor Roosevelt’s overt defiance of the laws of segregation during the conference—“[she] got a little folding chair and put it right in the middle of the aisle” since “[she] said she refused to be segregated,” and “[she] carried the little folding chair with her wherever she went” (*OMC* 121)—did not leave Durr indifferent. Neither was she immune to Mrs Mary McLeod Bethune’s courageous determination to be called “Mrs Bethune,” which, according to Durr, “sounds like a small thing now, but that was a big dividing line. A Negro woman in Birmingham, Alabama, was called Mrs. at a public meeting” (*OMC* 121). The Conference became thus a landmark which signaled the first integrationist steps in Durr’s development and highly contributed to her growing awareness of what a “terrible thing” was “to be white and have to think that everybody who wasn’t white was inferior, to look down on them and think they smelled bad and were common and vulgar” (*OMC* 121).

When Durr describes the process that led her to “come around to thinking that segregation was terrible” (*OMC* 121) she uses the term “osmosis” (*OMC* 121), and relates it to the effect of her having met Mrs Bethune and “other Negro people at the Foreman’s house” (*OMC* 121) like the Dobbs. As suggested by the term “osmosis,” these encounters did not cause Durr’s sudden epiphanic awakening to the injustice of segregation, but their effects gradually filtered into her mind and infiltrated her ideology causing an irrevocable alteration in her perception of the Jim Crow South. As already noted, in her memoirs Durr confesses that when she started meeting many of these black people she was exclusively interested in fighting against labor exploitation and for the voting rights of the white women. In fact, she seems to have given little thought to

the evils of racial segregation until the first meeting of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, where for the first time she found herself among an integrated group of people with representatives of the African American community (*OMC* 120). They were called “reds” and despised as communists, but Durr was aware that it was the fact that there were white people and black people peacefully sitting together that caused the reaction of the white population of Alabama and eventually the interference of the police “saying anybody who broke the segregation law of Alabama would be arrested and taken to jail” (*OMC* 121). Inspired by women such as Mrs Roosevelt and Mrs Bethune, Durr was thus beginning to realize the “contradictory feelings” at the basis of segregation: “We grew up with such contradictory feelings. ‘I loved dear old Suzy. She raised me from a baby and she treated me like a mama. She is the sweetest thing in the world.’ But, ‘Of course, I wouldn’t sit by her son on the bus” (*OMC* 122).

In spite of this growing opposition to the segregation laws and practices, Durr’s main interest in the late 1930s and the 1940s was still the promotion of the rights of women in the South through the abolition of the poll tax (*OMC* 126). Even after the Women’s Division was forbidden to fight for this end (*OMC* 115), Durr went on working for this cause as vice-president of the poll tax committee—officially called the Civil Rights Committee (*OMC* 152). In August 1941 this committee had grown so much that it was separated from the Southern Conference, which then became one of its members. The committee was now called National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax (*OMC* 152–53), and Durr was its vice-chairman. According to her, the NCAPT concentrated on the struggle against the poll tax, and although it had the support of several African American associations and its members opposed segregation, racism was not a central issue for them. The poll tax committee was backed by the White House—at least for a while⁶—and kept getting support from different groups—mainly women’s associations, labor unions and African American associations—until its dissolution in 1948.⁷ Although they got to introduce an anti-poll tax bill in Congress several times, they were never successful mainly because of the opposition of the southern politicians, who were constantly red-baiting and race-baiting the NCAPT. Durr herself was called “a Communist, a nigger-loving Communist” (*OMC* 163) by some of them. She knew that the actual source of the problem between the NCAPT and her fellow southerners was their obsession with the race issue

⁶ In late 1941 “Roosevelt needed the Southern senators so badly for his foreign policy that he decided he couldn’t offend them on such issues as the poll tax” (*OMC* 158).

⁷ The poll tax was abolished in 1964 by Constitutional amendment.

rather than communism: “Southern congressmen immediately translated the fight against the poll tax into the race issue” (*OMC* 179), since they saw this fight as a potential step forward in the black people’s access to their voting rights and so as a potential threat for the cheap labor that blacks represented.

Just before the dissolution of the NCAPT Durr had met Henry Wallace and was so positively impressed that she decided to campaign for him. One of the aspects that Durr admired in him was his refusal to speak to segregated audiences in the South during his campaign, which was usually the source of much trouble: “Wallace went all through the South . . . and he refused to speak to segregated audiences. They got tomatoes and other things thrown at them because of it. He struck a great blow against segregation right then and there” (*OMC* 197–99). It was the first time a candidate for the presidency of the U.S. showed so openly his determination to fight segregation, and Durr was especially proud of Wallace for this reason, but she got terribly disappointed when black people did not vote for him (*OMC* 201). Although it was still mostly a collateral effect of the other ambitious projects which she was undertaking, Durr’s opposition to segregation was becoming so evident that in her memoirs she admits that in the early 1950s she was reluctant to go back to Alabama because of the race issue, since she was certain her friends and relatives there did not share her views on the topic (*OMC* 224). In spite of her reluctance they went back in 1951 after a short period of time living in Denver.

These were the years when McCarthyism was reaching its peak, and red-baiting finally struck Durr directly when she was called to New Orleans to appear before the Internal Security Subcommittee during the Jim Eastland hearings in 1954 (*OMC* 255). These hearings were primarily a manifestation of the red scare that was affecting the whole country, but as Durr acknowledges, in the South the fear of communism was deeply rooted in the fear of racial integration, and always secondary to it: the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision was being discussed by the Supreme Court, and most southern politicians, Jim Eastland among them, tried to make the most of the situation by persuading southerners of the association of communism and racial integration.

Although the hearings initially represented a nightmare for Durr and her family, they eventually became a source of liberation for her. As a consequence of her husband’s poor health they had been living with his family in Montgomery since they had returned to Alabama, and out of respect for them, who were a traditional, conservative southern family, Durr had resigned from all associations and had kept quiet about political and race issues as expected from a “nice, proper Southern lady”

(*OMC* 271). But when Durr was called to New Orleans she was forced to break her silence, which triggered her return to the public political scene, and her subsequent liberation from her mask as a “nice, proper Southern lady.” Thus, when “the Brown decision came down . . . all hell broke loose” (*OMC* 272) in Alabama, and her political action naturally turned to desegregation. From Durr’s perspective, the brutality of the white reaction against desegregation made of this struggle a nationwide issue, since it forced the federal government to get involved and back up integration by enforcing the decisions of the Supreme Court (*OMC* 275), and this eventually brought the ideological contradiction of the southern conflict to the fore.

According to Durr, the red scare and the fear of red-baiting which McCarthyism had spread all over the nation had never been so strong in the South, where red-baiting had always been combined with but secondary to race-baiting: in the South fighting against segregation had usually gone together with being suspected of communism and thus of treason. But the 1950s meant the beginning of the cold war period, and in Durr’s own words

[t]he whole basis of the cold war was that communism meant dictatorship and capitalism meant democracy. How could anyone say that capitalism was the best system in the world when the whole Southern part of the United States was segregated and Negroes had no rights at all? It created a great dilemma for the United States. (*OMC* 284)

As a result of this “dilemma” and of the nationwide dimension acquired by the southern racial conflict, in the rest of the nation the struggle against segregation began to be identified with freedom and democracy rather than communism. Moreover, according to Durr, Martin Luther King’s political strategy highly contributed to destabilize the association between the Negro movement and communism by bringing the church into the game: “I always thought King was a great politician. He started the movement in the churches, so when the people started trying to red-bait the Negro movement, they had to go into churches and red-bait Jesus Christ—pretty difficult to do” (*OMC* 284). Durr suggests that for this reason from its onset red-baiting the Civil Rights Movement became difficult in the South.

From Durr’s perspective segregation was based on two basic notions: the fear of the sexual association of white women and black men, and the idea that blacks were diseased (*OMC* 288). In her memoirs, she repeatedly expresses her disgust at the widespread idea that the white women who were fighting segregation did so because they wanted to have sex with black men, and she attacks this argument on the basis that it was insulting and

degrading for everybody—white men included, since it takes for granted that white women would prefer black men for their sexual attributes if they were given the chance to choose. Thus Durr dismantles the denigrating association of African Americans with the most basic animal instincts, which constituted the basis of one of the two main stereotypes affecting black people, that of the brutish black rapist—and its female counterpart, the Jezebel.⁸ But Durr finds it much more difficult to see beyond the other main stereotype affecting African Americans, that of the faithful docile servant; in fact, she resorts to this image to counter those arguments that promoted segregation on the basis that blacks were diseased, thus showing her good intentions but also her blindness to the destructive effects of this stereotype and of the paternalistic ideology behind it:

You know, I was brought up to be a Southern lady, and it dawned on me how rude it was to think that a black was too dirty and smelled too bad to sit by me. I had been raised by them and sat in their laps, slept with them and kissed them all my life. This was what was so crazy about the South. (*OMC* 121–122)

Hobson uses this passage to justify his opinion that Durr's "conversion to racial justice . . . came about . . . because of her belief that segregation was morally wrong, but also because she believed that it was, quite simply, bad manners," which from his perspective proves her to be "a racial paternalist, in some measure" (125). I suspect that there is a subtle irony in Durr's reference to her upbringing as a Southern lady—a role which she elsewhere criticizes and rejects—and also in her subsequent attempt to counter segregation on the basis that it is bad manners: Durr seems to be sarcastically exposing the contradictions of Southern segregation by presenting it as a violation of the demand of kindness and graciousness expected from a southern lady. But the tone of irony is replaced by a nostalgic one when Durr turns her eyes to her childhood past to briefly recall her memories of childhood racial innocence: here she blindly accepts the surface appearance of racial harmony and mutual affection traditionally associated to the image of the faithful servant, mammy, without questioning the veracity of this myth.⁹ Durr needs to believe that these memories

⁸ According to Deborah Gray White, "[b]lack men and women were thought to have such insatiable sexual appetites that they had to go beyond the boundaries of their race to get satisfaction" (38).

⁹ After the publication of Trudier Harris's *From Mammies to Militants. Domesticity in Black American Literature* (1982) and Deborah White's *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (1985), several scholars have devoted their efforts to deconstruct the mammy image. For a more detailed analysis

of racial innocence are genuine and she clings to them firmly to justify what she identifies as the basic contradiction of segregation: the contrast between the feeling of protection and affection that most southerners like her got from their close relationship with the black servants who raised them as children, and the demands of segregation and separation that ruled race relationships in their adulthood. Durr bases her argument against segregation on this paradox without realizing that such a contradiction was mainly apparent: if she had stopped to consider the situation, first she would have realized that rather than contradicting the feeling of racial harmony evoked by her memories of her childhood relationship with the black servants, the southern segregated system actually depended both ideologically and economically on the presence of black domestics often idealized as mammy at home, and as a consequence she would have discovered the fragility of her own idealized childhood relationship with the black servants and of the mammy image.

In her autobiography, Durr does not hesitate to identify the economic reasons lurking behind the ideology of white male supremacy which constituted the basis of southern segregation: segregation was ultimately a means to deprive Negroes of any right and any power,¹⁰ and thus keep them as a source of cheap labor since “[c]heap labor was the great selling point of the South. Every Southern state, every chamber of commerce, and every corporation thought the way to make the South prosperous was cheap labor” (*OMC* 179). But it was not until much later in her life—if ever—that Durr began to look closer than any “chamber of commerce” and any corporation, and became aware of her own lifelong dependence on the cheap labor provided by black domestics. Long hours and short wages conditioned the real lives of all domestic workers in the South not only in Durr’s childhood, but also afterwards when she herself became a white employer of black domestic employees (Jones 127–28; Sharpless xiii, 8, 65–87). Although she admits a certain feeling of shame for the low wages she paid to her domestics—“I feel a little ashamed when I think what we paid the servants” (*OMC* 100), in her memoirs Durr never denounces this reality of labor exploitation, and never acknowledges its contribution to

of the pernicious effects of the mammy image, the real conditions of work of black domestics in the segregation period and their relationship with their white employers, see Hale (85–119), Jones (124–50), Manring (1–34), McElya (74–115, 160–206), Sharpless (129–72), Wallace-Sanders (1–12), White (46–61).

¹⁰ Hale analyzes segregation partly as whites’ reaction to the development of a black middle-class: “Whites created the culture of segregation in large part to counter black success, to make a myth of absolute racial difference, to stop the rising” (21).

the perpetuation of the same color line which she was otherwise struggling to destroy. Curiously, when she deals with the servant problem and refers to the white employers' generalized suspicion in the 1930s that their domestics "had formed Eleanor Clubs and were being encouraged to push white people off the sidewalks" (*OMC* 114),¹¹ she does so not to denounce the labor conditions of the domestic workers but to express how much she "hated for Mrs. Roosevelt to be so maligned" in the South (*OMC* 114). Somehow emulating the New Deal's disregard of domestic service,¹² Durr does not seem aware of the fact that the low wages—or no wages at all¹³—allotted to the help conspired with the ideology of segregation to keep blacks "in their place."

310 Although black domestics—especially those who had children—worked mainly for the welfare of their families, and they "refused to subordinate completely their own family interests to the demands of a white employer" (Jones 128), the paradoxical truth was that "[p]reserving and providing for the family frequently meant leaving it for long hours," since white employers expected their domestics to put the employers' demands over their own family needs and often "tried to disregard the fact that their cooks had lives outside the boundaries of their employers' homes" (Sharpless 110). As a consequence, balancing work and family was extremely difficult for most black domestics. On the one hand, since these women had to work long hours, they usually had to trust the care of their children to others or even leave them alone (Jones 129), which often complicated their rearing, and on the other hand, since they had to work for low wages, the practice of "composite income" was almost unavoidable (Sharpless 72–73), which most of the times forced black children to stop attending school and start working earlier than white children, and this inevitably limited their chances of socioeconomic improvement. As Niewiadomska-Flis concludes, this "systematic abuse and discrimination"

¹¹ After analyzing the white employers' opposition to organized labor in the case of the black domestics, as well as the difficulties that black women actually encountered to organize themselves, Sharpless suggests that "[j]ust as they had during the period before World War I, employers' imaginations remained more active than organizing African American workers in the 1940s" (85). The FBI itself concluded that "the stories of the so-called 'ELEANOR CLUBS' are the result of widespread rumors without foundation and fact" (Sharpless 86).

¹² Domestic service was excluded from the federal wage and labor laws which were developed to protect the rights of workers in the 1930s, as well as from the Social Security Act passed in 1935 (Sharpless 86–87).

¹³ Although it was rare, according to Sharpless some domestics worked only for food and shelter even in the twentieth century (72).

was designed “to keep the Black help at a subsistence level” (66),¹⁴ which ultimately meant that in spite of the black domestics’ efforts to provide their children with better future opportunities through education (Jones 97), they could hardly ever succeed in changing their status quo. In turn, this perpetuation of the southern socioeconomic order with black people as providers of cheap labor served to justify the ideology of white supremacy and thus to keep the color-line secure. In spite of her feeling of shame at the low wages she herself paid to her domestics, Durr never reflects on this reality and thus never acknowledges her part in this contrivance.

The economic exploitation of black domestics explains their presence in so many white homes—even in not affluent ones¹⁵—in the South, where from an ideological perspective black domestics wearing the mammy mask became essential for the racial training of white children in the ideology of white male supremacy. As Hale accurately explains, during the Jim Crow period “[t]he white home became a central site for the production and reproduction of racial identity precisely because it remained a space of integration within an increasingly segregated world” through the employment of African American domestic labor (94). It was at home that white children began to learn the meaning of race, racial identity and racial difference, which constituted the “primal scene of the culture of segregation” (96), and in white southerners’ memories black domestics, nostalgically idealized as mummies, usually “haunted these scenes of racial learning” (97). According to Hale, black domestics functioned both as markers of whiteness since “being white meant having black help” (103), and as “conduits through which [racial] identities were reproduced within white children” (105). Thus, “the relationships between white southerners and black women domestics became crucial to the reproduction of white supremacy” (115) in the segregated South, where paradoxically white children learnt whiteness from black women (104) by gradually internalizing the paternalistic conviction of the inferior status of blacks.

Black domestics’ involuntary contribution to the culture of segregation was intensified by the white southerners’ tendency to idealize these women’s role in their childhood memories to make them fit the traditional mammy image, which constituted one of the two stereotypes—Jezebel was the other one—affecting black women: mammy stories proliferated between 1890 and 1940, and in them “pre- and postwar images fused and mammy

¹⁴ As Susan Tucker explains, widely spread practices such as toting and gift giving contributed to keep the black help at a subsistence level (146).

¹⁵ Hale observes that black domestics’ wages were so low that even white mill workers and “women who lived on small farms . . . had access to black domestic labor” (102).

became the crucial nurturer, protector, and teacher of white children” (Hale 98). Mammy became again a symbol of racial harmony through her tacit assumption of white supremacy manifested in her devotion to her white charges and her white family (Wallace-Sanders 10, 18, 24; White 46–61). Thus, although “as the twentieth century opened, the actual domestic workers had little connection to the mammy figure that white southerners increasingly celebrated” (Hale 98), this image shaped the expectations of the white society for black women in the real world:¹⁶ as a consequence, “black domestic workers . . . faced a white popular culture that persistently conflated or compared their work and their lives with the fictitious mammy figure” (McElya 208). Regardless of the socioeconomic factors that actually conditioned the white employer-black employee relationship, white southerners persistently clung to their mammies in their memories of childhood innocence. And Durr was no exception.

In her autobiography, Durr counters without effort the stereotype of the animalistic black rapist; she proclaims the absurdity of denying black people intellectual and artistic skills, as well as moral values; she denounces the deprivation of rights of black people in a country that was supposed to be the leader of the free, democratic world; and she even establishes a connection between the southern rejection of the anti-poll tax movement and the southern dependence on the cheap labor provided by black workers. However, she fails to see that her own account of her idyllic childhood playing with black children and being taken care of by a black nurse is mainly an idealized romance which actually rested on black exploitation: that is, on the cheap labor provided by blacks, in this case black domestics. In her memoir Durr insists on clinging to mammy and remains blind to the fact that the “[m]ammy image is fully as misleading as that of Jezebel” (White 49). In other words, she chooses to ignore that the image of the faithful slave/servant/mammy represented as much a violation of black identity as that of the black beast rapist—and Jezebel—which served as an excuse for the ongoing “lynching spectacles.” As McElya states,

African American activists and journalists charged that honeyed testaments of love for mammy swelled from the same bloodlust and white supremacist sentiment that fueled race riots, lynchings, rapes, and other abuses of black people. The figure did not stand in opposition to this violence, as the UDC claimed, but was very much a part of it. (160)

¹⁶ According to McElya, “the long-standing national romance with the plantation idyll and its narrative of the faithful slave also shaped the desires and expectations of white employers outside the South who hired recently migrated black women” (214).

Like White and McElya, most scholars on the mammy image have insisted on the performative essence of such a mask and the gap separating it from the real feelings and conditions of life of most domestics: Wallace-Sanders defines the mammy-charge relationship as a “sentimentalized romance” which “trumps the reality of lived experience” (16); similarly Manring suggests that “the real woman who would be the basis for Aunt Jemima seems trapped in the amber of southern history, her image well maintained but the reality of her life open to interpretation” (19); Hale explains the popularity of this mask in the segregation period as a product of the whites’ imagination to justify the ideology of white male supremacy and promote the fiction of continuity between the Old and the New South (Hale 85–88), and like Sharpless, she also acknowledges the contribution of the forced practice of dissemblance by black women to the performance (Hale 16–17; Sharpless 145–46). But, like many other southerners, Durr seems to have “missed the performance” (Hale 17), and for this reason in her memoir she emphatically brandishes her memories of having “been raised by [black domestics] and [sitting] in their laps, [sleeping] with them and [kissing] them” (*OMC* 122) as weapons to fight segregation, without even questioning the real implications of these proofs of familiarity and affection. Thus, in contrast with Lillian Smith’s reflections in *Killers of the Dream*,¹⁷ Durr’s recollections of her mammy, Nursie, seem to remain untouched by her adult awareness of the evils of white male supremacy and segregation.

In her autobiography Durr’s rendering of her relationship with Nursie is a compendium of the most stereotypical mammy features:

Nursie was a second mother to me, as black nurses were to many Southern white children. I was devoted to Nursie. She was as much a symbol of safety to me as my mother was. She took care of me completely—even bathed and dressed me. Nursie put me to bed at night, and her little girl, Sarah, who was just my age, slept with me quite often. (*OMC* 14)

Nursie not only took care of the young Virginia, but she was also a source of protection and affection for the girl as befitted her role as mammy. Moreover, the image of the white girl Virginia sharing her bed with the black girl Sarah completes Durr’s nostalgic recollection of a time of childhood racial innocence previous to the learning of the meaning of race. Such a learning process started for her in the family plantation in Union Springs in the summer when Virginia turned seven and she was

¹⁷ Lillian Smith’s *Killers of the Dream* and Katharine DuPre Lumpkin’s *The Making of a Southerner* are usually mentioned as examples of the traumatic process of learning the meaning of race at home (see Hale 94–98, 117; Wallace-Sanders 21).

informed that she could not celebrate her birthday by having a barbecue in the backyard with the black children as she had done until then: “my mother and grandmother and aunts all said I had to have my birthday in the front yard and have just white children. No black children could come to the party” (*OMC* 16). Although it was ultimately agreed that she could have a barbecue in the backyard with the black children in the morning and a birthday party in the front yard with the white children in the afternoon, things did not go well: firstly, her cousin Elizabeth insulted Sarah during the barbecue, inspiring a furious reaction from Virginia, and then Virginia had a temper fit at her birthday party in front of “all these strange white children” (*OMC* 17). When “[that] night at the supper table, my aunt said I was the worst child she had ever known” (*OMC* 17), Virginia threw a knife at her, and when she was sent away from the table, she could find refuge only in Nursie’s lap. Virginia’s temper fits represent her resistance to the process of learning the meaning of race, and significantly when she sees her racial innocence—her “idyllic days” (*OMC* 16)—threatened she takes refuge in her mammy, that symbol of the “integrated feelings [and] integrated living” (Hale 117–18) which were allowed only in childhood. But the comfort of the “happy integrated days of childhood” which Virginia could symbolically find in Nursie’s lap came abruptly to an end when the black woman was insulted by Aunt May and neither Durr’s mother nor her grandmother came to her defense.

Aunt May, who had married an Irish man and was living in the North, functions in Durr’s childhood memories as an element of discord in the otherwise peaceful life at the old family plantation in Union Springs, a place especially attached to the bliss of childhood racial innocence. The presence of Aunt May in the plantation disturbs the “idyllic” racial integration offered to children there: significantly she tries to force the black children to call Durr’s sister Miss Josephine instead of Sis as she was usually called by both white and black children; it is no coincidence that she is at the family plantation when Virginia is not allowed to celebrate her birthday with the black children; and eventually, her criticism of Virginia’s intimacy with Nursie on the premise that “all those black women are diseased” (*OMC* 18) causes Nursie to leave, which triggers Virginia’s final awakening to racial awareness and segregation. The loss of Nursie, her mammy, meant for her as for many other southerners, the loss of childhood innocence and the subsequent immersion in the ideology of segregation:

After that summer in Union Springs when I turned seven, I went to school where there were only white children. . . . I was taught by the environment and by my mother that you can’t call a black woman a lady. . . . little by little, I was taught that they were not like us. (19)

Thus, Aunt May embodies in Durr's memories the culture of segregation which brought Virginia's state of blissful racial innocence to an end.

Paradoxically, the process of immersion in the segregated system triggered by this loss of racial innocence was not complete until as adults "white southerners . . . [traded] the real African American women who had nurtured them for sentimental mammy stories, mammy monuments, literary representations like *Scarlett's* mammy, and even mammy-sponsored biscuits and flour" (Hale 118). Following Lillian Smith's reflections on her own personal experience in *Killers of the Dream*, Hale's words suggest that by purposely idealizing their relationship with their black nurses to make them fit the fictitious mammy image, adult white southerners tried to legitimate their disregard for the reality of these black women, thus condemning their true selves to oblivion: "I learned to use a soft voice to oil my words of superiority. I learned to cheapen with tears and sentimental talk of 'my old mammy' one of the profound relationships of my life" (Smith 29). Here Smith reaffirms her relationship with her black nurse as "one of the profound relationships of [her] life," but she also acknowledges how much she contributed to its perversion by observing it through the prism of the mammy myth, and this realization allows her to explore in depth the inconsistencies behind this image. In contrast with Smith, in her autobiography Durr never seems to suspect that her image of Nursie may be animated by fiction and sentimentality: probably misled both by the white southerners' tendency to idealize mammy and the black domestics' concomitant practice of dissemblance, Durr never questions or explores the feeling of mutual devotion between her and Nursie, not even when she recalls experiences that should have contributed to her enlightenment such as the episode of Nursie's leaving or the anecdote about "Mrs Spraggs."

In spite of the trauma which it meant for her as a child, as an adult Durr praises Nursie's decision to leave, but just as a dignified reaction to Aunt May's insult and to her mother's and grandmother's silence. It is true that with her attitude and determination Nursie is primarily vindicating her dignity as a human being against Aunt May's insulting words, but she is also asserting her independence from Durr's family: the rhetoric of faithfulness, loyalty, mutual affection and devotion between the black mammy and the white family gets suspended in this episode which thus lays bare the mainly professional basis of the relationship. Virginia's mother's and grandmother's silence betrays the truth that racial allegiance surpasses any other feeling of loyalty in the South, and accordingly it exposes the fragile artificiality of the bond of affection binding the white family and the black nurse. Nursie's leaving simply ratifies the fact that being Virginia's nurse was primarily a job for her, and that the affection that she surely felt for her white charge was not so unconditional as Durr had ever

imagined, and did not at all surpass the love she felt for Sarah, her own daughter, as expected from a mammy figure.¹⁸ As a child Durr simply took her “little cocoon of love and devotion and care” with Nursie as a “second mother” (*OMC* 14) for granted, and as an adult she keeps doing so since she never engages in a fruitful dialogue with these memories to explore the true implications of Nursie’s devotion to her and of her leaving. She never realizes that by leaving, Nursie is not only vindicating her status as a free woman, but also the professional basis of her relationship with Virginia and her family; and since it happens when Virginia is being first exposed to the demands of racial segregation, Nursie is also showing her repudiation of the ideology of segregation and probably trying “to protect her daughter from the pain of becoming the material upon which [Virginia] practices her own racial identity” (Hale 103).¹⁹

Years afterwards, when she loses the opportunity of seeing Nursie again because she does not realize that a certain “Mrs Spraggs” is her beloved mammy (*OMC* 18), Durr acknowledges her “backwardness,” but again fails to engage in a true exploration of the situation. While she was working to abolish the poll tax in Washington, Durr learnt from one of her colleagues, Mrs Spraggs, that the latter’s mother-in-law—also called Mrs Spraggs—had known her as a child and wanted to see her. Since she could not remember having ever met someone called Mrs Spraggs in the past, Durr failed to see her. When shortly afterwards she learnt that this Mrs Spraggs was her beloved Nursie, it was too late: Nursie was already dead. Apart from her backwardness, this anecdote evinces that Durr’s actual knowledge of Nursie had very serious deficiencies, which may even cast doubt on the authenticity of their mutual devotion. However, Durr does not seem to suspect that her ignorance of Nursie’s complete name can be interpreted as evidence of her ignorance of Nursie’s true identity beyond the mammy mask: she loved Nursie—the mammy mask—but she knew nothing about Mrs Spraggs—Nursie’s actual name representing her identity as an individual. Thus, in contrast to Smith, Durr fails to see that the love of mammy—Nursie—is a form of violence because it depends on the erasure of the black domestics’ true self—Alice Spraggs.

¹⁸ Wallace-Sanders focuses her analysis of the mammy image on black nurses’ “dual role as surrogate and biological mother[s]” (7), and explains that mammy’s “devotion for the children she cares for is best illustrated by her disregard for her own children” (8).

¹⁹ Hale uses these words to explain Aunt Hester’s attitude in the short story “Little White Girl” (1931) by Sara Haardt. Although the situation is different—Virginia does not repudiate Sarah as Susie does with Pinky in the short story, Nursie could probably foresee that this would happen sooner or later.

According to McElya, one of the most impressive mass manifestations of the black domestics' challenge to the "faithful slave narrative" was the Montgomery Bus Boycott (210). Durr was living in Montgomery and was a good friend of Mrs Parks when the bus boycott started, and she supported Mrs Parks's decision to "challenge the bus ordinance on constitutional grounds" (*OMC* 281). Afterwards, she was among the white women who supported the boycott by offering black domestics a ride when they were walking, and she was well aware of the fact that

[a] vast deceit went on. Everybody knew everybody else was lying, but to save face, they had to lie. The black women had to say they weren't taking any part in the boycott. The white women had to say that their maids didn't take any part in the boycott. (*OMC* 283)

Durr relates an anecdote involving Mary, her mother-in-law's old cook, "a passionate advocate of the boycott," who nevertheless denied any part in it. When asked about her attitude

[she] laughed and said, "Well, I tell you, Mr. Cliff, I tell you, I learned one thing in my life and that is, when your hand's in the lion's mouth, it's just better to pat it on the head." That expressed the feeling in the black community. The black women needed those jobs. They weren't paid very much, but that's all the income many of them had. They couldn't afford to say, "I'm supporting the boycott." (*OMC* 283)

Mary's words expose the truth about black domestics and their forced practice of dissemblance, and although Durr is well aware of the performance going on in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955–56, there is no evidence in her autobiography that Mary's explanation has any effect on Durr's perception of the familiarity between white children and black domestics or on her conviction of their mutual devotion: she never elaborates on Mary's lesson and never dares to reconsider this devotion under the light of such a lesson. In fact, as an adult Durr resorts again to the mammy figure to describe her relationship with Mrs Bethune: "Mrs. Bethune translated into the black woman who looked after me and became my protector" (*OMC* 19). This proves that Durr never attempts to deconstruct the scene of idealized racial integration incarnated by the mammy image (*OMC* 44); as a consequence, she mistakenly recalls scenes of familiarity with black domestics to counter segregation without realizing that the romance of racial integration rested on the same violence that kept segregation going.

Nonetheless, although Durr does not succeed in disentangling her childhood memories from the grips of the mammy myth and southern paternalism, in her life she travelled a long distance from her early

assumption of the ideology of white male supremacy to her later support of the Civil Rights Movement. Her life experience and her ideological development during her childhood, adolescence and youth were determined by the traditional social expectations for white girls of the former planter class: she was raised by a mammy, learnt the meaning of race as a child and grew up to become a white middle-class housewife. But evidence of the misery caused by the Great Depression forced her to open her eyes to the reality of economic and social injustice around her, and led her to adopt an active attitude. She first channeled her efforts to fight for the political rights of southern white women and joined the anti-poll tax movement to undermine male supremacy in the South; but her association with this movement made her gradually aware of the evils of segregation and white supremacy until she became a supporter of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. Although blurred by her disregard for the manifestations of racism and white supremacy in the domestic sphere and her parallel blindness to the distorting effects of the mammy image, Durr courageously repudiated segregation in the southern public scene, thereby confirming her genuine commitment to what she considered her ultimate goal: the denunciation of “the exploitation of human beings by other human beings” (*OMC* 131).

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Cabeza de Vaca, Estebanico,
and the Language of Diversity in Laila
Lalami's *The Moor's Account*

ABSTRACT

Published in 1542, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *La relación* is a chronicle of the Pánfilo de Narváez's 1527 expedition to the New World in which Cabeza de Vaca was one of the four survivors. His account has received considerable attention. It has been appreciated and critically examined as a narrative of conquest and colonization, a work of ethnographic interest, and a text of some literary value. Documenting and fictionalizing for the first time in European history the experience of travelling/trekking in the region which now constitutes the Southwest in the United States, Cabeza de Vaca's story testifies to the sense of disorientation, as well as to the importance of psychological and cultural mechanisms of responsiveness and adaptability to a different environment. What allows the Moroccan-American contemporary writer Laila Lalami to follow that perspective in her book *The Moor's Account* (2017) is an imaginative transfer of the burden and satisfaction of narrating the story of the journey to the black Moroccan slave whose presence in the narratives of conquest and exploration was marginal. In Lalami's book, Estebanico becomes the central character and his role is ultimately identified with that of a writer celebrating the freedom of diversity, one who survives to use the transcultural experience of the past creatively in ways well suited to the needs of the current moment.

Keywords: account, Cabeza de Vaca, Estebanico, *La relación*, narrative, diversity.

"I have already stated that throughout all this country we went naked, and as we were unaccustomed to being so we cast our skins like serpents" (135), Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca writes in *La relación*, his exhilarating, hagiographically conceived account of the wanderings in the New World which began with his hopes for social ascent in the service of the Imperial venture, wealth, prestige and authority, but led to his recognizing the value of the personal adventure of descent into the realm of an elementary, existential experience in the service of God. Cabeza de Vaca's narrative progress leads through a paradoxical reality of the uncharted and the unnamed taking the familiar shapes of providential signs and redemptive patterns. In the trying barren desert conditions, the nakedness of the crown's treasurer of the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition means vulnerability and suffering, but it also means openness to change and readiness to embrace the new and the different in confrontation with an alien cultural environment. Without his armor and his clothes, "naked as I was born," Cabeza de Vaca often becomes lost, yet his own otherness is then less visible, less threatening, less endangering. Shedding the skin of a conquistador, exposed to the natural forces which by testing his endurance allow him, with God's guidance, to discover the power of his own virtues and skills, he is "like" an Indian. "Indianized but not an Indian, Spanish speaking but not a Spaniard," Juan Bruce-Novoa writes in "Shipwrecked in the Seas of Signification," Cabeza de Vaca remains as "unanchored" in the Indian territory as earlier at sea, his element being "alterability" (13). There is an underlying unease, a troubling ambiguity about his sense of identity, which at the end of his journey, in San Miguel, he lets the voices of the Indians accompanying him articulate:

The Indians cared little or nothing for what was told them; and conversing among themselves said the Christians lied: that we had come whence the sun rises, and they whence it goes down; we healed the sick, they killed the sound; that we had come naked and barefooted, while they had arrived in clothing and on horses with lances; that we were not covetous of anything, but all that was given to us, we directly turned to give, remaining with nothing; that the others had the only purpose to rob whomsoever they found, bestowing nothing to any one.

In this way they spoke of all matters respecting us, which they enhanced by contrast with matters concerning the others, delivering their response through the interpreter of the Spaniards. (Cabeza de Vaca 139–40)

"Us" refers to Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions who, for over eight years of their wanderings, had little time to give thought to the great quest for profit that Narváez's expedition promised. "Others" are now

the Spaniards, not the Indians, whom Cabeza de Vaca fails to convince that “we [the farers] were of the Christians” (138). The Spaniards remain suspicious, as they were when they first saw Cabeza de Vaca “strangely habited as I was, and in company with Indians” and chose to keep a safe distance from him. From their perspective, the narrative makes clear, de Vaca’s resurrection was dubious, neither to be hailed nor unwelcome (especially because his no longer undisputable countrymen “wished to make slaves of the Indians we brought”) (138–39).

After his miraculous return, it does not take de Vaca long to read signs of being culturally “shipwrecked” again. He survived Indian captivity by developing his mediating skills as a trader between tribes and, most efficiently, as a *curandero*, whose traditional role is “to interconnect the spiritual with the physical” (Bruce-Novoa 13). In scenes which can be read as symbolic representations of the marriage of the Christian and the Indigenous (to which the Spanish Church willingly gave consent recognizing the importance of “practical” means in achieving its goals), Cabeza de Vaca writes of the days when, by saying prayers over the bodies of the sick Indians, by making the sign of the cross and by repeatedly breathing on them, he and his companions were able to cure even those “having all the appearances of death” (138). As healers, they can negotiate peace among the tribes: “Throughout these lands,” Cabeza de Vaca writes, “these who were at war with one another made peace to come to greet us and give us all they owned” (138). They did not own much, but they made the Spaniards, now the “children of the sun,” no longer fear either the scorching heat or the cold of the desert night. Once back to the comforts of New Galicia, their healing and the negotiating powers seem to diminish. Cabeza de Vaca’s belief that “to bring all these people to Christianity and subjection to Your Imperial Majesty, they must be won by kindness, the only certain way” (140) anticipates the inescapable rather than makes his appeal win the support off the practices of the Spaniards’ faith and rule. The blazing “Badthing” he learns about from the Avavares acquires distinctly Spanish features and is not to be laughed at or ridiculed.

It is not surprising that *La relación* has received so much critical attention and has been put to so many political uses, ranging from the construction of the Black Legend (in the United States the first English translation was published in 1871) to the construction of the Chicano identity (by being re-discovered as one of the fundamental texts which focus on cultural hybridity in the United States-Mexico borderlands). Likely to be initially conceived as a way of promoting further exploration of the New World (and the need for moral guidance in the endeavor), telling us of the adventure of mobility and adaptability, the text of *La relación* opens itself to the flow of various interpretations and proves

particularly useful for commentators attempting to address concerns of the present moment. What proves helpful are the formal features of the account from 1536. It does not “sit,” as it were, in a single genre but moves from a fast-paced narrative taking necessary short-cuts to avoid monotony, to an essayistic, more scholarly explication, or more abstract speculation. It is this flexibility, with reference to both the experience it communicates and the literary form it is given, that some readers may accept as encouragement to view it in association with other cultural texts, however remotely these might be located. In a short essay for *A New Literary History of America*, Ilan Stavans writes of the account's contextual affinities with the works of Jack London and Ernest Hemingway (“the ultimate frontier story . . . endurance and personal courage”), or these of Henry Thoreau (“civil disobedience and refusal of social norms”) and John Muir (“retreat into wilderness”) (15). Perhaps more direct lines of correspondence could be drawn between Cabeza de Vaca's wanderer and Herman Melville's Ishmael, an orphan who survives the wreck, remains curious of “barbarous coasts” and, as the multi-voiced “Quarter-Deck” chapter demonstrates so well, is always ready to embrace ethnic difference.

There were more than six hundred people, not all of them Spanish, who on 17 June, 1527 left the port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River to sail the Atlantic. Those who survived were Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Alonso del Castillo Maldonado, Andrés Dorantes de Carranza, and Estevanico (or Estebanico, or Esteban), Dorantes's enslaved Moor. In Cabeza de Vaca's account, the name of the Moroccan slave closes the list: “*el cuatro [soberviente] se llama Estevanico, es negro alarabe, natural de Azamor*” (Lalami 324). Out of the margins of *La relación*, an early text documenting the colonization of America, and out of the politics of changing attitudes to the very concept of marginality, re-reading early texts in the light of their modern relevance, there emerges the figure of Estebanico in Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (2014), a Pulitzer Prize finalist and an American Book Award winner. In the Moroccan-American writer's book, the slave rises to the position of narrator and main protagonist. He is a Muslim, a religious man, and he begins appropriately: “In the name of God, most compassionate, most merciful. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds, and prayers and blessings be on our prophet Muhammad and upon all his progeny and companions” (3). This is a strong statement of faith, but such invocations of a single religion as a source of strength are, in fact, less frequent and less intrusive in the “moor's account” than in Cabeza de Vaca's; declarative as they appear, they speak also of the narrator's fascination with words, their sounds and the ways of putting them together into compositional designs. He begins the story of the journey from Azemmur to La Florida to Mexico City to Hawikuh (whose colors

“the servants of the empire” mistook for those of the Seven Cities of Gold) by reclaiming his real name: Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori. His must be a “humble work,” as he says of it, but the name of the author it bears has a ring of pride and elation to it that makes it sound in no way inferior to that of the author of *La relación*. More importantly, it aspires to be a “true story,” not an alternative but a corrective to the text of the “rival storyteller,” Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. As Estebanico, he was a slave to the Castilian men of power; as Mustafa he is a free man again, much more so than his ex-masters, “bound by the rules of the society” they belong to and “led [in their narratives] to omit certain events while exaggerating others, and to suppress some details while inventing others” (3). Whether “black or white, master or slave, rich or poor, man or woman,” Mustafa writes in the introduction to his story (more properly, a series of stories at times rejecting the rigidity of chronological order), we all want to “survive the eternity of darkness” (3–4). This is, of course, Lalami’s voice playing with her protagonist’s and telling us of the fears and the courage of those who practice the religion of writing, and rather than being victimized by viewing its goals dogmatically, celebrate the adventure of telling the “truth in the guise of entertainment” (4). *The Moor’s Account* makes the reader (and whenever Lalami has Estebanico say emphatically “reader,” she means to address both Western and Eastern audiences) aware of the pleasure of “literary” freedom on a journey across various traditions, conventions, narrative patterns of discovery, with self-discovery at the very heart of the process of telling.

There still remains the question of credibility: can Estebanico’s way of weaving the narrative of his “wondrous adventures” bring us any closer to the “truth” today than the Spaniards’ way of reading various signs could bring them to earthly or heavenly riches then? In a critical discussion of Lalami’s book for *The New York Review of Books*, Wyatt Mason wrote: “The trouble with Lalami’s version—scrupulously researched, dependably in line with the trajectory de Vaca describes in detail—is that the voice she has forged to fill the silence of history, the written voice of Mustafa’s own account in which Estebanico at last speaks for himself, doesn’t seem plausibly that of a singular human being” (24). What weakens the voice’s plausibility and at the same time empowers it with the possibility of reaching a wider audience (by modern standards) is that Mustafa’s text is not in Arabic, or in Spanish, or in Portuguese, but in English. Estebanico’s chances of becoming a successful trader in Morocco, then of surviving in America, and finally of finding there (in a Zuni village) a place he can call his home depend largely on what he declares to be his “love” of and “a certain ease” with languages. Mustafa’s command of English, however, as Mason notes and as Lalami writes about herself in a passage quoted in the review, is clearly the proof

of the “linguistic versatility” of the author born in Morocco, living in the United States, holding a PhD in linguistics, coming to love literature through her knowledge of French, writing and teaching in English. Readers may still raise their brows in wonder when Mustafa writes about the Moroccan boys’ school “credentials” (32) or his wife’s, Oyomasot’s, reluctance “to listen to her mother’s complaints about her many idiosyncracies” (242) or when he provides a historical frame for his account by reporting on events in the wider world, including the news about the King of England who “wrested himself from the authority of the Church and married a courtesan named Anne Boleyn” (283). Equally puzzling may be the use of colloquial idioms that evidently belong to much later epochs. Indeed, the trouble with such intrusion of elements pertaining to “foreign” linguistic registers is that they are of an incidental rather than a systematic nature and can hardly be explained by the narrative’s self-conscious practice of following uniformly a certain conventional strategy. On the other hand, could they not be seen as small, somewhat provocative gestures adding to the sense of authorial freedom, winks given to the reader, knowingly or unknowingly, suggesting the possibility of communicating meanings which transcend a particular historical moment? As there is no information about Estebanico’s life, Lalami may invent (and she occasionally lets readers clearly see that she is doing so) her own story that will best serve her purposes and lead its narrator to his experience in America, where it can intersect with that of Cabeza de Vaca’s and the meanings he and his commentators want to give it.

We learn, for example, that in Azemmur, when he was seven, Mustafa preferred the souq to the classroom. On market days he would skip school to watch fortune-tellers, faith healers, herbalists, apothecaries, beggars, and listen to the stories they “told or foretold” which “comforted people, inspired them, allowed them to imagine a future they had denied themselves” (33). An early memory takes him back to a tent at the market where “men of different ages and stations, merchants in linen clothes, farmers in patched jellabas, or Jews in customary black” (33) gathered around the figure of the healer speaking with a strange accent and bringing relief to a black patient by covering his back with hot glasses, “little towers of different colors.” In their desire to see the effects of the treatment, the people in the tent are “united.” It is at this point that Mustafa recognizes in the patient his own father. The father would like Mustafa to follow his profession of a notary, “a dutiful recorder of events in other people’s lives” (33), but on that market day he also makes his son understand that his way of serving others and experiencing a sense of community and brotherhood would be a lonely way of an outcast telling his own story. Reader, he seems to be saying, I have just let you witness with me an act of healing as transcendence of divisions, acceptance of difference and variety. Such an act must take

different forms and, as in Cabeza de Vaca's narrative, it can be hinted at or explicitly present to serve more didactic ends. It is not accidental that, years later, Estebanico is entrusted with the task of furnishing sails for the rafts which may hopefully bring a party of lost travellers to the safety of an abandoned ship. He collects and sews together old pieces of cloth: flags, sheets, shirts, vestments, handkerchiefs. When unfurled, the sails, made up of "a great jumble of colors, textures and shapes," catch wind and the slave's heart fills with a liberating sense of "boundless pride" (135). Is he suggesting connections between what he manages to accomplish so well for the benefit of his companions and the satisfaction he gets from weaving the text for his readers in the manner both foretelling and reminiscent of Melville's *sobreviviente*, or his humble, consumptive "Usher" who, to dust his collection of books, uses a handkerchief "with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world"?

It is a long and dangerous way from Azemmur to Mexico-Tenochtitlán where Mustafa's account nears its end, but what he has to tell us there, more directly than on the occasion of making the sails, confirms and strengthens what the market experience revealed to his awakened senses. In a crowded cathedral on the feast of Santiago de Apostol, contemplative and rebellious, Mustafa thinks about other ways of healing than what bishop Zumárraga's "gospel of peace" promises Indians. By that time he has already seen and heard enough to admit having been, through his silence, an accomplice to "pillaging, beatings, and rapes," to hate dogmatism won and supported by means of whips, swords and muskets, as well as dogmatism wearing the guise of kindness. No wonder that when the smoke from the burning candles fills his eyes with tears and makes him sneeze in the profound silence of the cathedral, Cabeza de Vaca leans forward and frowns in his direction. That he should be used a "model" in a mission of conversion which would make Indians "flock" to the Catholic church, "just as the multitudes in Italy flooded to Saint Francis," strikes him as "irony," not so much because of his Islamic faith but because he feels "as far removed from the bishop's idea of a proper Christian as any Indian was" (275). He and Cabeza de Vaca were and are still together, but the black slave seems to have walked a longer and brighter way. Having learned his own lesson of "alterability," having adopted the Indian ways and "spoken their languages," he calls for an all-embracing church. His own voice has a missionary quality (with Emersonian overtones), but it helps him endure the cathedral's stifling atmosphere:

Standing in that half-finished church, surrounded by statues of prophets and saints, I wondered why God created so many varieties of faiths in the world if He intended all of us to worship Him in the same fashion. This

thought had never occurred to me when I was a young boy memorizing the Holy Qur'an, but as I spent time with Indians I came to see how limiting the notion of one truth really was. Was the diversity in our beliefs, not their unity, the lesson God wanted to impart? Surely it would have been in His power to make us of one faith if that had been His wish. Now the idea that there was only one set of stories for all of mankind seemed strange to me. (275–76)

When Mustafa rushes out of the cathedral “desperate for fresh air,” he stumbles over “an old Indian man with a branded face and a missing arm,” a victim of the Spanish conquest in whom he can perhaps also see his one-armed father. The church he runs away from will remain “half-finished” as long as it fails to embrace diversity. Mustafa’s new idea is a very old one. It is, however, Lalami shows, always worth being put again in a story which, by a new version of the past it offers and a variety of readings it hopes to receive in the future, gives the idea further significance, just as by circulating among the Indians, the story of Estebanico’s healing powers made these powers stronger with the story’s every new telling.

The belief that “a good story can heal” (231) is as much part of the Eastern as of the Western tradition. Mustafa discovers that what he learned in the teeming markets of Azemmur holds true in the barren landscapes of America. It does not seem to trouble Lalami that her narrator’s discovery was that of one blazing the cultural trail of correspondences for the first time while her and the reader’s discovery is mediated by the pleasure of finding analogies between Mustafa’s imagined narrative and the many texts of and about indigenous cultures testifying to such correspondences. One cannot help thinking about Leslie Marmon Silko’s “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,” first presented orally, and later acquiring the status of a classic cultural essay. Giving examples of various therapeutic functions of storytelling, she concludes by remembering an old Indian woman, her Aunt Suzie, talking about “going over there,” by which, Silko realizes, she does not mean dying but “a journey that perhaps we can only begin to understand through an appreciation for the boundless capacity of language, which, through storytelling brings us together, despite great distances between cultures, despite great distances in time” (357). Lalami’s book also finds its place on the library shelves next to the Chicana/o writers, such as Rudolfo Anaya or Pat Mora, whose fictional and poetic *curanderas* and *curanderos* speak of ways of healing the individual and communal wounds in the borderlands Mustafa traveled through, and of the actual local practitioners of the art of verbal healing, such as Elena Avila who in *Woman Who Glows in the Dark* defines a *plática* in terms that writers of all cultures and all times may wish to define their work: “an exchange that

happens between my heart and my client” (150). Assuming the role of a shaman or *curandero*, Mustafa “listened to the sick man or woman and offered consolation in the guise of a long story” (Lalami 212). The story may be one of the many his mother told him when he was a little boy in Azemmur.

“Reader,” Mustafa says at some point, “the joy of a story is in the telling” (124), and the reader knows he is speaking of the kind of joy denied in the official Spanish narratives which, whether written or oral, are “synonymous with power” (128). In order to be told well, the stories need to be listened to well, the way Mustafa and his companions learn to listen when the Avavares tell them about “their ancestors, their neighbors, good and bad, the spirits that populate their world” (232). In a scene when Dorantes, accompanied by his slave, Castillo and Cabeza de Vaca are having dinner with Cortés (Estebanico is there because he has important information, while no other guests are invited as the conversation is confidential), the host neither enjoys the food nor expects to hear a long story told in a good way. Rather, he demands clear answers to direct questions he asks, although, having spies in the province, he already knows some of them. What really interests him are distances measured in dates and other clues helping to draw “a precise map” necessary for further exploration of the land; the Spanish crown cannot afford to let the territory north of the Rio Grande hide its riches. “We are doers, señores. Doers,” Lalami imagines Cortés saying to his guests. Eager “to say something that would interest or impress the famous Cortés,” Dorantes speaks “quickly” (290-91). Cabeza de Vaca seems more reserved but, as Mustafa observes, he finds Cortés’s “we” flattering. He is with his Spanish countrymen now and feels honored to have his position in their hierarchical, formalized world finally affirmed. He was different in the northern deserts. There, in a setting strikingly contrasting with the scene of the official banquet in the garden of the Cuernavaca fortress, Cabeza de Vaca hugged Mustafa “like a brother” after their long separation in the wilderness and could listen to his stories “with attention, neither interrupting nor hurrying [him]” (217). He would then give his own account of life among Indians and let Mustafa discover in the Spaniard “a kindred spirit, a fellow storyteller” (217). In *The Moor’s Account*, Mustafa never gets a chance to read Cabeza de Vaca’s account. However, because they have experienced the same shipwrecks and shared the horrors and the joys of a long walk as slaves and masters of their fate, Mustafa knows of the double purpose the narrative will serve. It will be delivered, personally and proudly, by Cabeza de Vaca to the imperial court and read officially as the Joint Report for possible signs of the mirage of wealth, becoming an incentive for another journey of conquest which will bring more suffering and more destruction. But long after Cabeza de Vaca

has traveled home to Castile and long after his narrative has gathered dust in the state archives together with other documents of diminishing literal worth, it will emerge again as yet another, personal and humble, record of the brotherhood and sisterhood of storytellers struggling to make life meaningful, each in his or her own way. Like a shaman's or a *curandero's* practice, it may do harm and it may do good.

When Cabeza de Vaca disappears from his narrative, Mustafa appears as Estebanico again in the text about Francisco Vásquez de Coronado's expedition. This time, however, he will not let himself be enslaved. He has been there before. He has redeemed his own primary sin of greed he committed as a trader in Azemmur and he has recovered from the humiliation of having sold himself to Narvaéz's greed. When "[e]verything was lost," he feels compelled to re-affirm his freedom by re-establishing his position of the writer of his own narrative: "I still had one thing. My story" (Lalami 296). Fiction comes to rescue. He will remain free by pretending to be a slave. When Coronado, Marco de Niza and others set out on their journey north to look for the Seven Cities of Gold, they make the mistake of using Mustafa rather than Estebanico for their guide. As befits a lover of different languages growing more and more versatile in the "seas of signification," he devises a scheme based on a system of signs which will allow him to keep a safe distance from those who claim to be his masters and, at the same time, bring him closer to the place which he himself wants to reach and which has nothing in common with their misplaced goals. Mustafa's idea wins the support of Father Marco, a frustrated recorder of the expedition not used to the discomforts of the journey, who cannot fail to see how appropriate the idea's clarity is in the conditions of the territory they are about to enter and how flattering it is to his own ambitions. Finding no joy in writing, Father Marco is a poor reader of ironic meanings. According to the plan, Mustafa will proceed alone ahead of the main party to inquire about the location of the Seven Cities of Gold and to allow Marco de Niza to be "properly introduced" to the Indians. The splendor of the riches he learns of will be signaled to his followers by the size of the crosses left behind him. If, which should not be doubted, the place the black slave discovers is as rich as Tenochtitlán, "the signal would be a white cross the size of a man" (316). Once Mustafa reaches Hawikuh, with its walls lit by the evening sun reminding him of his hometown in the East, he explains to Ahku, the cacique of the Zunis, that with the power of the white people's weapons the only way to stop Father Marco's advance is "to create a fiction": "A story? Ahku asked. Yes. I replied." Father Marco, and through him Coronado, will receive the news that Mustafa never found what they were looking for and that he was killed by the "fierce Indians." Thus, he will be born as a free man again, since his masters will not take

the risk of avenging the death of a black slave. When not fully convinced, Ahku asks: “What if the white man in Vacapa does not believe your story,” to which Mustafa replies: “He will . . . if the messengers know how to tell it” (319–20). This is the writer’s signature that Laila Lalami puts in her book and while a question mark, perhaps intentionally, still lingers over the degree of originality she manages to accomplish in it, one never doubts the honesty of her ambition.

In the last paragraph of his narrative, Mustafa offers his story to the child he will have with the Indian woman, Oyomasot. It openly celebrates the act of writing as a fully democratic act of accepting difference. Mustafa wants to make sure that the text he is about to finish, a guide to a new life he will be remembered by, is properly understood. “Properly” does not hide irony. Nor does “really” in “what really happened,” as long as the story finds its strength in being one of the many possible. With Oyomasot’s hand on his cheek, Mustafa remembers his mother’s stories. He “fed” on them when he was lost, when “he needed comfort or when [he] wanted to give it to others” (320). The Moroccan stories, some most likely not of native origin, crossed “the Ocean of Fog and Darkness” to prove their healing powers and, changed perhaps in the process of being told to accommodate different conditions, became transcultural and extraterritorial. The one who knows how to tell stories transgresses the division of gender as well; Mustafa is like an Indian and like a mother. However naked and childlike it made Cabeza de Vaca appear, the Spaniard’s narrative could no more suggest such a metamorphosis of perspective than it could describe the colors and the shapes of Hawikuh. It is not so much despite the questions of plausibility and transparency of the literary tricks it uses, but rather with their assistance that the “guise of entertainment” in Lalami’s book wants to take itself seriously and to convince the reader to do likewise. The imaginative proposition conjured from the past and given the name of Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori is didactic and it ends with a strong emphasis on its reference to our time:

The servants of the Spanish empire have given a different story to their king and their bishop, their wives and their friends. The Indians with whom I lived for eight years, each one of them, each one of thousands, have told yet other stories. Maybe there is no true story, only imagined stories, vague reflections of what we saw and what we heard, what we felt and what we thought. Maybe if our experiences, in all their glorious, magnificent colors, were somewhat added up, they would lead us to the blinding light of the truth. To God belong the east and the west, whichever way you turn, there is the face of God. God is great. (320–21)

The language of diversity, the author of *The Moor’s Account* tells us convincingly in a stylized voice, may be a true religion.

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“A past that has never been present”:
The Literary Experience of Childhood
and Nostalgia

ABSTRACT

This essay explores the modernist aesthetic involved in creating a fictive, nostalgic, childhood experience. Evoking the experience of childhood through fiction is as close to actually reliving childhood as we can get. The author argues that it is possible to actually transport the reader into not only the idealized world of childhood, but more so into an embodied experience of childhood through the use of different kinds of narrative and stylistic configurations. In a stylistic and narratological analysis of three modernist novels, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931), Tarjei Vesaas' *The Ice Palace* [*Is-slottet*] (1963) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), the author explores the different ways that literature can create (or re-create) the very experience of childhood through literary style. The strategies involved in establishing a fictive experience of childhood extend from narratological choices such as free indirect style, strict focalization through a child in the narrative (which implies limitations in perception and cognitive abilities, as well as in linguistic terms) to the use of a child-like temporality, the hyperbolic use of phenomena, and an emphasis of the sensorial aspects of perception.

Keywords: literary experience, childhood, nostalgia, modernism, aesthetics.

Literature can be *about* nostalgia, but it can also *evoke* nostalgia in the reader. Similar to the Madeleine cake in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, these evocations can be involuntary and accidental, but they can also be the effect of a deliberate nostalgic aesthetic offering tropes, symbols and stylistics that open up the potential for the reader's nostalgia. Nevertheless, since personal nostalgia is so closely related to individual biography, these aesthetic formations can, at best, trigger biographical memories and longings in the reader, blending private nostalgia with fictive nostalgia. There are several stylistic approaches to achieve this: analeptic narration,¹ free indirect discourse, anachronies in the narrative order, and the use of iterative narrative frequency, as well as established nostalgic tropes such as the ruin, shepherd, pastoral landscapes, to mention a few examples. The most resourceful trope to use, though, is that of childhood. In "Our flame, the will-o'-the-wisp that dances in a few eyes, is soon to be blown out and will fade." *Modern Literary Nostalgia as a Death Mood* I describe how the nostalgic trope of childhood relates to nostalgia's teleological nature:

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Nostalgia evoked through the use of childhood is generally achieved by addressing the world of childhood as an alternative to the present. This is done either through the use of an idealized space or time, by reinforcing its past character, or by using common symbols or representations of childhood that force the reader into the sensations of his own past childhood. (115–16)

The strength of the childhood trope is its universality: it is both private and impersonal as a literary representation. This is one of the reasons why the romantic nostalgic poets replaced the pastoral shepherd with that of the child: "We can only sympathize imaginatively with a shepherd in a pastoral; we all have memories of childhood, and thus a personal connection to a child," writes Aaron Santesso in *A Careful Longing: The Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia* (71). Thus, the poet is "able to engage with the reader's own nostalgia" (Santesso 71) through using a trope that irresistibly forces the reader into his own youth and childhood. The experience becomes personal, but the strategy is impersonal. Santesso convincingly situates the childhood trope as the most essential in the nostalgic, romantic poetry he investigates. The nostalgic childhood trope also includes everything associated with childhood such as children, children's games, and toys. Furthermore, Santesso writes that Schiller argued that children were

¹ For an extensive analysis of analeptic narration and the application of textual memory in order to create a nostalgic reading experience, see Salmose "Reading Nostalgia: Textual Memory in *The Great Gatsby*."

also associated with nature because “children were emblematic of a lost relationship with nature” (70). Nostalgic childhood tropes, then, come to symbolize nature as well.

The idea of using childhood imagery in order to create possibilities for reader associations with nostalgic domains is fairly common. A seminal example is the significant scene in J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* when Holden experiences sudden happiness watching his little sister Phoebe on the carousel. He himself does not understand why, but the whole image of the carousel, always playing the same songs, reminds him of his own childhood. Although he is not aware of it yet, this step of looking back to his own childhood with a subconscious desire is actually the first step to adulthood where this happiness will also be infused with the tragic element of nostalgia (Salinger 210–13). Holden’s nostalgia can be transferred to us as readers and can trigger similar nostalgic memories through the trigger of the carousel.

Another example of how the allusion to childhood is effective in evoking nostalgia can be found in Virginia Woolf’s highly nostalgic novel *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf chooses to address the world and wonder of childhood through Mrs Ramsay’s young son James Ramsay in order to firmly establish the nostalgic tone of her book. The book opens with a series of sensations—“[t]he wheel-barrow, the lawn-mower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling . . .” (5)—that together with Woolf’s rhythmic style put the reader right into the wonder of sensations of childhood.

Obviously, the genre of the children book also contains adult nostalgic elements. “*Wind in the Willows*,” writes Fay Sampson, “is not really a children’s book, but a middle class adult’s nostalgia for a rural idyll, a flight from the industrial and proletarian present” (62). This adult longing is also stressed in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. The sadness of lost childhood, as represented by Neverland, is forcefully explained by the narrator: “On these magic shores children at play are for ever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more” (Barrie 14). The constructed and idealized childhood in some children books, thus, comes to represent both a reminder of the childhood world and a nostalgic melancholia through its for ever lostness.

As noted above, the broad use of childhood in order to evoke readers’ nostalgia of their own childhood is a proven strategy. By extension, it is also possible to actually transport the reader into not only the idealized world of childhood, but more into an embodied experience of childhood through the use of different kinds of narrative and stylistic configurations. Where childhood tropes and scenes trigger our own childhood memories, the literary experience of childhood captures the very representation of these

memories through a focalized childhood mood. This nostalgic strategy is different than, for example, the adult remembrance of childhood through Victorian children's books. In focalized childhood, the narrator and focalizer is the child itself creating an interior childhood consciousness. The potential of such an aesthetic choice, in terms of nostalgic experience, is that the engagement with the childhood world is a more embodied and sensory experience. Although the childhood experience through fiction can be similar to one's own experience, its fictive nature still creates what Maurice Merleau-Ponty has described as "a past that has never been present" (252). The fictiveness of the literary experience makes it slightly unreal, just as idealized nostalgic memories. Even if fiction can simulate childhood in a convincing manner by reverberating the sensation and perception of childhood, as we will see in the analyses in this essay, that experience is confronted by the constant reminder of its pastness through the present, adult reading situation. Hence, it is in the oscillation between the adult time of reading and the childhood experience that nostalgia emanates.

Stylistic transmediations of childhood experience into fiction, and the subsequent creation of nostalgic experiences, is parallel to the experimentation of form in modernist fiction and heightened nostalgic awareness during modernity.² The creation of a childhood consciousness is thus a consequence of "the inward turn," modernism's focus on interior consciousness and subjective experience. Examples of modernist fiction that are constructed around ideas and concepts of nostalgia are innumerable. Some notable examples include James Joyce's *Ulysses*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway*, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, D. H. Lawrence's *Lost Girl*, and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*. Somewhat rarer are modernist novels that engage in childhood consciousness. The three diverse, but comparable, novels that make up this analysis, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931), Tarjei Vesaas' *The Ice Palace [Is-slottet]* (1963) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) will be used to exemplify how a specific, modernist literary style creates the potential for a reader experience of childhood (and by extension nostalgia). It is not my

² For studies on the relationship between nostalgia and literary modernism see: Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (19–32), Aaron Santesso's *A Careful Longing: The Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia* (72), Niklas Salmose's *Towards a Poetics of Nostalgia: The Nostalgic Experience in Modern Fiction* (101–08), Sylviane Agacinski's *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (3–61), Karin Johannisson's *Nostalgia: En Känslas Historia* (125–42) and Randall Stevenson's "Not What it Used to be: Nostalgia and the Legacies of Modernism" (23–39).

argument that these novels entirely capture the experience of childhood, only that a few scenes or sections do so. Hence, I will not deal with the novels in whole, but only sections from them. Furthermore, the three authors represented here are not selected for their considerable interest in childhood or childhood tropes; to my knowledge, with a few exceptions, their publications are not centred on childhood either as an idea or as style. They are, however, experimental in form and occasionally obsessed with nostalgia and temporality within their own experience of modernity. This nostalgic infatuation affects their content, as well as their writing style, accommodating what could be called a modernist aesthetics of nostalgia.

My definition of a literary childhood experience is the experience of childhood as an interior consciousness that is inflamed by sensations, perceptions and embodiment that simulate true childhood experience and memory. Literary childhood experience, thus, can be read as a basic combination of definitions such as *childhood consciousness*, *the embodiment of childhood*, *the experience of childhood*, *the sensations of childhood*. It is not my intention here to engage in the contemporary and appealing theoretical debate on narrative experience, built on cognitive and enactivist approaches from such diverse fields as cognitive and evolutionary psychology and neuro science; it is both too complex to develop within the scope of this essay and, as far as my own interests are concerned, not entirely relevant to my own analysis.³ Still, it might be worthwhile to discuss Marco Caracciolo's distinction between consciousness-attribution and consciousness-enactment in *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*. According to Caracciolo, we always attribute a consciousness to fictive characters as "an inevitable consequence of our tendency to interpret some bodily and verbal signs as expressive of consciousness" (117). This is different from when we "imagine *from* someone's perspective"; consciousness-enactment is about how "readers manage to experience a fictional world through the consciousness different from their own" (118). Caracciolo offers a series of triggers of consciousness-enactment that on the whole parallel my own stylistic and narratological analysis in this essay, such as internal focalization, stylistic markers, punctuation and consciousness tags (although I occasionally use a different terminology) (126). What I add to Caracciolo's theory is how these triggers operate also

³ For further reading on new theories of fictive experience, see Marco Caracciolo's *The Experientiality of Narrative* (2014), Alan Palmer's *Fictional Minds* (2004), Marco Caracciolo and Russell T. Hurlburt's *A Passion for Specificity: Confronting Inner Experience in Literature and Science* (2016), and Monika Fludernik's *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* (1996) where she develops the concept of *experientiality*.

within the biographical and social memory of the reader. However, similar to cognitive approaches to fictive experience, such as Caracciolo's and my investigation of a subjective reader experience, will be balanced by a more formalistic approach, using stylistics and narratology to inform how the literary aesthetics operate more in detail and how they indeed create the possibilities of childhood experience. I mainly use Gérard Genette's narratological taxonomy for this purpose.

THE WAVES OF CHILDHOOD (*THE WAVES*)

The deeply profound symbolism of water, sea, and especially waves has attracted human thought for ages through their associations with both the repetitiveness and passing of time. The waves' notion of change and obfuscation, and their relation to very basic natural elements, made them appropriate both as the title and the essential motif in Woolf's *The Waves*, a novel deeply engaged with the topic of time. The interludes describing the changing character (different waves) of an unchangeable entity (waves) remind the reader of the paradox of the passing of life and the universe's circle of life through death and resurrection. This reinforces the sense of the individual fate of *one* life, and the insignificance of this one life in a cosmic perspective. Waves stimulate a backtracking activity since they erase our marks in the sand and thus our own identities. Woolf manages to give her waves both a detailed material form and a symbolic value:

The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually.

As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously. (3)

The analogy to the human activity of breathing forces the reader to associate these waves with life, in addition to the other associations s/he may make. Moreover, the analogy also relates to children, or children sleeping, and how we as adults listen to their breaths, which is highly appropriate since these waves are supposed to symbolize the aging of the human being. Accordingly, we meet the protagonists as children when their heartbeats resemble "thick strokes moving" and potently sweeping "a thin

veil of white water across the sand.” When the protagonists are older the waves also illustrate their older age as in this example of late middle age:

Red and gold shot through the waves, in rapid running arrows, feathered with darkness. Erratically rays of light flashed and wandered, like signals from sunken islands, or darts shot through laurel groves by shameless, laughing boys. But the waves, as they neared the shore, were rubbed of light, and fell in one long concussion, like a wall falling, a wall of grey stone, unpierced by any chink of light. (117)

The late middle age waves are contrasted to the childhood waves (relatively light descriptions of childhood with smoothing and calm words, and waves that emancipated out of the sky as the sun rose) in a remembrance of those early waves. The brightness of the early waves is hinted at in the description of rays of light that flash and wander erratically and the loss of childhood is established in the metaphor of “*signals from sunken islands*,” as well as in the reference to “*laughing boys*.” Through the sunset’s colours and a wandering light, which abruptly ends, we enter the reality of old age: the dark waves that are passionless and motionless. The last sentence in the book is even robbed of any kind of life, or at least prosaic life: “*The waves broke on the shore*” (167).

The idea of waves as a symbol is not novel at all, and precisely because of that, it tends to function as a representation for the tragic and melancholic ingredients of life. The genius of *The Waves* lies in the way the image of the waves alters and echoes the past images of the waves in order to contemplate the passage of time. The sensation of the waves also infiltrates the whole rhythm of the book, which further enhances its nostalgic potential. “I am writing to a rhythm, not to a plot” (Woolf, *A Reflection of the Other Person* 204), Woolf noted, and in fact the novel’s tempo is governed by the rhythm of the waves. One could say that Woolf’s style is an undulating style, and it is not only in the novel’s general structure, as in the recurring interludes, that we find this rhythm but also in the text itself. The rhythm of the first waves, “*thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually*” (3), can be likened to how the characters are introduced in a rhythmic fashion that resembles these first waves:

“I see a ring,” said Bernard, “hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.”

“I see a slab of pale yellow,” said Susan, “spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.”

“I hear a sound,” said Rhoda, “cheep, chirp, cheep, chirp; going up and down.”

“I see a globe,” said Neville, “hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.”
“I see a crimson tassel,” said Jinny, “twisted with gold threads.”
“I hear something stamping,” said Louis. “A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.” (Woolf, *The Waves* 4)

The rhythm of the waves is echoed in the use of the same opening word “I” in each sentence. Furthermore, the fact that every speaker’s line is split by the word “said,” the absence of descriptions of how these lines are said, and even the repetitions within Rhoda’s and Louis’s lines, emphasize this rhythm. In addition, the over-representation of the “s,” “sh,” and “ch” sounds echoes the sounds of the waves on the shore.

The initial chapter of Woolf’s *The Waves* is a journey for the reader through the consciousness of childhood, which opens up the possibility of childhood identification and hence nostalgia. Although the six children do employ some different personal characteristics, they share a common non-linguistic syntax. The slight variety in their respective personalities helps the reader to find one of them to identify more directly with.

Steve Pinkerton has briefly explored this idea of childhood consciousness in his article “Linguistic and Erotic Innocence in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*,” in which he notices the children’s “infantile relation to language” (75). He discusses their wide use of catachresis that at times “[suggests] the poetic fecundity of a child’s mind” (75). It is an accurate description of a style that creates the odd and liberated metaphoric world of a child who has to make up their own language in order to communicate, or understand phenomena yet unknown to them. Thus, leaves “are gathered round the window like pointed ears” (Woolf, *The Waves* 4), and when “the smoke rises, sleep curls off the roof like a mist” (5), “[b]ubbles form on the floor of the saucepan” (5), and “the tablecloth, [is] flying white along the table” (5).

The use of poetic catachresis is but one aspect of the childhood consciousness in the first chapter. Also notable is the microscopic view that the children possess, and how disjointed one impression is from another. The microscopic aspect creates a world of wonder and a world where sensations come before intellect. This becomes immediately apparent in the first six soliloquies.

Each impression is embedded either with “I see” or “I hear,” and this immediately establishes the importance of the sensual aspect of the impression. Colours, shapes, and sounds, usually described with onomatopoeic words, catch the children’s imagination. The impressions are unrelated, and the exact impression they are trying to convey is still uncertain. The use of “I” not only forces the reader into the subjectivity of each child, but also illustrates

how isolated each individual subjectivity is, because communication with other children is not yet developed. This isolation of each child changes immediately in the second round of impressions when this imminent “I” is abandoned for a communicative word. “Look at the spider’s web on the corner of the balcony” (4) is what Bernard says to the others. This means that the other impressions are constructed within the same space, the garden, and are still very much filtered through the different children’s minds. We also notice this change from an isolated subject experiencing sensations into a subject aware of its own body. “Stones are cold to my feet” (4) says Neville, and this is countered by Jinny’s sensation: “The back of my hand burns . . . but the palm is clammy and damp with dew” (4). It is not only the syntax of children that gives the impression of early childhood; it is also the choice of impressions that carry childhood and nostalgic weight in their remarkable detail.

We also notice the duration of the impressions, which start out small and then become more entangled with other impressions. A couple of pages later Jinny expresses a line of thought that is a fast development from the first isolated impressions:

“I was running,” said Jinny, “after breakfast. I saw leaves moving in a hole in the hedge. I thought, ‘That is a bird on its nest.’ I parted them and looked; but there was no bird on a nest. The leaves went on moving. I was frightened. I ran past Susan, past Rhoda, and Neville and Bernard in the tool-house talking. I cried as I ran, faster and faster. What moved the leaves? What moves my heart, my legs? And I dashed in here, seeing you green as a bush, like a branch, very still, Louis, with your eyes fixed. ‘Is he dead?’ I thought, and kissed you, with my heart jumping under my pink frock like the leaves, which go on moving, though there is nothing to move them. Now I smell geraniums; I smell earth mould. I dance. I ripple. I am thrown over you like a net of light. I lie quivering flung over you.” (6)

As Pinkerton observes, now the use of “I” coincides with the use of “my” which “negotiate the self as both subject and object of desire” (Pinkerton 76). The sequence above shows a development towards more prosaic language—gone is the catachresis and the fragmented manner of perception. In its place is self-knowledge and an awareness of their own physiques. The description of the first innocent kiss is very precise in its consequences.

Although the prose becomes more “ordinary” as we follow the development of the children, their particular childhood perceptions prevail. Reading the first two chapters is an experience of the process of a child maturing. As the six children represent six different personalities, there

are further possibilities for childhood identification. This reading process makes it possible to experience nostalgia through the strong emotional reminder of one's own childhood.

THE SENSATIONAL PALACE OF CHILDHOOD (*THE ICE PALACE*)

The most important factor that creates a childhood consciousness in Tarjei Vesaas' *The Ice Palace* is undoubtedly the extensive use of free indirect style (FIS) in order to capture the inner world of the two children, mainly that of Siss. Through the use of FIS, the world of the children or childhood is communicated through a similar, but less radical, focalization as we have seen in *The Waves*. The lack of rationality, limitations in expression, simplicity, repetitions, and a dense detailed experience of the physical, form the base for childhood identification.

Michael J. Toolan writes about FIS that it "has formal characteristics which seem to locate it somewhere between direct and indirect speech: it retains the back-shifted tenses and third-person pronouns of indirect speech, but 'freely' dispenses with any framing introductory clause (such as *he thought, she said*)" (74).⁴ FIS is described by Genette as a narration when "the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then *merged*" (174). This is contrasted with the stream of consciousness, or what Genette names *immediate speech*, where "the narrator is obliterated and the character *substitutes* for him" (174).

FIS is more effective in conveying the nostalgic childhood experience than a traditional stream of consciousness narration because of its unusual sensation of a mixture between the real and the unreal, between reality and dream. This stems from the intimacy of FIS while at the same time it retains the use of third person narration. When one reads the subject "she" one is eventually assured that this "she" is in fact "I." The narration in *The Ice Palace* mixes factual events and enters into FIS without any warning. For example, on the very first page we are transported into FIS only through the use of the word "thoughts":

She gave a start. A loud noise had interrupted her thoughts, her expectancy; a noise like a long-drawn out crack, moving further and further off, while the sound died away. . . .

⁴ For an extensive discussion of how FIS resides between temporal units, see Erlich and Raybould.

Biting cold. But Siss was not afraid of the *cold*. It wasn't *that*. She had started at the noise in the dark, but then she stepped out steadily along the road. (7–8)

“She gave a start” can refer to an action, but also expresses that she *felt* startled. The use of “her thoughts” clearly indicates that we are and have been inside her consciousness. The thoughts that were interrupted were that she “was on her way . . . to something unfamiliar, which was why it was so exciting” (7). The extensive use of sensational descriptions, as in *The Waves*, is already declared by the rather specific description of the sounds of the ice from the lake. Sentences are generally short and somewhat fragmented in order to show the fragmented but poetic world of the child. Even a phrase as short as “[b]iting cold,” where there is a lack of subject and verb, confirms both that this is what she feels and what she thinks. These two words are the ones one would use if one thought out loud that, indeed, it was biting cold. The mystery and the irrational are then unfolded through a phrase such as “[i]t wasn't *that*.”

The apparent, but subtle, perception of the child can be seen in a phrase such as “[a]untie seemed to be talkative” (18). A non-focalized narrator would hardly use the word “seemed” since s/he would know if she was talkative or not. Obviously, we find this kind of expression in classic narration, but in this case the “seemed” appears to indicate the way that Siss is experiencing Auntie.

The children's experience of the world is brimming with repetitions. Instead of using different expressions or synonyms as a normal writer would, the repetitions illustrate the limitations within their consciousness to experience the world in a diverse and complex way. They also connect, poetically, situations and feelings with each other, especially when these are forceful. Thus we find the odd phrase “gleams and radiance” repeated four times in one paragraph when Siss and Unn are looking at themselves in the mirror (23), and Siss repeatedly refers to her fear of the dark as something that is “at the sides of the road” (32–34) while she heads home from Unn in the night.

Likewise, in the cardinal chapter “The Ice Palace” when Unn meets her fate in the ice formation at the waterfall commonly referred to as the Ice Palace, her experience is conveyed with greatest emotional strength through her observant senses, as well as through the limitations of her language. “The black lake” and “rime-white trees,” and close variations on these, occur regularly within this chapter, as well as a return of the previous “gleams and radiance.”

The simulation of children's rationale is to be found here as well. It can be simple things such as a forest being “hostile” or a fear of falling

“down into a hollow where the shadows were” (45) where the odd and charged words “hostile” and “shadows” communicate this rationale. The chapter also simulates a child’s line of thinking as when Unn is meditating upon why she could not go to school:

It was no use sitting down and saying that she didn’t want to go to school. Auntie would never accept that. It was too late to say she was ill too—besides, she was not in the habit of making excuses. She looked at herself quickly in the mirror: she did not look the least bit ill, it was no use telling fibs. She would leave for school as usual, and then make off before she met anyone. Make off and hide until school was over. (38)

First and foremost this chapter echoes the sense of the microscopic experience we saw in *The Waves*, where the details of sensation predominate as in the description of the ice on the lake:

Even the bottom was white with rime and had the thick layer of steel-ice on top of it. Frozen into this block of ice were broad, sword-shaped leaves, thin straws, seeds and detritus from the woods, a brown, straddling ant—all mingled with bubbles that had formed and which appeared clearly as beads when the sun’s rays reached them. (42)

Here the sentences are much longer, since this is not a fragmented experience but a series of impressions tied together either in the thought process or in the chronology in which Unn sees these things. The use of sounds to evoke the impression of the waterfall becomes an elegant transition from far to near. It starts with a “distant roar” (45) and the assertion that you are “not supposed to be able to hear the falls from here” (45). Then the stream’s “noiseless water beg[ins] to whisper” (45), later making “more noise” (46) until it “surge[s] more loudly” (46) and the roar suddenly is much “stronger” (47). When she gets closer to the falls, the sounds become more onomatopoeic. There is a “booming” (48) and the “water dashe[s] itself into white foam” (48) and “plunge[s] down in the middle” (48).

In much the same way as in *The Waves*, our experience of the world through the consciousness of the children allows for identification with the world of the child and thus our own childhood. This effect is achieved by using repetition, free indirect speech, as well as internal focalization in addition to a deliberate sensorial aesthetics.

THE SOUNDS AND SMELL OF CHILDHOOD
 (*THE SOUND AND THE FURY*)⁵

In the first section of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner creates an equally potent childhood experience as we have seen in the two previous examples. The first section of the novel tells the tale of Benjamin “Benjy” Compson, a mentally disabled man, during 7 April 1928. The section is focalized entirely from Benjy’s perspective and is an example of unconditional stream of consciousness as sensations, associations and memories enter into his consciousness randomly and non-linearly throughout the section. Although Benjy is not a child, his perception of the world is that of a child’s due to his mental impairment. Several aspects of Benjy’s section in *The Sound and the Fury* create the possibility of childhood identification. I will list them one after another, dividing them into sections of: “Hyperbolic Sensorial Memory,” “Perceptual and Cognitive Limitations of Childhood” and “Childhood Spatiotemporality.”

HYPERBOLIC SENSORIAL MEMORY

The focused and hyperbolic materiality of a childhood obsession (and memory) is mainly represented by the recurring image of Benjy’s “lost” sister Caddy. Throughout the section, Caddy permeates Benjy’s mind. Her appearance is accentuated through Benjy’s lack of synonyms. Irena Kałuza states: “Benjy’s beloved sister is always ‘Caddy,’ whether she is seven or nineteen years old” (49). Being the child he is, his emotional reaction to Caddy’s absence is sudden grief, or “bellowing.” While Caddy is just temporarily gone, this grief is short and ends upon her return. When she disappears, this grief must turn into trauma. However, since Benjy has no concept of time, he does not understand how long she has been gone, and that she will never return. This results in a permanent clash between hope and despair. That is perhaps the reason why his present is invaded suddenly and abruptly by memories of his sister, even though for Benjy these memories do not appear as memories but as present states.

The abrupt memories, usually—but not always—signalled by the change of normal font to italics, seem strong and very vivid in their

⁵ Caracciolo performs an analysis of consciousness-enactment of the opening paragraphs in *The Sound and the Fury*, an analysis he calls a “Slow-Motion Analysis” (118) in how he studies this text from a micro-analytical perspective. His analysis is preoccupied with in what ways the reader could enact Benjy’s consciousness. The reason I do not involve his brief analysis more in my own reading is because I want to pursue the consequences of this enactment in terms of a fictive childhood experience rather than dwelling on the very nature of consciousness-enactment.

involuntary capacity. Ross and Polk note that the temporal transitions are often guided in a Proustian manner from one sensation to another (10–11). In the novel’s first time change, it is the action of getting caught in the fence that transports Benjy into an earlier episode with Caddy:

We went along the fence and came to the garden fence, where our shadows were. My shadow was higher than Luster’s on the fence. We came to the broken place and went through it.
“Wait a minute.” Luster said. “You snagged on that nail again. Can’t you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail.” *Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through.* (2)

This is different from Proust’s method, where the narrator simplifies the time shifts by commenting on them. We are guided here only by the italic font. The actual doubling of human memory functions through associations or motivators and gives us a more physical, direct and childlike presence of memory and recollection. The physical presence is further aided by the use of a wide range of non-visual senses in describing forcefully the strength of the pasts, primarily through smells and sounds. Benjy rather smells or hears the past, than understands it: Caddy reminds him of the smell of trees, or leaves, pigs smell like pigs rather than look like pigs (28), trees are buzzing (30), father smells like rain (53), and Benjy hears the roof (55). This underlines the general sensorial aspects of memories in the way they are mainly associated with the non-visual senses.

Nevertheless, Benjy’s narrative is also highly visual, rather than verbal (except dialogue), and almost “cinematic” (Polk 145). If we look at the very first sentence: “Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting” (Faulkner 1), the visual aspect comes through in the “curling flower spaces.” Later Benjy does not only see a flag but he also sees how it “flapped on the bright grass and the trees” (1).

PERCEPTUAL AND COGNITIVE LIMITATIONS OF CHILDHOOD

The way that Faulkner narrates Benjy’s perceptual and cognitive limitations are similar to Woolf’s strategies in the opening chapters of *The Waves*. Like children’s, Benjy’s incapacity to link one thing with another, is replicated in the prose, since the lack of cause and effect is obvious. Benjy sees “them hitting,” but not what they are hitting. The omission of the ball is central. Two sentences later, “Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree,” but what is he hunting? Benjy’s lack of perspective is also apparent. As Ross and Polk notice, when the golfers are further away, Benjy experiences them as “small rather than as distant” (10), communicated by Faulkner as “[t]hey were hitting little” (1).

The repetitious prose, as we have seen in *The Ice Palace*, also reinforces the simplicity of childhood, and the somewhat limited perspective of the world is simulated through these repetitions and the use of a reduced number of words and expressions, such as “smells like rain” and a reoccurring symbol like “fire.” When Benjy sees something twice, it gives him the same impression (the narrative often using the same words). On the first page, certain images are repeated. The fence is mentioned eight times. The flag is mentioned five times, but the description of it is exactly reproduced twice: “flapped on the bright grass and the trees.” The flower tree or flower space is mentioned four times. Thus, the repetitious nature of the Benjy’s section, with not only the imagery repeated, but also the simplicity of language, certain mantras, the physicality of the events, all become repetitions internalized by the reader constantly forcing them into the experience of the simple world of childhood.

CHILDHOOD SPATIOTEMPORALITY

Even though we can, through the use of italics, make distinctions between the scenes from 7 April 1928, and the other fifteen located times in the section, they seem appropriately muddled together, almost creating a sense of timelessness, atemporality, perhaps even a sort of hypothetical time. It is truly a Bergsonian time flux, where the past times flow over us involuntarily and unexpectedly. Donald M. Kartiganer writes that “[t]he quality of Benjy’s memory is the chief indicator of his nonhuman perception, for he does not recollect the past: he relives it” (365). It is human rather than non-human, as it is through subjective time that we capture the human sensations of temporalities. Polk addresses an important issue, when he acknowledges that Benjy “does not use words; he does not *tell* us things, but experiences the world directly” (145). Through Benjy’s experience, narrated mimetically rather than diegetically, readers do have the possibility of sharing this kind of immediate experience. Although this kind of experience, and the flux of temporalities, is not reserved for children’s perception of the world, the associative and sense-based way of being in the world is usually related to that of a child’s lesser cognitive structure of time and duration.

The ambiguity of temporality as seen in the main structure of Benjy’s section is further established on its micro level. At a first reading it seems that scenes from 7 April 1928, are conveyed mainly through the use of progressive forms. Benjy’s account starts with “I could see them hitting” and “[t]hey were coming toward” (Faulkner 1). We are, of course, lacking time indicators since Benjy’s experience of the world is void of traditional time markers due to his deprivation of an ordinary sense of temporality and

spatiality. As with the use of FIS in *The Ice Palace*, past progressives are very appropriate for conveying a nostalgic tone, since they have this unique mix of temporalities in the tense itself. The use of past progressives does signal a temporality somewhere in between the past and the ongoing present; it does not completely belong to a past event, but it is not entirely a present activity either. Frances O. Austin actually claims that the ambiguity of past or present time naturally leads to something “out of time” (“*Ing* forms in *Four Quartets*” 24). In his study of the past progressives (and present participles) in T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* he concludes in a reply to Peter Barry that Eliot uses them as representation of “Eternity—which he sets against the time of clock and calendars” (“Making Sense of Syntax: A Reply to Peter Barry” 167). This sense of “out of time” makes past progressives very appropriate for conveying a nostalgic childhood tone, since they have this unique mix of temporalities in the tense itself.

The use of past progressives also makes scenes visual, actualizing a feeling that it *is* happening before us. This is confirmed by Toolan as he observes that

progressives are not swiftly passed over in the process of reading the text. The co-occurring adjuncts help to retain the reader’s attention, elaborating upon those predicates and their implications, and diverting the reader yet further from the linear sequence of events ordinarily signaled by a succession of non-expanded predicates in simple past tense. (113)

What Toolan means by retaining the reader’s attention is what Michael Hogan suggests as being an “immediacy,” an “immersion in the flux of the moment, and suspension within a single moment of time” that creates a dreamlike quality (qtd. in Toolan 102).

If we study the first page more carefully, we notice that the past progressive style is not constant. The golfers suddenly were not taking out the flag, they “took the flag out” and Benjy was not holding on to the fence, he “held to the fence.” Throughout this section, there is a mix between past tense and past progressive tense, further blurring the temporalities between now and then. However, if we look at the first narrative time change, we observe that we, with one exception, enter a total past tense:

Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said. Stoop over, Benjy. Like this, see. We stooped over and crossed the garden, where the flowers rasped and rattled against us. The ground was hard. We climbed the fence, where the pigs were grunting and snuffing. I expect they’re sorry because one of them got killed today, Caddy said. The ground was hard, churned and knotted. (Faulkner 2)

The verbs are all past tense, except for the activities of the pigs. The present tense “stoop,” “see,” “expect” are all part of the dialogue of Caddy, which is referred to as something present for Benjy.

As the narrative proceeds, it becomes equally difficult to establish a difference between the narrative present and past. In the present, we are, as in the beginning, challenged by the intervening past and past progressive tenses. The past sections tend towards the past tense, but the feeling of present is then balanced through the use of the present in direct speech. However, it is noteworthy that Benjy’s precarious symbolic memories, especially the ones concerning Caddy, are *always* in the past tense, establishing them as definitely past, even for Benjy (this is something that contradicts the sense of complete atemporality with Benjy). For example, all Benjy’s recollections of the smell of Caddy are “she *smelled* like rain” (emphasis mine).

Entering into Benjy’s consciousness is like entering into the consciousness of childhood; Faulkner’s highly imaginative and experimental narration opens up a potential fictive re-experience of childhood through a style that in disparate ways communicates the sensational and cognitive limitations of childhood without depriving this experience of its poetic, fantastic and timeless dimensions.

CONCLUSION

“The nostalgic return to childhood,” writes James G. Hart in “Toward a Phenomenology of Nostalgia,” “is a return to the aurora of springtime, the dawn of hope” (408). Evoking childhood is perhaps the most conventional and effective way of constructing nostalgia in literary readers and this has been done throughout literary history from Romanticism to the present using tropes, symbols and metaphors. What I have explored here is an additional and less acknowledged strategy: the creation of a childhood experience through fiction. Evoking the experience of childhood is the closest to actually reliving the past childhood as we can get, and the nostalgia stems from our adult, subsequent reading position that is implicitly present through the experience. This oscillation between past and present, which is an essential aspect of nostalgia and differentiates it from ordinary remembrance, is thus not inherent in the text but in the relation between the text and the reading situation. Although this aesthetic practice is not very frequent, there are occasions, mostly in modernist narratives, when this method is being used, as the three samples included in this essay confirm. The strategies involved in establishing a fictive experience of childhood, as we have seen, extend from narratological choices such as free indirect

style and strict focalization through a child in the narrative (which implies limitations in perception and cognitive abilities, also in linguistic terms) to the use of a child-like temporality, the hyperbolic use of phenomena, and an emphasis of the sensorial aspects of perception. Being in childhood, “the dawn of hope,” is to be transported not to the actual childhood, but to the idealized place of childhood where dreams and opportunities seem endless.

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Mexican Village: Josefina Niggli's
Border Crossing Narrative

ABSTRACT

The paper presents Josefina Niggli (1910–83), an American mid-twentieth-century writer who was born and grew up in Mexico, and her novel *Mexican Village* (1945). A connoisseur of Mexican culture and tradition, and at the same time conscious of the stereotypical perceptions of Mexico in the United States, Niggli saw it as her literary goal to “reveal” the “true” Mexico as she remembered it to her American readers. Somewhat forgotten for several decades, Niggli, preoccupied with issues of marginalization, hybridization, and ambiguity, is now becoming of interest to literary critics as a forerunner of Chicano/a literature. In her novel *Mexican Village*, set in the times of the Mexican Revolution, she creates a prototypical bicultural and bilingual Chicano protagonist, who becomes witness to the rise of Mexico’s modern national identity.

Keywords: Josefina Niggli, U.S.-Mexico borderlands, Chicano/a literature, Mexican folk traditions, biculturalism.

Josefina Niggli (1910–83), an American writer of the mid-twentieth century, who was born and grew up in northern Mexico, lived both literally and figuratively on the border between the United States and Mexico, epitomizing this borderland's syncretic spirit. Her literary works concerned issues of diversity, marginalization, hybridization, biculturalism and bilingualism in the context of relations between the two neighboring countries. After her death, Niggli was forgotten for a few decades but since the 1990s, literary scholars on both sides of the national border again became interested in her writing. Chicana/o authors in the U.S. want to recognize her as their forerunner, while critics in Mexico see in her a "precursor of literature by *regiomontana* women writers" from the area around Monterrey.

Josefina (or Josephina, both spellings appear in critical texts, which in itself can be regarded as a sign of her unstable national and cultural identity) Niggli was born in the city of Monterrey in northern Mexico at the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, an oppressive civil war that lasted over a decade, until 1920, in the course of which time Mexico "was remaking itself" (Coonrod Martinez 3). According to *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, Josephina Niggli's father, Frederick Ferdinand Niggli "came from a family of the Swiss and Alsatians who had emigrated to Texas in 1836. Her mother, Goldie (Morgan) Niggli, was a violinist well known in the Southwest, with ancestors from Ireland, France, and Germany" (565). However, in an interview the writer gave to Maria Herrera-Sobek, she claimed that her parents were Scandinavian. Frederick Niggli, an American businessman, was involved in the development of cement industry in northern Mexico, and he built a family home in the small town of Hidalgo, close to Monterrey. During the turbulent years of the Mexican Revolution, American entrepreneurs, as well as Mexican social elites, felt endangered by the rebelling masses. Therefore, Josefina, an only child, and her mother moved to San Antonio, Texas, where eventually Josefina went to school and later on to the College of the Incarnate Word. The Niggli's, who considered themselves an American family emotionally connected with Mexico as a result of their long residence there, in the United States identified with the large group of Mexican immigrants, referred to as *Mexico de afuera*, the "lost ones to be gathered home" (Gruesz 10). The immigrants escaped to the United States from Mexico to avoid the violence of the war but insisted on preserving their national identity and traditional Mexican values; it was their intention to go back home as soon as the revolution was over. In an effort to maintain the purity of the Spanish language, they published a daily newspaper, *El Paso del Norte*, the cities El Paso and San Antonio having become *Mexico de afuera's* cultural centers.

Living and studying in the United States, Josefina Niggli grew increasingly aware of "the place of Mexico in the U.S. imaginary" (Gruesz

10), of the stereotypical opinions Americans had about Mexico, the Mexican people and their culture. It became “her lifetime goal [as a writer] to capture [what she considered to be] genuine Mexico, the Mexico she knew and to relate it to an English-language public” (Coonrod Martinez 21). As Kirsten Silva Gruesz points out in her brief but revealing essay “Mexico in America,” included in *A New Literary History of America*, at the beginning of the twentieth-century American perceptions of Mexico were “conspicuously partial.” The years between the two world wars were referred to in the U.S. as “the moment of romantic Mexicophilia,” with an “enormous vogue for things Mexican” (9). The pre-Columbian ruins and pyramids discovered (or perhaps rediscovered by the American tourist industry) in Mexico were compared to the ancient monuments of Egypt, which had been intriguing the Europeans since the Napoleonic wars. Unexpectedly, Americans, concerned primarily with progress and the future, found antiquity at their own doorstep. On the other hand, with its poverty, primitivism, conservative Catholicism, and the Spanish language, Mexico was perceived in political, economic and cultural terms as the opposite and inferior to the United States. In American popular opinion, Mexicans loved music, dance, and the pleasures associated with the human body, whereas Americans felt emotionally restrained by the Protestant religion and the Puritan tradition.

The United States’ closest neighbor across the country’s long southern border has traditionally been perceived by Americans as distant, strange and exotic. In order to better understand the fundamental differences between Mexico and the United States, it is necessary to go back in history to the sixteenth and seventeenth century, to the beginnings of the New World’s colonization by the two most important European colonial powers at the time, Great Britain and Spain. The Spanish colonists not only brought with them to America a language and a religion different from those of the Anglo-Saxon Protestants but they also arrived in the New World with very different attitudes from the British. Whereas the British immigrants came in entire families, intending to settle down and take advantage of what they believed was the second chance God was giving His chosen people (to build “a City Upon a Hill”), the ambitious young men from Spain, many of them from what was then the most impoverished region of the country, Extremadura, usually came alone, leaving their wives or fiancées behind to spare them the hardships of the ocean voyage. They hoped to get rich quickly and return home. Once they got to America and realized that they would not be able to go back as soon as they had planned, the Spanish conquistadors had no choice but to make contacts with the local Indians, their institutions, and their traditions. Kirsten Silva Gruesz writes: “In building the civic spiritual heart of New Spain over grounds

already sanctified by tradition, the Spanish practiced selective *adaptation* of indigenous institutions rather than their wholesale eradication—which is not to say the process occurred without violence” (9). The living presence of the past in Mexico, according to the critic, is “the antithesis of the American cult of progress and forward movement” (10).

The first military conflict between the U.S. and Mexico, the war of 1846–48, was viewed by some American intellectuals of the nineteenth century, such as Henry David Thoreau or the “patriotic poets,” Joel Barlow and Philip Freneau, as an unjust aggression on the part of the United States. Distancing themselves from what they saw as colonialist practices of their government, the critics of this war traced connections between the pre-Columbian past in America and nineteenth-century democracy in the United States. “Aztec virtue” was opposed to “Spanish vice,” while the American invaders of Mexico, such as General Winfield Scott, were compared to the Spanish conquistadors. In 1846 General Scott marched with his army through Mexico along the same route, from Veracruz to Mexico City that Hernan Cortéz had taken three hundred years earlier. In the 1920s, when Niggli’s literary career was beginning, memories of another war, the 1898 American war with Spain, were still fresh in the minds of many Americans. The Spanish American War, initiated in Cuba, had made American colonialism even more evident than the war with Mexico. It became illegal to speak Spanish in public places along the U.S.-Mexican border, and the rules concerning discrimination of Mexican people were similar to the Jim Crow laws in the South. Clearly, violence marked the language of communication between the two countries.

The Spanish and British colonies in the New World developed in very different directions. Whereas the British settlements flourished, offering economic opportunities to their inhabitants who enjoyed relatively equal social status, the Spanish colonial societies developed deep class divisions and were devoted to maintaining them. The colonial proceeds landed for the most part in the hands of the Spaniards or their direct descendants often seeking connections with, as well as protection from their European allies, whereas the indigenous “Inditos,” the cheap labor force of the Spanish colonies, remained poor and uneducated, slaves in their own homelands. The only spiritual comfort they were offered was religious instruction by Jesuit or Franciscan missionaries and eventual conversion to Catholicism, since, once the prospect of quick enrichment proved a mirage, gaining new followers for the Roman Catholic Church (which also supported colonization in the Americas) was regarded as the main goal of Spanish colonization of the Americas.

Unlike the Spanish colonizers, the British settlers, guided by the principles of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, had little contact with

the local Indians. Apart from the mythologized Thanksgiving feast, encounters between white settlers and red Indians were for the most part limited to conflicts over the possession of land and marked by violence, leaving behind a trail of wars and captivity narratives. The aim of the British colonists was to eradicate the indigenous population and occupy the American land in the name of the superior civilization they believed they were bringing from Europe. The purity of the white race was a significant element of British ideology of colonization in North America.

People living in the Spanish colonies were differentiated by both race and class, as well as by the intricate relations between the two. In his book *The Southwest*, David Lavender writes about “the rigid ladder of caste [already] taking form in New Spain”:

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At the top were the [arrogant] *gachupines*, or *peninsulares*, men born in Spain. Only they could hold the principle offices available in the New World. The *criollos*, those born outside the mother country, were socially inferior, even though the purest Spanish blood flowed in their veins. Still lower were the *castas*, showing the stigma of various mixtures of white, Indian, and Negro blood. (47)

Even though people of mixed race were regarded as inferior in Mexico, they belonged to the Spanish colonial society, and some were given the opportunity to occupy more significant social positions. “An exceptional *indio*,” Lavender writes, “could become a mounted herdsman, a *vaquero*, rather than a facelesstoiler in the field; and a *mestizo* (part *indio* and part white) could acquire a few head of livestock, possibly a small mine. *Criollos* capable of managing extensive properties sometimes achieved greater wealth than most *gachupines* possessed” (48).

Issues concerning race and racial mixing—*indigenismo* and *mestizaje*—came to the forefront again during the Mexican revolution of 1910–20, when the Mexican lower classes, for the most part racially mixed, rebelled against being exploited by the predominantly white upper class descendants of Spanish conquistadors. *Mestizaje* became an important aspect of Mexico’s search for a modern, twentieth-century national identity. Concepts of class and race, characteristic for the Mexican society of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century society permeated the border between Mexico and the United States, delaying the Americanization of the Southwest, a region acquired by the United States from Mexico after the war of 1846–48. New Mexico and Arizona, inhabited mostly by Spanish-speaking descendants of peninsular colonists and indigenous Mexicans, did not achieve statehood until 1912. However, when in 1880 the American railroads reached Santa Fe, making the city accessible both

from the east and the west, the Southwest became open to tourists, meeting the demands of the growing American leisure class who sought new travel destination, eager to explore exotic regions of their own expanding homeland. The Santa Fe Railway and the renowned travel agency, Fred Harvey Company, made it possible to tour the Southwest in luxurious conditions. Fascinated by American military defeats of the Navajos (1863) and the Apaches, together with their ferocious leader Geronimo (1886), most tourists were drawn to the Southwest by the prospect of meeting Indians. In popular perception, Indian culture evoked thrill and suspense. It was also, however, the romance of the Spanish heritage—architecture, music, dance, cuisine—that drew the tourists' attention and, as a result, brought American visitors closer to the border between the United States and Mexico, as well as to Mexico's otherness.

In the late nineteenth century, a period of intense technological and industrial development, Mexico, with its cheap land and labor force, began to attract American entrepreneurs. In the Preface to his historical novel *El Paso* (2016), Winston Groom explains:

Beginning in the late nineteenth century the Mexican government—in eternal social and financial turmoil—started selling off vast tracts of land in its desolate northern provinces on the notion that wealthy American entrepreneurs would exploit the land by building infrastructure that the government in Mexico City could not afford. Accordingly, the Guggenheims began to develop large mining operations in Northern Mexico, Harrimans built railroads, Morgans, Hearsts, and Whitneys developed enormous livestock ranches, and so on, employing thousands of Mexican citizens until, inevitably, the revolution moved northward. (xi)

The protagonist of Groom's novel, Colonel John Shaughnessy, "a thrill-seeking Bostonian railroad tycoon," owner of the New England & Pacific Railroad Company, has a "colossal ranch in Chihuahua" (32). His gigantic cattle herd extends over twenty miles.

Josefina Niggli's father, not nearly as wealthy as the fictional Colonel, owned a cement plant near Monterrey, close to the American border. Whereas in the south of Mexico the Revolution primarily involved poor indigenous peasants commanded by Emiliano Zapata (the Zapatistas), in the north General Pancho Villa became the leader of cheap laborers protesting against the working condition imposed on them by the greedy American businessmen. Because fighting was at times violent, Frederick Niggli, concerned about the safety of his family, like many other American industrialists in Mexico, sent his wife and daughter to live in the United States.

Before she published her first and only novel, *Mexican Village*, Josefina Niggli wrote and published poems and plays based on Mexican folklore. Her public literary career, dedicated to creating better understanding between Americans and Mexicans, began in 1931, with *Mexican Silhouettes*, a volume of poetry which her father financed. Following in the footsteps of several other American writers of the time, Niggli worked anonymously for Hollywood film studios: Twentieth Century Fox and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Among others, she took part in the production of Rouben Mamoulian's *The Mark of Zorro* (1940), a romantic story set in California's colonial past, another significant addition in the development of popular culture.

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Mexican Village, Niggli's only novel, was published in 1945 by the University of North Carolina Press. Just as her other literary works, it is written in English, with American readers in mind. Evoking associations with modernist American novels such as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* or William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, *Mexican Village* is made up of ten interrelated stories. It presents life in Hidalgo, a remote Mexican community in the Sabina Mountains during the years 1920–30. The stories, connected by the figure of Bob Webster, the son of an American businessman and his Mexican maid, introduce a variety of village characters: poor men eager to make some money, domineering patriarchal fathers, womanizers, submissive women, strong women, unhappy lovers and outcasts. Niggli's imaginary village is a microcosm reflecting current cultural, social and national Mexican problems. The novel is set in the decade following the Mexican Revolution, with the outcome of the long civil war still uncertain. The question Josefina Niggli is asking herself and confronting her readers with is whether Mexico would remain in the hands of its conservative elites, the colonial aristocracy of Spanish ancestry, supported by the neocolonial forces in the United States and European colonial powers or if it would follow a more liberal and democratic route, granting civil rights to its indigenous population. Bob Webster has just returned to America from Europe, where he fought in World War I. In Hidalgo he found a job as a manager of the local quarry. The fact that a Texas Mexican (*Tejano*) becomes the new boss at the quarry seems to suggest that radical changes in Mexican society may be possible. Webster is different from the previous foreign quarry managers, Frenchmen or Italians; not only is he a *mestizo* but he speaks Spanish and respects the local people. Familiar with the past and traditions of Hidalgo, Webster has childhood memories of the village where he used to spend time with his Mexican grandmother.

The most powerful people in Hidalgo are the owners of the hacienda, the "family Castillo." Their ancestors came from Spain over three hundred years earlier. Local people say that the *casa Castillo* has the power of life

and death in Hidalgo and the entire surrounding valley. As a family, they can be seen as representative of the nation, of Mexico. Don Saturnino, the head of the family, is the father of two sons: a good one, Alejandro, who died young, and the bad Joaquin, always in conflict with his father, who disappeared for a long time but has recently returned to claim the inheritance and the position of the aging Don Saturnino. According to a family legend, Isabela Castillo, daughter of Don Diego Castillo, who inherited the "Castillo title and estate" after her father's death in 1842, was kidnapped by Huachichil Indians. In reality, it was Isabela's dishonest and greedy brother Fausto who sold her to the Indians, so that he could inherit the Castillo fortune. Fausto died but Isabela, who lived happily among the Indians and married to an Indian named *El Caballo Blanco*, recorded the events of her life in a letter, which after many years mysteriously reached Robert Webster. The closing sentences of the long letter read: "My brother Fausto (may he eat his hands in eternal agony) has the Castillo pride of the pure strain within him, even as I have, and this is my revenge: that an Indian shall be true heir to the Castillo title and estate" (Niggli 475). In her letter, Isabela is ceding the Mexican heritage to an Indian, or actually to a half-Indian. Robert is given the opportunity to inherit what belongs to the *casa Castillo*. If, by extension, the family can be a symbol of the nation, Robert, a half-Indian, a *mestizo*, can claim or, in a sense, "inherit" all of Mexico. However, such a possibility is not entertained for long in Niggli's text. The cruel Joaquin, who now considers himself the rightful heir of the Castillo family, threatens to kill Robert. Although in the last scene of the novel they call one another brother and *compadre*, Webster decides to leave Hidalgo, the primitive village in isolated mountains. A modern man, torn by characteristic human anxieties symptomatic of the cultural changes in the twentieth century, he is summoned back to the modern technological world by a telephone call, and to get there fast, he takes the train, although the people of Hidalgo offer him an excellent horse.

In the context of the post-revolutionary political scene in Mexico, which Niggli aims to delineate in her book, Robert represents the liberal spectrum of people open to social changes, and ready to accept the indigenous Indians and *mestizos* in their ranks. He is the ideal citizen of post-revolutionary Mexico, and a proper potential partner of the democratic republic of the United States. However, Mexico is not yet ready for him. Joaquin makes Robert leave Hidalgo, so that the rule of the Castillo family over the area can continue. The "bad" son remains in the village, and in the end he and his father are "fighting their private revolution." Although Bob Webster changes his name to Roberto Ortega, taking his mother's name and announcing his identification with the "Inditos," before he leaves Hidalgo he realizes that in spite of the honor Saturnino wished to bestow

upon him, he could not accept either the Castillo title or the estate because as a half-Indian, he is at the same time a half-foreigner. Foreign rule, while good for Mexico's elites, was never beneficial for the Mexican people:

Don Saturnino prefers to form an alliance with a foreigner than admit defeat. For all his Spanish pride, he is now being truly Mexican. Here is a microcosmic bit of Mexican history being played out in terms of family rather than a nation. By begging me to stay here and help him he is merely repeating the monarchists' appeal to Austria's Maximilian to protect them from the liberal [Benito] Juarez. (Niggli 453)

360 Constantly searching for an identity, which is both a curse and an opportunity for the modern man, and rejected by his father ("Are you suggesting that I admit an Indian son of mine? Damn it, I am a white man!") (56), Robert does not find acceptance in Europe where he fought in World War II; neither does he find his own place in the peripheral Mexican village. When he decides to leave Hidalgo, he is uncertain where to go. Robert's indecision about his ethnic and national identity illustrates the unstable character of these categories (Niggli xxii). Like Josephina Niggli herself, her protagonist is a bilingual and bicultural "border crosser," always in motion.

Although Niggli demonstrates in *Mexican Village* that Mexico's political or social situation did not change much as a result of the Revolution, she feels quite strongly about the improving position of Mexican women in the first decades of the twentieth century. Her female characters are no longer in the grips of the traditional Mexican stereotypes imposed upon women by the Spanish colonizers: the suffering but passive La Virgen de Guadalupe, the helpless and desperate mother La Llorona and La Malinche, the translator and mistress of Hernan Cortéz, accused of betraying her nation. Unlike the powerful female Aztec goddesses of the pre-Columbian times, Coatlicue and her daughter (whom Gloria Anzaldúa writes about in *Borderland/La Frontera*), La Virgen, La Malinche and La Llorona are weak and wholly dependent on men, who can easily manipulate them. In *Mexican Village*, Niggli undermines the stereotype of a submissive woman, freeing her from the limiting colonial bonds. The women Niggli creates attempt to subvert the male-dominated social order of Hidalgo. Nena Santos from the story "The Chicken Coop," who has gone barefoot throughout her life, demands shoes for her wedding day, defying her husband who would rather spend money on a new goat. Sarita Calderon from "The Street of the Cañon" wants to bring peace to the neighboring villages of Hidalgo and San Juan Iglesias. The villagers are feuding over which village has the right to bury the relics of a famous historian, Don Romolo Balderas. Sarita

insists on settling the issue before she, an inhabitant of Hidalgo, and Pepe Gonzalez, who is from the other village, get married. Lolita, the Gypsy from "The Plaza of Viceroy's," struggles to liberate herself from a promise she had given to her brother Gitanillo, a male patriarch.

One of Niggli's best developed women characters is Maria from "The River Road," which is, according to Herrera-Sobek, "[t]he best story in the collection" (xxii). Maria is portrayed as powerful and independent. Although she is the town's most beautiful girl, she is rejected by the community because she lives in extreme poverty. Maria is "the long-suffering and secret mistress" of Alejandro Castillo, considered to be the "scion" and heir of the family wealth and social position. She can never marry him. As an outcast, she cannot even enter a beauty contest with the other girls from Hidalgo. Yet, Maria feels privileged to be Alejandro's lover. She wants to "*gozar la vida*" ("enjoy life") with him. Without Alejandro life has no meaning for her. In the last conversation with Evita, Alejandro's lawful but rejected wife, Maria expresses her deepest feelings in a very emotional way: "Don't you understand? He was like a god to me. I worshipped him like I worship the Blessed Infant. He was all my life. We were lovers, yes. . . . If you think I am ashamed, you are wrong. I am proud of it. Prouder than any bride that stands in the church" (Niggli 217).

Niggli's gallery of female characters would not be complete without a *curandera*, a healer, who knows well the local herbs and other natural medications, and who traditionally assisted at births and at deathbeds. A *curandera* is a "border crosser" with insight into the "other world" and connections with the indigenous Indians. As there were few medical doctors in the Spanish colonies, people's health was often in the hands of healers. Her unique abilities made a *curandera* woman to be afraid of and, at the same time, to be respected. In Niggli's novel the part of the *curandera* is assigned to Tia Magdalena, Bob Webster's house-keeper, knowledgeable "in red, black, white and green magic." This is how she introduces herself to him: "Me, I am different. I am a witch—an eagle witch. Remember that. I do not belong to the stupid clan of town witches. In me there is power, not simple spells to win a lover or kill an unwanted husband" (33).

Niggli's women characters attempt to undermine the patriarchal communal order. Although none of them has a job to support herself financially, they are self-conscious and proud. They manage to make independent decisions, sometimes not only about their own lives but about the life of the community as well. In the introduction to Niggli's novel Maria Herrera-Sobek observes: "Most of the women in *Mexican Village* are strong in personality though stubborn and petulant at times. They generally subvert the male-dominated system in order to satisfy their personal but sometimes also communal desires" (xxiv).

One of the artistic goals Niggli set before herself in writing the novel was recreating the atmosphere of Hidalgo in order to make her readers feel they are actually there, experiencing life and culture of a Mexican village first-handedly. She wanted readers to see Mexico with their own eyes, looking beyond the stereotypes they were accustomed to. Niggli has often been praised for being a dedicated observer of Mexican tradition and its rich and varied folklore. In *Mexican Village* she incorporates several folklore genres: primitivist graphic illustrations, proverbs (*dichos*), popular folk songs and legends. Each story is framed by folk motifs. Each title page is decorated with a simple black and white drawing, in its suggestive simplicity resembling a woodcut print intended to be colored by a child. These drawings introduce the stories' central characters and the objects which will later make their appearance in the text. Palm trees, saguaro cacti, marvelous butterflies and vines of flowers in bloom fill the pages, richly decorated by elaborate designs along the edges. Additionally, every story is preceded by a folk proverb, such as "Love is action, not kisses and hugs" or "Rivers rise in flood and destroy; brooks water the land and sing." In *Mexican-American Folklore* (1989) John O. West writes that proverbs function as "bits of wisdom, short traditional guides to conduct" and "the wisdom of many, the wit of one" (15). As used by Niggli, proverbs announce the events to be described in the stories and "encapsulate" their message.

The legend of *El Caballo Blanco* is woven into the plot of *Mexican Village*. *El Caballo Blanco*, the already mentioned frontier bandit Daniel Menendez, is Isabela Castillo's husband, whom she married out of great love. Isabela's long lost letter, written more than half a century ago and appointing an Indian as heir to "the title and the estate" of the Castillo family, was finally, and no doubt magically, delivered to Bob Webster. The legend enters into the story not only for "decorative" purposes, or to add to its "quaintness," but to develop the plot and to enhance the meaning of the narrative. Together with Niggli's novel, the legend assumes national dimensions. Bob Webster, a *mestizo*, as the heir of Mexico's national history and cultural tradition, appeals to and represents the political views of the Mexican liberals, who wanted Mexico to become a democratic republic. Those are also the views that Niggli herself identified with and wanted to introduce to her American readers. Maria Herrera-Sobek would like to see Josefina Niggli as a forerunner of the strategy of including folklore in the structure of Latino narratives. She points out that in this respect, Niggli was ahead of her time, since folklore and magical realism became an integral part of Hispanic narratives only during the "Latino boom" of the nineteen sixties and seventies.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, Chicana writers, whose literature was gaining increasing recognition in the United States, dedicated a lot of effort to finding precursors in order to extend their tradition in

history and thus strengthen their position on the contemporary American literary scene. Political and social activists themselves, they looked as far back as the seventeenth century, and in the figure of Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz (1651–95), a nun, a writer, and a scholar, also found an activist for women's rights in colonial Mexico. Josefina Niggli was credited with a position on their list as well. When she talked about her ethnic identity in an interview with Maria Herrera-Sobek shortly before she died, Niggli, however, did not consider herself a Chicana author. Chicano/a identity assumes a person's mixed Spanish and indigenous Indian ancestry, with Aztlan as the imaginary homeland. Niggli definitely recognized Mexico as her birthplace and her country of childhood. However, feeling emotionally deeply bound with Mexico, she also recognized her familial and cultural roots in the United States and Europe. Her parents came from Europe, and she spent her adult life in the United States. It was her literary ambition to secure a position for herself on the American literary scene. Nonetheless, like Chicano and Chicana writers, the author of *Mexican Village* can be seen as a border crosser in several respects. In the words of Herrera-Sobek, a critic who has devoted much scholarly attention to Josefina Niggli, "[b]eing bilingual, bicultural and biconceptual she sought to cross the cultural boundaries between Mexico and Anglo American culture" (xxii).

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“The Most Photographed Barn in America”: Simulacra of the Sublime in American Art and Photography

ABSTRACT

In *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo, two characters visit a famous barn, described as the “most photographed barn in America” alongside hordes of picture-taking tourists. One of them complains the barn has become a simulacrum, so that “no one sees” the actual barn anymore. This implies that there *was* once a real barn, which has been lost in the “virtual” image. This is in line with Plato’s concept of the simulacrum as a false or “corrupt” copy, which has lost all connection with the “original.” Plotinus, however, offered a different definition: the simulacrum distorts reality in order to reveal the invisible, the Ideal.

There is a real building which has been called “the most photographed barn in America”: the Thomas Moulton Barn in the Grand Teton National Park. The location—barn in the foreground, mountain range towering over it—forms a striking visual composition. But the site is not only famous because it is photogenic. Images of the barn in part evoke the heroic struggles of pioneers living on the frontier. They also draw on the tradition of the “American sublime.” Ralph Waldo Emerson defined the sublime as “the influx of the Divine mind into our mind.” He followed Plotinus in valuing art as a means of “revelation”—with the artist as a kind of prophet or “seer.”

The photographers who collect at the Moulton Barn are themselves consciously working within this tradition, and turning themselves into do-it-yourself “artist-seers.” They are the *creators*, not the slaves of the simulacrum.

Keywords: simulacrum, sublime, DeLillo, Baudrillard, Plato.

In the novel *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo, two characters, Jack and his friend Murray, drive to see a famous barn, described as the “most photographed barn in America” (12). The episode has perhaps become “the ‘Most Discussed Scene in Postmodern Fiction’” (Knight 39). Numerous road-signs show Jack and Murray the way to the site, where they find hordes of picture-taking tourists. They watch the photographers for a time; then Murray launches into a diatribe, interrupted only by silences and the clicking of the cameras. “No one sees the barn,” he claims (DeLillo 12). Here are some of his observations:

“Once you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn.”

“We’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. . . .”

“Being here is a kind of spiritual surrender. We see only what the others see. . . . A religious experience in a way, like all tourism.”

“They are taking pictures of taking pictures,” he said.

“What was the barn like before it was photographed? . . . What did it look like, how was it different from the other barns, how was it similar to other barns? We can’t answer these questions because we’ve read the signs . . .” (DeLillo 12–13)

Murray’s words here echo Jean Baudrillard’s analysis of the simulacrum—the notion that, in the age of the hyperreal, the image precedes the real. As Claire Colebrook observes, the barn in the novel is a simulacrum, in Baudrillard’s terms,

precisely because it has no origin. You can only photograph the most photographed barn in America *after* it has been photographed; the process of imaging and simulation precedes and produces what the barn is. . . . From a Baudrillardian point of view this is lamentable. We have lost all relation with actual barns—their place in farm life and rural culture—and fallen into a world where we value something only to the extent to which it has been copied. (97–98)

In the novel, Murray himself—a professor of popular culture—embraces the postmodern flux of signs; but the scene at the barn has most often been cited as “an articulation of the crisis of the real, of the mediation of our experience by the media” (Geyh 18). It is as if the picture-snapping

visitors to the barn are poor benighted souls, in thrall to the “society of the spectacle”¹—preferring the fake to the real.

Murray’s references to “spiritual surrender,” and tourism as a “religious experience,” suggest that visitors to the barn become absorbed in the “aura” of fame and celebrity, and lose their individuality in a condition of “collective perception,” which seems akin to a form of mass hypnosis. Joseph Tabbi and Michael Wutz suggest that when Murray says: “We can’t get outside the aura. We’re part of the aura. We’re here, we’re now” (DeLillo 13), the character expresses what Baudrillard called the “ecstasy of communication” (Tabbi and Wutz 17). It is as if the visitors to the barn are “prisoners” in a Platonic cave, fixated on, and even driven into a kind of rapture by, the endless stream of information and images cast on the cave wall. The term “aura” in this context appears to refer to the aura of the commodity, or what Baudrillard terms the “power and pomp of fascination” (4) of the simulacrum. In the silences when Murray isn’t speaking, the only sounds are “the incessant clicking of shutter release buttons, the rustling crank of levers that advanced the film” (DeLillo 13). It seems the photographers are themselves part of a “machine” for producing images, to reinforce the “aura”; all they can do is keep clicking. Mark Schuster suggests that “they exist primarily to service the barn, to maintain, as Murray insists, its image. Just as the barn serves no other purpose than to be photographed, the tourists serve no other purpose than to photograph it” (16–17).

Baudrillard argues that in the age of mass communication, the image has become “weightless” (5) and circulates “in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference” (6). It is detached from the real, and only refers to other images. In an internet blog, Leigh M. Johnson sees the barn in these terms, as “a sign with a referent so distant and distorted that meaning of the *sign as sign* became more meaningful than the meaning of its original referent.” Johnson also notes that images of the barn appearing on websites such as “flickr”² have “intensified the scene in DeLillo’s novel to the nth degree. Now, we don’t even have to *physically visit* the most photographed barn in America to (not) ‘see it’” (emphasis original). In the novel, however, there is no attempt (by the character or the author) to explain why this particular barn should draw so many visitors, or why its image in particular should circulate so widely. The implication is that it is simply photographed because it is famous; and famous *because* it is so frequently photographed.

¹ The phrase “society of the spectacle” is most closely associated with Guy Debord.

² Johnson calls the website “Flixter” but he provides a link to flickr.

When Murray asks: “What was the barn like before it was photographed . . . ?”, he implies that there *is* a “real” barn, an original, which we could see, if only we were not in thrall to the image. This is in line with Plato’s concept of the simulacrum, at least “as he is usually read: the simulacrum is a copy of a copy, its untruth defined by its distance from the original” (Euben 144). In *The Republic*, Plato postulates a hierarchy of authenticity, using the example of a bed:

We have seen that there are three sorts of bed. The first exists in the ultimate nature of things, and if it was made by anyone it must, I suppose, have been made by God. The second is made by the carpenter, the third by the painter. (373)

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In other words, there is an Idea of the bed, inhabiting the world of ideal Forms, and originating from the mind of God. The carpenter makes imperfect copies of the ideal Form; and the artist makes a copy of the carpenter’s bed—i.e. a copy of a copy, and so corrupt. The artist imitates only the appearance of things, which are themselves only pale shadows of the Form. The simulacrum, in Plato’s definition, is a distorted copy—for example, a statue which uses illusory effects such as false perspective: outwardly, it simulates the real thing, but this is only an effect of resemblance. Any link to the divine Form has been lost; but there is a danger that the spectator may nevertheless mistake the copy for the Idea or Form.³

Plato’s famous parable of the prisoners in a cave, mesmerized by shadows cast on the cave wall, has frequently been conflated with Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality. Carl Plantinga, for example, observes:

Having never left the cave, and having no experience of that larger, extra-cavern universe, the cave-dwellers naïvely experience shadows on the wall as actuality, appearances as the real thing, these mere semblances as the “really real.” Could this be our condition in today’s world of media images? Have the misleading images on the cave wall been replaced by the relentless flickering lights of television and movie screens? (307)⁴

³ Deleuze argues that the Platonian hierarchy of being leads to an endless and futile quest to distinguish “good from bad *copies*,” imago from simulacrum (*Logic* 298).

⁴ Plantinga goes on to note that postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard “revise Plato radically. They accept his claims about images as deceptive appearances that reveal nothing and produce no knowledge. But they take an enormous and fateful step beyond Plato, by denying the existence of any actuality or reality that may be revealed” (307).

In fact, the metaphor of the cave implies something different. For Plato, the majority of ordinary people only see the material surface of reality, and do not see through it to the divine Forms themselves. He describes how a prisoner might leave the cave, and finally see the sun—implying the acquisition of special knowledge and vision into the realm of Forms. As James L. Porter notes, the cave for Plato is “an allegory for the ascent of the soul from the world of visible things to the immaterial world of intelligible things,” and is, in this sense, an encounter with the “immaterial sublime” (471). For Plato, only the philosopher can achieve this level of insight, or guide others to see it (90).

Ironically, the metaphor of the cave is itself an *image*, a form of “shadow on the wall.”⁵ Plotinus, the Neoplatonist philosopher, broke with the Platonic view of art as a corrupt copy, to argue that it may distort reality in order, precisely, to *reveal* the invisible, the “forming principles [*logoi*] from which nature derives” (5.8.I: 34–40). His example was a statue of Zeus, which was not based on any model drawn from life, but rather, created the *idea* of Zeus, or “what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible” (5.8.I: 34–40). In other words, it is an image which reveals the invisible or divine. In this way, art is not twice removed from the original Idea (as in Plato), but rather, it “stands at the point where things turn around and go back, where things return to the starting point on the path to the One [i.e. the spirit in all things]” (Besançon 50). From Plotinus, then, we may infer a very different definition of the simulacrum from the Platonic model. In Plotinus, the “false” image is *deliberately* detached from the real. The simulacrum in this sense does not refer to the real, but to the *ideal*; it seeks to participate in the Platonic “Idea.” It changes the viewer’s way of seeing, redirecting their gaze from the material to the immaterial, and affording them an insight into a “transcendental beauty” which “has all the hallmarks of the sublime” (Porter 609).

To return to the example of the “most photographed barn”: it may be argued that the multiple images of “pioneer” barns, in photographs, paintings and films etc., continually affirm and reinforce the (Platonic) Idea of “the barn.” In other words: each image represents the ideal of all barns, rather than some actual/individual barn. In part, it celebrates the place of barns in American mythology, as an icon of “pioneer” life on the frontier.

There is an actual building which has been called “the most photographed barn in America.”⁶ It is the Thomas Alma Moulton Barn,

⁵ Plato himself apologizes for speaking in images and explains that his own insight into the realm of Forms is not strong enough for him to speak more directly and literally. See Fine (95).

⁶ The barn was evidently proclaimed the “most photographed barn in America” in 1994 by *Country Extra* magazine (see Storrow)—perhaps in reference to DeLillo’s novel.

which stands on Mormon Row (now within the Grand Teton National Park). The location partly explains why it is so popular as an image: the combination of the barn in the foreground, and the Grand Teton mountain range behind, forms a striking visual composition. Keith Wilson, in *Viewfinder: 100 Top Locations for Great Travel Photography*, writes that the barn, when photographed in snow, “gives you an idea of the isolation the early settlers must have felt during their first winters” (43). The solitary barn, dwarfed by the mountains towering over it, evokes the heroic struggle of those early homesteaders, to stake a foothold on this wild, majestic, but daunting frontier. In this way, its “real” history (i.e. what it was like before it was photographed) has been subsumed in a wider social narrative: the myth of the American frontier. In this sense, it is now more “virtual” than “actual”; more “ideal” than “real.” It is true, then, that we cannot simply see the Moulton barn as a particular barn, in a particular setting; we cannot go back to what the barn looked like before it was photographed. Rather, it stands for *all* “pioneer” barns, and represents the “essence” of frontier life. On this level, the appeal of the building might simply be said to be based in nostalgia. This accords with Fredric Jameson’s argument that, in the postmodern age, history has been replaced by a new aesthetic “nostalgia mode” (28), where the past is consumed through a glossy pastiche of styles. (There may be an echo here of Baudrillard, who wrote: “When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning” [6].) The “nostalgia mode” satisfies a craving for history, even as it turns the past into “a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum” (Jameson 26). An image such as the barn, then, appears to form part of a shared imaginary, a myth of the past, which obliterates real history, existing “beyond real historical time” (Jameson 29).

It is clear, however, that Jameson is wedded to the (Baudrillardian) idea that, in the “society of the spectacle,” the “real” has been lost, in the endless play of surfaces. He condemns the simulacrum as a corrupt (false) copy of the “real.” He even uses the image of Plato’s cave: postmodern cultural production, he argues, “can no longer look directly out of its eyes at the real world but must, as in Plato’s cave, trace its mental images of the world on its confining walls” (33). Jameson (like Baudrillard) seems to cast himself in the Platonic role of the philosopher who has escaped from the “cave” of illusions and can guide the rest of us to the “light.” Arguably, however, the simulacrum was never about the representation of “real” history, but always about reaching beyond the visible/real, to the *unreal*, the ideal.

The photographer J. Riley Stewart has described the process he went through in photographing the Moulton Barn. He saw it as telling a story

of human struggle on the high plains of the Grand Teton mountain range. The main subject was the old abandoned barn, dominated by the eternal, massive, menacing mountain range. To me, it was a story of humanity’s neverending [sic] fight with nature: in this case a battle lost by those who abandoned their homestead simply to survive. (“Revelations”)

This has little to do, of course, with the actual barn, or the actual history of the people who lived there. In fact, there is no interest in the barn as a “real” place. Instead, there is a conscious construction of the image as simulacrum. Ostensibly, Stewart was creating an image of pioneer life, in the “nostalgia mode.” However, it is evident that he was also pointing to other meanings or themes: the fragility of life, and human transience in the face of the “eternal” forces of nature etc. In this sense, he is not simply telling a story but creating the image as a kind of capsule, to contain or embody an Idea.

Stewart is not in thrall to the image; rather, he is using the medium, and (like Plotinus’s artist-figure) distorting the “real,” to tell his chosen “story.” In photographing the barn, he approached the task with what we might term a “camera consciousness”⁷—an awareness of the image *as image*. In his blog, he describes how he constructed the image, focusing on the barn with a zoom lens, to isolate it from the surroundings; and using a vertical perspective, with the barn near the bottom of the frame, and the mountains looming over it, to create “an illusion of pressure and force of nature upon it” (“Revelations”). He also modified the lighting in the shot, to highlight the barn as the “leading character” of the “story,” and darkening the mountains “to make them appear menacing and stark” (“Revelations”). Stewart also shows an awareness of artistic influences on his work. In a separate article called “A Study in Luminosity” (published online alongside the blog on the Moulton Barn), he discusses the dramatic use of light in nineteenth century “luminist” art, “where it appears as if God created a huge spotlight to illuminate the subjects.” He notes that it is the interplay between light and shadow which creates the emotional impact of luminist art: luminosity “gives us hope in the knowing,” whereas dark shadows make us “wary and uncertain” (“Luminosity”). It is evident that, in his barn photo, Stewart was not simply creating a pastiche of the luminists’ style; rather, his own interest in the style was as a language or “code” of the “immaterial sublime” (Porter 471). If there is nostalgia here, it is less for an aesthetic style or genre, than for the idea of an art form which is dedicated to revealing the invisible, the work of God.

The “most famous barn” phenomenon has to be seen, in fact, within the wider tradition of the “American sublime,” which is associated in particular

⁷ The phrase “camera consciousness” is taken from Deleuze (*Cinema* 74).

with artists of the luminist and Hudson River schools, such as Thomas Cole, Thomas Moran, and Albert Bierstadt. In Plotinian terms, these artists created simulacra of nature, distorting the “real” to lead the viewer’s gaze “from the outer world to the world within” (Porter 609). Edmund Burke claimed that the sublime must evoke a sensation of “astonishment” in the viewer (95); Moses Mendelssohn compared it to “a lightning bolt, which blinds us in one moment and disappears the next” (qtd. in Franzel 100). This suggests a sudden, spontaneous, one-off event. The sublime in art, however, may be seen as the attempt, not simply to repeat or simulate this experience, but to *create* it.

In accounts of nineteenth century expeditions in the American wilderness, authors often used the language of the sublime to evoke some of the extraordinary sights they encountered. Here, for example, is how Nathaniel Langford, a member of the 1870 Washburn expedition, described seeing the Yellowstone Grand Canyon:

The brain reels as we gaze into this profound and solemn solitude. . . . Down, down, down, we see the river attenuated to a thread. . . . The solemn grandeur of the scene surpasses description. It must be seen to be felt. . . . You feel the absence of sound, the oppression of absolute silence. (qtd. in Meyer 61)

This account evokes a momentary experience in which the viewer is “stopped cold” by an overwhelming sight. However, we may see that Langford’s account of the canyon echoes Burke, in the stress on “greatness of dimensions” (Burke 97), “Solitude, and Silence” (Burke 125), and a sense of “infinity” (Burke 129). Langford was seeing the canyon for the first time, and yet, far from this being a sudden and “one-off” event, he was effectively *prepared* for the experience. He went looking for the sublime in nature, and that is what he found. In this way, the “image” preceded the “real.”

In her book *The Spirit of Yellowstone* (1996), Judith L. Meyer demonstrates how the reports published by the first “discoverers” of Yellowstone such as Langford influenced later accounts, in guidebooks etc. Describing the canyon, for instance, writers often talked about the “profound solitude and absolute silence” (Riley qtd. in Meyer 62) or “the sheer depth, the gloom” (Hoyt qtd. in Meyer 62). Tourists frequently spoke of their experience of the site in similar terms; they “told of the canyon’s dizzying depth and a feeling of speechlessness, timelessness, and insignificance in the face of God or nature” (Meyer 63). The language of the sublime, then, had become conventional, suggesting that responses to nature were conditioned rather than spontaneous; or rather, perhaps, there was a desire by visitors to step, so to speak, *inside* the simulacrum:

to stand where others have stood, and experience the idea of the sublime; in this sense, to take part in a “collective perception” (DeLillo 12). These accounts also affirmed the Yellowstone canyon itself as a special site, a kind of “power centre,”⁸ where the sublime may be revealed.

A year after the Washburn expedition, the artist Thomas Moran joined the Hayden expedition to Yellowstone. His 1872 painting, *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, “marked the beginning of a career dedicated to painting radiant scenes of the sublime western landscape” (Miller 107). In this work, Moran sacralizes nature. At its centre is a waterfall: there is a stream of white, with an intensely glowing ball of light at its base, like a divine light shining through creation. A pillar of spray rises from the base, like smoke from a sacrificial altar. In this way, the scene is like a temple to nature. It appears that the artist is seeking to replicate the “one-off” experience of the sublime—an epiphany, or, to use Mircea Eliade’s term, a “hierophany” (11); or rather, perhaps, we may say he is seeking to construct the experience for the *viewer*. In the foreground, there is a platform of rock, where two human figures stand, in a direct line below the waterfall; they are worshippers at this “temple.” One of them is evidently intended to represent Hayden himself. He is an embodiment of the explorer: he faces the waterfall, his hand outstretched, as if in a gesture of admiration and awe. The figure is our surrogate in the painting, as viewers. The size of the canvas for the painting (7 foot by 12 foot) seems to draw us in (like a modern cinematic IMAX experience). Its very size emulates the grandeur or “greatness of dimensions” of the sublime.

Moran manipulated reality in his painting, adapting the layout of the valley to suit his purposes (Kinsey 54–55). This fact alone belies any suggestion that the work was based on a direct experience of the sublime in the landscape. Rather, the sublime was *constructed* in the image. It is a simulacrum, in the sense that it distorts the real to unveil the invisible. The painting also served as a record of a moment of discovery and conquest. Hayden’s outstretched arm could suggest he is claiming possession of the land for the nation. This does not, however, contradict the idea of an encounter with the sublime. (Ralph Waldo Emerson, we may recall, associated the wilderness of American West with transcendence; he described it as “the yet untouched continent of hope glittering with all its mountains” [*Collected* 1 136].)

The painting rapidly spread as a commodity, appearing in magazines and guidebooks; and it played a particular role in promoting Yellowstone Park as a tourist destination. In its endless circulation, however, the image did not (*pace* Baudrillard) become detached from the “real,” as it was always-already *unreal*. Its appeal was not simply the “aura” of celebrity;

⁸ For the concept of the “power centre,” see Lake.

rather, it functioned as a kind of quasi-religious icon, as if the sublime, the supra-natural, was immanent *in the work itself*. Every copy of the image in circulation was a repetition, and exploitation, of this occult “power.”

Joni Kinsey notes that guidebooks of the 1880s

presented the canyon as an embodiment of the spirit of the entire national park, and in describing the scene writers invariably referred not just to the natural setting, which many of them had never seen, but implicitly to Moran’s more accessible image. (66)

Ordinary visitors, it seems, followed suit. (One of them, for example, wrote: “From its foot, like incense before an altar of silver, rises the mist eternally” [Atwood qtd. in Rubinstein, Whittlesey and Stevens 43]). Visitors perhaps believed—or wanted to believe—that they were, themselves, having a “unique” and spontaneous experience of nature; but we can see how far it was actually pre-formed or mediated. It could be argued that they could no longer “see” the canyon—or could only see it as if it was a painting by Moran. Arguably, however, this was the point. Visitors *wanted* to see what Moran saw; they wanted, in other words, *to step inside the simulacrum*. However, there must have always been an awareness, for visitors, of a certain gap, a mismatch between the image, and the actual place. For one thing, as we have seen, the painting misrepresented the geography of the valley. Moreover, it employs a combination of elements—such as the sacred light of the waterfall—which do not represent the “real” landscape, but rather the ideal of the sublime. Paradoxically, it is as if the *painting* is the “original,” because it is the ideal (Platonic) Form; and the *reality* is the poor copy.

Today, the place where Moran is thought to have painted the canyon is known as Artist Point. If this is hallowed ground, however, it is because Moran made it sacred; and because it is the spot where he created his masterwork. One modern guide book advises visitors that the spot is “beset by the masses of digital shutterbugs,” but “you’ll still find the occasional painter and wide-format photographer. Remember, to them this is hallowed ground. Please give them room to work and respect their concentration” (Waypoint Tours 42). The implication is that contemporary artists and photographers are seeking to follow Moran’s lead, and capture the invisible through their art.

EMERSON’S “TRANSPARENT EYEBALL”

As we have seen, descriptions of the Yellowstone canyon in early guidebooks etc., often followed Langford in using the language of the sublime. Meyer notes, however, that in time, there was a shift in language:

Langford’s “painful silence” changed to “a reverent hush” (Meyer 63). In 1878, for example, Edwin Stanley wrote, on seeing the Yellowstone canyon: “[W]e were awed into silence and reverence, feeling that we were in the very antechamber of the great God of Nature, and that he was talking to us and teaching us lessons of his greatness, his grandeur, and his glory” (77–78). Barbara Novak notes that the concept of the American sublime in the nineteenth century was increasingly “Christianized” (33). The beginning of this shift is observable as early as 1835 in the “Essay on American Scenery” by the painter, Thomas Cole, who urged his readers to

Learn

The laws by which the Eternal doth sublime

And sanctify his works, that we may see

The hidden glory veiled from vulgar eyes. (Cole 36; italics original)

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An even more significant and influential shift may be found in Emerson’s writings. He defined the sublime as “the influx of the Divine mind into our mind” which comes from “the heart of nature”: “We distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term *Revelation*. These are always attended by the emotion of the sublime” (*Collected 2* 166–67; italics original). In his essay “Nature” (1836), Emerson made what has been seen as founding statement of American transcendentalism. Evoking a moment of epiphany, he wrote:

Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite spaces,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (*Collected 1* 10)

In other words: Emerson’s “pupil” sees through the material surface of reality, to “apprehend that flow of animating energy otherwise known as Spirit” (Gatta 89). For Emerson, there is a force or spirit emanating throughout the universe, an ontological univocity of Being which he termed the “Over-Soul” (and Plotinus called the “One”).¹⁰ Emerson regarded the natural

⁹ See Harrison (84–85).

¹⁰ Alain Badiou has argued that the concept of an ontological univocity of being implies that “beings are all identically simulacra and all affirm . . . the living Power of the One” (25). He shows how the Deleuzian concept of the “simulacrum” may be related to Deleuze’s own affirmation (in *The Logic of Sense*) of the “univocity of Being” (*Logic* 179); see Badiou (23–28). Emerson’s essay, “The Over-Soul” is published in Emerson *Collected 2* (157–76).

world as a kind of “coded poem” which the individual seeks to penetrate, in order to understand the language of God: “Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact” (*Collected* 1 18). Most people, he believed, only see the phenomenal surface of matter; what they needed was “a general education of the eye” (*Later Lectures* 62). He elevated the poet as “seer,” just as Plato elevated the philosopher. The poet, he wrote, “turns the world to glass” (*Collected* 3 12)—i.e. he/she sees the “invisible,” and makes it “translucid to others” (*Collected* 3 15). In the essay “The Poet” (1841–43), he states that, when we read the poet’s works correctly, “[w]e are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air” (*Collected* 3 17). In this way, Emerson followed Plotinus in seeing art, not as the Platonic “false copy,” but as the means of revealing the Ideal. He recognized that the writer has to exercise judgement, to convert “nature into the rhetoric of thought” (*Collected* 2 199); there is a combination of “spontaneous reception” of impressions from nature, and the “willful reproduction” of these impressions (Meehan 77). Arguably, however, in the “transparent eyeball” passage, Emerson himself went beyond “willful reproduction.” His original notebook version of the passage was very different to the final version that appeared in “Nature”: “Standing on the bare ground with my head bathed in the blithe air, & uplifted into infinite space, I become happy in my universal relations. . . . I am the heir of uncontained beauty & power” (*Journals* 18). David Greenham suggests that, in the revised version, Emerson was reconstructing the experience at “a higher literary level in order to get beneath the experience to its very grounds” (85). But in fact, he uses language, not to *reveal*, but to sacralize the experience. He reconstructs it aesthetically; and in the process, he *changes* it. He goes from being happy in his “universal relations” to “all mean egotism vanishes.” In other words, *he* eliminates the ego in the account. He turns what was originally recalled as a moment of simple happiness, into an epiphany. Crucially, the passage encapsulates the Neoplatonic idea of the “One” (or “Over-Soul”)—the moment of insight into the energy or Spirit flowing through matter. In other words, the experience was made to embody a pre-existing idea. In this prime statement of American transcendentalism, then, language itself operates as the medium, the “glass” (or “transparent eyeball”). Emerson *creates* the revelation of the “invisible” through his writing. Arguably, he is working on himself as a poet-seer and educating his *own* “eye.”

ANSEL ADAMS AND THE PROCESS OF “VISUALIZATION”

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, photographers such as Herbert Gleason and Ansel Adams followed in the tradition of the American sublime. Adams himself described the wilderness as

“a mystique: a valid, intangible, non-materialistic experience” (qtd. in Turnage). He wrote: “the clear realities of Nature seen with the inner eye of the spirit reveal the ultimate echo of God” (Adams, *Letters* 248). While he used elements of the nineteenth century “code” of the sublime (such as the “God light”—i.e. shafts of light coming from the sky), it is clear that his images were not simply exercises in style but were based in the notion of divine “revelation” (Emerson, *Collected* 2 167); and he saw himself as an “artist-seer” in the Emersonian tradition. He used his camera to “see” with the “inner eye of the spirit”—as if it was the “transparent eyeball”—to guide others to witness the “clear realities of Nature” (Adams, *Letters* 248).

At the same time, Adams famously stated that “you don’t take a photograph, you make it” (qtd. in Colley 15). He argued the need for what he termed “visualization,” meaning a conscious process of seeing the final image in the mind’s eye before actually taking the photograph. The implication of visualization is that the artist must use “willful reproduction” (Meehan 77) to reveal the “echo of God” (Adams, *Letters* 248); in other words, he/she is constructing the image as simulacrum. At the same time, there is an emphasis on the subjectivity of the artist. Adams stated: “Photography is a way of telling what you feel about what you see. And what you intuitively choose to see is equal in importance to the presentation of how you feel—which is also intuitive” (qtd. in Hammond 79). He observed, for example, that his 1941 photo *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico* was “not at all realistic.” He made the sky preternaturally dark because that “is how it *felt*” (qtd. in Sheff and Sheff, italics original). It might be argued, in Emersonian terms, that the artist is not simply expressing his feelings in the image but communing with nature and resonating in himself the “flow of animating energy otherwise known as Spirit” (Gatta 89). Nevertheless, it is clear that Adams is not so much revealing the unreal or invisible, as creating it *in the image*.

Clearing Winter Storm (c.1937) is a photograph of the Yosemite Valley, taken from New Inspiration Point. When it was published in the book *This is the American Earth* (1968), the accompanying text by Nancy Newhall read: “You shall face immortal challenges;. . . You shall live lifted up in light; you shall move among clouds” (Adams and Newhall 106). Adams himself recalled how he came to photograph *Clearing*. He was looking for an opportunity to shoot Yosemite in a snowstorm as a “one-of-a-kind situation.” He had “visualized” the image, but it took considerable time and preparation to achieve it. He found his opportunity when a break occurred in a snowstorm, and “the valley was revealed under a mixture of snow and clouds with a silver light gilding Bridal Veil

Fall” (Adams and Alinder 203). But this was not the end of the matter: in processing the image, he used dodging and burning (lightening and darkening) to increase the contrasts (*Examples* 105). Clearly, Adams was waiting for a moment when the “God light” would break through, creating a contrast between reverence and awe, and terror. The swirling clouds overhead create a sense of invisible forces (or “Spirit”) at work in the universe. The trees on the valley floor suggest a congregation of worshippers in this natural (or divine) “cathedral.”

Thus, *Clearing* appears to represent a moment of epiphany; but this is carefully constructed *in the image*. It has also become celebrated as a legendary moment in the history of photography, when the heavens literally opened, and gave Adams the image he wanted. Shaoni Bhattacharya notes that the “romance and wildness” of the image “belies the fact Adams shot it from a parking lot, and that in fact the view should show human trails and paths etched into the mountainsides, but the camera angle chosen obscures them” (Bhattacharya). But the inclusion of signs of human presence would have introduced the “profane” into this image of the “sacred.”

Clearing has been reproduced in countless posters, calendars and books etc. In this sense, it has acquired the aura of a “celebrity” commodity. But it has also become a quasi-religious icon, a metonym for this moment of vision by the artist-as-seer. As in Moran’s painting, the multiplying copies seek to replicate and exploit the “sacred power” which is immanent in the image. At the same time, the artist himself has acquired celebrity status; so what speaks through the image, in part, is Adams himself, and his skill in creating memorable images of the sublime.

Adams is a continuing influence on landscape photographers. There are blogs online with titles such as “Learn Ansel Adams’ Biggest Secret for Stunning Photography—Visualization” (Silber) or “Nature Photography: Think Like Ansel Adams Today” (“Nature Photography”). Peter Essick notes that some photographers even try “to go back to the exact shot and re-photograph standing ‘in the tripod holes’ of where Adams stood” (qtd. in Leary). John Kasaian has observed groups of photographers at Tunnel View, where Adams shot *Clearing*, “standing around waiting for snow to stop falling.” Arguably, the aim is not simply to take photos like Adams, but to re-experience, if not some religious epiphany, then the moment of capturing the perfect image. Even where photographers want to create an original image of their own, they may still be trying to think like the “master,” to follow him like a “prophet” or artist-seer. In this way, there *is* an urge to copy, to reproduce; but this is not the same relationship to the image as the one evoked by DeLillo in *White Noise*.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AS PILGRIM

America’s national parks are littered with places which have effectively been turned into “power centres” through the images associated with them—Yellowstone Grand Canyon, New Inspiration Point, Half-Dome etc. We do not, perhaps, see these sites literally as places where the sacred meets the profane; but they have become famous as sites where artist-seers such as Moran and Adams achieved artistic, if not religious, “epiphanies.” The modern “pilgrim” follows trails through the parks with their own camera, as if in footsteps of these artist-seers. There are photography guidebooks and websites for visitors, which are akin to pilgrimage guides. Following them gives photographers opportunities to exercise their skills, and to become do-it-yourself artist-seers. This is about far more than “taking pictures of taking pictures” (DeLillo 13); it is a form of individual, physical re-enactment of the process whereby key sites were *constructed* as simulacra of the sublime. For the Grand Tetons, for example, essential locations on the photographic trail include Snake River Overview—where Adams took his famous shot of *The Tetons and the Snake River* (1942); Oxbow Bend; and the Thomas Moulton Barn.

We may see how the barn is a gift to photographers for crafting images of the sublime. Arguably, the meaning of the barn—for everyone apart from the Moulton family themselves—has long been *as image*. The building itself evokes something of the aura of the “sacred site.” The shape of the roof recalls a church; and it matches the angle of the mountain peak, as if the two are mystically aligned.

Photographers exchange tips online on how to capture the best shots of the barn; for example: “If you are going to do the Mormon barns, get there for sunrise . . . you’ll have lots of company. That is when the lighting is best for this spot” (“em-I-sails”). In response to a photograph on the internet (by Mike Hall), showing the barn at dawn, one viewer commented: “Magical lighting! As if this beautiful landscape is bathed in sacred light!” (Hall). These comments suggest that a visit to the site is not a form of “spiritual surrender” (DeLillo 12). Photographers are not there to surrender to the “aura” of the image, but to construct the simulacrum for themselves. If they see themselves as channeling anything, it is the “spirit” of their artistic forebears—even appropriating something of their celebrity “aura”; as if they remain not simply models to follow, but “spirit guides.” For example, one photographer (Jeff Clow) described his shot of the barn as an attempt “to channel my inner Ansel Adams.” A comment by a fellow photographer on Clow’s “flickr” page, where the image is published, reads: “Yep, for sure Ansel is inside you somewhere” (Clow).

In Clow's image, there is a strong emphasis on shape. The barn mirrors the mountain behind it; and the bank of clouds in the sky seems to mirror both the mountains, and the trees in the foreground. It is as if the human, the natural, and the supra-natural, are all merging, in an image of what Emerson called the "eternal One" (*Collected 2* 160). Nevertheless, it may be argued that Clow's work is simply a pastiche. Other comments posted by visitors to his "flickr" page suggest that the primary interest in fact lies in questions of composition and technique, rather than in the image as an "echo of God" (Adams, *Letters* 248); for example: "The textures and depths are fantastic. Has a vintage feel to this beautiful view," and "[b]eautiful shot. . . . love the clouds and processing. Is this a HDR?" (Clow).

Thomas Weiskel has suggested that the sublime might be a "moribund aesthetic" in an age when "we have lost the obsession, so fundamental to the Romantic sublime, with natural infinitude" (6). Ironically, then, it might be argued that the problem is not that the image has become detached from the "real" (i.e. the "actual" barn); but rather, that it has become detached, to some degree at least, from the Ideal. Arguably, however, the idea has *not* died out, but rather persists as a presence in much landscape photography, however obscured it may seem by all the technical talk about filters, exposure, balance etc. In an editorial in an issue of *Aperture* magazine, it was argued:

While belief in a God as an undeniable reality or as an abstract concept is often in debate, many people believe in or sense an otherness . . . be an inherent factor in humankind's experience. These "moments of grace," these so-called epiphanies . . . are more or less intuitive perceptions or insights into the reality or essential meaning of something. . . . Photographers have described a "moment of grace," when they are unexpectedly able to create an image of lasting meaning and revelation. (Bridges 2)

Aperture was founded in 1952 by a group of photographers including Ansel Adams; so it is perhaps not surprising to find it continuing to affirm the idea of spiritual "revelation." Arguably, however, the idea is also evident in the work of photographers such as Eliot Porter and Peter Essick. (One contemporary photographer, John Parkinson, describes his book of landscape images, *Visual Verse* [2006], as a collection of "God's Art" [vii].)

In a blog called "8 Lessons Ansel Adams Can Teach You About Photography," Eric Kim urges his readers: "Photograph with your emotion, and your entire soul." Similarly, in the book *Digital Landscape Photography: In the Footsteps of Ansel Adams and the Great Masters*, Michael Frye recommends paying attention to light and weather, and using "every possible visual tool—

line, shape, pattern, tone, color, movement, exposure, and depth of field—to emphasize the feeling you’re trying to convey” (54). We may see, then, that the romantic concept of the “artist-seer” endures. Moreover, it is clear that technique is being used by photographers to shape the image—i.e. *making*, not taking photos (as Adams advised). There is a pleasure in the ability to *transform the real* and produce images of landscapes as “power centres.” Arguably, photographers accrue a sense of their own authority as “artist-seers,” through their ability to construct the “power” in the image. They are the creators, not the slaves of the simulacrum.

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The Catch of the Hyperreal: Yossarian and the Ideological Vicissitudes of Hyperreality

ABSTRACT

Hyperreality is a key term in Jean Baudrillard's cultural theory, designating a phase in the development of image where it "masks the absence of a profound reality." The ambiance of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) closely corresponds to Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal as images persist to precede reality in the fictional world of the novel. Since for Baudrillard each order of simulacra produces a certain mode of ideological discourse that impacts the perception of reality, it is plausible that the characters of this fictional context should be ideologically impacted by the hyperreal discourse. From this vantage point it is possible to have a new critical assessment of Yossarian's (protagonist) antiheroic stance and study the role of the "business of illusion," whose ideological edifice is based on the discourse of the hyperreal, on his antiheroic stance and actions. By drawing on Baudrillard's cultural theory this paper aims to read Heller's novel as a postmodern allegory of rebellion against the hyperreality of the twentieth-century American life and trace its relevance to modern-day U.S.

Keywords: hyperreality, society of spectacle, business of illusion, antihero, Baudrillard.

INTRODUCTION

Catch-22 (1961) remains the most studied Heller novel with an ongoing relevance and topicality which continues to extend the wealth of academic materials on its literary merits and cultural significance. Since its publication in early 60s the novel had been the subject of diverse critical studies ranging from mythological to post-structural examinations. A good example of such studies is Jon Woodson's *A Study of Joseph Heller's Catch-22: Going Around Twice* (2001) in which he traces a mythical subtext associated with the Sumerian epic *Gilgamesh* in Heller's novel or David M. Craig's *Tilting at Morality: Narrative Strategies in Joseph Heller's Fiction* (1997) which also touches on the mythological substructure of the novel, namely Yossarian's archetypal conviction to evade death and live forever, and his similitude to Prometheus in terms of having a "liver condition." On the other hand, the novel is also widely credited as one the earliest instances of postmodern fiction. Gary W. Davis was among the first critics who took note of the novel's postmodern connotations, specifically the "discontinuity between language and reality" that pervades the universe of the novel as reflected in Yossarian's whimsical transformation of meaning while censoring letters or the meaningless "bombing pattern" phrase that General Peckem invents to convince everyone that it is important that the bombs explode close to each other and make a nice aerial photograph (qtd. in McDonald, *Reading "Catch-22"* 64–68). In *Laughing at the Darkness: Postmodernism and Optimism in American Humor* (2010) Paul McDonald also touches on the postmodern traits that run throughout the novel; however, his interest is focused on the echo of a different aspect of the postmodern condition in the novel. McDonald asserts that absurdities in the novel like the "bombing pattern" or nailing soldiers together to create eye-pleasing parades are symptomatic and reflective of the "the culture of simulacrum" which has dominated American culture. McDonald argues that the novel echoes what Fredric Jameson calls a "second order of reality," i.e. a symptom of American postmodern culture where images threaten to "take precedence over reality." McDonald goes on to suggest that Yossarian's refrain "they're going to kill me" is not directed at Hitler but those who subscribe to and prevail the "empty surfaces" of the culture of simulacrum:

He comes to see reality as something people ignore in favor of convenient misrepresentations that sustain whichever comfortable delusion or master-narrative they choose to embrace. Yossarian's refrain, "They're trying to kill me," in other words, refers less to Hitler than to those who subscribe to such misrepresentations with no regard for logic, or humanity. (28)

McDonald's analysis of Yossarian's refrain and character opens an avenue to look at the idiosyncrasies of this intricate character from a new perspective. This is the task which this paper undertakes in what follows, but before that I consider it necessary to discuss Yossarian's idiosyncratic dangling between the poles of heroism and its opposite: antiheroism. While in the eyes of the likes of Woodson, Craig and Davice he stands as a mythological/postmodern/counterculture hero, literary scholars such as M. H. Abrams, J. A. Cuddon and Ihab Hassan consider him to be a perfect example of what is labeled as "antihero." In his essay "The Antihero in Modern American and British Fiction" (1959) Hassan designates antiheroes as different types of victims:

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In fiction, the unnerving rubric "antihero" refers to a ragged assembly of *victims*: the fool, the clown, the hipster, the criminal, the poor sod, the freak, the outsider, the scapegoat, the scrubby, opportunist, the rebel without a cause, and the hero in the ashcan and hero on the leash. (55)

Many of the labels that are listed above are descriptive of Yossarian; his clownish demeanor, outsider stance, and final rebellion, to name but a few, make him an ideal example of Hassan's designation of this literary trope. However, his antiheroic stance is mainly embodied in his overwhelming fear of death which forces him to circumvent duty at any cost; poisoning the soldiers' food, sabotaging military maps, or faking illness are among the many measures he takes to postpone or avoid flying missions. While Yossarian's fear of death and antiheroic stance is constantly conveyed to the reader, no clear explanation for his behavior is provided. What this article aims to accomplish is to pin down the underlying reasons for Yossarian's antiheroic stance in the light of the "culture of simulacrum" in which he was assimilated. First, it is important to note that the "culture of simulacrum" is not a term coined by Jameson as McDonald presumed. As Jameson explains in his article "Periodizing the 60s," later assimilated in the volume *The Ideologies of Theory* (1988), "the culture of simulacrum" was an idea developed out of Plato's theory of forms by Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard, designating a state of reproduction where there is no original for the made copies (195). According to Jameson its conceptualization is also indebted to the writings of the French situationist Guy Debord:

This omnipresence of pastiche is not incompatible with a certain humor, however, nor is it innocent of all passion: it is at the least compatible with addiction—with a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudoevents and "spectacles" (the term of the situationists). It is for such objects that we may reserve Plato's conception of the "simulacrum," the identical

copy for which no original has ever existed. Appropriately enough, the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has observed, in an extraordinary phrase, that in it “the image has become the final form of commodity reification.” (17)

The concluding quote from the above passage is taken from Debord’s influential text *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Debord explains “spectacle” as an assertive confirmation of the regulation of appearances over all aspects of social life. The first phase of economy’s monopoly over social life caused a debasing shift from evaluating humans as who they are to evaluating them based on what they have. However, in the present stage, “havings” should derive their prestige and final goals from the appearances. This has brought about yet another shift, this time “from having to appearing” (Debord 11). Therefore, the late twentieth century gave birth to a grand spectacle which replaced the real world with a world of images in which the social relations between the members of society are mediated via image. Debord suggested that the rise of this spectacular culture has generated “a second nature with its own inescapable laws” which dominates our daily awareness (13). Debord’s writings preceded and influenced the writings of Jean Baudrillard, the main theorist on the “culture of simulacrum.” For Baudrillard socio-cultural life in late-twentieth century had surpassed the level of “spectacle” and had reached a more radical phase. Hyperreality is the key term that Baudrillard uses to describe this new stage in the relationship between image and reality, namely the phase where simulacra (image) “masks the absence of a profound reality” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 8). In Baudrillard’s vision the progression of the relationship between reality and its representation (image) falls into four main phases: “it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum” (8). The emergence of the hyperreal order coincides with the inauguration of the third phase of simulacra and extends into the fourth one (see section 1.3 for a full discussion on hyperreality).

The centrality and omnipresence of the United States in Baudrillard’s writings is a renowned feature of his study of postwar era, as it is reflected in his comment that “all of the themes that I first examined in my previous books suddenly appeared in America, stretching before me in concrete forms” (qtd. in Rubenstein 11). Baudrillard’s interest in the United States and his critical writings on its “hyperreal” status makes his theory a suitable intellectual background to examine the reflection of a hyperreal

America in Heller's war novel. This article aims to argue that Yossarian's antiheroic stance and status are shaped by hyperreality as his perceptions and actions are conditioned by its discourse. It is worth mentioning that "for Baudrillard, each order of simulacra produces knowledge, ideas and perceptions that maintain and reproduce the power relations of that order" (Pawlett 73). Hence, hyperreality is treated as a hegemonic discourse in this paper and the extent to which Yossarian's subjectivity is ideologically conditioned by it is attested by reference to many events of the novel. In the first section of this article the hyperreal status of Pianosa island, where the events of the novel take place, is compared to Disneyland and the continuing relevance of Heller's novel for the modern-day U.S. is discussed. In the second section, Yossarian's antiheroic stance is explicated as a symptom of the domination of the hyperreal discourse over his subjectivity. In the third section, Yossarian's encounters with the embodiments of the orders of simulacra are fully detailed. Finally, in the fourth section, Yossarian's transition from an antiheroic stance to a heroic one is explained in terms of his adopting the role of Baudrillardian "Evil" and rebelling against the hegemony of the hyperreal.

BODY OF DISCUSSION

1.1. *CATCH-22* AND DISNEYLAND

In his reading of *Catch-22* Paul McDonald concentrates on instances in which a fascination with images critiques "a TV culture which has a corrupting influence on how we perceive reality" and quoting from Neil Postman, "we have adjusted to what may have at one time been termed 'bizarre'" (*Reading "Catch-22"* 29). Lieutenant Scheisskopf's obsession with creating eye-pleasing parades in which the hands of the soldiers remain immobile or Peckem's fabrication of a "bombing pattern"¹ are among the examples that McDonald provides in his reading. We can supplement McDonald's reading with other examples from the novel. The preoccupation of American culture with the "bizarre" is embodied in its generation of trends such as celebrity worship or paparazzi, and both of these corresponding trends are satirized in the novel: Hungry Joe introduces himself as an important photographer from *Life* magazine to cajole Italian girls to pose naked for him, wheedling them with promises like "[b]ig picture on heap big cover.

¹ A meaningless term Peckem fabricates to convince everyone that "it's important for the bombs to explode close together and make a neat aerial photograph" (Heller 222).

Si, si, si! Hollywood star. Multi dinero. Multi divorces. Multi ficky-fick all day long” (34). Also, in a typically Paparazzian style, he bursts into the room where Yossarian and Luciana are making love to take photographs of them (he keeps pursuing this task on multiple other occasions). On the other hand, the predicament of celebrity worship is epitomized in Major Major Major who suffers from resemblance to Henry Fonda. Contrary to Fonda, Major Major Major is the personification of mediocrity so that “even among men lacking all distinction he inevitably stood out as a man lacking more distinction than all the rest” (Heller 56), as a result of which he had to apologize to everyone for not being Henry Fonda.

The fact that most of these characters possess top military ranks—General, Lieutenant, Major, etc.—and serve as authorial figures brings about expectations in terms of their maturity and rational conduct. However, their blatant obsession with appearances renders their actions childish and immature so that it seems like these top military ranks are filled by children rather than serious adults. How can such rampant childishness be explained? Where does it come from? To answer these questions we should draw on Baudrillard’s analysis of Disneyland as a place symptomatic of American culture. Baudrillard considered Disneyland as an objective miniaturized replica of the United States where features such as American lifestyle, values, or even individual American characteristics could be easily detected:

It is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp. Whence the debility of this imaginary, its infantile degeneration. This world wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the “real” world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly among those adults who come here to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness. (*Simulacra and Simulation* 12–13)

The childish behaviors of the characters that populate Heller’s novel are in line with the rampant childishness which, according to Baudrillard, has eclipsed American image-centered society. For Baudrillard Disneyland stands for this society and transcends the level of an imaginary entertainment center:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle. (12)

In *America* (1986) he even goes further to propose that “[i]f you believe that the whole of the Western world is hypostatized in America, the whole of America in California, and California in MGM and Disneyland, then this is the microcosm of the West” (*America* 54–55). From this perspective, it is arguable that similar to Disneyland the fictional island of Pianosa, where the events of the novel are taking place, stands as a miniature duplicate of United States as it mirrors its hyperreal society of spectacle. However, the difference is while the function of Disneyland is to somehow obscure the hyperreality of twentieth century American life, the events in Pianosa island operate to illuminate that fact. Furthermore, the fact that the novel’s most extreme cases of childishness belong to the highest officials sends a political message pertaining to the subservience of the ruling system to the rules of spectacle. This is to say that the governing system is nothing more than a simple gag within the bigger machinery of the spectacle. A good example for this fact is the 2008 American primary election where Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama fought over Democratic nomination. Throughout their competition, policies and standards were so overshadowed by the precedence of appearances that images became a signal for reliability, suitability or trustworthiness (Toffoletti 15). However, perhaps, we do not need to look as far back as 2008 election to take note of the continuing dominance of “spectacle” over American culture and the relevance of Heller’s novel for modern-day America. Following the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of United States, Robert Zaretsky published an article in New York Times under the title “Trump and the ‘Society of the Spectacle.’” According to Zaretsky:

With the presidency of Donald Trump, the Debordian analysis of modern life resonates more deeply and darkly than perhaps even its creator thought possible, anticipating, in so many ways, the frantic and fantastical, nihilistic and numbing nature of our newly installed government. In Debord’s notions of “unanswerable lies,” when “truth has almost everywhere ceased to exist or, at best, has been reduced to pure hypothesis.”

Zaretsky goes on to pose questions regarding the spectacular aspect of Trump’s presidency, including “[w]ho can separate the real Trump from the countless parodies of Trump and the real dangers from the mere idiocies?” or “[i]s it possible we are all equally addicted consumers of spectacular images he continues to generate? Have we been complicit in the rise of Trump, if only by consuming the images generated by his person and politics?” Zaretsky’s questions not only reflect Debord’s perspective but also touch on the heart of Baudrillard’s theory, namely when he asks

“[w]ho can separate the real Trump from the countless parodies of Trump” he is—perhaps unknowingly—evoking one of Baudrillard’s key concepts: hyperreality.² It is against this background that we can discern the resonances of Heller’s novel in the modern day United States, a country where images precede reality and make presidents out of TV personalities. It is precisely against this backdrop that we can analyze the antiheroic stance and status of Yossarian.

1.2. YOSSARIAN AND THE “BUSINESS OF ILLUSION”

Among the schemes that Yossarian devises to avoid flying missions, faking illness is the most persistent one as he keeps moving to and from hospital throughout the narrative. His mysterious liver condition and the response of military Doctors to it serve as a good starting point to study his antiheroic status in the light of Baudrillard’s theories. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) Baudrillard differentiates between the acts of simulating and dissimulating illness:

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn’t have. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending: “whoever fakes an illness can stay in bed and make everyone believe that he is ill. Whoever simulates illness produces in himself some of the symptoms” (Litre). Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the “true” and the “false,” the “real” and the “imaginary.” Is the simulator sick or not, given that he produces “true” symptoms? Objectively one cannot treat him as either ill or not ill. (3)

Therefore, illness simulation blurs the lines between “true” and “false” or “real” and “imaginary” illness because the simulator cannot be objectively diagnosed as either ill or not ill. Medicine faces crisis in this case since if symptoms are artificially producible any illness could be viewed as simulated and medicine loses sense since it is only cable of treating real illnesses (3). This is the case that the doctors who are treating Yossarian are faced with since his illness blurs the lines between real and fake illness: he is hospitalized because of

a pain in his liver that fell just short of being jaundice. The doctors were

² The inability to distinguish the real Trump from his parodies is symptomatic of the hyperreal condition where “there is no original for the made copies.”

puzzled by the fact that it wasn't quite jaundice. If it became jaundice they could treat it. If it didn't become jaundice and went away they could discharge him. But this just being short of jaundice all the time confused them. (Heller 1)

The nature of Yossarian's medical condition which fluctuates between being jaundice and not being jaundice intrinsically mimics the effects of simulation *par excellence* as it defies the possibility of discerning truth from simulation. As Baudrillard appropriately questions "what can medicine do with what floats on either side of illness, on either side of health, with the reduplication of illness in a discourse that is no longer either true or false?" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 3–4). By falling short of being jaundice, Yossarian's liver condition vacillates or "floats" between illness and health, and thus renders medical authority helpless. Furthermore, his liver condition materializes Baudrillard's well-known diagnosis of hyperreality as "substituting the signs of the real for the real" (4). In an ambiguous dialogue with Milo Minderbinder the antihero claims: "I don't really have a liver condition. I've just got the symptoms" (Heller 40). The signs of the illness replace the real illness in this case. In addition to this, the narrative obfuscates the true status of this liver problem to the level of sheer indeterminacy. In the chapter "The Soldier Who Saw Everything Twice," Yossarian pretends to have pain in his appendix and rushes to hospital to avoid combat duty. However, the attending doctor explains to him that having an appendix problem is not a suitable ailment for circumventing duty since it can be taken out immediately and he has to leave hospital, yet he urges him to "come to us with a liver complaint and you can fool us for weeks" (Heller 120). Given that the novel has a non-linear form and the sequence of events is chronologically disordered, it is to be presumed that this encouragement is what triggers Yossarian's constant liver condition throughout the novel. This fact contradicts what we read in the first page of the novel which implies he actually had some pain in his liver: "Actually the pain in his liver had gone away, but Yossarian didn't say anything and the doctors never suspected" (Heller 1). What is more significant is the reaction of medical authority to this act of simulation. When Yossarian bluffs to Doc Daneeka about the mysterious pain in his liver which has confused nurses and doctors alike since it neither becomes jaundice nor vanishes away, Doc Daneeka does not question the eccentricity of his medical condition. He simply takes Yossarian's claim at face value and writes this order on a piece of paper: "give Yossarian all the dried fruit and fruit juice he wants, he says he has a liver condition" (40). The reaction of the hospital doctors to Yossarian's claim also parallels Doc Daneeka's model: they readily accept Yossarian's claims about his condition. This unquestioning acceptance of

Yossarian's claims on the part of the medical authority is quite surprising, especially provided that—as it is later revealed in the novel—they are fully aware that Yossarian is lying. However, Baudrillard would not find the reaction of these military doctors surprising:

What can the army do about simulators? Traditionally it unmasks them and punishes them, according to a clear principle of identification. Today it can discharge a very good simulator as though he were equivalent to a “real” homosexual, heart-case or a madman. Even military psychology retreats from the Cartesian clarities and hesitates to draw the distinction between true and false, between the “produced” symptom and the authentic symptom. (*Simulacra and Simulation* 4)

The full proportions of refusing to distinguish the true from the “produced” is best exposed once we return to the aforementioned advice that Yossarian received from a doctor on how to improve the feasibility of his illness simulation. What is most significant in this case is the complicity of authority (in this case medical authority) in the production of simulation. By withdrawing from discriminating between authentic symptoms and “produced” ones they stimulate simulation; they also instruct in the best methods for masking the truth to the point of unrecognizability. This being said, the emerging question is—what is the rationale behind such extreme reluctance to distinguish the true from the fake? The key to this question can be found in yet another episode of the novel involving Yossarian, doctors, and simulation. This time instead of simulating illness he has to simulate dying. He is asked by one of the doctors to play the role of a dying son for the family of a soldier who is already dead for a few minutes, so they will have the opportunity to meet their dying son for the last time. The doctor offers a deal to Yossarian, proposing that if he cooperates with him he would not reveal that he is lying about his liver condition while explaining that he is fully aware that he is faking it: “how do you expect anyone to believe you have a liver condition if you keep squeezing the nurses’ tits every time you get a chance? You’re going to have to give up sex if you want to convince people you’ve got an ailing liver” (Heller 124). Yossarian becomes baffled and when he expresses immense surprise about the fact that the doctor knew the truth but did not divulge it, he is answered by a sentence that sums up the whole rationale behind this ubiquitous desire for not discerning the original from the produced: “We’re all in this business of illusion together” (124). The doctor’s confession reveals that the saturation of intersubjective relations by the discourse of simulation is to the extent that the relations of power between the authority (medical authority and the army) and their subjects (soldiers) are quite transformed, i.e. both are equally complicit in carrying

the plot of masking the truth in favor of the fake. Yossarian's simulation provides the doctor a suitable leverage for making him take part in yet another act of simulation. This on-going process of stimulating simulation, in which every act of simulation inevitably leads to further acts of simulation, culminates in the production of a long chain of simulations whose beads are interdependent upon each other. By yoking the communal and interpersonal relations of the subjects together, this chain leads to the generation of the illusion-centered ambience which pervades the universe of the novel. In addition to this, the doctor's answer to Yossarian also serves as a reminder of Debord's assertion that "the spectacle cannot be understood as a mere visual deception produced by mass-media technologies. It is a world-view that has actually been materialized, a view of a world that has become objective" (7). "The business of illusion" is thus the materialized world-view that reigns over the spectacular context of the novel, a context in which the hegemony of the spectacle has so deeply penetrated and homogenized the characters that deviation from its norms is not even conceivable for them, e.g., the soldier who saw everything twice was not lying about his condition yet the hegemony of the business of illusion had so influenced Yossarian that he not only viewed this soldier as a master of simulation but also started to emulate him to lengthen his own stay in the hospital. Only when this soldier finally dies does Yossarian discover that he was not feigning his symptoms and actually saw everything twice. From this perspective, the basis of Yossarian's antiheroic stance can be explained according to his assimilation within the omnipresent discourse of hyperreality. What essentially designates him as an antihero and seeds his fear of death throughout the novel is his indifference to the ideals which explained and justified the war for everybody else. Ideals pertinent to the war such as heroism, patriotism, democracy or fighting against the evil of Nazism which justified the war for the majority of those who were involved in it did not have the slightest meaning to Yossarian. As the narrator informs us, the protagonist exclusively regarded survival as a valuable ideal:

It was a vile and muddy war, and Yossarian could have lived without it—lived forever perhaps. Only a fraction of his countrymen would give up their lives to win it, and it was not his ambition to be among them. To die or not to die, that was the question. . . . History did not demand Yossarian's premature demise, justice could be satisfied without it, progress did not hinge upon it, victory did not depend on it. That men would die was a matter of necessity; which men would die, though, was a matter of circumstance, and Yossarian was willing to be the victim of anything but circumstance. (Heller 45)

The question is why notions such as "justice" or "victory"—alongside

the aforementioned nationalistic causes—have no hegemonic power over Yossarian to convince him dying in this war can be heroic. The underlying basis of Yossarian’s antiheroic stance and the answer to this question could be explained by investigating the effects of the dominance of hyperreal hegemony, and the fact that its discourse had a greater influence on Yossarian than rival discourses—including those of patriotism. As was previously mentioned, the most notable side effect of the domination of the discourse of hyperreality over a given context is the obfuscation of the determinacy between the fake and the real. Yossarian is implicated in an ambience which is totally subsumed by such discourse and indeterminacy, so that everywhere he is surrounded by its symptoms and manifestations. As a result of this, his eyes are screened by the ideological glasses of hyperreality and he looks at his surroundings through the lens of this spatially and temporally dominant discourse. This being said, it is no wonder that ideals such as patriotism, progress, justice or heroism have little credit for Yossarian: their truth and authenticity is undermined by the illusion-based discourse of hyperreality. As Baudrillard explains, “the era of simulacra and of simulation” is marked by “no longer [having] a Last Judgment to separate the false from the true, the real from its artificial resurrection, as everything is already dead and resurrected in advance” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 8). Simulation proceeds by negating the possibility of distinguishing the real from the non-real and Yossarian is so absorbed in this negation that determining the authenticity of notions such as patriotism, justice, and heroism remains as elusive for him as distinguishing the authenticity of the symptoms of the soldier who saw everything twice. They might or might not have basis in reality and, as the case of the soldier who saw everything twice verifies, a resolute assessment of their reality principle could turn out to be distinctly erroneous.

There are numerous examples within the novel which affirm such a reading of Yossarian’s condition and point to his condescending skepticism about the validity of hero-making ideals, especially patriotism: for example, the “educated” Texan from Texas “patriotically” believed “that people of means—decent folk—should be given more votes than drifters, whores, criminals, degenerates, atheists and indecent folk—people without means” (Heller 4). Texan, on account of his nationalistic views, is referred to as the “patriotic Texan” throughout the novel and his patriotism is “donated” to and echoed by Dunbar as well, who after listening to him cries “that’s it, there was something missing—all the time I knew something was missing—and now I know what it is. No patriotism” (4). Although Texan’s and Dunbar’s alleged patriotism is, it seems, satirically irrational, it is not regarded as such by Yossarian. In response to Dunbar’s words he retorts:

You're right, you're right, you're right. The hot dog, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Mom's apple pie. That's what everyone's fighting for. But who's fighting for the decent folk? Who's fighting for more votes for the decent folk? There's no patriotism, that's what it is. And no matriotism, either. (4)

Yossarian's haphazard remarks touch on the foundation upon which the ideological edifice of patriotism is erected: "Hot dog," "Brooklyn Dodgers," and "Mom's apple pie" are symbolic representatives of the very ingredients which compose American patriotism, i.e. patriotic discourse mainly mobilizes masses under the banner of protecting indigenous cultural riches (hot dog, Brooklyn Dodgers) and domestic values (Mom's apple pie) against the threat of foreign intruders who seek to take them away from the indigenous nation. Thus, from this perspective, heroism in war is at least partly dependent on entirely cultural factors that are echoed in Yossarian's remarks but ironically are totally meaningless to him. Through a mocking endorsement of Texan's and Dunbar's literal fascism (something against which they are supposed to be fighting) and negating the domestic values which "everybody is fighting for," Yossarian flagrantly parodies their presupposed significance. Yet he doesn't stop there, and by a satirical juxtaposition of patriotism with "matriotism" further parodies the ideological basis of patriotic discourse. Furthermore, this extensive dismantling of presupposed values culminates in Chaplain's act of transgression: Chaplain is portrayed throughout the novel as an epitome of faith in righteousness who is one hundred percent subservient to his ethical ideology, contrasting with the likes of Yossarian or Doc Daneeka who find ideological principles meaningless. Yet, following in his footsteps, he lies about being sick in order to get checked into the hospital. Chaplain's act of transgression follows no purpose. He sins just for the sake of sinning and afterwards he is able to rationalize his transgression to himself in a way that convinces him he has not sinned at all. The conclusion that Chaplain draws from this experience perfectly illustrates the devaluation of moral certitudes under the hegemony of hyperreal discourse: "It was almost no trick at all, he [Chaplain] saw, to turn vice into virtue and slander into truth, impotence into abstinence, arrogance into humility, plunder into philanthropy, thievery into honor, blasphemy into wisdom, brutality into patriotism, and sadism into justice" (Heller 248).

1.3. YOSSARIAN AND THE ORDERS OF SIMULACRA

Chaplain's conclusion is a further confirmation of the obfuscation and the arbitrary disposition of the reality principle under the hegemony of the hyperreal. A phenomenon which finds further embodiment in the

death of *the soldier in white*: this unnamed and unidentified soldier is so heavily injured that he is described as being made of gauze, plaster and a thermometer, which plays the role of mere adornment for this mummified body which has a black hole for a mouth and the thermometer is placed in it at morning and removed from it in afternoon on a daily basis. The immobility and muteness of the soldier in white is to the extent that the very possibility of the existence of a living being within the caste of plaster and gauze is questionable for the other inmates. His survival is dependent on two tubes connected to his elbow and groin, transferring nutrition to his body and disposing its waste. The condition of soldier in white parallels what Slavoj Žižek describes as being “between two deaths: dead while still alive” (167). Žižek provides many cinematic examples of this phenomenon among which Ivan Reitman’s *Dave* (1993) stands out as the most pertinent one to the case of the soldier in white: in this movie the U.S. President is reduced to the level of an immobile vegetable after suffering a huge stroke. The Secret Service replaces the paralyzed President with Kevin Kline’s title character, an ordinary man who impeccably resembles the President. At the end of the movie, simultaneous with the proclamation of the real President’s death (which is untrue), Kline engineers his own disappearance while being joined by the President’s wife who has fallen in love with him. Žižek interprets Kline’s role-playing as the President as being located “between two deaths,” i.e. the metaphorical death of the President (complete paralysis standing as a symbolic equivalent for death) and his social death followed by the official declaration of his death (undermining his biological subsistence). However, Žižek believes that in this case the genuine embodiment of being “between two deaths” is located in the image of the real President himself:

In the triad of the “real” President, his stand-in, and the Presidency as the symbolic *place*, which can be occupied by different actual individuals, the key image is that of the incapacitated “real” President in a secret room beneath the White House, attached to a life-support machine—so, ultimately, the one who is “between two deaths” is the “real” President himself: he is still alive while socially already dead, reduced to a level of pure biological subsistence. (168)

Is not the plight of the President in Reitman’s film similar to the predicament of the soldier in white? Is he not also placed between two deaths and experiences death twice? And is this not yet another example for the confusion of the real and the fake (in this case real death)? The covering of the soldier’s entire body in gauze and plaster which rendered him motionless and speechless, like the vegetable state of the President,

signaled his symbolic death, while his social death occurred when Nurse Duckett declared him officially dead on one occasion when she was removing his thermometer. However, since the soldier in white is fully covered in gauze this announcement is not confirmed by any visible change in his appearance or bearing; the connected tubes to his body kept inserting and retracting fluids into it and from it. Nurse Duckett's assertion of his death is the only existing fact to rely on and, like Yossarian's claim to have a liver condition, it goes undisputed. Once again no desire for preserving the reality principle is perceivable and the veracity of a statement goes uninvestigated. There is no reason not to assume that, as in the case of the President in Reitman's film, the soldier is, at least technically, still alive. Also, in both cases, a formal proclamation is the "death knell" that ends whatever life these two characters had. This is precisely why Yossarian believed that Nurse Duckett had "murdered" the soldier in white:

if she had not read the thermometer and reported what she had found, the soldier in white might still be lying there alive exactly as he had been lying there all along. . . . Lying there that way might not have been much of a life, but it was all he had, and the decision to terminate it, Yossarian felt, should hardly have been Nurse Duckett's. (Heller 113)

Yossarian's reaction once again highlights the priority and importance of the image in his mind: for him, the termination of the image equates to murder for him. The motionless figure of the soldier in white, covered entirely in bandages, surely revealed little signs of life. Nevertheless, it constituted an image: the image of an injured soldier who is not yet dead and is struggling to live and regain his health. Regardless of the extent of the veracity and the reliability of this image, given that the soldier is mortally wounded and already dead in many ways, it persisted until the very moment that Nurse Duckett destroyed it by announcing the soldier's death. The fact is the the soldier's recovery was out of the question, both to the nurses and to the rest of the ward (who even suspected there was nothing within the bandages and that the soldier was sent there as a joke). Yet, regardless of the unchanging condition of his physical health, his image as a recovering soldier remained fully intact until the nurse terminated it. In other words, it is the termination of this image which caused the soldier's social death and is synonymous with it. Yossarian's view of the death of the soldier in white as an act of murder by Nurse Duckett precisely touches on this point. However, it also once more draws attention to the obsession of the antihero with the role of image and representation, an obsession which is voiced on a collective level once the soldier in white reappears in the ward. Upon returning from a "Hollywood extravaganza in Technicolor,"

the inmates discover the soldier in white back in his old place and in his old condition. Dunbar's screaming that "he is back" is first echoed by a feverishly delirious patient and then by the whole ward, which erupts into total chaos. Patients and injured soldiers start running as if the place is on fire. Still, what is even more haunting than the bedlam that follows the apparent reappearance of the soldier in white is Yossarian's conviction that it is indeed the same man:

"He is back, he is back!" It was, indeed, the same man. He had lost a few inches and added some weight, but Yossarian remembered him instantly by the two stiff arms and the two stiff, thick, useless legs all drawn upward into the air almost perpendicularly by the taut ropes and the long lead weights suspended from pulleys over him and by the frayed black hole in the bandages over his mouth. He had, in fact, hardly changed at all. (Heller 248)

The underlying reason for Yossarian's presumption that the newly arrived injured soldier is the same soldier in white, who has returned from the realm of the dead, goes one step beyond his obsession with appearances. It is symptomatic of the Baudrillardian third order of simulacra and another confirmation of the extent to which Yossarian's universe, and thus American culture generally, is overshadowed by hyperreality. Essentially, Baudrillard's orders of simulacra register the evolutionary phases of the image: "from reflecting reality, to masking reality, to masking the absence of reality, to having no relation to reality whatsoever" (Toffoletti 17). While in the first order of simulacra the original referent is distinguishable from its counterfeit or image, the second order "blurs the boundaries between reality and representation" (Lane 86), as evidenced in Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*: this work of art is comprised of 32 canvasses, each illustrating one can, all of them looking entirely identical minus their different labels. All of the images are printed from one single silkscreen template so that not only distinguishing between them becomes impossible but also none of them can be conceived as the original from which the rest have been copied (Toffoletti 21–22). At first glance, akin to Warhol's *Cans*, the phenomenon of the soldier in white might appear as an incarnation of the second order of simulation. However, closer inspection reveals that this is not the case since, unlike Warhol's artworks, the soldier in white phenomenon draws upon no external referent. While the extreme similitude between Warhol's cans has made them substitutable for one another so that none of them stands as the original version, they still remain representational copies from a real model—the actual cans of Campbell Soup Company. Comparably, the soldier in white is a dehumanized figure

reduced to the level of a meager image—that of a mummified, immobile and mute effigy, substitutable by other identical images—something which actually takes place in the novel. However, unlike Warhol’s *Campbell Cans*, the twin images of the soldier in white are anchored to no external referent; they are copies without an original model. Thus, the phenomenon of the soldier in white belongs to the third order of simulacra: the order of the hyperreal, where “images circulate freely, detached from any concrete association with an object in the real world, hence can accrue meaning in relation to each other” (Toffeletti 24). In this context, it is significant that the reappeared figure of the soldier in white is discovered once the inmates return from a “Hollywood extravaganza in Technicolor” (Heller 248). In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno argue that, by seeking to reproduce the empirical world of everyday perception, films have become the prototype of reality, so that after leaving the cinema the moviegoer perceives the outside street as a continuation of the movie he has just watched. The more impeccably a film succeeds in recreating the objective external world, “the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema” (Horkheimer and Adorno 99). Therefore, the motion picture that the inmates viewed prior to returning to the hospital served the role of a catalyst which fueled their sense of illusion since “life is to be made indistinguishable from sound film” (99). This is in line with Baudrillard’s description of United States as a place where “even outside the movie theatres the whole country is cinematic (*America* 54).” The spectator leaves the movie theatre to confront a bigger spectacle: “Where is the cinema? It is all around you outside, all over the city, that marvellous, continuous performance of films and scenarios” (54). In a similar fashion, the characters left the Hollywood spectacle to step into the yet bigger spectacle of their everyday reality and thus were fully prepared to take part in its world of illusions. This rings particularly true in relation to Yossarian who is one hundred per cent sure he is confronted with the same man [the soldier in white] and he “would recognize him anywhere” (Heller 249). The fact is that his fixation on “the business of illusion” was already well-established, yet what happened pushed him completely over the edge and prompted him into a full acceptance of the hyperreal.

Internalizing the discourse of the hyperreal and embracing its sense of reality not only aggravated Yossarian’s paranoia. It also taught him how to manipulate the “precession of simulacra” to his own advantage and to cancel a dangerous mission that he feared would result in his death: Yossarian was fully convinced that he was going to die in the mission to Bologna, a city which could not be conquered by the ground forces. To cancel the mission he tiptoes into the maps tent during the night and moves the bomb

line, a red ribbon which specified the position of Allied infantry forces on the map, over the city of Bologna. The next morning every military official was convinced that the city was captured and that the mission was canceled. What is at work here is closely related to Borges's short story *On Exactitude in Science*, a tale used by Baudrillard as his starting point in *Simulacra and Simulation*. In the story the cartographers of an ancient Empire create a map so identical to the territory of the Empire that it ends up fully covering it. However, following the decline of the Empire the map deteriorates and only its shreds remain. Baudrillard describes the tale as an instance of second order simulacra which is succeeded by the hyperreal in the modern era:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself*. (1)

Is not the “precession of simulacra” as Baudrillard delineates in the above paragraph materialized in the incident with the map? Unlike the map in Borges' story the map in *Catch-22* precedes the territory and any alteration to it guarantees an alteration in reality—at least in the mind of the paranoid residents of Pianosa Island. The high ranked army officials readily accepted the alteration of the bomb line's position as infallible proof of the conquest of the named city. Even though they were fully aware that the ground forces were in no position to accomplish this task, the map's forged claim on the conquest of Bologna is as undisputedly welcomed and embraced by military authority as Yossarian's feigning of illness was embraced by the medical authority. This fact once again points to the simulation-centered ideology which directs the characters' mode of thought and action. Yet, the true importance of the incident with the map is in its highlighting of a remarkable shift in terms of the antihero's interaction with simulation. In his antiheroic fear of death and impulsive desire to circumvent duty Yossarian makes a huge leap from a minor simulation of illness to a major manipulation of simulacrum. In the first case nobody was harmed by his conduct but the latter case led to the possible demise of Major De-Coverley. Although moving the bomb line did not fool the enemy it surely deceived Major De-Coverley (misled by

the bomb line's position, he is under the impression that Florence was also captured so he flies there to rent apartments for soldiers on lease) and caused his disappearance. Major De-Coverley's case can be considered an example of the violence of the hyperreal but this does not make Yossarian any less culpable. He can be blamed for the possible death of Major De-Coverley as much as he is responsible for the death of Kraft and his crew in the Ferrara mission: out of excessive fear he couldn't get the target the first time so he made a second turn to bomb it again which resulted in the death of Kraft and his crew. Nevertheless, in both cases it is difficult to perceive any trace of guilt or self-condemnation in Yossarian. Although he frankly admits to being responsible for Kraft's death he seems completely untroubled by it, as is evidenced by his "always almost forgetting Kraft when he counted the dead men he knew" (Heller 274). Analogous to his indifference to patriotic values, morality and ethical stances are also alien to him. It appears that the truth-effacing simulative ambience of the novel has discredited all sorts of values and principles so that the antihero, along with some characters close to him, are left with a moral abyss in which standing up even for righteous principles is viewed contemptuously. This is evident in Doc Daneeka's condemnation of Dr Stubbs: "he is going to give the medical profession a bad name by standing up for principle" (Heller 238). Dr Stubbs stands up to Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn and grounds soldiers out of pity. What he does is quite rare within the universe of the novel, and the likes of Doc Daneeka and Yossarian are not able to comprehend it. Nevertheless, Yossarian does not remain a one-dimensional character and starts to change late in the novel.

1.4. YOSSARIAN'S REBELLION AGAINST THE HYPERREAL

What initially triggers his transformation is his traumatic witnessing of Snowden's horrible death, an event which is consistently referred to throughout the novel but only described graphically near its end. In this chapter Yossarian is utterly incapable of even alleviating the pain of the severely wounded Snowden who was dying at the back of the plane. The Morphine syringes of the first-aid kit were stolen and replaced by a note which read: "What's good for M&M Enterprise is good for the country, Milo Minderbinder" (Heller 298). Milo's note satirically echoes the kind of patriotic slogans which serve the interests of "the-powers-that-be." However, unlike Texan's comic patriotism there is nothing in Milo's note that could amuse Yossarian. Following this event, he starts to march backwards, naked, with his gun slung over his shoulder and refuses to fly more combat missions. Yossarian's disobedience is in complete defiance of military authority and is the starting point for his moral awakening. The

awakening is complete when he hears about M.P.s raiding of a brothel he used to visit and flees to Rome to save the kid sister of Nately's whore who is now homeless. This chapter which is entitled "The Eternal City" narrates Yossarian's failed attempt for finding the kid sister and graphically details the scenes of cruelty and inhumanity which he encounters on his journey through the city. As Heller himself explains this chapter is "a trip to the underground, a purgation from which Yossarian emerges. . . . He is guilty and that is the beginning of his moral consciousness" (qtd in McDonald, *Reading "Catch-22"* 48). Yossarian's awakened moral consciousness forms the basis for his subversion of the hyperreal ideology. Hitherto, symptomatically speaking, Yossarian remained guilt-free and skeptical to values and principles and even prone to paranoia because the hegemony of hyperreal challenged the authenticity of all values and principles. Yet his "purgation" makes him take moral responsibility and thus turns him against this dominant discourse. He struggles to liberate himself from it, as it is reflected in his assertion that "every victim was a culprit, every culprit a victim, and somebody had to stand up sometime to try to break the lousy chain of inherited habit that was imperiling them all" (Heller 276). What he breaks is the lousy chain of "the business of illusion" which had him under his claws so far in the novel. By standing up for the principle of preserving the safety of a child (the kid sister) he liberates himself from the cynicism that hyperreality had installed in him. It is the first time in the novel that Yossarian is not obsessed with his own safety and survival; instead his mind is totally preoccupied with finding the homeless kid and helping her. The fact that the safety of the child is completely contrary to his own interests is highlighted by the fact that he moves to Rome to help the child without being on leave, something which he is finally arrested for. At this point Yossarian's status changes from antihero to hero since he is exhibiting a basic hallmark of heroism: sacrifice. This shift is due to his rebellion against the suppressing hyperreality which had denied him any moral clarity or certainty and had left him exclusively with nothing but constant fear of death. In Baudrillardian terminology, this act designates Yossarian as an agent of "Evil." This term does not have moral connotations in Baudrillard's vocabulary but rather denotes a structural critique of simulation: the world of simulation is completely bound up with what Baudrillard calls "the discourse of the Good" which "by whitewashing violence, by exterminating all germs and all of the accursed share, by performing cosmetic surgery on the negative" (*The Transparency of Evil* 81) attempts to muffle and eradicate Evil. Thus Evil becomes that which remains outside of simulation and threatens to destabilize it, "it is a structural critique of anything all-pervasive that emanates from simulation and a hygienised reality" (Hegarty 63). Therefore, by critiquing the moral

indifference that emanates from this discourse Yossarian becomes a personification of the “principle of Evil.” From this perspective, the fact that Yossarian gets arrested by M.P.s after his transformation is significant. Metaphorically, the M.P.s act as the agents of the hyperreal discourse tasked with arresting Yossarian precisely because of his subversion of its hegemony. In Yossarian’s personification of “Evil” and the M.P.s metaphorical containment of this subversive force we find an allegory of an attempted rebellion against the hyperreality of postmodern life. From this perspective Heller’s novel should be read and interpreted as a postmodern allegory that details an individual’s struggles to escape from the post-truth relativism of a mentality which rejects certitudes in favor of perspectivism or, to put in Nietzschean terms, denies facts in favor of their interpretations.³ Yossarian is arrested by M.P.s while he is lecturing Aarfy on ethics and humanity. Aarfy had raped and murdered a young girl without any feeling of remorse and in response to Yossarian’s reproaches condescendingly answers: “Oh, I had to do that after I raped her, I couldn’t very well let her go around saying bad things about us, could I?” (Heller 268). The juxtaposition of Yossarian’s strong sense of morality and condemning righteousness with Aarfy’s casual indifference clearly illustrates Yossarian’s break from the chains of indifference-oriented skepticism which he exhibited earlier in the novel. When the M.P. forces arrive Yossarian assumes that they are going to arrest Aarfy, but instead they arrest him for not having a pass and ironically apologize to Aarfy for intruding. Their apology to Aarfy makes perfect sense since Aarfy’s indifference to his crime is totally in line with the malignant imperatives of the hyperreal which advocate the refutation of certitudes, including moral ones. From this perspective, there is no reason for arresting Aarfy but Yossarian’s arrest is urgent: he is taken back to the headquarters to be reintegrated into the discourse of hyperreal and resume his previous skepticism. This is achieved by confronting him with the greatest of all moral challenges. He is taken to Colonel Korn and Colonel Cathcart’s office where he is informed that they are going to send him home under one condition: he should “like” them. The fact that Yossarian is desperate to return to U.S. is evident, however, for fulfilling this wish he has to turn his back on all of those friends who died in the war since Colonel Cathcart and Korn are fully responsible for their deaths. Cathcart’s zeal for promotion prompted him to increase endlessly the number of missions and to volunteer his squadron for any dangerous mission, which resulted in the death of some of Yossarian’s most intimate friends such as Nately. Korn is no less blameless as he played the role of a persuader and the feeder of Cathcart’s

³ “There are no facts, only interpretations.”

vanity. Additionally, they are frank about their evil quests and malignant nature, as evidenced in Korn's questioning Yossarian: "Won't you give up your life for Colonel Catchart and me?" (Heller 288). Although what they are asking for may seem ridiculously innocuous, they make no effort to hide the malicious connotations that underpin it: Korn openly reveals the moral dimensions connected to the deal when he informs Yossarian: "You're going to loathe it. It [the deal] really is odious and certainly will offend your conscience" (Heller 289). Furthermore, he also expresses his knowledge of Yossarian's moral awakening and his own lack of morality quite blatantly as he describes Yossarian as "an intelligent person of great moral character who has taken a very courageous stand," and himself as "an intelligent person with no moral character at all" (Heller 288). On an allegorical level, this scheme is staged to reintegrate Yossarian back into the framework of hyperreality and its "business of illusion" and to shatter his newly found sense of certitude and morality. In Baudrillardian terms, the whole scheme is designed to "save the reality principle," to once again screen Yossarian's eyes with an "ideological blanket" and alienate him from his newly found truth. What can be more effective in this regard than the charm of image?

We're going to promote you to major and even give you another medal. Captain Flume is already working on glowing press releases describing your valor over Ferrara, your deep and abiding loyalty to your outfit and your consummate dedication to duty. Those phrases are all actual quotations, by the way. We're going to glorify you and send you home a *hero*, recalled by the Pentagon for morale and public-relations purposes. You'll live like a millionaire. Everyone will lionize you. You'll have parades in your honor and make speeches to raise money for war bonds. (Heller 291, emphasis added)

Yossarian is initially deceived by these luring images and accepts being Cathcart and Korn's "pal," to like them and say good things about them. Nonetheless, the victory of "the business of illusion" is temporary and the antihero soon regains his previous heroic stance and cancels the deal. After being stabbed by Nately's girlfriend he is once again returned to the hospital where he is shaken awake and informed by a mysterious stranger that "we've got your pal, buddy" (295). At first he is totally baffled by this utterance and is incapable of comprehending its meaning, but later on in a moment of epiphany he understands it. He speculates that this "pal" must be a friend of his, such as Dunbar or Nately or "like Clevinger, Orr, Dobbs, Kid Sampson or McWatt" (297), someone he knew that was killed in the war. Then the epiphany dawns on him and he exclaims: "I just realized it, they've got all of my pals, haven't they?" (297). The

unknown stranger and his mysterious message is a personification of the protagonist's conscience which is troubled by the "odious" deal and tries to awaken him. This reading is reinforced by the fact that Yossarian was asleep when he was visited by the stranger and falls to sleep again shortly after the encounter, and was quite delirious before that in the first place. He was visited by his own conscience which awakened him from his moral stupor. Finally, Yossarian calls off the deal, and, after learning that Orr was not dead and had carefully planned his escape to Sweden, he decides to desert the army too. Of course, in contrast to the common belief which was reinforced by the film adaptation of the novel, he did not intend to follow Orr. In an interview Heller explains how Yossarian's desertion is in line with his newly shaped heroic character and confirms the premise of this article:

Yossarian is running into danger, not away from it. He says there's a little girl in Rome whom he might be able to save. It's ironic that, after all the discussion about the ending of the novel, the film depicts Yossarian trying to row to Sweden. Nothing could have been farther from the case in the novel. (qtd in McDonald, *Reading "Catch-22"* 50)

CONCLUSION

In this article Paul McDonald's thesis that the universe of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* reflects the "second order of reality" that, according to Fredric Jameson, dominates American society was taken as a basic premise and, by drawing on Jean Baudrillard's theories on hyperreality, it was developed into a framework for studying the antiheroic character of the protagonist of the novel. It was argued that similar to Disneyland the island of Pianosa, where the events of *Catch-22* take place, stands as a microcosm of the United States and mirrors its simulacral condition. The childish behavior of the top military officials and other army members who populate this island are in line with Baudrillard's belief regarding the rampant childishness which has dominated the American society of spectacle. The antiheroic status of the protagonist of the novel is also read as a direct result of his ideological conditioning within this context: Yossarian's "liver condition" embodies this, as it fluctuates between being jaundice and not being jaundice and defies the possibility of discerning the real from the non-real. This condition is symptomatic of what Baudrillard termed hyperreality, "substituting the signs of the real for the real" (4). Hyperreality is the foundation upon which the ideological edifice of the "business of illusion," which saturates the fictional context, is erected. Accordingly, the stance and the actions of

Yossarian are regulated by its discourse and his antiheroic status is rooted in its hegemony. His indifference to pertinent ideals such as heroic patriotism or fighting against the evil of Nazism, which designates him as an antihero, is due to the fact that his subjectivity was ideologically blanketed by the hyperreal discourse and he looked at his surroundings through its lens. Thus, the possible authenticity of ideals such as patriotism, justice or heroism remained as elusive for him as distinguishing the authenticity of the symptoms of the soldier who saw everything twice, which, contrary to what Yossarian presumed, were not simulations. In other words, the truth-effacing side effects of hyperreality prevented the protagonist from having certitude about these abstract ideals. This point is especially well illustrated in his mocking contempt for the satirical patriotism of the Texan and Nately. Furthermore, it was contended that the change that occurs in Yossarian's status as an antihero and his final heroic stance was due to his rebellion against the hegemony of the hyperreal which had deadened him to certainty and moral integrity, as a result of which he becomes a personification of Baudrillardian "Evil," i.e. that which remains outside simulation and poses a threat to the hyperreal order. This rebellion leads to Yossarian transcending his antiheroic status and adopting a heroic one, as evidenced by his rejection of Korn and Cathcart's "odious" deal.

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CANADIANA

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Timothy Findley, His Biographers,
and *The Piano Man's Daughter*

ABSTRACT

In this paper, Sherrill Grace, Findley's biographer, will examine her biographical practices in the context of Findley's own memoir, *Inside Memory*, and his interest in creating fictional auto/biographers and auto/biography in several of his major novels (notably *The Wars*, *Famous Last Words*, *The Telling of Lies*, and *The Piano Man's Daughter*). His fictional auto/biographers often use the same categories of document that Findley himself used—journals, diaries, archives—and this reality produces some fascinating challenges for a Findley biographer, not least the difficulty of separating fact from fiction, or, as Mauberley says in *Famous Last Words*, truth from lies. Like many writers, Findley kept journals all his life, and they are a key source of information for his biographer; however, his way of recording information and his creation of fictional journals means that a biographer (like the readers of his fictional auto/biographers) must tread carefully. While not a theoretical study of auto/biography, in this paper Grace will offer insights into the traps that lie in waiting for a biographer, especially when dealing with a biographee who is as self-conscious an auto/biographer as Findley.

Keywords: Timothy Findley, AutoBiography.

“What makes biography so endlessly absorbing is that through all the documents and letters and witnesses, the conflicting opinions and partial memories, we keep catching sight of a real body, a physical life.”
(Lee 2)

“This is the story of everything I know. Of who we are. And how we lived. And where we come from.”
(Findley, *The Piano Man’s Daughter* 537)

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Full disclosure: Timothy Findley (1930–2002) was a Canadian novelist, playwright, short story writer, essayist, and autobiographer, and I am Findley’s biographer. I have, therefore, access to documents and information not available to other readers, and much of what I am about to say would not be known to the reader who picks up *The Piano Man’s Daughter* (1995) for the first time. If you prefer to discover a novel without the baggage of background facts, then stop reading this essay now and get the novel. If the backstage machinery and facts fascinate you and enrich your discovery, then read on.

Biography and autobiography were very important to Findley. He kept journals and diaries through most of his life; he published one memoir, *Inside Memory*, was preparing another, *Journeyman*, when he died, and gave numerous interviews in which he stressed the impact of certain people and events on his own and his family’s life. Most important for understanding his published work, however, is the fact that he so often created fictional biographies and autobiographies, with fictional biographers and autobiographers. Moreover, he sometimes merged the two genres, blurring the lines between them to demonstrate that a life story cannot be told without revealing the teller’s life; he understood that, as Paul John Eakin explains, we live “relational [lives] developed collaboratively with others, often family members” (*How Our Lives Become Stories* 57). Over the past forty years, much scholarly attention has been given to theorizing biography and autobiography, but the artists got there first—from Proust to a host of contemporary writers, and Findley knew about relationality without reading any of the theorists.¹ *Inside Memory* is unique in the sense

¹ This discussion of the novel owes a great deal to my reading in autobiography theory, memory studies, and to biography theory. For a selection of works I have found most useful, see Atlas, Bruss, Couser, Derrida, Eakin, Egan, Erll and Nünning, Grace (*Inventing Tom Thomson*), Kirmayer, Lee, Lejeune, Ricœur, and Smith.

that Findley tells us about himself by telling stories about other people who made an impact on his life and who he can never forget. He tells us that he remembers scenes and places, not in objective terms but because he is part of the light or the atmosphere or the sounds and words that included him.

Several of his novels function as some form of fictional AutoBiography (a term I will use to describe his blurred life-story strategy); the main character keeps a journal or writes a diary and saves his or her letters, photographs, and other memorabilia, or, the main character relies on another's memory archive to reconstruct that person's life, and in the process discovers his or her own life. For example, *The Wars* (1977) contains a biographical story created by a nameless narrator, who is Robert Ross's biographer; there would be no novel without this biographer. The distinction between the biographer and Robert Ross, however, is clear because the biographer is researching his subject decades after Robert died. On this level of the narrative there is no AutoBiography, but *The Wars* contains two intertextual witnesses who knew Robert and recall their memories of him. One of these witnesses is the Canadian nurse, who received his badly burned body at her nursing station and resented the presence of the Military Police who guarded him as if he were a criminal capable of escape. Marian Turner does not see Robert as crazy or criminal for rebelling against orders and killing a superior officer; she sees Robert as sane, and she offers him enough morphine to end his suffering. When he declines her offer, saying simply "not yet" (Findley, *The Wars* 189), she takes his words as an indication of his courage and steadfastness. Nurse Turner tells us little about herself apart from the unforgettable impact Robert has had on her life, but the other intertextual witness, Lady Juliet d'Orsay, confesses as much about herself as she does about Robert when the biographer interviews her. She describes herself as a "Boswell in bows" (143), and reads long sections from her diaries into the biographer's tape recorder. Lady Juliet's diary is a fine, if limited, example of fictional AutoBiography, and she represents Findley's first use of this strategy in his fiction.

Famous Last Words (1981), a more ambitious, complex text and, in my opinion, Findley's masterpiece, is a full-fledged AutoBiography written on the walls of an abandoned luxury hotel in the Austrian Alps during the final days of the Second World War. The AutoBiographer is one Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, an American novelist and a Fascist sympathizer, who is wanted by the Americans for treason and by the Nazis because he knows too much about other powerful fascists who plan to slip through the post-war Allied net. One of the two American officers who reads his writing and reacts to it certainly believes the story to be trustworthy and

sincere; the other officer condemns Mauberley and classifies his so-called confession as a lie, a cynical attempt to exonerate himself. Readers are left to decide for themselves, but before rushing to conclusions they would be wise to reflect on Mauberley's own warning, written as an epigraph for his life-story: "*All I have written here is true: except the lies*" (Findley, *Famous Last Words* 59). The points at which Mauberley has lied about himself or about the others who are inseparable from his life-story, we can never know. One example illustrates this problem well. A key figure in Mauberley's life is the infamous Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor. Mauberley meets Wallis when they are young and he follows and helps her as her life unfolds during the late thirties and the war. Of course, we must picture Wallis (a real person) as Mauberley (a fictional character) recreates her—ruthless, ambitious, impeccable in her dress, jewelry, and parties, and a fascist sympathizer like her husband—but when we turn to the facts and the historical record, we find that Mauberley's biography of Wallis hews close to what her *real* biographers and historians tell us. So where are the lies, where the truth? And where, precisely, do biography (of Wallis, who Mauberley adores) and autobiography (Mauberley's own life-story, with all its probable obfuscations, selective remembering, and strategic editing) overlap?²

Three of Findley's lesser known works, *The Telling of Lies* (1986), *You Went Away* (1996), and *Pilgrim* (1999) also involve autobiography, biography, and AutoBiography. The heroine and narrator of the first of these novels solves the mystery of a murder, but in the process she reveals significant events in her own life and in the lives of others; her textual *modus operandi* is the diary she keeps and we read. *You Went Away* is a moving novella about a family that is falling apart during the Second World War. The first-person narrator who addresses the reader explains that he has found a box of old photographs and is trying to decipher who the people in the pictures are and what happened to them. We know nothing about this narrator, except that he is struggling to create a meaningful story. What Findley knew, and hints at, is that the story the man creates from old photographs is very close to an early period in Findley's own life.³ *Pilgrim* was Findley's last major novel and it warrants its own exclusive attention, but suffice it to say here that a private journal plays a key role in the novel, and sections of this journal are transcribed within the main narrative; indeed, they are so important that they supersede other narrative

² For studies of *Famous Last Words*, see Bailey, Brydon, Gabriel, and Scobie.

³ Set during the Second World War, the novella presents a boy's perspective on his parents deteriorating marriage, his father's alcoholism, and on his father's rejection of him.

elements in the text. Within the journal we read autobiographical stories about the man who keeps these journals and biographical stories about several others.

Clearly, Findley's fictional biographers and autobiographers are complex, often unreliable, characters. They play central roles in his novels and they always challenge the reader to separate fact from fiction, truth from lies, and one person's life-story from another's. There is, however, one sense in which these characters are utterly reliable. They always stress their problems with the basic materials with which they must work—those documents, witnesses, conflicting opinions, and “partial memories” that Hermione Lee mentions. To Lee's list I would add (from experience) that any reader of a Findley novel must wrestle with the intricate web spun by a fictional biographer or autobiographer whose narrative blurs the boundary between the two genres *and* who deliberately incorporates aspects of Findley's own or his family's life in their stories. But my chief topic here is *The Piano Man's Daughter* and Findley is nowhere more autobiographical and AutoBiographical in his fiction than in this novel.

GIVING LILY KILWORTH A VOICE: *THE PIANO MAN'S DAUGHTER*

Findley conceived of *The Piano Man's Daughter* as a companion to *The Wars*. Where the latter drew on aspects of his Findley family's lives, most notably on an uncle who had been a decorated First World War officer, in this new novel he turned to his mother's family for inspiration, factual details, and stories. In *The Piano Man's Daughter* the key source of inspiration for the character of Lily Kilworth, Charlie's mother, was Findley's aunt, Ruth Bull Carlyle (1893–1984), about whom I shall have more to say. The first-person narrator of the novel is Charlie Kilworth, and Charlie's mission is to tell his mother's life-story, which means he must find and tell his own. Lily Kilworth is the piano man's daughter, but her father, Tom Wyatt, was killed in an accident before he could marry Ede Kilworth, Lily's mother, and Ede's story is one of the relational lives that contribute to both Lily's and Charlie's life-stories (see fig. 1). When Findley has Charlie tell us, towards the end of the novel, that “[t]his is the story of everything I know” (Findley, *The Piano Man's Daughter* 537). about his mother's and his own family, about who they all were and where they lived, he is assuring us of the truth of the complicated AutoBiography we have just read; he needs us to see him as a reliable narrator, unlike Mauberley, who we are wise not to trust entirely. In ways I will describe, Charlie repeatedly reminds us that he is trying his very best to give us all the information he can find in the clearest, most honest terms possible.

Charlie's prime motivation for telling us his story is his passionate need to make amends to a mother he adored but felt he had betrayed. Lily Kilworth is an unusual mother and her story is heartbreaking. Not only is she born in 1890 as an illegitimate child, but she is also born with a terrible illness inherited through her mother's family. From the age of three she had suffered epileptic seizures, but worse still she heard the voice of a mad relative that loomed out of fire places and she grew up to be both terrified of this man's voice and a pyromaniac. After she suffered a seizure in front of her mother's husband, Frederick Wyatt, and a group of wealthy dinner guests, she was locked in the attic every time her family entertained. Lily hated her mother's husband and refused to recognize the man as a father or to use the name Wyatt. Beautiful and brilliant, Lily spent two years in England in her early twenties, and that is where she conceived her son, Charlie. However, Lily cannot remember who Charlie's father was because this man had rescued her during one of her attacks and she had clung to this stranger until forcibly removed from him. In this way, Charlie's decision to tell Lily's story is also motivated by his desire to identify his father for both his and Lily's sake.

By the time he does learn his father's identity, however, it is the fall of 1939, another war is coming, and Lily has died on 17 July 1939 in the fire that destroyed the Asylum for the Insane at Whitby, Ontario, in which she lived. Lily had been confined to this asylum after her breakdown in 1918, and this collapse was precipitated by the news that her lover, Neddy Harris, the father of her unborn child had been killed on the last day of the war. Consumed by despair, Lily had tried to kill herself by burning down the movie theatre in which she had first met Neddy, but she was saved by an eight-year-old-Charlie. Lily was immediately committed to the infamous Queen Street Asylum for the Insane in Toronto, where she attacked her son on his first visit and where she later gave birth to a stillborn daughter. Lily believed that by saving her life, her son had betrayed her, and Charlie believes that he must atone for her terrible life after her incarceration as a dangerously mad person and her years of slow and partial recovery. He has never thought of his mother as crazy, and he sees her treatment as appallingly wrong. To Charlie, Lily is unique, full of imagination and talent, beautiful and loving of nature and all other creatures. She could also be a frightening woman who, at times, would insist that they flee into the night from wherever they were staying because the voice in the fire was calling to her. As a child, Charlie could not understand what was happening to his mother at such times, except that she was terrified and wanted to save them both.

If there is anything positive about the fire in which Lily dies, it is that Charlie retrieves her wicker suitcase, which survived the flames and contains his mother's notebooks, photographs, letters, and other memorabilia. This suitcase, then, holds the basic archive with which Charlie must work to

reconstruct the story of Lily's life. And he begins her story in his pre-Second World War present of July 1939 by telling us that "some of what follows I lived and some was told to me" (6) and that the parts he passes on to us "about Lily's family and the men she loved . . . were written in Lily's notebooks, or told to me by others" (7). Charlie's archive, then, is as complete as possible and he can supplement what is not in the suitcase from his own experiences and with what others recall. Chief among these people are his grandmother, Ede, and his maternal great-grandmother Eliza Fagan Kilworth. To grasp the meaning of Lily's existence, he must know the root of her illness and how her mother and grandmother handled such a catastrophe. Eliza is the one who passes on the factual information about inherited madness in the Fagan family because it was her uncle, John Fagan, who had the "falling sickness" and eventually burned down the family home in Dublin, killing himself and Eliza's grandparents. Genealogy matters hugely in this story, and the tragedy of Lily's life bears close resemblance to a tragedy in Findley's own family.

Findley once insisted that, although he had drawn heavily on his mother's family to create *The Piano Man's Daughter* and dedicated the novel "in memory of my Aunt Ruth," Lily was not Ruth and he was not Charlie. In a 29 April 1998 fax to his German publisher, Doris Janhsen, he explained that "the most pertinent personal background" to the novel concerned pianos—playing them and making them—because his mother's father, Frederick Bull, had sold pianos and owned a piano factory, and everyone in the Bull family played pianos, including Findley himself. However, a closer reading of the novel that is informed by Findley's biography makes clear that in the character of Lily Kilworth he was attempting to give his Aunt Ruth, a woman he adored and believed to have been abused by her husband and the medical profession, the voice she had been denied during her lifetime. Ruth had wanted to be a writer—she had published poetry—but she was a schizophrenic in an era that did not understand this illness and dealt with such women by sedating them and incarcerating them so they would not be an embarrassment to their families. Ruth was committed on her husband's orders and for many years Findley was not allowed to see her because the family considered her mad. Findley was technically correct, of course, in his letter to Jahnsen because fictional characters are *not* the same as real people. Lily is an invention, as is Charlie, but their function is to tell us an AutoBiography that Findley creates from personal experience, deep emotional attachment, and his family's history.⁴

Ruth Bull was Findley's mother's sister and he "adored" her. In *Journeyman*, he describes her as a "wonder . . . a medium, a mystic" (91), as

⁴ Several other characters bear some resemblance to Bull family members, and Timothy Findley had a father, who played an important role in his life.

well as a woman with schizophrenia who spent over half her life in asylums. On rare occasions as a child, he was taken to see her in the Whitby Asylum, with its lawns, trees, and walls, and he remembered her vividly as “tall, somnambulistic, reticent—and beautiful” (Findley, *Journeyman* 91). “This is the stuff,” he writes, “from which Lily Kilworth was born” (91). In addition to the inspiration he experienced from such seminal images, he decided that Ruth “wasn’t going to die without having said a few words aloud, beyond the secrecy of her notebooks and letters” (88). And so, with some modifications, we have Lily, who suffers, Findley explains, from something “closer to autism than schizophrenia” and yet is “the closest I’ve ever come to attempting a self-portrait” (92). This autobiographical claim comes as something of a surprise—Findley was never diagnosed with a mental illness—but he goes on to locate the connection between Ruth-Lily and himself in “uniqueness,” a quality that sometimes caused Findley considerable despair.⁵ In terms of narrative voice and perspective, however, Findley is much like Charlie—haunted by a powerful, misunderstood woman, and determined to tell her story.

Explicit connections between reality and fiction are established in the novel through the photographs reproduced for the 1995 hardback edition, where the endpapers carry a collage of old pictures, most of which are Findley and Bull family snapshots. Six of these pictures reappear in the novel at the beginning of the “Prelude” and at five of the novel’s seven parts. Unfortunately, the paperback edition does not include the collage, but it does retain the six individual images that introduce parts of the book. These six reproductions of faded photographs should prompt a reader to question the relationship between the fictional characters and the real people in the photographs; the collage, however, enhances the connection between real life and fiction, actual people and imagined ones, and stresses the multiple connections between the author’s family and the fictional biographer’s story. The most important picture is the faded photograph of Findley’s mother, Margaret, in a 1920s bathing suit, laughing beside her sister Ruth, who stands between Margaret and their father, Fred Bull. You can find it in the lower left-hand corner of the collage and at the beginning of the “Prelude.” These are the real people, or so this old photograph insists, about whom we will read, and the woman in the centre, smiling at the camera, is important (fig. 2).

The Piano Man’s Daughter employs an elegiac romance plot in which a narrator tells the story of a person who has died and cannot speak for him- or herself, except through the narrator’s story.⁶ Elegiac romances involve a triangulation of characters: the narrator/biographer (Charlie), the

⁵ I explore these matters fully in *Hope Against Despair*.

⁶ The elegiac structure can be found in several novels, notably *The Great Gatsby* and *Fifth Business*; see Merivale.

biographee (Lily), and a third, desired but missing figure, which in this novel is the father—Charlie's father (not known *yet*), Lily's father (Tom Wyatt, dead), and Lily's stillborn baby's father (Neddy, dead). By creating Lily's life story, Charlie creates his own *and* the stories (from what is known) about these fathers. *The Piano Man's Daughter* is, then, a quest novel, structured as an elegiac romance, and told as a fictional AutoBiography.

In Charlie's words, "I will give her back her life" (Findley, *The Piano Man's Daughter* 13), and he begins by putting his biographer's cards on the table and addressing us: "I will tell you about" (7), "I will tell you honestly" (8), "[y]ou already knew my father had disappeared" (9), "I am *Charlie Kilworth, Piano Tuner*. . . . You may well have heard of the Wyatt Piano Company. Perhaps you own a Wyatt yourself" (9). And he confesses that on one occasion he had disowned his mother; she had fallen to the ground and, rather than admit that he knew this woman having a seizure in public, he ran away, hoping she would not die because he would then have to "claim" her (13). With these opening assurances, and the visual corroboration of family photographs, Charlie not only claims Lily, he claims our attention and our trust. But he goes further. As he opens Lily's wicker suitcase, he describes each object—her notebooks, photograph albums, letters, a jewelry box containing a wreath of grasses and flowers, a jar of stones, a box of matches, and a boy's sun suit on which Lily had embroidered the name, Charlie. We see each item (and hopefully remember them because each plays a role in Lily's life), and we can relate to them, especially if we also preserve such personal treasures. When Charlie tells us that he can detect her perfume emanating from the opened suitcase, we believe that what we see through his eyes and words really are "Lily's *familiars*, her *totems*. . . her songs" (12) and that Lily believed each of her things "had its own voice" (12). We are, in short, hooked by the time we have opened the book and read the first dozen pages.

Although Charlie often seems to disappear beneath an authoritative, traditional third-person voice and focalization, he surfaces repeatedly to remind us that this voice is, in fact, his. The first such voice shift occurs at the start of part one, "1889–1890," which is introduced by a picture of a woman in a garden, presumably the character Ede, who we meet in this section and who was pregnant with Lily.⁷ Charlie is describing this and other photographs for us, giving us their dates (if they carry dates), and telling us that he is there

⁷ This photograph is of Edith Maude (Fagan) Bull, Findley's maternal grandmother, dated by Findley as 1908; it is a profile shot of a pretty woman with short hair and a full white blouse; she is smiling and reaching out to some bushes in a garden. The original photograph is held, with other family photographs, in the Findley/Whitehead *fonds* at Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

in one photograph: “I am there in Lily’s womb. The date is August 1910. I will be born the following October” (18). Then, almost imperceptibly, Charlie’s personal voice and perspective shift as he slips into his more formal biographer’s voice to describe Ede giving birth to Lily in the corner of a field near her family’s farm at Munsterfield, at the exact spot where Lily had been conceived: “It was in [Ede’s] mind that she would create a wreath of those flowers and grasses from the field” (24). We are told this because Ede told Lily and both his grandmother and his mother told Charlie about this wreath (kept in the wicker suitcase) and about Lily’s conception and birth. Charlie could not possibly reconstruct such private events without evidence, and he surfaces several pages later to assure us that he “found scribbled notes,” written by Ede in her diary and preserved by Lily (66–67, 71–72).

Another striking instance of Charlie’s surfacing from beneath the objective voice occurs when he explains why Lily hated Frederick from the moment he arrived at Munsterfield to court Ede. “She told me this herself,” Charlie tells us, that on first sight Frederick “terrified” her because he had cold eyes when he smilingly insisted that she come to him to be kissed. Lily was only six at the time, but she refused, and Charlie “watched [her] conjuring the moment”: “I might have been seven or eight years old when she told me this story,” he says, and the scene Lily evokes is “straight out of *David Copperfield*. Mister Murdstone had risen from its pages and forced himself into [her] life” (126). Of course, it is Frederick and Lily who have just risen from the pages of Charlie’s biography, where we (as Hermione Lee claims good biography will) catch sight “of a real body, a physical life” (Lee 2). And if we have read Dickens, the terror called up by the reference will be even greater.

On many occasions, such as this Dickensian encounter between Frederick and young Lily, Charlie quotes his mother, either from the stories she told him, their conversations, or her notebooks. Lily’s voice appears in italics as she interrupts Charlie’s first and third person narration. Charlie also quotes his great-grandmother, Eliza, without using italics and, on one occasion, Eliza tells Ede, who in turn tells Charlie, “The Story of John Fagan” (132). This story is an essential key to our understanding of Lily and Charlie because in 1843, John Fagan set fire to the family home in Dublin and he and Eliza’s grandparents perished. Uncle John had been locked in the attic because he had visions, spoke with God, and wrote on the attic walls. The writing on the walls was “all about death” and fire, and the words were “decorated with leaves and bees and singing birds” (134–35).⁸ Lily has

⁸ In *Famous Last Words* Mauberley is explicit about the biblical reference to the Book of Daniel. No biblical allusion is made in *The Piano Man’s Daughter*, but a well-read reader will catch the allusion.

inherited this genetically transmitted illness and John's story is integral to hers; moreover, Charlie refuses to father a child for fear that it too would be afflicted. Biography overlaps, in the genes and the stories, with autobiography to establish the lynchpin in Charlie's AutoBiography. The story of Uncle John, however, finds its source well outside the pages of *The Piano Man's Daughter* in Findley's family and his Aunt Ruth not, to be sure, in its details, but in the situation, the misunderstanding of and cruel response to mental illness, and the fear it evokes in those who can only see madness and danger in the visions and behavior of such uncles and aunts. The generic blurring of biography and autobiography within the novel extends to a blurring of distinctions between fact and fiction, imagined characters and real people, between fictional AutoBiography and the Findley/Bull/Fagan story in which Timothy Findley's maternal ancestral story contains a Fagan line and an Aunt Ruth.

As Charlie gets older, he feels better able to tell us Lily's story without relying on others. From about the age of five or six, he becomes a remembering, participating eyewitness to her life, her escapes, her terrors, and her joy in music, movies (she names him for Charlie Chaplin), nature, and love. In the wicker suitcase he finds notebook entries "addressed" to him (213), and he tells us about the times he and Lily studied her photograph albums in an effort to identify his father. This shared search for the lover/father enables him to include more and more of his autobiography into Lily's biography until he finally tells the story of his adult life, career, marriage, and visits to Lily at Whitby (276 and 378–79). Thanks to the gift inherited from Lily's pianist father (Tom Wyatt), and the father he has yet to discover, Charlie possesses perfect pitch and becomes a pianist and piano tuner, not a maker of instruments like his Wyatt relatives. For the story of piano manufacture and sales in turn-of-the-20th-century Ontario, Findley drew upon the lives of his maternal relatives; the Bull father and sons were all musicians and involved in the business, none more so than Findley's grandfather Bull. As Findley told Doris Jahnsen, pianos were the strongest autobiographical link in the novel. But that is where the connections between Charlie's life and Findley's ancestors ends because when Charlie learns who his father was, the discovery is a fictional surprise.

REFLECTIONS ON A SUITCASE

Just before Charlie discovers his father's identity, he raises an important question, one that all respectable biographers and autobiographers should consider. "Something must be said about our finances," he remarks: "If I were reading this, I would want to know *where their money came from*"

(514). The obvious answer, that it comes from the Wyatt and Kilworth families, will not do because by the 1920s the piano manufacturing business was failing and the patriarchs of both families soon died. These families no longer had the means to pay for Charlie's private school and Lily's expensive care. Personal finances, Charlie notes, are none of our business, and yet money cannot be ignored "when you're telling the story of someone's life" (515). So back to the wicker suitcase we go for the clue Charlie needs. In a package of statements for his school fees, he finds the school thanking someone by the name of "E. Anderson" (516). This name means nothing to him, but as one thing leads to another (across a chronology that jumps back and forth, much as research does), he and we finally discover that "E. Anderson" is, in fact, Lily's closest Cambridge friend, the wealthy Eleanor Ormand. Eleanor had found Lily after her seizure in 1910, and she later married the German officer who had rescued Lily, Karl Hess. After Hess died in the Great War, Eleanor remarried a Mr Anderson: she is "E. Anderson." However, she withholds her identity and the secret of Charlie's paternity until after Lily's death, when she writes to him with all the details (526–27). She knows that Karl Hess was Charlie's father and because she loved both Karl and Lily, she had watched over Lily and her son after the war. She tells Charlie that he looks like his father, that Karl loved music, and that "*Your name is Hess—if you want it*" (526).

With these revelations, Charlie's autobiography is almost complete and the missing link in Lily's biography is in place. In a "Coda," Charlie tells us that he fought in the Second World War, was emasculated by a land mine in a field near Ortona in 1943, but had fathered a daughter while on leave with his wife in 1942. The novel ends after the war, when the couple and their daughter visit "Lily's field" to mark the anniversary of Lily's fifty-sixth birthday. The AutoBiography is complete. It has come full circle back to the field where these life-stories began. And Charlie's name, like his mother's and daughter's, is Kilworth. As far as I am aware, no such war injury, no such asylum fire, and no such benefactor exist in Timothy Findley's biography, and I have not located a mad Irish Fagan ancestor who burned down the family home in the 1840s. When Charlie wraps up the stories in *The Piano Man's Daughter*, he closes his work *as a fiction*. He has created what Lee would call an "endlessly absorbing" biography of his mother, brought her to life, and told us all he knows about the Fagans, Kilworths, and Wyatts. Along the way, he reveals a good deal about social class, social prejudice, rural and urban life in southern Ontario between 1890 and 1946, about the treatment of mentally ill women, the rise and fall of piano manufacturing, and inevitably about himself and about Lily's shaping influence on his life.

The result is a rich AutoBiographical novel. It is also a novel in which archives matter. Most of Findley's novels contain archives; *The Wars* is an obvious example because that is where Robert's biographer begins—"in the archive" (11). The archive in *The Piano Man's Daughter* is more personal, more akin to the memorabilia that many families keep and pass along to future generations, and rather more unusual. The wicker suitcase that Lily always carries with her when she travels or when she escapes with Charlie into the night to flee her demons, is Charlie's main source of information. It is invaluable; without it Charlie could not tell Lily's story or quote Lily's words for us or discover important details about his own life. This suitcase *is*, in a sense, Lily's life, her story. After the fire in which she dies, it is all that is materially left of Lily's life, except, of course, for Charlie. It preserves her identity, her scent, her voice. This suitcase is, then, a symbol of the past, of remembering, of ancestors, places, and events. And we should not overlook the possibility, reinforced by their reproduction in the text, that those photographs in the suitcase are Findley's family photographs, which makes the suitcase a symbolic link between the fiction and reality, between Findley's characters and his own biography.

Although this novel may close as a fiction—after all, it does not reproduce events in Findley's adult life—there are numerous ways in which the facts and people of Findley's biography linger and disturb us after we close the book. We are left wondering where the fiction and the *real* life diverge. I am also left reflecting on Findley's passionate need to give his Aunt Ruth a voice, to give her some words she could say out loud, to allow her to be heard. Without doubt, Ruth Bull Carlyle haunted Findley and he felt the deepest sympathy for her, but some feminist critics might argue that as a man, even a gay man, he could not speak for/as a woman and should not presume to try. While I acknowledge that argument, I believe that by speaking through Charlie to ventriloquize Lily, he has brought her character alive and given her a powerful voice. It is in this vividly realized character that we will feel the presence of Ruth and hear her speak. What's more, Findley has broken the silence surrounding mental illness, and he has recreated a convincing period in one area of Canada with such memorable characters that they will haunt the reader, much as Lily haunts Charlie, and as Aunt Ruth haunted Findley. Lily's message to her son was always "pass it on" (537), and that is what he does by calling up the ghost of her irresistible life-force and by urging all of us to remember, to respect all living things, and to sing about the joy of being alive. Which is what Timothy Findley does in *The Piano Man's Daughter*.

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Quotations from Timothy Findley's work and the photograph in fig. 2 appear with the permission of Timothy Findley as author and Pebble Productions Inc. as rightsholder.

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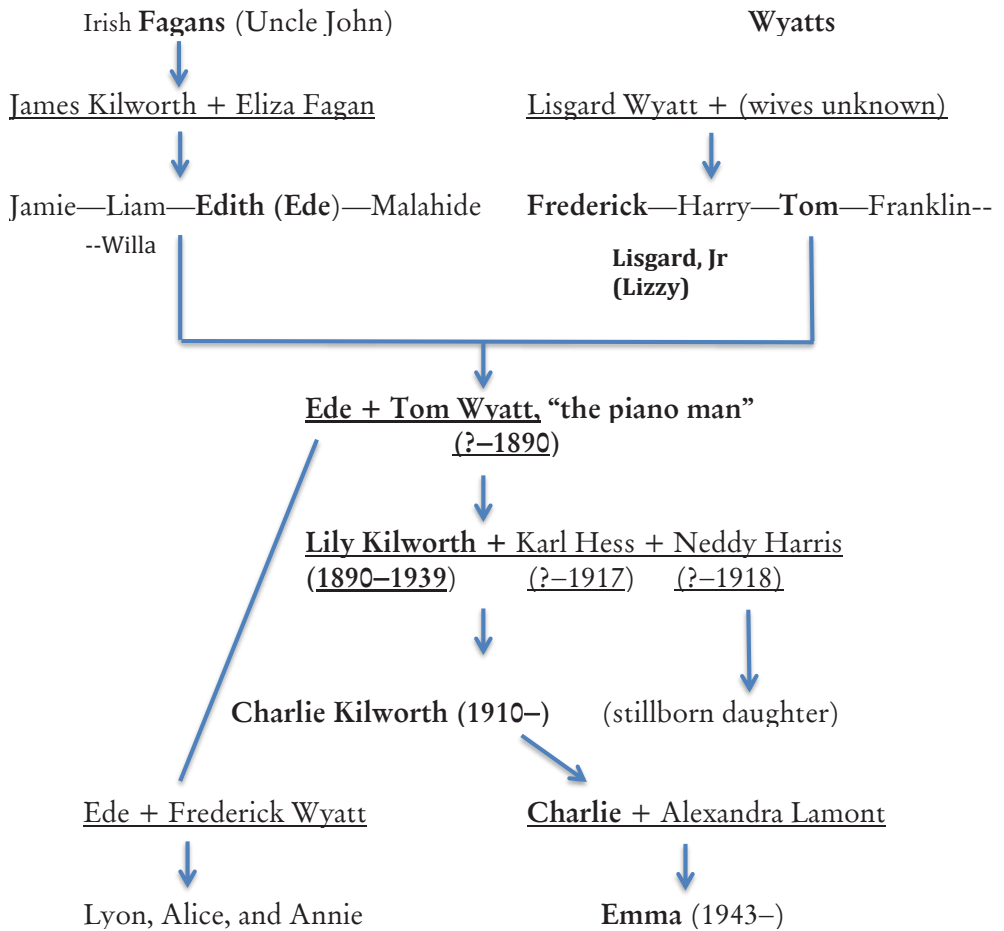


Fig. 1. Fictional genealogy in *The Piano Man's Daughter*.



Fig. 2. From left to right, Fred Bull (Findley's maternal grandfather), Ruth Bull Carlyle (Aunt Ruth), and Margaret Bull Findley (Findley's mother). This photograph appears in the endpaper collage for *The Piano Man's Daughter*. Reproduced from *Journeyman* (facing page 114). Original is with Findley/Whitehead fonds, LAC (MG31-D196).

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Transvestite M(other) in the Canadian North: *Isobel Gunn* by Audrey Thomas

ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the eponymous protagonist of *Isobel Gunn*, a Canadian feminist historical novel by Audrey Thomas, published in 1999. Based on a real story, the novel fictionalizes the life of an Orcadian woman who made her transit from the Orkney Islands to the Canadian north in male disguise, and was only identified as a woman when she went into labour. The article juxtaposes the novel against its poetic antecedent *The Ballad of Isobel Gunn*, published by Stephen Scobie in 1983. In the article Gunn's fate as a unique transvestite m(other) in the Canadian north is compared to the fate of famous transvestite saint Joan of Arc. Though removed from each another historically and geographically, both women are shown to have suffered similar consequences as a result of violating the biblical taboo on cross-dressing. Isobel's sudden change of status from a young male colonizer to the defenseless colonized is seen in the context of managing the female resources by colonial authorities. At the same time, the fact that Isobel allows herself to be deprived of her son is analyzed in the light of insights on the maternal by Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. The absence of the mother and the ensuing condition of her offspring's orphanhood are shown as a consequence of reducing the position of the mother to that of an imperial servant, the fruit of whose body can be freely used and abused by the male imperial authority.

Keywords: Audrey Thomas, Isobel Gunn, Canada.

FACTS AND FICTION ABOUT ISABEL/ISOBEL GUNN

Isobel Gunn (1999) by Audrey Thomas reconstructs the story of an Orcadian woman who challenged stereotypes in Prince Rupert's land from which white women were excluded on principle during the British colonization of Canada (Cox 138). William H. New states in *A History of Canadian Literature* that the novel is based on "a real-life event" previously depicted in a poem by Stephen Scobie (301). Described as a "feminist historical novel" (Kuester 318), the text by Thomas seeks to supplement the official version of events reported in the journal of Alexander Henry, the younger (Gough 418–19), an excerpt from which opens the narrative and frames it in a politically neutral tone.

The quoted passage recounts the amazement of the chief factor at "an extraordinary affair" which occurred in Pembinah on 29 December 1807 when "one of Mr. Heney's Orkney lads" succumbed to severe pain which soon resulted in "dreadful lamentations." As it turned out the lad was "a pregnant girl, and actually in childbirth" (Thomas xix). The journal does not state what made the previous concealment of a girl possible in the all-male camp. *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* provides rudimentary facts about Isabel Gunn, alias Fubister, a daughter of John Fubister whose paternal name she adopted when she entered employment with the Hudson Bay Company. Her son was officially registered in the colony as John Scarth's child. After the discovery of her actual sex Isabel was sent back to Scotland with her son where both lived in poverty (152). Stephen Scobie's work entitled *The Ballad of Isabel Gunn* was the first attempt to reinvent the real woman's story by referring to the official description of "the extraordinary affair." Known for his skilled use of dramatic monologue Scobie reconstructed Isabel's own voice and spun a yarn about the young woman's passionate attachment to a man, which made her follow him to Canada in male disguise until her sex was revealed as a result of childbirth. Scobie's ballad revolves around the motif of female devotion, self-sacrifice and spurned love. His Isabel is driven by the desire for togetherness, which ends the moment her lover abandons her for the indigenous woman he has cohabited with before, as was the pattern in the imperial colonies spawned by western fantasies of power translated into sexual terms.

Audrey Thomas provides the real woman with a radically different life story, which involves a traumatic past and a troubling future. Just like Scobie, Thomas crosses the gender line and fictionalizes Isabel's adventures from the perspective of the opposite sex. The main focalizer of the narrative is a Presbyterian parson, Magnus Inkster, a native of the Orkney Islands and unique listener to Isabel's story. Significantly, his name brings to mind an

Orcadian saint murdered after Easter circa 1117 and credited with healing miracles (Antonsson 73–77). Instead of dwelling on the romantic love-affair, Thomas chooses to show Gunn as a victim of a horrendous rape by the very man who was complicit with her plans and facilitated her transit to Canada to later claim what he considered his due in a particularly brutal way. Restrictions on white women in the colonies (Stoler 42) rendered Isobel defenseless in the hands of male colonizers the moment her sex was revealed. After giving birth to her son the heroine is returned to the only appropriate role for a woman and prevented from competing with men whom she was able to impress with her courage and resilience when in disguise. She is reduced to the position of a washerwoman. Her contact with the men who treated her as their companion is replaced by contact with their soiled clothes. Thus she becomes a recipient of literal dirt, as well the site of Kristevan abjection because she dared to question the boundary of the symbolic order. Besides, her place is now with native women who serve the colonizers in various ways. Thus she turns from a male colonizer into the female colonized.

As the novel unfolds, the reader does not know that the eponymous heroine's death was its catalyst. Left alone to die, Isobel is looked after by the widowed Magnus in her final hours and afterwards. He keeps vigil over her and decides to make the vigil last as long as custom has it. "It's a woman's task" (Thomas 21), Magnus says, but he is determined to sit through several days near Isobel's dead body, and his vigil becomes a pretext for the ethical task of memory. Magnus recreates Isobel in his private text by offering empathy and testimony. Thus the protagonist comes back to life, or is replaced by a narrative. The lives of Magnus and Isobel stand in startling contrast. He was the only son of loving parents; she was one of many daughters of a drunken father who staggered into the hut after childbirth, snatched the newborn, and parted her legs to see what sex the next offspring was. Infuriated at another failure, he threw the baby down and rushed out, leaving the mother mute with pain and grief. The emotional unavailability of Isobel's parents is offset by images from Magnus's childhood, his parents' mutual attraction, contentment with each other and joy with their child. Brought up in this household, Magnus manages to retain the gift for togetherness. As a mature man he marries a widow with three daughters and is quite happy to treat the young siblings as his own children. As such he represents a spectacular contrast to Isobel's callous and violent father.

The atmosphere of early family idyll in Magnus's household is suddenly disrupted by a chilling event. By accident, Magnus finds himself in the company of his father and the father's friend, the local doctor, when both are summoned on an adult errand; its goal is to subdue a madwoman,

who turns out to be Isobel's mother. Having given birth to one more girl after Isobel, the woman throws the baby into the fire, and is soon taken to prison where she eventually commits suicide. Both Magnus and Isobel witness the moment when the distraught mother is led away for good. Magnus often observes that it must have been Isobel's early life that led her to be like a boy. It may well have been her father's rejection that imprinted itself on her later choices. The parson's emotional intelligence makes him reason like a precursor of psychoanalysis. He explains Isobel's masculine manner by the weight of her early traumas. Isobel defies female meekness and passivity. She grows up to be as strong as a man; she ploughs the field, and steals eggs from the nests suspended on dangerously vertiginous cliffs. She derides maternal duties and says no to future marriage.

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Isobel and Magnus exchange stereotypical gender attributes. He is a meek "man of the cloth" (Thomas 122), sensitive after his mother, gentle after his father. Isobel is tough, strong and determined. Like her mother and father she hates everything that is connected with women's fate. Unlike Magnus she does not pine for company; she never feels isolated when on her own; she is driven by a single goal, to achieve her transit to the new world in the new male identity that she appropriates from a boy who drowned. Accordingly, she chooses to name herself John Fubbister. In the male disguise she makes it to Hudson Bay, partly due to the only man who recognized her as his friend's sister. As long as she is protected by her male identity she lives a happy life, until she is raped by the very man who knew her as a woman, which soon leads to her undoing. The rapist cum protector dies a sudden death as a result of an accident. His actual role is never revealed to anybody except parson Inkster. The woman's former friends treat her baby as the fruit of a secret love, thinking she risked everything to follow her beloved man. "Let them say what they like—Isobel tells Magnus—I know the truth of *hid*" (Thomas 59). The fictional confession undermines Scobie's romanticizing vision of passion and abandonment. Thus Thomas's narrative becomes a counter-commentary to the androcentric assumption that the only reason for Isobel leaving home in male disguise was the desire to follow her man and not her choice to live a better life for her own sake.

TRANSVESTITE MOTHER AND TRANSVESTITE SAINT

Magnus, who arrived in Prince Rupert's land after Isobel's return from her transvestite condition to her previous identity, empathizes with her and is moved by her love for the little boy whose smile brightens the routine of the colonial settlement, even if his mother is ostracized for what she did,

or to be more accurate, for what she did not do. Whatever was accepted and tolerated in Isobel when she was a man now becomes a major fault. The unmarried chief factor who covets Isobel's bright child because he has no heir, and desires no mixed progeny by an Amerindian, thus sums up her situation:

She is barely above a savage herself—an illiterate peasant who ran around barefoot most of the year and when she became a woman showed her contempt for society and God's law by disguising herself as a man and following her lover to the bay. (Thomas 123)

It is on the grounds of her apparent moral degeneration that Mr Morton considers Isobel unfit to bring up her child, and skillfully brings about the separation of mother and son, whom he wishes to adopt. The very comparison to a savage echoes Stoler's explanation of the word "degeneration" as the loss of one's racial identity (61–62). Identified with a savage, Isobel becomes the territory that was subject to rape, and now is subject to pillage. Her only resource—her son—is claimed by the chief factor. Translating this into the ideas of Luce Irigaray, the "father" forbids the child bodily contact with the mother (Anderson 114). Physically and metaphorically the mother is erased from colonial discourse, while the fruit of her body ends up appropriated by the man in a position of authority.

Morton's words about Isobel's "contempt for society and God's law" immediately bring to mind another woman in disguise, Joan of Arc, an illiterate peasant and "holy transvestite" who decided to save France from the English during the One Hundred Years War (Broome Saunders 83). Joan was vilified by the English and abandoned by the French. When she decided to give up her male clothes upon the urging of the church authorities, she was bound to face degradation. She no longer belonged with the privileged male sex. Her victory was appropriated by the weak French king and his followers the moment they began to feel stronger.

In this respect, Thomas's novel seems to be a distant reflection of the situation because Isobel's child who is the first racially pure child in the colony is appropriated by the chief factor who finds the boy useful for his plan. The mother is sent back to Scotland where she eventually dies in penury. The boy's origin is suppressed because the chief factor who intends to raise him blackmails and bullies everybody into silence, thus depriving the boy of his mother not only physically but also spiritually.

In France it was only the rehabilitation of Joan of Arc that led to recognizing her contribution to the French victory and which allocated to Joan her rightful place in historical discourse. Her enemies called Joan of Arc "a courtesan" or "the Armagnac whore" because she stayed in the all-

male company in the military camp (Edmunds 50). After being captured by, or rather conveniently abandoned to, the English, she was exposed to the constant voyeurism of the guards keeping watch in her cell. Also, she was continually threatened with punitive sexual violence, and began to wear male clothes again in an attempt to protect herself against such invasions (Warner 130). As a warrior maid she violated the famous and literally accepted taboo from the Book of Deuteronomy (22:5) connected with a ban on crossdressing; thus she was tried for violating the divine law. Some reports have it that the proceedings connected with her trial lasted so long because she was pregnant as a result of a prison rape. Even if this has not been substantiated by historical sources, her fate offers a strikingly familiar antecedent to the vicissitudes of Isobel Gunn who was bound to face retribution for crossing over to the territory of the opposite sex.

Labelled “a loose woman” and “a camp-follower in disguise,” Isobel did not protest her innocence (Thomas 136). It would have been useless. When Magnus Inkster proposes marriage to her out of friendship and concern for her child, she refuses the offer. As a rape victim she has dissociated herself from her own body and rejects any intimate contact with men. Her child, however, senses Inkster’s fond approval and spontaneously calls him father. When this happens for the first time, Magnus is suddenly overwhelmed by an emotion he has never felt before and realizes what he has missed out on in his solitary life. This momentary experience of fatherhood paves the way for his later decision to get married and adopt his wife’s children by another man, the way he wanted to adopt James. James’s actual foster father, Mr Morton, grows suspicious because he realizes the boy’s indifference and refusal to call him father despite constant requests. Just as he brought about Isobel’s departure, Morton arranges for Magnus Inkster to leave Prince Rupert’s land as “*persona non grata*.” On the day of the parson’s departure James calls him father once again, but now this takes place in public and becomes a major insult to the actual foster father who has gone to great lengths to erase the mother and father of choice from the adopted boy’s history. Magnus Inkster’s role in the story is his healing influence on Isobel and his work on her testimony, which he dutifully preserves and remembers due to the education he acquired. Like Joan of Arc’s story, Isobel’s confession is saved from oblivion due to the mediation of an empathetic male listener. His education and vocation provide the reader with the necessary distance to Isobel’s story, which he pieces together from the pained confessions of an uneducated woman. In Scobie’s version Isabel is far less simplistic and capable of critical judgement on a passage from Mr Henry’s journal about which she says:

Alexander Henry was no better, have you seen / what he wrote? that nonsense / (just like a man) about “round, white breasts” / as if I would bother with that, my / water broken, my belly contracting, men / haven’t the guts to write the truth / of what a woman suffers . . . (Scobie 50)

Thomas’s simple, though defiant, Orcadian strikes the reader as much more credible, also due to her Orcadian speech which makes her stand out in Magnus’s smooth narrative.

COLONIAL ORPHANHOOD IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

In the conclusion to the novel voiced by a contemporary narrator, Thomas shows the gap in the family history of Isobel’s son. Several generations later an anonymous mother tells her son that his great-grandfather was not sure whether the man who had brought him up was really his father. The mother’s absence from the story is completely bypassed, lost in the telling by another woman who does not even wonder about this omission. Is this Thomas’s implicit comment on how women contributed to their own absence from the family or public discourse? Isobel allows herself to be persuaded that she will be an impediment to her son’s career, because they will both be reduced to penury on her return home. Thus she exchanges her maternal support for the dubious prospects of her son becoming a gentleman. This proves that despite her immense courage Isobel was prone to manipulation, the simple reason being her belief in the worthlessness of female life or maternal support. The mother herself agreed to the contract. Perhaps it could not have been otherwise. Her own mother had abandoned her children in a way that was much more destructive, literally and emotionally. In the light of Thomas’s novel one can venture another comment; the mother’s place is in her absence from the official discourse, and in the erasure of her contribution. This connects with the comments of Luce Irigaray who discusses the forgotten debt to the maternal under patriarchy (Boulous Walker 15). The issue remains particularly pertinent in the process of appropriating female reproductive resources by imperial authorities.

Incidentally, Thomas achieves a skillful rewriting of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* where we never get to know Pip’s parents. Both his mother and father are names on a gravestone, and the protagonist is transformed into a gentleman on the strength of a convict’s money that is laundered as a result. Magnus Inkster called Prince Rupert’s land a northern equivalent of Van Diemen’s land for a reason (Thomas 95). Like Australia in Pip’s case, it becomes the subconscious of the disoriented Canadian family whose distant

descendant asks a question about his origin. It is far from a coincidence that it is this boy out of the five boys in the family, who, for no reason at all, conceives a dream of becoming a sailor. He leaves his household like his ancestress Isobel and goes to Europe where he joins the British navy. Like Isobel he changes his name, and therefore the news of his death in the Second World War never reaches his family. He loses his life when his warship is torpedoed in Scapa Flow of all places, that is to say, in the space that was like the inner sea for Orkney people such as Magnus and Isobel.

The physical and spiritual efforts of Isobel and Magnus respectively went into the making of the colony and the status of its chief factor. Having appropriated the fruit of Isobel's body and of Magnus's mind—Magnus gave the boy his first lessons—Mr Morton abandons his adopted boy eventually. The chief factor returns to England like Magwitch but dies an heirless man, leaving his legacy to no descendant. The hope that had sustained Isobel in the moments of isolation and anguish is never fulfilled. Her son is not only cut off from any information about her, but he never returns to the British Isles physically as a result. It is only his descendant who asks a question about his origin that unwittingly ends up closest to the answer, but he dies at sea.

Thomas's engagement with the theme can be grasped through Kristeva's concept of primeval and inchoate semiotic suppressed by the patriarchal symbolic (Kristeva 13, Smith 15). The fluid, maternal semiotic associated with the abject and abjected mother throws light on Isobel's status in the colony and on her later marginalization. Her son will always be intrigued by women whose faces are scarred by smallpox and will yearn to touch their cheeks, much to their astonishment and fright. But this is his buried memory of contact with the mother whose face was disfigured by smallpox, which eliminated her from the group of marriageable or marketable girls at an early age. Isobel confessed to Magnus that James touched her as if to heal her; a distant echo of that gesture from the time of perfect togetherness with the mother remained with him forever. Isobel's twentieth-century descendant is also eliminated from the discourse of private family memory. Curious about his personal history he merges back into it in the waters of Scapa Flow, as if he rejoined the amniotic fluid of the primeval unity with the body of the lost mother whose name gives the novel its title.

RECLAIMING THE NORTH IN CANADIAN LITERATURE BY WOMEN

Thomas joins the women writers who seek to reclaim the Canadian north discursively. Let me mention only two of them; Jane Urquhart and Aritha van Herk. In Urquhart's novel *The Underpainter* the reader comes to appreciate

the marginalized Sarah, a woman used and abused by her lover, the famous painter whose fascination with the north is translated into emotional frigidity in the relationship with the one who loves and inspires him. Interestingly, the chief factor from Thomas's novel is also an artist; his portraits of people and drawings of beavers amaze Inkster who wonders how it is possible to connect artistic talent and total emotional obtuseness. As for Aritha van Herk, her novel *The Tent Peg*, in which a woman modelled on biblical Jael stakes her territory in an all-male camp, forms another parallel to Thomas's text. Van Herk uses a biblical ancestress who drove the tent peg into the temple of the enemy thus depriving him of life and winning the case for the Israelites. Van Herk's JL drives her tent peg into the male discourse on the north, disrupting it but also allowing for the mining of hidden emotional resources. Thomas uncovers the woman who existed as a historical character and voices her so as to emphasize the Canadian debt to the suppressed maternal. Joan of Arc's story allows for the exposure of the experiences of other underprivileged women of low origin: women who may not have achieved a comparable military feat, but who nonetheless contributed to historical discourse in ways that are overlooked on similarly sexist grounds.

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REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

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**Songs of America: A Review of
John Berryman's Public Vision by Philip
Coleman (Dublin: UCD P, 2014)**

Asked about his reaction to being classed as “confessional,” Berryman described his response as one of “rage and contempt,” adding: “The word doesn’t mean anything. I understand the confessional to be a place where you go and talk with a priest. I personally haven’t been to confession since I was twelve” (qtd. in Stitt 21). It is wise to approach anything John Berryman says about his own writing with a fair degree of suspicion (he seems to reveal more about his poetry when he discusses the work of others) but this kind of reaction clearly indicates a skepticism about reductive critical classifications in general, and a suspicion regarding the specific category. A thorough interrogation of the latter “both with regard to the poet’s critical reception and in terms of the more general development of Anglo-American criticism since the 1970s” (xv) informs Philip Coleman’s 2014 book whose aim is to relocate “the scene of disorder” (a formulation used originally in Berryman’s “Formal Elegy” for JFK) from the poet’s psyche to the sphere of contemporary American realities, and posit Berryman’s public vision as “a central aspect of his lasting achievement” (209).

Before he proceeds to examine the extent of Berryman’s allusions and engagement with several urgent contexts of its composition, Coleman focuses on the pervasiveness of the disputed designation in the literary critical discourse, and its contribution to the status of confessional poetry as art which fails to engage with the public sphere: starting perhaps as early as M. L. Rosenthal’s oft (and rather selectively) quoted view of Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies* as a “magnificent but unpleasantly egocentric” display of personal faults, through Marjorie Perloff’s assessment of Berryman’s work as an example of the aesthetics of “non-engagement,” “confessional” seems to have evolved into a vaguely dismissive term for the “less poetic” kind of poetry whose main purpose is to provide a key to the tortured private life of the poet.

The highly problematic nature of the classification itself, and of the very distinction between the *poetic* and the *confessional*, has already been acknowledged, to some degree: Steven K. Hoffman notes, for instance, that even if the

standard Freudian position does indeed have a validity, it certainly does not help to distinguish the confessionals from any other lyric poets, who also release potentially explosive personal issues in the act of composition. In addition, when applied specifically to the confessionals, it has tended to seriously obscure the degree to which conscious craft determines this literary endeavour. (706)

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Jo Gill proposes to view confessional writing as “a ritualized technique” which “constructs rather than reflects some pre-textual truth” (4) but the notions of confessional school or confessional aesthetic, Coleman points out, continue to cause confusion and, in general, negatively affect the perception “of mid-century American poetry’s meaning and value” (5). Although in his assessment of Lowell’s 1959 volume Rosenthal does acknowledge that the poems carry “the burden of the age with them” (qtd. in Coleman 5), socio-political concern

has frequently been ignored in the critical appraisals of the so called confessional poets, and especially in the studies of Berryman and Sylvia Plath. The critical failure to recognize the importance of social, political and historical issues in their poetry has been damaging to the popular and academic perception of a large group of poets . . . (Coleman 5)

John Berryman’s Public Vision interrogates and reappraises the value of the “confessional” label and re-reads Berryman’s poetic output, from the early poems written between 1938–48 to the ones included in the 1972 *Love and Fame*, revealing the poet’s keen interest in the state of American identity, as well as contemporary social and political realities overshadowed by the memory of two world wars, the nuclear threat, the Vietnam war, political paranoia, cultural tensions, and an overwhelming sense of loss and dispossession. Coleman concludes the first part of the book with a nuanced reading of “Formal Elegy”—where “Berryman is concerned to break down certain borders and boundaries—of form, genre, self/other, past, present and future between the private and public, state and citizen” (42)—creating a critical “lens” through which the poet’s further engagements with the public sphere will be reviewed.

Important encounters with W. B. Yeats (“I have moved to Dublin to have it out with you, majestic Shade,” Berryman writes in *DS* 312), left-wing protest painter Ben Shahn (who supplied illustrations for the 1956

edition of *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*) and communist poet and close friend Robert Bhain Campbell (mentioned, among others, in “Dream Song 88,” alongside Yeats, as one of the “violent dead” whose “awful brains” Henry wants to pick), are examined and re-problematized in this thoroughly researched study. So is Berryman’s ceaseless ambition to “*think harder* in verse,” which he vowed in a note on a manuscript of one of the poems (emphasis original). Coleman’s attentiveness to Berryman’s “self-conscious delight in language (not least in his use of a word like ‘frove,’ as highlighted in his note, but also ‘thews,’ ‘repine’ and ‘belvedere’),” evident in his treatment of the poet’s notoriously difficult syntax and radical stylistic experimentation, mirroring, perhaps, Berryman’s own profound attention to the word, results in a series of convincing readings of texts intended to “give aesthetic pleasure in proportion to the complexity of [their] argument” (79). What is particularly satisfying about Coleman’s analysis is that he traces the development of the poet’s public vision throughout the entire *oeuvre*, from the “poetics of survival” located in Berryman’s early work, the “nightmares of Eden” resurfacing in the texts from the post-war decade, “cinematic vision and epistolary projection,” and the themes of displacement in *The Dream Songs*, to the “questions of priesthood & of State” in *Love and Fame*. The book concludes with a commentary on Berryman’s presence in Irish literary culture of the 1970s and a brief discussion of his contemporary influence on both sides of the Atlantic.

Accompanied by a discussion of his published and previously unpublished work, correspondence, essays and notes held at the University of Minnesota, Coleman’s readings succeed in showing Berryman as a poet both deeply committed to technical innovation and continuously aware of the volatile “outside” reality in a hope that the former may help negotiate or at least register the perplexing experience of being in the world. At the same time, *John Berryman's Public Vision* is a persuasive and forceful intervention in the state of research not only on the author of *The Dream Songs* but also mid-century American poetry in general, a stimulating and highly readable piece of criticism which is likely to become an important reference for Berryman readers and scholars.

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**Yeats, Incurrigibly Plural. A Review
of Barry Shiels's *W. B. Yeats and
World Literature: The Subject of Poetry*
(Farnham: Ashgate, 2015)**

In his *W. B. Yeats and World Literature*, Barry Shiels states his purpose sharply: “This book is the first study of Yeats’s poetic modernity to scrutinise within his writing the relations between the order of poetic expression and the effects of money, trade and globalisation” (3). Bold though the claim may appear, it is in fact a pioneering attempt to embrace in the process of reading the Pollexfen side to Yeats. W. B. Yeats’s well-known but no less crisp insight, that in marrying Mary Pollexfen he, a descendant of a gregarious but impoverished family, gave “a voice to the sea-cliffs” (Jeffares 24), has long circulated among the poet’s biographers though nobody really set much store by it. There have been suggestions, early on by Richard Ellmann and more recently by R. F. Foster, that, as a shrewd theatre manager and self-promotor, Yeats relied on the business-capable Pollexfen in him, not the prodigal Yeats strain (see Foster 9–10). One is, for example, reminded of how skilfully Yeats handled his copyright in both the UK and the U.S., at the same time using his business acumen to keep his sisters’ press solvent. In fairness to Shiels, it must be admitted that no one has interrogated Yeats’s understanding of money matters as part of his poetic practice although the rather meticulous explorations of the publishing history of his books give one a good idea of how successfully he managed as prosaic an aspect of his life as finances. Still, reading Yeats against the background of global monetary policies is a project little covered by the substantial Yeats criticism.

In spite of the declared thesis of his monograph, Shiels evokes a wider picture of Yeats as caught between avowed traditionalism and a deep awareness of the developments of international modernism as concomitant of the larger process of modernity. One of the earliest expressions of this tension is that between what Shiels refers to as the “sub-national” and the “supranational”

affiliations of Yeats: “at one level Ireland [in a poem like ‘An Irish Airman Foresees His Death’] is essentially local, immanent, minoritarian in ethos and always falling short of full national sovereignty; at the other level it is a movement of transnational flight and essentially diasporic in nature” (30–31). The former aspect remains a still better-known facet of Yeats’s literary production, although an increasing body of scholarship points to Yeats’s involvement in the development of transnational character of modernism. Instead, however, of rehashing the familiar terrain of Yeats’s exposure to the Far East and his keenness to elaborate a form of ritual drama that would take stock of the Japanese *noh* tradition, Shiels pays attention to aspects of Yeats’s *œuvre* that have hardly been considered. Notably, “The Song of the Happy Shepherd” and the follow-up “The Sad Song” are both given as examples of “telephonic technology,” which would have underscored the feelings of spatial and temporal dislocation: “The modernist writer is forced to acknowledge that his language is thrown into an indefinite space—a space in-between—within which it can be distorted, interfered with, contracted by speed, its words elongated” (41). The “telephonic” effect of “echo-harboring” (41) does indeed work in some of Yeats’s best poems, particularly “Man and the Echo,” and one feels that a man who never shunned the benefits of technology, like cars, electric light, the telegraph and the telephone (one of the things he had installed in the Rathfarnham house, where he moved with his family in 1932, was a telephone), must have appreciated the effect that his poems created.

Yet the traditionalist side to Yeats is duly noted and given some treatment. Still, Shiels is quick to note that even when Yeats trumpets his allegiance to tradition, as in the “General Introduction for My Work” where he states “I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional” (Yeats, *Later Essays* 213), this is “a frank acceptance that it is the ‘original’ work of an individualised modern author” (Shiels 58). This individuality, however, is not ascribed to the Romantic perception of the poet as legislator of the world but rather to the promulgation of the copyright law, which had been stipulated by a number of government acts between 1896 and 1911. Given Yeats’s awareness of how to ensure that copyright remained with him for both the UK and the U.S. editions of his works, Shiels’s point is crucial to our understanding of the sense of individuality that Yeats seems to have cherished.

Having shown Yeats’s tricky affiliation with tradition and traditionalism, Shiels focuses on the poet’s perception of other indigenous cultures. Taking his cue from Herder, he argues for a more nuanced idea of folk culture than just a set of beliefs that are inherited from generation to generation, the latter position only seemingly resonant with Yeats’s own understanding of folk culture; as Shiels adequately puts it, “no folk tradition is complete to itself but rather exists in combination with its other, usually

the folklorist or anthropologist; moreover, it is this imperfect relation that accounts for a tradition of the verb, of call and response, over the noun” (88). This is a pertinent claim in that Yeats realized that the tradition which is handed down to the poet is in no sense a stable set either in the sense that it comprises a definitive number of tales and beliefs or that the tales follow a prescribed plotline. As early as in the series of articles on faerydom that ran between 1897 and 1902, Yeats continuously implies that the ideas he expounds on represent certain popular variants but do not aspire to lay down the definitive edition.

Yeats’s (and Gregory’s) quest for reinstating the traditional beliefs of Ireland in the contemporary context is beset with various quarrels he engaged in on behalf of his views. Shiels goes back to some of the better-known ones but does manage to shed some interesting new light on them. This is the case with the disagreement that Yeats had with Douglas Hyde in 1892 over his paper “The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland,” in which Hyde argued for the need to bring back Celtic as the first language in Irish life, including literature. Yeats responded by claiming that the “continuity of the nation’s life” would best be preserved “by translating or retelling in English, which shall have an indefinable Irish quality of rythm [sic] and style, all that is best of the ancient literature” (Yeats, *Uncollected Prose* 255). Shiels observes that in so positioning himself, Yeats’s idea is underlain with a polarity, whereby “a tradition based upon the qualities of ‘translating and retelling’ invariably mourns its lost origin yet remains in its expressive life unauthenticated and uninhabited by the idea of original perfection” (91). This strikes a pertinent note, for Yeats’s theoretical pronouncements on the nature of poetry and its applicability to social praxis recurrently show him to both endorse the view that tradition is a prerequisite for the development of a nation and to refute the idea that this tradition is an unshakeable dome, as in Eliot, that must be paid obeisance to by the budding poet. Critics like Ronald Schuchard in his magisterial *The Last Minstrels* have shown that Yeats’s ideas about tradition and originality assume a fixity of perfection available as a fleeting insight but then represent variation and an ad hoc implementation when actualized in a poem or oral performance. Shiels draws a parallel between Yeats’s own retellings of Irish folk tales in *The Celtic Twilight* and “ironically picaresque” stories and Borges’s detective fiction, in which he would “conjure the spirit of vast encyclopaedic projects whose indices continually defer the secret knowledge they promise” (Shiels 96). This nicely captures the implicit spirit in which Yeats wrote his *Celtic Twilight* stories, all of which exude an aura of locality and fleetingness rather than authority and completeness.

Towards the end of his study, Shiels approaches Yeats’s last writings, a difficult territory for anyone willing to suggest that Yeats was less of an

authoritarian, at least in his work, than critics like W. J. McCormack would have him be. The strategy Shiels adopts when dealing with the last poems and *On the Boiler* emphasizes “concealment amidst the diverse forms of his expression” (177) such as he practises in the later poems, plays and essays, all of which maintain a balance of various views. For Shiels, Yeats never falls for the trap of politics, which is “bound to resentment as the identification of expression with the content of subjective demands,” instead, he is “the subject who is willing to repeal his very subjectivity and withdraw the grounds for argumentation” (177). Such an approach to Yeats’s late writings seems more fruitful than asserting that poems like “Man and the Echo” and “Circus Animals’ Desertion” are mere disguises for a poet inherently keen to “[s]corn the sort now growing up / All out of shape from toe to top” (Yeats, *Poems* 327).

Whereas he occasionally fails to take full stock of the subversive potential implicit in *On the Boiler* or poems like “Under Ben Bulbin,” in which Yeats drops hints that politics will forever remain inferior to literature, never reaching the level of complexity of the poetic text (one is reminded of the peculiar ending to his last pamphlet), Shiels offers a sustained and thorough reading of Yeats as poet, playwright and theoretician of literature. By stressing the international context of Yeats’s interests, in folk, other literary traditions and the cultural politics of Ireland and Europe (as much from the theoretical as from the practical point of view), he achieves a level of critical insight that a specialist and a layman alike will find appealing.

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**“Disability demands a story”:
A Review of Stewart Parker’s *Hopdance*
(ed. Marilyn Richtarik, Dublin:
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In most of his literary works, the acclaimed Northern Irish poet and playwright Stewart Parker did not allude to his experience of disability as an amputee. Thus, his recently published short novel *Hopdance*, edited by his biographer Marilyn Richtarik, can be seen as Parker’s posthumous act of “coming out” as a disabled writer, rather than a writer with a disability. I have used the former term intentionally to underscore the fact that the novel, taking inspiration from the Joycean literary tradition of autobiographical coming-of-age narrative, presents the disability experience of the protagonist, Tosh, the author’s alter ego, in the form of a journey of personal and artistic self-discovery. Hence, disability is not the main character’s secondary feature, but it serves as an acquired characteristic that defines Tosh as a person and an artist, and as the main motif in the novel.

“[D]isability demands a story” (43), writes Michael Bérubé, commenting on David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder’s seminal work in which they argue that “disability has functioned throughout history as one of the most marked and remarked upon differences that originates the act of storytelling” (54). This demand for a story is most conspicuous in everyday interactions in which a departure from the bodily norm prompts questions about the cause and origins of a bodily variation which often has the form of an impairment. The stories told in response to questions such as “What’s happened to you?” have often been used in contemporary culture so as to reinforce the prevalent ableist narratives about disability. These narratives frequently approach disability from a medical perspective, according to which impairment is a defect, an abnormality, and an essentially negative condition that needs healing. Alternatively, an impairment can be overcome when the impaired person discovers some “special” talent which can be the source of his or her success “in spite” of the physical (or mental)

“limitations.” Tosh’s journey does not easily fit within such conventional narrative models.

Depicting the acquired impairment as a traumatic and life-changing experience, the novel was considered by Parker to be unfinished. Explaining the nature of her editorial work on its text, Richtarik states: “Upon Parker’s death, *Hopdance* consisted of a few sequences of scenes typed at various times, the remaining scenes (most of them) still in manuscript, and handwritten notes regarding the order in which these vignettes should appear” (“Stewart Parker’s Life Story”). On the basis of Parker’s notes, these episodic scenes have been arranged in a non-linear way that still makes the narrative progress coherently, first towards the climactic moment of amputation, and then towards an important scene of denouement. In terms of structure, the two episodes that frame the narrative are of particular importance. The novel opens with the description of the moment of confrontation when Tosh looks into the mirror after the surgery and does not identify with what he sees in it—“Scary ghost. Sad freak. . . . halt scarecrow.” What pervades the following episodes is a sense of displacement to a new body and a new world outside the hospital, which once used to be safe and familiar, but now, seen from the perspective of an amputee, inspires deeply uncanny feelings.

The subsequent, non-chronological episodes progress towards a powerful conclusion—a poignant moment of self-awareness and self-acceptance when Tosh meets a beggar who, much like himself, is an amputee. The old man presents him with a question which is strongly linked with the experience of disability. After their mutual visual recognition, the beggar demands a story, asking: “What’s your story, son?” The act of verbalizing the story of his bodily transformation has a therapeutic value for Tosh. It is a way of working through his traumatic experience and a means of achieving peace. Yet this episode and the whole novel alike are about much more than just overcoming trauma through self-expression. Most importantly, *Hopdance* offers a narrative about a man who becomes a storyteller—a process facilitated by the experience of disability which gives Tosh a new perspective on his life and the surrounding reality. In her biography of Parker, Richtarik comments on the liberating aspect of such experience. She explains that in a conversation with a friend the writer stated that “before the discovery of his cancer, the only amputees he had ever noticed were beggars” and thus later developed a conviction that “he would also be poor.” Consequently, Parker’s decision to become a writer—“an utterly impractical career choice”—was, according to Richtarik, mostly motivated by his belief that all amputees are doomed to material deprivation (*Stewart Parker*). Yet what emanates from Tosh’s encounter with the beggar is more than a sense of occupying the social

margin which, in the protagonist's case, is a place that enables a distanced and deep insight into the surrounding world. The idea of homelessness, often connected with a nomadic lifestyle, when combined with the oral tradition, also brings to one's mind an instant association with the Gaelic *seanchaí* (the traditional Irish storyteller). All this indicates that Tosh's impairment serves as an enabling, rather than a disabling, experience which facilitates a discovery of a new way of being in the world and can be seen as an initiation into the world of Irish storytelling and literature.

Having in mind the vibrant presence of disability arts in Ireland and their significant development in recent decades, as well as Irish disability activism which, especially since the 1990s, has greatly contributed to the dynamically changing local attitudes to disability, Parker's *Hopdance* is a timely and important novel. The person who deserves special acclaim for bringing it to light is Marilyn Richterik whose meticulous editorial work helps the reader to examine the development of the novel, which was initially intended as a screenplay. The editor's note on the text and her appendices which trace the revisions in the order of the scenes that Parker introduced to the initial draft are particularly helpful in this respect, while the foreword written by the artistic director of Rough Magic Theatre Company (which has staged a number of Parker's plays, including *Pentecost* and *Northern Star*) and Parker's niece —Lynne Parker—adds a personal touch to the novel. All of this makes *Hopdance* a worthy and needed contribution to the Irish literary canon.

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Building Bridges: From Łódź to Ulster and Back

Jadwiga Uchman
Interviews Jan Jędrzejewski

Jadwiga Uchman: Jan, I'm very glad to see you in Poland again, even though I meet you quite often in Ulster, or Coleraine, to be specific, because of the exchange between the two universities. We met for the first time when both of us were working in the Institute of English Studies in Łódź. You got a scholarship to Oxford, and then—what happened?

Jan Jędrzejewski: Yes, I was a teaching assistant at the University of Łódź from 1984, and then, in 1987, I was lucky enough to get a scholarship to Oxford, which was funded by the Soros Foundation for postgraduate, or rather pre-doctoral, students, from Poland and Hungary. There were several of those scholarships awarded to people from across Poland, and I was lucky enough to get one as the only person from Łódź in the group. I spent that academic year, from September 1987 to July 1988, as a postgraduate visiting student at Worcester College, Oxford. During that year, I was not studying towards an Oxford degree (I was at that stage still planning to submit my doctorate to the University of Łódź), but I had a chance to do research towards my doctorate and also broaden my general knowledge and experience of anything to do with British literature, culture, life and institutions—well, anything to do with Britain—during that period. That lasted for ten months and then I went back to Poland. In the meantime, towards the end of that year at Oxford, a number of us, members of the scholarship group, started looking for ways of trying to turn this visiting scholarship into something more long-term, hopefully with a view to obtaining our doctorates from Oxford. A number of my fellow students succeeded in achieving that.

JU: As did you.

JJ: Yes. It took me longer than others to get this full doctoral scholarship, so I came back to Poland for the academic year 1988–89, and then I went back to Oxford in the autumn of 1989. I stayed there for three and a half years, working on my doctorate.

JU: Did you have an English or a Polish supervisor?

JJ: When I was registered while I was a teaching assistant in Łódź, I was supervised by Professor Adela Styczyńska, as any young staff member would have been supervised by a senior colleague. But when I went to Oxford I had a supervisor who was allocated by the University, and I was very privileged to have Professor John Bayley, who was one of the most outstanding literary critics working at Oxford at that time, as my supervisor.

JU: When you got the doctorate, did you return to Poland? Did you go back to teaching?

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JJ: I did not return to Poland. In my last year of the DPhil (DPhil is the formal abbreviation for an Oxford doctorate), I started looking for jobs all over the United Kingdom, and in the summer of 1992, before my doctorate was confirmed, I was lucky enough to be shortlisted and interviewed for a job at the University of Ulster, and I was offered a job there. So, basically, I moved straight from my postgraduate studies at Oxford to a full-time academic position at the University of Ulster, where I started in January 1993.

JU: Did you stay there all the time?

JJ: Yes. I've now been at Ulster for almost twenty five years. I've spent my entire British career there.

JU: There was a wonderful exchange between the University of Ulster and Łódź, thanks to your efforts. At the beginning there was a two week exchange of academic teachers between Ulster and Łódź.

JJ: Yes. The link between Ulster and Łódź was something I always wanted to develop. I was always aware, when I was a student and then a teaching assistant in Łódź, how important it was to have direct links with UK institutions. So when I was able to facilitate this, I felt that it was the right thing to do. I followed the model of some of the previous exchanges we had in Łódź. I made contact with the British Council, and at that point we were lucky enough to have the support of both the British Council office in Warsaw and the British Council office in Belfast. So for ten years or so, between the early 1990s and the early 2000s, we had a British-Council-sponsored link between the two universities, specifically the literature departments of the Institute of English Studies in Łódź and the English

Department at Coleraine. That arrangement lasted in various forms over a period of about ten years. In the early 2000s, given the changes to financial priorities and arrangements within the British Council, we had to look for an alternative source of funding, and at that time we developed an Erasmus link. For over ten years now, we have had an Erasmus partnership which facilitates the travel of staff and students both ways. So it's been a very fruitful and positive collaboration.

JU: Were there any other exchanges for young scholars?

JJ: Yes. There was a different scheme from 2001 to 2005, but that was not organized directly between our two universities: it was an initiative that was developed between the then Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Ulster, the late Professor Robert Welch, and the British Council in Warsaw. Basically he devised a scheme whereby the University of Ulster would collaborate with the British Council to facilitate summer visits by young scholars from English departments at Polish universities, who would be either pre-doctoral or post-doctoral, and who would come to Ulster for about three months over the summer. The British Council paid them a stipend, and the University of Ulster offered them accommodation free of charge, and also ensured access to the library, to computing facilities, and so on. Each year there would be three or four young scholars from various universities in Poland coming to Ulster. The scholarship scheme lasted for five years from 2001 to 2005 and in total, I think, sixteen people from across Poland participated in that programme. Four out of the sixteen came from Łódź, so there was a big proportion of Łódź people. I hasten to add that, given the attractiveness of that programme to people from across Poland, much as I was obviously keen on having people from Łódź, the four people from Łódź who took part in the scheme all won their places on merit, through a competitive mechanism.

JU: The support of the British Council is one thing but your personal involvement is another. I was quite surprised last year when you told me about looking for accommodation for Erasmus students in Łódź while you were here during summer holidays.

JJ: Well, one of the things I suppose I always try to do is to make sure that the people that I work with have as good an experience as possible. We have to remember that the way exchanges tend to work in the United Kingdom is that while there are lots of students wanting to come to the UK, there are not very many UK students actually willing to go abroad unless they are themselves language students and they go to France,

Germany, or Spain. So trying to send exchange students to Poland is actually quite a demanding job. The experience of studying in a country where the language is difficult, and which is still perceived primarily in its Eastern European context, does not appear so very attractive to British students. My three students who are actually at the University of Łódź this academic year completed the formalities a bit too late to apply for university accommodation. When they discovered they were on the waiting list it wasn't quite clear what they would do, and whether they would eventually get places in university accommodation. I was in Poland then, so it was a decent thing to do to try to help them. It wasn't much of a problem to do a little bit of research to find them places in a student hostel. It only took me a couple of hours.

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JU: I wish there were more people like you.

JJ: Well, thank you very much.

JU: You are also very helpful to our academic teachers who come to Ulster on the Erasmus exchange. I can always write to you and you get books through the interlibrary loan system which it would not be easy for me to get during a short stay. It's a great help and not so many people are willing to help nowadays.

JJ: Well, again, it's no big deal. It only takes me a few minutes to fill in an order, and I'm glad to be able to help. I must say I was very lucky when I was a postgraduate in England, and during that time I met some truly fantastic people. They helped me in all sorts of ways, so I now feel I should behave in the same way to others, to return the favour, as it were. It's just the decent thing to do.

JU: This brings us to the medal you received from the University of Łódź last year but were unable to collect then, and you will get it this Wednesday.

JJ: That's correct. The University of Łódź was very generous last year to award me a medal "Universitatis Lodziensis Amico" ("To a Friend of the University of Łódź"), and I feel very honoured to have been awarded it. I was not able to come to attend a special meeting of the Senate last year to collect it, so I will get it this year.

JU: Congratulations.

JJ: Thank you very much.

JU: I was very pleased to hear that you would be getting one. There is another thing: I remember you had not been officially informed about it.

JJ: Yes. I suppose all the various administrative procedures take a while, so yes, I did know “unofficially” that I would be getting it before I knew “officially.”

JU: There is one more thing I would like to ask about, namely the question concerning popularizing Polish literature and culture abroad. You told me during our previous meetings about a conversation with Professor Welch and the question of the authorship of a particular poem.

JJ: Well, that goes back to the summer of 1992, when I was interviewed for the job at Ulster. I was supposed to give a presentation, and the title of the presentation was “Issues of Identity in Irish Literary Studies.” At that time I knew very little about Irish culture and Irish literature, apart from the standard big names that everybody has read, such as Swift, Yeats, and so on, but little beyond that. So I thought that, maybe, I could try to make a case about some cultural and historical parallels between Ireland and Poland that might serve as a basis which I could use to explore some aspects of Irish identity. I could, perhaps, try to look for Polish texts which, if you changed the word “Polish” to “Irish,” could possibly pass for Irish poems, and/or vice versa. I found a perfectly respectable 19th-century translation of Mickiewicz’s “Do matki Polki” and, as it happened, it actually fitted the cultural context of 19th-century Ireland extremely well. So I presented it, with the word “Irish” replacing “Polish” throughout the text, and tried to analyze it at the interview, before identifying it as a Polish poem half way through my presentation. And that enabled me to say a few words about the Irish and Polish identities in the 19th century. Now, little did I know that one of the members of the interview panel, who was then the Chair of the English department at Ulster, Professor Robert Welch, who you referred to, was a specialist in 19th-century Irish poetry. Obviously, those were the days before the internet, so it was impossible to check who the people on the interview panel might be. So I just obviously did not know. But, not surprisingly, he was absolutely puzzled to hear, from a candidate from Poland, an analysis of an Irish poem he had never read. Obviously he must have appreciated the trick that I played on him and the rest of the panel, because they offered me the job. Now, I’ve got to say my perception of Irish culture has changed dramatically in the years I’ve lived in Northern Ireland, and I suppose if I were to be listening to that presentation now, I would say that there were numerous flaws in my argument. I would also be able to present many more examples, some of them hopefully more sophisticated, both to

support and to contradict my argument. However, my analysis must have been deemed to be interesting enough because I got the job at the time. I've got a very different view of Ireland now, hopefully somewhat more nuanced and somewhat more insightful, but that is how I started working at Ulster.

JU: As far as I recall there was a Polish link in the lecture which you gave after getting the title of professor.

JJ: Yes. I suppose I did mention that particular job interview because basically my formal title is Professor of English and Comparative Literature, and my professorial lecture was specifically on the advantages of studying comparative literature, so I did talk a little bit about various ways in which comparative literary studies operate. I started off by mentioning my experience of that 1992 interview, and then I finished by playing a similar trick on the audience, this time in relation to a contemporary event. I read a poem, and tried to convince the audience that it was about the invasion of Iraq. However, the poem was a translation of Broniewski's "Bagnet na bróń," and the reason I chose it was that if you put yourself in the position of an Iraqi at the time of the American invasion, and if you compare that experience to the experience of the Polish people in 1939, when the German invasion was looming, you notice that the similarities are quite obvious. That, to me, was another way of demonstrating that comparative literary studies may be useful, transferring ideas and perceptions from one culture to another, and thus enriching our thinking and experience. Also, from the rhetorical point of view: given that I had started my lecture with a mention of that job interview from 1992, the Broniewski poem rounded things off nicely, and it seemed that my trick worked again.

JU: You made the lecture available to me and I found it fascinating. I would like to thank you very much for a very interesting interview.

JJ: Thank you very much.

JU: I hope that you will keep coming to Poland and strengthening the links between Poland and Ireland.

JJ: Northern Ireland.

JU: Northern Ireland. Sorry. Maybe you could come because there is a sequence of lectures in honour of Professor Ostrowski and we invite prominent speakers who are in Poland at the time to give a lecture. So perhaps during one of your future visits you could give a lecture as well.

I will keep it in my mind and make arrangements to have you as a speaker some time in the future.

JJ: I would be honoured. I was a student of Professor Ostrowski and he taught me a course of lectures on the history of English literature so, yes, I would like to do that.

JU: Thank you once more for a very stimulating interview.

JJ: Not at all.

Jan Jędrzejewski was educated at the University of Łódź, Poland (MA in English philology, 1985), and at Worcester College, University of Oxford (DPhil, 1992). He has taught at the University of Ulster since 1993; he became Senior Lecturer in 2001, and Professor of English and Comparative Literature in 2007. He served as Head of the School of English and History (2009–14), and Dean of the Faculty of Arts (2014–17). A specialist in nineteenth-century English literature, particularly the Victorian novel, Professor Jędrzejewski also has major interests in Irish literature in English and in comparative literature. He has published monographs on Thomas Hardy and the Church (1996) and George Eliot (2007), critical editions of Hardy and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters. He is currently involved in revising and updating a multilingual pan-European literary compendium, *Lettres Européennes/A History of European Literature*.
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