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# Ma**TEXT**ters

## A Journal of Literature Theory and Culture

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# Editorial

It is my pleasure and privilege to inaugurate the second issue of *Text Matters*, devoted to *Marginalia/Marginalities*. A special guest of the issue is Krzysztof Zanussi, an internationally acclaimed film director, whose visit to the University of Łódź in December 2011 created a unique opportunity for a conversation about his incredibly rich oeuvre.

Following this are three sections of *Text Matters* engaging with *Marginalia/Marginalities.* The first section, titled "Marginal Matters in Theatre and Film," opens with two articles placed in different time contexts but concerned with theatre and drama. William Over examines actor biographies from the 18th century, and shows how actors gradually moved away from a disdained marginal status towards the position of public educators and "advocates of social improvement." Jadwiga Uchman explores Samuel Beckett's activity as a self-translator, namely, his rendering *En attendant Godot* into English with considerable differences in details, related, for example, to place names. The next two contributions focus on American films. Catherine M. Lord discusses *The Thin Red Line* by Terrence Malick so as to engage with images of nature as the margin for human activity, her analysis inspired by Jacques Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy.* Katarzyna Małecka's essay deals with the Coen brothers' neo-noir comedy *The Big Lebowski,* whose failure as a cinema release was followed by huge DVD sales and internet viewing figures.

The next section, "Margins in Fiction, Poetry and Literary Theory," opens with two articles dealing with the Gothic. Delving into its beginnings, Agnieszka Kliś grounds her analysis in the post-Freudian understanding of the Gothic as repressed and expelled to the margin. Maria Beville provides us with insights into "Le Horla" by Guy de Maupassant and *She* by H. Rider Haggard, exploring a significant relation of terror to the

fantastic, the understanding of the latter influenced by Tzvetan Todorov. Collapsing the boundaries between art and literature, Zbigniew Maszewski illuminates the oeuvre of Bruno Schulz, a Polish-speaking author of Jewish origin, whose ex-libris designed for Weingarten is shown to articulate the meanings informing Schulz's prose. Wit Pietrzak focusses on the poetry of J.H. Prynne, who draws inspiration from Ezra Pound, Charles Olson and Chinese literature. The next two articles intersect with postcolonialism. Tom Thomas examines Edward Said as a thinker who inhabited an in-between zone as a result of interests which made him incessantly cross and question the boundaries of disciplines. Paul Sharrad's text focusses on the reception of Thomas Keneally's novels in his home country Australia and in Poland. Finally, Sylwia Wojciechowska explores the significance of the bogus quotation for the message of Jim Crace's novel *Arcadia*.

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The articles collected in the section "Marginalized Identities" all hinge on protagonists who are at odds with a cultural, social or family context, and who are therefore consigned to that which is repressed but can (or cannot) be transcended. The section opens with the first part of a biographical study of Ira Daniel Aldridge, the natural son of a famous black nineteenth-century actor who died in Łódź. It was submitted by Bernth Lindfors, author of a biography of Ira Aldridge himself. The next contribution, by Kylo-Patrick R. Hart, delves into gay masculinities constructed in "Brokeback Mountain," a short story by Annie Proulx. Remaining within American fiction, Anna Gilarek juxtaposes two dystopian novels—*The Female Man* by Joanna Russ and *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy—so as to examine the marginalization of women. Jadwiga Maszewska analyzes ethnic literature, focussing on the motif of "intercultural travel," which pushes the frontiers of the American literary canon into a hitherto marginalized zone. The short stories she discusses include Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," Louise Erdrich's "The World's Greatest Fishermen," and Daniel Chacon's "The Biggest City in the World." In contrast, Richard J. Gray II looks at the postcolonial novel *La Goutte d'or* by Michel Tournier, whose Somali protagonist ventures to France on a quest for his image imprisoned in a tourist's camera, but who remains subject to marginalization enforced by an imperial gaze. Identity dilemmas are given a different turn by Alessandra Rizzo, whose study concerns Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri (of Bangladeshi and Bengali roots respectively) and the impact of cultural translation on second-generation immigrants. In the last submission, Praveen Shetty, Vishnumoorthy Prabhu and Pratapchandra T provide insights into Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, whose protagonist experiences frustration with the global market and climbs the social ladder to finally become an agent of the very forces he disdained.

Three reviews in this issue tackle entirely different topics. Adam Sumera comments on the way images of London in literature are conjured up and explored in *The Making of London: London in Contemporary Literature* by Sebastian Groes. Wit Pietrzak engages with Simon Glendinning's *Derrida* in order to demonstrate which aspects of the philosopher's oeuvre are given special treatment. Monika Kocot examines the way "Native Americanness" is constructed in *Native Authenticity: Transnational Perspectives on Native American Literary Studies.* Finally, but importantly, the message of *Marginalia/Marginalities* is completed by two interviews. In the first, Maria Assif talks to Fadia Faqir, a Jordanian writer based in Britain, about the marginalization of Arab women and a paradoxical freedom offered by in-betweenness and displacement. In the second, Krzysztof Majer talks to Norman Ravvin, a Canadian writer of Jewish origin, about the tradition of Jewish writing, and his "atypical" point of view embraced in stories related to a Polish Jewish past.

While the contributors discuss subjects ranging from literature through literary theory to film and theatre, their message revolves around discursive marginalia or marginalized identities. The texts are often informed by a Derridean reading of the relation between the centre and the margin, whereby the margin becomes a site of disruptive creativity displacing the centre and shading off into a non-hierarchichal succession of marginalia which question and redefine the meaning of texts and the construction of identities.

Dorota Filipczak

# A Special Guest
## of *Text Matters*

Krzysztof Zanussi

A photograph from his private collection

# Krzysztof Zanussi Revisited[1]
## A Conversation—Dorota Filipczak

### (University of Łódź)

**DOROTA FILIPCZAK:** Professor Zanussi, let me first thank you for your kind agreement to share your thoughts with *Text Matters.* I would also like to congratulate you on joining the board of the European Film Academy.

**KRZYSZTOF ZANUSSI:** If I may interrupt you, it's not a terribly great honour, because I am one of the founders of this Academy. Then I withdrew from it for many years because I was very disappointed by the way it developed. However, I have lost my battle, and I'm again ready to serve this academy. But it is not what it was meant to be. The Academy was practically formed and founded by Ingmar Bergman, and he wanted to create a very exclusive club of people whose work is known beyond the limits of their own language, and of their own culture. And he had the idea to have a *numerus clausus* of one hundred like, say, in the Vatican conclave, and have it like the French Academy. Unfortunately, this idea came to Ingmar Bergman too late. I was one of the first forty members whom he convoked. But an Academy of that sort did not attract enough attention and enough sponsors, so after a couple of years we had to change the profile, and now we are over a thousand people, and the members' fees are making life for the Academy possible, but it is definitely not the same Academy. So there is nothing to congratulate me on. It's rather a surrender.

**DF:** Thank you for setting that straight. Could you comment on the challenges facing the European Film Academy then and now?

**KZ:** Well, the Academy was born already too late, because Europe was so divided that practically no artist knew any counterpart in a neighbouring country. We didn't know each other. Bergman, for most of his career, did not know Fellini. He did not know Pasolini. He did not know Truffaut. Very few directors were multilingual. Fortunately, Bergman was, but not that many, not Fellini. Three fourths spoke some English, but that was the time when English was not so commonly spoken in this professional circle. So originally it was meant as a club to meet and talk, and try to compare markets,

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[1]    I was able to talk to Professor Krzysztof Zanussi after his lecture on life choices of the protagonists in *The Structure of Crystal* and *Wege in der Nacht* given to history students during his visit at the University of Łódź on 14 December 2011.

views, cultural traditions and roots. Today it's all different, and it is again the club where we may exchange some views and some ideas. And the European Film Academy is holding quite a few seminars and MA classes. I think this is the most important part of it. It's also awarding a European film prize, which is of very limited importance; we couldn't make it more prestigious, because not that many European films travel. They do not travel. French films are shown in France, Italian films are shown in Italy, and German films are shown in Germany. And it's only American cinema that is uniting us. It is again a great defeat, because at the time of my youth all was different. My father was sending our maid and our driver to see American films, because they were seedy. And it was a natural expectation that American films would be very popular but very simple-minded. And at the same time educated people were choosing French, sometimes Italian, sometimes Spanish, and sometimes British films. Not German, because after the war German films were almost non-existent, and it took us a long time before we recognized that Germany had an existing culture. But if we drop this limitation, then we understand that what was true forty or fifty years ago is not true any more. And now international European films are very few. There was a time in the sixties when we were trying to make co-productions that were meant to be intercultural. And the British, in this very aloof way, were calling it *Europudding*, because these films were shot unnecessarily in English, using English as a vehicle to bring various actors together. And a native-English-speaking audience was never ready to accept it. There is one example that is interesting for European readers; an example of Rainer Fassbinder, a German director, who made a film based on Genet (translated by Trout), and he shot this film in English with Jeanne Moreau, who is bilingual, and other actors who were quite fluent in English. But for the American market he had to show the dubbed German version with subtitles, because the thinking of the film and the narration was definitely not Anglo-Saxon. So the language was an obstacle. People felt more alienated when they heard English dialogue; they felt better when they heard German dialogue with subtitles. And then in art cinemas this film was working, so it was a great memento for *Europudding*, but of course the whole concept of *Europudding* was this aloof British approach telling us: "Drop making films in our language; buy our films, that will be enough." And one of our colleagues defending the continental view said: "Translate the name into French, and immediately it sounds better, *eurogâteau*." This sounds very attractive, because pudding is appalling, as is most British cuisine. This is not the cuisine of our dreams.

**DF:** Let me move on to your films now. In *Wege in der Nacht* (*Night Paths*, *Drogi pośród nocy*, 1979) a crucial role is played by the library which connects a Polish countess, a Wehrmacht officer and a Jewish refugee. You said

that your cinema came primarily from literature. The scene with Friedrich and his cousin discussing Japanese aesthetics brings to mind Ezra Pound with his orientalism on the one hand and his involvement with fascism on the other. There are references to Plato and Nietzsche. What were the textual inspirations behind this film?

**KZ:** Well, it's very hard for me to dig into these inspirations because I'm not very well read. And sadly, at my advanced age, when I should have read more, I have major problems with my sight and I don't read as much as I'd like to. But without a doubt what you made reference to is the time of lectures I had as a student, and they remained in my memories, and they are always there. I regret I do not read as much as I would like to, but when it comes to the classics I have the basic knowledge.

**DF:** Your critics often mention film directors who have influenced you. Bergman is a case in point. What about literary inspirations, the texts that mattered to you, or the texts you would treat as milestones?

**KZ:** Well, I had this opportunity a few years ago, when I started my term as a *consultor* at Pontifical Council for Culture. One of the bishops approached me in a most humble way, a really exemplary Christian. He told me: "I am incompetent. I find myself in this world of arts and I know nothing. Could you give me the first ten milestones, the books to read, because you talk about some works I've never heard about"; a very simple-minded bishop from a small, not very important, country, but with the right approach. So I was challenged by this list. It's like going to an uninhabited island with such a list. And I started with Stendhal, believing that this is the beginning of modern narration, and then I had Camus and Dostoyevski. I had Thomas Mann and Joseph Conrad as these very important writers. I put (because of my deep personal conviction) Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa with his *Il Gattopardo,* because I think it's a masterpiece of the 20th century, but not many people share my view. I put Graham Greene, believing that these are stories that will reward the reader. And I took Bernanos, because he is a bishop. And this was more or less my list of ten. And I was very moved because this bishop called me a couple of months later and he confessed that out of ten he'd read seven, and he liked practically all of them. So it means that he was sensitive to the values which I was trying to promote.

**DF:** Now that you've mentioned Conrad and Greene, I would like to ask you about other English-speaking writers, especially playwrights, because you directed plays by Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter. You directed *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller.

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**KZ:** Oh yes, I did a couple of times, recently in Russia. I directed Pinter a couple of times as well. Tom Stoppard too. I think that all Anglo-Saxon drama is often very much down to earth; it's realistic. It's often psychological, sometimes very close to film or television, but it's also close to the public. I'm afraid that continental Europe, especially Germany, went too far with this kind of experimental theatre and language which is now very formal and conveys very few ideas. So when I touch Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller I know what my task is as the director, what I'm supposed to do. And I have the material for actors to act and for the public to be moved by. In many other plays written today I lack this material and then I am very disappointed. German theatre is especially alien to me. So I feel I'm always in opposition. I directed a lot in Germany, and I know I will take the plays that no German director wants to touch, like Pinter, like Stoppard, like Tennessee Williams.

**DF:** Correct me if I am wrong: your films seem incredibly intertextual, not only *Wege in der Nacht*, but also, for example, *Persona Non Grata* (*Persona non grata,* 2004). Perhaps it is a case of affinity rather than inspiration. The book I have in mind is *Under the Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry.

**KZ:** I didn't think about any similarity, but it's subconscious; the book is in me. And you know I am a non-drinking person, so it is very particular. I'm not such an admirer of *Under the Volcano*. I am somehow irritated by this book, because it's about the sickness without the remedy.

**DF:** Well, it is and it isn't. There is a huge mystical dimension.

**KZ:** There is a mystical dimension but there is no practical suggestion that this destiny is a little bit in our hands. It is very fatalistic to me. And that's what I disagree with.

**DF:** I see. I think *Under the Volcano* should be seen as a part of a continuum, because Lowry planned a twentieth-century equivalent of Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

**KZ:** : Oh yes, he did.

**DF:** But he failed.

**KZ:** Exactly, because even for Dante *Paradise* is the most difficult and the most disputable part of the Trilogy.

**DF:** The Ambassador from your film *Persona Non Grata* resembles the Consul from *Under the Volcano* in his idealism and obsessive jealousy—and his partiality for drink, which is only hinted at in the film. The setting is Spanish-speaking and postcolonial, like Lowry's Mexico. Why did you choose Uruguay of all places?

**KZ:** Well, I chose Uruguay just because I wanted a God-forgotten place with no particular aura of local problems. Argentina would have been impossible. Mexico has too strong an identity for the Ambassador to be confronted with. Uruguay is almost a piece of Europe on another continent, but there are other similarities; they do exist; there is no doubt about it. And I even kept some Spanish dialogue in the film. As I'm ignorant of this colour of various languages, it's a big problem for me, because I shoot many films abroad. And, of course, my command of all other languages is never as good as my command of my mother tongue, Polish. However, I have to deal with the problem, because sometimes my assistant tells me this actor mispronounced the word (when an actor, a local native-speaker pronounces the word, I take it for granted that this is the right pronunciation), and that sometimes he changed the word, and this particular word is poorly chosen, or it is in bad taste, or it is ahistorical, or socially wrong, or a person of this class would never use this word. So there is a feeling of incompetence, a feeling that everything is really on shifting sands. I'm never sure what actors are saying. This is a big pain and a very big challenge.

**DF:** Are you aware of the reception your film had in Uruguay?

**KZ:** Yes, I was in Uruguay when the film was shown, and of course there was a strong reaction in the capital, in Montevideo. And they rather liked the film's image of their country. This is a very peaceful and unproblematic image, but on an everyday level there was a funny incident. The man who lent us his house for shooting was scandalized by the fact that the interior does not match his house, because we shot the interior in Moscow. And he said it was cheating; he felt defamed, because, as he said: "I have totally different paintings and different interiors." He was so unaware of what the film is about.

**DF:** You cross many borders to make your films, and I wonder how your films cross the borders and find their audience in countries whose historical experience seems so remote, especially in postcolonial countries. I know from an Indian professor that your films got a lot of response there.

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**KZ:** India is a very particular country. And, of course, it's only the upper class. Only 10 per cent of Indian population speak English, because 90 per cent do not. But then you have the film societies, and this is the real audience. By the way, I have lectured in India quite a lot, and I've been there over thirty times. So yes, I feel this following in India. And Indians definitely have their choices of film. It's the same in the States, where there are film societies and art cinemas in big cities and on campuses, and they show my films. And some TV channels were showing my films. Then I see the choice is totally different; the evaluation of my work is different. They go for those films which I thought were far less important, but it's up to them. So whenever I'm asked what films of my own I like best, I answer, "It is up to you." I've been travelling to China quite a lot, both Communist China and Taiwan China. Taiwan is much more articulate. And in these countries, like in Thailand and other Buddhist-mentality countries, totally different choices are made. They are mostly interested in the films that have clear-cut ethical problems, but they are totally insensitive to the whole metaphysical perspective. They reject it. The notion of mystery is not something they buy.

**DF:** I would like to ask you about the reception of those films that seem to me quintessentially Polish, such as *The Contract* (*Kontrakt*, 1980), *Constant Factor* (*Constans*, 1980) or *A Woman's Decision* (*Bilans kwartalny*, 1974), where I can recognize items familiar from my childhood. I can see that the dress code is there and the wall unit, and tea in glasses, an emblem of communist Poland.

**KZ:** The Poland of our youth.

**DF:** Yes, how did all this get across?

**KZ:** Well, sometimes people were pointing out particular details that were exotic to them, like, for example, in *Camouflage* (*Barwy ochronne*, 1976), where the *rektor* is visiting the students' camp and some items from the kitchen are taken to his car. This was a surprise in the States, and even today in Poland people are surprised; they say: "Why does he do it? Does he need to steal apples and tomatoes from the students' kitchen?" At that time it was obvious, and of course the audience laughed when they saw it. But these are usually minor things. There is no bigger issue than the issue of cellphones. One of my scripts (*The Unapproachable*, 1982) is based on the fact that somebody must make an urgent telephone call. It wouldn't make sense today, because everyone has a cellphone, and you can ask anyone to do you a favour. And here you had to enter somebody's house to make a call. So such things change. And, of course, the social code was

always confusing. Western audiences saw my protagonist, who was a medical doctor, and they were surprised that his living standards were lower than those of any nurse they knew. But this was the reality in a socialist country, where doctors were very poorly paid.

**DF:** I have been trying to examine the issue of death in your films, a theme that seems so fundamental, and yet so difficult because there is always a risk of reductiveness. In your commentary on the DVD for *Persona Non Grata* there is your statement that death is one of the few topics worth talking about, apart from love. Now, this struck me as a very biblical juxtaposition.

**KZ:** Yes, it was meant to be biblical. I wanted it to be biblical.

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**DF:** "[F]or love is strong as death" (Song of Songs 8:6). Isn't this embedded in the film?

**KZ:** I hope so.

**DF:** The Ambassador from *Persona Non Grata* keeps looking for his wife the way the beloved keeps looking for the bridegroom in the Song of Songs. It's a pity that this very important intertext went unnoticed in Polish criticism.

**KZ:** Well, criticism, especially in Poland, was not very profound. A new generation of critics is emerging and the old one has vanished, so it's a time of vacuum. But when I showed this film in Italy I could see that it had been noticed.

**DF:** Are they more biblical than we are?

**KZ:** Oh, they definitely are.

**DF:** I have devoted much time to studying fiction about women, so I would like you to talk about your female characters for a while.

**KZ:** I must invite you to my next film. It will be a film in defence of women against feminists. Let me add—and this is my own rhetorical invention— feminism is like cholesterol; there is good feminism and bad feminism. I am not against all feminism. That would be stupid. Every fight for equal rights is good feminism. But this attempt to make women identical to men but even worse is a bad thing.

**DF:** Your female characters strike me as very independent, for example, Elżbieta in *Wege in der Nacht* has a very independent mind. The same could be said about the protagonist's aunt in *In Full Gallop* (*Cwał*, 1995). With her double identity she ensures the survival and cohesiveness of the whole family. And I felt that Marta in *A Woman's Decision* is the one who really makes her own choice. Lilka in *The Contract* defies the hypocrisy of her social milieu. Bella in *Family Life* (*Życie rodzinne*, 1971) is also defiant. They seem quite powerful and very liberated for their contexts.

**KZ:** I would agree about that, but I had that example in my family. My mother and my wife are independent and very strong women, and not submissive, by any means. And I think in previous generations there was always the legend of a strong, independent woman in the family, and I was fascinated by it. For many years in my private life I was trying to find a submissive partner. And I didn't find one. And I married a woman who is very strong, and we fight, but my wife wins in many fields, sometimes to my embarrassment, because she drives a car better and much faster, so pays bigger fines. She is very good with technology too. And although we are both over seventy, she climbs big trees and prunes them when necessary, while I'm dying of fear that one day she will fall. And, of course, she directs all the construction work at home. This is her field, and this is, I think, one of the archetypes of Polish women in the 19th century. My mother took over the factory after my grandfather was executed (during the Second World War). She learnt the job in one day, and she was very good at it.

**DF:** Actually, I would like to ask about the female perspective in your films, because it seems so inevitable and so necessary. I mean we wouldn't get the message of *Wege in der Nacht* without Elżbieta. And the same goes for Emilia in *The Year of Quiet Sun* (*Rok spokojnego słońca*, 1984). Could you say more about this?

**KZ:** Well, that's hard for me to do, because I take it as natural. It's just a portrait of women I met in my life, or whom I imagined, but based on some experience and some knowledge.

**DF:** What about the question of choice in your films, especially with regard to women?

**KZ:** I was largely in conflict with the fashion and approach when I made *A Woman's Decision*, because for me a really liberated and free woman is getting back to her marriage and her husband; it's not that she surrenders,

but that she chooses. And once this is her free choice, then she knows that this is true to her real nature. And I think this was quite problematic at the time, because some feminists said that breaking the relationship is always better than keeping it, because it was the fashion of the times.

**DF:** This is incredibly reductive.

**KZ:** Yes, this is reductive. But I hold to the idea. And I think it's no coincidence that this film did fairly well in America.

**DF:** I am not surprised at all. But let's move on to *Revisited* (*Rewizyta*, 2009). What I like about this film is the open-endedness. At the end of the film, the protagonist, with his background of suicide attempts, confesses that he has climbed the crane to watch the sunrise, frustrating our expectations that this time he will successfully kill himself. I would like to ask about the idea of your connecting with your own work intertextually. Why did you revisit these particular films: *Family Life, Camouflage, Constant Factor* and *With a Warm Heart* (*Serce na dłoni*, 2008)?

**KZ:** Well, for many reasons, and maybe the technical reasons. These actors were alive and these stories were left open to some extent. I could have done it with other films, but sometimes the protagonist dies at the end so there is no chance to do it. In some cases, as in *Illumination* (*Iluminacja*, 1973), for example, the actor, Stanisław Latałło**,** died, so I had no chance to revisit him. I would be curious to see what happened to his character later, but somehow he was bound to die. So that was the main reason for the choice, and besides I thought these were the four films that had something in common, too. So that was my intuition.

**DF:** Your oeuvre is intertextual not only with motifs but also with actors who keep returning in your films. So they bring into a film their own achievement, like Zbigniew Zapasiewicz—who, incidentally, played the Consul in a theatrical adaptation of *Under the Volcano.* Is this an attempt to see how a particular kind of actor will develop, faced with a new challenge?

**KZ:** Well, I'd say that whoever develops and does not become stagnant in his career is my ally. I've dropped some actors because they didn't show any sign of growth. And the others with whom I remain friends are people who have grown. So I think this is the key to the answer.

**DF:** So the actors grow in the films.

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**KZ:** And they grow through the other films; they grow in their stage work. So I watch them, and I see that in the new decade of their life there is something new to discover.

**DF:** I'd like to ask you about the role of memory in your films. After all, the crucial motif in *Revisited* is remembering.

**KZ:** You know, that's hard to be theoretical about, but the fight for memory is the only resistance we can show to the passage of time and death. If we are able to preserve a relationship, friendship, love, or marriage, it is a victory, because time is dividing us all permanently. It is a natural process, like decomposition is a natural process. And we need entropy to decline if we want things to be organized, to be put together. So I feel this passage of time very strongly. I try to show my opposition, and I know that time is going to win anyway. But my opposition, my resistance, is this little sign of dignity that I have tried. I knew I was bound to lose, but I tried.

**DF:** How would you describe your contact with the audience nowadays and in the seventies, in any case, behind the Iron Curtain?

**KZ:** Let me give you a very biblical example. I steal it from somebody who had enormous merit. It was a tiny Chinese priest, the Cardinal of Manila. His name was Sin (Jaime Lachica Sin). And he was the leader of the victorious church of the Philippines against the dictatorship of Marcos, whom I happened to know personally too. And Cardinal Sin was at the frontline of a demonstration, and the soldiers got the order to shoot, to fire, and they didn't. And that's how the dictatorship finished. So when Cardinal Sin visited Rome just after it happened, there was a press conference and everybody was so exultant, and he was asked how he felt in the role of leader of the victorious church. He gave a very sincere answer: "I feel like the donkey that Christ used on Palm Sunday entering Jerusalem. This donkey thought that all this honour was for him." We were having a marvellous reception at that time, but it was not for us. It was because of the resistance, because we were showing opposition to the evil power. So we were also focussing the feelings of an audience that wanted a change, and that's why we were rewarded beyond our merit. And we now think that this was a beautiful time from the donkey's perspective. That we had won all the applause. It wasn't only for us. It was mostly for the message that we were bringing and the hope and sense of solidarity. People were happy in the cinema when they could applaud together, or laugh together against something that they thought was evil.

**DF:** That's very interesting as well. I am intrigued by the presence of music in your films. It's like another self that you have. It's significant that when you tell an artist's story in *The Silent Touch* (*Dotknięcie ręki*, 1992), you choose a composer, not a film director, not a painter or a writer. Was there a reason behind this particular choice?

**KZ:** In the case of *The Silent Touch*, it was my composer Wojciech Kilar, with whom I had worked all my life, and it was a homage to his composition. I was reconstructing the fictitious birth of this composition. But otherwise, yes, I am a music goer and music lover. So this was probably most natural for me, most spontaneous to go for a musical background, and to look for music more than painting, more than architecture, although my ancestry is all architects and constructors. So that's probably the reason I've made many documentaries about music. And I directed a couple of operas (even this year). So that's where I feel comfortable and often excited.

**DF:** You focussed on Penderecki, Lutosławski and Baird in your documentaries and films.

**KZ:** Now I've made another television documentary about Kilar. I've recently made films about music for Germany, and I made a film about the music in the Warsaw ghetto (1993). So as you see, there are many references to music.

**DF:** Quite. You seem to be in a quarrel with postmodernism.

**KZ:** Absolutely outspoken.

**DF:** And the whole of deconstruction.

**KZ:** Oh yes, deconstruction is a part of it. When I was teaching at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee in Switzerland, I was having classes next to Jacques Derrida. So it was a joy when students came from his classes to mine and I could tell them: "He's a great philosopher. I'm nobody, but don't trust him. Don't believe him. What he says is all wrong." And some students followed me.

**DF:** And yet I am aware of a very interesting use of deconstruction by theologians or people working in religious studies.

**KZ:** I wouldn't be scandalized at all. I know what it is like in Poland. My daughter-in-law is promoting Derrida from a metaphysical perspective,

and his development absolutely justifies this. He has great value in the deconstruction of certainty, which is absolutely illuminating. He is a father killer because he is an ex-Marxist. He killed Marxism quite successfully. But in my opinion he went a bit too far.

**DF:** Perhaps different people use Derrida differently.

**KZ:** Yes, but there is this facet of Derrida which I defend. But I think that on a popular level postmodernism is perceived as relativism or nihilism. And this is a real danger of our time.

**DF:** You seem to have so many personas: film-maker, scientist, philosopher, story-teller, intellectual, quester who unhides the hidden. Which would be the right identification? All of them or none of them?

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**KZ:** All of them or none of them, which is almost the same. I have this great grace in life to have so many vests, and it is always exciting to see life from a different perspective, and discover that there are more surprising perspectives.

**DF:** My last question is to do with your revisiting the students of history at the University of Łódź. What's the difference between your discussion with the audience here and, for example, at American universities, where you have also had lectures?

**KZ:** Well, we have far less in common when we cross the Atlantic because the life experience is different. But if we overcome this element of alienation, we find that the basic human feelings are the same. And students are always very perceptive, if you really have the readiness to give them something. And that's the basis. So when you come with good will and want to share, they are with you. When you come only to impress or teach and educate, then you may be rejected. I've had this experience in different places, including China, where I've recently lectured quite often, and it is again extremely far away in terms of mentality. But at the end there is something human that we can dig into, and then I have the feeling of very good contact.

**DF:** Thank you very much for this inspiring and insightful conversation.

**KZ:** Thank you. Dziękuję.

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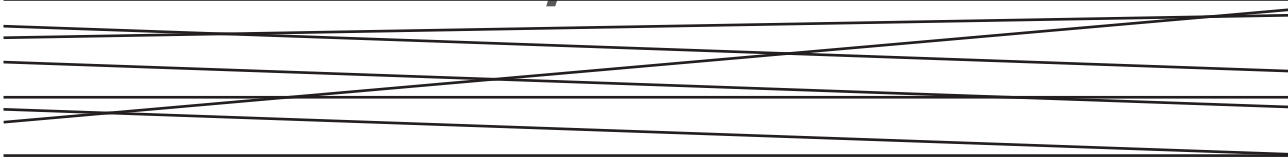
# Marginal Matters in Theatre and Film
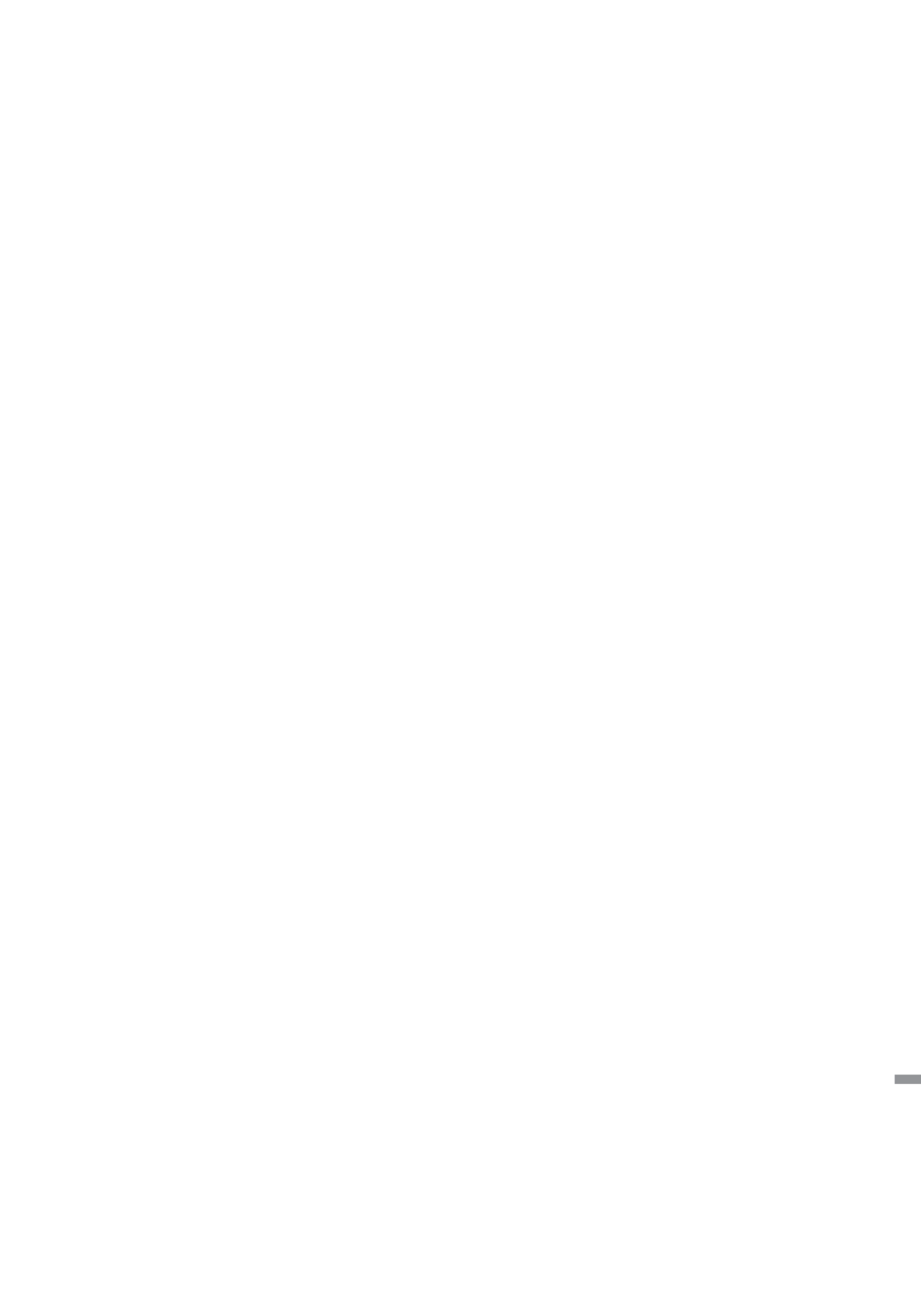
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# The Margins of the Rational Man: Fluid Identities in Eighteenth-Century Biography

## ABSTRACT

This study will explore the Enlightenment conception of the individual of reason, its attempted formulations in actor biographies, and its ultimate denial by the reality of human identity as multiple, fluid, and dialogical. Such fluidity sought to overcome the marginal status of the stage player through the embodiment of rational models of personality. Some stage celebrities, most notably David Garrick, were offering themselves as public models of identity for the new age of reasoned discourse. This involved the presentation before the public of stage performers as fully realized individuals. However, the unavoidable problem was that presenting an individual, even a renowned stage star, as a living paradigm of the enlightened person of reason would prove elusive. Aside from the inherent contradiction of locating any perfected stereotype in an actual person, the qualities making an individual in full conformity to his or her "reason" did not match the particular cultural qualities demanded for a successful eighteenth-century middle-class Englishman or Englishwoman. Nonetheless, by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, significant advances were made both within the particular profession of acting and before the onstage and offstage public. The acting profession was moving quickly and for the first time in England away from its marginalized status to offer respected agents for cultural change. The new genre of actor biographies as well contributed to this more fully realized formulation of the modern individual.

> It is not the violent man unable to control himself who moves us;
> that is an advantage reserved for the man in full possession of himself.
> (Diderot, *Paradox on Acting* 320).

## Reason beyond the Margin

As a new class of self-made celebrities, many stage actors eagerly endorsed the notion of education for improvement through reason and sought to offer public instruction, despite their perceived marginality and lingering doubts about their own moral respectability among the same public. Actor biographies and essays, both new genres, introduced the notion of the celebrity performer as archetype of the rational man.[1] This study will explore the Enlightenment conception of the individual of reason, its attempted formulations in actor biographies, and its ultimate denial by the reality of human identity as multiple, fluid, and dialogical. Such fluidity sought to overcome the marginal status of the stage player through the embodiment of rational models of personality.

When Enlightenment notions posited knowledge as the means to improve the human condition, they furnished the grounding for nothing less than a science of living. The new rationality rejected many of the traditional notions of religious obedience to reified laws and directives in favor of human-based standards for progressive change. Bracketed by Locke and Hegel, the age prioritized "reason" as the universal method for individual betterment, requiring "rational self-responsibility."[2] Reason in this way became the supreme unifier of the energies of the mind. "Variety and diversity of shapes are simply the full unfolding of a . . . homogeneous formative power." This dynamic but coherent power was characterized with the single word "reason." This task Montesquieu expressed succinctly and eloquently: to bring "nature under the intense light of reason" (Cassirer 5–6; 47–48).[3] In Herbert Marcuse's words, "From now on, the struggle with

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[1]  Daniel J. Boorstin discusses the development of the essay from Montaigne as originative of the biography of an individual (556–66). However, he does not mention actor biographies. The appearance of the actor biography was a vital element to the rise of the self-made celebrity, and hence of the individual, in the eighteenth century.

[2]  John Locke expanded on Francis Bacon's prioritization of reason for human progress. At the end of the era, Hegel presupposed rationality as the essential tool for human betterment. Locke's "rational control of the self" implied "the ideal of rational self-responsibility" (Charles Taylor 174).

[3]  However, Diderot warned of applying systems of reason to every field, especially natural history and such disciplines as botany (Cassirer 77).

nature and with social organization was to be guided by [the individual's] own progress in knowledge. The world was to be an order of reason" (3–4). Much of the new thought in the eighteenth century concerned egalitarian goals that posited a social leveling, or at least balancing. These democratic aims, brought about in part through a greater appreciation of truth by scientific reasoning and broader educational visions, remained largely unrealized throughout the century. Still, the British middle class moved to the epicenter of consciousness, inspiring and defining movements for change.[4] Conspicuous among these were certain theatre celebrities, who began to offer public instruction for personal improvement, albeit aware of their own problematic acceptance among elements of the general public.

In an age when reasoning, individual deportment, articulate speech, appropriate clothing, contained emotionality, knowledge of social etiquette, and amateur scientific experimentation marked the identity of the gentleman, and to an extent that of the lady, famous theatre performers were increasingly valued as educators and—specific to the new science of living—as advocates of "nature" in the theatre.[5] Figures such as Charles Macklin and David Garrick, two of the most revered, in Great Britain, actors and actor-managers (stage directors), began to accept aristocrats and the new bourgeoisie alike as students of acting, deportment, manners, moral behavior, and most vitally, of the new science of living. Instruction was offered in the homes of the actors and their customers, while oratories and coffee houses became the sites of public and semi-public demonstrations of such behavioral standards. Also, dramatic productions did double duty as entertainment for mixed audiences of the aristocracy and the middle class while offering opportunities for spectator/learners to observe the class-coded details of behavior, interaction, and moral sensibility presented by the characters on stage.[6] Extending this interest, actor biographies and essays furnished models of the individual for a rational age, a discourse that could overcome the marginal status of the theatre profession.

Some stage celebrities were offering themselves as public models of identity for the new rational individual, a powerful theme which, to

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[4]   Among others, Paul Langford discusses middle-class influence on the wider culture of eighteenth-century Britain in *A Polite and Commercial People* and *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689–1798.*

[5]   The general Enlightenment project for the improvement of living, especially by acquiring notions of sensibility for various endeavors and behaviors, are detailed throughout Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World*.

[6]   See for example William W. Appleton, *Charles Macklin: An Actor's Life*, 98–108; Christian Deelman, *Great Shakespeare Jubilee*; a general discussion of manners, deportment, and middle class sensibilities are discussed in Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* (59–123; 461–518).

borrow a term from Laura Brown, qualifies as a "cultural fable," that is, "a collective enterprise, which, through its collectivity, engages with the most vital, problematic, or prominent aspects of contemporary experience" (3). However, the unavoidable problem was that presenting an individual, even a renowned stage star, as a living paradigm of the enlightened man of reason would prove elusive. Aside from the inherent contradiction of locating any perfected stereotype in an actual person, the qualities making an individual in full conformity to his or her "reason" did not match the particular cultural qualities demanded for a successful eighteenth-century middle-class Englishman or woman. In fact, the motivation to represent a person of reason to the general public was based on contradictory aims and power-centered strategies, not rational and fixed ideals. The reality of human experience as multiple, fluid, and dialogical would undermine any such absolute identities and ultimately reaffirm the marginality of theatre professionals.

## Reason under Control

The inner qualities of character, emotion, and thought were often presumed outwardly verifiable in the eighteenth-century public sphere. There was a widespread need among the increasingly self-conscious middle class to learn the external rules and aesthetics of "politeness." The hunger for "the polite attainments of fashionable living" could be accommodated by self-made celebrities known for their graceful deportment but also for their adherence to "nature" and "truth," different concepts that the period did not hold in contradiction (Langford 80). Outward manifestations of human thoughts and feelings became systematized by prominent actors for popular heuristic purposes.

Macklin became the first major performer to analyze communicative delivery in a systematic way. His instruction included schematic terminology indicating various lengths of pausing for effect, and the proper movement to express particular thoughts and emotions. Emotionality through physicality, thought through eloquence of speech, and diction (word choice) as the conceptual form of sentiment, all were thought controllable and teachable as a system. Human feeling was no longer understood by these offstage teachers as an ineffable force of nature, or originative of divine grace or reified evil. Rather, both the inner life and the outer life were controllable and analyzable in the service of "Truth" and "Nature." In effect, all of human subjectivity could be classifiable and directly transmittable through training and discipline from a knowledgeable teacher/performer. This didactic orientation was inspired largely by an Enlightenment view that regarded the human body as a controllable

machine, in real life as much as in artistic performance. Such a mechanistic approach to human expression would be refined by David Garrick and other stage performers to view truth in performance from more realistic models (Roach 87). Here he knew his audience. Training and personal discipline as ideals were particularly appreciated by the rising middle class, which remained relatively insecure about its new position in British society, despite its growing numbers.[7]

As even Georgian royals and members of the high nobility received instruction from notable performers and actor-managers, theatre celebrities themselves were eager to be perceived as embodiments of the new ideal of controllable feeling for enhanced living. The desire of the new educator/performers to gain higher social status had personal as well as ideological justifications. Even noted stage performers, especially glamorous feature players, were often heckled in the English theatres, challenged and harassed in the green rooms and dressing rooms, and parodied in print and before audiences. These affronts to their new social status as self-made celebrities were mainly undertaken by theatre going aristocrats, who exploited their own *de facto* legal immunity and traditional cultural privileges.

David Garrick's famous banishment of gentlemen spectators from the English stage had social and ideological as much as artistic significance, a fact overlooked by most theatre historians.[8] In fact, the era's program of social and personal betterment also served the demarcation of social classes to maintain elite structures, albeit with an acceptance of broader notions of privilege. Peter Borsay comments, ". . . improvement, for all its emphasis on sociability, was a major tool in the pursuit of status." Nonetheless, refined discourse and deportment was sought not merely as part of the material culture of luxury and leisure, but "as vehicles for deeper psycho-moral systems," as an expression of mental forms of self-improvement (189, 201).

Cheryl Wanka notes that the new phenomenon of the actor celebrity brought multiple public versions of the person celebrated. She understands, as did Garrick's biographer Thomas Davies, how Garrick's reputation offered the morally suspect a degree of middle-class respectability (54). However, the wider historical context needs to be considered. More than a morally respected performer and producer, Garrick became a national figure embodying universalistic values, an identity that countered the marginal status of his profession. His enlightened principles of artistic

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[7]   Roy Porter discusses the concerns and goals of the rising middle class in the British Enlightenment. See *Flesh in the Age of Reason*.

[8]   For example, Kristina Straub in *Sexual Suspects* assumes a more static social identity for the performer in that century, one more deterministic and less dynamic.

truth and simplicity directly influenced the social reception of the other arts as well. For example, his support and literary influence on Jean-Georges Noverre (1727–1810), the "Shakespeare of the dance," led dance as an art form away from dogmatic standardization (Boorstin 489–90).

Accordingly, many eighteenth-century British theatre figures assumed a double identity within culture. First, they embodied the new standards for "truth" and "nature" in everyday life on both the individual and social levels, offering demonstrations of the new "truth" of human action onstage. Their approach included the selection of plays, which had typically valorized the traditional aristocratic values and sensibilities that were now emulated by the more broadly oriented middle-class. Second, actors began to offer the public individual instruction on *The Science of Acting*, as Charles Macklin's now lost tome was entitled. Greatly influenced by Macklin, John Hill's instructional book, *The Actor*, rejected what he regarded as pseudo-scientific analyzes of expressed feeling, such as Aaron Hill's mechanistic method of evoking a set list of passions through gesture and facial expression (*The Prompter*). More sophisticated didactic standards were replacing earlier attempts to apply rational schemata directly to the representation of human sentiment. Nevertheless, the controllability of human subjectivity through trained outward manifestations remained the overall intention in public performance as the century progressed.[9]

Stage celebrities taught privately and demonstrated onstage the new enlightened standards of human behavior and the outward conveyance of emotion and thought. Although most personal qualities presented for emulation were originative to the aristocracy, certain middle-class attitudes and tenets were valued, especially a disciplined focus for life and an enterprising attitude increasingly associated with economic rationality. Eighteenth-century tragedies, both the traditional and the new "middle-class tragedy" were widely cherished as exemplifications of the new ideals for living. These new living standards were at times even passed along to the working classes. A telling example was George Washington at Valley Forge, who had Joseph Addison's patrician tragedy *Cato* performed to educate his troops in personal resolve during the hard winter (Addison).

Theatre celebrities often sought to project their own public personae as high-status representatives of the new rationality and "sensibility." The new rational individual possessed thoughts and feelings made understandable, and hence controllable—under public scrutiny. For Macklin and especially Garrick, the growing social status of actors allowed a less defensive and more didactic orientation towards the public, culminating in the celebration of the self-defined "new truth on stage." This manifesto

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[9]   See footnote 6.

developed into a close association of Shakespeare as national icon with all Shakespearean actors, especially with Garrick himself as public guardian of the Bard's artistic "Truth." Moreover, Shakespearean dramatic form was comprehended as a mixture of tones and character types associated with the social mobility of British society (Gary Taylor 118, 122–23).

## SEVERAL VERSIONS OF THE SELF

Donald Stauffer's study of eighteenth-century biography argued that the histrionic experience of the stage actor, the ability to play many roles and to handle dialogue easily, was a significant influence on the narrative development of biographical writing. Actors, he thought, seemed less hesitant to express their private thoughts and emotions than most people and were more adroit at presenting them to the reading public (27–30). All the same, eighteenth-century stage personalities often felt a need to hide their private lives from their readership and audiences. Stauffer's chapter on the stage actor's influence in the development of biographical narrative recognized the importance of histrionic sensibilities but ignored role playing as a conscious writing strategy in biography. The autobiographic *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740), for example, presents a lively mix of onstage and offstage performances wherein the actor's private identity continually evades the reader. Cibber's elusive writing strategy prevented a largely anonymous but socially powerful public from fixing his private identity. However, the same strategy fell short of creating a new archetype of the enlightened individual, whose thoughts and actions follow the course of transparent truth. This new goal demanded "simplicity" of action and word for the self-improving rational person, who would overcome a marginalized status.

William Epstein argues that, as the movement for greater individualism influenced various eighteenth-century social institutions, autobiography became an important genre through which a writer could secure a degree of public identity. New biographers discovered a successful channel through which the rising consumer market could materially reproduce the individual (52). Epstein's viewpoint needs qualification in the important case of the actor's biography, where the private life of the biographical subject often merged with his or her public identity as stage performer of known roles, a circumstance that complicates the narrative of self-disclosure—and hence fails at creating a model for rationality. The biographical form presented the actor/biographer with a useful medium for self-defense but also for self-promotion, an attractive option in an era when stage performers were regarded with suspicion and condescension. Expanding Epstein then, it could be said that the actor's biography, repre-

sented by Cibber's *An Apology*, reproduced not one individual alone but rather several versions of the biographical subject for purposes of both self-promotion and self-defense. Epstein's reproduction of the individual was in this way extended and altered by the writer's intentional creation of a personality with multiple identities for ends that both protected and promoted the individual subject. The fluidity of human identity had in fact replaced universalistic and abstract conceptions of human being.

In contrast to *An Apology*, Thomas Davies' *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* (1780) seems to construct a consistent identity for its subject. In fact, however, Davies also intentionally conflates the onstage and offstage identities of his subject, much as Cibber does defensively to construct an indeterminate identity to evade personal criticism and for public promotion. Of course the narrative of individualism, then and now, has never been so transparent that it simply "reproduces the individual," as if such an entity were photographically repeatable. On the contrary, the biographies of Cibber and Garrick reveal strategies that construct multiple personalities for multiple purposes: to protect the actor from public attack; to promote the theatre as a central—no longer marginal—cultural institution charged with promulgating rationalistic concepts of education for personal living; and finally, especially in the Garrick biography, to identify actors as public exempla of "reason" and "truth."

Contemporary critical reaction to *An Apology* often denigrated the marked fluidity of its identities. The anonymous author of *The Laureat: or, the Right Side of Colley Cibber* (1740) wrote that Cibber's posturing showed only "self-sufficient Folley" (Ashley 99). In *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding commented that Cibber "lived such a life only in order to write it" (4). In fact, most observers then and now missed, or ignored, the defensive basis of his multiple role playing in the autobiography and public letters. Acting remained socially marginalized, a suspect and precarious profession among audiences and the general public alike.

Cibber was not unaware of the potential power of his profession to redefine the wider boundaries of cultural identity. For instance he records that King George was so impressed by his cast's performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* that a courtier quipped that the monarch might replace all his court officials with stage actors (300). Cibber later expands this theme with a lengthy comparison of passionate rivalries between actors with rivalries among royal courtiers throughout history (304). He even briefly imagines a theatre where stage performers would be raised above their traditional social status, and the stage magnified to become a national political institution of reason and nature. "I have so often had occasion to compare the State of the Stage to the State of a Nation, that I yet feel a Reluctancy to drop the Comparison" (301). The public's ha-

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bitual conflation of actor and stage character allowed Cibber at times to associate the theatre profession with roles of much higher social privilege, endowing it with a status worthy of an educational institution based on reasoned living. However, more commonly Cibber's celebrity power and personal independence were maintained by using the ambiguity of his multiple identities rather than by professing ideologies of social betterment.

## FROM SOCIAL SYMPTOM TO ARCHETYPE

The two generations separating Cibber's account of the theatre from Thomas Davies' biography cover a period of major change in cultural perception. The most evident change in *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* is the assumption, albeit tentative at moments, of social respectability and reasoned judgment. Davies, an actor who changed careers to become an important London publisher, and his wife, the actress Susanna Yarrow Davies, regarded themselves as models of social respectability in the theatre (Boswell 2:391). Although *Memoirs* reflects just as much professional exuberance as Cibber's account of theatre life, it reveals much less defensiveness, less posturing for public approval, and far less personal display. While Davies occasionally laments the "limited station" of the theatre, he portrays Garrick as a stage figure who in every way exudes "order, decency and decorum" (1:44, 148–49). For instance, Garrick runs a patent theatre like a well-regulated business, projecting a respected level-headedness to the public: "While the leading players of Covent Garden were wrangling among themselves, the manager of Drury Lane [Garrick] pursued his business unremittingly" (1:146).

Whereas *An Apology* often assumes a tone of forced assertiveness, Davies presents Garrick as unconcerned and even compliant to public wishes. Such non-threatening and confident personal qualities assured his acceptability and popularity among the London nobility (1:43). Though he almost always reveals a keen awareness of his public image, Garrick's social attitude remains confidently circumspect and reserved, in stark contrast to the insecure volubility of Cibber. However, he too carefully avoids argumentation in cultivated society, often to the point of innocuousness. As with Cibber, the Garrick of the *Memoirs* possesses a capacity for anticipating public perceptions of his private identity: "Indeed, the guarding against distant ridicule, and warding off apprehended censure, was a favorite peculiarity of Mr. Garrick through life" (1:197). Similarly, Garrick's *An Essay on Acting*, according to Davies, was written "to attack himself ironically, to blunt, if not prevent, the remarks of others" (1:198). Its defensive strategy of self-deprecation is similar to Cibber's strategy. Ironic self-reference as a rhetorical device was employed by both figures throughout their careers.

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Both would use self-criticism as a preemptive tactic, knowing that their audiences would likely assume that their frequent offstage role playing was common in the acting profession. With a public less likely to take their identities at face value, Cibber and Garrick often succeeded in avoiding escalating attacks.

Davies' detailed account of a scandalous pamphlet war reveals the degree to which Garrick and other eighteenth-century actors were vulnerable to public scrutiny. Davies feels a need to reassure his readers that theatre spectators are the anonymous patrons, and that stage performers are "their servants" (1:87–88). However, despite the occasional guarded statement, the main point of the *Memoirs* is to cast Garrick in the progressive role of public educator, to present him as an enlightened contributor to innovative social formation, hence central, not marginal, to the culture. Garrick's public persona as an advocate for social improvement Habermas identifies more generally as the "new form of bourgeois representation" (37). In fact, two specific developments famously credited to Garrick helped actors and theatre managers achieve a higher social status. The first was the introduction of a "natural" acting style, one more subtle and detailed in characterization. The second was the successful association of Shakespeare as patriotic and cultural icon with the public identity of David Garrick.[10]

Davies' deft treatment of these two public identities promoted his subject as harbinger of the new verisimilitude in the theatre and of a vitalized national culture, represented above all by the figure of Shakespeare. Garrick sought to perform Shakespeare "unaltered," purposefully redefining the national icon on the London stage. Later Garrick organized the first Stratford Festival. To the extent that actors expanded their eighteenth-century repertory of performances to become onstage and offstage social regulators and educators, they transcended the limits of their former professional identities. No longer the passive personifications of traditional class-based ideals, English stage celebrities would become forgers of progressive change. Garrick as the enlightened actor/educator sought to instruct the British public from his own script of social identities. He would define the future in innovative ways by professing moral and aesthetic judgments on playwrights and plays. The theatre professional would become a privatized individual of authority, according to Garrick. Garrick would instruct by means of the actor as teacher, bringing central Enlightenment ideas onto the podium of the stage (both literally and figuratively).

Garrick became public educator in another cultural sphere when he assumed responsibility for giving formal lectures on Shakespearean drama-

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[10]  Garrick's management of the Shakespeare Jubilee is assessed by Martha Winburn England.

turgy from the famous Drury Lane Theatre stage. For Davies these prescriptive lectures "criticized the various palates of the public for theatrical representation, and compared the wine of Shakespeare to a bottle of brisk Champaign" (1:311). Reflecting the Enlightenment pursuit of rational justification for social institutions, the stage lectures broadened Garrick's reputation in the dialectic of cultural change. His interest in artistic verisimilitude and his public reputation for cool-headedness and circumspection reveal a concern for the representation of the "new nature" in the arts, designed to keep the imagination on short leash, under the control of reason and discipline (qtd. in Daston 121). In the face of Samuel Johnson's warning in *Rasselas*, "All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity," Davies presents Garrick as the supreme artist who all the same is a shrewd economic realist uncorrupted by forms of fiction and imagination (104–05). Garrick's reputation associated the theatre professional with innovative ideals for the new middle class.

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Garrick alone is associated throughout the *Memoirs* with the development of a new acting style.[11] Davies considers this an entirely originative artistic achievement, a supersessionist movement where "nature" and "simplicity" must replace the traditional exaggeration, mechanistic externality, and broad gesturing of previous eighteenth-century character portrayal: "Garrick shone forth like a theatrical Newton; he threw new light on elocution and action; he banished ranting, bombast, and grimace; and restored nature, ease, simplicity, and genuine humour" (1:44). Davies repeatedly asserts that his subject's stage identity seamlessly complements his private identity, conflating Garrick's public and private identities in his arguments. Thus Davies claims that Garrick's personal stature remains consistent throughout his life. Whereas the Cibber autobiography presents multiple identities of the subject largely for defensive reasons, the Davies Garrick by and large possesses an integrative identity where public and private lives merge to define the dedicated professional, the new individual embodying the Enlightenment ideals of consistency and instrumental focus. He is allegorized as a theatrical Newton and a Shakespeare who will demonstrate a world of reason and nature, of bourgeois conformity for the new commercialized world (Daunton 141–80).

Garrick's attention to truth and simplicity in theatrical performance complements an offstage attention to "ease, simplicity, and genuine humour" in business practice and social deportment. Davies quotes in its entirety the Samuel Johnson prologue for Garrick's opening of the Drury Lane Theatre, which champions Garrick's stagecraft as a new turn towards

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[11]   In fact, Macklin helped Garrick with certain roles early in his career (Cooke 107). Macklin preceded Garrick in the development of more "natural" roles.

"Nature": "Tis yours this night to bid the reign commence / Of rescu'd Nature, and reviving Sense." Davies' comment on this speech strongly associates Garrick's management of the Drury Lane Theatre and his offstage conduct in general with the theme of middle-class diligence: "He was so accomplished himself in all the external behavior, as well as in the more valuable talents of his profession, that his example was greatly conducive to that regularity which he laboured to establish" (1:147–48). Garrick is presented as "reviving Sense" in the theatre by representing the middle-class and capitalist aspirations of consistency and disciplined work. Actor, educator, theatre manager, and offstage archetype of the self-made individual form a single persona of civic centrality, beyond marginality, the new individual who supports a social agenda.

**38**    The *Memoirs* often rebuts public criticism of Garrick, arguing for the singular importance of the age's man of reason. For example, his promotion of Shakespeare along with other revered playwrights in England is critiqued for its obvious profit motive and for giving "no encouragement to new compositions." Davies dismisses these objections succinctly: "There is no drawback on the profit of the night in old plays" (1:269). He includes an Oliver Goldsmith's quote that depicts the soul of Shakespeare greeting a resurrected Garrick in heaven before other famous personages (2:164–65). Throughout the appendix Davies quotes at length selected eulogies to Garrick, most of which associate Shakespeare in some way with Garrick: "Though the proud dome and sculptur'd form declare / Immortal Shakespeare thy peculiar care" (2:454); "While here to Shakespeare Garrick pays / His tributary thanks and praise" (2:456); "When Shakespeare died, he left behind / A mortal of an equal mind. / When Garrick play'd, he liv'd again" (2:462). The appendix also includes details of the funeral celebration at Westminster Abbey, where Garrick achieves final recognition by being buried "near to the monument of Shakespeare" (2:486). He becomes a latter day Prometheus bringing Enlightenment values of "truth" and disciplined enterprise to the nation, by so doing escaping his profession's traditional marginal status.

Both Shakespeare and Garrick are associated with modest language and unassuming behavior, in contrast to the embroidered dramaturgy of "gentlemen authors" such as Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher (2:328–29). Plainness and modesty as values for living are identified with a middle-class ethos, in opposition to traditional aristocratic concerns, such as social deportment and honor. Thus Davies quotes in full Oliver Goldsmith's eulogy to Garrick wherein the actor's onstage performances embody the plain truth as a prescriptive ideal for living. His stage acting is "natural, simple, affecting," in the service of those ideals through which the plain truth reveals the human heart. Honest striving displaces established aris-

tocratic privilege and hubris; plain middle-class manners supplant the artificialities of upper-class civility, which function to delimit social status. The criticism of aristocratic hegemony is thinly disguised, even as Davies seeks to render Garrick's public persona non-threatening to upper-class privilege.

For Leigh Woods, "Garrick's refusal to use theatre for political purposes aided him in his ability to concentrate on areas of private, subjective, and emotionally intense experience which he discovered in his characters" (148). The *Memoirs* deliberately extends this presumed apolitical strategy to its subject's conformist and circumspect private life. Davies was naturally predisposed to become interested in such a persona. In fact, he had been urged by Samuel Johnson to write Garrick's biography in order to extricate his own family from social disgrace and to save his publishing career from financial ruin. The middle-class virtues Davies attributes to Garrick—hard work, discipline, and moral steadiness—he desperately sought for himself as a former actor and publisher on the brink of economic failure. Garrick becomes the redeemer of an imagined status lost since the Elizabethan "Golden Age" in order to recast (and re-caste) the stage practitioner as public educator. He presents the characteristics of a model theatre manager, that is, of a successful propertied individual in Habermas's sense (see above p. 12).[12]

For Davies the new verisimilitude of the Garrick acting style associated with polite conversation in the actor's private life. Whereas the caprice, sarcasm, and braggadocio of Cibber's public personae reveal a celebrity escaping social categorization through a fluidity of voice and identity, Davies' Garrick presents consistency, dependability, and business solidity, qualities that exemplified the recognizable values of the new reason-directed sociability.[13] However, both biographies utilize, in varying degrees, a fluidity of identity for social acceptability, a strategy that complicates universalistic and rationalistic conceptions of human experience.

## SPACE FOR MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Writing on the age of representation, William Egginton refers to Jacques Lacan's notion of the split subject, that is, one who views the self objectively in response to modern notions of representation. Egginton's subject is the theatregoer of the Spanish Golden Age, but his summary of the spectator's

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[12]    Michael Duffy discusses the general trajectories that defined the commercial and product-oriented world of middle-class capitalism in the eighteenth century (213–42).

[13]    Many recent studies on the significance of sociability and civility in the culture and science of the Enlightenment have been undertaken in recent years. For a comprehensive treatment see Dorinda Outram (14–30) and Wanko (10–46).

experiential situation applies accurately to the eighteenth-century English theatre performer and spectator:

> Spectators become, themselves, microcosms of the theatre, acting roles for internal and external audiences, and thereby developing techniques of self-representation that would serve, on the one hand, to help integrate them into a new system of political organization while, on the other hand, to produce a sort of "breathing space," a gap between the role played and the subject playing it that would guarantee that the subject never becomes fully subsumed by the role. (410)

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Audience members respond to the ideological enticements of the roles represented onstage by using evasive means of internal and external fantasization. The common practice of gentlemen spectators sitting on the English stage in open view of other audience members is an overt consequence of the internalization of role playing and the theatricalization of everyday life. Garrick's famous banning of such spectators from the stage instances the performer's own contribution to the disruptive circumstances of the audience's internalization of role playing. As members of society, stage performers also felt the need for "breathing spaces." Accordingly, in the role of actor-as-public-educator, Garrick distinguished and defended his art and profession from the incursions of aristocratic theatre patrons, reconfirming the actor's personal space both literally and figuratively. It reconfirmed Garrick's movement from the margins to the center of eighteenth-century society.

Stage actors had long lived in a position of ambivalence: they were objects of desire but also social outcasts. For Egginton,

> The actor was the living, breathing conduit for the spectator's desires and identifications, existing in a relation of excess or surplus to the already-existing web of social relations: he or she could represent any and all roles within the set, but for that very reason had to be excluded from the set. In brief, the actor was a symptom of the social body. (401)

However, in eighteenth-century England the actor-as-educator sought to redefine the doctrine of civility, making the actor not solely a "symptom" of the social body but also a central definer of social identity. If the theatre spectator could hybridize into an actor in the theatricalization of everyday life, so too the actor had channels through which he or she could transcend assigned roles. As in the case of Colley Cibber, eighteenth-century stage performers were able with some facility to embroider, repair, transform, deny, and even criticize their own onstage and offstage identities. In turn Garrick and Davies sought consistent strategies for the broad transforma-

tion of society. As a recognized public educator, Garrick to some degree was able to transcend the objectification of the stage performer. A signifier representing another signifier, Garrick would be an arbiter of national taste and creator of allegorized themes. His new personae were prescriptive and authoritative as much as mimetic and symptomatic, embodying a cultural semantics of the self-made individual of property. All the same, these identitarian strategies moving the subject to the center of cultural life also brought with them ambiguities and uncertain hybridities.

Jean Baudrillard claims that objects become carriers of a particular social and cultural hierarchy, "but precisely for that reason . . . far from following the injunctions of this code undeviatingly, individuals and groups use it to their advantage. . . . That is to say, they use it in their own way: they play with it, they break its rules, they speak it with their class dialect" (37). Going further, Michael Bronski understands that any social group "creates and recreates itself—politically and artistically—along with, as well as in reaction to, the prevailing cultural norms. No counterculture can define itself independently of the dominant culture" (7). Both views form a symmetry of internal cultural balance. Alan Sinfield explores the levels of freedom through which emerging groups operate within dominant culture:

> [T]hey may return from the margins to trouble the center. They may redeploy its most cherished values, abusing, downgrading, or inverting them; willy-nilly, they exploit its incoherences and contradictions. So they form points from which repression may become apparent, its silences audible. (79)

For Louis Althusser all art has this potential of "internal distantiation" by revealing the dominant ideology from which it departs (204). Both Bertolt Brecht's famous *Verfremdungseffekt* and the eighteenth-century English celebrity actors discussed here represent conscious attempts to distance artistic performance from "the motive forces of . . . society" (39). However, while Brecht used the didactic function to inspire social revolution, English performers allied with, as much as challenged, hegemonic social forces for purposes of self-defense, individual trajectories, and national idealization.

## Multiplicity, Fluidity, and Indeterminacy

Garrick's offstage identification with Shakespeare's "truth to nature" supported certain Enlightenment values appropriated by the middle class, in effect circumventing traditional aristocratic priorities for patronage and

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enforcement. Garrick in his private life was widely perceived to embody middle-class, entrepreneurial values and behaviors. His "natural" acting style and antiquarian accuracy in costume and scene design associated with the Enlightenment values of fidelity to historical truth, but also with the pragmatic and empirical utility of middle-class enterprise.

The cultural discontinuities that engaged the rising status of the actor and actor-manager as moral educator but also as propertied "successful individual" in Habermas's sense paralleled the Enlightenment notion of instruction for living. The progression from Cibber to Macklin to Garrick reflected the general rise and confidence of the self-made, middle-class professional. New notions of celebrity engaged this development. The defensive ambiguities of the celebrity's marginal status earlier in the century gave way to the exalted narratives of later actors, most especially to Garrick in his search for new formations of social identity. Nevertheless, in both cases, the intentional alteration and conflation of private and public identities, the fluidity and indeterminacy of human identity, conflicted with the project to portray the individual of reason, whose coherent and universalistic qualities were valorized.

The consistent identity and social centrality of the subject is continually undermined in these biographies, since character identity remains fluid on and off the theatre stage. The hybridity and indeterminacy of human identity are exploited by public professionals such as Cibber and Garrick. Since the private life of the biographical subject often merges with his or her public identity as performer of known roles, the meaning of the individual subject suggests hybridized and changing identities rather than the fixed, consistent definitions required for the individual of reason. These circumstances make problematic but also enrich the narrative of self-disclosure, human identity and the movement away from the social margins.

Garrick's promotion of a new acting style embodying greater complexities derived from the verisimilitude of nature and truth was inspired by an Enlightenment emphasis upon spontaneity and unconscious motivation (from D. Hume and J.J. Rousseau, for example).[14] Garrick's public persona valorized the new capitalistic success ethic by promoting middle-class standards of discipline, moral reliability, individualism, and a more realistic acting and stagecraft style that reflected these values. The eighteenth-century actor's biography genre was at once symptom of this change—self-made individuals recognized as worthy subjects of biogra-

[14]  Hume before Rousseau emphasized custom and feeling over reason in daily life. See his *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature* (16 ff). Hume's emphasis on "passion" and social custom over rationality in decision making influenced subsequent economists such as Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. See Fitzpatrick (23–47).

phy—but also, more significantly, a documentation of the multiplicity and fluidity of human identity that engaged the dialectics of the era. Instead of fixity and unity, human identity offered multiplicity and a fluidity of voice that defied coherence. Thus the age brought into question its own equation of "nature" with "reason," a disruption that was hardly settled during the eighteenth century. David Hume's famous attack on human decision making as rational and universal even he regarded with some ambivalence, as evident in his treatise's subtitle, *Treatise of Human Nature: An attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into Moral Subjects.* So the famous defender of "nature" against "reason" could not entirely divorce himself from the powerful pull of rationality in human representation.[15] A similar ambivalence is traced in the actor biographies examined here; Garrick also could not entirely acknowledge the contradictions of rational consistency, nor could he entirely accept the fluidity of human nature that would allow him to escape from the marginalizing status of his profession.

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[15]   The observation on Hume's apparent ambivalence was suggested by Basil Willey (111–12).

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## Crossing the Borders of Language and Culture: Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

# ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to compare four versions of the text of *Waiting for Godot*: the French original, Beckett's own translation into English and two Polish renderings done by Julian Rogoziński and Antoni Libera. The article starts with a short discussion concerning rules governing the translation process and then its evaluation. While working on the transposition of the French original into English, Beckett introduced numerous changes, this being due to his sensitivity to the very quality of each of the languages and specific references characteristic of the two cultures. Antoni Libera, an expert in Beckett's oeuvre, argues that Beckett's translations should be more adequately described as second language versions and that the artist recommended further translations based on his two language versions. Libera himself followed this recommendation while translating Beckett's works into Polish. Upon publication, he provided illuminating notes, shedding light on the differences in Beckett's versions and providing critical insight into the texts. Julian Rogoziński, on the other hand, based his translation of *Waiting for Godot* only on the French original. This accounts for the fact that, at times, his rendering of the text lacks precision and may not even be quite understandable. Rogoziński's version is less satisfactory than that of Libera due to the fact that it was written earlier and by an older man, which at times results in the use of old-fashioned, outdated Polish diction and structures.

> Hence, a paradox. On the one hand every signature aspires to be seen as the sign of absolute presence, to be untranslatable, while on the other it always reaches out for confirmation, for the other's countersignature. As Derrida puts it, "we must write, we must bring about new events with untranslatable marks—and this is the frantic call, the distress of a signature that is asking for a *yes* from the other, the pleading injunction for a counter-signature. . . ." (Lucy 167)

The aim of the paper is to discuss Samuel Beckett's activity as a self-translator as well as to analyze chosen fragments of two Polish translations of *Waiting for Godot* by Julian Rogoziński and Antoni Libera.

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When Samuel Beckett started writing for the stage, he did so in French and not in his mother tongue. His decision may have been due to the fact that the use of the still to some extent foreign language made him more sensitive to the choice of concrete expressions and structures specific for that language. Later, he translated his works into English. As time passed, more and more often would he write first in English and then become his self-translator. At the beginning of her article entitled "Samuel Beckett's Bilingualism," Ann Beer writes:

> "Heavenly father, the creature is bilingual!" . . . exclaimed Belacqua, in Beckett's first collection of stories. The throwaway remark, directed towards a briefly appearing Scottish nurse, seems at first glance unimportant. Yet it stands as a prophetic exclamation about the creature's creator, Beckett himself. It also marks the only time in more than sixty years of publication that the word "bilingual" appears in his writing. The creature was bilingual, like Belacqua, who dreamed in French, and Beckett made them so. Bilingualism does much to distinguish this most distinct of artists. To have two tongues, two modes of speech, two ways of responding to the world, is to be necessarily outside the security of a unified single viewpoint. . . . Far from being a mere curiosity, bilingualism works at the heart of Beckett's aesthetic activity, releasing waves of innovative energy decade after decade. (209)

Some of the critics, though, interpret his decision to write in French as a sign of his break with Ireland and his becoming a part of the new, French reality. Ann Beer argues that the cycling tour to France and the time spent in *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris (1928–30)

> were enough to confirm the love-affair with a language that lasted throughout Beckett's life. In both critical and imaginative writing, he seemed to grasp that the "old ego," both "minister of dullness" and "agent of security," . . . could be left behind, and the new ego welcomed,

through the shifts in consciousness and expression that an acquired language made possible. (211)

A similar opinion is voiced by other critics discussed by Morin: "Although writing in French was a natural development for a bilingual writer living in France, Beckett's turn towards French has been depicted as a 'contradiction,' an 'abandonment,' a 'betrayal' and a form of 'linguistic denial'" (Janvier 46; Chamberlain 17; McCormack 18; Kiberd 590; qtd. in Morin 55).

 Herbert Blau, who often worked with Beckett, asked him about his use of two languages and thus recalls the occasion: "What enlivened and disturbed him most was my remark about the language of his dramas. I said that by writing in French he was evading some part of himself. (Pause.) He said yes, there were a few things about himself he didn't like, that French had the right 'weakening' effect . . ." (qtd. in Bair 516). Referring to the above remarks, Bair states that "Blau was not the only one to comment on Beckett's evasion of self; Pierre Schneider suggested that writing in French was not so much evasion as an attempt to state his deepest thoughts without actually confronting the inner sphere in which these thoughts were located" (516).

Whenever Beckett prepared the second language version, he paid meticulous attention to detail, introducing deletions, additions and changes, modelling the text according to the altered language and cultural tradition. Richard Seaver, who translated a number of books from French, recalls meeting Beckett while translating two of his early stories into English. The artist suggested, for instance, changing the word "dressed" into "clothed" because it sounded better and also recommended other modifications:

> "In the next sentence," he said, "you're literally correct. In French I spelled it out, said 'travelling expenses' alright. But maybe we can make it a bit tighter here, just say something like 'it was to get me going,' or 'it was to get started.' Do you like either of them at all?" On we went, phrase by phrase, Beckett praising my translation as a prelude to shaping it to what he really wanted, reworking here a word, there an entire sentence, chipping away, tightening, shortening, always finding not only *le mot juste* but the *phrase juste* as well, exchanging the ordinary for the poetic, until the prose sang. (105)

The artist employed the same approach while self-translating. Antoni Libera, in his introduction to Beckett's dramatic works, argues that even though Beckett himself referred to his second language texts as translations yet a more adequate word to use would be a language version. Furthermore, the playwright suggested that any further translations should be based on

his two original texts (Libera, "Wstęp" 6–7). Stan E. Gontarski, the editor of many of Samuel Beckett's prose and dramatic writings, concedes:

> The infinite or impossible or perpetual or incomplete or open text has been characteristic of Beckett's work since *Watt. . . .* As a self translator, for example, Beckett has taken the creative process a step beyond original publication and transformed his texts, used opportunities of translation to revise, clarify and often simplify his texts, much to the frustration of literary critics who find that the insights drawn about the English texts may not always apply to the French texts, and *vice versa*. Beckett's texts then exist in multiple versions even before the complications of performance are considered. (134)

The alterations introduced by the playwright may be already noticed in his first drama, *En attendant Godot*. Written in French and premiered in Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in January 1953, the play was then translated by the playwright into English and successfully produced in England under the title *Waiting for Godot.* Being innovatory both in content and form, a specific use of language being one of its characteristic features, the play astonished readers, audiences and critics alike. Bair writes:

> Ultimately, what is so striking about the play, and what must have been particularly arresting to the first French audience, is the language. Beckett was the first postwar playwright to write dialogue in everyday ordinary spoken French. It must have been a surprise for literate audiences to hear characters on the stage saying *merde* and trading insults with each other, things which were never done in the Comédie-Française. The language Beckett used in *Godot* is the language any group of *clochards* sitting on a bench or in a cafe might say to each other. The simplicity of speech is what the French heard in their everyday lives, but never noticed. (388)

Although the use of swearwords astonished the French audience, it caused even more problems with the Lord Chamberlain when the play was prepared for production in England.

> [He] took offense at much of the language and insisted on significant changes before he would approve it. Beckett agreed to make some changes—"Fartov" became "Popov" and Mrs Gozzo had "warts" instead of "clap"—but there were several deletions, especially of the hanging-erection and the dropped pants, which were quite unacceptable to him. (Bair 445)[1]

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[1]  The scene with the falling pants was of vital importance for Beckett. When Roger Blin directed the production in Paris, Latour, the actor playing the part of Estragon,

At first it seemed that the English production of the play would not take place as Beckett did not seem to be willing to introduce the required changes:

> Samuel Beckett informed Rosset (21 April 1954) that the incriminations were so preposterous that the whole thing was off. Twelve passages were listed for omission, some of which Beckett (reluctantly) agreed to amend, but also passages vital to the play (the opening of Lucky's tirade). (Ackerley and Gontarski 88)

However, when the play was produced in 1955, in Dublin, there was no censorship from the Lord Chamberlain,[2]

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> all the offending passages were retained, just as Beckett had written them, causing the critic of the *Irish Evening Herald* to comment that "Some of the grosser crudities, which were omitted or glossed over in London, were included here. They add nothing to the atmosphere, and are merely an attempt to out-Joyce the Joyce of *Ulysses.*" (Bair 455)

Transforming the drama into English, while preserving the plainness of the language and its lower class status, Beckett introduced a number of changes reflecting his awareness of the cultural differences between the two countries. The first group of these comprises the altered names of places and other language specific allusions. And so, for instance, while speaking about his pipe in the French version, Pozzo mentions his "Abdullah" (*En attendant* 48), whereas in the English version he refers to his "Kapp and Paterson" (*Waiting* 35). When asked about his name by Pozzo, Estragon in the French answers "Catulle" (*En attendant* 51), whereas in English "Adam" (*Waiting* 51). In Lucky's speech (*En attendant* 59–62 and *Waiting* 42–45) many changes have been introduced and so the names of "Poinçon and Wattman" have become "Puncher and Whattman." It is worth noticing that the Eng-

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dropped his trousers only as far as his hips which greatly irritated Beckett. On having learnt about it, he wrote a letter to the director demanding they should fall completely down. He ended the letter with the sentence: "That might seem stupid to you but for me it's capital" (qtd. in Bair 429).

[2] There was censorship in Ireland, though, under the Act of 16th July 1929, a bill meant to control and suppress "obscene," as it called them yet never precisely defined, publications in Ireland. Beckett strongly criticized the Act in his article "Censorship in the Saorstat," written in 1934 and published, with alterations made by the author, in 1935. The censorship in Ireland was strictly connected with conservatism and matters of Catholic orthodoxy. According to Morin, Beckett's attitude towards censorship "implicated him in ferocious disputes, the most famous of which involved England's Lord Chamberlain, to whom he referred as 'the Lord Chamberpot'" (Harmon 24, qtd. in Morin 43).

lish word "puncher" is an equivalent of "poinçon" (one who hits, beats or strikes), whereas Wattman in English evokes correlation with "what man" or "what's his name." As McMillan and Knowlson argue, "there are other associations, too: 'Wattman,' for instance, which puns on 'What,' as in the name *Watt*, suggesting a questioner or a researcher" (133). In the French original, the notion associated with telling names is further underlined by the fact that it exists if we take into consideration two languages, in English, the hidden connotations are restricted to one language only. The names "Testew and Cunard" (Testew, again telling because it contains the word "test") have replaced "Testew et Conard," and the French Academy "de Berne-en-Bresse" has changed into "Essy-in-Possy." In the two language versions the names of "Fartov" and "Belcher" appear, containing associations connected with the English verbs "to fart" and "to belch," referring to two instances involving extreme gaseous expulsions. The French place names "Seine Seine-et-Oise Seine-et-Marne Marne-et-Oise" have been replaced by "Feckham Peckham Fulham Clapham" (three of them are districts in London, while the fourth, "Feckham" is a word invented by Beckett by analogy to the sound quality of the other names), the specific sound quality of the original being preserved but extra vulgar associations added. "Voltaire" is changed to "Bishop Berkeley" and "Normandie" gives way to "Connemara," the western region of Galway in Ireland. Finally, the names of "Steinweg" and "Peterman" (the latter spelled with double "n" in the French version) crown the numerous instances of multi-lingual word play. McMillan and Knowlson point out:

> A *peterman* is English underworld slang for a *cracksman*. But these names actually derive from the German and Greek etymological roots for *stone* i.e. literally "Stoneroad" and "Rockman": "It is all about the world of stones," commented Beckett on Lucky's monologue. *Stein = Stone* (German); *Peter/petros* = stone (Greek). But the French *péter*, perhaps hardly coincidentally, means *to fart* and "la pétomane," sounding very much like "Peterman," was the French music-hall star who used to fart to musical tunes. (136)

The multilingual associations become the basis for the choice of names of the four main characters in the play. The origin of these names is Slavic (Vladimir), French (Estragon), English (Lucky) and Italian (Pozzo), and thus the situation presented in the play acquires a universal meaning: "Waiting is the fate of all mankind," as Hassan argues (178). Furthermore, the nicknames of the two tramps, Didi and Gogo, symbolically indicate Vladimir being associated with mind and thought (from French *dire*) while Estragon's physicality is stressed by the original meaning of the verb "go": after all, it is he who utters the often repeated phrase "Let's go."

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The question of decoding the identity of Godot has for years bothered the Beckett critics and admirers.[3] In the notes to his translation of the drama, Libera argues that the name Godot is a telling one, yet he also maintains that it can only be decoded by a linguist who will notice the English word denoting deity (God) being followed by the French "ot" used in diminutives in that language. At the same time, however, he does not hesitate to indicate the French and English origin of the nicknames Didi and Gogo ("Przypisy" 610).[4] When asked about the identity of Godot, Beckett answered: "If I knew who Godot was, I would have said so in the play."[5] He rejected the religious interpretation, saying: "If Godot were God, I would have called him that"[6] and "Christianity is mythology with which I am perfectly familiar, and so I use it. But not in this case."[7] Bair writes that "When Roger Blin asked him who or what Godot stood for, Beckett replied that it suggested itself to him by the slang word for boot in French, *godillot, godasse* because feet play such a prominent role in the play. This is the explanation he has given most often" (382). Knowlson writes that Beckett "told Woodhorpe that he regretted calling the absent character Godot, because of all the theories involving God to which this has given rise" (699, note 166). Yet Beckett admitted on another occasion:

> It would be fatuous of me to pretend that I am not aware of the meanings attached to the word "Godot," and the opinion of many that it means "God." But you must remember—I wrote the play in French, and if I did have that meaning in my mind, it was somewhere in my unconscious and I was not overtly aware of it. (qtd. in Bair 557)

This remark is interesting, especially, as Vivian Mercier argues, if one remembers that "Beckett has often stressed the strong unconscious impulses that partly control his writing; he has even spoken of being in a 'trance' when he writes" (87). Mary Bryden, who has written a book *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*, argues in the "Introduction":

> . . . the hypothesized God who emerges from Beckett's texts is one who is both cursed for his perverse absence and cursed for his surveillant presence. He is by turns dismissed, satirized, or ignored, but he, and his tortured son, are never definitely discarded. If God is not apprehended

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[3]  For the discussion of a number of different interpretations see: Uchman 1984.

[4]  Libera provides detailed notes to his translation, supplying discussions about the differences between the two language versions as well as interesting critical insights into Beckett's dramas.

[5]  Samuel Beckett to Alan Schneider and many others (Bair 382).

[6]  Samuel Beckett to Harold Hobson (Bair 382–83).

[7]  Samuel Beckett, November 17, 1971 (Bair 186).

in the here-and-now, there is nevertheless a perceived need, a potential opening, for a salvific function which a Deity could fulfil. (2)

The second group of alterations introduced by Beckett, while transposing the original into the English, is connected with the cultural status of the drama or, to be more specific, with the literary intertextual references which are added in the English version. Whereas the aforementioned alterations are mainly examples of a translation which changes the unfamiliar elements of the source text into those familiar for the target recipient, as defined by Romy Heylen, the following cases may be treated as representative of the third option mentioned by him, which is characterized by a balance between the source and target cultural elements.[8] In the notes accompanying his translation, Libera points out that there are two additions in the English version: these sentences are absent in the French original. The first of these is the one uttered by Vladimir "Hope deferred maketh the something quick, who said that?" (10). Libera argues that the sentence is an incomplete quotation of Solomon's parable ("Przypisy" 610). The second intertextual reference is, again, introduced by Vladimir, who, on being asked by Estragon what he is doing, says: "Pale for weariness" and then, answering the uncomprehending Estragon, adds: "Of climbing heaven and gazing on the likes of us" (*Waiting* 52). Libera argues that the source of this exchange is to be found in P. B. Shelley's poem "To the Moon" ("Przypisy" 618). However, Libera does not notice one more intertextual reference included in the English version. In the second act, after the entrance of Lucky and Pozzo and their falling down, when Pozzo is crying for help, Vladimir utters quite a lengthy monologue:

> Let us not waste time in idle discourse! (*Pause. Vehemently*.) Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed,

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8    Similarly, when in 1967 Beckett went to Berlin to direct a production of *Endgame*, knowing German fluently, he collaborated on the German translation. Cronin remarks: "The changes to the German text suggest both a more adequate knowledge of that language and long thought about the text he had written. Thus when Clov says that the world outside is '*kaput*,' meaning broken or out of order, he was now made to say that it is '*aus*,' which has the meaning of expended or extinguished. The line '*Das Spass is zu Ende*,' meaning 'the fun is over,' was changed to '*Die Fest ist jetzt zu Ende*,' which is a deliberate echo of Friedrich Schlegel's well-known translation of the line from *The Tempest*, 'Our revels are now ended'" (555–56). The case of the German corrections of the original text makes it quite clear that Beckett paid meticulous attention to detail and also, while crossing language and cultural borders, not only demonstrated his extreme erudition but also skilfully employed intertextual references to evoke the desired associations and make his meaning more explicit.

those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate has consigned us! What do you say? (*Estragon says nothing*.) It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, that's the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come— (*Waiting* 79–80)

In the French version, the passage "Mais la question n'est pas là. Que faisons-nous ici, voilà ce qu'il faut se demander. Nous avons la chance de le savoir" (*En attendant* 112) contains only the negation of Hamlet's question. In the English version, it is followed by a direct quotation from the great tragedy. The Polish renderings of the lines are as follows: Rogoziński: "Ale nie o to chodzi. Trzeba się zastanowić nad tym, co tutaj robimy. Teraz mamy sposobność się dowiedzieć" (106) and Libera: "Ale nie w tym rzecz. Rzecz w tym, co tutaj robimy. I oto mamy szansę dowiedzieć się tego" (*Czekając* 114). Libera preserves the repetition present in the English version, yet it is not the repetition of Hamlet's famous sentence. Both translators, too, accentuate the existence of the chance of getting to know the answer. The English version, however, emphasizes the fact that they are already in the know. Rogoziński based his translation on the French version; Libera, however, stresses that, according to the will of Beckett, he has based his translation on the playwright's two versions ("Wstęp" 9). It is a pity that he has not also noticed the Shakespearean intertextual reference because it adds a lot to the meaning of the speech and it seems unquestionable that, faced with the English version, many readers or viewers of the drama will recognize the quotation coming from the Bard's famous tragedy.

In his soliloquy, Hamlet ponders on the meaning and sense of human existence. Human beings have a choice left: they can either commit suicide or go on living and suffering. Vladimir's question and answer also refer to the same dilemma. For him, however, there is no choice left. The only thing people can do is to wait for Godot to come. Living, then, means waiting. Wallace Fowlie has written that *Waiting for Godot* has given a phrase to the French language: "j'attends Godot," which means that what is going on now will continue to go on for a great unspecified length of time. As he writes: "'J'attends Godot' is really equivalent to saying 'That's what it means to keep living'" (210). Many critics have agreed that waiting as presented in the play is equivalent to living (Cavell 150, Esslin 49, Hinchliffe

150, Mayoux 151). Godot's coming may give an end to this waiting but also to living. The only possibility of finishing waiting is to meet Godot, who may symbolically denote death. Thus Godot, the terminus of waiting, may represent death as the only way out of waiting, the inherent element of life. Obviously it must be stressed that this is only one way of interpreting this complex symbol. McMillan and Knowlson write:

> At all productions he [Beckett] insisted that he does not know who Godot is and maintained that the play "strives at all costs to avoid definition." He encouraged the American director Alan Schneider's list of over a hundred suggestions as to who or what Godot might be. From the beginning, his textual revisions worked to delete passages that seemed to limit interpretation and, instead, sought to expand the identity of Godot. (87)

Vladimir's speech is reminiscent of Hamlet's soliloquy not only on the account of the meaning of human existence but also because of the appearance of two key ideas: life and death. Yet, whereas in Hamlet's speech life is contrasted with death, in Vladimir's life leads to death (which will replace it). There is yet another similarity between these two monologues: Hamlet does not think only about himself but extends the meaning of his soliloquy to all human beings. The same can be said about Vladimir's speech. He implies the universality of meaning directly at its beginning: "all mankind is us." Thus, they are meant not to be individuals only, but they also represent the whole of mankind. Later on, he remarks: "We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?" and Estragon answers: "Billions" (*Waiting* 80). The destiny of waiting is not their lot only—billions of people have lived their lives, waiting for their death to come. The reference to Hamlet's soliloquy adds to the universal status of the situation depicted and, therefore, it is a pity that it is missing in both Polish translations.

The universal quality of the tramps' situation is also discernible in the variations of the title Beckett contemplated. Dougald McMillan and James Knowlson write:

> In both the English and German texts, waiting itself is the subject of the title, with those who wait and one awaited secondary. An abandoned early title for the French original was simply *En attendant* [*Waiting*]. While cooperating with Elmar Tophoven on the first German translation, Beckett considered using as the title *Wir warten auf Godot* [*We're waiting for Godot*], picking up the repeated phrase in the text and universalizing the predicament of the play. But he decided on *Warten auf Godot* in order to retain waiting as the central focus of the title. (87)

The meticulous attention to detail and precision in the use of language which characterize Beckett's original pieces and their rendering in the second language by the playwright are a challenge to those trying to convert them into yet another language. A number of translators have undertaken this task, Antoni Libera undoubtedly being the most successful. He is not only familiar with the great artist's output which finds expression in his numerous critical insights, but he is also sensitive to even the minutest nuances of Beckett's writing, and, being a theatre practitioner, of the need to achieve the stageability necessary for a dramatic text. He has written an article devoted to the problems he encountered while translating just one of Beckett's seemingly simple yet, in reality, very complex sentences: "Birth was the death of him." Being aware of the fact that "language functions not only on the level of semantics and semiotics but also on that of articulation and phonetics," he finally arrived at a satisfactory solution: "Urodził się i to go zgubiło" (Libera, "Jak przetłumaczyć" 29).

Before comparing the two renderings of *Waiting for Godot* in Polish it seems justified to mention a few details concerning the two translators. First of all, Rogoziński was born in 1912, so 37 years before Libera, which may explain his slightly linguistically outdated rendering of the text. Secondly, he translated only from French and thus, unlike Libera, did not use Beckett's two authorial versions. Thirdly, being a translator of literature and not, unlike Libera again, a man of the theatre, he probably was not aware of the concrete demands concerning translating drama. Last but not least, he was a translator of Beckett and not a critical expert of his output.

The first passage to be discussed is interesting for two reasons—the differences introduced by Beckett in the English text and the solutions to the problem provided by the translators. The scene under scrutiny is the one concerning Pozzo's speech about the description of night and the sky and his expectations connected with the appreciation of his performance as a gifted showman. In the French original, Vladimir says "Oh, très bien, tout à fait bien" while Estragon: "(*accent anglais*)—Oh, très bon, très très très bon" (*En attendant* 53). In the English version, Vladimir says "Oh very good, very very good" and Estragon "Oh tray bong, tray tray tray bong" (*Waiting* 38). Whereas in the French version the French words are spoken with an English accent, in the English one the words spoken by Estragon are French, even though their spelling in the published version is English. Harvey has thus commented on the scene: "This is neither an interest in local color nor merely an easy way to get a laugh from the audience. It is rather a means of calling into question the reality of language" (147). Rogoziński closely follows the French version: "VLADIMIR Ależ jak najlepiej, doprawdy jak najlepiej. . . . ESTRAGON *akcentem angielskim* Och! Bardzo dobrze, bardzo, bardzo dobrze" (48). Libera, on the other hand,

tries to achieve the effect of the second, English version by mixing English and German words: "VLADIMIR Ach, bardzo dobrze, bardzo dobrze. . . . ESTRAGON O, wery gut, wery wery gut" (*Czekając* 65). It seems that Beckett would have liked Libera's version more for, when he directed *Waiting for Godot* in the Schiller-Theater in Berlin in 1975, he preserved the English version, cutting, however, one of Estragon's three "trays" in succession and having two, instead (*Theatre Notebook* 36). This change, by the way, indicates Beckett's meticulous attention to detail which found its expression in the alterations introduced in the text during successive productions of the play which he co-directed.

Pozzo's outburst concerning time, finishing with the sentence: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (*Waiting* 89) is paraphrased later on by Vladimir: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps" (*Waiting* 90–91).[9] Rogoziński translates these two fragments in the following way: "Baby rodzą okrakiem na grobie, słońce świeci tylko chwilę, a potem noc, znów noc" (123) and "Okrakiem na grobie i trudny poród. Rozmarzony grabarz wyciąga ręce z głębi dołu i nakłada okowy" (125). Libera provides another rendering of the text: "One rodzą okrakiem na grobie, światło świeci przez chwilę, a potem znów noc, znów noc." (*Czekając* 126) and "Okrakiem na grobie i trudny poród. Grabarz z głębi dołu zakłada opieszale kleszcze" (*Czekając* 127). What Rogoziński misses in his translation is that, being equipped with forceps, the gravedigger simultaneously plays the role of a midwife—the birth and death are intrinsically bound, this being a *leitmotif* of Beckett's entire *oeuvre*.

Ruby Cohn recalls a meeting with Beckett in 1968 when, as she writes,

> over a glass of wine in a Paris café, I asked whether he had nothing new for the stage. He answered almost angrily: "New? What could be new? Man is born—vagitus. Then he breathes for a few seconds, before the death rattle intervenes." I may not be quoting Beckett's exact words, but I remember "vagitus" because it was a new word for me—Latin for crying or squealing. Pushing aside our wine glasses, Beckett noted on the paper table-cover the timing for his 35-minute play *Breath*. (129)

The play was written in English in 1969 and dispenses altogether with actors and words, being an example of the most minimalistic piece of theatre imaginable, fully justifying Tom Stoppard's opinions: "Certain people like Beckett and Pinter have re-defined the minima of theatrical

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9    In the French original: "Elles accouchent à cheval sur une tombe, le jour brille un instant, puis c'est la nuit à nouveau" and "À cheval sur une tombe est une naissance difficile. Du fond du trou, rêveusement, le fossoyeur applique ses fers" (*En attandant* 126 and 128).

experience" (Taylor 27), "The early plays of Beckett are significant for me in that they didn't rely on elaborate theatrical paraphernalia. They redefined minimums, they show us how much can be done with little" (Maves 101) and "But it [*Waiting for Godot*] really redefined the minima of theatrical experience. Up to then you had to have X; suddenly you had X minus one" (Hunter 111). Despite the fact that it has been discussed as a mere joke on Beckett's part (Fletcher 117), it seems this was not the artist's aim, even though it is difficult to treat in a standard way a piece that is so short. Within this limited period of time, roughly equivalent to a single breath (as the title indicates), Beckett telescopes an entire life. The raising and lowering of the curtain establish the temporal limits of the drama, as well as human existence, as Beckett perceives it. The piece is the playwright's comment on man's condition: a stage empty of everything except a little rubbish, a dim light never intensifying to real brightness, a faint birth cry, a single breath in and out, a second cry, then silence. Silence, as a life-time has left no trace in eternity. No matter how long, because of suffering, life may seem to Beckett's characters and people in general, to be measured in terms of eternity as just an instant. Beckett stressed that it is "Important that two cries be identical" ("Breath" 211): the end of the play (and of human life) is the same as the beginning, the short period between the natal and death cries, both of them identical, is a mere "breath," an instant as compared to the eternity of non-existence or the duration of the macrocosm. The end of human life is accompanied by the same attributes of light and sound as the beginning: a circle has been completed.

There are a number of other instances when Rogoziński seems unable to grasp the sense of the original, while Libera manages to do so. It might be supposed, though, that, having access to both the French and English version, the latter was at an advantage. An example of this kind is provided in the scene when Pozzo comments on the constant quantity of the tears of the world:

POZZO. Il ne pleure plus. (*A Estragon*.) Vous l'avez remplacé, en quelque sorte. (*Rêveusement*.) Les larmes du monde sont immuables. Pour chacun qui se met à pleurer, quelque part un autre s'arrête (*En attendant* 44)

POZZO: He's stopped crying. (*To Estragon*.) You have replaced him as it were. (*Lyrically*.) The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. (*Waiting* 33)

POZZO Już nie płacze. (*do Estragona*) Zastąpił go pan w pewnym sensie. (*rozmarza się*) Łzy ludzkie działają niezmiennie. Kiedy ktoś zapłacze, gdzie indziej zawsze ktoś płakać przestanie. (Rogoziński 41)

POZZO Już nie płacze. (*Do Estragona*) W pewnym sensie pan go zastąpił. (*Lirycznie*) Łez na świecie zawsze jest tyle samo. Gdy jeden przestaje płakać, drugi gdzie indziej zaczyna. (Libera, *Czekając* 58)

There seems to be no justification whatsoever for Rogoziński's sentence "Łzy ludzkie działają niezmiennie" because, firstly, no such idea is expressed in Beckett's text and, secondly, such a translation does not render the original idea that there is a balance of happiness and sadness in the world. It is true, however, that "unchanging," "immutable" and "unalterable" are the English equivalents of the French word which Beckett then changed while making his translation into English. In this case, the consulting of Beckett's two language versions is very helpful. There is no reason, either, in the scene when Pozzo is looking for his watch, for Rogoziński to introduce the diminutives contained in this sentence: "Zegareczek dwukopertowy, proszę panów, z sekundnikiem" (Rogoziński 60). Libera finds a much better solution: "Autentyczna cebula, panowie, z sekundnikiem" (Libera, *Czekając* 74).

Apart from the aforementioned drawbacks of Rogoziński's translation, one more should be added. It must be stressed, however, that its shortcomings result less from the translator's inefficiency than from the passage of time and the changes its flow has brought to the Polish language. Rogoziński's sentences like "Rad jestem, że znów cię widzę. Myślałem, żeś odszedł już na dobre" (7), "Zawsześ do tego pierwszy, żeby siać zwątpienie" (15) or "No tom sobie znów spoczął" (46) seem old fashioned if not even archaic. Being an experienced translator, however, Rogoziński should have realized that the use of outdated phrases and structures while translating Beckett, whose writing is characterized by simplicity and modernity, is a mistake. The difference in the quality of the two translations has been noticed by those responsible for producing Beckett's plays, and thus the one most often chosen is that of Antoni Libera. A comparison of the four texts makes it quite clear that after Beckett had written the original text in which he brought about "new events with untranslatable marks," he then transposed it into French and gave his counter-signature to the second language version. The two Polish translators of the play later on added their counter-signatures.

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# At the Margins of the World:
# The Nature of Limits in Terrence Malick's
# *The Thin Red Line*

# Abstract

Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998) is an anti-war film which can be read as an Orphic narrative meditating on the relationship between humans and "nature." Many scholarly readings of the film have been attracted by analyzes that explore the influences of Cavell and Heidegger on Malick (Critchley, Furstenau and MacCavoy, Sinnerbrink). Kaja Silverman's recent opus, *Flesh of My Flesh* (2009), contains a chapter titled "All Things Shining." She elegantly examines how Malick's film explores the theme of "finitude." She argues that, ontologically speaking, human existence gains a more intense "glow" when humans are made aware of their mortality. The present becomes paramount. But like Orpheus, the present seeks to make amends with the past. Taking Silverman's analysis one step further involves exploring finitude through the film's many animal, arboreal and geological images. Nature can be read as a "margin" that more fully enhances the film's exploration of connection and finitude. To this end, the opening chapter of Jacques Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy* (1986) is invaluable. Entitled "Tympan," Derrida's introductory essay introduces a wealth of ecological metaphors. These stimulate an interaction between Silverman's model of finitude, Derrida's surprising ecologies at the margin and Malick's quest for what shines in all beings.

## The Power of Limits

In Terrence Malick's magisterial third feature, *The Thin Red Line* (1998), an interpretation of James Jones's 1962 novel of that title, there is one especially striking scene. During the Guadalcanal campaign, World War II, an American battalion begins its assault on Hill 210; the fortress is controlled by Japanese soldiers. As Charlie Company makes its ascent amidst the exploding grenades, the war scene is interrupted by shots of the lush natural environment. There is a close-up of a bird chick struggling out of its shell. The newborn creature takes care of itself while the humans, unprotected, hurl themselves towards the treacherous hilltop. A soldier struggling along on his stomach nearly collides with a snake, which has business of its own. *The Thin Red Line* presents a continual *mise-en-scène* of natural environments which make their own thresholds with the human world. At first glance, nature may appear to be at the margins of the film's narrative of warfare. However, I shall argue that Malick's inscription of nature at the cinematic margins illuminates this work's central vision.[1]

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By "central vision" I mean the audiovisual construction of the title and theme: there is a thin red line between life and death. Death defines limits and is perpetually at the margin of life. With this in mind, *The Thin Red Line* invites a dialogue with Jacques Derrida's concept of "margins." In "Tympan" (ix-xxix), the introductory chapter to *Margins of Philosophy* (1986), Jacques Derrida announces that limits are what make philosophy possible:

> *Being at the limit*: these words do not yet form a proposition, and even less a discourse. But there is enough in them, provided that one plays upon it, to engender almost all the sentences in this book. (x)

In his chapter, Derrida experiments with limits by typographically dividing the page into two. The large chunk of text on the left-hand side carries the more philosophical discourse. This is complemented on the right-hand side; its narrow margin is replete with mixed metaphors. Derrida typographically stages a philosophical discourse aware of its limits, placing it directly across from a margin which refuses such limits. From here, Derrida writes in poetic fragments. He introduces the mythological character of Persephone and places her in an environment thick with nature images

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and ecological metaphors. As the reader progresses, it becomes evident that the margins are indispensable; they may indeed be providing the essay's central thesis.

Malick's cinematic vision of nature forms the marginal "notes" which comprise his film's main theme. Private Witt (Jim Caviezel), who possesses most of the poetic voice-overs, wonders whether "all men got one big soul." But such a deep regard for communion comes at a price. What is required is a confrontation with the facts of human finitude. Philosophical, psychoanalytical and artistic responses to human mortality have been richly articulated by Kaja Silverman in her most recent book, *Flesh of My Flesh* (2009). Her chapter on *The Thin Red Line*, "All Things Shining," examines this theme by following a host of thinkers from Freud to Heidegger and Romain Rolland to Lou Andreas-Salomé. Silverman's introduction to the book reminds us that Heidegger goes back to the basics of "totality" and his abiding concern for "beings as a whole" (Silverman 11). My aim is to forge a deeper connection between the theme of human finitude and Malick's staging of nature as a force which teaches the power of limits.

To do this I shall engage a three-way dialogue between three works: Derrida's philosophical and poetic exploration of margins, Silverman's Heideggerian and psychoanalytic reading of Malick's aesthetics of finitude and *The Thin Red Line*. This film explores the margins between nature and the human condition by disabusing the human ego of status and self-interest. Once shorn away, a "shining" remains. This emanates from what Private Witt conceives to be the "workings of one mind." For him, the collective soul involves a recovery of individual souls. Central to Silverman's study is one of the canonical myths about soul rescue, that of Orpheus and Eurydice. In an earlier chapter ("Orpheus Rex" 37–58) which follows the psychoanalytic work of Lou Andreas-Salomé, Silverman underlines how the latter theorized "recognition" of unconscious processes to be as crucial as their repression (48). She traces how Salomé's work centres on the human need to reach back and regain lost desires. Silverman stages Orpheus as that part of the psyche that goes on an unconscious journey to recover denied parts of the self; thus Eurydice personifies vital elements of the self that are stranded in the unconscious (58). In connecting Silverman's insights to Derrida's "Tympan," which focuses strongly on organs of hearing and the inner ear, it is important to recall that Orpheus is a musician. The sense of hearing becomes heightened in the shades of the underworld. Furthermore, in his marginal notes, Derrida introduces Persephone as a star actress. He enables her to shape-shift from goddess into elements of nature, ranging from images of conch shells to spirals, snails, coiled hair and the inner ear itself (x-xiv). Derrida's Persephone is musical and treads a dizzy underworld of vibrations. From here, listening can be external

(outer ear) and internal (inner ear). Between these two anatomical areas are margins. In *The Thin Red Line*, the film's marginalia between nature and humans not only listen, they vibrate.

## DERRIDA AND THE INTIMATIONS OF NATURE

The allegedly "main" text part of Derrida's "Tympan" offers a philosophical treatise that includes a biology lesson. Its topic is the ear, a vulnerable membrane made of a thin tissue which creates a margin between outer sound and inner vibration:

> We know that the membrane of the tympanum, a thin and transparent partition separating the auditory canal from the middle ear (the *cavity*), is stretched obliquely *(loxos)*. Obliquely from above to below, from outside to inside, and from the back to the front. One of the effects of this obliqueness is to increase the surface of impression and hence the capacity of vibration. It has been observed, particularly in birds, that precision of hearing is in direct proportion to the obliqueness of the tympanum. The tympanum squints. (xiv–xv)

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Although it resembles a biology treatise, Derrida's passage mixes metaphors in its last sentence, the "tympanum squints." Organs for hearing also have a visual function. Audiovisual metaphors populate both sides of the page. The right-hand, narrower side of the page, that is, the margin which plainly "talks back" to the main text, may have a different topic and deploy different metaphors. These spin off into reflections on plants, insects, snail shells, and natural objects which look like spirals. All of these have their own audiovisual qualities. On this right-hand "margin" of the page, Derrida leads Persephone through her journey of metaphors. She becomes twirled into a "*spiralled* name . . . a curved name" (xiii). Persephone's linguistic freight also includes an ability to pierce (xiv). She is capable of being "undulating" and "grassy" while also being associated with an insect, the "*ear*wig" which, in turn, leads back full circle to the ear that can squint (xiv). Then to complicate the matter further, in Persephone's name there is the suffix of "*phone.*" This is linked to the media of the "telephone" and the "gramophone" (xv). But Persephone's various names, mutually enfolding, belong to the marginal side of the page. Ergo, Derrida's marginalia argue that the ear itself is divided into yet more membranes: there are spaces beyond spaces, margins beyond margins, and such is the state of philosophy. In other words, Derrida's essay links the concept of margins to a mixed metaphor which interweaves many meanings: ears, auricular senses, vision, movement, nature, the underworld and the female gender in the form of Persephone. According to mythology, she is the goddess Core

(Demeter's daughter) before being abducted by Hades, god of the Underworld; thus Core becomes Persephone and Queen of the Dead (Graves, *The Greek Myths* 89–90). Persephone has a paradoxical connection to both death and fertility. Demeter only agrees to re-fertilize the land if she can keep Core (Persephone) with her for nine months of the year (Graves 91). Persephone belongs to the Triad of Goddesses (Core/Persephone/Hecate) overseeing fertility. According to Graves, one translation of her name is "the ripe ear" (92). Thus in mythological terms, Persephone becomes ripe with connotations of death, the fecund and the aural. She becomes a site of vibrations, vegetation and natural cycles. Put more simply, all these different connotations which attach to Persephone, from sound, vision, nature and death, likewise attach to Derrida's concept of the margin(s).

**66**   Derrida's multiplex concept of the margins is uncannily present in the world of *The Thin Red Line*. The film will not be so obliging as to "illustrate" Derrida's splendour of circling metaphors. My exploration of contact between the spirals and repercussions in Derrida and the audiovisual ecologies of Malick's universe is to use the latter to critique the former. After all, Derrida only mentions death as an afterthought. It is as though he dashes off another scribble in the closing image of his introductory chapter with the words "some glorious cadaver" (xxix). Does he also seek what shines in death? It would take a number of steps to move from this glowing signifier of death to Silverman's analysis "All Things Shining." Cadavers suggest the opposite. But then the film's counterpointing of sound, image and "nature" enables me to make these steps towards Silverman. For between music, image and the natural environment emerges Malick's marginalia of primeval creatures and inspiring corpses.

The film's opening audiovisual image inscribes one such margin. Indeed, Malick can use the drawn-out long-shot of a crocodile to make a pre-emptive jot down the margins of the film's prologue. Before we can meet human characters, we must first meet the crocodile as it makes its way into a river. The creature gracefully punctures the surface algae. Here is atavistic, pure nature. To flick back to the margins of Derrida, I recall Persephone, who carries the freight of nature and its fecundity. As the crocodile disappears under the green surface, there is a sense of all that lurks below, invisible, waiting. What drives this image through its stately frames from the first moment of the crocodile's retroactive entrance (not from the water to the land but from land *back* to the water, an evolutionary backtrack) is organ music. One chord is sustained throughout the uninflected shot of the crocodile's descent into its green and watery underworld. The chord crescendos and this is what sets up Witt's opening monologue that raises the question: "What is this war in nature?" But the crocodile species, both atavistic and resplendent, has been here far longer than any human; it

hardly strikes one as in a state of "war." After all, war is a human invention.

The first organ note is simple, all-encompassing and breaks through the margin that separates humans from nature. The opening chord and the crocodile's movements are not interrupted by montage editing. The chord could come from inside the crocodile as well as from the vibrations of our inner and "visual" ear. This means that the sound actually permeates the threshold between inner and outer cognition, between human psyche and natural environment. This audiovisual signifier also dissolves the boundaries between now and the atavistic past. As a musical instrument, the organ signifies time ancient and historical. The organ chord thus testifies to the crocodile's hereditary rights and longevity. The crocodile can also be read as a signifier for evolution and the cycles of life and death. The crocodile will feed, fornicate and die.

Humans also have a cycle of life. But the human experience of the moment can be undone by memory. When Witt has gone AWOL on one of the Melanesian Islands, his experience of blissful communication with the swimming children, their mother, the fishermen and the gorgeous landscape, will be both punctuated and punctured by older memories in the form of a scene insertion which comprises Witt's reminiscence of his mother's death. He confesses that he saw nothing elevating in the way she passed on, but hopes one day to leave life with her dignity. In other words, his memories of his mother's death offer a marginal remark that will become important to Witt's eventual death at the hands of a Japanese battalion; he faces this moment with dignity, and even after death his voice-over will return. The crocodile's opening chord will find its closure in the human voice. The evolutionary journey has been made, and death faced with acceptance. Between each step along the journey, the task has been to connect human to human, *homo sapiens* to nature.

Silverman emphasises throughout her book that surrendering to the knowledge of death is what allows us to acknowledge our similarities to each other. This is a tall order. Facing death means facing finality. The crocodile is precisely that: the atavistic flesh from which we come, the primal DNA from which we will be extinguished. The audiovisual image of the crocodile is a cunning piece of marginalia. There is no sense of connection or aspiration to moments of bliss and wholeness without that perpetual and monotone vibration. The vibration is the reminder of annihilation. To scribble a note back to Derrida, when we perforate the threshold line between a raw nature (that which reminds us of mortality) and our human, emotional sense of connection, it is not the cadaver we will seek. Attention should be rather paid to those edges between life and death. In Malick's film, the shots that visualise Witt's mother dying with dignity hinge on the paradox that we do not see the actual moment of her death. Rather, we

hear her heart beating. The camera tracks away from this to the image of the caged birds in her bedroom. The bird as soul has not yet escaped the physical cage. The images that hold sway assert life as most present when it touches the membrane between life and death, stretching it out to its full extent.

Importantly, this idea of a membrane that is punctured is only one part of the complex arsenal of metaphors that Derrida offers. In the first citation I chose (above), one of the words that he uses to refer to the construction of the auricular canal is "obliqueness." This word pinpoints the image of a plane that is neither horizontal nor perpendicular to another. Things oblique lie at odd angles to each other. The passage I quoted from Derrida ends appropriately with the phrase "the tympanum squints." This is exactly what an oblique plane would do if it had eyes to behold the object of its gaze. To take Derrida one step further in this direction, I would argue that marginalia work obliquely. They do not look straight back.

The gaze is not returned eye to eye, but with a sensitive squint. Just before Witt makes his final journey through the stream to decoy a Japanese battalion, there is a close-up of the head and body of a large, fluffy white owl. The owl is watching. It is surrounded by encroaching soldiers. The owl is sentient to the rustle in the trees; there is a ruffle of air through its feathers. The owl may be looking on, but it does not look straight into the camera. There is no shot-reverse-shot between owls and humans. Such a shot would give the owl its own footnote. It would be looking "wisely" or presciently at the human warriors. But Malick refuses us the consolations of the shot-reverse-shot. Thus he disabuses us of the comfort of a mythological creature who is keeping its fairy-tale eye on us, looking out for us, like some spirit who knows the meaning of life. This is far from the case. The owl leaves us with its wink delivered along an oblique angle. Here, the odd effect is that the owl is watchful yet indifferent. It sees but does not judge. The owl avoids our anthropomorphizing tendencies. Similarly, when the Americans capture a crocodile, strapping it down, poking it with a stick, it winks too, but neither at the soldiers nor us. When Witt realises that there is real danger in his position, he looks at a collection of bats suspended from the trees. They could be eyeing him up or not. But then, they are bats. It is their sonar skills that make them aware of Witt's presence. They are actually looking at him from a position of feral sensitivity. They also gaze at him obliquely. All these oblique winks, squints and looks from the natural world present opaque marginalia.

It would be easy to project a host of interpretations onto nature's sideways and often auricular, sensory glances. In *The Thin Red Line*, the oblique look of animals decomposes a gaze that would analyze. In fact, the spectator's powers of analysis are softened by the touch of sensory vibra-

tions. Wind subliminally ruffles the owl's feathers and the leaves of trees as they catch the light. What shines also makes itself heard. The margin between nature and sound captures Persephone before she again disappears into an underworld where, as Orpheus discovers, to even risk looking back just once can have disastrous consequences. Perhaps Malick's film draws us into a state of experiencing nature as an invisible margin where the underworld and death are always present. But while they cannot always be clearly seen, they can be heard. In his essay, Derrida has a passion for peering into the canals of the ear. To recall his mixing of metaphors, he associates Perse*phone* with phones and gramophones. Quite differently, Malick keeps us listening and watching without the fetishes of endlessly turning metaphors. Malick's cinematic poetics is consistent and economical in the way it fuses and separates its main and marginal audiovisual texts. In Derrida's intimations of nature, the spiral, the insect and the bird will dovetail into an ecology of metaphors, full of Derrida's fabricated creatures and media machines. In Malick's world, however, nature is both world *and* underworld. Nature and animals and the endless trees and grasses which incubate the soldiers and which will also be their killing fields stubbornly refuse to be co-opted into an excessive range of metaphors. Yet, as Silverman's exquisite analysis of the film argues, it will constantly remind us of the vicissitudes of place and psyche, and place as psyche.

## Orpheus Shining

Silverman's analysis of *The Thin Red Line* relies on her reading of the Orpheus / Eurydice myth through the lens of Lou Andreas-Salomé's work. Silverman cites Salomé's profound experience as a young girl who, in her childhood garden, confronts her first experience of finitude. As a result, argues Silverman, Salomé "gained psychic access to the limitlessness of being" (27). Salomé works with Freud during a time when he is immersed in those troubling texts, *The Future of an Illusion* (1929) and *Totem and Taboo* (1913). It is in these texts that Freud theorizes the existence of a death drive; he must consider how it can connect to his other models, most notably the Oedipus Complex. Salomé's own approach to the double dynamic of the Oedipus complex and finitude took another turn. Silverman reads Salomé's *Looking Back* (1951) as a linking of Oedipus with Orpheus. Anyone taking the psychoanalytic journey will have to separate from the primary beloved(s). But for Salomé, the therapist's work needs to do more than have the patient merely let go of the past. Instead, he or she must be encouraged to regain a connection to what has been lost. In Salomé's work, reclaiming that past, even in part, provides the grounds for healing. Not only do patients experience a richer part of their "re-

claimed" personal unconscious, but they can also win back pieces of their historical and collective unconscious (Silverman 45–47).

Here, a sense of connection between past and future can enable a larger sense of "being." When Silverman gets to her chapter on Malick, Salomé's art of looking back is then read in intimacy with Romain Rolland's celebrated work on "oceanic feelings" (124–25). Heidegger enters the stage when the concept of "looking back" is interwoven with the task of looking beyond the individual unconscious. When this happens, when finitude is faced, "we" can gain a deeper sense of connection to the greater "whole." Heidegger's question about poets ("What are Poets for"), published one year after the end of World War II, asks what drives humans to the historical horrors he has witnessed. Malick's Witt will ask the question: "What is this war at the heart of nature?" Heidegger wants to consider the uses of poetry in a "destitute time." This question leads to the act of facing the disturbing sides of human "nature." Humans threaten themselves when they refuse to give up the desire to be assertive in everything. Humans need to learn to surrender. When they refuse, they act in destructive ways. Destruction jeopardizes any sense of deeper connection. In such times, the poet can come into her or his own, for the poet's job is to shed light on finitude and allow us to grapple with the transience of the human lot.

The undercurrent of Silverman's project in "All Things Shining" is to take Heidegger, Salomé, Romain Rolland's notion of "oceanic feelings" (Parsons 174), and blended versions of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth and allow them all to converse with *The Thin Red Line*. Silverman underlines how Malick almost coaches his characters in the art of being disempowered so that they can learn the power of limits. This surrender requires a loss of narcissism. Silverman details individual characters: Witt, Bell, and the cynical Sergeant Welsh, who feels most alone "only with other people." Silverman tracks them sensitively on their journey through Hades. Here they might catch glimpses of what they lost long ago. They will all be robbed of illusions that block the flow of oceanic feelings, or what Witt calls the "one soul." Here, my concern is to take Silverman's concept of finitude one step closer to Malick's poetics of nature. Indeed, to do this means staging a meeting between Silverman's Eurydice and Derrida's Persephone.

Derrida's Perse*phon*e and the phonic meanings that cluster around her name lead into a cavernous yet lush underworld. Indeed, Persephone occupies a soundscape. Like some vicarious Hades, Derrida relegates her to "grottos, to chasms, to all the pockets hollowed out of the terrestrial crust whose emptiness makes them into resonating drums for the slightest sounds" (xvi). Derrida is on a roll with his conceptual metaphors of space, as it is "the deep country of hearing, described in terms of geol-

ogy" (xvi). Even Derrida's metaphors for anatomy are made of the stuff of place, when he refers to the "cartilaginous cavern" (xvi). Keep in mind too that, for Derrida, the inner ear at the end of the auricular canals is also a margin. Furthermore, Persephone comes to signify a cavern of sound. Thus she becomes the margin itself, ingrained in geology, earthy and soiled by those chasms dug out of the ground.

*The Thin Red Line* is subtle and consistent in a cinematography which is aligned to the ground, soil and what lies under the earth. There are frequent shots of the canopy of trees and light which are filmed from a position on the ground. During the crucial hill battle, the camera's POVs and even those shots which operate out of the POV axis are grounded deep in the grass. As spectators, we are drawn repeatedly into looking at the world from our stomachs and on our knees. We have grass and soil in our faces. Soldiers crawl. At the hill's bunker, Japanese soldiers are smoked out of burrows and humiliated as they squirm through the smoking geology of the landscape. The Americans reach the Japanese Bivouac, where the combat will involve guns and bayonets; as they do, Captain Stavros's voice-over becomes the guiding monologue. Relieved of his duty because he wanted to save his men's lives, Stavros's voice-over accompanies Witt as the latter looks down at a Japanese corpse. There is one shot of this cadaver's face looking up, mist descending, his gaze oblique. The rest of his body is trapped under the cavernous ground. Everything Stavros says offers a tender margin to the relentless visage of the death mask: "Are you righteous? Kind? . . . Are you loved by all? Know that I was too. Do you imagine your sufferings will be less because you loved goodness, truth?" Many of the monologues ask similar questions, being both personal and universal in their scope. Yet the scope of this possible "you" is never specified. Indeed, the "you" could refer to the dead soldier before he joined the army, active in his civilian world. Was he righteous, kind, loved by all? He was certainly not going to escape suffering. The poetic repetition of "you" repeatedly hails the "other" that metonymically can dwell within the phrase "all of us." We are linked to the Japanese soldier by common humanity. One day we will all be cadavers and return to the earth. The phrase "Are you loved by all?" touches on the oceanic feeling that Silverman refers to throughout her study. Yet there is an extra twist. The dead soldier's body is in the cavern, the underworld. He is already fused with nature. To conjure Derrida's Persephone, she possesses the dead. The cutaway to the shimmering trees, again, consistently filmed from ground level, reminds us of the embrace of death. Perhaps between the margins where Persephone meets Malick's vision of nature, the Freudian death drive creeps in. One wonders whether nature takes the role of both Persephone and Hades, ready to collect soldiers like male Eurydices.

In her first two chapters, Silverman emphasizes that the Orpheus / Eurydice narrative is a heterosexual myth (117–20). Silverman gives the examples of Witt's mother and his stay with the Melanesian people as traces of Orphic myths. But I will draw out her examples with the following observations. Witt's mother takes a double role, as she is both Oedipally connected to him and may yet be one shadow of Eurydice. In the film's early scene which follows Witt's idyll with the Melanesian peoples of the Solomon Islands, he is drawn to a mother and her children. Hypothetically, they could be Witt's new family, he being the father, his Melanesian wife holding their child. The paradise is pre-Orphic, pre-separation and, indeed, pre-Oedipal. Later in the film, Malick will have his character Witt live out an adult's cares. When Witt returns to a scene with another set of villagers, he must face images that dismay him, from quarrelling brothers and frightened children to a shelf of sinister looking skulls. Are these skulls Japanese or American or Melanesian or simply revered ancestors? Whatever their source, they are reminders that death awaits. These many faces are lined up along a thin red line.

In Silverman's reading of Salomé's work another thin line appears. Orpheus and Eurydice can be analyzed as two sides of the same psyche (45). Orpheus is the side of a human that must turn backward to find a Eurydice who may be far more than one individual. I would take Silverman's insights one step further. Orpheus Rex is woman or man or even a social collective (as Silverman also alludes to in her reference to Benjamin's celebrated Angel) that must look into an unconscious, both individual and social, to grasp the finality of loss, of death, and the necessity of living vitally. The movement back towards an unconscious that is greater than that of an individual will meet a Persephone on the margins of deathly nature.

In *The Thin Red Line*, nature as a deathly space is rooted in the earth. Appropriately, when Witt does consummate his wish to die with dignity, his comrades bury him in the earth. Now, the dignified Orpheus Rex joins his dignified mother, with all these parts of the psyche merging with the film's final voice-over. His voice will be a synecdoche for untold voices, and as he (and they) speak, the camera tracks back through water, air and sky. Orpheus Rex travels through nature and cannot avoid Persephone. According to Derrida, Persephone is linked to the "phone" in phonetics, and by association, the human voice. Persephone is entirely absent from Silverman's index of proper names, and Derrida has no use for Orphic vibrations in the inner ear of his essay. Caverns are ill-lit and full of sound. Yet nature, when Persephone comes above ground, is all shining. Indeed, perhaps Persephone is also Eurydice's paramour.

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## To End it All: The Thin Green Line

Eurydice and Persephone both occupy the underworld, while Persephone can spend part of the year above ground. The underworld is not a separate space, but is an overlapping terrain that acts as a powerful margin for the "upper" world. If one connotation of the underworld in *The Thin Red Line* is nature, then it is trees, earth and animals that provide the site in which life and death are staged, in which nature as death is the margin for nature as life. But more than this, Witt's pantheistic visions of the connection between humans and nature underline how the "one big soul" is itself the stuff of nature. The thin red line between life and death runs obliquely to many thin green lines. Following Derrida, these margins of green lines that invisibly mark the boundaries between humans and nature are everywhere, yet are nowhere easily found. After all, without a margin there would be no opportunity for that boundary to perforate, change shape or overlap with other fleshy and arboreal membranes. Within Malick's frame, the Japanese soldier's face, emerging from the earth, is also a poetically repeated POV shot of the shining trees. In other words, the dead have a gaze, and so the thin red line between life and death is also the thin green line. In other words, anything that connotes the earth, its caverns, the trees, animals, water, sky and, in fact, the full range of what is now referred to as biodiversity is itself a margin. Derrida subtly theorises that marginalia are somehow cleverly central in their contributions. In Malick's film, all that is natural is indeed central to the cinematic frame; yet all that is natural cunningly camouflages its true powers.

In his introduction to the BFI study book, devoted entirely to Malick's film, Michael Chion provides us with an important insight into the function of the "frame" in cinema. According to Chion, one of the triumphs of *The Thin Red Line* is its ability to deliver on the following aesthetic remit: "Cinema is the art that makes it possible to place the large and the small things of this world on the same scale, making them figure at the same size in the changeless form of the screen" (9). Derrida's work on marginalia argues for subverting the notion that the main part of the text is not to be read as less important than the margin. The cinematic screen makes small and large scales co-determinate. The screen enables the marginal or small or less focused within the frame to be perpetually present. Hans Zimmer's music is a crucial component throughout all the sequences. The film's first chord is more than a motif for the crocodile. After all, no musical harmony would be possible without the appropriate base notes. The first chord could be described as the film's first primal sound around which many other sounds and sound effects will evolve. When the soldiers as-

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sault the hill, sound effects in the form of thunderous explosions are what debilitates and terrifies. The camera that is submerged in the grass often frames the soldiers with grass around and through their faces. The grass runs obliquely to their expressions, but is a reminder that the collective of faces is inescapably part of nature.

In the film's epilogue, the POV of this collective of faces, bodies and resonating nature becomes the site from which the camera will look as it sails away from the Solomon Islands. Witt's voice-over implies a soul speaking out towards water and land. This "voice" is made of myriad souls. He refers to a "you" which is both the individual and collective soul. Perhaps this spiritual centre speaks out to nature from a position difficult to trace. The monologues might emerge from where Eurydice and Persephone meet and then separate. There is an oblique cross-over between thin and green red lines, cutting through the collective "we." Silverman is very specific in her interpretation of Witt's last lines: "Look out through my eyes. Look out at the things you made. All things shining." Silverman catches the "all" as both "earthly" and "diverse" (132). The "all" and its manifold connections offer no easy solutions. There are no spiritual power grids to keep everything in some comfortable state of homeostasis. The "all" is an infinitely turning, disappearing space between marginal worlds. And these co-exist with difficulty. They require the perpetual interventions of mortality.

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# "The Dude Abides":
# How *The Big Lebowski* Bowled Its Way
# from a Box Office Bomb
# to Nation-Wide Fests

# ABSTRACT

Since *Blood Simple*, the first film they wrote and directed together, the Coen Brothers have been working their way up in the film world and, in spite of their outside-the-mainstream taste for the noir and the surreal, have earned a number of prestigious prizes. After *Fargo*, one of their most critically acclaimed films, expectations were high, and when the Brothers released their next bizarre venture, most critics rushed to measure it against *Fargo*'s success. Consequently, *The Big Lebowski*, the Coens' 1998 neo-noir detective comedy, was considered an incoherent, "unsatisfactory" medley of genres and styles and a box office bomb, and nothing hinted that this unorthodox story of mistaken identity, featuring a pot-smoking, unemployed character named the Dude as its "hee-ro," would gain a following. Yet, since its 1998 DVD release, *The Big Lebowski* has been hailed as the first cult film of the Internet, continuously inspiring versatile cultural phenomena as nonconformist in their nature as the movie itself. This essay examines particular factors which initially might have been responsible for alienating the audience only to help *The Big Lebowski* become a peculiar cultural event in later years. It looks at *The Big Lebowski*'s characters, the historical time and place of the film's action as well as at various external historical events, phenomena, places and people such as, for example, the Port Huron Statement, the Reagan-Bush era, Los Angeles and its immigration issues, racial minorities, civil rights activists, the Western genre and, last but not least, Arnold Schwarzenegger. Reflecting the film's oddities, this bag of cultural idiosyncrasies appears to provide some plausible explanations for *The Big Lebowski*'s unexpected, against-all-odds rise from the marginal position of a critical and commercial failure to the status of a cult classic and cultural landmark.

There is no accounting for taste. Specifically, there is no accounting for the public's taste when it comes to art, especially in a country where possibly every other nation in the world is bound to have a representative. Of course, given the right time and place, taste can change, providing an opportunity for yet another from-rags-to-riches story in which a commercial failure rises to a cult classic and a cultural phenomenon of unexpected proportions. In 1998, the Coen Brothers' neo-noir detective comedy *The Big Lebowski*[1] failed the taste not only of the average American, but also of the Sundance Film Festival audience and critics who rated the movie with quite a few walkouts (cf. Howell). An unnamed British reviewer in *The Guardian* branded *TBL* as "an unsatisfactory film," trading "the tautness that won *Fargo* such acclaim for a loose, meandering outline" ("Big"). The same anonymous author doomed the film by calling it "infuriating" and prophesying that it "will win no prizes" ("Big"). Due to a different cultural sensibility and, possibly, the specific sense of humour famously attributed to the Small Island, the British fortune-teller-turned-critic might be essentially forgiven for disregarding the movie's potential which, with time, would meander way ahead of *Fargo* in public acclaim. Yet, some natives of the Big Country were equally unenthusiastic, regardless of which part of the US they came from. *The New York Daily News* movie critic Dave Kehr hybrid-titled his review "Coen Brothers' Latest Is a Big Letdownski Comedy about Druggie Bowler Strikes Out and Its Tired Film Noir Plot Is a Turkey" (Kehr), and as if this lexical and stylistic abuse was not atrocious enough, Kehr tautologizes by berating the Coens for dropping their main character "in the middle of one of their standard film noir plots, a vein they've been vigorously overworking from *Blood Simple* to *Fargo*," and for "ask[ing] him to behave like a professional crime-stopper" (Kehr). According to Kehr, the Coens' story is "a tired idea, and it produces an episodic, unstrung film."

Many other reviewers have deemed the movie's alleged lack of "tautness" in narrative and cinematic style to be an almost unforgivable sin, branding *TBL* as "a bunch of ideas shovelled into a bag and allowed to spill out at random" ("Big"), "the Coens' gaudy bag of tricks, whose cleverness and imagination exist mainly for their own sake" (Rosenbaum), or a narrative in which "the story line is in truth disjointed, incoherent and

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[1]  Instead of the full title, the abbreviation *TBL* will be used in most cases throughout the essay. Also, all the quotations from the film will be parenthetically cited with the abbreviation *TBL*, with three exceptions where, in order to preserve the characteristic spelling of some words, two block quotations and one action description are provided from the printed screenplay and accordingly indicated.

even irritating" (Turran). Certainly, as Fred Ashe more recently and less aggressively points out, *TBL* defies "the constraints of literary form by stitching together a variety of genres: the noir detective story . . . , the Busby Berkeley musical, the Vietnam movie, the pornographic movie, the screwball comedy, the buddy film, and the 1960s romantic quest à la *Easy Rider*" (55). Such "stitching together" may be a challenge for the storyline, and yet, *Pulp Fiction* or *Clerks*, both released four years prior to *TBL*, were spectacular successes, although neither of these two culturally significant phenomena can boast a particularly linear or coherent narrative. Also, even if *TBL* mixes genres and exhibits an arbitrary narrative technique, the story is not emotionally draining in a heavy postmodern way in which, for instance, Gilliam's 1998 adaptation of Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* may appear to be to some viewers. Thus, the critical complaints about the movie's stylistic and narrative incoherence hardly seem a legitimate reason for *TBL*'s initial lack of public acclaim, especially that, as Roger Ebert observes, the way *TBL* "rushes in all directions and never ends up anywhere" is not "the film's flaw, but its style," cohering with the lifestyle of the main character:

> The Dude, who smokes a lot of pot and guzzles White Russians made with half-and-half, starts every day filled with resolve, but his plans gradually dissolve into a haze of missed opportunities and missed intentions. . . . The spirit is established right at the outset, when the narrator (Sam Elliott) starts out well enough, but eventually confesses he's lost his train of thought. (Ebert)

One might argue that *TBL*'s unexpected rise from its critically and commercially marginal position to the status of an almost unprecedented cult film in the years following its DVD release stems from the fact that the Coens' creation embodies their "inspired, absurdist taste for weird, peculiar Americana [and] their own bizarre subgenre" (Howe) as well as some more traditional, even if largely revised, American values. *TBL* is "perhaps the only psychowesternoircheechandchonginvietnambuddy genre pic in existence" (Comentale and Jaffe 3), and, as such, testifies to an outlandish amalgam of individualism and creativity, the two crucial prerequisites of the American way to wealth. The mixture of genres reflects the versatility of American culture and refers to important historical events, while the movie's commercial fate is a postmodern spin on the American Dream myth, in which there is no hero but just the Dude who is "the laziest [man] in Los Angeles County . . . which would place him high in the runnin' for laziest worldwide" (*TBL*). To make some more sense of why this independent, marginal medley of genres, styles and peculiar characters

alienated the audience at first and then "went out and achieved anyway" (*TBL*) without following any methods for success, it might be beneficial to examine more closely the essential elements contributing to the creation of any text: the time, the place and the characters. In *TBL*, all these components exhibit some amount of otherness, marginality, and asynchronism with the expectations of the American middle class, the targeted audience of most American movies, while invariably addressing classic elements of US culture.

At the beginning of the movie, the Stranger, the story's cowboy-type frame narrator, announces,

> A way out west there was a fella, fella I want to tell you about, fella by the name of Jeff Lebowski. . . . This Lebowski, he called himself the Dude. . . . Now this story I'm about to unfold took place back in the early nineties—just about the time of our conflict with Sad'm and the Eye-rackies. I only mention it 'cause sometimes there's a man—I won't say a hee-ro, 'cause what's a hee-ro?—but sometimes there's a man . . . and I'm talkin' about the Dude here—sometimes there's a man who, wal, he's the man for his time'n place, he fits right in there—and that's the Dude, in Los Angeles. (Coen and Coen 3–4)

Set in the early 1990s, the movie, however, hardly ever refers to the Gulf War, while frequently bringing up the Vietnam War through multiple ramblings of the Dude's bowling pal Walter Sobchak, a Vietnam veteran. Unlike Walter, the Dude is a pacifist, a pot-smoking, laid-back hippie stuck in the 1960s and early 1970s, the heyday of the civil rights movement, when, as he himself claims, he helped to draft the Port Huron Statement (1962) and was one of the members of the Seattle Seven (1970), the two radical student-based anti-war ventures of the New Left. Among its multiple principles defining what was wrong with America of the 1960s and what steps should be taken to amend the warped democracy, the Port Huron Statement condemned "the pervasiveness of racism in American life," the perils of "the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb," and the international "uncontrolled exploitation . . . of the earth's physical resources" ("Port Huron"), all of which had been long neglected by the United States government, mostly on account of the country's enduring involvement in the financially exploitive Vietnam War, a frequent reference in the film. The Statement's supporters proclaimed that racism, possible nuclear extinction and environmental disaster "either directly oppressed" them "or rankled [their] consciences and became [their] own subjective concerns," leading them "to see complicated and disturbing paradoxes in [their] surrounding America" as well as the hollowness of the nation's founding declaration that "all men are created equal" and should be able

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to pursue happiness in a war-free country and world ("Port Huron"). Professing "we are a minority," the Port Huron activists knew how important but also how marginal to "the vast majority of . . . people" their views at the time were ("Port Huron"). In 1969, replacing the vacuum created by the collapse of the national Students for a Democratic Society, the leaders of the Seattle Liberation Front, founded by University of Washington professor Michael Lerner, were tried and briefly imprisoned after the anti-Vietnam war demonstration on February 17, 1970 in front of the Federal Courthouse in downtown Seattle ("Seattle").

Based on a real member of the Seattle Seven, the Coens' friend Jeff Dowd, the character of Jeffrey the Dude Lebowski is a retired-civil rights activist, who finds himself at the end of the Reagan-Bush era with his aversion to aggression intact, but with no radical anti-war ventures to fuel his existence. The Persian Gulf War did not last long enough to call for any significant anti-war demonstrations and actually earned the Republican president national support. Although any specific references to the political climate of the country or the L.A. region are absent from the story, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Los Angeles County, as well as most other regions of Southern California, "remained under the stewardship of a countersubversive coalition that targeted civil rights crusaders, feminists, antiwar demonstrators, and gay activists as culpable for the social ills and economic malaise wrought by economic restructuring, deindustrialization, and the dismantling of the welfare state" (Avila 234). Generally, "[l]iberalism in all its forms was anathema" during the Reagan-Bush administration (Glazer 234). Upon the Dude's visit to claim compensation for his soiled rug, the poser millionaire Lebowski, with whom the Dude is confused at the beginning of the story, also reminds him that the Dude's "revolution is over" and that "the bums will always lose" (*TBL*). Even in the Dude's own words, he is essentially someone who "the square community does not give a shit about" (*TBL*).

Such anti-liberal circumstances could hardly make the Dude fit "right in there," and yet, the Dude remains comfortable within the film's historical setting. This laid-back attitude, however, might be what initially encumbered his appeal at the time of the film's release in the late 1990s. In the early 1990s, limiting his protests to professing pacifism, the Dude poses as a mere reminder of the radical New Left individualism which once challenged the government by "opposing the Vietnam War, working for free speech and civil rights, and practicing civil disobedience" (Stacey Thompson 126). Thus, in essence, the Dude was to the protest period of the Vietnam War what Thoreau had been to the imperialistic period of the Mexican-American War, while in the early 1990s, he exemplifies a hippie version of Rip Van Winkle on whom "the changes of states and empires

made but little impression" (Irving 991). As Fred Ashe points out, both Rip and the Dude lack "masculine aggression" and seem "unfazed" by the respective wars referred to "in both texts [which] come off as inconsequential and serve primarily to highlight the thematic war between aggressive American striving and passive American slacking" (Ashe 48, 49). In 1998, during the second term of Clinton's presidency, the overtly liberal image of an economically unproductive, unburdened and unconcerned hippie, who definitely inhales more than once within 112 minutes of his screen appearance, failed to fit in the country's economically thriving frame, which is to a certain extent surprising, considering the number and popularity of slacker films and television shows released around this time period, such as, for instance, *Wayne's World* (1992), *Beavis and Butt-Head* (1993–1997), or *Clerks* (1994). In *Doing Nothing: A History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers, and Bums in America*, Tom Lutz observes that although "many of the slackers of the 1990s and beyond have not felt much power to change the world" the way that the 1950s and 1960s rebels did (299), the 1990s slacker "characters [do] have jobs, just not *good* jobs" (285). The work-shy Dude, on the other hand, helped move history forward in the 1960s, but, ironically, got stuck there and, thus, has more in common with the loafers of the past, even distant past (e.g. Rip Van Winkle, Bartleby or Huck Finn), than with the 1990s counterculture in which many indolent individuals managed their "disregard for the world of employment [only] very briefly" (Lutz 286), accepting mediocre jobs over total rejection of work. As a result, in 1998, the Dude turned out to be an outsider even in the world of outsiders and, thus, might have seemed a little redundant to the audience. Pondering on what "a Lebowski" is and how the phenomenon exists in the world, the editors of *The Year's Work in Lebowski Studies* observe,

> At first glance, we can reasonably assert that it is not a tool, in the same way, say, a hammer . . . or a heavy drink may be a tool. In fact, compared to the familiar things on our domestic shelving units, this one seems to lack any obvious purpose, any implicit use or application to aid either the individual or the community. The actual viewing experience produces nothing, accomplishes nothing, changes nothing. In fact, Lebowski-users—the "achievers"—use the film to *avoid* work, and whatever force or energy they might apply in their endeavor is clearly unmatched by any obvious input. (Comentale and Jaffe 3)

While other cinematic slacker characters might appear equally unproductive in what they have to offer to the viewers, the Dude surpasses all of them in failing to meet any expectations of the audience and society by "reject[ing] such traditional markers of American self-hood as family, career, religion, [and] even his given name" (Ashe 52). In the Rip Van Winkle

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manner, "the Dude drifts through life guided by no personal code more tangible than the desire to live free of care" (Ashe 52), but even in this characteristic he outmatches Irving's protagonist, because the middle-aged Dude has no family to neglect and, therefore, avoids the accusation of being an irresponsible husband and father.

Yet, a couple of years after its 1998 DVD release, *The Big Lebowski* and the Dude must have benefitted many individuals and more than one community, giving rise to such cultural phenomena as: annual Lebowski Fests, which originated in 2002 in Louisville, Kentucky, and since 2004 have been "replicated . . . in other locations: Las Vegas, New York, Los Angeles, Austin, Seattle, London, [and] Edinburgh" (Comentale and Jaffe 23); Dudeism, "a religion deeply inspired by *The Big Lebowski*, as well as several other traditions that predate Lebowski—most particularly: Taoism, Zen Buddhism, American Transcendentalism and humanism" ("Dudeism"); *I'm a Lebowski, You're a Lebowski*: *Life, the Big Lebowski and What Have You*, a 2007 book by the Lebowski Fest organizers, prefaced by the Dude (Jeff Bridges) himself and including interviews with most of the movie's cast; and at least one academic study, *The Year's Work in Lebowski Studies*, a 2009 insightful collection of essays by scholars referred to in the present Lebowski essay. This, of course, is just the crème de la crème of the Lebowski cult, the beginnings of which "are shrouded in mystery, thriving elsewhere in multiple viewings, late-night campus screenings, recitations of catch-phrases, drinking games, and theme parties" (Comentale and Jaffe 23). In 2007, commenting on the upcoming Lebowski Fest UK in Edinburgh, Liz Hoggard gave *TBL* its British share of credit by interestingly accentuating the film's bizarre achievement through the recollection of its unsuccessful beginnings:

> The plot is frankly unfathomable. The film bombed at the box office. And yet many fans consider the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* a work of 'cinematic pop poetry,' and Observer readers rate it the seventh funniest film ever. Back in 1998 when it was first released the film was considered a flop, but it has now sold more than 20 million copies on DVD. One Wall Street firm even interviews candidates by throwing lines of the film at them—to see if they can pick up on them.

Establishing oneself on Wall Street via mere linguistic impact is an unquestionable achievement in itself, making one wonder which exchange of lines in particular would result in being hired at that particular firm. The likely winner seems the scene where the millionaire Lebowski asks the less than casually clad Dude (his jelly sandals are a touch of sheer genius), "You don't go out looking for a job dressed like that? On a weekday?" to

which the Dude responds with a question, "Is this a... what day is this?" (*TBL*). In hindsight, had *TBL* been released in 2002, the film might have been received with much more enthusiasm. In spite of its apparent lack of social and cultural commentary or usefulness, *TBL* can be experienced as a healthy cultural balance to the American obsession with measuring one's life through economic success and the trite US policy of manifest destiny. In the prosperous late 1990s, however, few felt the need for such balance because who really needs to see what is wrong when things are going right and the only legitimate concern is the president's sex life. Applying Bakhtin's concepts of the carnivalesque to *TBL*, Paul Martin and Valerie Renegar observe,

> [I]n the late 1990s, the United States was enjoying a period of economic and social prosperity. . . . Consequently, most Americans were not receptive to social critiques that *TBL* had to offer. However, in the intervening years, the cultural landscape has shifted in several important areas. With a flagging economy, an extended and bloody war with Iraq, and the terrorist attacks of September 11, the United States has increasingly become a place where the mainstream media tends to legitimate only official points of view and political dissent is unpopular. The latter tends to be "swallowed by the big official spin" (Griffen 279), creating a void in popular critical discourse. With this void begging to be filled by those left voiceless and powerless, *The Big Lebowski* has become even more relevant today.

It is hardly coincidental then that the first Lebowski Fest, very much a carnivalesque event, was held on October 12th, 2002 at Fellowship Lanes in Louisville, Kentucky. Although "this inaugural year was a bit tame," as "Fellowship Lanes is a Baptist run bowling alley which didn't allow drinking or cussing" ("Lebowski Fest"), the very fact that this less than liberal state has become home to an annual event celebrating the Coens' unruly creation proves that, to quote Walter quoting Theodor Herzl, "if you will it, it is no dream" (*TBL*). In the parlance of the capitalist Lebowski, over time, *TBL* has met challenges, bested competitors (none of the 1990s slacker movies can boast this amount of attention in the age of technology), overcome obstacles (cf. *TBL*), and made the social and cultural opposites meet within and without its historical timeframe, while eluding easy classification all along.

*TBL* spaces out of time on many levels and in many directions, almost as surrealistically as the knocked out Dude does flying over the Los Angeles nightscape in the first dream sequence. The location of *TBL* marks, reflects and coheres with the film's cultural marginality, oddities and rejection of narrative discipline, which might help throw some more light on

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the shift in *TBL*'s status. At the outset of the story, the Stranger muses in his Texan drawl,

> A way out west there was a fella, . . . fella by the name of Jeff Lebowski. . . . This Lebowski, he called himself the Dude. Now, Dude, that's a name no one would self-apply where I come from. But then, there was a lot about the Dude that didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. And a lot about where he lived, likewise. But then again, maybe that's why I found the place s'durned innarestin'. (Coen and Coen 3)

The Stranger comments on the regional and cultural differences of his country, pointing out that the Dude and his place of residence intrigue him because they both elude his Southern logic. After this introduction, according to the script's action description, "the smoggy vastness of Los Angeles [at twilight] stretches out before us" (Coen and Coen 3), and the Stranger adds, "They call Los Angeles the City of Angels. I didn't find it to be *that* exactly, but I'll allow it as there are some nice folks there" (Coen and Coen 3). The Stranger represents the American invention of "that most mythic individual hero, the cowboy, who again and again saves a society he can never completely fit into" (Bellah at al. 145). Less solemn in nature than Will Kane and with a Dude-like attitude towards his role as narrator, this cowboy, a literal American "Stranger" in L.A., is just such an individual to whom city life does not "make a whole lot of sense" and for whom his home prairie territory promises openness and freedom, in contrast to "the massive electrical L.A. grid that the film's opening sequence lingers on" (Ashe 47). With his Southern accent and cowboy gear, the narrator stands out in the bowling alley, and yet, when midway through the story the Dude casually compliments the Stranger's outfit, the city setting suddenly becomes more complimentary as well, and the Dude, in his stretched-out sweater, might be perceived as a reluctant cowboy-type himself.

Located between the Mojave desert and the Pacific ocean, Los Angeles, both metaphorically and geographically, traps the free flow of the American West and, as a profit-hungry and economically exploitative metropolis, "presages the end of individual autonomy as a primary feature of American life" (Ashe 47). And yet, with its most famous district, Hollywood, responsible for popularizing the cowboy image and, thus, enhancing the mythic image of American individualism and self-reliance, as well as with "more artists, writers, filmmakers, actors, dancers and musicians living and working [there] than [in] any other city at any time in the history of civilization" ("Only"), the City of Angels also poses as an almost God-like place, providing unlimited creative opportunities for various in-

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dividuals, many of whom happen to be as outlandish in their lifestyles as the Coens' artistic output and, thus, frequently referred to as "freaks." One of the most succinct literary references rendering the cultural ambiance of this city, a place uninhibited by Puritan heritage, comes from Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*. Halfway through their drug-infused Las Vegas escapade, having violated most social norms for the sake of testing and exposing the downsides of the American Dream, Raoul Duke, based on Thompson himself, decides to decline his Samoan attorney's telegram invitation to report to the Dunes Hotel for more abuse of everything that can be abused, as he thinks he "pushed" his "luck about as far as it was going to carry [him] in this town . . . all the way out to the edge" (78). Consequently, he plans his escape back to L.A.,

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> There is only one road to L.A.—US Interstate 15, a straight run with no backroads or alternate routes, just a flat-out high-speed burn through Baker and Barstow and Berdoo and then on the Hollywood Freeway straight into frantic oblivion: safety, obscurity, just another freak in the Freak Kingdom. (Hunter S. Thompson 83)

While both cities could easily compete for the American Dream myth capital, Duke, with whom the Dude incidentally has a lot in common, finds Los Angeles, even at the peak of its 1970s racial tensions, to be a place where someone like him feels relatively secure, possibly because, unlike Las Vegas, Los Angeles tends to be less "relentlessly middle-class, middle-income, and middle-aged" (cf. Whissen 90), which, from the standpoint of unbridled, financially broke individuals unconcerned with time, like Duke or the Dude, is definitely a good thing, allowing such outsiders not to have too much money and ambition, and yet still enjoy life on their own terms in this predominantly "two-class [region] of haves and have-nots" (Whissen 90). Ambition, the pressure for success and money are there but so is the choice not to do too much or to do things weirdly and differently. Reporting back on Lebowski Fest West, which finally took place in L.A. in 2005, a *LEO weekly* journalist observes that in spite of the discomforting attention the fest staff were getting from the cameras documenting the event, the commotion and interest "still seemed like nothing to L.A.—a city whose smoggy breath continually warps your horizon as fast as it cranks out more freaks to draw the attention away from you" (Titan). Trapped between two geographical extremes, yet expanding over an impressively vast area with several independent cities attached to or engulfed by it, Los Angeles liberally allows over-the-top otherness as much as obliterates it, only to spout out more bizarreness. Unlike *TBL* at

the time of its original release, the L.A. Lebowski Fest of 2005 managed to make a mark in the region, selling out entirely for its two-day celebration and disappointing "the countless people who planned on attending but were caught unaware of the power of the Lebowskifest" (Titan). The Entertainment Capital of the World clearly underestimated the impact of its own marginal creation which did not benefit the city's economy in 1998 when it was born, but, like Frankenstein's creature, came back to claim its position.

Just as *TBL* stitches together genres and "suggests . . . laid-back connections between more or less disparate phenomena" (Comentale and Jaffe 5) (e.g. the Dude's Wizard of Oz-like pair of bowling shoes handed to him by a Saddam look-alike, the wicked wizard of Western Asia, in the second dream sequence), Los Angeles stitches together a unique variety of cultures from within and without America. After having been captured from the Mexicans by US forces in 1846, this west-coast area speedily became an American "bastion of middle-class whiteness" (Avila 230), only to renegotiate these conditions and rebalance its predominantly white population at the end of the twentieth century:

> Since 1970, the vast influx of immigrant populations into Southern California has transformed the region . . . into a Third World citadel. In 1970, 71 percent of Los Angeles County's population was non-Hispanic white or Anglo, and the remaining 29 percent of the population was divided among Latinos (15 percent), African Americans (11 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (3 percent). By 1980, the non-Hispanic white population had dropped to 53 percent, and ten years later it had fallen further to 41 percent. . . . By 1990, Latinos comprised 36 percent of the city's population; African Americans and Asians constituted 11 percent, respectively. Today's Los Angeles ranks among the most diverse urban regions in the world and the city once heralded as the "nation's white spot" now mirrors the polyglot diversity that defines the city and even its past. (Avila 230)

Such cultural and political changes might also partially account for *TBL*'s rather moderate reception in 1998. In order "to preserve white hegemony," "[i]n the 1990s, California voters passed a series of measures that targeted immigrant groups and racial minorities," for instance Proposition 13, which "drastically reduced property taxes at the expense of public services such as schools, libraries, and police and fire protection, services that racial minorities have been increasingly forced to rely on" (Avila 232, 233). The threat that speedily growing non-white minorities were perceived to pose to the whites found its reflection in the region's political and cultural output:

One year after the end of the Reagan-Bush era and on the heels of the Rodney King uprising of 1992, the film *Falling Down* engendered controversy among national audiences for its neonoir portrayal of the white man's identity crisis in contemporary Los Angeles. "D-Fens, " an unemployed engineer suffering a nervous breakdown, begins a killing spree as he walks from downtown Los Angeles to the beach. In the tradition of noir's white male antihero, D-Fens trudges through the racialized milieu of the city, attacking a Korean market, a fast-food outlet, a Chicano gang, and a neo-Nazi. The city that once resonated with compelling expressions of suburban whiteness is now alien territory for D-Fens, an inhospitable non-Anglo landscape that renders white male identity obsolete. (Avila 234)

*Falling Down* became a box office hit because the misunderstood protagonist is a military type who, like a lonely cowboy, fights violence in search of justice at the time of white flight. Six years later, with an even greater upsurge in immigration and powerful cultural changes in the region, the Coens' neonoir "Western at the limit of the West" (Comentale and Jaffe 6) might have seemed oddly out of place. If D-Fens aka William Foster (Michael Douglas) indicates "the fin de siècle crisis of white male identity" (Avila 234), the image of an unemployed, family-shunning hippie could hardly have helped enhance this identity in 1998, and, thus, might not have initially resonated with white male Americans, or their wives. Moreover, in spite of lacking aggression himself, the Dude's character, with his 1960s pacifist mind-set and liberal attitude even towards the nihilists who burn his car, might, by association and quite ironically, bring to mind more radical and culturally resonant acts of violence which L.A. gave vent to at a time of rapidly increasing immigration and the civil rights movement, such as Robert Kennedy's 1968 assassination at the Ambassador Hotel, "the gruesome spectacle of the Manson family" or the 1970 killing of Rubén Salazar, who was "held up as a martyr in the struggle against Chicano oppression" (Avila 227). The majority of whites in Southern California were prone to blaming the non-white immigrants, angry minorities and the civil rights activists for the lack of morals in the area and "for obstructing their path to realizing the suburban good life" in the 1970s and 1980s (Avila 227).

Thus, it is hardly surprising that in the 1990s a Caucasian, confronting a city filled with violence and social deviants worse than him, and wandering through L.A. with a bagful of weapons reclaimed from a revenge-seeking Latino gang, mastered more sympathy from the audience nationwide than a pot-smoking dropout who drives around L.A. for recreation. Eventually, however, in this contest of two cowboy-like types, the Dude wins without drawing any weapons, because, unlike unstable

white-collar D-Fens, who also used to be prone to bouts of aggression as a family man, the Dude represents a consistent, laid-back, unemployed single individual, whose lack of typically masculine/military behaviour and disregard for forced male responsibilities offer an alternative to the craziness and violence of L.A. that also resonated with males all over the country, who, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, must have felt not only the crisis of identity resulting from the unprecedented increase in women's rights and power, but were also probably eager to avoid the post 9/11 military commotion and drop out of yet another imperialistic US intervention waged, in order to, among other things, benefit the likes of "the other Jeffrey Lebowski, the millionaire" (*TBL*). This does not mean, however, that the Coens' unorthodox homage to the Western genre and to Los Angeles "as natural extension of the American frontier" (Comentale 228) and as the setting of multiple noir classics is devoid of violence and demand for justice, the two necessary profit-harvesting ingredients in most products of the Dream Factory. The acts of aggression and angst in *TBL* include, among other things, frequent references to the Vietnam War, Walter's angry outbursts triggered by almost everyone and everything, a gun in the bowling alley, a disturbing dance number by Jesus Quintana—allegedly an ex-pederast with a record, a severed toe and a bitten-off ear, repeated threats of genital mutilation, a mug thrown at the Dude's forehead by the sadistic police chief of Malibu—"a real reactionary" (*TBL*), the accidental shooting, untimely stealing and premeditated burning of the Dude's car, and, last but not least, Donny's death caused by trauma experienced during the fight between Walter and the alleged kidnappers of Bunny Lebowski. All this violence, simultaneously suffused and sharpened by the Coens' stylized cinematography, is as scary as it is funny, calling for a hero who feels at home in the City of Angels, this "bizarre universe, a shimmering America beyond America" (Comentale 228), because only such an individual could have developed enough immunity to survive all the dangers and anxiety that such a mixture of weirdness, surrealism and aggression are bound to cause to an average man. As Edward P. Comentale observes, the Dude, definitely "a man for his time and place," remains cowboy-style righteous, albeit unarmed and unaggressive,

> [T]he film presents the Dude as representative of a lost mode of living, a defender of the old easygoing ways against all manner of big city cons. A drifter, a dropout, a man extremely slow to provoke, the Dude nonetheless serves to uphold a moral code in a battle against forces that are awkwardly juxtaposed, but undeniably modern: big business, big government, fluxus feminists, and German nihilists. (230)

Although at the time of his debut "a lot about the Dude didn't make a whole lot of sense" to Americans, "[a]nd a lot about where he lived, likewise," they eventually found both "durned innarestin." A "deadbeat" might seem like mediocre hero material, but he can still "uphold a moral code" without compromising his simple ideals of pacifism and leisure, ideals which many were finally able to recognize and embrace as an antidote to the aggression-fuelled and war-oriented American life at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Geographically and culturally positioned at the edge of the country's landscape, Los Angeles visually enhances the adventures of the Dude, who, on the whole, feels comfortable in its vastness and sustains his presence, his "royal we" (*TBL*), equally well in the Pasadena mansion of his namesake and in his own frequently invaded and thrashed simple abode. The city's impressive night-time overview, the characteristic Googie architecture, which became an integral part of US scenery in the 1950s and early 1960s (Martin-Jones 220), and "the everyday feel of [its climate] from a low-rent perspective" (Rosenbaum) feature as culturally recognizable trademarks, while the Dude's lack of aggression exposes and balances the city's gratuitous violence, giving the ultimate frontier myth a fresh twist.

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While basic information has been provided about the film's main protagonist and how he might have contributed to the movie's delayed success, little has been said about the other characters, each of whom might provide additional insight into what has made *TBL* a cultural icon regardless of its otherness and initial failure. Since each character provides enough material for at least a separate essay, they hardly fit into these concluding remarks. Yet, it must be mentioned that the critics in 1998 were dissatisfied not only with the movie's narrative structure but also with the characters. Jonathan Rosenbaum seemed particularly disappointed, piling up accusation upon accusation: "the Coen brothers . . . lin[e] up a succession of autonomous freaks"; "All that *The Big Lebowski* really cares about is the nightmarishness of 90s Los Angeles and the way a couple of dysfunctional 70s types endure it"; "The Dude and Sobchak begin as caricatures . . . , but they're allowed to grow into something deeper, if only because the humanist economy of the Coens' surrealist vaudeville allows for a couple of human beings within the tapestry of freaks," while "[the arbitrary narrative] reduces everyone else in the movie to a parade of satirical cartoons" (Rosenbaum). Undoubtedly, as Roger Ebert more favourably points out, "Los Angeles in this film is a zoo of peculiar characters" (Ebert), featuring, among others, the Dude's bowling companion Walter Sobchak (John Goodman), the Vietnam veteran connecting the Vietnam War with literally everything; the Dude's landlord Marty (Jack Kehler), an aspiring performer whose "dance quintet" and costume can only be out-weirded by the tight purple costume

and slow-motion dance of the Dude's bowling rival Jesus Quintana (John Turturro); and, last but not least, the Dude's "special lady friend," Maude Lebowski (Julianne Moore), the other Lebowski's artsy daughter, who "covers her body with paint and hurls herself through the air in a leather harness" (Ebert), and whom Rosenbaum sees as "a nasty parody of a feminist artist," conveniently ignoring the fact that the financially and artistically independent Maude actually figures as the titular Big Lebowski (Julianne Moore observes that while Maude is "almost beyond pretentious," "she's [also] got all the power" and "the Dude respects Maude for what she is and what she does," which she reciprocates [Green et al. 38]). The Coens' choice "to lin[e] up a succession of autonomous freaks" in *TBL* serves a purpose that Rosenbaum and many other critics failed to appreciate at the time of the film's theatrical release. While certain characters such as the nihilists could be classified as "dysfunctional types" in the sense of being a threat to non-violent members of society, others, such as, for instance, the Dude's quirky landlord or even Walter, help redefine "freakishness" as a term denoting choice, openness, freedom, security, and, last but not least, a type of unquestionable achievement which does not require one to compromise their original values.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, Hunter S. Thompson aka Raoul Duke would certainly embrace the Coens' "tapestry of freaks," and so would Dylan Moran, an Irish actor and stand-up comedian, who in his 2006 show quips: "Arnold Schwarzenegger is the governor of California. There is a perfectly ordinary English sentence. How did that happen? Do you know how that happened? 'Cause I tell you . . . . He got there by lifting things" (Moran). Sarcastic as it is, Moran's remark, however, pays tribute to the Golden State, implicitly contrasting California's cultural flexibility with the more traditional, not to say rigid, culture of, for instance, Great Britain. Although no longer governor as of January 2011, Schwarzenegger has raised the bar for the unusual in the region yet another notch, simultaneously redefining his own long-lasting American Dream. Although all the Dude ever lifts is a bowling ball and glasses of White Russian, *TBL*'s shift from a commercially and critically marginal production to a culturally significant yet inherently offbeat phenomenon measures up to the from-rags-to-riches life story of the Austrian bodybuilder-turned-Mr. Universe-turned-actor-turned-politician, who, incidentally, after moving to California trained at Gold's Gym in Venice, Los Angeles, which is where the Dude dwells. The number of both bizarre and classic cultural connections one can draw in relation to *TBL* is endless, twisted and surprisingly gratifying, though the real pleasure lies in just enjoying the ride. As Ebert rightly observes, "The Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* is a genial, shambling comedy [which] should come with a warning like the one Mark Twain attached to *Huckleberry Finn*: 'Persons attempting

to find a plot in it will be shot'" (Ebert). And yet, just like in Twain's unnecessarily censored classic, there is nothing incidental in the Coens' film, a pertinent example of which can be found in the movie's constant play on "the Dude's trademark verb—to abide—. . . contrasted with Lebowski's—to achieve" (Comentale and Jaffe 20), a distinction which serves to defend the Dude's lazy lifestyle against the unrelenting Puritan work ethic. Because even if the Dude is a lazy man and a relic of his recent rebellious past, and, thus, the utmost failure among the 1990s' slackers, in time he has proven that, in the parlance of the Port Huron Statement, the famous American independence does not have to equal "egotistic individualism" or military involvement—"the object is not to have one's way so much as it is to have a way that is one's own" ("Port Huron"). Finally, against *The Guardian* critic's prediction, *The Big Lebowski* did win a prize, the 1998 Golden Aries for Best Foreign Film, awarded, coincidentally yet more than appropriately, by the Russian Guild of Film Critics. To use the Dude's favourite qualifier: How "far-out" is that? Enough to repeatedly toast *The Big Lebowski*'s rise from a box office bomb to a nation-wide cultural event with the Dude's favourite drink.

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# Margins
# in Fiction, Poetry
# and Literary Theory

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# The Marginality of the Gothic:
# A Reconsideration

# ABSTRACT

It is commonly accepted that we discuss the Gothic in terms of the margin. These two seem to be inseparable and associating them appears "just natural." However, in light of the contemporary critical debate on the ubiquity of the Gothic, the mode's "natural" marginality might appear somewhat out of place. While the Gothic is still increasingly popular in popular culture, it has also become incredibly popular among literary scholars. In fact, it not only permeates the culture we live in, but it also appears to occupy a mainstream position in academia these days.

Viewing the Gothic as a notion shaped to a certain extent by the critic, this article investigates—and reconsiders—the persistence of the Gothic margin in contemporary critical discourse. Following Paul A. Bové's consideration of the ways in which institutionalized criticism partakes in discourse, it sees contemporary Gothic criticism as at least potentially operating within discourse in Michel Foucault's terms, and thus considers the possibility of the Gothic margin being in fact a critical construct, functional within the contemporary discourse of criticism. Hence, the article poses questions about the origin of Gothic marginality, the contemporary status of the Gothic margin and its potential functionality, and finally, possible results of the loss of the marginal status for the Gothic as a critical object. It seeks the answers by means of scrutinizing critical accounts, such as Fred Botting and Dale Townshend's introduction to the *Critical Concepts* series on the Gothic, and by contrasting different attempts at (re)presenting the Gothic and its status. Finally, it considers the distinction between the past—the era of critical neglect—and the present—allegedly the times of the vindication of the Gothic. In so doing, it aims at determining whether and why the marginality of the Gothic could indeed turn out to be constructed by the critics.

Marginality and the Gothic can be easily paired. What could be more marginalized in the field of literature and critical studies than the low, popular genre termed Gothic fiction? And what could be more interested in the margins than the very same genre? The two appear so interlinked and interdependent that separating them would probably appear simply "unnatural." Yet it has become a subject of contemporary critical debate that the Gothic has entered both the cultural and the critical mainstream. To give one example, in her introduction to the 2007 issue of *Gothic Studies* devoted to the Gothic in contemporary popular culture, Catherine Spooner pronounces our pop culture to be saturated with the Gothic—from Goths to the latest fashion shows, from computer games to *Jerry Springer*—and the Gothic to have finally made its way into academia, becoming "a burgeoning area of research" (1).

While Spooner sees the ubiquity of the Gothic as an indisputable fact, the opening article of the same issue by Alexandra Warwick problematizes this fact in a stimulating way. Warwick begins by addressing the nagging questions of why criticism is so fascinated with the Gothic that it seeks Gothic traces where one could justly claim there are none, and why contemporary culture is so crazy about being Gothic. She ascribes the contemporary success of "Gothickness" to the very nature of both contemporary (post-Derridean) critical practice and Western society (permeated by a quasi-psychoanalytical discourse) (7–10). Similarly to Spooner, Warwick contrasts the past and the present throughout the article: the times in which the Gothic was underestimated and neglected, or, in Warwick's terms, properly marginal, and the era of its dominance in almost every sphere of culture. In the end, however, she comes close to stating that making the Gothic ubiquitous ultimately annihilates it, depriving it of any particular specificity (14).

Warwick's observations are illuminating and important—both if we talk about the influence of Gothic studies on its object, and if we want to investigate the marginal status of the Gothic. Firstly, it appears that if we are to investigate the marginalization of Gothic fiction, then we are actually to investigate the past: the way in which the Gothic used to be treated as opposed to contemporary critical practice. Secondly, if it is not exactly the case that Warwick "mourns" the Gothic as it used to be—that is, occupying the margin—then at least she presents it in a way suggesting a loss. On the one hand, this loss is, obviously, the loss of the marginal status. Just as Warwick assumes that the contemporary Gothic celebrates the loss of the set of axioms through which repression once used to be enacted (social order, coherent psyche, sense of justice) (13), we may assume that

Gothic critics celebrate, rather than lament upon, the loss of the marginal status, itself a sign of repression. On the other hand, however, the loss indicated by the text is also the loss of the constitutive feature. If we choose, as Warwick does, to view the Gothic as characterized by voicing the unspeakable through representing it in coded, displaced forms; and if we observe, also as she does, that in contemporary Western culture the unspeakable is commonly spoken of and is the centre of attention, and the Gothic becomes only yet another stage for "the desire for trauma" to be fulfilled in full view (11–13); then we must notice that Gothic fiction no longer performs the role which so many contemporary critics give it credit for—that of staging the prohibited, silenced, explained away, or, simply, marginalized.

If the Gothic has become devoid of what it constituted, then perhaps we should not be surprised that many contemporary Gothic texts, like Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*—despite the call to give the contemporary Gothic deserved attention (Spooner 1)—are (still) said to be what eighteenth-century critics said contemporary Gothic productions were, namely "just romance."[1] But the aim of this article is not to determine what is or what should be Gothic. Far from aiming at defining Gothic, this article attempts to view the marginal status of the Gothic through the lens of critical practice itself. In short, it treats the Gothic as a critical construct, a notion shaped to a certain extent by the critic elaborating on the status of Gothic fiction.

As James Watt observes with regard to early Gothic literature, every writer has his or her own agenda (6). Michel Foucault might say that different writers operate within different discourses, the discourses having their own agendas as well. Paul A. Bové, while elaborating on the notion of Foucault's discourse, shows how criticism, especially if institutionalized, also operates within discourse, joining "in the general disciplinary project of producing and regulating the movement of knowledge" (3). Such a criticism introduces categories which shape a given mode of critical scrutiny and make it appear natural, commonsensical and obvious: "By obliging all to answer the 'same' questions," questions which seem to be transparent and thus absolutely objective, discourse "homogenizes critical practice and declares 'invalid' whatever does not or cannot *operate* on its political and intellectual terrain" (Bové 5–6). As we have already said, the marginality of the Gothic appears just obvious—how could we negate it? But then it may be worthwhile posing the question whether such a marginality could be a construct, or a statement validated as true within contemporary critical

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[1]  Fred Botting discusses this film in *Gothic* (177–80). His analysis will be referred to later in the article.

discourse in which it is functional (Bové 9) for some underlying reasons, and thus having "the privilege of unnoticed power" (Bové 6).

The suggestion that the marginal status of the Gothic could be a construct, validated and functional within the discourse of contemporary critical practice, is tempting, for it appears striking that something so popular as the Gothic is still so strongly associated with the margin. In order to determine whether and why the marginality of the Gothic has been constructed by contemporary critics, we shall investigate a number of issues. First of all, it is necessary to establish the origin of the Gothic margin and investigate the question why literary critics should be so interested in a marginal form. Next, it is crucial to consider whether or not the Gothic is really no longer marginal these days. Finally, a compelling question is could the loss of marginal status result in the end of the Gothic? By referring to those issues and scrutinizing chosen critical readings, this article also responds to the call for "Gothic criticism that takes up self-analysis in terms of its own role in defining an increasingly malleable genre" (Rintoul 709).

## The Origins of the Gothic Margin

As we have already noticed, the origins of the Gothic margin seem to be located in the past. As Jerrold E. Hoggle and Andrew Smith point out, similarly to our own times, the late eighteenth century witnessed a blossoming exchange between the Gothic and the critics (2). But, at the same time, this very exchange did not mean that the Gothic was a mainstream form, but rather contributed to the Gothic's marginal status. Similarly, the great popularity of the Gothic, boosted by the circulating library at that time, confirmed the genre's/mode's low status.

The Gothic did not become marginal suddenly, or at a fixed point in time; in a way, it has always been so due to a number of factors. In their "General Introduction" to the volumes of Routledge's *Critical Concepts* series devoted to the Gothic, Fred Botting and Dale Townshend define Gothic fiction through its perceived marginalization and exclusion at the time of its rise. As they state, "Gothic"

> was a term of critical abuse in contemporary reviews perturbed by the rise and rapid spread of a new species of fiction that refused neoclassical realistic and didactic aesthetic rules. . . . Hostile critical tones denounce the threat of fiction as endangering not only aesthetic values, but moral and social values as well: painting vice in attractive colours, romances encouraged readers to eschew the virtues of order and decency, of respect for social mores and familial duties, of chaste habits and disciplined, rational reflection. (1: 1)

Presented in this way, the Gothic should emerge as an arch-infamous invader of the mainstream and a threat to its pillars (neoclassicism, realism, didacticism and aesthetics).

The whole account, rich in negative connotation of "Gothic" of all sorts, from barbarous Goths to the French Revolution, is structured around the ways in which we can assume the concept of "Gothic" to denote things marginal and marginalized at the same time. True, the authors do point to the positive connotations of the Gothic Revival, and of the Goths (Botting and Townshend 1: 7–9). Similarly, they offer a broad account of how Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* reassess the term "Gothic" (1: 9–11). However, the overall assessment of early Gothic criticism seems aimed at showing how it considered the Gothic to be threatening the desired order of both literature and society. Botting and Townshend acknowledge the role of the Gothic in shaping aesthetic criticism and the novel, but emphasize this took place by negative definition; they unequivocally associate the Gothic with romance, the negative literary category inherent to the seventeenth-century aristocratic order, in the place of which the moralistic, didactic novel was introduced (1: 4–7). They point to common grounds for the Gothic and Romanticism, but emphasize the latter insisted on differentiation from the writing of sensationalism and stimulation, viewing such writing as an inferior, corrupting, "debased and debasing aesthetic mode" (1: 11–12), thus separating it "from aesthetics of nature, sublimity and the imagination, that, decades earlier established the very condition for [its] appearance" (1: 11), by making it subject to the familiar distinction between higher and popular forms of art, the elite and the mass, the spiritually and morally ennobling, and sick and granting the fulfilment of the basest appetites (1: 12).

For Botting and Townshend, there is a steady continuation of the marginalization of the Gothic from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth century (1: 13–14). All in all, their account appears an exhaustive and illuminating one. It is also much in tune with the observations of numerous other critics on the marginalization of the Gothic by eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century criticism.[2] As such, the account may be viewed as exemplary. If we consider it, however, from a broader historical perspective, it will prove partly incomplete.

Making a case against "the *hobgoblin-romance,*" the author of "On the Titles of Modern Novels" (1797) admits there were "writers of genius, who

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[2] See e.g. the remarks on criticism of the aforementioned periods by Botting, *Gothic* (18), Kilgour (218), Hoggle and Smith (3–4), or Anne Williams considerations of the "critical myths" of the Gothic produced by realist and Romantic critics (6, 8).

have succeeded in the terrible" and "innumerable imitations," dismissed as "fair game for ridicule" (E. 304). By contrast, Botting and Townshend's "Gothic genre" or "romance" seems to be a thoroughly coherent category, whose general definition, somewhat strangely, is close to the definition of the margin of literature as such. They write for example that the Gothic functions within a paradigm where "more laudable forms of literary endeavour are constituted, defined and rendered knowable only through their difference from the inferior form of literary production that is the Gothic romance" (1: 13). What is strange here is the fact that the Gothic becomes a meta-touchstone for negative definition, the exclusive embodiment of "the inferior form of literary production." The Gothic played a great part in the establishment of the categories of high and low culture; however, was Gothic fiction the only inferior form against which high art constituted itself? Undeniably, there was a time when Gothic productions dominated the market. But then, this fact should be given more attention.

Indeed, apart from "the writers of genius," the end of the eighteenth century was familiar with their "imitations," written on a scale incomparable to anything that had preceded the spread of literacy, proceeding industrialization and consumption, and the rise of the circulating library. Caught in the treadmill of market demands, Gothic texts indeed flooded the market. While Botting and Townshend do provide us with an array of reasons for the debasement of Gothic texts in terms of them disturbing the rules of proper composition and social order—they were immoral, idle, sensationalist, unrealistic, spoiling, endangering parental control, irrational, revolutionary, aesthetically corrupt, etc. (1: 1–4)—they fail to mention that those texts comprised both works which constitute the Gothic canon today and numerous other fictions whose production was based on repetitiveness and conventionality, constant reproduction and multiplication to quantify sales regardless of quality. Furthermore, they omit to add that the Gothic texts were also accessible to a newly extended reading public, not necessarily skilled in distinguishing what was "worth" reading from what was not—and that this could be viewed as an underlying factor contributing to the critical outrage.

As much as literary, political or social, the origins of the marginalization of the Gothic may be seen as economic. In a sense, in the eighteenth century, the previous three categories depended on the latter. Emma Clery convincingly illustrates the way in which, due to its close relation with commerce, Gothic fiction took part in the process of shaping the categories of good and bad literature, seeing "a draft version of the sociological opposition high art/popular culture" in Hugh Murray's *Morality of Fiction* of early 1800s (Clery 151). Clery links the process with the emergence of consumerism and the circulating library, and the spreading practice of

adherence to popular taste to increase sales (135–40, 148–54): with the victory of the public's demands over "the legislation of writing from above" (135). Being one of the favourites of the Minerva Press, the Gothic is on the side of "bad readers produc[ing] bad writing produc[ing] bad readers" (151); and it is the emergence of this "bad writing" that pushes criticism to establish the categories of high versus popular (139).

While discussing eighteenth-century literary criticism, Douglas Lane Patey defines the "ideological functions" of a critic: "criticism, like literature itself, served as a forum for discussion of a wide range of social, political, and religious issues as critics sought to create, through the education of taste, a body of polite popular opinion in all these areas," especially where censorship was rigorous (5). True, the wrong taste may threaten the sociopolitical order—but in a sense, the very potential of not manifesting taste and learning may be considered as threatening as the content of particular works by unskilled writers. Moreover, this potential is made possible not so much by the spreading moral corruption, but by the rules of the market, which appears able to spread anything that sells well regardless of its quality, or affiliation with "taste." As Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall claim, partly dismissing Rosemary Jackson's view that fantastic modes have been muted by the critics as they subverted establishment ideals, "most critics who have scoffed at the Gothic have done so not in rearguard defence of some realist norm but in a genuine attempt to discriminate between good romances and bad romances" (210). Written to satisfy market demands— the rule of the market defined by "quantification, abstract equalization, the transformation of use into exchange-value, and instantaneous obsolescence . . . the replacement of qualitative distinctions of value by the absolute criterion of quantity" (McKeon 245)—numerous Gothic imitations fail by definition to abide by the rules of proper taste. Thus, the Gothic, so popular in the 1790s, is unavoidably connected with the phenomenon of which Patey writes while commenting on the spread of literacy, and the consequent multiplication of tastes as seen by Goldsmith:

> there has emerged a large and diverse reading public . . . which has in turn helped to generate too many writers, too many, that is, of the wrong social alignments (lacking polite taste): "If tradesmen happen to want skill in conducting their own business, yet they are able to write a book; if mechanics want money, or ladies shame, they write books and solicit subscriptions." Thus the very extension of taste to a wide public damages taste. (27–28)

The lack of taste, as defined by the eighteenth-century critics, is what seems to have made the Gothic a popular and inferior form, in the first place.

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On the other hand, not all Gothic fictions were written for the Minerva Press and omitted to address the requirements set by the most notable critics; nonetheless, many of the Gothic classics produced by well-educated members of the elites were still criticized since, for various reasons, they did not conform to the rules of "proper" writing as set by criticism. If we consider solely the case of Walpole's *Otranto*, we can see that what determined its reception were the rule of *incredulus odi* on the one hand, and the doctrine of *utile dulci* on the other (Clery 2, 27, 54, 59). While *Otranto* is "digestible" as a translation of a medieval manuscript, thus having some historical value, when it is revealed to be contemporary writing, it is attacked on the grounds of preaching superstition in the age of reason (Clery 54). Bearing in mind all the faults of the Gothic enumerated by Botting and Townshend, we could assume works such as *Otranto* were marginalized due to more or less consciously introduced subversive traits, traits that indeed transgressed and threatened the desired aesthetic, social and political boundaries. However, again it seems we should avoid generalization. On the one hand, indeed, we may observe how certain authors engaged in rejecting or subverting the mainstream. The sole line of Walpole's first preface to *Otranto*, telling of the possibility that a Catholic priest used the spread of letters in medieval Italy to reverse "enlightenment" and popularize superstition, may be considered as overtly mocking critical canons in retrospection—with the second preface it becomes clear that Walpole, i.e. Muralto, with the help of "letters," "spreads superstition" in the Enlightened eighteenth century (Clery 61–62). On the other hand, we could ask ourselves, for instance, if there is indeed that much propagation of revolution in Lewis' *The Monk*.[3]

There may be another reason for the critics fearing the Gothic apart from its inherent real dangers of subversion, one which comes down to what Watt writes of "Monk" Lewis:

> [though] the licentious "content" of certain works did provoke critical reaction . . . it is always hard to separate the condemnation of immorality from the unease about who precisely was doing the reading, and under what circumstances. . . . what was largely at stake in the negative reviews of *The Monk*, especially, was the regulation of cultural production itself. (83–84)

Or, which can be related to what Michael McKeon states on the modernist view of eighteenth-century critical emphasis put on morality:

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3   For a corresponding discussion of *The Monk*, see Clery (156–71) and Watt (70–101).

Modernity is accustomed to see in the eighteenth century an anomalous devotion to moral instruction, to the "didactic." It is important to recognize, however, that this phenomenon represents not so much an increased investment in moral pedagogy as the coalescence of moral pedagogy as one among several categories of knowledge, rather than (as in the customary view) the purpose that superintends them all. The didactic was not simply endorsed at this time; it was constituted as the mode of ostentatiously explicit instruction out of the debris of an older system in which all knowledge had been tacitly and pervasively "didactic." By the same token, contemporary anxiety about the effects of novels on impressionable readers signifies an increase not in the impulse toward social regulation and discursive discipline, but in the apprehension that customary (and highly effective) regulatory discourses were being enervated by social instability. (262–63)

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What we have here is a statement that the eighteenth-century critics, more than policing particular forms of subversion, were primarily concerned with maintaining rules for producing and reading texts for fear of these rules being obliterated by new social conditions. This takes us back to the rule of the market and its consequences. The true subversive nature of the Gothic lies in the mode's general affiliation with a newly emergent phenomenon of unsupervised reading, threatening with a vision of anybody being able to write anything with no regard for anyone—and hence, in the first place, the mode's negative reception by critics aiming at "the regulation of cultural production." We could venture as far as to say that it is the final lack of this regulation that will, all in all, lead Wordsworth to introduce a new way of experiencing excitement through literature in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*—a way that runs counter to "the application of gross and violent stimulants" in the form of "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" manufactured for immediate gratification, and demanding little mental effort (248–49).

The impact of spreading commerce, market demands and commoditization of writing on the perception of the Gothic is an important factor if we take into consideration the origins of the marginal status of Gothic fiction. The Gothic was indeed marginal because it was popular, and it was popular because it "pandered to the basest of appetites and motives" (Botting and Townshend 1: 12). But in doing so, the mode not necessarily anticipated Freud's forbidden passions. Omitting to acknowledge the aspect of its marginalization connected with the fear of unregulated, value-deficient reading and writing limits the understanding of the Gothic's status to the terms of subversion (of established literary and social norms) and repression (enacted by the critics). If we do not see the

Gothic as a part (substantial, but still a part) of a wider phenomenon of the constitution of the literary margin as encompassing "bad" (and only then subversive) writing, we create an impression that the Gothic equals the margin equals the popular, their definitions merged into one, and is basically preoccupied with haunting the established social/political/moral norms with what is to be repressed by a given order. In this way, the Gothic becomes inseparable from the margin, and defines the margin and itself in terms of subversion, "an underground, an underclass, an unconscious, a locus of uncomfortable exclusion that . . . continues to return" (Botting and Townshend 2: 12). Thus it may be treated, by definition, as a valuable repository of "productive negatives that remain objects of criticism" (Botting and Townshend 2: 13).

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## On the Gothic Margin

We could pose the question if the image of the marginal Gothic as presented by Botting and Townshend is already a construct in a way. On the one hand, the account is exhaustive and does justice to various issues. On the other, it limits the parameters within which the Gothic used to function, as a result of which Gothic fiction actually may seem somewhat more important than once was the case.

A similar observation is made by a number of critics—in the first place, with regard to the psychoanalytical readings of Gothic fiction. Viewed through the lens of psychoanalysis, the Gothic margin is defined in terms of "the individually or culturally repressed" (Warwick 10), and thus should explain both the individual and culture.[4] Interestingly, in this way the Gothic becomes important because it represents the repressed, and as Baldick and Mighall remark, in a somewhat ironic tone, the assumption that the Gothic was once "victimized," vindicates it nowadays (210). What Mighall finds of particular importance while discussing psychoanalytical readings of Victorian Gothic is that they de-contextualize the text—the critic identifies with the character of the villain as the one who brings liberation from Victorian repression—thus, in the case of, for example, Dracula, the villain proves a counterpart of the modern critic, as he or she brings "sexual liberation, the basis for our own modernity and enlightenment" (278). Consequently, what makes a vampire, rather than a Victorian, close to us is the privileged position that our own culture grants to what is repressed. If this is the case, the conflation of the Gothic, the marginal and the subversive may indeed underlie the contemporary mainstream status

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[4] For a brief discussion of the problematic status of psychoanalytical readings, see Warwick (9–10).

of the Gothic among critics and scholars; thus, the Gothic margin may turn out to be a functional construct in contemporary critical discourse. All in all, subversion, transgression, the unconscious, repression of desire and infantile drives are all habitually located on the margin. So is women's and class liberation. All of them are habitually identified as the domain of the Gothic. Apart from that, they are generally associated with the excluded from the dominant order. As Botting remarks elsewhere, the excluded is as telling and as significant as what is celebrated by a given culture, and thus proves worthy of the attention of the critic ("Preface" 3).

As we have noticed at the beginning of the article, the Gothic is nowadays hardly marginal, both in popular culture, in which it has never been so, and in academia. But the content of the Gothic text remains defined in terms of the margin. On the one hand, it seems that Gothic critics, starting with David Punter, have done their best to elevate the Gothic from the level of "literary curiosity" or "popular trash" (Spooner 1). Punter, right from the start of his discussion of the Gothic's origins, in the arch-famous *The Literature of Terror* (1980), commits himself to renegotiating the status of the Gothic and dealing away with its stigma of popular fiction.[5] As Baldick and Mighall state, he provides the Gothic with "high Romantic credentials" (214). However, the vindication for the interest in the Gothic results from changes within the critical circles themselves rather than from seeing Gothic fiction as high art. The character of these changes transpires for instance from Maggie Kilgour's justification for contemporary interest in the Gothic, namely the interest in social conditions and context that the Gothic may reveal (221). Similarly, the character of these changes can be traced in Punter's dissatisfaction with the application of Freudian and Marxist theories only to realist fiction (ix). Obviously, the orientation towards socio-psychological studies of cultural context contributed to "challenging the hierarchies of literary value and widening the horizons of critical study to include other forms of writing and address different cultural and historical issues," which, as Botting writes, "moved Gothic texts from previously marginalized sites" (*Gothic* 17). What seems to trigger moving the Gothic from the margin to the mainstream is our own drive

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[5]   The Gothic's alliance with high art and good literature are discussed on a twofold level here. First, quoting figures and analyzing the structure and financial possibilities of the eighteenth-century readership, Punter comes to the conclusion, first, that the costs of obtaining the top Gothic novels would be too high for the lower classes of society, and second, that they were clearly written for the learned public (the bourgeoisie) (24–25). Then, on the literary level, Punter points out the allegiances of the Gothic with the Richardsonian novel, sentimentalism and graveyard poetry, all four, as he sees them, allied against the strictly rationalist, conservative and anti-emotional premises of the Enlightenment (27–33).

towards determining our cultural origins—if we accept Hoggle's view that the Gothic is an "archival location," a repository of "betwixt-and-between conditions" (301) into which the middle class abjects (in Kristeva's terms) its anxieties and contradictions in the process of forming "a distinct sense of identity" (297), then we can find the Gothic an abundant source of information on how contemporary middle-class identity came into being.

Defining its significance in socio-psychological terms ultimately removes the Gothic from the sphere of critical margin, making it a domain of cultural significance. Simultaneously, if we consider Hoggle's understanding of the role of the Gothic as a space of cultural abjection, we can see the Gothic still stands for the marginal, and, peculiarly, its literary marginalization is maintained in spite of its entrance into the critical mainstream. In fact, the condition of the margin is what determines the significance of the Gothic. Gothic fiction should be studied—because it illuminates culture by uncovering what culture rejects. The same sort of statement can be found in Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*; here, the fantastic unveils the frames of the dominant order as it

> points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to . . . that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent. (4)

This is what Botting voices while stating that the cultural margin is as illuminating as the mainstream—studying the margin enables one to fully comprehend "the newly dominant order" as it familiarizes one with the "produced, policed and maintained . . . antitheses, opposites enabling the distinction and discrimination of [the order's] own values and anxieties" ("Preface" 3).

Summing up, the Gothic is still defined by the contemporary critic/scholar as marginal, the margin being seen in the first place as the sphere of exclusion, repression and abjection; simultaneously, the Gothic is being seen as vital, since it allows us to better comprehend the mainstream—the dominant order, or socio-political system. But why is such comprehension vital? We may point to an interesting parallel between the importance of the margin and Warwick's observations on the contemporary status of trauma. Warwick poses that "contemporary culture *wants* to have trauma, [which] is induced, predicted and enacted, persistently rehearsed even when it is not actually present" (11). In quasi-psychoanalytical therapy, trauma is a necessary component, a condition *sine qua non* for human wholeness, without comprehending and internalizing which one cannot

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fully become oneself. Encompassing the unspeakable and repressed, trauma must necessarily be processed (11–13). The same goes for the margin, itself the trauma of society/culture, as it encompasses all that threatens the superficial unity of the socio-cultural self. Nowadays, it seems to be widely assumed that this self cannot be fully comprehended, and cannot properly claim to constitute a whole, if it does not deal with what it has repressed, rejected or abjected.

There is another way of explaining the importance of studying the margin—namely, through the lens of liberation from repression, the same which, as Warwick states, is celebrated by the contemporary Gothic. Botting hints at this when he states that, with the social, political and sexual liberation that took place in the twentieth century, criticism also liberated itself from the imposed canons and rules of literary evaluation ("Preface" 4). We could take this one step further by remarking that critical liberation not only parallels the broader socio-political one, but also, unavoidably, participates in it. If Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytical critics see the Gothic as expressing "class violence and anxiety, female oppression and rage, sexual repression and freedom" (Botting, "Preface" 4), then their readings function within the paradigm of repression and liberation, normalization and subversion, and thus the value of the Gothic is construed in terms of its contesting the imposed norm, opening the path for subversion and unveiling mechanisms of repression. This becomes more visible if we consider Jackson:

> Fantasies are never ideologically "innocent" texts. The tradition of Gothic fiction . . . in many ways reinforces a bourgeois ideology. Many of its best known texts reveal a strong degree of social and class prejudice and it goes without saying, perhaps, that they are heavily misogynistic. Yet the drive of their narratives is towards a "fantastic" realm, an imaginary area, preceding the "sexed" identity of the subject and so introducing repressed female energies and absent unities. Especially in the vampire myth, the attempt to *negate* cultural order by *reversing* the Oedipal stage constitutes a violent countercultural thrust which then provokes further establishment of repression to defeat, or castrate, such a thrust. The centre of the fantastic text tries to break with repression, yet is inevitably constrained by its surrounding frame. (122)

Interestingly, while Foucault writes on the contemporary attitude towards sexual liberation, he links it with the broadly accepted, though debunked by the evidence, "myth" that the Victorian era was the era of repression, which silenced sex and pushed it into the furthest margin of society (3–5). He also considers twentieth-century wide-spread attempts at restoring sex to a more central status as being aimed at liberation from

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the alleged Victorian repression, a conscious rebellion against "the oppressive power":

> If sex is repressed . . . than the mere fact one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom. This explains the solemnity with which one speaks of sex nowadays. (6)

We can say that speaking of the margin, as much as speaking of sex or of trauma—all three representing the repressed—may be seen in terms of liberating oneself, and, subsequently, of celebrating one's liberation. Hence, speaking of the ways in which the Gothic "threatened," unveiled or subverted the imposed order by giving voice to the repressed is also a way of liberation. However, just as the "repressive hypothesis" raises serious doubts (Foucault 10), so seeing the Gothic as reflecting repression and struggling to overcome it may have its dangers. In the first place, it is our culture that is obsessed with speaking of repression and liberation—and not necessarily the Gothic of the past.

Botting points to this danger as he states that reading the Gothic as offering some liberation is a kind of reading in which elements repressed in the text become "manifestations of critical assumptions themselves" ("Preface" 4–5). In a similar vein, Robert Miles warns that Marxist, psychoanalytical and feminist methods of scrutiny invite the danger of de-historicizing a Gothic text by projecting on it contemporary concerns (3). According to Markman Ellis, psychoanalysis fails to properly explain the Gothic, as it imposes its own conclusions on the text (14). Finally, Baldick and Mighall overtly denounce "Gothic Criticism" on the grounds of its reinventing the Gothic "in the image of its own projected intellectual goals of psychological 'depth' and political 'subversion'" (209). In their account, subversion, transgression and liberation are imposed on the Gothic text to confirm the presumptions of the critic and contribute to the critic's own cause—thus, the Gothic becomes ultimately rewritten, its defining parameters blurred and changed. Criticism is seen not as analyzing a body of fiction but congratulating itself, "on behalf of progressive modern opinion, upon its liberation from the dungeons of Victorian sexual repression or social hierarchy" (Baldick and Mighall 210); it becomes an "instance of the . . . campaign against nineteenth-century literary realism and its alleged ideological backwardness" (210).

So far, we have answered all but one of the questions posed at the beginning of this article. The Gothic is still seen as marginal and we may point to the potential functionality of its marginal status. If we see the

margin exclusively in terms of subversion and repression, then scrutinizing it becomes a matter for our own liberation. Of course, we cannot state that the Gothic has nothing to do with subversion—there are texts in whose case denying they are aimed at contesting the socio-political norms would amount to an act of fakery. However, the marginalization of the Gothic does not stem exclusively from the attempts of the critics to silence what counters the establishment norms. If the agenda of contemporary criticism encompasses, in certain circles, vindicating the repressed, the agenda of the criticism of the past not necessarily encompasses already what could be called repression. Thus, the contemporary readings of the Gothic of the past are in danger of constructing new Gothic narratives, in fact. Hence, the Gothic margin as the margin of the repressed appears to be, all in all, at least partly a discursive construct.

## The Death of the Gothic Margin

The final question that we posed at the outset was whether the lack of marginal status amounts to the lack of the constitutive feature of the Gothic, and thus the end of the mode. If yes, then the partial artificiality of the Gothic margin should be confirmed. As it appears, not all Gothic fiction has always been aimed at subversion and giving voice to the repressed. A large part of it was aimed primarily at imitation of popular motives and increased sales. Some canonical Gothic authors did not aim at contesting the stance of criticism—for example, Reeve, according to Watt, "was concerned both to define her work against the bathos and frivolity of *Otranto* and to exploit the affective power and exemplary potential of prose fiction" (47). Nowadays, many Gothic texts appear perfectly mainstream, abiding by the rules of the market and threatening little subversion, for instance Coppola's *Dracula*. It is with Coppola's *Dracula* that, Botting announces, the Gothic dies, deprived of what constituted it, beginning with excess and transgression (*Gothic* 180).

According to Botting, Coppola turns a tale of transgression, horror and final climatic expulsion of evil into a mere "sentimental romance" (*Gothic* 178). Here, Dracula is less otherworldly than human, less of a threat to proper patriarchal relations and gender roles than a husband whose only aim is to be reunited with his wife, and there is no purifying climax that could restore the patriarchal *status quo*, only a merciful final blow from a loved woman (Botting, *Gothic* 177–79). Instead of representing a properly marginal figure, the vampire turns out to be more domesticated than we would expect. No revision of norms seems to be offered. Thus, what is actually announced, and mourned, is not the death of the Gothic, or of the vampire, but the death of Gothic marginality itself.

Paradoxically, we might wonder if Coppola's version of the Dracula myth is indeed that domesticated. In one sense, it is. As Botting notices, the film's images of blood cells constitute a strong allusion to blood disease, and the fear of AIDS in the 1990s can be easily linked to the fear of syphilis in the 1890s; in evoking this fear, the film seems to parallel the novel (*Gothic* 177). However, if the novel is read, in the vein of Christopher Craft, as saturated with homosexuality, and seen as expelling the threat of gender inversion but only after entertaining the promise of sexual liberation, then the film is strangely silent—in the age of AIDS, it risks not a word about homosexual relations. But in another sense, Coppola's *Dracula* does unsettle the fixed order—the Victorian one. While for Craft the female characters in the novel are but the Count's surrogates, vessels for male desire (268), in the film it is a woman with a double identity who becomes the main character and the trigger for the plot: Mina, or Countess Dracula. What is more, this two-fold figure is liberated enough to fully subvert the male plot. If in the novel women are only a pretext for patriarchy to reassert itself, in the film patriarchy has little role to play. It does exterminate Lucy—but in the end all the men, including Dracula, are saved by a woman. It is Mina who has enough liberty to embrace and internalize the vampire, turning upon a kiss from Harker's wife, whom she is, into the Count's wife, whom she is as well. Thus, the story turns out to be one of individual (female) trauma and integration. In contrast to Lucy from the novel, Mina grants herself the promiscuity that is sanctioned (she has both Harker and Dracula), and though, at the end, it seems one husband must go for the other to fully become one, it is the woman who has the power to put the men in their proper place. There is no need for a climax. The *status quo* has been subverted permanently, there is nothing to restore. Of course, the new order is our own—one in which the Victorian repression has been dealt with.

If we consider Coppola's film from such a perspective, we can see that it is saturated with revision as well. But somehow this revision passes unnoticed. Perhaps it is because we want to see the Gothic as always subverting and transgressing, and not as showing the repressed liberated, or disclosing subversion to be the new centre, the new order. Or perhaps because viewing the Gothic as such remains outside our critical discourse, and so cannot be validated. The Gothic margin dies, taking with it a certain vision—or construct—of the Gothic. But its ghost is a true Gothic ghost, haunting the Gothic that remains.

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# The Macabre on the Margins:
# A Study of the Fantastic Terrors
# of the *Fin de Siècle*

## Abstract

With a view to discussing an important three-faceted example of marginality in literature whereby terror, the literary Fantastic and the *fin de siècle* period are understood as interconnected marginalia, this paper examines works such as Guy de Maupassant's "Le Horla" and H. Rider Haggard's *She* from an alternative critical perspective to that dominating current literary discourse.

It demonstrates that in spite of the dominant associations of fantastic literature with horror, terror, as the marginal and marginalized fear of the unknown, with its uncanny, sublime and suspenseful qualities, holds a definitive presence in *fin de siècle* fantastic texts. Literary analysis of the chosen texts registers significant examples of the importance of terror to fantastic writing, and as such functions to extract an "aesthetics of sublime terror" from the margins of critical studies of this often macabre literary mode.

> THE OLDEST and strongest emotion of mankind is fear,
> and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.
> *H.P. Lovecraft "Supernatural Horror in Literature"*

The terrifying and sublime elements of fantastic literature are all too often marginalized in favour of a focus on the horrible and the horrific. From

this perspective this paper will analyze a three-faceted example of marginality in literature whereby terror, the literary Fantastic and the *fin de siècle* period are understood as interconnected marginalia. It will necessarily explore the implications of the aesthetic concept of terror in relation to fantastic literature at the borderline period of the turn of the twentieth century. With a focus on the marginal space between terror and horror, Guy de Maupassant's "Le Horla" and H. Rider Haggard's *She* will be analyzed in order to discuss the prevalence of both the sublime and fear of the unknown in this macabre mode of fiction.

## Terror and Horror

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Terror is understood in this context as an experience that can be clearly differentiated from horror, dread, anxiety and other experiences of fear. Recalling the ideas of Edmund Burke and Ann Radcliffe, it can be argued that terror is an experience of fear that is bound by suspense and hesitation. Importantly, the fear experience of terror, rather than exposing the object of fear, is suggestive of unimaginable horrors. The imagination is stimulated at the concealed possibility of the grotesque, and it is in obscurity and hesitance that terror finds its power. This results in a state of suspension between simultaneous fear and fascination in the subject. As Devendra Varma so aptly put it, "the difference between Terror and Horror is the difference . . . between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse" (130). And here, in the suspenseful state aroused by fear of the unknown, we find the most potent link between terror and the fantastic which itself has been defined as a genre bound by an experience of hesitance. According to Tzvetan Todorov, the fantastic is effectively "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting the supernatural event" (25).

Terror is, according to Radcliffe, in her early 19th century essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," a route to sublime experience for this very reason, and was, as such, promoted as the prime focus for supernatural writing. The so-called "Mother of Gothic fiction" espouses the somewhat Romantic view that terror, because of its obscurity, has the ability to arouse and stimulate the sublime faculties of the imagination. Furthermore, she claims that when the object of fear is revealed, terror is evaded and the sublime feeling is lost: "now, if obscurity has so much effect on fiction, what must it have in real life, when to ascertain the object of our terror, is frequently to acquire the means of escaping it" (Radcliffe). Edmund Burke had already laid the foundations for this approach to the sublime in stating in his philosophical enquiry that "terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime . . . [and] is

productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (86). Thus, terror is resultantly an enigmatic experience that is distinguishable as a subjective response to the unrepresentable and its power in supernatural writing can be apprehended in the earliest of nineteenth century fantastic tales.

Horror on the other hand, (and without relegating it to an inferior position by any means), is an experience of fear in which the grotesque object finds representation, and as such it has a very different impact on the imagination of the subject. Where terror, aroused by the unknown causes the imagination to expand, horror, provoked by the known or presented object, is associated with processes such as recoiling, abjection, and repulsion and the physical symptoms of fear. According to Gina Wisker, horror "names and dramatizes that which is otherwise unthinkable, unnamable, indefinable and repressed" (9). As a fearful response generated in literature, it may be seen as being positioned on the other side of the margin to that occupied by terror. And the marginal space between is the space occupied by the representational capacity of the imagination and the aesthetic sensibility of the subject.[1] Wisker, in her comprehensive outline of horror fiction, which covers *Beowulf* through to twenty first century horror film, claims that "horror is located both in the real and in the nightmarish imaginary" (2). This is significant in that it highlights the very real and everyday occurrences of horrific events but also the playing out of horrific fantasies by the unconscious in response to fear of such events. Furthermore, she adds that horror "embodies that of which we cannot speak, our deep-seated longings and terrors . . . and once they have been acted out, they are managed. Order is restored" (2). Horror is effectively a dramatization of terror, that fear of the unknown and unrepresentable, by creating and representing various fantasized objects of fear, more often than not through the creation of some sort of monstrous body.

Furthermore, while horror in literature is a limited form, if one agrees that, physically, there are a finite number of ways to scare the human reader or viewer, and additionally if one agrees with Devendra Varma that "to describe is to limit–to suggest is to stimulate the reader's imagination by the intimation of terror beyond the compass of words" (103), terror is unlimited in that it deals with the unknown, the unrepresentable and the sublime. For this reason, sublime fear has been associated by David Sadner with fantastic literature, which he defines as "a discourse of the sublime

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[1] Terror is linked to the sublime as discussed in Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, wherein the resultant experience of simultaneous pleasure and displeasure are seen as the result of a conflict of reason as it comprehends the sublime, and imagination as it fails to "re-present it" (24–26).

in literature" (*Fantastic in Literature* 316). Referring to Addison's *Pleasures of the Imagination* and "the fairy way of writing" which Sadner reads as an 18th century working definition of the fantastic, he also claims that in "both Romantic poetry and fantastic literature the imagination reaches beyond its grasp in a movements towards transcendence" (*Fantastic Sublime* 50). I would argue that it is in the pursuits of terror that the fantastic achieves this Romantic ideal and that terror, particularly in the *fin de siècle* fantastic, is a potent and defining narrative force.

The distinctions between horror and terror, as outlined above, however, are often neglected in studies of the literary fantastic and the Gothic anxieties that it so often pursues. Terror as an aesthetic experience is as such marginalized in favour of the more overt examples of horror and the horrific, which in much literary criticism have been placed at the centre of studies of the literary fantastic. At this point it should be stressed that it is not the aim of this study to suggest that authors of the fantastic are aware of these aesthetic and psychological distinctions between terror and horror. In fact, it is quite clear from most fantastic and Gothic texts that the terms "terror" and "horror" are often used within narrative interchangeably. However, beyond the language of these narratives, on the levels of structure, plot and metaphor, there is certainly evidence of a discernable marginal space between fear of the known or "presentable," and fear of the unknown and "unrepresentable," and it is upon this difference that this argument is based. With a focus on terror then, as fear of the unknown we can gain new perspectives on the fears generated in fantastic writing of the *fin de siècle* period linking the hesitation experienced in fantasticism to the hesitation experienced in the terror aroused by the same literature.

## THE FANTASTIC

To reiterate Todorov, the fantastic is "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting the supernatural event." Significantly, considering the fantastic as such would imply that it is based on fearful uncertainty about the nature of reality. It is a literature of the impossible as C.S. Lewis points out in his *Experiment in Criticism*, defining the fantastic as "any narrative that deals with impossibles or preter-naturals" (50). With regards to this approach, the fantastic is linked directly to the sublime as interpreted by cultural theorist, Slavoj Žižek. According to Žižek, the sublime is "paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way of the dimension of what is unrepresentable"; it is that which may allow us to "experience the impossibility of the thing" (203). The hesitation and impossibility that characterizes the fantastic may, therefore, be regarded as being closely as-

sociated, as Sadner has pointed out, to the transcendence of the real and the encounter with the sublime other.

From this point, most critics would agree that the fantastic is most appropriately linked to periods in which accepted reality is brought under scrutiny, such as phases of political instability, or times of cultural turn.[2] It is a mode of literature in which the margins between the possible and the impossible are blurred and as such is defined by the experience of hesitation and ambiguity. Todorov furthers this idea by suggesting that in the fantastic, there is also a blurring of the margins separating the psychological and the supernatural in terms of reader approach to the "marvellous" tale. This ties the fantastic firmly to the *fin de siècle* period as a pivotal era in terms of literary development. Much cultural unease was brought about at this liminal time by the dawn of psychoanalytic theory. Re-emerging awareness of the unknown and unknowable limits of the human psyche led to studies that eventually coined the term psychoanalysis in 1897. As a result, the seemingly deviant concepts of sexual desire, instinct, aggression and hysteria were transformed into the most potent of literary enquiries. The fear of the unknown, arguably propelled the literary fantastic toward representations of related cultural terrors, in British society in particular. We see this in British fiction that deals with issues to do with the beginnings of the decline of the British Empire which brought with it fear of colonial otherness; and with issues related to developments in technology, science and medicine. Similarly, studies in physiognomy and criminal anthropology inspired such works as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Such stories, while dealing with cultural fears, related those fears to the interiority of evil and "otherness" and readily captured the imagination of readers now placed in a world diminishing in terms of truth and authority. So at the end of the 19th century, the fantastic reached a peak, and responding to social and cultural fears and anxieties it offered an encounter with sublime otherness through the experience of terror. And from this point it continued as a literature of alienation, existing as David Punter states in his critical work on the Gothic mode, on "the borderland of culture" (196).

The fantastic and "horror" have long been conceptually interlinked. This relationship primarily has to do with the fearful confrontation with the impossible and, or supernatural that the fantastic involves and also to do with the carnival aspect of horror which offers readers, among other things, "titillating exercises in reassurance" (Botting, *The Gothic* 134). Many critics have observed that we crave horror because of the aspect of

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2    See Rein. A. Zondergeld's commentary on this, as translated to English in Johansen (51).

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safety and the restoration of order that it involves. It is, as such, a popular transgressive mode which excessively crosses the margins of the acceptable, in the same movement, delineating those margins, establishing them perhaps even more firmly than before. The fantastic, in its concern with the marginalized and "othered" aspects of self and society is recognized as a subversive and as such marginal literary mode by many critics, most notably Rosemary Jackson in her book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. And this traversal of the limits of social and personal tolerance has often been related by those who connect the fantastic more directly to horror writing and film, to Bakhtin's carnivalesque, as a sort of licensed release from established rules of order and stability. In the *fin de siècle* period, the restoration of order was without doubt a fundamental occupation of much literary fiction. Although considered historically as a period of radical change, the late 19$^{th}$ century produced a European society that was repressive; obsessed with the appearance of propriety, restraint and high morals. During this period the fantastic served a cathartic social function, offering often chaotic "other" worlds and figures to counterpoint the rigidly contained social order of the day.

But the chaos of horror was temporary and in many ways, the fantastic writing in English of the period, much of it, since classified as Gothic, utilized horror to reinforce societal conventions, most notably those upheld by the ideologies of patriarchy and Empire. Considering the *fin de siècle* and particularly the fantastic, one can identify clear examples of what Botting refers to as the "cautionary strategies" of such writing (*Gothic* 7) that are directly related to horror. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for example, while seemingly a novel that is transgressive to the extreme—representing the horrific object of fear, the painting of Dorian's corrupt soul—ends with the punishment and self-destruction of the narcissistic hero-villain. The horror figure of the monstrous double, in this way, serves to personify and therefore control the threat of "degeneration." Similarly, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the diabolical vampiric Count, the ultimate antithesis of Victorian stability and values, is efficiently destroyed by the tandem forces of science, the modern Victorian man, and the New Woman. With respect to this, Kathleen Spenser has referred to Stoker's novel as "a classic example of the conservative fantastic" (209), noting that at the point when Dracula is killed, the represented alien element is expelled and the ordinary world is restored. Horror has passed, the object of fear has been represented and consequently limited, and so the subject returns to a position of safety.

Horror considered, what of terror, which can be read as a mode of fear in which there is no object to be represented or delimited, in which order is transgressed but not subsequently restored? As has been outlined,

terror is a mysterious experience of the irrational, the weird and the uncanny simultaneously, and driven by suspense and tension, it offers unique creative space for writers of the fantastic. As such, the terrors of the *fin de siècle* fantastic, unlike its horrors, offer experiences of fear generated with a particular purpose. The sublime and imaginative consequences of terror effectively pose a mode of readerly and writerly experience that is transgressive in an unlimited sense. The recognition of the unknowable and unrepresentable object of fear is a transcendence of the margins that delimit external reality and society, offering the subject a route to the dark marginalia of the unconscious mind where all of its grotesque and uncanny qualities are at play. This unlimited quality of terror tenders a more anarchic literary experience, rebelling against order and reality and the limits of subjectivity.

For this reason it is intrinsically linked to the fantastic as a genre of hesitation, in its continued struggle with the order of the real and its resistance to marginalization and representation. In relation to this, H.P. Lovecraft claimed that "[a] tale is fantastic if the reader experiences an emotion of profound fear and terror, the presence of unsuspected worlds or powers" ("Supernatural Horror"). It is interesting to note that the frontman for twentieth century American horror writing would imply that terror is the primary fearful response associated with the literary fantastic in the periods during and preceding Lovecraft's own highly influential post-*fin de siècle* writing. However, this is less surprising when one considers the importance of the imagination and the sublime in Lovecraft's work and in particular in his aesthetics. He discloses something of this in his essay "Horror and the Supernatural in Literature":

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the dæmons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft)

In this commentary it is clear that Lovecraft prioritizes an atmosphere of "breathless and unexplainable dread of unknown forces," that sublime tension addressed in Radcliffe's essay which can arouse the imagination to a point of transcendence, here founded upon the hint of the supernatural and its potentially malignant otherness. This approach also is reminiscent of the literary theorizations of Edgar Allan Poe which practice similar examinations of the relationship between word and effect in

writing. Poetry, Poe claimed, should begin with the consideration of the effect—the "innumerable effects or impression of which the heart, the intellect or the soul is susceptible" ("Philosophy") and standing by his manifesto, Poe remained, in all of his works, focussed on the power of poetic language to elevate the imagination.

## Guy de Maupassant: "La Peur," "Le Horla"

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Terror is inherently linked to the symbolic power of much fantastic writing. Yet, in terms of its aesthetic value in the fantastic text, terror is often undervalued and overlooked. Due to the cognitive and therefore memorable nature of horror, the sublime qualities of terror and its relationship to hesitance are perhaps easily neglected. In responding to this with a demonstration of how the fantastic, in relating to its context, utilizes terror as its primary aesthetic focus, the *fin de siècle* writing of Guy de Maupassant provides a number of illuminating passages. The 1887 short story "La Peur" offers an interesting focus to begin with. Encapsulating the marginal space between terror and the sublime, this uncanny story offers a distinctive handling of the unrepresentable. In an important moment in the story, the haunted protagonist, becoming increasingly paranoiac of some "sensed invisible power," describes how

> a vague fear slowly took hold of me: fear of what? I had not the least idea. It was one of those evenings when the wind of passing spirits blows on your face and your soul shudders and knows not why, and your heart beats in a bewildered terror of some invisible thing, that terror whose passing I regret. (Maupassant, trans. Jameson 238)

This particular approach is similar in many respects to that which is found in what is generally considered de Maupassant's most accomplished fantastic tale "Le Horla" (which inspired, significantly, Lovecraft's own "The Call of Cthulhu"). In "Le Horla" we are offered a vision of sublime terror that is related to the Romantic notion of the invisible force of the wind. The protagonist, alone in his chamber and in a state of nervous excitement, becomes aware of this natural power as one of the many "unknowable forces, whose mysterious presence we have to endure" (Maupassant, trans. McMaster et al. 2). Later, in a fearful conversation with an enigmatic monk, he is enlightened to a sort of occult philosophy:

> Do we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Look here; there is the wind, which is the strongest force in nature. It knocks down men, and blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships on to the breakers; it kills,

it whistles, it sighs, it roars. But have you ever seen it, and can you see it? Yet it exists for all that. (Maupassant, trans. McMaster et al. 9)

This is almost a direct representation of what Lovecraft outlines in his account of the essentials of the weird tale, mentioned earlier. The "certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces is present," and the fixed laws or limits of nature have been suspended. Nature becomes much more than itself as a manifestation of a supernatural force.

The result in this tale is that the narrator's "confused and irresistible fear" is intensified. Heightened experiences such as the following proliferate:

I turned round suddenly, but I was alone. I saw nothing behind me except the straight, broad ride, empty and bordered by high trees, horribly empty; on the other side also it extended until it was lost in the distance, and looked just the same – terrible (Maupassant, trans. McMaster et al. 6).

According to Lovecraft, "this tense narrative ["Le Horla"] is perhaps without peer in its particular department" and de Maupassant's stories "are of the keenest interest and poignancy; suggesting with marvelous force the imminence of nameless terrors, and the relentless dogging of an ill-starred individual by hideous and menacing representatives of the outer blackness" ("Supernatural Horror"). Significantly, in relation to Lovecraft's comments, the word used by de Maupassant, "Horla," is a word play that has been equated with the French phrase *hors la* ("out there") and so we can divine that the centre of the work is based upon relating an excessive fear of that which is beyond or outside limits and unknown, in this case even unnamable. As such it is a story that is strongly focussed on terror of the unknown, a sublime terror.

Although this story is mentioned in Lovecraft's essay on "horror" in literature, it is the "tension" and hesitation of the tale that is regarded by Lovecraft as the source of its power; its suspense, essentially, its terror. In de Maupassant's account here of the experience of the Gothic sublime, we encounter the potential of terror in overwhelming the subject both physically and metaphysically through the evocation of the uncanny. According to David Morris, in his writings on the Gothic sublime,

the terror of the uncanny is released as we encounter the disguised and distorted but inalienable images of our own repressed desire . . . [it is derived] not from something external, alien or unknown but—on the contrary—from something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it. (307)

Similarly, in Harold Bloom's critical writings we find an account of the uncanny as Freud's own theory of the sublime (Bloom; qtd. in Sadner, *Fantastic Sublime* 54). Enforcing this connection is a later passage from the story in which the narrator suspects the physical evidence of the supernatural force that is haunting him, to be of his own making:

> It could surely only be I? In that case I was a somnambulist—was living, without knowing it, that double, mysterious life which makes us doubt whether there are not two beings in us—whether a strange and unknowable, and invisible being does not, during our moments of mental and physical torpor, animate the inert body, forcing it to a more willing obedience than it yields to ourselves. (Maupassant, trans. McMaster et al. 10)

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This experience of the uncanny is an integral part of the terror involved. The object of fear is related to the unknown and unknowable aspects of the self, those which according to Freud are deeply familiar, most repressed, and while strikingly strange and unsettling, intrinsically a part of our identity (*The Uncanny*). For de Maupassant, this idea of the uncanny offers an interesting focus for his study of the psychological and mental deterioration of the individual, a common enough interest for writers and thinkers of the period. With close connections to the concept of the *doppelgänger*, it poses an investigation into specific terrors to do with identity, self knowledge and marginality.

According to Peter Cogman, de Maupassant's primary literary focus was "the limits of human knowledge, the idea that our senses impose a limited and inadequate view of reality" ("Le Horla"). His questioning of ideas of the real and the numinous are linked to a Gothic vision of the sublime, in which terror can evoke some experience of the esoteric and perhaps even transcendental. In "Le Horla," the terror of the narrator's experiences is more powerful and fearful than when the supernatural object is horrifically revealed, as in the following passage:

> I spent a terrible evening yesterday. He does not show himself anymore, but I feel that He is near me, watching me . . . and more terrible to me when He hides himself thus than if He were to manifest his constant and invisible presence by supernatural phenomena. (Maupassant, trans. McMaster et al. 23)

His later association of this unidentifiable "He" with the diabolical, which is destined to replace humanity on the earth, emphasizes this dark sublimity. The narrator's imagination goes out of control, transgressing limits to the point of no return and it is effectively this unknown being which takes over his narrative and leads to his paranoid committal of arson

which destroys his home and the servants trapped inside. De Maupassant, through the build-up of the story generates an increasing suspense which mirrors the terrors of the protagonist in the mind of the reader and as such suggests that it is the power of terror and not horror that is truly worrying due to its close links to the mental deterioration of the subject in relation to the arousal of the hysterical state.

## Unrepresentable Terrors: H. Rider Haggard's *She*

A very different exploration of the terrors of fantastic writing is offered in H. Rider Haggard's *She*. Offering a counter-point of sorts to de Maupassant's unidentifiable "He," *She* offers an intriguing example of the preoccupations of *fin de siècle* fiction in relation to terror. Considered by many critics as an example of the colonial fantastic, it outlines the adventures of a Cambridge educated classics scholar in an unexplored area of East Africa, where a marvellous immortal *femme fatale* Empress rules a society of slaves, her "Empire of the imagination," "by terror" (Haggard 179). Significantly, the novel offers a very clear positioning of Todorov's definition of the fantastic, offering a world in which there is a tense co-dependence between the magical/occult and the mundane reality of the "real" world. The intrusion of the unreal across the margins of empirical reality in the form of the uncanny is supported and documented with historical and archaeological referencing which contradicts the cognitive strategies undertaken by the academic protagonist resulting in intense and lingering fear and desire to uncover the mysteries at hand.

Significantly, in addition to this uncanny terror, according to Dale J. Nelson, *She* includes a comprehensive catalogue of the aural, visual and tactile experiences that are conducive to Burke's outline of the sublime, noting particularly the character's encounters with the violence of nature, the "savagery" of man and extreme darkness (Nelson 114). One such example is the narrator, Holly's misadventure in the dark labyrinth of *She*'s caves; the obscurity and confusion, serving to intensify the suspense that leads up to the sublime unveiling of *She* in the twelfth chapter, half-way through the text. Nelson refers to the power of sublime terror in the example of the visual obscurity represented in *She*'s first appearance in the novel. Holly is aware of her presence on some level, just as in the case of the narrator of *Le Horla*, but cannot see her.

> Presently I clearly felt that somebody was looking at me from behind the curtains. I could not see the person, but I could distinctly feel his or her gaze, and, what is more, it produced a very odd effect upon my nerves. I was frightened, I do not know why. The place was a strange one, it is

true, and looked lonely, notwithstanding its rich hangings and the soft glow of the lamps . . . Minute grew into minute, and still there was no sign of life, nor did the curtain move; but I felt the gaze of the unknown being sinking through and through me, and filling me with a nameless terror, till the perspiration stood in beads upon my brow. (Haggard 145)

De Maupassant's unknown watcher is reinvoked in some sense here as the suspenseful feelings of "nameless terror" are aroused in the subject of both character and reader. Haggard continues:

At length the curtain began to move. Who could be behind it?—some naked savage queen, a languishing Oriental beauty, or a nineteenth-century young lady, drinking afternoon tea? I had not the slightest idea, and should not have been astonished at seeing any of the three. I was getting beyond astonishment. (145)

Interestingly, in this case, woman, in her ultimate form—intensely beautiful, wise and powerful, is feared as an unknowable other by the Victorian male protagonist. Sandra Gilbert comments on the effect of Haggard's portrayal of the terrible Queen as neither divine or demonic, angelic or monstrous. She is a marginal figure in that she exceeds categorization (124). *She* herself speaks of her own account and tells us: "Because I wait for him I love. My life has perchance been evil, I know not—for who can say what is evil and what good?—so I fear to die even if I could die" (153). Like other critics, Gilbert is focussed on the Empress's virginity and the purity of her love which opposes her monstrous passion and ruthless drive to gain the object of her desire. Due to this, "*She*," like a number of other female figures from fantastic literature, came to be cited in much psychoanalytic theory, notably those of Freud and Jung. Her symbolic power in relation to fear of otherness seems to lie behind this relatable to her own unnamability and marginality, being referred to throughout as "*She*" and is heightened by the introductory letter which frames the story, sent by Vincey to his son Leo before his suicide:

The unknown is generally taken to be terrible, not as the proverb would infer, from the inherent superstition of man, but because it so often *is* terrible. He who would tamper with the vast and secret forces that animate the world may well fall a victim to them. (Haggard 39)

The play between terror of the unknown and horror in the face of the grotesque is quite complex in the novel and possibly reaches a representative climactic moment at the point when Leo Vincey (Holly's charge) meets the ancient corpse of his *doppelgänger,* Kallikrates, his ancestor and the object of *She*'s desire.

> With a sudden motion she drew the shroud from the cold form, and let the lamplight play upon it. I looked, and then shrank back terrified; since, say what she might in explanation, the sight was an uncanny one—for her explanations were beyond the grasp of our finite minds, and when they were stripped from the mists of vague esoteric philosophy, and brought into conflict with the cold and horrifying fact, did not do much to break its force. (Haggard 237)

What we have in this passage is a demonstration of terror and the uncanny in what is unknowable and incomprehensible to the human finite mind. This is in stark contrast to "the cold and horrifying fact" (238) that stretched out on the stone slab is a corpse that is Leo's exact double. The fear experienced by Leo, observed by Holly, is outlined as follows:

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> I turned to see what effect was produced upon Leo by the sight of his dead self, and found it to be one of partial stupefaction. He stood for two or three minutes staring, and said nothing, and when at last he spoke it was only to ejaculate—"Cover it up, and take me away." (238)

Here we have a clear demonstration of horror: the stupefaction of the imagination by the transgression of the limits of identity, in the representation of an ultimate fear, death. When the horrific has been presented and the grotesque has taken full effect, order is restored. The subject asks for the thing to be covered up and to be taken back to his temporary home.

Both of the textual examples here, from de Maupassant and Haggard respectively, register significant examples of the importance of terror to fantastic writing, particularly at that generative and liminal period of the *fin de siècle*. As such, they function to extract an aesthetics of sublime terror from the margins of critical studies of this macabre literary mode. This paper has sought to examine the implications of terror in the *fin de siècle* fantastic and as such, has demonstrated that in spite of the dominant associations of fantastic literature with horror, terror as the marginal and marginalized fear of the unknown, with its uncanny, sublime and suspenseful qualities holds a definitive presence in *fin de siècle* fantastic texts. It is a mode of fear that is closely related to the fantastic as a literary genre on the very grounds of the concept of marginality; terror and the fantastic being both bound by hesitation and the transgression of limits. This play on limits that we find in the fantastic terrors of the *fin de siècle* offers "a discourse of the sublime," to reiterate Sadner, an envisioning of the impossible realities that frighteningly occupy the most macabre margins of our imaginations.

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# Bianca Looks from above the Book: Readings on the Margin of Bruno Schulz's Ex-Libris for Stanisław Weingarten

# ABSTRACT

The bookplate which Bruno Schulz designed in 1919 for his friend, Stanisław Weingarten, anticipates the motifs of his later literary work: a book, the Book, a collection of books reflecting the collector's preferences but dependent on the laws undermining the notions of authorship and ownership. Standing on the margin of the artistic and literary scene, Pierrot/Schulz acknowledges the relatedness of his and Weingarten's "private" vision with the recurrent, universal themes of world art and literature. The scene designed for the emblem of Weingarten's library demonstrates Schulz's awareness that the pleasure of discovering spaces of textual cross-fertilizations belongs to the realm of discoveries made by "standard" narratives of psychoanalysis. The scene also demonstrates Schulz's readiness to imaginatively play with that awareness.

The essay traces correspondences between the elements of the 1919 Pierrot ex-libris and the books from Weingarten's collection which, with time, included and gave privileged position to the works of Bruno Schulz. Among the authors referred to are Rainer Maria Rilke, Alfred Kubin, and Jules Laforgue (in the critical appreciation of Jan Szarota).

In "Spring" Bianca lifts her eyes from the book. There is a saddening measure of compulsiveness about her doing so every delightful time Joseph sees her. Looking from over the book, Bianca always "acknowledges and returns" Joseph's "ardent greeting," "replies" to his "deep bow." "Quick" and "penetrating," in its precision teasingly otherworldly, Bianca's look from above the book satisfies Joseph's desire to "ask something with [his] eyes." In the last section of "Spring" when he sits down by her bed to begin "the report," Joseph finds it irritating that Bianca should not stop reading, to which her later comment on Joseph's "ridiculous" sense of mission and her eyes narrowing down "in a paroxysm of delight" provide a mirroring, self-ironic reply. On that very night Bianca is seen "lifting her eyes from the book" to make "a quick, perfunctory, but astonishingly apt decision." Joseph watches her sign his papers, while she, complying with the rule of reciprocity, "watches [him] with slight irony as [he] countersign[s] them" (*Sanatorium* 71).

As Bianca, by simply raising her eyes, lets Joseph know "that she knows all [his] thoughts," she knows also that the question he asks himself, "What is she gazing at with attention, with such thoughtfulness?" means also "What book is she reading?" It is a ridiculous question, since Bianca, princess and daughter of a washerwoman, may be reading *any* book at that fleeting, privileged moment—a short uplifting look returned from where?—when Joseph imagines it "soaring" and "screaming like the phoenix, all its pages aflame" (10), a moment for which he will love it "ever after," although or because it becomes lost, subject to his quixotic, belated but refreshing, missions on the margins of spring nights. In other words, as readers of "Spring" have long observed to their satisfaction, Bianca's eroticism may seem bookish, but in reality it comes directly from the Book. When Joseph explains that the nature of spring will become "clear" and "legible" only to "an attentive reader of the Book," he refers the reader back to his own raising his eyes from the text of "The Book" he is reading and writing:

> any true reader—and this story is addressed to him—will understand me anyway when I look him straight in the eye and try to communicate my meaning. A short, sharp look or a light clasp of the hand will stir him into awareness, and he will blink in rapture at the brilliance of the Book. (1)

Bianca's villa is in an "extraterritorial area," the night on which Joseph enters it is "extramarginal," the text Bianca reads is extratextual. With every attentive reading of "Spring," following Bianca's attentive look answering Joseph's, we sign up for a new journey down into the subterranean,

timeless and boundless, vaults of spring, there to welcome with delight and greet with a deep bow familiar texts, "everything we have ever read, all the stories we have heard and those we have not heard before but have been dreaming since childhood." They are texts from the official, canonical history of literature pointing, in allusions, approximations, cross-references, towards their "nameless forerunners . . . dark texts written for the drama of evening clouds," and, further still, towards "unwritten books, books— eternal pretenders" (43–44). Among the literary "whisperings" and "persuasions" in section XVI of "Spring" one recognizes, interwoven with the text of Goethe's "Der Erlkönig," the lines of Rilke's "A Man Reading":

> I've read long now. Since this afternoon,
> with its rain rushing, lay against the windows.
> I'd become oblivious to the wind outside:
> my book was hard.
> I gazed into its lines as into faces
> whose looks grow dark from deep reflection,
> and around my reading the hours built up.
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> And when now I lift my eyes from the book
> nothing will seem alien, everything great.
> There outside exists, what here inside I live,
> And here and there the whole of things is boundless
> save that I interweave still more with it
> when my gaze shapes itself to objects
> and to the grave simplicity of masses,—
> then the earth grows out beyond itself.
> It seems to encompass the entire sky:
> the first star is like the last house. (209)

In "Spring," "distant worlds come within reach" (51), and in "Autumn": "Man's house becomes like the stable of Bethlehem . . ." (*Letters* 218).

Were one to take the meandering "process" of reading spring dusk "literally" and through "unclear associations" follow words to their etymological roots, the kinship of Bianca (*księżniczka*) and *książka* (the book she is reading) should not go unobserved. Or perhaps, as Joseph also proposes, one should venture to penetrate the dark mysteries of spring with the help of "a textbook of psychology," a potential, potent fragment of the Book revealed in Rudolph's stamp album, "a compendium of knowledge about everything human" corresponding to that single look of Bianca's which lets the reader know that she "knows everything that there is to know" (*Sanatorium* 39). Such imaginative, interpretative spaces evoke an uncanny feeling, a mixture of excitement and sadness, of having been visited before, not un-

like that experienced by Joseph on approaching "the other side" of Bianca's villa at the end of the story. In the reader's memory this is already a return to "the other side" from an earlier passage in which Joseph's descending, bifurcating road of literary associations ends with "the Mothers" (*Sanatorium* 43). Will Bianca raise her eyes then from over Kubin's *Die andere Seite* (Georg Müller's 1909 edition), where on arriving at some remote Asian location of Patera's Dream Realm the traveler sees the house he could swear he has seen before and on the wall of the hotel room meets the familiar gaze of Maximilian, the emperor of Mexico? Does not Bianca know the text of Rilke's "Erlebnis" (the 1919 issue of *Insel-Almanach*), where a visitor taking a stroll in the Duino gardens with a book in his hand leans against a tree and experiences "die andere seite der Natur," the formulation of the phrase itself giving him, as it sometimes happens in dreams, a sense of saddened pleasure since it aptly expresses the clarity of envisioning and understanding what is always being returned to?

Schulz's reader does not forget the nightly wanderings in apparently "familiar" districts of "Cinnamon Shops." There, too, Joseph penetrates dark interiors, magnificently furnished and full of mirrors, to approach finally the school headmaster's private apartment and imagine seeing his daughter, Bianca's earlier, younger version: "She might lift her eyes ['from the book'; perhaps the English translator got impatient with it] to mine—black, Sybilline, quiet eyes, the gaze of which none could hold" (*The Street* 88). The headmaster's daughter returns Joseph's gaze and the text shapes itself into a dreamy vision reminiscent of the landscapes in "A Man Reading"—the inner and the outer coalescing and expanding into "an immense dome," an all-encompassing "heavenly geography."

A sign of desire and inquiry, of momentary recognitions of inter-relations, connections, symmetries, self-mirrorings, of the pleasure and melancholy these communicate, of compulsive re-visits, of discoveries in the dynamics of perspective repeatedly narrowing down and expanding—a look from over a book links Schulz's prose to his graphic work. One of the signs of which Schulz wrote that they inspiringly imprison the artist's imagination, it is present in both and allows each to be read and viewed in terms of their mutual correspondences. The graphic form of ex-libris, by its definition as it were, embodies such familial bonds. Standing in a marginal position of servitude to the book and to its owner, it demonstrates also a privileged, elevating function of a mark which points symbolically to a kind of intimacy between the two, and to the possibility of their share in a system of relationships within a larger context—building up a collection of books. Ideally, such a collection rejects completion. Ideally, the gaze of the artist designing the graphic emblem of the collection meets the gaze of its owner from one of the books, the one that she/he possesses, the one that she/he is

not in possession of, the one that has not yet been written. An ex-libris condenses into a miniature composition the idea of dissemination and speaks of the desire to return to some mythical, primal unity. It is a visual, fixed and traveling, seal of companionship, ownership and mission, welcoming fresh additions to the library in the sense that Walter Benjamin gave it:

> I am not exaggerating when I say that to a true collector, the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth. This is the childlike element which in a collector mingles with the element of old age. For children can accomplish the renewal of existence in a hundred unfailing ways. . . . To renew the old world—that is the collector's deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things. (*Illuminations* 211)

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Bruno Schulz designed two bookplates for Stanisław Weingarten, his friend, a businessman, an art and book collector. They were "commissioned" by Weingarten insofar as the pictorial components and the stylistic features they shared represented Schulz's own intimate, artistic "mission" which Weingarten understood, identified with, and the indications and confirmations of which both discovered in the books they chose to read. The bookplates date from approximately the same time. My interest is in the Pierrot ex-libris from 1919 (the date is given in the left bottom part of the design next to the front legs of the Pegasus). A version of the bookplate appeared in Stanisław Weingarten's catalogue of books illustrated by Bruno Schulz. In the ex-libris Pierrot stands on the margin of the theatrical stage in full sight of the ensuing scene:



(from a private collection)

The composition of Weingarten's ex-libris demonstrates features of Schulz's idiosyncratic style, while relying heavily on the symbolic reputation of its canonized, if not clichéd, components. The classicist contours of its top and bottom parts seem to deliberately give the design the appearance of some antique piece of furniture (possibly expressing the tastes of the same epoch as Patera's collection). Set in contrast, though equally familiar, are indications of movement: the slightly bent knees of Pierrot in his "hesitant" readiness to step forward or step back, the procession of the dwarfed human figures in the background, the fleeting poise and the black cloud-like hair of the woman, who, once she disappears behind the curtain on the right side (from the spectator's perspective), will perhaps not surprise Pierrot by making her appearance from behind the curtain on the left side to dance across or be swept away from the stage back again. These gestures and movements communicate a sense of repetitiveness which is visually strengthened by the recurrence of striped patterns on Pierrot's costume and of circular patterns on the folds of the curtain, in the pelvic cavities of the skeleton and the coils of the serpent. Repetitiveness, or rather the inexhaustibility of a single motif "assigned" to the artist is, of course, a trademark of Schulz's work, literary and graphic. It comes from and leads back to unending discoveries (spanning old age and childhood) in correspondences between one's own mythology and some general mythology, the realization that no book one ever reads and no work of art one ever sees is read or seen "accidentally," as they all somehow "belong to" the collection, both private and universal. Unsurprisingly, among Weingarten's books with Schulz's mark of ownership on them stands Thomas Mann's "Tonio Kröger": this young man has just come back from Denmark to revisit his home, which is now a public library and, there, on being asked whether he needs a catalogue to the book collection, answers from over one of the books that he knows his way around very well. According to Schulz's reading of his own work for Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, the most rewarding adventure in the discovery of kinship with Mann's work, perhaps prompting the author of *Heimkehr* to send his manuscript to Zurich, was Schulz's reading of *Joseph and His Brothers*, where "Mann shows that beneath all human events, when the chaff of time and individual variation is blown away, certain primeval patterns, 'stories' are found, by which these events re-form in great repeating pulses" (*Letters* 114). Had Schulz and Weingarten had a chance to read of Adrian Leverkühn's father's "devouring drop," an experimental though well-practiced manipulation in the physics of absorption not irrelevant to the psychology of authorship and ownership, they would have recognized the text as theirs. The last entry in Weingarten's catalogue came with the year 1939.

References to repetitiveness in Schulz's work are numerous and they appear in the most powerful and moving fragments of his prose. It is still

with great pleasure that the reader follows the old pensioner's look over the linear divisions of the small town architecture towards the bright gap of the school square, where in the "hiatus of time opened onto a yellow and wilting eternity, beech logs have been sawed since Noah's day, with the same patriarchal and eternal movements, the same strokes and the same bent backs" (*Sanatorium* 162); or, the little dog's (Nemrod's) instinctive recognition that whatever he was experiencing, in spite of its appearance of novelty, was "something which had existed before—many times before—an infinite number of times before" (*The Street* 66); or, the memory of father, loaded with books, on his way to the shop on the street level of the building:

> How many other fathers have grown forever into the facades of houses at five o'clock in the morning, while on the last step of the staircase? How many fathers have thus become the concierges of their own gate-ways, flatly sculpted into the embrasure with the hand on the door handle and a face dissolved into parallel and blissful furrows, over which the fingers of their sons would wander, later, reminiscing about their parent, now incorporated forever into the universal smile of the house front? (*The Street* 98)

In such passages, the phoenix-like hearts of Schulz's poetic prose, the tropes of repetition evoke a sense of momentary returns to homely spaces.

Schulz sees catastrophes and falls, looming inevitably, but, like in Mann's "Prologue: A Descent Into Hell," they are provisional, repeatedly acted out rather than definitively immobilized. There are "downcast eyes" and there is a self-ironic "smile." A crowding group of naked men and women might have come onto the back stage of Weingarten's ex-libris out of numerous versions of human final catastrophes celebrated also, among those in the art albums from his collection, by the right panel of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, especially the fragment where postures of damnation are related to depictions of musical instruments (the ex-libris testifies to the presence of many books on music in Weingarten's library). There is a round, fish-like mouth sucking in the hands of the kneeling female figure. In front of that figure is a man in a fetal position, turned towards the right side of the stage (from the spectator's position again), like everyone else in the procession, including the woman whose mirrored, enlarged counterpart appears center-stage, the heads of both tilted backwards. This is Pierrot's/Weingarten's/Schulz's look from over a catalogue of texts on the dance of life and death, the marriage of the tomb and the womb, the temptation to see in a scene of degradation and damnation a scene of Bacchanalia.

The embryonic man seems to have arrived at the end of the journey, to be back home again. The perils of the dark background with all its deathly whisperings are left behind, all the fish-like rounded mouths of the demons of the night (on a closer look there may be more than one, or, is it a demon branching out into a thousand-mouthed colony of polyps?) have sunk into the marine darkness and at the cliff-like edge there is a gap of light. Somewhat distant from the rest of the group, the curling man will not be pushed over the edge, nor will he take a voluntary leap down into the abyss. It is not man's final catastrophe. He will rise instead, straighten up and take his place back again on the left side of the stage. What will he see when he lifts his eyes from over the edge of the cliff? Endless variations of the same scene. It is the vision which anticipates the arrival of the stellar "Cyclist" in "The Comet," where under a "pitchblack night" dwarfed figures, like in Bosch's painting, form "living chains," as well as the vision which opens up before the old pensioner on his way back to his childhood:

> Like in Rembrandt's etchings one could see on such days under that streak of brightness distant microscopically focused regions, which, never seen before, were now rising from above the horizon below that bright crevice of the sky, flooded with the bright-pale and panicked light, emerging [the Polish word "wynurzone" brings a closer association with the imagery of marine depth and of the depth of a dream which, despite its novelty, is "like in Rembrandt's etchings"—a multiple-copied, returning dream] from another epoch and another time, like the promised land revealed, but for a brief moment, to the longing peoples. (*Proza* 378, translation mine)

This is clearly Schulz's messianic vision appearing earlier in "The Age of Genius" and, earlier still, in the version of Weingarten's ex-libris from the catalogue of his books: Pierrot/Schulz stands on a book and looks from behind the stage column at some "discolored and watery" horizons with sketchily delineated processions of wanderers coming down and ascending the hills. The beginning is the end is the beginning. Messianic perspectives open up with any new born child and any new-born child speaks of the coming of the Messiah, just as any book, including Schulz's at its phoenix-like moments, speaks of the presence of the Book.

There is, however, something about the simplicity and the linearity in Schulz's depictions of the fetus, the skeleton, the arm, the procession of bent human figures, which brings distant recollections of charts once hung on the walls of school classrooms, presenting, with an almost pornographic indiscretion, parts of human anatomy, or sequenced stages in evolutionary change. Despite its allusiveness, its dependence on "cultural"

rather than "natural" orders, the knowledge which Schulz's ex-libris seems to communicate would not make it entirely out of place in biology book-cases. The school may owe its prestige to teachers of literature, of art, of religion (including the cabbalists), but the Headmaster is, perhaps, a biology teacher. When years later, in 1936, Witold Gombrowicz "attacked" him with the opinion of "the doctor's wife from Wilcza Street," Schulz rejected its directness but could not ignore it; in a kind of Tonio Kröger saddened gesture, he simply extended the procession on the evolutionary chart with the figure of an "avant-garde," "truly vital" artist as a representative of "belligerent biology," "conquering biology" (*Letters* 120). What troubles the viewers of Schulz's ex-libris for Weingarten today, what after almost a hundred years they still find truly provocative, is the "biological" vitality of the hand tightly clenched around the body of the woman and its relationship to Pierrot's open hand promising a "light clasp" of understanding.

Whether miniaturized, "repressed" into the back stage, or telescopically enlarged, moved to the foreground, the woman in Weingarten's ex-libris is dancing rather than being tormented; whether supported by the twisted bodies of idolaters or in the grip of the huge arm, she is here disquietingly comfortable. The line of the central, gracefully pliable body fits the contour of the rigid, clawed hand emerging from the dark. The dance-like motion belongs to some well-rehearsed program; the woman with a girlish, sweet and innocent countenance will act out her role with an artful and disciplined precision as many times as the arm moves across the length of the stage. Behind Pierrot in his conventional role of voyeuristic aloofness—and behind the Harlequin looking over the shoulder of Stanisław Weingarten reading a book in an illustration to his library catalogue—is Bruno Schulz. Moving lightly with the precision of a tool in the grip of the fiendish, animalistic hand, the woman from Weingarten's ex-libris answers Pierrot's gaze while it answers Schulz's gaze at his own hand drawing, obediently and provocatively, in the iron grip of the hand which will make him return, again and again, in many variations, to the few key images ascribed to him in his early childhood. The gaze does put the woman in the position of biological servitude. Does Pierrot, the belated representative of "belligerent biology," intend to step forward and liberate the woman? The catalogue of Weingarten's library will one day include—with an entry in its owner's disciplined handwriting on a pencil-lined page of the "S" section—Schulz's "Spring," a story of the calligraphic and stellar Bianca:

> Every day at the same time, accompanied by her governess, Bianca could be seen walking in the park. What can I say about Bianca, how can I describe her? I only know that she is marvelously true to herself, that she fulfils her program completely. My heart tight with pleasure, I notice

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again and again how with every step, light as a dancer, she enters into her being and how with each movement she unconsciously hits the target. Her walk is ordinary, without excessive grace, but its simplicity is touching, and my heart fills with gladness that Bianca can be herself so simply, without any strain of artifice. (*Sanatorium* 39)

Bianca is not Adela's opposite. The house maid may actually be her mother. Leaning over Adela's arm, Joseph becomes awakened to the power of her eroticism and to the powers of his Book. But in the question which he asks Adela: "Where did you find the book?" the Book associated with Adela's body is already reduced to a book, *any* book with a small letter but still in the service of the Book, just as Adela's body is now *any* female body in the service of some superior "biological" Law. It is his gaze, which she catches so quickly and so understandingly (knows instinctively?), that Adela, anticipating Joseph's bending over Bianca's bed, ridicules. How many boys, future fathers, have experienced such blatant rebuffs to their desire to mystify their first, and subsequent, sexual arousals? "You silly boy. . . . It has been lying here all the time; we tear a few pages from it every day" (*Sanatorium* 5).

Among the many texts which the woman from Weingarten's ex-libris may be raising her eyes from to meet Pierrot's gaze are fragments of Jan Szarota's *Współczesna Poezya Francuska: 1880–1914* [*Contemporary French Poetry: 1880–1914*] (Lwów, 1917). Stylistically revealing little affinity with Joseph's "fragments of rainbow," they seem to "fit," to "belong" nevertheless. In the section devoted to the discussion of Jules Laforgue's work, Szarota translates passages from *Moralités légendaires* in which the poet views himself as a Messiah and "nature's Benjamin," understanding everything, ready to "impregnate" everything. Referring to Schopenhauer and Hartmann as possible sources, Szarota traces the evolution of Laforgue's Pierrot. He is a "pessimist" "drunk with Nothingness" and a dandy putting on pontifical robes to assist in an imaginary wedding night by the marital bed, a mock-priest in a paper-made chasuble celebrating a mass on an improvised altar. And when the woman he flirts with leans towards him "willingly," he whispers to her "Let us not be so insistent":

He only entertains himself and takes his leave at the right time, as he is all too familiar with the back stage affairs of this sentimental comedy, and with the hand of the great Stage Manager, although he hides himself so well behind. He knows that the woman, the traveling salesman [?] of the Unconscious, makes her enticing gestures to draw the man into her laboratory to ensure the continuity of the human species. (*Współczesna* 193, translation mine)

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Pretending to be lured into the "biological" trap, Pierrot walks away bowing gently. But then he also begins to openly resist the instinctual mechanisms behind the woman's facial expressions and poses, to rebel against her being a slave to "the Unconscious" and a tool of "Mammy Nature." Using Pierrot's costume, Laforgue completes his [and the woman's] evolutionary path exclaiming to her: "We are brothers!" (201). "Downcast eyes and a smile" might have been Schulz's comment on the crudity of the critical apparatus and the critic's failure to share Pierrot's ironic, distancing smile. Apart from all the differences in aesthetic sensitivity, there is, of course, a significant time gap between Szarota's text, first written in 1912, and Schulz's reading of the "unconscious" in Maria Kuncewicz's *Cudzoziemka* [*The Foreigner*] from 1936. The sublimation of the tools of the psychoanalytical method and perhaps skepticism about its adequacy for literary analysis accompanied the changes in the position of the woman and the way she was being looked at. While it gains so much in the depth of critical insight, Schulz's celebration of Róża's independence and vitality does not, however, entirely oppose Szarota's perspective; while it gestures towards some mysterious (Kafkaesque) "supreme tribunal," it depends much more on the "psychological laboratory" than on "eschatological theater" (*Letters* 92). Róża is still "a perfect instrument of the beauty of life," a self-contained object of desire, a phoenix-like creature, a book on its flight to the Book. She does not open her arms, but it takes her single smile to make all arms open to her. Róża's secret, Schulz writes, "lies precisely in her self-sufficiency and independence from the environment." She needs no one; like Bianca, "she is beginning and end and absolute center." All she needs to exist, then, is the artist's gaze from the margin, imagining her to be a perfect reader of his work as a messianic vision of "substantiality and fullness of being" (92–93), annihilating all disparities between nature and culture, a woman and a man, the inner and the outer. But, if Róża is "beautiful" because she is "everything," she can also be "beautiful" because she is "Nothing." It is a dangerous vision, as Pierrot from Weingarten's ex-libris understands. In the catalogue of books it is a distance of only a few lines from the aesthetically balanced *Salome* by Oscar Wilde to the pornographically simplistic *Geschlecht und Character* by Otto Weininger, the woman dancing and the woman "under the sway of the phallus."

The hand upholding/moving the woman's leg in Weingarten's ex-libris (much more sinewy and biological, much less symbolic than the diabolical hand clutching the woman in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*) is the same hand that helps a male figure raise a gigantic phallus, for the woman to rest comfortably on, in Schulz's ex-libris eroticis for Maksymilian Goldstein from 1920. On the opposite side, a grinning skeleton in a kind

of pontifical robe is looking from above the book. In Kubin's *Die andere Seite*, undoubtedly an inspiring book for Schulz also because it testified to the common, "dark" sources of graphic and literary expression, the final apocalyptic vision includes a scene in which the American's body cannot contain the vitality of the gigantic phallus. It begins to live its own independent life, assumes the shape of a colossal snake and then shrivels and disappears into one of the subterranean corridors of the Dream Realm. Following it, the narrator's gaze penetrates the earth and catches sight of a thousand-armed polyp reaching underneath all the houses. A few pages later, the narrator sees Patera's body, curled up, strikingly small and delicate, its face turned downward to the ground.

In Schulz's 1919 ex-libris, the arm holding a woman is a phallic hand and it acknowledges Schulz's debt to and share in a long (male) literary and graphic tradition in which the space of textual or visual cross-fertilizations is also the space of incestuous relationships. The motion of the woman's body, the backwards tilt of her head, draw a circular image. The woman who gives birth opens the path to death. Performing her assigned role, she offers a seductive embrace which is lustful, polyp-like and maternal because the embrace answers the look of Pierrot who imagines himself to be a lover, a child, a sucked-in body. Schulz's Pierrot, like his depictions of catastrophes, celebrates rather than resists or represses the dependence of the artistic vision on "dark foundations." In a sense, the woman's open arms welcome his sincerity. Pierrot, a prompter on the margin of the stage, raises his hand to his mouth to whisper the lines of the incestuous text of veneration onto the stage; well-acquainted with the play, the viewers can imaginatively draw lines of correspondences between this secretive hand, the woman's body rounding along the phallic arm, the protruding elbows and bony testicles of the skeletal death (the least aesthetic prop on the theatrical stage), and the open, unsecretive mouth of the serpent, hissing and coiling (decoratively but also pornographically). The reader of Schulz's literary texts remembers now Joseph, who years later, in "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass" (having established his position in the world of letters), orders a pornographic book from a bookstore next to his father's store, which is also his home. Instead, he gets a gigantic folding telescope, "with great refractive power and many other virtues" (*Sanatorium* 123). Father looks from over his spectacles, irritated but understanding. Joseph puts his head into the chamber of the apparatus and in the telescopic field of vision recognizes the maid walking along one of the dark corridors of the Sanatorium carrying a tray. She seems to return Joseph's look and she smiles. But what is it she is carrying on the tray? Joseph does not risk taking a closer look. In one of the following scenes, however, he sees in the dark corridor a familiar figure of a woman:

It is not a nurse. I know who it is. "Mother!" I exclaim, in a voice trembling with excitement, and my mother turns her face to me and looks at me for a moment with a pleading smile. Where am I? What is happening here? What maze ["matnia" in Polish; no wonder the English translator gets lost so often] have I become entangled in? (133)

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To learn from his father is the purpose of his visit to the Sanatorium, and when he first enters its aquarium-like, "inky deep" reality, Joseph looks inquiringly at Jacob sleeping, his face "somewhere on a distant shore," and then he falls asleep himself, the son and the father sharing the same "eternal" dream. Some "watery" clues to their experience may be looked for again in the cosmic, provincial and universal, repeated catastrophe in "The Comet." In a scene paralleling that from "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass," when the procession of dwarfed figures retreats, father seeks refuge at home, puts his head into the chimney shaft, makes himself dreamily comfortable, narrows his eyes in bliss, adjusts the screw of the micrometer, and lets the narrowed field of vision extend into stellar vistas. Jacob watches the "moon's brother" on its way back to "mother Earth." It then turns into a brain, "blissfully smiling in its sleep," like father himself. Letters of captions as in a cross-cut preparation become discernible. In the brain father recognizes the contours of the fetus bathing "in the light waters of amnion" (*The Street* 158). Is he coming back again to the edge of the cliff from the 1919 Pierrot ex-libris? Schulz's illustration of the "Z" letter in Weingarten's book catalogue shows a bespectacled, fatherly figure in a cubistic library, leaning against piles of books and placing his feet on them. The familiar figure is looking through the magnifying glass at some tiny, darkened object in his hands while from above the letter "Z" the elongated, phallic shape of the telescope penetrates an oval shaped space. What a maze of corridors with books and works of art, exchanging looks, whispering to themselves, dreaming their dream of the promised text they all come from and lead back to. The more secretive the gesture of Pierrot's hand, the more open his invitation to the readers. How many of them have already been tempted to raise their eyes from any of Schulz's literary and graphic works exclaiming: "I know." There is little doubt that the serpent's hiss is meant to be a sobering hiss. The serpent is a dragon is an umbilical cord is a snake with "a stuck-out tongue" (*Letters* 113). With its body winding into many coils, surrounding the name of the owner and supporting the winged horse of its designer, it conventionally points to still new books in a growing collection—new entanglements, new garlands. Father may be right: the Book is a myth and there are only books. After all, the ex-libris holds no mystery other than the desire to never give up seeing

mystery in what is always a simple story, as simple as Bianca's, or as a melody which death plays on its primitive fiddle. The viewers may step back now with the words of Laforgue's Pierrot from "Encore un livre": "J'ai fait mon temps, je déguerpis / Vers l'inclusive Sinécure!" (*Poésies* 211). Saying this, they are already back in.

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# The Shortest Way to Modernity
# Is via the Margins:
# J.H. Prynne's Later Poetry

# Abstract

In the essay an attempt is made to investigate the processes of construction and reconstruction of meaning in the later books of the Cambridge poet J.H. Prynne. It has been argued that his poetry disturbs the act of meaning-making in a ceaseless experimental reconnection of words taken from multifarious discourses, ranging from economics to theology. Yet, what appears striking in this poetry is the fact that these lyrics take their force from figurative meaning with which the words are endowed in the process of a poem's unfolding. Prynne appears to compose his lyrics by juxtaposing words that in themselves (or sometimes in small clusters) do yield a meaning but together exude an aura of unintelligibility. We may see this process as aiming at the destruction of what might be posited as the centre of signification of the modern language by constantly dispersing the meaning to the fringes of understanding. The poems force the reader to look to the margins of their meaning in the sense that the signification of the entire lyric is an unstable composite of figurative meanings of this lyric's individual words and phrases. To approach this poetry a need arises to read along the lines of what is here termed "fleeting assertion"; it is not that Prynne's poems debar centre in favour of, for instance, Derridean freeplay but rather that they seek to ever attempt to erect a centre through the influx from the margins of signification. Therefore they call for strong interpretive assertions without which they veer close to an absurdity of incomprehension; however, those assertions must always be geared to accepting disparate significatory influxes. Indeed, interpretation becomes a desperate chase after "seeing anew" with language but, at the same time, a chase that must *a priori* come to terms with the fact that this new vision will forever remain in the making.

The path literary modernism seems to have traversed since the beginning of the twentieth century until the present moment may be described as a journey from the centre (aesthetic, cultural, metaphysical) to the margins. However it is defined, the modernist mode has by now become a spectral presence, hovering over the outermost ridges of writing practice. To some extent this fate lay in the very notion as promoted by the High Modernist writers of the Anglo-Irish tradition, with their emphasis on the artist's separation from the tarnished popular culture. Of course, here a distinction between two modernities must be stressed; on the one hand, modernism is "a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism"; on the other, it is "an aesthetic concept" that percolated down to the histories of literature (Calinescu 41). The latter may then be characterized by its immersion in "the structural and philosophical presuppositions of myth and depth psychology" (Holquist 135). Elitism of the Eliot/Pound strain of modernist letters is countered by the American climate, which as early as in 1922 was voiced by Matthew Josephson, who observed that "the true innovation of American modernism lay precisely in its fusion of experimentalism and popular culture" (Kalaidjian 4). This inner plurality of stances towards modernism notwithstanding, the characteristic features of modernist art[1] no longer define the core of contemporary writing.

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Yet modernist poetics, especially the early experimental and playful kind, survives until the present, even to the extent that, and here Marjorie Perloff must be credited with the clearest enunciation of that fact, American poets such as Susan Howe, Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian and Steve McCaffery are at times referred to as "the second wave of modernism" (Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism* 5). Perloff mentions in passing that the second wave of modernist poets is not limited to the US but embraces all nations that participated in the creation of what Hugh Kenner, after Bradbury and McFaralane, convincingly termed "international modernism"; still, the fact remains that the popularity of modernism in its avantgarde form has fused with a plethora of other aesthetic formations. What retains the scent of novelty and potentiality for the current writing is the irrepressible experimentalism that comes from the indomitable men of letters of the early twentieth century. In the present essay the focus is placed on the many-aspect notion of marginality in the work of J.H. Prynne, who

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[1]   Those are lucidly laid out by Michael Whitworth in his introduction to modernism (10–16).

has willingly chosen an ephemeral and furtive presence among the contemporary poets.

Critics, who chant his inexplicability as insistently as their counterparts did the weirdness of, for example, Pound's *Cantos*, tend to concur with the view that Prynne is a late-modernist poet (Corcoran 174; Hampson and Montgomery 82; Mellors 19; Reeve and Kerridge 1). Hampson and Montgomery pertinently note that Prynne's poetics "has its basis in classical modernist techniques such as multiplicity of discourses and the absence of a consistent speaking subject" and add that his recent work "frequently uses multiple vocabularies to monitor the ethical impasses that confront the individual enmeshed in the signifying systems of late capitalism" (83). Corcoran ends his short evaluation of Prynne's work of the 1968–1980s period by expressing some reservations about the progressing ambiguity with which this poetry is rife. However, since the modernist principles which Prynne employs deliberately draw from the experimental art of Pound and Charles Olson (Corcoran 82), it is no wonder he veers towards the outermost fringes of linguistic productivity, juggling various idioms and deploying multifarious references to past literatures (not only English and American but also, notably, Chinese).

Prynne's later work shares with early modernism a pleasure in constantly pressing language beyond the limits of meaning so that it begins to yield a quality that shuns typical elucidatory procedures centred on the coherent signifying utterances. This drive towards opening language to unexplored regions of its potential forces the poems to seek a path leading beyond the acknowledged scope of meaning to the margins of iterability. The volumes after *Kitchen Poems* orient themselves decidedly onto the frontiers of expression in a deliberate leap in the direction of perpetual (for Eliot, fervent supporter of the centre in his later work, a favourite word) breaking apart and reconstruction. Critically, the poems easily eschew whatever theoretical assumption the interpreter should bring into play inasmuch as each of their metaphorically-metonymic phrasings is an "occasion for learning [a] new meaning" (Davidson, *Inquiries* 251). Therefore, to approach Prynne's later work is to decidedly think oneself into a position of what I would term "fleeting assertion." This idea can be traced back to Donald Davidson's conception of passing theory, which "is derived by wit, luck, and wisdom from a private vocabulary and grammar, knowledge of the ways people get their point across, and rules of thumb for figuring out what deviations from the dictionary are most likely" (Davidson, *Truth* 107). Thus passing theory is predicated on the contingent use of interpretive methods and "is geared to the occasion" of a particular interpretation of the meaning of an utterance or, for that matter, text. There is no prior theory that could explicate any utterance unless it is applied recursively (*Truth* 101).

It is this claim that makes Davidson a worthy literary theoretician rather than his slightly dubious postulate of intended meaning, which has been taken as his major insight in the sphere of literary theory (Wheeler 189–90). Passing theory may, as it seems, be argued to be a crucial input in the practice of criticism in that it stresses the fact that every utterance has a decipherable meaning which must overlap with the interpreter's in order for this meaning to be apprehended. Granted that we perceive the world, as Davidson asseverates, not through language but through having a language (*Truth* 141), that is, by means of having a faculty of language similar to the faculty of sight or taste and not through eyes or taste-buds, it becomes clear that the interpreter must either share the general perception of the world or learn to literally "see" with the speaker's language. Under such circumstances no preconception can last and no postulate can shirk change; as a result the reading process turns into a series of interpretative twists and leaps: what has been called fleeting assertions. Such a notion of interpretation does not relinquish the idea of centre but, importantly, envisions it as a contingent derivative of a conversational situation where a text is taken as the partner in conversation with the interpreter, following a cue given by Bartczak (10); thus the centre becomes a result of the play on the margins. It is not the case that we cannot understand a text but rather that we decline to embrace its point of view.

This theoretical introduction is needed to pave the way back to Prynne, since his poetry is nothing if not an invitation to "see" with the poems' idiom, barring final assertions. To step out of the simple declarative construction of language which has proven notoriously difficult to escape, the poems give up traditional punctuation and employ a congeries of phrases ostensibly arranged at random. In his last book of poems in the twentieth century, *Pearls That Were*, Prynne juxtaposes various jargons so as to extract their rhetorical potential. In "Ever much missed," the nondescript speaker, who more likely than not appears to be a mixture of various voices eavesdropped on, explains the constructional feature of this poetics:

> . . . freedom to make
>   more graces to shade
> its wildish, loose arraignment
>   under loan to decide.

Who it is precisely that is free to make more graces and whose wildish arraignment the poem mentions remain unclear and perhaps not to be explicated. Further, there are two verbs referring to arraignment, which is either to be shaded or, transitively, is to decide; also the loan cannot

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readily be accounted for. Despite this bewilderment, the stanza courts a feasible reading by attracting attention to the peculiar use of the legal word; "arraign" through Old French comes from Latin "reason, account" ("Arraign"). The poem thus reveals its rhetorical texture which seeks to make its subject matter the very fact of the poem's existence. "Loose arraignment" explains the poem itself. Phrases are joined together to create a contingent account of the act of creation of language which is to be shaded—why it is to be so we thus far do not know. Still, the phrase appears to lay bare the structural machine underpinning the lyrics in the volume inasmuch as they are loosely arraigned, randomly called upon to appear before the high court of reason.

What this loose arraignment leads to are "Derisive permutated fictions" of the last stanza. Of all lines in Prynne's oeuvre there are few that match this one in the power of evocation. The line opens the path to the rhetoric plenitude of Prynne's poetry in that each following poem, each succeeding line, is an attempt at a fiction, a supreme fiction, one could add, in line with the absurdly powerful "Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan" of "Bantams in Pine-Woods." Like language in Davidson's view forever capable of new uses thanks to the existence of metaphor that joins known words into unheard-of phrases, these lyrics try to name what has not yet been named.[2] Hence their derisive quality; there is no final explication of those permutated fictions, since "each one / discount[s] as neatly"; instead they require an approach that would fully appreciate their changeability.

However, it is not a Derridean freeplay that the poem boasts, but rather a Davidsonian constant recreation and redeployment of passing centres of communicative situations as the poems display a "floating / levity of design." Whilst "floating" might indicate that the poems assume freeplay as their defining feature, "levity of design" stresses the fact that they keep striving after a form, if not of mythical order, then surely of a frivolous linguistic insight. The seriousness vested in this design of "permutated fictions" stems from the biblical connotation of "levity" to The Leviticus, the book of laws, but at the same time it is mitigated by a humorous lack of respect that lies at the core of the modern meaning of the word. The "design" must be as equivocal as the "levity" itself that conjoins two overtly irreconcilable meanings of frivolity and grave respectfulness. Whilst the poems sustain a rise (indeed, a *levit*ation) in unbearable lightness of signification and phrase-spinning, they remain intransigent about the need

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[2]  Davidson, in congruence with Richard Rorty, argues that "learning to interpret a word that expresses a concept we do not have is a far deeper and more interesting phenomenon than explaining the ability to use a word new to us for an old concept" (*Truth* 100).

for a particular structure, albeit one "redressed in motion" ("Sent out to tender" from *Pearls That Were*).

This tension between seriousness and levity may be generalized into a grander (if still passing) theory of Prynne's poetry. If by gravity we understand the need for assertion and by frivolity the distance kept from even the slightest possibility of making a declarative point, then "levity of design" is what we are left with. On the one hand, a search for an increased expressive power; on the other, an accepted knowledge that only through experiment can this power be achieved, thus it must remain forever on the margins that language may be permutated into a newer expression. This position is restated in the final two stanzas of "Damp to level."

> Up in sparkling glee, over wide salt sea
>   oh madam don't be coy
> for all your glory, fear of another day
>   and another story.
>
> Across the thread a hooked undertow
>   that could rant and roar over
> the level slit of its horizon, lifted
>   in fierce, disordered pleasure.

The opening sets in a mirthful mood that exudes an air of flirtatious disportment on the part of the speaker. A reference to "To His Coy Mistress" introduces a lightness of mood that conjures up the defiant call of love from the last couplet of Marvell's poem. The speaker in Prynne's lyric asks the lady to conquer her fear of "another story," which together with the speaker they could begin to tell. Rhetorically, however, Prynne substitutes the sexual drive that motivates Marvell's speaker for a narrative motivation in his poem. Whereas in "To His Coy Mistress" the language is subservient to the desire to coax the lady into starting an affair, in "Damp to level" it appears that it is the act of spinning the tale of love that is paramount in the speaker's mind.

This hankering after "another story" is carried over to the last stanza where the "wide salt sea" is again alluded to. Yet, the mention of the "hooked undertow," a passing reference to the nautical jargon similar to the use of legal "arraign," seems to recall the double-bound "levity of design" in that the undertow always moves in a different direction to that of the surface current. Thus the speaker hints at the "undertow" of the poems, which is the rhetorical layer of the images that relate back to themselves in an act of fictional permutation down the paradigmatic axis of figuration. The undertow can now "rant and roar" (an enlivening of the tiresome "rant and rave") over the flatness of its horizon; the cha-

grin of the underlying rhetorical level of the poem is directed against the necessary linking of language with nature insomuch as, in a sudden flair of imagination, a part of natural assortment of the world takes issue with its own obviousness. The poem looks beyond the simple sentences that to Davidson determine our generally true perception of the world (Sosa 174), all the way to the newness of figurative re-apprehension of reality.

Language in the modernist mode struggles to regain an initial contact with nature, it seeks to be the world it describes as in the definition of objective correlative; it also tries to construct images that would be the thing they evoke, not merely symbolize an unwarranted vision. All these features are then to be filtered through dynamic, vorticist syntax in order to express the complexity of the world. Those are mottos of modernism spawned mainly by Pound and Eliot, but they still apply to Prynne. What distinguishes him from the High Modernists, if not from Joyce in the more saucy fragments of *Ulysses* and all of *Finnegans Wake* (especially in Davidson's analysis), is the "disordered pleasure." To Prynne, the medium of language, even when put in poetry, is stripped of the noumenal. To write poetry is tantamount to feeling joy derived from incessant disorganization done underneath the literal layer. "Disorganized pleasure" stems from "derisive, permutated fictions" and "levity of design." This postulate follows on from Davidson's famous proposition that "a metaphor does not say anything beyond its literal meaning" in the sense that the figuration which is triggered by the disordered pleasure is aimed to make us notice the endless connections between things (both within the world and along the axis of figurative or rhetorical meanings) (*Truth* 257, 262). This can be done only on the margins of meaning and as a result of indomitable experimentation which keeps trying to "explode the text up on stage" (*Triodes, Book II*), since what is at stake is the freedom of loose arraignment of the levity of design.

Dead metaphors are seen as agents of rhetoric oppression, as in an ending fragment of "The scores read like this" from *Triodes, Book III*:

> The crime of the rational script permits a script
> of crime in time to calibrate the forces
> of pent-up sentence: word by word.

If "the rational script" has its way, all the crimes it entails, such as exclusion of minority, ban of any differences from the preponderate "normal" and the right to civil disobedience, will have enough time to gather strength. Importantly, Prynne is quick to notice that the oppressive forces of "the rational script" first locate themselves in linguistic practice into which they sift slowly but unstoppably. What this results in is the "pent-

up sentence" or language suppressed. The centre, artificially sustained in everyday use of language, forces an arbitrary praxis under the guise of the natural state of being (quite similar to Barthes's mythology as a second-order semiotic system).

This fragment of *Triodes, Book III* openly tackles the horrible notion of eugenics that became a part of the modernist agenda in the 1920s and 30s. It many ways the concept stemmed directly from what Prynne calls "the rational script" and gained support because it "was in many ways radical and forward-looking. It was based on the new, dynamic science of evolution and was defined by equally new mathematical techniques that became the foundations of modern statistics" (Soloway 27). All the most renowned modernist writers, at least for a moment, subscribed to the idea. D. H. Lawrence supported it in the letter where he writes of a lethal chamber (81) so vividly evocative of the Nazi concentration camps; both Eliot and Yeats associated eugenics with development of society, each picturing it in a slightly different way (Bradshaw 44, 48). All those heinous aspects of modernism scud in the background of Prynne's poem. He ascribes them to rational linguistic practice (Davidsonian seeing through having a language). It is just that such a language is necessarily deranged and stifled out of its natural malleability; where those repressed, "pent-up sentences" can find relief are the margins. Modernism was after all the period which saw the emergence of psychoanalysis as practised by Freud and Melanie Klein, who investigated the psyche's "revolutionary mass, occluded rhythms, surreptitious discourses, repressed desires," in other words traced what was beneath the surface of consciousness and understood it to be infinitely chaotic, confused and phantasmagoric (Frosh 135); through letting go of the constraints put on language the depths of our selves could be unveiled.

This tension between order and constant dissipation comes back in full swing in *Blue Slides at Rest* (2004). The poems are formally regular in the way that Perloff understood William Carlos Williams's later poems to be regular ("To Give a Design" 89–91), but words constantly thwart our attempts at sustaining an interpretation. Whilst the lyrics look ordered when seen on page, they explode ("up on stage," to refer to the ending poem of *Triodes, Book II*) each meaning with every following word:

> Partition blurred caloric engine his spiral transfusion
> playful to flex, inherent tuneful quantity. Both recessive
> to malabsorb, lapse of thought. Neither remembered this.

What is striking is that there are two forces clashing with each other. On the one hand, there is the centripetal drive that strives to erect a full-fledged image (added to it must be the fact that all poems are divided

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into two twelve-line stanzas and there are ten poems altogether, clearly a structural agenda underlies the volume); on the other, with each new beginning the phrases centrifugally fail to come to a plausible finish. "Partition," suggesting division so as to form a new array, is deflected by the subsequent "blurring." The "caloric engine," first put to use in the early nineteenth century, produces mechanical work as a result of the process of heating up and subsequent cooling of air, hence "flexing" in the second line of the poem, which evokes the work of human muscles; yet the energy produced by the engine is playful, for it is used in order to extract the "inherent tuneful quantity" from composing the words on the page. At the same time, the comma after "flex" separates the verb from its object, which would otherwise turn the largely disjointed phrases into a coherent sentence. A similar punctuation ploy occurs in "recessive / to malabsorb, lapse of thought," since without the comma malabsorbing would link with "lapse of thought," making the sentence, if not regularly understandable, then figuratively acceptable. However, the task in the poem is to confront two opposing forces, and this is done unwaveringly. The number two figures in these lines only furtively in that "both" and "neither" hint at the fact that the lyric is dealing with two drives which sometimes concur with each other and sometimes conflict. What matters here is that one should never be "in all for all in." This phrase calls for what has been called fleeting assertion inasmuch as the condition for "seeing" the world of the poem is changeability; never, the poem (for the word "speaker" seems far too incongruent) suggests, should one be "all for" being "all in." There is no totality, no gross price one has to pay to enter the text, for there is no single entrance but a "flowing bastion gate."

Thus "Bind will," if you must bind something, as the path through this "cambium shower" demands that you surrender the desire to "fall back" and "press on," instead you should persist in spinning ephemeral interpretations of those elusive texts whose "principle [is] stamen"; the word "stamen" denotes "a male fertilizing organ of a flower" ("Stamen") and thus seems to be a figurative reference to dissemination. The lyric, it appears, piles layer after layer of rhetorical devices one on top of another in a wild metaleptic leap. Despite this seeming principle of unrestrained freeplay, there is a strong emphasis on what may best be described as "the shadow unendurably now calibrated" ("Cranial flat-bed declension" from *Biting the Air*). The poems are thus spread between "the shadow" zone of the limitless play (perhaps the fringes of meaning) and the calibration which seeks to correlate the text of the poem with the reader who comes to the text to "see with" it. Thus the task and the oft-mentioned difficulty of Prynne's poetry may be that, in a hardcore avant-garde manner reminiscent of the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*, it—as Davidson put it in his

essay on Joyce—forces us to "share in the annihilation of old meaning and the creation—not really *ex nihilo*, but on the basis of our stock of common lore—of a new language" (*Truth* 157). The variety of jargons Prynne claims in his poems, from astronomy to zoology, is aimed at the stirring of "Dull roots with spring rain"; in a manner akin to the modernists of the early twentieth century, these lyrics "Have words / not joined to fit right" ("Each one tissue-wrapped phoneme sedative" from *Blue Slides at Rest*). In lieu of rightness, Prynne offers energy, the power that words which customarily do not fit together produce when rolling against each other. It is this force, always coming to the fore from the outermost limits of linguistic expression, that mandates the production of meaning and finds the means of description of what so far has never even come to exist at all.

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# Edward Said and the Margins

# Abstract

Edward Said was the quintessential intellectual of the last quarter of the twentieth century. Commonly celebrated as the founding figure of post-colonialism, his critical oeuvre spans varied terrain. The very strength of his critique lies in these diverse tributaries of thought. Crossing borders and boundaries incessantly, Said's intellectual project celebrates the culture of resistance while opposing doctrinaire rhetoric. The paper tries to journey along the multifarious "margins" of discourses that crop up in Said. "In-between" spaces have to be investigated for their radical potential, while daring to "transgress" has its own dangers. Said unmasks the unholy nexus between knowledge and power in the mapping of the "Orient" that abetted the colonial enterprise. His contrapuntal readings of literary texts reveal the ubiquitous presence of imperial empire. Consequently, voices from the margins spur counter narratives and "writing back" in the postcolonial condition. Intellectuals in exile tend to be "marginal" and this location helps in looking at the two or even three sides of an issue. Questions of identity, selfhood, nationality, politics, memory, history, representation, geography, homeland, anxieties of influence are dealt with in the paper. The intertwining of the personal and the political occurs in Said. "Memory" is the only hope for resuscitating a "lost world" and battling the accompanying sense of "loss" and "despair" infused in both individuals and communities alike. The paper tries to address how "border crossing" and the "coalescing of margins" create an interdisciplinary breadth in Said, which resist categorization. The "centre/margin" binary is problematized by acknowledging the presence of "many voices," "polyphony" being a favourite concept of Said. Music gave to him metaphors for human emancipation, while "transgression" was vital. His acknowledgement and assimilation of fellow critics is also mentioned. Beyond enunciating insider-outsider distinctions, Said tried to cultivate knowledge as a bridge between different interests and locations.

The feeling of being on the edge of something could be the signature of the complicated times we inhabit. Fringes of experiences, speculations, memories and histories—call it by any other name; limits, edges, borders, frontiers or margins of all kinds—are thresholds waiting to be crossed, spaces rife with the seductive aura of transgression. As the twilight which invades both night and day, margins infiltrate the centre and the core expands to the periphery. Fred Dallmayr points out that "margins of political discourse . . . designate those border-zones or crossroads where attentiveness and creative initiative intersect and where the stakes of meaning and non-meaning, order and disorder have to be continually renegotiated" (ix). Jacques Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* illuminates that, when we look at a painting we take the frame to be part of the wall, yet when we look at the wall the frame is taken to be part of the painting, the *parergon* is neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work (*hors d'oeuvre*), neither inside or outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work (61). Voices from the margins will demand to be heard and will demand that the nuances they offer be taken into account. Spaces on margins have to be occupied to reclaim lived spaces as localization of radical openness and possibility. Margins are "both sites of resistance and sites of repression" (hooks 151) and are seen as "an intervention."

> A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonizer/colonized. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators. (hooks 152)

This paper attempts to explore how Edward Said negotiated with "margins" of varied forms in his critical output. It looks into the "art/act of crossing" borders along textual, political and cultural margins.

Edward Said was a "border intellectual" par excellence. The broadness of Said's approach to literature and his other great love, classical music, eludes easy categorization. Said's influence, however, was far from being confined to the worlds of academic and scholarly discourse. He distinguished himself as an opera critic, pianist, television celebrity, politician, media expert, popular essayist and public lecturer. His interests ranged from intellectual history to current affairs, from philosophical to journalistic discourse. Said thrived on creative, often strategically, selective eclecticism. Abdirahman Hussein notes that

> Said often conjoins in the same sentence or paragraph . . . epistemological with ethical concerns, materialist constructions with speculative leaps, or existentialist self-definitions with broad socio-political matters, given this lack of respect for traditional boundaries between genres, modes of enquiry, and areas of intellectual combat, what grid or criterion does one use and to what specific interpretive end? (*Edward Said* 2)

The "in-between zone" was vital to Said not only in its geographical and political designations but also in its subtler cultural, historical, epistemological and ontological connotations. It is not an indication of ambiguity, neutrality or passivity but an active field of engagement deployed as an instrument of ideology critique. His multi-vectored methodology is thus an empowering one. Said's life was one always "between worlds," crisscrossing boundaries, constantly incurring the risk of falling off one side or the other side of the limit while undoing, redoing, modifying this limit. His "voyage in" invited danger and reputation as "professor of terror"!

Said was a "cultural amphibian," who exulted in the role of the "humanist gadfly," challenging experts in their carefully guarded territories (Marrouchi, *Edward Said* 24). He reiterated the Adornian stance that "for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live" (*Reflections* 568). In the final paragraph of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said remarks, "No one today is purely *one* thing" (407), and for him, concepts of unitary, essentialized or monolithic identities, not least in the form of racist or xenophobic nationalisms, were the root cause of much suffering and oppression. Coalescing of margins and interpenetration of discourses was vital to Said. Patrick Williams points out that

> For him—rather than the ideological constructs offered by discourses or institutions like Orientalism emphasizing cultural difference and hierarchy, or the reactive and reductive politics of identity which results in embattled, often bitter, separatism—humanity is formed in and by the complexities of "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories," as one of the section titles of *Culture and Imperialism* has it. Again, the purpose is not to indulge an easy celebration of hybridity or syncretism (precisely the kind of contemporary theorizing Said was most uncomfortable with), but to point to the necessary and difficult task of both accounting for and analyzing the forms of such overlapping and intertwining, as well as assessing their impact. This process, both historically informed and contemporarily relevant, embodies the best of Said. (170)

Identity and its constructedness was a continuous concern of Said. His own life exemplified that identities are fractured, multiple and paradoxical. Said called himself "a Palestinian going to school in Egypt, with

an English first name, an American passport, and no certain identity at all" (*Reflections* 557). His professional career found him in an unenviable position of speaking for two diametrically opposed constituencies, one Western, the other Arab. Golda Meir's scathing denial, "there are no Palestinians," in 1969, propelled him to articulate the Palestinian history of loss and dispossession (*Reflections* 563). Said explains that his identity was that of a "minority within minority." His parents were Protestants in Palestine. Most of the Christians in the Middle East, who were a minority within an essentially Muslim society, were Greek Orthodox. Missionaries who came to Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria in 1850's, failed to convert the Muslims or Jews and ended up converting other Christians. His father's family had thus turned Anglican and mother's Baptist (Viswanathan 234). Being an Arab Christian had its own toll; while singing hymns like "Onward Christian Soldiers" he found himself at once both aggressor and aggressed against (*Reflections* 558). Strangely, despite his extremely anti-religious politics, he was glorified and branded as the defender of Islam. Furthering the crisis of identity was the condition of exile. Said comments:

> In a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (Said, *Reflections* 185)

He found parallels between his life and that of Joseph Conrad, sharing the fate of the wanderer with the loss of home and language. The exilic loss of Palestine was a cruel punishment. The tantalizing hope of return sometimes makes life more miserable, as life cannot be started afresh leaving behind severed ties. An intellectual in exile would be characterized by restlessness and movement, being constantly unsettled (Said, *Representations* 39). Seismic shocks to jolt people out of their complacency have to be sent. The intellectual in exile should be a consciousness that cannot be regimented in a totally administered society (*Representations* 41). Exile would thus mean being "marginal," unable to follow prescribed paths. It is the world "responsive to the traveler rather than to the potentate, to the provisional and risky rather than to the habitual, to innovation and experiment rather than the authoritatively given *status quo*" (*Representations* 47).

This positioning helped Said to show not only the obligatory two sides to every question but also the often overlooked third dimension as well (Marrouchi, *Edward Said* 2). He took the quest of "writing back" forward beyond nationalism and postcolonial statehood, crossing bounda-

ries to interpret the world and text based on "counterpoint," where "many voices" were "producing history." The struggle for Palestine, to Said, was not to create a nation which would give another airline to the world, but to transform Palestinians into a people who fight for justice. He could thus turn against Arafat and his retinue who opted for easy and unjust settlement in the Oslo agreement (Marrouchi, *Edward Said* 10). Refusing to don the cloak of neutrality, Said has shown how theory can be effective in countering explosive struggles of cultural hegemony.

Said's project on the "Orient" gave voice to "margins" in diverse ways. While unmasking the unholy nexus between power and knowledge, he illustrated how "margins" are created and controlled by imperial "centres." The second part of Chapter One of *Orientalism* is entitled: "Imaginative Geography and its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental." Said argues that Orientalism relies heavily on the production of geographical knowledge in the imperial centre. Any representation of the "Orient" is necessarily spatial. Beyond the techniques of mapping that underplayed the imperial project, it is the cultural politics of space and place that he is primarily concerned with uncovering. Said points out that the upsurge in Orientalist study coincided with the period of unparalleled European expansion: from 1815 to 1914. Central to the emergence of the discourse is the imaginative existence of something called "the orient," which comes into being within what Said describes as an "imaginative geography." Derek Gregory points that "in *Orientalism* Said treats these imaginative geographies as so many triangulations of power, knowledge and geography, and the conceptual architecture of his account is derived from the spatial analytics of Michel Foucault" (311–12). One can find the resonances of Foucauldian ideas on discourse, discursive formations, power/knowledge and representation in Said. Drawing on the discontinuous, genealogical historiography of Michel Foucault, Said views the entire corpus of writing on the "Orient" as a "discourse." Furthermore, he appropriates Foucauldian notions, of power and knowledge, and disciplining for analyzing the discourse of Orientalism. Foucault conceives discipline as a mode of modern punitive power, which establishes its control over the body and makes it docile and useful. And no power relation is possible without the corresponding fields of knowledge, according to him. Said probably takes this as a signal point and demonstrates how Oriental subjects are constituted by power/knowledge relations. For Said (as well as Foucault), discourse was the means through which power constructed and objectified the human subject of knowledge. This Foucauldian idea of "knowledge as power" can be found throughout Said's critique of Orientalism. It was Foucault who offered Said a means of describing the relationship between knowledge and power over the "Orient."

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In *Culture and Imperialism* he repeatedly points towards the struggle over geography, over territory, over space, and over place, amply evident in the Palestinian struggle. Edward Said refashioned spatial sensibilities not only in "geographic" terms but in a broader epistemological sense. Committed to transgressing established borders, Said envisaged "new topographies," where watertight compartments of cultures, professions, realms of experience, become inevitably hybrid and interpenetrating. In-between zones and marginal interstices which carry the burden of culture are thus created. "Third Space," deployed by Homi Bhabha, is an image of such hybrid in-betweenness, to undermine essentialist representations of identity. It is created when the colonial demand cannot be fully translated from its original place of articulation to another place, but instead splits to give something else (Bhabha 211).

While interrogating textual margins, especially those in the novel, Said problematizes the centre/margin binary by playing off voices from the peripheries against those that occupy centrestage. The novel is of crucial importance to Said's analysis of imperial culture because, in his view:

> Without empire . . . there is no European novel as we know it, and indeed if we study the impulses giving rise to it, we shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and, on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism. (*Culture* 82)

The novel—as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society—and imperialism are unthinkable without each other. The continuity of British imperial policy throughout the nineteenth century is accompanied actively by the novel's depiction of Britain as an imperial centre. The novel's function furthermore, is not to ask questions about this idea, but to keep the empire more or less in place (*Culture* 88). It becomes imperative to reinterpret the western cultural archive as if fractured geographically by the activated imperial divide.

The chief methodological proposal of Said is "contrapuntal reading." This is a form of "reading back" from the perspective of the colonized, to show how the submerged but crucial presence of the empire emerges in canonical texts. An awareness of both "metropolitan history" and "other histories" is needed while reading. The idea for contrapuntal reading came from Said's admiration for the Canadian virtuoso pianist Glenn Gould, a person who exemplified contrapuntal performance in his ability to elaborate intricately a particular musical theme (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 192). Contrapuntal reading is a technique of theme and variation by which a counterpoint is established between the imperial narrative and the post-

colonial perspective, a "counter-narrative" that keeps penetrating beneath the surface of individual texts to elaborate the ubiquitous presence of imperialism in canonical culture. As Said points out,

> In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work. (*Culture* 59–60)

Contrapuntal reading takes both (or all) dimensions of this polyphony into account, rather than the dominant one, in order to discover what a univocal reading might conceal about the political worldliness of the canonical text. Said's masterful readings of *Mansfield Park*, *Aida*, *Kim*, Camus and Yeats testify to this counterpoint and "writing back." R. Radhakrishnan aptly comments that *Culture and Imperialism* is a work situated "virtually on the border between several discourses, several issues and agendas" (Robbins et al. 15) while Mary Louise Pratt detects "achronology" as an important principle prescribed by this method of Said (Robbins et al. 3). She elaborates that Said reads the past through the present, reading "retrospectively and heterophonically." Pratt describes:

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> It calls upon us, for example, not to "respect the integrity" of the English nineteenth century at the expense of understanding it more fully. It implies, for instance, including twentieth century texts of decolonization or anti-imperialist thought or revisionist history on the syllabus and in argument, to create the counterpoint to the otherwise unrelenting . . . intolerably alienating—imperial/ethnocentric vision. The argument is less ethical than intellectual: you'll understand the nineteenth century better that way. (Robbins et al. 3)

Edward Said travelled through methodologies. Dividing his critical agency into disparate areas—the activist and the theorist—without any dialogue between the two would result in ghettoizing and depoliticizing Said's work. It would aggravate existing schisms between political and professional engagements, associating solidarity with politics and opportunism with professional ventures (Robbins et al. 16). Said tried cultivating knowledge as a bridge between different interests and locations. Beyond enunciating insider-outsider distinctions, his was the task of building cognitive and ethico-political bridges. He traversed through divided histories and spaces by means of a universalist imagination, acknowledging overlaps. R. Radhakrishnan further comments that Said's work of mediation, translation and representation is:

. . . a border task that is neither all metropolitan nor all peripheral. It is in this spirit of initiating dialogue across an asymmetrical divide that Said perhaps privileges the metropolitan location. His reading of Ranajit Guha, C.L.R. James, George Antonius and Alatas in a metropolitan context is a way of peripheralizing the center and not an act of capitulation to the metropolitan center . . . Said is profoundly involved in the task of articulating coalitions between *differences within the First World* and *the Third World as difference.* In other words, when postcoloniality moves to the center, the center itself is not and cannot be the same anymore. Business as usual in the center cannot be continued anymore in the same old way. (Robbins et al 17)

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Rescuing the politics of his homeland from the margins of public imagination, revitalizing its cause by taking recourse to "memory" as a strategic tool, and the ensuing poetics of space was cardinal to Said's endeavour. Said's interesting juxtaposition, "I'm the last Jewish intellectual. . . . The only true follower of Adorno. Let me put it this way: I'm a Jewish-Palestinian" (qtd. in Viswanathan 458), proclaims the collapse of structures of oppositional differences without, however, erasing difference itself (Hochberg 47–48). What Said points out is the inseparability of the Jew and the Arab, their histories and memories. Said challenges all "national memories" which are built on a process of exclusion and forgetting each other; the erasure by the massive colonial enterprise of Zionism for example. Healing is to be sought through memory, "re-membering." It is in the recreation of collective memories, in a historical continuity, "as part of a shared political, ethical and psychological sphere," that both Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians can have a tranquil future (Hochberg 48). The main obstacle to a peaceful agreement between these two "unequal communities of suffering" is their mutual indifference to each other's suffering. The land is lost "national patrimony" to one, and "Biblical fiat and diasporic affiliation" to the other. Both consider themselves as "victims of violence" (Hochberg 50).

Memory is a social, political and historical enterprise. Memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions very much something to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain. Said says:

Memory and its representations touch very significantly upon questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority. Far from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in school and university, is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need

to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider's understanding of one's country, tradition, and faith. ("Invention" 178 )

The title of Said's memoir *Out of Place* states the theme of this intimate and honest work. It tells the frustrating story of a lifelong search for identification. Though sparked by the diagnosis of chronic leukemia, the writing of the book also stemmed out of having "no sense of roots." The chaotic nature of the time and place into which he was born and the neurotic nature of the household in which he was raised, were responsible for this plight. He was born as a "mandate child" in 1935, Talbieh, Jerusalem, which was cut adrift by the shattering of the Ottoman Empire and absorbed into the British Empire at the end of World War I (Davidson 166). In 1948, the family fled to Egypt following the creation of Israel, losing its property and assets in Palestine. This left an indelible mark on the young Said. The sense of disconnectedness and loss, "being not quite right and out of place" (*Out of Place* 295) dominated the rest of his life.

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Francoise Lionnet opines that postcolonial autobiography carries the conviction "that writing matters and that narrative has the power to transform the reader" (qtd. in Luca 126). Memoir is a form of witnessing to historical events. Personal histories are created and individual accounts of public events are recorded. It shapes materials of the past by memory and imagination for present needs. Said's memoir documents the politics of identity formation and self representation. It tells the story to keep it alive, to fight oblivion. In fact Said had earlier told the "story" of Palestine in a variety of ways, in *The Question of Palestine* (1979), *Covering Islam* (1981), *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986), *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (1994), *Peace and its Discontents: Gaza-Jericho 1993–1995* (1995). It was his quest for the "lost world." In fact a single Palestinian narrative is impossible to imagine; parallel histories of the communities in the occupied territories, documenting their experiences have to be coalesced to do justice to this "story telling." *Out of Place* documents how events like "World War II, loss of Palestine and establishment of Israel, end of the Egyptian monarchy, the Nasser years, the 1967 war, the emergence of Palestinian movement, the Lebanese Civil War and the Oslo peace process" (xiii) and places like "Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon, the United States" (xiv) were crucial in the making of Said. The three places in which Said grew up no longer exist—Palestine, Lebanon (before the civil war) and colonial monarchical Egypt—and theirs is a "story worthy of rescue" (*Reflections* 568).

A deliberate creation of archives, museums, memoirs and celebration of anniversaries, eulogies are all needed to keep traces of memory alive

as they are no longer "real environments of memory." Ioana Luca applies French historian Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* to *Out of Place* and detects in it "sites of memory" where " 'memory crystallizes and secrets itself,' which functions as traces of such 'environments of memory' in a society cut off from its past and even original location" (137). The intertwining of personal memory and national identity is achieved in the book. Palestine remains only in "traces of memory" and as Nora says "no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded" (qtd. in Luca 138). *Out of Place* recreates a "site of memory" where Palestine turns "from a trope to a full fledged topos" (Luca 140). The memoir acted as therapy and healing to Said during his leukemia days and also undertook the task of "commemoration" of times and places threatened with forgetting. His autobiography goes beyond traditional boundaries of the genre and resists fixity and inhabits a "third space of continuous becoming, the space of the Deleuzian 'AND'" (Luca 140), opening up "in-between spaces where new forms of art, experience, and political action emerge" (Luca 141).

Said's investigation of cultural margins in the realm of music, while furthering his passion for annihilating disciplinary fiefdoms, intend to show that, however private the experience of music may seem, it never escapes social context and functions. His *Musical Elaborations* mixes theoretical speculations in both musicology and literary theory with autobiography. Foucault and Adorno mingle with Brahms and Wagner. Music criticism, sometimes technical and sometimes impressionistic, joins with literary criticism, and both intertwine with narrative and remembrance. Said notes that writings on music are governed by the assumption that classical music develops according to its own internal and formal logic, independently of social history, has been relatively untouched by recent developments in literary and cultural theory (*Musical* xiii). His goal is to treat music as a cultural field and to see (or hear) music as always implicated in social distinction and roles, in questions of national and regional identity. For Said, both Foucault and Adorno are guilty of a totalizing theory that does little to contest the totalizing society it confronts. "No social system," Said writes, "no historical vision, no theoretical totalization, no matter how powerful, can exhaust all the alternatives or practices that exist within its domain. There is always the possibility to transgress" (*Musical* 55). Even Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, epitome of a musical, elaborating a social order, contains its own transgression.

> Read and heard for the bristling, tremendously energetic power of *alternatives* to its own affirmative proclamations about the greatness of German art and culture, *Die Meistersinger* cannot really be reduced to the

nationalist ideology of its final strophes stress. It has set forth too much in the way of contrapuntal action, character, invention. (*Musical* 61)

Like Glenn Gould, Edward Said is able to think radically and for himself. He does not approach the pieces of music through the preconceptions and musical clichés of his time. This led him to reject almost all nineteenth century piano music after Beethoven, to view Wagner with distrust, and to admit to his personal canon only a fraction of the output of Mozart. Said argues for his aesthetic from a number of positions, but it is best understood as the aesthetic of a dedicated and passionate polyphonist. Mustapha Marrouchi comments that polyphony is a special illness of Said's inner ear, an almost pathological specialization in the way of his thinking and perhaps even a condition of Said's psyche. This passionate commitment to musical polyphony places him at odds with the culture of the concert hall and classical music (Marrouchi, "Variation" 102).

*Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society* contains freewheeling and often exhilarating dialogues—which grew out of the acclaimed Carnegie Hall Talks—an exchange between Daniel Barenboim, internationally renowned conductor and pianist and Edward W. Said. Barenboim is an Argentinian-Israeli while Said Palestinian-American. These dialogues range across music, literature and society, opening up many fields of inquiry: the importance of a sense of place; music as a defiance of silence; the legacies of artists from Mozart and Beethoven to Dickens and Adorno; Wagner's anti-Semitism; and the need for "artistic solutions" to the predicament of the Middle East—something they both witnessed when they brought young Arab and Israeli musicians together, in the West-Eastern Divan orchestra, founded in 1999. This "crossing over" was not easy, but rewarding:

> In doing so they managed to overcome daunting human and bureaucratic barriers, enabling gifted young musicians from both sides of a widening political divide to benefit from master classes taught by some of the most accomplished performers and musicians of their era, and to meet and learn from one another in ways that would otherwise have been unthinkable. (Barenboim 91)

"Counterpoint" was a musical practice and personal guide to Said "to relate divergent musical and cultural backgrounds, and as a metaphor for humanistic emancipation" (Groot 221). "Polyphony" in music allows no domination of one voice over others and if it does occur, it would be temporary, shifting the role of prominence from one voice to the other. In a metaphoric sense "polyphony" is a "totality of equal social relationships"

(Groot 223). To Said, "amateurism" helped in making connections across lines and barriers. He also points out that "the basic humanistic mission today, whether in music, literature, or any of the arts or the humanities, has to do with the preservation of difference without, at the same time sinking into the desire to dominate" (Barenboim and Said 154). Dissidence is allowed in polyphony, especially in the case of Bach. This could be helpful in volatile social situations, as Said's humanistic ideal allows "room for dissent, for alternative views . . . to advance human . . . liberty" (Barenboim and Said 181).

Edward Said's trajectory crosses several intellectual boundaries and margins. His impressive and substantial *oeuvre* "never suffered from a Bloomian anxiety of influence" (Bayoumi 46). Said names freely the critics from whom he borrows ideas and concepts. He then assimilates and uses them in his own fashion. Abdirahman Hussein argues that Said "borrowed valuable insights from revisionist Marxist thinkers—his reflections on history, hegemonic culture, identitarian thinking, critical consciousness, and the late style are permeated by Lukacsian, Adornian, Gramscian, and Williamsian ideas" ("New" 102). Said admires Lukács, because "theory for him was what consciousness produced, not as an avoidance of reality but as a revolutionary will completely committed to worldliness and change" (*World* 234). Said owes allegiance to Georg Lukács and his groundbreaking understanding of the reification of consciousness, a constant reminder that the force of identity (as a concept, form, psychic state, mode of thinking) must be battled and resisted at all costs (Gourgoris 64). Adorno's influence on Said not only shaped his writings on music but also his views of criticism and critique. Adorno (and Said) was deeply interested in the idea of "late style," of how final works of a great artist (especially Beethoven) exist not as a summation of one's own *oeuvre* but in fact in a position of alienation from one's audience. Said finds much common ground with Adorno's writing on exile. "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" writes Adorno in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (qtd. in *Representations* 42), a thought that no one believed more strongly than Edward Said. Gramsci's concept of hegemony provided Said a way of explaining how the influence of certain ideas about the "Orient" prevailed over others. While using Gramsci's distinction between civil society and political society in *Orientalism*, Said takes culture, which is located in civil society, as the chief instrument for inducing consent and therefore hegemony. Said learns from Raymond Williams the basic principle that resistance to empire in a way requires the mapping or invention of new space and geography. He points out that in the concluding chapters of *The Country and the City*, Williams sketches "the new geography of high imperialism and decolonization" focusing on "the relationships between

peripheries and metropolitan centre" (*Reflections* 467). Williams' examination of structures of feeling, communities of knowledge, emergent or alternative cultures and patterns of geographical thought tremendously influenced Said.

Bruce Robbins illuminates that Edward Said gave authority to a secular internationalism founded on an ambiguous border crossing, "neither simply an exile (which privileges the place of origin) nor simply an immigration (which privileges the destination), but both an exile and an immigration at once" ("Secularism" 34). Orthodox rigidities melt down as Said's critical enterprise interrogates "margins." The interdisciplinary breadth of Said's corpus may be proposed as antidote to banal "micro specializations" that become stumbling blocks in the path of solidarist positions, which are threatened by solipsistic, nihilistic and pessimistic stances. Rediscovering the societal roots of experience at the margins, via Edward Said, could help dismantle impervious walls of exclusion and open up spaces for all those who have been long shut out of the boulevards of dignity.

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# Interpodes: Poland, Tom Keneally and Australian Literary History

# ABSTRACT

This article is framed by a wider interest in how literary careers are made: what mechanisms other than the personal/biographical and the text-centred evaluations of scholars influence a writer's choices in persisting in building a succession of works that are both varied and yet form a consistently recognizable "brand."

Translation is one element in the wider network of "machinery" that makes modern literary publishing. It is a marker of success that might well keep authors going despite lack of sales or negative reviews at home. Translation rights can provide useful supplementary funds to sustain a writer's output. Access to new markets overseas might also inspire interest in countries and topics other than their usual focus or the demands of their home market.

The Australian novelist and playwright Thomas Keneally achieved a critical regard for fictions of Australian history within a nationalist cultural resurgence, but to make a living as a writer he had to keep one eye on overseas markets as well. While his work on European topics has not always been celebrated at home, he has continued to write about them and to find readers in languages other than English.

Poland features in a number of Keneally's books and is one of the leading sources of translation for his work. The article explores possible causes and effects around this fact, and surveys some reader responses from Poland. It notes the connections that Keneally's Catholic background and activist sympathies allow to modern Polish history and assesses the central place of his Booker-winning *Schindler's Ark* filmed as *Schindler's List*.

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The organized study of Western literatures has developed under the aegis of romantic nationalism. Constructing an Australian Literature has been no exception to the rule. In fact, the closeness of its origins to British writing perhaps intensified its postcolonial rejection of European ways and a championing of its own unique qualities of idiom and outlook, even as its peripheral colonial position made it hyper-aware (as a white settler nation) of its cultural connections to Europe. The emergence of national literary cultures in ex-colonies was accompanied by the formation of postcolonial literary studies that by definition operated on a global platform. These, however, tended in practice to work as comparative studies of national literary cultures, so models of literary history did not altogether change, despite major shifts in theories of literary value (Sharrad). More recently, Franco Moretti's attempts at new mappings of a world history of the novel and Pascale Casanova's (Paris-centric) ideal of a world republic of letters point to new ways of doing literary history that are multi-modal, non-homogeneous and transnational (Apter, Gikandi, Even-Zohar).

One figure who sits at the intersection of old national cultural criticism and new modes of transnational thinking is Australia's "national literary treasure," Tom Keneally. He won the premier Australian award for fiction, the Miles Franklin Prize twice: in 1967 with *Bring Larks and Heroes,* a novel reflecting the convict origins of British settlement in Botany Bay (now Sydney) and in 1968 with *Three Cheers for the Paraclete*, reflecting his own disenchantment as a trainee priest with the institution of the somewhat fossilized Irish Catholic church in Sydney. The Miles Franklin originated in the era when Australia was attempting to establish its own literary tradition and until very recently its rules demanded that entries represent Australian life. Keneally started publishing from the beginning in both Australia and England, later being taken up by US publishers as well. He won the Royal Society of Literature Prize in 1973 for *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (a historical novel about race relations at the time of national Federation in 1901) and was nominated for the Booker Prize several times before winning it in 1982 with his documentary historical novel *Schindler's Ark*.[1]

The critical treatment of Thomas Keneally has been almost completely focussed on his place in Australian literary history as determined from

within Australia. He is placed in relation to Patrick White (Allington 36), evaluated in terms of his Irish Catholic slant on Australian cultural history (Peter Pierce, "'The Critics Made Me'"; Dixson), measured according to how many national awards (Commonwealth Literary Fund, Miles Franklin, Order of Australia) he has received (Beston 49). Obviously, there is good reason for this: we only have to consider the number of his novels and plays either set in Australia or based on Australian protagonists. And his work has been directed very much at an Australian readership.[2]

However, this is only part of the story. Keneally's interest in moral challenges (Baker 125; Willbanks 136; Pierce) and the ambiguous nature of heroism (Fabre 102–04) and his fascination for history (Allington 36; Slattery 4–5; Walshe 46) have led him to position Australia in relation to events overseas.[3] There are also novels with no evident links to Australia at all (the small-scale drama of negotiating the Armistice that is *Gossip from the Forest*, the story of Joan of Arc in *Blood Red, Sister Rose*).

Outside of the texts themselves, Keneally's publishing has also been from the beginning a matter of negotiations between Australia, Britain and the U.S. Early in his career, he realized that to make any living as a writer, an Australian needed more readers than Australia could provide (Willbanks 129–30). And within Australian literary circles, Keneally has avoided complete co-opting into critical discussion around the dominant national culture by featuring Aboriginal, Belorussian, Jewish and Polish characters. Moreover, as his work gains readers in Britain and the US and he is repeatedly shortlisted for the Booker Prize, as his books sell film rights, he is taken up for translation across Europe, with some work also published in Indonesia, Korea, China and Japan.

Robert Dixon has made the point that Australian literature, either as a body of texts or as the story of its production as a corpus of critical study, is more than what happens within the borders of the nation (Dixon). Despite his pride in sales at home and his national profile in the media, Keneally has often complained of how narrow coterie and national fixations have limited positive responses to his writing and argued that he has been more favourably received overseas (Krausmann 56; Willbanks 130). So a complete critical assessment of the Keneally oeuvre must look not just at his placement in relation to the standard models of Australian literary

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[2]  Early on, he stresses in interview that his Australian sales for *Bring Larks and Heroes* lead his overseas figures (Beston 55.)

[3]  His reworking of polar explorations, for example, are allegorical investigations of the retreat of Britain from Empire and the Commonwealth (Baker 135–56; interview by Hergenhan, 454; Willbanks 134–35), and his wartime settings—from *The Fear* to *The Widow and her Hero* and *The People's Train*—show Australian society interacting with events in Northern Africa, Singapore, Russia, and so on.

culture, but also assess how he is received abroad, and how that reception influences what he does and how he is placed at home. Translations of his work play a part in this network of producing the writer's career.

For example, the circulation of his novel *Towards Asmara* amongst foreigners attending the independence celebrations by the Eritrean government is something Keneally is proud of (interview by Wilson 25). This presumably means that whether the novel is well received at home or not, there is an impulse to continue "engaged" writing championing the underdogs of global conflicts. Keneally's contact with the wider politics of famine in Africa during his visit to Eritrea, combined with the positive response overseas to *Towards Asmara* clearly leads him to write the Sudanese half of *Bettany's Book.* That mix of Australian colonial history and topical international affairs might well divide opinion on the success of the novel in Australia.

My point here is that the construction of a literary career and the literary reputation resulting from it is often the product of a complex network of events and influences outside of the usual national cultural machine of reviewing and academic critique, and effects can be quite indirect. It is still generally true, despite multiculturalism, that Australian literary reception operates within an Anglophone ghetto, save for one or two classicists and those who name-drop the major French and Russian writers. The fact that Keneally might be read across Europe and commented on globally in at least fourteen other languages than English does not register in "home" constructions of his literary history and cultural standing. Arguably, however, as nations and their cultures become inevitably globalized through literary festivals, international awards and the electronic media, transnational models of literary criticism and history need to be brought into play.

Poland is the country with most translations of Keneally's work. Up to 2010, six titles have been taken up, beginning with *Blood Red, Sister Rose* (1982) and including *Gossip from the Forest* (1996), *Schindler's Ark* (1996), *A Family Madness* (1996), *Woman of the Inner Sea* (1994) and *An Angel in Australia* (2003). Poland's strong Catholic culture, its Polish Pope, John Paul II and the inspiration taken from him for the Solidarność movement through the 1980s possibly accounts for *Blood Red, Sister Rose* being the first book translated (Catholic saint versus the oppressive forces of a military occupation). Though it appeared with a press devoted to literary works (including the major South American novelists), the popularity of this title is suggested by its reissue in paperback by Da Capo in 1995. The other Australian writer with a significant number of titles in Polish is Catholic Morris West—seven works, but not the unorthodox *Shoes of the Fisherman* (AustLit)—and Keneally's personal interest in flawed Catholics and true goodness sparked his taking up Oskar Schindler's story (*Searching*

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*for Schindler* 21). It is interesting to see that some of the titles picked up in Germany were not translated into Polish. *Jimmie Blacksmith* and *A River Town*, for example, did well overseas and their selection accords with touristic curiosity amongst young Germans for Australian colonial history and exotic Aboriginal culture, but that element seems not to have penetrated the Polish market. Surprisingly, *A Season in Purgatory* also failed to attract Polish translation, though it is also clearly related to the European War and its subsequent politics. *Three Cheers for the Paraclete*, the fictionalized version of Keneally's own disenchantment with the church as bureaucratic machine, did not appear in Polish.

Reasons for the circulation of texts are complex and can often only be supposed, but reader self-interest is always a factor in permitting a market to develop. Polish curiosity about how Poles might settle into a country like Australia probably drove the second translation, *Woman of the Inner Sea*, which depicts a Polish-Catholic migrant family and their real-estate wheeler-dealing offspring in Sydney. Surprisingly, the mainly Cracow setting of *Schindler's Ark* and the book's success with the Booker Prize did not spark immediate translation into Polish, but obviously the exotic Outback yarns and the Polish component of *Woman of the Inner Sea* proved enough of a success for the translator, Pawel Korombel and his publisher, Da Capo, to take on another Keneally book (*Gossip from the Forest*) and to reprint *Blood Red, Sister Rose*. It would seem that *Gossip from the Forest*, however, for all its compact dramatic qualities, lacked either "hook" of exotic appeal or local interest for a Polish market, and one can only assume did not do as well since Da Capo did not buy up rights to *Schindler's Ark.* However, it may be that the much larger Prószyński media operation was the only publisher able to put up a competitive sum for the rights to an international best seller. The *Blood Red, Sister Rose* reprint and subsequent translations clustered around 1994–96 clearly resulted from the production of Spielberg's Hollywood version of the book in Poland in 1993, Keneally visiting for the shoot and making public appearances as the author. *A Family Madness* is picked up, presumably for also depicting the ongoing trauma of the European War and Keneally acknowledges its origins in his historical work on Schindler (Baker 138–39, *Searching for Schindler* 155–56). It may be that perceptions of populist alignment of religious faith with nationalist opposition to Communism led to the odd inclusion of *An Angel in Australia* in the list of translations. Its publisher ranged from international pulp fiction to major Polish poets, but included emphasis on detective and historical novels (Fisiak). *Angel* (also circulating under the title *The Office of Innocence*) is a murder mystery set in war-time Sydney, and is centred on the temptations and ethical dilemmas of a young priest. Marek Paryż's review notes Keneally's "dynamic reconstruction of

the past" and how wartime confuses moral values and challenges Frank Darragh in his faith in confession and absolution, how Australian society is forced into change by the war and how history shapes everything (62–63). Consistent with this reading, the critical response to Keneally's work centres around the actual historical moment of Spielberg's filming of Schindler/Holocaust history at Auschwitz.

With the exception of a piece by Jacek Brzeziński in 1989 in a literary monthly reporting on the international literary scene, Poland seems to have been unaware of the success of the novel *Schindler's Ark* until Spielberg's film was made. Jerzy Armata notes its success elsewhere, summarizes the book with favourable comment and retells the story of its coming into existence ("Steven Spielberg w Krakowie"). Then all attention tended to be focussed on Spielberg's film rather than the novel. This was certainly the case in *Wprost* and other papers mentioning Keneally and his fiction tend to subordinate discussion to the Leopold Page/Pfefferberg story and the movie (Kruczkowska 4). An interview with Keneally appeared in 1994 and two features in 1995 in anticipation of the book's release.

*Gazeta Wyborcza* mounted two features discussing the nature of the best seller (Varga 2, Baczyński and Kalabiński 8). Although *Schindler* made it to the top ten sellers in Poland (Sadurski X1), there seemed to be some doubt about its credentials as a best seller, with sales quoted only at 60000 and no mention of it being the Booker's best ever commercial success (Caterson). It is discussed as "the book of the film," although its being framed as a popular best seller is offset by the fact that it was published in Poland under the series label "Connoisseur's Library" (Fisiak). Blog sites suggest that it is valued (as in Germany) as historical testimony and a moral lesson, and that its art is subordinated to the historical reality of its lead character (Fisiak). However, Polish reviewers seem less anxious about the "faction" mix than those debating the Booker Prize (Hiscock, Raphael). Jacek Brzeziński, for example, says *Schindler* is more a "transition between reportage and a historical work" rather than fiction, but still credits the writer with imaginative inhabiting of his language and character such that readers are drawn into the drama; Keneally turns Schindler into a carefully detailed "literary hero" who nonetheless keeps his personal essence a secret (320–23). The progressive Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* praises the text for not being too much of a hagiography (as does Gabriela Górska on the website *Literacje*) and for getting most of its historical facts right ("Dwie książki o zagładzie" 11). It suggests the "feel good" aspect is offset by the awareness of all those who did not make it onto Schindler's list and concludes that the documentary fiction is a good bit of craftsmanship rather than a literary masterpiece. One review, however, notes that the book was popular

elsewhere before the movie release and calls it a "must-read" ("Review of *Schindler's List*" 7), and another allows that the book makes a good comic picture of a crafty rogue-hero, an aspect that Spielberg's more reverential film fails to capitalize on (Królak 8).

Keneally's engagement with Poland clearly had a lasting influence. It led to his scriptwriting for the 1984 film *Silver City*, directed by Sophia Turkiewicz, and dealing with post-war Polish migrants. In the unlikely context of Africa, several years later, Poland is selected for specific mention. *Towards Asmara* shows the repressive regime of Mengistu's Ethiopia propped up by Soviet aid. Poland under Communism is implicated in this, and when Eritrean Amna is arrested she is thrown into the back of a Polish Fiat. On the other hand, the patriotic struggle of the Eritreans against persecution is compared to Polish nationalism: the narrator describing the cells used by Amna's captors recalls the pride in the graffiti of Polish partisans detained in the Pawiak prison in Warsaw (247). These details stem directly from Keneally's 1981 visit to Poland to research the Schindler story (*Searching for Schindler* 82–83, 88). Authorial even-handedness does not overcome the ambiguities of history and social reality to produce a mutual admiration pact between Keneally and his Polish readers. There was mention of people finding *Schindler* to be anti-Polish in the conservative paper *Rzeczpospolita* (and stated clearly by the right-wing historian-publicist Jerzy Robert Nowak in a blog) such that Keneally felt obliged to point in an interview to the many Poles who were not aligned with the Nazi regime during the war. Nonetheless, the article was titled "The Best Story of the Century" (Sadurski X1), and the novel and film hailed (as in Germany) for its importance as a reminder to historical abuses of power and relevance to ethnic cleansing in contemporary situations such as Rwanda.

Keneally's research into Holocaust experiences in occupied Poland clearly led him to look at other aspects of the European war and to think about their effects on migrants of that generation in Australia. This results in *A Family Madness* (1985), based on the factual group suicide in Sydney of a migrant family haunted by the war. At the beginning an Anglo-Australian airs his limited knowledge of Europe based on his approval of Lech Wałęsa (17), but the rest of the book deals with the destructive guilt of a Belorussian who collaborated in Nazi war crimes in a vain attempt to free his homeland from a history of domination by Poland, Russia and Austria. Reviewer Ewa Nowacka clearly respects the book but does not want to consider that fanatical nationalism might lead people to collaborate with the Nazis in order to achieve some limited political autonomy as much as it would lead to partisan opposition to fascism. Accordingly she faults Keneally's depiction of Kabbelski, but admits that the book, though a bitter pill for many Polish readers, does its homework on Belarus history, shows

the haunting of past guilts across time and space, and offers a different perspective that in itself may be a blessing. The article is of interest, too, in that it puts Keneally in an international literary context by reading him against Polish writer Józef Mackiewicz (26).

Conclusions from this limited sample of overseas production and reception must of necessity be tentative. For a start, the vicissitudes of Polish history and lack of a comprehensive search machine for archival materials limit the number of reviews found. Secondly, they have no evidently immediate or direct effect on Keneally's literary reputation in Australia and on its national literary history. Further research into the links between Poland and Polish communities in Australia and to what extent this has an effect on literary reception/transmission would fill out the picture of multicultural Australia. In a wider frame, Australia's literary connections with Poland go back to a memoir of gold-digging published in 1856 by Seweryn Korzeliński and the AustLit database reveals not just significant Australian writers of Polish background such as Ania Walwicz and Peter Skrzynecki, but also a wealth of wartime memoir and migration narrative with which some of Keneally's fiction could be compared.

While it may be hard to produce definite conclusions, from all this, we can, I think, see how the very fact of having one's work translated might give heart to a writer and incline him or her to follow certain interests whether these are approved of by a home readership or not. What this small study does show is that Keneally's interest in history and "faction," though it may not result in uniformly positive reviews, is validated by Polish selection and response to his work, as is his interest in the Catholic church and moral dilemmas. Polish reviews, like others elsewhere, show too how Keneally's books have been swamped by focus on the *Schindler* film and as a result deployed for their socio-political interest rather than their literary qualities. The author's sense of appreciation abroad for European material will have an effect on his reception by a nationalist-inclined literary culture at home, if only because continued engagement with overseas settings will preclude him from further local success with the Miles Franklin Prize and earn criticism from "patriot" reviewers. As long as Catholicism continues to be seen as a relevant and influential part of Australian society, continuing this line of writing will be valued positively; but in so far as the national debate closes around domestic navel-gazing and protectionism and depicts the church as a backward element in modern secular society, Keneally's work will be seen as exotic or outdated. Examination of the overseas publishers picking up Keneally titles also speaks to how the author is positioned in academic and general literary culture. With the exception of the first Polish publication, the books all seem to fall into popular/bestseller titles by established names who rate more than formula

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mass-market authors. For a small ex-colony still anxious to consolidate its own literary culture but also eager to produce the national genius who will win the Nobel Prize for literature, it is instructive to see how the larger spread of literary culture in Europe and the US allows this "middlebrow" position more serious critical regard than has been the case in Australia. If there is no local understanding of the transnational dynamics affecting the writer's career, there can be no full or even adequate critical appreciation of his work and the national literary history will position it in a limited or skewed manner. Keneally has said, "I consider myself increasingly a citizen of the planet. . . . Australia is, now, stitched into the international community" (Todd Pierce 122). Australian literary scholarship is similarly moving to broaden its determinedly nationalist focus.

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# "Throw[ing] the Longest Shadows": The Significance of the Bogus Quotation for *Arcadia* by Jim Crace

## ABSTRACT

Preceding his *Arcadia* with a non-existing quotation, Jim Crace proves to be no Arcadian innocent: challenging the shrewdness of his readers, the contemporary novelist seems to take pleasure in inviting them to an intellectual game which begins before the novel unfolds. The highly evocative title and the bogus quotation are bound to evoke associations which become the subject of minute examination in the novel. Its result turns out to be as astounding as the uncommon aphoristic trap laid for the readers. This article examines the significance of the bogus quotation as a part of the novel's message and a key to its interpretation.

## ABSTRACT

Contemporary writers seem to have a predilection to precede their works of fiction with quotations. The epigraphs constitute a heterogeneous group, some of them excerpted from prose or poetry composed by world-famous authors,[1] others originally appertaining to popular art[2] or literature of fact.[3] They may either be placed above the first lines of a novel or may

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[1]   Cf. the excerpts included in *Possession* by A.S. Byatt (1990) or *The Time Traveller's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger (2004).
[2]   Cf. the excerpts from contemporary songs included in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* by Roddy Doyle (1996). The quotation preceding the novel is taken from "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" by Shel Silverstein.
[3]   Cf. the introductory extract from the minutes of the Geographical Society meeting included in *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje (1992).

be brought into relief on an extra sheet separating the title page from the actual text. Intended to evoke certain images and as an inspiration to drawing parallels, they enrich the reading of a literary work.

Jim Crace's *Arcadia* (1992) is no exception to this rule. The critical attention is activated in *Arcadia* before one becomes absorbed in the plot since the much-telling title makes any potential reader consider their notions of pastoralism. For ages, poetic Arcadia has been known as a region of peace, leisure and happiness, and the pastoral, in the broadest sense, as "any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" (Gifford 2). A delight in the natural is visible in the literary milestones of the pastoral convention, in the *Idylls* by Theocritus and the *Eclogues* by Virgil. As far as anglophone literature is concerned, the same holds true for the pastoral praise of English countryside; it is enough to mention *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare[4] or William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, which is famous for its worship of "the sovereign Nature" (VIII, 126). Such a concept of Arcadia, even in its most narrow pejorative definition, dispraising the pastoral simplicity as the one reduced to mere kitsch and sentimentality (Gifford 2),[5] is hardly met by *Arcadia*.[6] To the consternation of the readers, the novel turns out to be an enigmatic version of the pastoral. Instead of employing the well-established set of pastoral *loci communes,* its author attempts to revise their nature by joining concepts traditionally disjunctive in the pastoral convention. Thus, Crace investigates the viability of creating Arcadia within the city and experiencing rural life in the heart of the cityscape.

In fact, the feeling of consternation is a constant companion to the readers of *Arcadia.* Before indulging in the book, they are offered a quotation of apparently seminal significance for the text, granted by the fact that it has been placed in the middle of a blank page preceding the novel:

"The tallest buildings
throw the longest Shadows
(thus Great Men make
their Mark by
blocking out the Sun,
and, seeking Warmth

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[4]  A useful study of the pastoral dimension of *As You Like It* in Alpers (69ff).

[5]  For more information on the variety of literary Arcadia and the pastoral cf. Empson; cf. also James and Tew, eds., passim.

[6]  The enigma of Crace's *Arcadia* is brought into relief by the design of the cover versions of the novel, be it the first 1992 or any subsequent 1993, 1997, 2008 editions of the text. None of the cover images endorses the conventional image of Arcadia. More information about the convention, the genre and the mode in Alpers, passim.

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themselves, cast
Cold upon the rest).”
Emile dell'Ova, *Truismes,* Editions Baratin, Paris, 1774 (original formatting)

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Given the name of its author, the title of the source and the details concerning its edition, one is expected to assume that it is a genuine quotation excerpted from a famous collection of an eighteenth-century book of aphorisms. To the complete astonishment of the readers, however, the search for its source reveals that neither Emile dell'Ova nor his *Truismes,* nor Editions Baratin has ever existed. The learned content of the quotation notwithstanding, it is but authorial mystification. Admittedly, the revelation comes as a surprise since the few lines of the epigram have been assigned a careful form, stressed by the evident scrupulousness of formatting, and the philosophical content pivoted on the centuries-old theme of human transience. As a consequence, the readership is biased towards believing in the authenticity of the excerpt, an assumption which finally proves a fallacy.

Interestingly enough, there is a hint in the bibliographical notes helping an attentive reader out of the trap. He or she might be slightly alarmed at the English meaning of the French word "baratin": a verbose speech, in marketing denoting a sales pitch, a spiel. The reading of the linguistic game is left open to the readers: is the implied meaning of the name of the fake publishing house a pure coincidence, or is it an intentional word play of the author? If the latter is true, does the "spiel" only refer to the game the author has arranged for his readers by having offered them the bogus quotation, a literary trick licensed by *licentia poetica,* or is the word "spiel" targeted at delivering further means for enriching the interpretation of the text of the novel? Since *Arcadia* is focused upon laying bare the extent to which mercantile forces predetermine the life of an individual, the latter assumption seems perfectly plausible. Thus, the word "baratin" may indirectly signal the main field of action of the novel's protagonist: Victor's brilliant success in trade is the best illustration of the "spiel." In a wider context, one might argue that "baratin" hints at the novel's major concern with the economic growth of the city primarily based upon the act of selling goods. Soaked in materialism, it is "no wonder Victor never fell in love" (Crace 3),[7] "a cheque [being] . . . his version of a kiss" (9). Interestingly, the social dimension of the novel has been the subject of a heated discussion between Crace and the scholars commenting on his *Arcadia*. Defying Frank Kermode's claims that "his [Crace's] novels are devoid of direct political reference," Crace has argued that his "books are full of politics and social commentary" (Farren).

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[7]   Unless otherwise indicated, all the references to Crace's work are to *Arcadia*.

The intentionality of the author's mystification finds confirmation in the bibliographical research as well. It is worth mentioning that Crace's awareness of applying a bogus quotation with all pretensions to authenticity is given its due significance in the light of other works by this author. In fact, the epigraphs included in his earlier novels, *Continent* (1987) and *The Gift of Stones* (1989), attest to the rule generally applied by Crace in his fiction, namely to the authorial habit of preceding his books with bogus quotations. In the context of the present article, this reiteration is a fact which must stay in its focus.

The curious quotation, or more precisely Crace's pointed epigram, requires its due interpretation, first of all, in terms of the philosophical contents. The aphoristic message intensifies the feeling of consternation in the readers who first try and analyze its contents in relation to the concept of "Arcadia." As mentioned above, they expect a poetic vision of idyllic bliss and happiness, implied in the title, but the aphoristic lines are apparently at odds with such a mood and such inferences. Taken thoroughly out of the natural context, the strife for light far better resembles Darwinian notion of the struggle for the survival of the fittest than the idyllic concept of ease and repose. The examination of the epigraph is further complicated by the fact that the leading simile dominating the lines, "the tallest buildings . . . [like] Great Men," disclaims the pastoral approval of the natural and, by comparing people to artefacts, it perversely advocates the unnatural in them. The only feature which characterizes the epigraph and, at the same time, endorses the pastoral convention is the ongoing interplay of binary oppositions which governs the lines. The strife for light and warmth, emphasized by the references to shadow and cold, relates to the same idea of polarity which is inherent in the pastoral convention. The convention, notorious in scholarly circles for lacking an accurate definition of its nature,[8] springs from the struggle between the antagonistic forces in the world, between the sophisticated and the ordinary, the innocent and the experienced, the young and the old, the natural and the artificial. As one contemporary critic describes the pastoral space: "Arcadia may be best regarded as a realm of action, of certain intersections full of innate contradictions, which it attempts to partially solve" (James and Tew 13). Having adopted the idea of polarity inherent in the pastoral, Crace has adjusted it to his own post-modern vision. The result is a curious deployment of a tension of a clear pastoral origin and of a counter-pastoral value ensuing from the exchange between the natural and the artificial. By and large, Crace's new attitude towards the core pastoral notions, signalled in the epigraph, marks the novelty which his

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[8]  More information, cf. Snyder (1).

*Arcadia* offers to the readers. Recently, Crace's idiosyncratic version of the pastoral has been called "enigmatical" (Tew 230).

As may be expected, the epigraph plays a crucial role as far as the structure of the novel is concerned. It opens the text of *Arcadia* and it closes the novel, the aphoristic message being resumed again in the middle of the book (Crace 52, 209–10) as well as on its penultimate page (Crace 345). It skilfully predicts the *leitmotif* of the novel whose pivot is the desire of the main protagonist, Victor, an eighty-year-old successful businessman, to leave a lasting trace of his existence upon the city in which he arrived as an infant. A child of the country, who has grown up in the environs of an urban open-air market, of "The Soap Market,"[9] Victor is an example of a rags-to-riches multimillionaire. His world view is an odd mixture of country worship, on the one hand, and of an archetypal representation of the city as the place of all opportunities, on the other. Thus, the countryside appears to be an ideal land of "Milk and Honey,"[10] which Victor adores, even if only knowing the object of his adoration from his mother's idealized recollections of their native village. Never in his adult life has Victor visited the place he was born in, which is apparently no obstacle for him to consider himself one of "all good farmers" (52). However, striking as the fact is for a literary vision of Arcadia, it is the city that gives Victor's family shelter and saves them. Such an emphasis on the magic appeal of urbanity violates the basic assumptions of the pastoral ethos and renders Crace's *Arcadia* a curious contribution to the tradition of the pastoral.

Now eighty, Victor has set his mind on enacting his dream of Arcadia, the basis for which are his mother's nostalgic recollections of the countryside. Living in the city, he longs for rurality. He decides to have an exclusive shopping mall built, "the tallest building" called "Arcadia," which is his answer to the claim of "make[ing his] Mark" in the world. Arcadia, the mall, his "earthly paradise" (334) sarcastically nicknamed "the Glass Meringues" (215), embodies the thought expressed in the epigraph. Indeed, its contents are paraphrased in the text of the novel: "The luck that Victor wished upon himself was this: that he would live into his nineties, long enough to make his lasting, monumental mark upon the city" (52).

As the novel unfolds, the readers witness the gradual process of erecting the mall. Finally, they are confronted with an assessment of the achievement voiced by a journalist, by one of those who have allegedly seen the dream realized. It turns out that the journalist is the narrator of Victor's life story. Although he has accepted Victor's offer to write down his mem-

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[9]  This is the title of part one of *Arcadia* focused on the presentation of Victor's adult life.

[10]   This is the title of part two of *Arcadia* which pictures his difficult childhood.

oirs, the credible source of all personal details, his attitude towards Victor's "monumental mark" is not that of enthusiasm. His explicit approval of the architectural wonder is, in fact, its cynical derision:

> Yet, Arcadia is a triumph. Let's admit it. It weathers as I watch; it settles in. There is no complacency, just the swagger and ambition that cities flourish on. I'd stand here happily—glass in hand, alone—all day, and not be bored, and not grow tired, and not be stifled by its flamboyant uniformity, by its recreant geometry, by its managed cheerfulness. Give me the chance. Give me the time. Give me the bottle and the glass. (333–34)

This ironic claim is a prelude to the most important section of the novel. (Dis)approving of Arcadia, the journalist makes the readers think of the mechanisms governing "Victor's earthly paradise" (334). "Let's admit it" (333), what governs our lives is ambition and money, the journalist seems to expect his readership to confess. The paragraph lays bare the satiric potential of the pastoral mode. As Andrew V. Ettin justly observes:

> The pastoral is an ironic form, based on a perceivable distance between the alleged and the implied. . . . Its real subject is something in addition to (or perhaps even instead of) its ostensible subject. The pastoral impulse toward containment involves holding contraries together in apparent unity, forged by art out of discordant emotions and perceptions. (qtd. in James and Tew 232)

The passage of *Arcadia* quoted above is governed by the irony founded on the discord between the alleged and the implied. Allegedly, the narrator approves of Victor's great achievement by emphasizing "Arcadia is a triumph" (333). Yet, the readers are expected to realize that something fails to flourish in the cities. Further in the novel, the narrator elaborates on "the sorcery of cities":

> This is the sorcery of cities. We do not chase down country roads for fame or wealth or liberty. Or romance even. If we hanker for the fires and fevers of the world, we turn our backs on herds and hedgerows and seek out crowds. Who says—besides the planners and philosophers— that we don't love crowds or relish contact in the street with strangers? We all grow rich on that if nothing else. Each brush, each bump, confirms the obvious, that where you find the mass of bees is where to look for honey. (263)

The strange appeal of cities and of places similar to Arcadia, the mall, is rooted in power, money and fame. At first glance, the assumption seems

to hinge upon the pastoral convention: promoting "fame" and "wealth," the city appears hostile to the simple and the unsophisticated. In keeping with the convention, the city designates counter-pastoral space, since such notions as money, fame or career, perversely claimed worthwhile and desirable in the passage, are fundamental constituents of the vice associated with the city. Nonetheless, what renders the citation enigmatic in terms of the pastoral ethos is the implication that the man is not actually searching for simplicity. Nor is anybody looking for the space where *otium,* i.e. repose and contemplation, counts for more than *negotium,* i.e. active life. From the pastoral point of view, this is a hazardous claim and it utterly destroys the pastoral quality of the passage.

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The emphasis on power and fame also marks the achievements of the "Great Men" in the introductory epigraph of *Arcadia.* Its closing resumes the thought expressed in the motto in a more direct manner on the penultimate page of the novel. The last few paragraphs function as brackets since they re-phrase the aphoristic verses. This time, the leading idea is put in prose. Having seen all the artificial naturalness, a curious oxymoron which, however, properly describes the mark made by Arcadia, the mall,[11] the journalist resumes the thought expressed in the motto:

> The tallest buildings throw the longest shadows, it is said, by those who spend their lives in contemplation of their monuments, and those for whom *the shadow life* is better than the real. But most of us who live in cities die and take our shadows to the grave. . . . It is said that great men have the grandest tombstones, too, and throw the longest shadows even after death. The cemeteries prove the truth in that. (345, my emphasis)

The same imagery which characterizes the bogus quotation governs the paragraphs closing *Arcadia.* The motif of the shadow becomes the core around which the thought of the journalist is oscillating. Contemplating Victor's monument, Arcadia, the mall, he begins pondering upon the Horatian idea of "exegi monumentum" but concludes on a more sober, realistic note. "I'll leave no monument to me. No bar, no restaurant, no market hall will bear my name" (334). Resuming the thought expressed in the epigraph, the journalist goes as far as to cynically deride the idea which has become the *leitmotif* of the novel. Mentioning the tombstones of the long-forgotten deceased literally "throw[ing] . . . Shadows" in cemeteries, he aims at making the readers aware of the pointlessness of the strife for "mak[ing such a] Mark." By contrast to the introductory aphorism, no tensions animate the sober discourse any more. The realistic conclusion of the novel,

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[11]   Cf. the paragraphs describing nature confined within an artificial frame (Crace 336).

stressing the democratic dimension of death, has been devoid of the notion of Darwinian struggle. The journalist claims: "But I prefer to think that worms and damp and degradation are open-minded democrats which treat us all the same. We are all citizens at last. At least until we are all soil" (345).

Leaving aside the structural and contextual significance of the bogus quotation for the text of *Arcadia*, the readers might try and analyze the mere fact of enclosing an aphoristic trap in a novel. The question is what has been the *spiritus movens* of the author's apparent intention of putting his potential readers to the test of bogus quotations preceding *Arcadia* as well as his other six novels. The answer is suggested in the text of *Arcadia*. Once again one recurs to the motif of the shadow, first announced in the epigraph and taken up further in the text. At the end of the novel it is meant to describe not only the lives of the characters but, in a wider context, the ones of the contemporaries in general, the "shadow li[ves]" (345). Next to the protagonist of *Arcadia,* other characters also live catching at shadows. Victor's mother, Em, and Rook (Victor's first-hand man) and Anna (Victor's secretary) as well as Joseph ("Rook's ne'er-do-well [foil]" 31), all of them live their "shadow li[ves]," their daydreaming resulting in a complete final disappointment. By contrast, the novel is closed with a picture of the journalist really tasting his life. He admits: "I make my mark upon the city, too. My living mark. I stretch my legs as best I can and set off slowly down the street. My rainy footprints on the pavement will soon dry, but footprints . . . are more substantial—are they not?—than shadows" (345). The rhetorical question, directed at the readers, seems to be targeted at addressing the problem of the authenticity of experience.

It is significant that a short piece of research makes it clear that Crace has taken much pleasure in the intentional delusion of his readers. In an article, he admitted:

> I have in the past acquired a reputation for concocting non-existent writers and unwritten volumes. My first seven novels were flattered by sham epigraphs from invented works by counterfeit authors, including Pycletius,[12] Emile Dell'Ova, and the "excavationst" Sir Harry Penn Butler.[13] It always cheered me up when my books were badly received to learn that the scholarly critic[14] was nevertheless more than familiar with the works of my bogus epigrapher. (Crace, "New Kind")

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[12]  The alleged author of the epigram preceding another novel by Crace, *Continent* (1986). Interestingly enough, "[t]he current edition of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* includes an entry (written by Crace) for Pycletius, continuing the joke and enhancing its post-modern credentials" (Farren).

[13]  The alleged author of the introductory epigram in *The Gift of Stones* (1988).

[14]  Probably, Frank Kermode—cf. Farren.

In an interview, he admits: "I like to tease people" (Crace, "In Conversation"). If so, the question is whether it is only for the sake of deception that Crace wants to disorient the readers? It seems that his motives are deeper. By offering them the quotations bearing all signs of genuine excerpts, he puts them to a test in order to find out if they content themselves with mere appearances. The detailed way of annotating the alleged quotation proves Crace's desire to disguise the delusion. If the readers fall into the trap, it will mean that they are perfectly satisfied with judging by appearances and dealing with copies instead of originals. As a consequence, they may be regarded as those who catch at shadows.

The idea of perfect satisfaction with second-hand experiences, the principle of "the shadow life," suggests still another dimension of the novel. I would like to argue that Crace's *Arcadia* employs the idea of hyperreality presented by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation.* The famous intellectual claims that a new era of hyperreality began in the 1980s, the time his monograph was first published. It is marked by the loss of distinction between the real and the hyperreal. On the first page of his monograph he argues that:

> 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. (1)

Baudrillard's claim that contemporary society worships "the precession of simulacra,"[15] i.e. with copies without the original, is further furnished by an analysis of its participation in the world created by the media, in the first place, by TV and places like Disneyland. Theorizing the postmodern society, he investigates the nature of the interaction between the hyperspace and those who enter it:

> By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials—worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication,

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[15]   The epigraph preceding the monograph defines simulacrum as follows: "'The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.' Ecclesiastes" (Baudrillard 1).

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nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real. (2)

*Arcadia* is Crace's endorsement of the idea of hyperreality. Interestingly enough, it begins at assigning the novel its enigmatic title. The evocative name, which offers a rich array of pastoral connotations, turns out to designate an odd place, in Baudrillard's words, the map without the territory. Victor's Arcadia, the mall built of glass and concrete, is a tangible example of Baudrillard's simulacrum: seemingly representing the original, the pastoral Arcadia, it is only a kitsch image of the pastoral ideal driven *ad absurdum,* underpinned by no original at all. It is, indeed, a simulacrum without the original. The modern building in the heart of the cityspace, "the fruit and vegetables . . . so polished and so uniform" (336), the "lab-grown lettuces" (336) together with the "glasshouse broccoli" (336) and "bio-technic aubergines" (336), all sold in the shopping centre, whose logo is "a dancing apple with a hygienic, grub-free smile" (336), is this not a provocative idea? What does this image represent but the idea of hyperreality, of blurring traditionally antagonistic elements, of enclosing nature within the cityscape as well as the natural within the artificial? As Baudrillard notices, "*that is where simulation begins*" (31), in the implosion of polarities. "[N]othing separates one pole from another any more, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contraction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other: *implosion* . . . , an implosion of meaning" (31). This is the absurdity of Victor's version of Arcadia.

In a wider sense, this is the absurdity of any shopping mall readers know from first-hand experience of reality (or better, of hyperreality): the artificial-looking fruit, the fountains and plants, which one is not allowed to touch, the "perfect surveillance" of the hypermarket (Crace 76),[16] all these characteristics are perfectly familiar to contemporary readers. The characters of Crace's novel, alongside the readers easily deceived into believing in the authenticity of the epigraph, represent a hyperreal society which contents itself with mere substitutes. In the case of hypermarkets, they are satisfied with "this hyperspace of the commodity where in many regards a whole new sociality is elaborated" (Baudrillard 75) and are involved in its "immense to-and-fro movement totally similar to that of suburban *commuters*" (75). The same to-and-fro movement is discernible in Crace's description of the market: "here was chaos, a nightmare for pedestrians. To cross the market by foot was to volunteer for service in the bruising labyrinths of an ants' nest. . . . Insane. Insane" (Crace 211).

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16    Cf. the description of Arcadia, the mall (333).

In a more specific sense, the act of the intentional deception, performed by the author, exemplifies the process of simulation, "feign[ing] to have what one doesn't have" (Baudrillard 3). The habit of preceding his novels with fake quotations proves Crace a literary designer of hyperreal space.

Crace's *Arcadia,* an enigmatic version of the pastoral, functions as a touchstone of hyperreality. The introductory epigraph seems to be its herald. Thoroughly conscious of setting a trap with the bogus quotation for his potential readers, Crace proves himself to be a true representative of contemporary society, a society which, on the one hand, is well versed in simulation and manipulation[17] and, on the other hand, has long lost the ability to discern between the real and the fabricated. In terms of Christian standards of morality, such an attitude towards the world and society as well as towards our inner selves may be judged sinful. If so, it seems plausible to assume that Crace's point of reference in composing his introductory epigram might have been an English proverb: "Old sins cast long shadows." *Arcadia* may be interpreted as a novel examining one of the oldest sins, greed, leading to the dehumanization of the protagonist of *Arcadia*. In a wider context, it may be an accusation of contemporary society, re-oriented at profit-making, gained at the expense of the authenticity of experience. Since materialism and industrialism have led to the commodification of the human, Crace's epigram may be regarded as a commentary on the state of affairs: "buildings [like great men] throw the longest shadows."

The ambiguity of the introductory epigraph, its philosophical context as well as structural function, indicate that the aphorism is meant to play a pivotal role in shaping the interpretation of *Arcadia*. Crace's cynical attitude towards his potential readership seems to aim at delivering a tangible proof of how superficial and easily contented readers have become. It is left for each of them to decide whether they want to feel "as though [they] were more [themselves]"[18] after having read *Arcadia.*

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[17] First of all, performed by the media—cf. Baudrillard's examples connected with TV and Disneyland.

[18] In a dystopia, *Brave New World,* the phrase is used by a disillusioned member of Fordian society who wanted to find his way back to his real self (Huxley 90).

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# Marginalized Identities

Ira Aldridge with his son Ira Daniel

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# The Lost Life
# of Ira Daniel Aldridge (Part 1)

# ABSTRACT

The sons of famous men sometimes fail to succeed in life, particularly if they suffer parental neglect in their childhood and youth. Ira Daniel Aldridge is a case in point—a promising lad who in his formative years lacked sustained contact with his father, a celebrated touring black actor whose peripatetic career in the British Isles and later on the European continent kept him away from home for long periods. When the boy rebelled as a teenager, his father sent him abroad, forcing him to make his own way in the world. Ira Daniel settled in Australia, married, and had children, but he found it difficult to support a family. Eventually, he turned to crime and wound up spending many years in prison. The son of an absent father, he too became an absent father to his own sons, who also suffered as a consequence.

There are several mysteries surrounding Ira Aldridge's eldest son Ira Daniel. Who was his mother? Why did his father send him away to Australia at age nineteen? What did he do there? Where and when did he die? Are any of his descendants alive in Australia today? Given the lacunae in British and Australian birth, marriage and death records, we may never be able to answer some of these questions, but other documents that have survived provide us with enough hard facts to reconstruct the trajectory of a portion of his life, particularly moments in his childhood and young adulthood that appear to have determined the direction he ultimately decided

to go. It is not an altogether happy story. In a sense Ira Daniel can be seen as a victim of his father's remarkable success as an actor.[1]

ENGLAND

By the time the boy was born, his father was forty years old and had been touring the British Isles for more than twenty years as an itinerant performer of tragedies, comedies, melodramas, and farces. An African-American, Ira Aldridge had debuted in London in 1825, playing Othello and other black roles in two metropolitan theatres in a combined run that lasted six months. But further offers of employment in the capital did not materialize, largely because of his race. No theatre could afford the luxury of hiring a black actor as a regular member of its company, so the young thespian, by then known as the African Roscius, began touring the British provinces as a visiting star. He would remain in a city or town for a week or two and then move on to the next engagement, if he could find one. Initially this was a very difficult way to make a living, but eventually, as his fame grew, he was in demand and busy most of the year moving from place to place to take up assignments with local acting companies.

At the end of his first run in London Aldridge had married Margaret Gill, an English woman ten years his elder who normally travelled with him as he made his rounds. She never had any children and would have been about fifty years old when her husband brought Ira Daniel home. We don't know exactly when this happened, and there is some uncertainty about the precise year the boy was born. Aldridge's biographers claim the birth occurred in May 1847, using as evidence a letter the father had written to a friend on 4 June 1860 stating that his son had "just entered his thirteenth year" (qtd. in Marshall and Stock 101 and 249). This dating is confirmed in the manifest of the ship Ira Daniel boarded for Australia early in February 1867, where his age is given as nineteen.[2] However, in the British census of 1851, which was conducted on March 30th that year, when his father was

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[2]   Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 7666, Inward Overseas Passenger Lists (British Ports) 1852—, fiche B267: 1.

performing in Derby, his age is recorded as two-and-a-half, which would place his birth at around September or October 1848. Also, on most Australian documents that mention his birth, 1848 is the year cited (see, e.g., "Pentridge" 208a). Perhaps these discrepancies were a result of a difference between the date he was actually born and the date he entered Margaret Aldridge's household. She brought him up as if he were her own son and may have regarded his arrival in her life as a more accurate marker of the beginning of his true existence as a child. It is possible that Ira Daniel knew nothing of the real circumstances of his birth and may have accepted 1848 as the correct year.

No one has discovered who his mother was. There has been a suggestion that she was "an Irish lady" (Scobie 132), and the 1861 census states that he was born at St. Pancras, London, but no birth certificate has surfaced to verify this or to name the mother. Suspicion naturally falls on actresses with whom Aldridge worked in theatres at Margate, Portsmouth, Landport, Wolverhampton, and Brighton approximately nine months before May 1847.

Aldridge may have had affairs with other women even earlier. The 1841 census records for Worksop, a small town southeast of Sheffield, reveal that on the day the census was taken, he was rooming in a boarding house there with a woman identified as Sarah Aldridge. She was said to be five years younger than he was, so this could not have been Margaret under a different name. Sarah also could not have been Aldridge's sister because she was listed as not having been born in foreign parts nor in Scotland, Ireland or even Nottinghamshire for that matter. Perhaps she was an actress in the theatre troupe Aldridge had joined in Worksop that week. Or maybe she was an old friend he had brought along for companionship on his tour. There is even a possibility that she might have been the woman who six years later gave birth to Ira Daniel, but Aldridge is not known to have had any lengthy affairs at this stage in his life.

As a child Ira Daniel accompanied his parents on their travels. He even came along on Aldridge's first tour of the European continent, which lasted nearly three years—from July 1852 till April 1855. Ira Daniel would have been almost eight years old by the time this tour ended. Back in London he was placed in the North London Collegiate School, High Street, Camdentown, presumably as a boarder, for his parents started travelling again in the fall and were constantly on the road for the next two years. During this time Aldridge was sued successfully for adultery by a young actor whose wife had given birth to a child evidently fathered by a black man. The child died in infancy but not before Aldridge had promised in a letter to the mother that she and the child would not be neglected by him. News of this court case circulated widely in Britain (see, e.g.,

"Stothard v Aldridge" 9), and one wonders what young Daniel and his classmates made of it.

Aldridge spent most of the next two years touring Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, and Russia, returning to London only sporadically for short engagements. He was performing in some of the largest theatres in Europe and earning lots of money, but he had only limited contact with his son and his wife during this period. As if to compensate for his long absences, he remained in Britain from June 1859 to March 1861, but an active touring schedule kept him away from London much of this time.

Meanwhile, Ira Daniel was doing well at school. Aldridge was very pleased with his progress, proudly telling a friend that the boy "is a great favourite with his masters, who entered a high opinion of his mental capabilities. Out of thirty-seven competitors for two elocutionary prizes . . . Ira Daniel . . . took the second" (qtd. in Marshall and Stock 101 and 249). The son may have been attempting to emulate his father, for a schoolmate recalled some years later "his acting very effectively in an amateur representation of 'Box and Cox'" (Hill 263), a popular short comedy of that era. Conscious of his father's spectacular success on the stage, Ira Daniel may have envisioned following in his father's footsteps.

One reason why Aldridge's wife Margaret no longer accompanied her husband on his tours is that her health was breaking down. By 1860, when she was sixty-two years old, she was confined to her room for considerable periods, so she stayed at home and looked after Ira Daniel when he was out of school. It may have been during her convalescence that Aldridge, somewhere in his travels, struck up an acquaintance with a young Swedish woman, Amanda Paulina Brandt, who would have been twenty-six years old in 1860, roughly half Aldridge's age (Sjögren 68–72). Their relationship matured into a serious romance, and in March of that year she presented him with a daughter. Twenty months later, when he was again on tour in Russia, she bore him a son. Both of these children were conceived somewhere in England and born in London. Aldridge, in essence a polygamist, was by then supporting two families. In 1861–62, while Aldridge was away, Margaret and Ira Daniel were living at 4 Wellington Road, Kentish New Town, but not long afterwards he moved them to a larger house, which he named Luranah Villa, on Hamlet Road in Upper Norwood, a growing suburb south of London near Crystal Palace.

In an effort to protect both families, Aldridge sought to invest the large sums he was earning abroad by purchasing property in this new neighborhood, but he found he could not do so and bequeath such property to his heirs without first becoming a British citizen. He duly applied for citizenship and was granted it on 7 November 1863, after which he

arranged to acquire as many as six other houses in the vicinity of Hamlet Road (Haddon 35). He also promptly left for Russia again in order to refill the family coffers.

We do not know if Margaret and Ira Daniel knew about Amanda and her children by this time. Aldridge, though not a faithful husband, appears to have maintained a loving relationship with all his dependents, even while he was away on tour. On 27 November 1863, from somewhere in Russia, he sent an affectionate letter to sixteen-year-old Ira Daniel stating that "I received a letter from your Mamma just as I was leaving Moscow. She was as well as could be expected." He encouraged his son to

> go home at Xmas, if so kiss Mamma for me, get your clothes changed, say I will pay the difference on my return—it is the establishment at the corner of Tottenham Court Road, you know it.
>
> How are you progressing in French and your other studies? Well, I hope. Write to Mamma when you have time, tell her you have heard from me.
>
> When you go there see that the gardener properly attends to the garden, and that it is well stocked with vegetables. Write me; I send you an envelope with kisses.
>
> Affectionately yours,
>
> Ira Aldridge, K.S. (qtd. in Marshall and Stock 284–85)

Ira Daniel evidently was now spending most of his time at boarding school, seldom visiting his sick "Mamma," and having only occasional contact by mail with his father.

Margaret died four months later, on 25 March 1864, while her husband was still away. Ira Daniel signed the death certificate as a witness and may have had to make arrangements for the funeral. Aldridge returned to London as soon as he received the news, but in May he was on his way back to Russia, leaving Ira Daniel on his own at school or at Luranah Villa.

The following year, on 20 April 1865, he married Amanda, who by that time was living at Luranah Villa with her two children. Ira Daniel appears to have continued staying there, as well, for on the day of their marriage he wrote each of them a polite letter of congratulations from that address:

> MY DEAR FATHER,—I write to congratulate you on the occasion of your marriage and to wish you and my dear stepmother every joy and happiness in your new relationship.
>
> I am sure that you will find in Madame a true and loving wife, and one who will fill the lonely void so recently left in your home and your heart.

I shall use my best endeavour to continue to deserve your love and shall strive to the utmost of my power to win that of my stepmother by deference to her wishes and brotherly kindness to her children.

That you may be long spared to enjoy ever-increasing happiness is the most earnest wish of

<div align="right">Your dutiful and affectionate son,<br>
IRA DANIEL ALDRIDGE</div>

His letter to Amanda was tied with a blue silk ribbon:

MY DEAR MADAM,—It is with great pride and happiness that I feel now able to address you as Step-mother and I hope most sincerely that you may be long spared to us. I am sure that in you my father will possess a true and faithful wife, and that I myself shall be able to look upon you as a loving mother, worthy of replacing in my affection her whom I so recently lost.

As I have before assured you in conversation on the subject, I shall be very much grieved if you were to feel any apprehension respecting my conduct towards my brother and sister. I again desire you to be convinced that I shall love them as only a brother can love, and that nothing shall ever be wanting on my part which may tend to increase their welfare.

In conclusion I pray that God may bless and prosper you both, granting you many years of enduring happiness.

Such is the most earnest and heartfelt desire of your affectionate

<div align="right">Stepson,<br>
Ira Daniel Aldridge (qtd. in Marshall and Stock, 294–95)</div>

Despite the courteous tone of these letters, one wonders how a young man almost eighteen years old would have regarded his father and thirty-one-year-old stepmother at this point in his life. He would have known his father to have been a philanderer who had left an ailing, elderly wife for a much younger woman, and he may have harbored some resentment toward Amanda for having won his father's love and attention in such circumstances. Amanda's children would have been five and three-and-a-half years old at this time, so Ira Daniel would have been aware that throughout his teenage years he had never been his father's only child. Perhaps he blamed his new siblings for some of the parental neglect he must have felt while growing up. Ira Daniel was facing a major adjustment in his life, for he now found himself in the awkward position of an outsider in his father's home. No longer an innocent adolescent but not yet a man, he was ripe for rebellion.

His father remained in England for several months after the marriage but chose not to resume touring the provinces. He performed only three

nights in August at the Haymarket Theatre in London and spent the rest of his time relaxing with his family at Luranah Villa. However, tempting offers continued to pour in from abroad, so in the fall of 1865 he set out once again, this time stopping in Russia, Ukraine, Crimea, Turkey, and Poland before returning to London at the end of August 1866.

He may have been called back to deal with Ira Daniel's misbehavior, for something had gone dreadfully wrong at home while he was away. Amanda, who was pregnant when he left, had given birth to their third child, a daughter, in March. In a letter to her husband written half a year earlier she had reported that all was well at Luranah Villa (qtd. in Marshall and Stock 277 and 314), and in March Aldridge had received a satisfactory account of Ira Daniel's schoolwork from his headmaster (Marshall and Stock 317). But during and after Amanda's pregnancy, she could not control her stepson, who evidently was not treating her with the love and respect he had promised. Aldridge's biographers believe he became "wild, pleasure-loving and irresponsible" while his father was away (Marshall and Stock 300).

Aldridge did not remain long in London this time. By October he had embarked on a tour of France, but he continued to monitor what was going on at home. He had told Ira Daniel to leave England, and when he heard a month later that the boy had not yet done so, he wrote on 30 November from Rouen to a trusted friend, the theatrical publisher Thomas Hailes Lacy, complaining of Ira Daniel's "innately bad disposition" and asking for help in ensuring that he be compelled to ship out as soon as possible. The tone of his letter reveals that he was thoroughly disgusted with his errant son:

> From what has transpired I can place no confidence whatever in what he says or promises, I have written to my friend and Executor Mr. J.J. Shea-han of *Hull, 43 Francis St west* requesting him to receive him, and if possible procure him a berth to go abroad for a time in the hope of amend-ment for on that only depends his hope of any future help from me. I will direct my agent Mr. H.F. Ray of Upper Norwood to call and repay you the advance made him for which I thank you, but do not let him impose upon you, he is such a hypocrite that he would deceive the most wary. Will you further take the trouble to let him know the contents of this letter, and to make his way immediately to Hull, or send his address directly to Mr. Sheahan or give it to you for that purpose, and also to say whether he is content to do as I request or be lost to me forever. I will send him no money but will make arrangements for his journey to Hull as soon as I hear from you that he acceeds [*sic*] to my wish . . .[3]

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[3]  T.O. Mabbott collection, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University. The letters from Ira Aldridge to Thomas Hailes Lacy (cited here) and from Ira

We do not know exactly what led to this rupture between father and son, but clearly it had something to do with the way Ira Daniel had treated his young stepmother. He had never behaved inappropriately while his "Mamma" was still alive. He had been a dutiful son, a good student, and his father had been proud of his accomplishments at school. But now his father regarded him as a liar and hypocrite, a prodigal son who had to be sent away.

Aldridge did not specify where Ira Daniel should go. Perhaps he left that decision entirely to his son, who may have wanted to get as far away as possible from his father's household. Ira Daniel departed from Gravesend, London, on 21 February 1867 as a steerage passenger bound for Australia aboard the Merrie Monarch. His "profession, occupation or calling" was recorded on the ship's manifest at "Gent." Most of the other fourteen passengers on board were in their teens or twenties and were headed, as he was, for Melbourne.[4]

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## Melbourne

The voyage took 112 days, with the Merrie Monarch arriving at Hobson's Bay on 13 June 1867. Ira Daniel immediately set out to look for work, and on the strength of his name alone quickly secured an engagement at the Theatre Royal to perform as Mungo, a negro servant in Isaac Bickerstaff's eighteenth-century farce, *The Padlock*. This was one of his father's most famous roles, considered by some to be even better than his masterful rendering of Othello. Ira Daniel must have seen him in it countless times, so he would have had a good model on which to base his own performance. However, he may not have been familiar with the script, for though he was originally billed to appear on June 22nd, his debut was postponed until a week later, supposedly to allow him to recover "from the effects of a long Sea Voyage" ("Theatre Royal" 22: 8). It is likely that he may have needed more time to rehearse his part.

The principal lessee at the Theatre Royal in those days was Joseph C. Lambert, an elderly British comic actor who was nearing retirement "after a career extending over forty years, during which he has taken part in no less than 10,000 performances in Europe, America and Australia."[5]

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Daniel Aldridge to his stepmother Amanda Aldridge (cited in footnote 6) are reproduced with the permission of Harvard University Library's Theatre Collection.

[4]  Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 7666, Inward Overseas Passenger Lists (British Ports) 1852—, fiche B267: 1.

[5]  Unidentified cutting in a file of "Theatrical Newspaper Cuttings," Q792/T, held at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. The other five lessees of the Theatre Royal were named Vincent, Harwood, Stewart, Hennings, and Bellair (Stewart 13).

He had lived and worked in Australia since 1855, specializing in old men's parts, of which it was said "he had no rival in this part of the world" ("The Late J.C. Lambert" 71). In his younger days in Britain he had performed in London as well as on the provincial circuit, so he certainly would have known of Ira Daniel's father and may have crossed paths with him occasionally. Indeed, there is evidence in surviving playbills suggesting that they appeared on stage together at Dublin's Theatre Royal in December 1832, and they may have performed together elsewhere in Britain as well.

Lambert was pleased to add the son of the African Roscius to his troupe, and to spark public interest in this new performer he advertised him in the press as "Son of the Chevalier Ira Aldridge, Knight of Saxony, holder of the Ernestinschen House Order of Prussia; also of the Orders of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Austria, Russia, the Swiss Cross, &c.; who has appeared before nearly all the Crowned Heads of Europe" ("Theatre Royal" 20:8). Lambert also encouraged Ira Daniel to include in his performance two of the songs his father had popularized: "Dear heart, what a terrible life I am led" and "Opossum up a Gum Tree." Newspapers publicized the upcoming event, but one of them did not express high expectations of the outcome, noting only that "what Artemus Ward calls 'a kullered gentleman' is shortly to appear in the mouldy old part of Mungo in 'The Padlock'" ("Theatrical" 2).

The reviews of Ira Daniel's debut on 29 June 1867 were devastating. The most positive appraisal appeared in the *Argus*, which spoke of his performance as "very tolerable, but . . . certainly very far removed from excellence; indeed, the admiration of the audience seemed chiefly excited not by the fact of his good acting, but by his ability to act at all" ("Monday, July 1, 1867" 5). The *Herald* stated bluntly that "Mr. Aldridge junior does not appear to have inherited the histrionic talent of his father, and his debut on Saturday night was a signal failure. He apparently knows nothing about acting, and still less about singing. He does not possess a particle of humour, or anything in the shape of facial expression" ("Theatres" 1:3). The *Age* dismissed him as "evidently a novice, [who] has much to learn before he can obtain a position" ("The Theatres" 5), and the *Leader* excoriated the managers of the theatre for allowing Ira Daniel and other inexperienced youths like him "to show their faces before the public at all," for they were "as much fit for the stage as wild boars would be for guests at a spinsters' tea party" (Autolycus 22). The *Australasian* also took the managers to task for casting a rank amateur as Mungo when there were four or five professionals in their acting company who could have played the role ten times better; Ira junior, the critic complained, "made the dullest, poorest, feeblest attempt at being funny I ever remember to have seen." Moreover, he "can no more sing than he can act, and if the management have made

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a long engagement with him, the best thing they can do is to pay him for doing nothing" ("The Theatres, &c" 17).

Lambert took this advice to heart. After allowing Ira Daniel to play Mungo once more, which he did "without much success" ("The Theatres: Theatre Royal" 5), but with "much more ease and spirit than on his first appearance" ("Theatres" 2:3), Lambert withdrew him from the stage, even though a third appearance had already been announced. Ira Daniel never performed in Melbourne again. *Bell's Life in Victoria* reported that he had

> retired, probably to go through a probation in the up-country districts to enable him to acquire a slight knowledge of what is necessary in order to attain anything like a respectable position on the metropolitan boards. I believe Mr. Aldridge possesses education and accomplishments, therefore probably he may, at some future time, make a better show than on his first appearance in Melbourne. (Surface 2)

Hardly a ringing endorsement, this must have made Ira Daniel even more painfully aware that as an actor he had failed completely.

On 7 August, less than six weeks later, his father died on tour in Poland. This news did not reach Australia until mid-October, and Ira Daniel did not know of it until he read an obituary in a Melbourne paper (probably "Death of Ira Aldridge" *Age* 7, although the same obituary had appeared a few days earlier in the *Leader* 19). He immediately wrote a lengthy letter to his stepmother:

> MA CHERE MADAME,—I scarcely know how to commence my letter. To say that I am deeply grieved is not sufficient. I can hardly believe that it is true my dear, dear father is no more. Oh Madame! I have indeed a great deal to blame myself with, for I feel I have not acted as I ought to have done towards so good a parent.
>
> [How] truly I lament it now it is too late. I hope he forgave me for all the uneasiness and trouble that I caused him. I have never received a line from him or you since I left England for here. My father promised me that he would write; perhaps he was too ill. Was it so? How is it, my Dear Madame, that neither Mr. King or anyone did not write and let me know of my Dear Father's death. I should have been ignorant of it had it not been for the newspapers.
>
> Now Madame, what I am about to say, believe me, comes from my heart. I have deeply wronged you and have always taken your good advice as hatred towards me, in fact, I did not understand the full meaning of your kindness. Mind, my Dear Stepmother, I am not asking you to call me back to England, far from it; but if you think that I could be of any service whatsoever to you or the Poor Children, say so, and if I do not get the money to return I will work my passage over. I can assure

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you I am quite altered and with God's assistance will never go wrong again. I have not been at all fortunate since I have been here for I was doing nothing for eleven weeks and now have only obtained a situation as money taker at the Haymarket Theatre at one Pound a week. I am indeed very thankful for even this. I hope soon to get something better.

How are you, my Dear Madame, and how is Luranah, Fred and the Baby? Please kiss them for me and tell them not to forget that they have a Brother who often thinks of them and who will also be their protector. Will you write to me? Yes, I am sure you will. I do not know where you are at present, therefore send this to Mr. King's care. Let me know all respecting my dear Father, did he leave me any particular message or not? If He did, I will do his bidding and shall feel happy to think that I have strictly obeyed his commands once. Was he long ill? Did he suffer much; I see by the papers that you, my Dear Step-mother attended him the whole time. I am glad that you were with him. I had no idea that he was going to Russia again as I also saw in the papers that he was going to visit America shortly. I know what a fearful blow this must be to you, but I think, my Dear Madame, it is a debt one must all pay sooner or later. Do you intend remaining at Norwood or going to France? If you have any pity for me, Madame, I am certain you will write, and let me know your whereabouts.

I really cannot understand why I have never had a letter from someone to tell me of my Dear Father's death. Why, I cannot tell. I see it occurred on the 7th of August at Lodz in Poland. Well, the Mail did not leave England for here until the 26th, surely there was sufficient time to write. I hope though next mail will bring me some news. I have though begun to despair for so many mails have already arrived, with no news for me. I have not much to write except, my Dear Madame, to condole and sympathize with you in your and my heavy loss, for indeed a better or kinder Father I know never existed. Try and bear up in this indeed great trial, and think if possible that you have a Stepson who although he may have wronged you is truly penitent and will ever as long as he lives do his best to atone for the injury he has already done you.

In conclusion, I again ask you to write me, pray do not keep me in suspense, and if you only say that would like me to return I will do so instantly. So God bless you, my Dear Madame, and the Children whom you, I pray, kiss for me. I cannot scarcely realize that the past is all true. Would to Heaven it were not. Good-bye, my Dear Stepmother, and believe me,

<div align="right">Ever your affectionate Stepson,<br>
Ira D. Aldridge (qtd. in Marshall and Stock 300–02)</div>

Amanda Aldridge never replied to this letter. One of her daughters told Ira Aldridge's biographers that "she had been advised against it by friends, and in later life regretted the decision" (qtd. in Marshall and Stock

302). But there may have been another reason for her silence as well. Frederick King, the land and estate agent in London through whom Ira Daniel forwarded his letter to his stepmother, had written on 2 September to Lacy expressing concern about the settlement of the actor's estate:

> My dear Sir,
> Just previously to poor Aldridge leaving England he consulted me about his property and his affairs and as to how he should provide for Ira and asked me if I should have any objection to act as one of his Executors with Mr. Bone his Broker to which I assented and he left me to go to London to give instructions for his Will and told me in the Evening on his return that his Sol$^s$ suggested that Madame should also be Executrix with us and said he should execute the Will in the morning which I presumed he did and then left England.—I have not heard a *word* from Madame since he left England but my impression is that she thought my sympathies were with Ira and that she induced him to make a subsequent Will in Paris by which I fear she prevailed on him to make a Will intirely [*sic*] in her favour leaving Mr. Bone and herself Ex$^{or}$ & Ex$^x$.—Whether it was a Will or a codicil I don't know but whatever it is she has it as a Mr. Waters wrote from Paris to Mr. Bone as also did the Manager of the Theatre at Lodtz where he died to say so and that he Mr. Bone was one of the Ex$^{ors}$.—I am therefore at a loss to know in what position poor Ira is left until I hear more.—I fear Madame was a little offended at my dictating to her her duty towards Ira, and perhaps also telling poor Aldridge the *just* way he should dispose of his property and I fear Aldridge became quite a child in her hands after he left England and made another will entirely at her dictation and with what effect to poor Ira I do not know.
>      I have waited to hear before writing Ira but will write him next mail if only to give him the above information.
>      I will give you a call on my return.
>
> <div align="right">I am, My dear Sir,<br>Yours faithfully<br>Frederick King[6]</div>

King's fears proved to be correct. Aldridge had written a new will in Paris on 25 June 1867, six weeks and a day before his death, naming Amanda and Mr. Bone as his executors, and leaving the bulk of his estate to Amanda. He did however make some provision for Ira Daniel, bequeathing him "the sum of five hundred pounds sterling absolutely on his attaining the age of twenty five years" (qtd. in Marshall and Stock 326). The will was proved in London on 4 November 1867, and one assumes that King was told of it and tried to communicate the news to Ira Daniel. Aldridge

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[6]  T.O. Mabbott collection, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

left an estate valued at under £9,000, so Amanda gained a great deal and Ira Daniel relatively little by comparison. But there is some doubt about whether this legacy ever was passed on to Ira Daniel five years later. Perhaps Amanda, Mr. Bone and Mr. King no longer knew where in Australia he was. Amanda's refusal to communicate with him suggests she wanted to have nothing further to do with the boy who had given her so much trouble earlier. She certainly had no intention of calling him back to England.

Ira Daniel left Melbourne not long after writing his stepmother. He had been working at the Haymarket Theatre for about a month when he wrote her, but the job didn't pay much and may have been given to him purely out of sympathy for his plight as the unemployed son of a great actor. The lessee and manager of the Haymarket Theatre at that time was William Hoskins, another British actor who had had considerable experience on stage in London and the provinces before emigrating to Australia in the 1850s. He too would have known of the African Roscius and, like Lambert, may even have performed with him occasionally, so it is not surprising that he offered a helping hand to Aldridge's son.

Ira Daniel, however, had had a good secondary school education, and he decided to put that to use by seeking employment as a tutor. He found such a position in Lilydale, a village (population ca. 250) twenty-four miles east of Melbourne, where he met and fell in love with a young seamstress, Ellen Huxley. They were married on 10 January 1868 at the Registrar's Office in Fitzroy, a section of Melbourne, and one wonders if this was an elopement, for no one from her family appears to have been present; the only witnesses to sign the marriage certificate were Mary Mortimer and Margaret Selina Mortimer, who may have been relatives of the Registrar, N.W. Mortimer. Ellen's father was then serving a four-year term in prison for forgery and uttering ("Forgery" 2), so he wouldn't have been able to attend, and her mother, who ran a grocery store in Melbourne, may have been too busy to come and witness the ceremony, but some of Ellen's seven siblings who lived in the area surely would have been there had they known that their sister was getting married. When the couple's first child was born the following year, Ellen and Ira Daniel were living in Carlton, where he was now teaching. The child, a daughter, survived only two hours, dying after vomiting blood due to an accident involving her mother.

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# Annie Proulx's Imaginative Leap: Constructing Gay Masculinity in "Brokeback Mountain"

# ABSTRACT

Non-heterosexual men have long existed on the social and cultural margins. Gay and bisexual male characters in literature, too, have done so for many generations. This essay explores the construction of gay masculinity in the short story "Brokeback Mountain" in relation to the "imaginative leap" that its author, Annie Proulx, undertook in order to conceptualize and represent this noteworthy form of marginalized otherness. It demonstrates that, despite the story's various refreshing elements, "Brokeback Mountain" ultimately relies far too extensively on the logic of melodrama when telling the tale of Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist, who fall in love in 1963 and continue their sexual relationship over the course of two decades. As a result, this story ends up positioning its two queer protagonists as enemies of the patriarchal social order and the larger society within which it so comfortably exists, implicitly perpetuating both heterosexism and homophobia as it does its cultural work.

Like other female novelists, Annie Proulx—until somewhat recently best known for her 1993 novel *The Shipping News*, winner of both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, which focuses on complex romantic and familial relationships amid the backdrop of a desolate Newfoundland fishing village—regularly constructs male characters and masculinities in her various literary creations. In recognition of her noteworthy accomplishments in this regard, various critics have noted that

Proulx "entertains the mythic legends of drunken cowboys, rodeo heroes, betrayed lovers, and aging ranchers" (Bakopoulos 43); creates "tough-as-nails characters who do the best they can to make ends meet and to make relationships work" (O'Neal 4D); "vividly portrays the complex inter-play between people and their environment" (O'Neal 4D); "deftly uses the influence of the elements taking its toll on the characters' psyches" (D'Souza 32); understands the "deadly accidents that can strike like light-ning in the midst of exhausting daily routine that grant her stories their distinctive impact" ("Close" 91); and composes works filled with "im-ages of unrequited longing, wide-open spaces, [and] hardscrabble lives" (Jacobs 369). In addition, critics have observed that Proulx has "made a specialty of what might be called fancy writing about plain folks" (Rubin 20), possesses the impressive abilities "to reveal both the humor and the sheer awfulness of what it's like being caught between a rock and a hard place" (Rubin 20) and "to merge the matter-of-fact and the macabre" ("Close" 91), and continually "demonstrates her creative mastery of the English language" (Glover and Hoffert 115) to create "luscious prose" (Jacobs 369) with "descriptive flair [that] few contemporary writers can match" ("Range" 8), effectively "twirl[ing] words like a black-hat bad-man twirling Colts, fires them off for the sheer hell of it, blam, blam, no thought of missing, empty beer cans jump in the dust, misses one, laughs, reloads, blams some more" (Skow 88).

When it comes to Proulx's constructions of male characters and mas-culinities, arguably the most intriguing example of this process occurred with her construction of gay masculinity in the short story "Brokeback Mountain." Originally published in the October 13, 1997 issue of *The New Yorker* and reprinted two years later in Proulx's collection *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*, "Brokeback Mountain" tells the tale of two Wyoming ranch hands, Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist, who fall in love while working together as sheepherder and camp tender in 1963 and later pursue their intense magnetic attraction and ongoing relationship over two decades. As Proulx has revealed, this story began taking shape one evening when she noticed an older, lean and muscular ranch hand in a Wyoming bar who was intently watching a group of young cowboys playing pool (qtd. in "Getting" 130). She noticed something in his expression that suggested a kind of bitter longing, which led her to wonder whether he might be gay, and what it must be like for any man to grow up gay in homophobic rural Wyoming (qtd. in "Getting" 130).

"'Brokeback' was constructed on the small but tight idea of a couple of home-grown country kids, opinions and self-knowledge shaped by the world around them, finding themselves in emotional waters of increas-ing depth," Proulx has stated ("Getting" 130). With regard to the process

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of constructing the short story's two male central characters, she has expressed, "Put yourself in my place: an elderly, white, straight female trying to write about two nineteen-year-old gay kids in 1963. What kind of imaginative leap do you think was necessary? Profound, extreme, large" (qtd. in Minzesheimer 4D). The goal of the present essay, therefore, is to determine just how effectively Proulx used her imagination in constructing the gay masculinity of this story's two protagonists.

Without a doubt, Proulx has done a nice job of creating interesting central characters in "Brokeback Mountain." About Ennis and Jack, she writes that both of these rough-mannered, rough-spoken high school dropouts—a "pair of deuces going nowhere" (257)—were raised on poor ranches at opposite corners of Wyoming and ultimately found themselves with few prospects (256). Ennis is presented as a scruffy, long-legged, muscular, and supple man, possessing unusually quick reflexes, whose body is ideal for fighting and riding horses (258). Jack is presented as a smaller man with curly hair, buckteeth, and well-worn boots who is interested in rodeo life and possesses a love of puppies and other animals (257, 258).

During the summer they work together as herder and camp tender on Brokeback Mountain (Jack's second and Ennis' first) in 1963, when both are still in their late teens, Ennis and Jack ultimately enjoy a special time "when they owned the world and nothing seemed wrong" (255). Although they are officially instructed to spend much of their days apart (the tender is to spend the entire day and night in Forest Service-designated campsites while the herder is to watch over the sheep during the day, pitch a pup tent and sleep with the sheep at night, and return to camp only briefly each day for breakfast and supper), Ennis and Jack begin to violate this policy regularly and spend increasing amounts of time together as the weeks progress (257). At first, they begin sharing memories and quarts of whiskey, smoking cigarettes together, talking about horses and rodeos, singing songs and playing the harmonica, getting up only occasionally to relieve themselves (260, 261). Soon, they become increasingly respectful of the other's opinions and take pleasure in having found a companion that neither had expected (260). Even though Ennis is already engaged to marry Alma Beers at the time he meets Jack, the growing attraction between the two men—romantic, sexual, and otherwise—becomes impossible to ignore (256, 261).

Jack's attraction to Ennis is revealed initially in the short story when he furtively watches his companion undress and observes that Ennis wears neither socks nor underwear (260). Then, after a night of heavy drinking, a dizzy, drunk-on-all-fours Ennis decides to remain in camp overnight and return to the sheep at sunrise. After he is awakened by Ennis' teeth chattering in the frigid night, Jack invites Ennis to share his bedroll and, in the

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words of Proulx, "in a little while they deepened their intimacy considerably" (261). By this, she means that Jack takes Ennis' hand and places it directly on his own erect penis (261). Uninterested in that scenario, Ennis flips Jack over, gets on his knees, unbuckles his belt, lowers his pants, and engages in anal sex—"nothing he'd done before but no instruction manual needed" (261). The next morning, "Ennis woke in red dawn with his pants around his knees, a top-grade headache, and Jack butted against him; without saying anything about it both knew how it would go for the rest of the summer, sheep be damned. As it did go" (262).

As time progresses, Ennis and Jack continue to have sex, first only at night in the tent, and then later outdoors amid both sunlight and firelight (262). With the exception of a brief conversation during which both men state that they aren't queer, they never talk about their sexual interactions or the resulting emotions they feel. At summer's end, they part ways, with Ennis reiterating his intention to marry Alma in a few short months (263). As they drive away in separate directions, Ennis feels "about as bad as he ever had" and attempts to vomit, but nothing comes up (264). He does not see Jack again for four years, during which time he and Alma are wed and give birth to two girls, and Jack marries a young Texas woman named Lureen, who gives birth to their son (264, 266).

On the day they are reunited, Ennis and Jack immediately embrace and begin to kiss—so hard that Jack's buckteeth draw blood—not knowing that Alma is witnessing their passionate interaction (265). Leaving Alma at home, they depart quickly in Jack's truck, buy a bottle of whiskey, and within minutes check into a motel and begin to have sex; afterwards, their room smells "of semen and smoke and sweat" (267). At first, Jack insists that he didn't know their sexual entanglements would resume, but then he immediately admits that he is lying; in fact, he says, he redlined it all the way to Ennis' home in Riverton because he couldn't wait to be with him again (267). Ennis admits that, even though they both have wives and kids, having sex with women cannot compare to having sex with Jack (268). In response, Jack suggests that the two of them establish a life and ranch together; Ennis resists the idea, feeling it would not be fair to their families and afraid that others will discover they are not heterosexual, make fun of them, and potentially even kill them as a result (269, 270). Instead, Ennis insists that they will need to make the best of a complicated situation, remain with their wives and children, and get together every once in a while in the middle of nowhere (270).

As the years go by, Alma divorces Ennis, takes their daughters with her, and marries the local grocer (272). Although Jack remains married to the affluent Lureen, he continues to get away with Ennis in the wilderness every few months, under the pretense of going fishing or hunting. Their

last sexual encounter occurs in May 1983, two decades after they first met. At the end of their few days together, Ennis informs Jack that, because he needs to keep his current job in order to keep up with his child-support payments, he will likely not get to see Jack again until November, rather than in August as they had initially planned (277). Jack, heartbroken, reminds Ennis that he once proposed they live together:

> Tell you what, we could a had a good life together, a fuckin real good life. You wouldn't do it, Ennis, so what we got now is Brokeback Mountain. Everything built on that. It's all we got, boy, fuckin all. . . . You got no fuckin idea how bad it gets. I'm not you. I can't make it on a couple a high-altitude fucks once or twice a year. You're too much for me, Ennis, you son of a whore-son bitch. I wish I knew how to quit you. (277–78)

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Ennis' reaction to these words, which includes him falling to the ground on his knees, is so extreme that Jack fears Ennis is having a heart attack. Then, Ennis recomposes himself and the two men part ways— "nothing ended, nothing begun, nothing resolved" (278). Months later, Ennis learns from a postcard that Jack is deceased (279). Although the "official" story he receives from Lureen is that Jack drowned in his own blood after a flat tire he was fixing on a back road exploded and slammed its rim into his face, leaving him unconscious in the wake of breaking both his nose and jaw, Ennis suspects that his thirty-nine-year-old friend was instead murdered with a tire iron for being non-heterosexual (279). During a brief visit with Jack's parents in Lightning Flat, Ennis learns that Jack had entered into a relationship with another man, for whom he was planning to leave his wife. With this information, Ennis becomes convinced that Jack was indeed murdered with the tire iron (282).

Without question, "Brokeback Mountain" is a story composed of intriguing, non-heterosexual, rough-and-tumble male characters and emotional, thought-provoking narrative developments as it explores the complex sexual and romantic relationship between two ranch hands who find themselves trapped within the confines of a hypermasculine culture. In addition, the extreme masculinity of Ennis and Jack, developed and exhibited in various hypermasculine environments and emphasized at several key points in "Brokeback Mountain," offers a refreshing, counter-stereotypical representation of gay and/or bisexual men in a U.S. media offering. For example, after Ennis takes over the role of herder from Jack, he shoots a coyote—a "big son of a bitch [with] balls on him [the] size a apples" (259)—his first day on the job, then returns to camp to tell the tale to Jack while lathering up soap and shaving his face with hot water and a dull razor (259). During their last day working together on Brokeback Mountain,

Ennis and Jack roughhouse to the extent that Ennis ends up landing a hard punch on Jack's jaw (263). During Ennis' childhood years, he was encouraged by his father to resolve disputes with violence whenever necessary, for there's "nothin like hurtin somebody to make him hear good" (270). During their four years apart, Jack spent half his time repairing his old truck and the other half participating in Texas rodeos, during which he suffered crushed vertebrae, developed a degenerative stress fracture in his arm, broke several ribs and his leg in three places, and experienced numerous sprains and torn ligaments (268).

Also refreshing in this story of sex and love between two men are its touching moments of romantic intimacy, such as when Ennis refers to Jack naturally and immediately as "little darlin" on the day they are reunited after four years, or when Jack recalls his favorite moment ever spent with Ennis on Brokeback Mountain (266). In this latter encounter, Ennis walked up behind Jack, pulled him close—"the silent embrace satisfying some shared and sexless hunger"—and held him tightly as Jack fell into a sleep-like trance while standing in front of the fire, enjoying the humming vibrations of Ennis' steady heartbeat (278, 279). For Jack, Proulx writes, "that dozy embrace solidified in his memory as the single moment of artless, charmed happiness in their separate and difficult lives" (279).

Diana Ossana, who worked with Larry McMurtry to adapt "Brokeback Mountain" into a feature-length screenplay, concisely identifies other of the short story's impressive attributes when she writes: "Its compelling narrative covers a substantial time period—twenty years—in thirty pages. The prose is tight, precise, evocative, unsentimental and yet incredibly moving. The dialogue is specific to the time, the place, the social and economic class of the characters. It is a near perfect short story, in technique as well as emotion" (146). In addition, it is one of a comparatively limited number of literary works that meaningfully explores the realities of non-heterosexual relationships in rural rather than metropolitan settings. When all is said and done, as *USA Today* reader Ron Henry has expressed, "Brokeback Mountain" ultimately "portrays a love relationship full of passion and conflict. The story puts a human face on two [non-heterosexual] people in love" (17A). Proulx herself echoed such sentiments when she stated, "It is a love story. It has been called both universal and specific, and I think that's true. It's an old, old story" (Cohen D6).

I agree with Proulx that "Brokeback Mountain" is a very old story, but perhaps not in the way that she intended. Despite all of its appealing attributes, the most substantial shortcoming of this short story is that it (most likely unwittingly) relies far too extensively on the logic of melodrama when telling the tale of Ennis and Jack, an approach to storytelling that has historically been popular with women but that does not lend it-

self particularly well to providing an effective and nuanced construction of late-twentieth-century gay masculinity.

The character name of Jack Twist immediately calls to mind another literary character named Oliver Twist, created by Charles Dickens. Dickens, an author who intentionally rejected the Romantic and post-Romantic emphasis on creating characters with psychological depth, instead regularly employed melodramatic storytelling techniques in his various novels (Heyck 670). Authors who employ such techniques tend to create characters that are exaggerated and somewhat superficial caricatures rather than well-developed, well-rounded characters (Heyck 670). As such, character is largely transparent in melodrama, a genre of storytelling that itself is intended to express and reinforce values shared in a patriarchal society through a formulaic structure involving the struggle between good and evil, in which good ultimately and consistently prevails (Heyck 670). The rapid compression of time spanning two decades in "Brokeback Mountain" results in a similar form of restricted character development with regard to this short story's two protagonists, which then readily results in its unfolding according to the logic of melodrama, whether intentionally or unintentionally. About this story, even Proulx herself has admitted that "there was not enough there. I write in a tight, compressed style that needs air and loosening to unfold into art" and requires enlargement and imagination (qtd. in "Getting" 134).

The phrase "the logic of melodrama" refers to the ways that social otherness is formulaically dealt with and resolved within stories that fall into this genre. Critic Merle Rubin appears to have (consciously or unconsciously) picked up on this noteworthy aspect of Proulx's short story when he wrote, "Life here is raw, lived close to the bone. . . . And for those who don't fit in, life can be tougher yet" (20). Having emerged initially in Western culture in late-eighteenth-century stage plays and works of prose fiction (and appearing quite commonly later in cinematic offerings as well), melodramatic works continually represent struggles within or against the shared cultural values of a patriarchal society, with some noteworthy form of repressed identity causing social and cultural conflicts to emerge (Lopez 178). Certainly, traditional melodrama focuses on the protagonist as victim and strives "to remain nostalgic, longing for a return to an ideal time of respectability that lacks antisocial and/or immoral behavior" (Hart 31) as they are defined in a patriarchal society, which causes melodramatic works to represent repressive media offerings that appeal largely to audience members' emotions rather than to their reason or intellect (Beaver 230; Hayward 205; Lang 49). The hallmarks of melodrama, therefore, include the clear-cut distinction between good and evil, the notion that good must triumph over evil in the end, simplification of story and plot, and limited

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psychological development of characters (Lopez 178). As a result, as genre scholar Daniel Lopez has explained, melodrama emphasizes "plot and action at the expense of characterization. It may be said, then, that the main objective of melodrama is to arouse one's emotions in the most direct way possible" (178). The affective nature of melodramatic texts, therefore, is regularly employed to draw focus to "deviant" characters in the story world who, because of their noteworthy forms of "difference," produce within their surroundings fears and anxieties of "the other" in relation to mainstream social norms of a patriarchal society and must be reacted to/ dealt with accordingly (Hall 226; Hart 16).

In "Brokeback Mountain" specifically, by possessing noteworthy otherness in the form of non-heterosexual sexual orientations, protagonists Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist emerge as the characters who deviate in a noteworthy way from their surrounding others in the patriarchal social order of rural Wyoming from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. According to the logic of melodrama, whenever this or any other substantial deviation from patriarchal social norms and expectations emerges, the characters possessing noteworthy otherness are typically forced to restore the patriarchal social order by the story's end in one of two specific ways: by conforming to the social expectations of the patriarchal social order through some tremendous personal sacrifice or by being eradicated entirely (most often through death) from the patriarchal social order. This is precisely what occurs in "Brokeback Mountain." Following his final moments spent in the wilderness with Jack in May 1983 and their argument about Ennis' ongoing refusal to establish a life together with him, Ennis sacrifices his last chance at romantic and relational bliss and conforms to the repressive expectations of the patriarchal social order by again refusing—this time once and for all—to establish a life with another man; he ends up emotionally barren and alone as a result. In contrast, Jack's noteworthy otherness needs to be dealt with even more forcefully within the story world, because it becomes clear that he has continued to pursue romantic and sexual entanglements with other men outside of his failed relationship with Ennis (e.g. with male hustlers in Mexico and with the ranch neighbor from Texas that Jack's father mentions to Ennis at the end of the short story for whom Jack was planning to leave his wife in order to establish a life in the aftermath of his interactions with Ennis). From the standpoint of the logic of melodrama, therefore, it is absolutely no surprise that Jack suddenly ends up dead in the end, for his eradication by death simultaneously eradicates his threatening and irrepressible social otherness pertaining to the socially acceptable actions of men within the patriarchal social order of the story world. As media scholar Linda Williams has explained, such outcomes are to be expected because melodramatic texts endeavor intentionally to begin and end in a "space of innocence" (65).

In addition to the story's ending, such an understanding of how the logic of melodrama is incorporated and functions within "Brokeback Mountain" serves to explain additional aspects of this work's overall contents. For example, the careful reader is likely to notice that the most noteworthy and meaningful moments of Ennis and Jack's ongoing relationship in the short story consistently occur amid troublesome weather conditions. Their descent from Brokeback Mountain at the end of their initial summer together is motivated by a powerful storm that is moving in from the Pacific; about this, Proulx writes:

> They packed in the game and moved off the mountain with the sheep, stones rolling at their heels, purple cloud crowding in from the west and the metal smell of coming snow pressing them on. The mountain boiled with demonic energy, glazed with flickering broken-cloud light, the wind combed the grass and drew from the damaged krummholz and slit rock a bestial drone. As they descended the slope Ennis felt he was in a slow-motion, but headlong, irreversible fall. (263)

Their passionate reunion after four years occurs amid bolts of lightning (266), and their sexual escapades at the Motel Siesta immediately thereafter are accompanied by "a few handfuls of hail [rattling] against the window followed by rain and slippery wind banging the unsecured door of the next room then and through the night" (267). Their final moments spent together in the spring of 1983 occur amid "the clouds Ennis had expected, a grey racer out of the west, a bar of darkness driving wind before it and small flakes" (275). These recurring troublesome weather conditions implicitly reinforce the degree to which their non-heterosexual romantic and sexual interactions cause disruption and chaos in their surrounding story world.

An understanding of how the logic of melodrama is incorporated and functions within "Brokeback Mountain" also serves to explain why fathers (and/or their absence) are featured so prominently within this short story. Readers learn, for example, that Ennis' homophobic father, who died when Ennis was in his early teens, repeatedly made derogatory remarks about Earl and Rich, two older men who had established a ranch and life together, and even forced the nine-year-old Ennis to view Earl's dead and severely battered body when it was discovered in an irrigation ditch (270). Ennis recalls of this experience:

> They'd took a tire iron to him, spurred him up, drug him around by his dick until it pulled off, just bloody pulp. What the tire iron done looked like pieces a burned tomatoes all over him, nose tore down from skiddin on gravel. . . . Dad made sure I seen it. Took me to see it. Me and

[my brother]. Dad laughed about it. Hell, for all I know he done the job. (270)

This is the same man who taught Ennis the lesson that, when it comes to unpleasant things in life, "don't say nothin and get it over with quick" (270). Readers also learn that Jack's emotionally abusive bull-riding father kept all of his rodeo secrets to himself, never once went to see his son ride, and possessed such a quick temper that he once beat his young son repeatedly with a belt, and then urinated all over him, after Jack failed to make it to the toilet on time (260, 282). This is the same man who, perhaps having come to realize the extent and nature of his son's ongoing relationship with Ennis, refuses to allow Ennis to scatter Jack's ashes up on Brokeback Mountain, as his son had requested. Finally, the readers learn that Jack's disapproving father-in-law "hates [his] fuckin guts" (267) to such an extent that he is willing to pay Jack good money to disappear entirely and permanently from Lureen's life (270). It is clear from these representations of fathers and fatherhood in "Brokeback Mountain" that Ennis and Jack can neither inherently conform nor adequately measure up to the expectations of the patriarchy. It is further clear that these fathers are featured so prominently in the short story because they represent both the repressive patriarchal social order of the rural Wyoming story world generally as well as Ennis' and Jack's internalized versions of its repressive social expectations more specifically. Throughout the pages of Proulx's short story, therefore, these two male protagonists ultimately are represented as "enemies" of both the heterosexual patriarchal family and the larger society within which it comfortably exists, characters that must be dealt with forcefully in order to restore the patriarchal social order by the time everything is said and done. This reality is efficiently (albeit subtly) reinforced at two key points in the short story as it is revealed that Ennis prefers to engage in anal rather than vaginal sex with his wife; about this preference, Alma thinks to herself while engaged in a discussion about sex with Ennis, "Anyway, what you like to do don't make too many babies" (271).

In summarizing the overall message of "Brokeback Mountain," men's studies scholars Jane Rose and Joanne Urschel have expressed:

As [Ennis and Jack] age, the relationship does not mature. Their experiences with each other are frozen in the memories of Brokeback Mountain. Love that cannot be public, love that is forbidden and dangerous, love that has no future is a love that cannot grow with the aging cowboys. Many of the central aspects of a loving relationship are not developed, do not grow, and in the end produce nearly unbearable pain. Ennis is left with a handful of precious moments. Ennis and Jack glimpsed

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the promise of what love can offer, but circumstances and wounds kept them from the fulfillment of the promise. (250)

The restricted character development and overarching presence of the logic of melodrama in this short story, however, render such outcomes virtually inevitable. From start to finish, "Brokeback Mountain" retains a tight focus on the complex romantic and sexual relationship of its two non-heterosexual male protagonists and the resulting conflicts pertaining to gay masculinity in a homophobic and hypermasculine (story) world. By readily incorporating melodramatic storytelling logic and conventions, "Brokeback Mountain" presents extremely limited (i.e., conform or die) options for non-heterosexual men that further contribute to the social construction of a world within which gay and bisexual sexual orientations continue to be devalued, thereby implicitly perpetuating heterosexism and homophobia as the story does its cultural work, even though its author's initial intentions appear to have been exactly the opposite.

As John Lawrence stated so eloquently in his letter to the editor of *The Advocate*, "Brokeback begins in the early 1960s and ends in the 1980s. By the '80s (let alone today), it should no longer have been necessary to separate the lovers and have one of them beaten to death" (12). Lawrence is correct in his view, except when it comes to melodramatic media offerings, within which such an outcome is regarded as being the expected, required, most appropriate, and only possible "happy" ending. Given this reality, and despite the short story's various merits, perhaps the imaginative leap involved in effectively constructing gay masculinity in "Brokeback Mountain" proved to be an even bigger one than Annie Proulx was adequately prepared to take.

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# Marginalization of "the Other": Gender Discrimination in Dystopian Visions by Feminist Science Fiction Authors

# ABSTRACT

In patriarchy women are frequently perceived as "the other" and as such they are subject to discrimination and marginalization. The androcentric character of patriarchy inherently confines women to the fringes of society. Undeniably, this was the case in Western culture throughout most of the twentieth century, before the social transformation triggered by the feminist movement enabled women to access spheres previously unavailable to them. Feminist science fiction of the 1970s, like feminism, attempted to challenge the patriarchal status quo in which gender-based discrimination against women was the norm. Thus, authors expressed, in a fictionalized form, the same issues that constituted the primary concerns of feminism in its second wave.

As feminist science fiction is an imaginative genre, the critique of the abuses of the twentieth-century patriarchy is usually developed in defamiliarized, unreal settings. Consequently, current problems are recontextualized, a technique which is meant to give the reader a new perspective on certain aspects of life they might otherwise take for granted, such as the inadequacies of patriarchy and women's marginality in society.

Yet there are authors who consider the real world dystopian enough to be used as a setting for their novels. This is the case with *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy and *The Female Man* by Joanna Russ. Both texts split the narrative into a science fictional and a realistic strand so as to contrast the contemporary world with utopian and dystopian alternatives. Both texts are largely politicized as they expose and challenge the marginalized status of women in the American society of the 1970s. They explore the process of constructing marginalized identities, as well as the forms that marginalization takes in the society. Most importantly, they indicate the necessity of decisive steps being taken to improve the situation.

Sex-based discrimination is the most widespread form of social oppression, since the criterion of gender is readily applied in delineating social division lines. According to feminists, this has led to the establishment of the patriarchal system, defined as a political institution "whereby the half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male" (Millett 34). Such a dichotomization is a direct result of the dualistic thinking of the phallocentric society, in which the core of the system of thought and of the society as a whole is embedded in oppositional binarism. A relationship which remains in a binary opposition inherently entails a strong contrast and a superiority relationship. Inevitably, thus, "the other" is ascribed an inferior rank, along with features opposite to those exhibited by the superior norm. The male and the female in the patriarchy-shaped consciousness are representative of such a relationship, in which the woman is "the other," who frequently assumes marginalized status.

This marginality is closely associated with a strong sense of difference resulting from the decidedly androcentric perception of gender. Significantly, femininity can even be defined in terms of a marginalized social position. Following Julia Kristeva, Toril Moi describes femininity as "that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order" (248). Thus, it seems undeniable that gender is one of the main determinants of marginality (Lee 33), and that women are the most frequent victims of marginalization. This fact manifests itself primarily in exclusion from social and economic life, denial of freedoms and lack of equality. Invariably, patriarchy is the instrument of social control, which ensures that this state of affairs persists, as it "[keeps] women out or on the edges of its economy and institutions" (Heath qtd. in Barr 70).

The marginalized status of women has been one of the main preoccupations of all the waves of feminism, the first two in particular. While feminist philosophy addresses the problem from a socio-political perspective, feminist science fiction attempts to approach it from a literary angle. A marginal genre in itself, feminist speculative fiction discusses the same issues that concern feminist theorists, yet it presents and dramatizes them in the form of thought experiments. The negative aspects of patriarchy, including the marginalization of women, are typically exposed by means of dystopian visions. Masculinist dystopias feature worlds of male dominance, where discrimination and sexism are carried to the extreme. These are usually set in invented worlds, planets, moons and lands, the exact spatial and temporal location of which remains unknown. Despite this or, paradoxically, due to this intentional cognitive estrangement, the problems dramatized in such novels are recognizable for a contemporary

reader. Indeed, many critics perceive strong parallels with the contemporary world, which can hardly be dismissed as unintended. Even though certain issues are exaggerated, their relevance to current issues is indisputable.

Thus, defamiliarization and the introduction of fantastic elements do not detract from the social significance of feminist science fiction and they certainly do not lessen their impact on its target audience. Still, many authors opt for more straightforward ways of social indictment than merely criticism by implication. They rely on realist techniques to convey the message about the deficiencies of our world and its social organization, in particular the continued inequality of women. Consequently, instead of otherworldly locations and extraterrestrial races, the reader is presented with a more or less traditionally realist, or even naturalist, depiction of twentieth-century America—contemporary to the authors at the time of writing. This allows the writers to illustrate truthfully, without the guise of science fictional tropes, the actual gender inequality that they wish to disclose as prevalent and harmful.

The two most significant texts of this kind are both feminist utopian classics—*Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy and *The Female Man* by Joanna Russ. The action of both novels is set in the same year, 1976. Therefore, they can be seen as a literary response to what second-wave feminists indentified as the oppressive and limiting social environment of the 1970s. Also, both texts combine utopian and dystopian elements as they juxtapose a utopian alternative with the flawed contemporary society. Interestingly, both envision the utopia to be located in our future, rather than on a distant island or planet as the stock utopian convention would have it. Thus, it is not spatial but temporal distance that separates us from the utopia and the conclusion is that it can only be reached if the right choices are made in the present. The depiction of future worlds as well as the use of the time travel theme are fantastic elements, which categorize the novels as science fiction works. However, these speculative components exist side by side with close social observation.

In fact, *Woman on the Edge of Time* is frequently described as a work of social realism (Makinen 17). However, it is also defined as "a successful blending of realistic and speculative modes" (Walker 17), which points to its genre variety. The plot centres on a female character, Connie, who experiences all the negative aspects of contemporary America—she lives in "a wild zone of dispossession and contempt" (Berkson 111). Even though she is described as a typical utopian traveller, she departs from the pattern as her journey to utopia is a consequence of time travelling, or, as Dana Fancourt sees it, of mental travelling (99). Connie accesses utopia through what Fancourt defines as "altered states of consciousness" (100). Indeed, it

is only her mind that is transferred to the future, with her body remaining in her own time.

The society she visits is the future community of Mattapoisett, a place of absolute equality. The strong contrast between the two primary settings stems from the fact that Connie's own life is a story of failure and abuse, all resulting from her being female in a patriarchal society. Marleen Barr makes the chilling observation that Connie's suffering is not purely fictional but is actually shared by many women in America (74). Connie's discrimination takes place on three levels: that of gender, class and race, all of which constitute the grounds for her social oppression (Makinen 17) but also "the determinants of power" in a patriarchal society (Bammer 96). Katherine Payant considers Connie the apotheosis of a victim of capitalist patriarchy, representing the abuse endured by social groups such as "women, ethnic minorities, the poor, the uneducated, the old" (66), all suffering from the effects of marginalization. Connie can therefore be perceived as the ultimate "other"—she is everything that a white Anglo-Saxon upper-class male is taught to despise, his absolute opposite. Not only is Connie a female, but also a Chicana from a poor immigrant family. Her underprivileged status is aggravated by her aborted pregnancies, a failed attempt to gain a college education and her history of criminal activity and child abuse. At the novel's start, she is on welfare, she has lost custody of her daughter and she is about to be hospitalized in a mental institution. She is thus an outcast in every sense of this word—she is racially, socially and sexually estranged from the mainstream society. Even though her social status renders Connie "an unlikely heroine" (Green), it is precisely what enables the author to use this character to expose and denounce the abuses of patriarchy.

All the calamities that fall upon Connie can be traced back to the men who have come her way. In fact, her life is a catalogue of unfortunate relationships with men, beginning with her father, and continuing with her brother, her college professor, her husbands, partners and her doctors. Connie's plans to "be someone" (Piercy 46) fail as she becomes pregnant by a white student who disclaims any responsibility for the child. The woman decides to have an illegal abortion, done "without anaesthetic" (Piercy 234). Her family disown her and Connie describes herself as a "spoiled woman:" "Neither baby nor husband, neither diploma, nor home. No name. Nobody" (Piercy 234). Connie is not only "spoiled," she is also a nobody in social terms—her whole existence is negated and for her family and the society she becomes a nobody. Connie's predicament exposes the sharp contrast between America and Mattapoisett. In Mattapoisett live birth has been eliminated and the responsibility for children is shared. In the twentieth-century patriarchy it is women who take

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the brunt of unwanted pregnancies. Connie's two aborted pregnancies are shown to have been a burden to her. The first one cost Connie her college education, which, according to Michael, reveals that reproduction assists Western culture in limiting women and in thwarting their potential (11). What is more, since Connie's disadvantaged status in the society results in the immediate removal of her daughter from her custody and placing her with a white family who benefit from Connie's misfortunes, she can also be described as a "reproductive machine" (Barr 75).

During her college education Connie is used not only by her boyfriend, but also by one of the professors, who hires her as a secretary, or rather "secretary-mistress" as Connie blatantly puts it. What Connie feels recalling this liaison is what she calls "the anger of the weak" (50)—an anger that can never find an outlet as nobody sympathizes with the suffering of the weak and the poor, whose pain is never brought to light. Connie recalls with bitter irony that Professor Silvester "liked to have a Spanish-speaking secretary, that is, a new one every year—dismissed when he went away for summer vacation. He called them all Chiquita, like bananas" (50). The professor, representing the characteristic features of an educated and respected WASP, objectifies his secretaries, which is evident in denying them the right to be called by their own names. They are all products easily identifiable by a brand name, disposed of as soon as the professor is ready to dispense with their services—the sexual ones rather than the secretarial.

As for Connie's two husbands, only the first offers her true affection, yet he is killed in race riots. The circumstances of his death are very telling. Piercy shows that both gender polarization and racial intolerance lead to oppression and violence. Connie's second husband, Eddie, is a wife batterer, who eventually abandons Connie and her small child. Subsequently, Connie partners with Claud—a black saxophone player and a pickpocket. Though described as a caring man, he is guilty of drawing Connie into the world of crime. After he dies in prison Connie suffers from severe depression and becomes an alcoholic. Consequently, she neglects her daughter, Angelina, and hits her in a drunken fit. As a result she is declared unstable and unfit for mothering and her daughter is placed with a foster family. Significantly, the fostered family is white—the social worker comments that finding a family for her will be easy due to the child's relatively light skin. Thus, in capitalism, even the child is objectified and treated like a product. She is of interest to a well-off American family because she fulfills the requirements that they have set for the prospective child. Moreover, ethnic origin emerges here as a crucial factor determining one's progress from marginality to the mainstream.

After this violent incident Connie is institutionalized for the first time. The same happens again when she assaults her niece's pimp, Geraldo.

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Even though she acts in Dolly's defense, she is not believed and Geraldo's testimony is taken as more credible by the authorities than Connie's words. This is yet another example of how a woman's voice is stifled and male authority is recognized. Another man who has the final word in committing Connie to the hospital is her brother, Luis. Luis is eager to have Connie shut out of sight as he is ashamed of his humble origins as the son of Mexican immigrants, which he considers to be the potential source of his own marginality. He dreams of social advancement, which is only possible if one submits to the rules of mainstream America. His efforts to establish his Anglo image culminate in the choice of his three wives, each of whom is to reflect his current status. Altogether, they mark Luis's progress towards the desired social position: they advance from a Puerto Rican to a WASP. Connie notes that "all Luis's wives came to sound the same, nodding at him, but each one was fancier and had a higher polish" (33). Thus, what Luis's successive marriages amount to is basically a product update—until the most desirable model is obtained. Even though he rejects his Mexican heritage and poses as a mainstream American, it is also clear that he moulds his wives to behave in the Mexican manner "passive . . . dressed in black with . . . eyes downcast, never speaking until addressed" (Piercy 43). Women who are ethnic minorities are thus presented to be suffering from double marginalization—within the society and within their own households.

Connie finds herself at the mercy of men such as Luis and Geraldo. She is aware of her own powerlessness and vulnerability in the male-dominated world: "All my life I been pushed around by my father, by my brother Luis, by schools, by bosses, by cops, by doctors, and lawyers and caseworkers and pimps and landlords. By anybody who could push" (98). Connie's evaluation of her life is highly negative—she perceives her own status as a victim and she also denounces the society's tendency to control, dominate and subdue all those who are unable or unwilling to fight back. Connie's resentment at such treatment is clearly directed at the male part of the society. In fact, in Geraldo, Connie discerns the reflection of all the abusive men she encountered in her life: "[he] was her father, who had beaten her every week of her childhood. Her second husband, who had sent her into emergency with blood running down her legs. He was el Muro, who had raped her and then beaten her because she would not lie and say she had enjoyed it" (Piercy 51).

Connie was conditioned into accepting abuse due to the domestic violence that she experienced on a regular basis as a child. This damaged her self-esteem and made her unable to control her own life and eventually caused her to strike her own daughter. Connie has been made into a patriarchal pawn—she realizes that she is merely a thing, with which men are

free to do whatever they like. Her awareness of her own objectified status is clear in the frequent descriptions of herself in terms of things: "an object" (302), "a bag full of pain and trouble" (41), "human garbage carried to the dump" (32). This latter image and the invocation of waste disposal is a recurrent motif in masculinist dystopias. The "dump" is the mental asylum, where "little is recycled" (Piercy 32). Other undesired elements kept within the institution include, in Connie's words, "[those] who caught like rough teeth in the cogwheels, who had no place or fit crosswise the one they were hammered into" (31). The machinery imagery points to the dehumanization of social outcasts as well as to the soulless, mechanical character of the society, in which elements that fail to interlock within the apparatus are promptly discarded.

Another aspect that Connie's institutionalization dramatizes is the readiness with which the woman is labelled insane. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas remark that it is not uncommon for a woman to be described as neurotic if she acts against the expectations of the society. This is especially valid in the case of women who resort to violence or challenge the status of women under patriarchy (243). A similar opinion is voiced by Magali Michael, who considers the insanity diagnosis in cases such as Connie's a label that ensures the hegemony of males (131). Needless to say, it legitimizes women's confinement to the social margins. Indeed, those whom Connie befriends in the hospital are all misfits. Sybil is "persecuted for being a practicing witch, . . . for encouraging [women] to leave their husbands" (Piercy 84). Moreover, as is typical of patriarchal critics, she denounces sex with penetration and sex in general: "who wants to be a dumb hole? . . . do you want to be a dumb hole people push things in or rub against?" (85). Sybil believes that by refusing to have sex life she makes her first step towards disobjectification—she ceases to be a mere hole, a thing.

Many of the patients in the text undergo experimental treatment intended to eradicate socially unacceptable patterns of behaviour. Connie is subjected to the procedure as well, which in her case involves placing electrodes in her head in order to modify her conduct. In a very meaningful manner, the description of the operation is full of images of penetration: "First Dr. Redding drilled on her skull . . . she could feel the pressure, she could feel the bone giving way, she could hear the drill entering. Then she saw them take up a needle to insert something . . . [into] her penetrated brain" (281). This mental and medical rape is one of many references to this manner of domination in the text. In fact, rape can be seen as "a prevalent metaphor to describe society's violent manipulation of those it considers marginal" (Michael 11).

Apart from the electrode implantation and the actual rape that Connie endured, she also experienced another incident of medical violation. When

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she was admitted into hospital with a hemorrhage after an illegal abortion and the beating by Eddie, doctors performed a totally unnecessary hysterectomy, because "residents wanted practice" (Piercy 14). Connie feels that by this violation she was deprived of her femininity. Similarly, the brain implantation procedure, which is to control Connie's emotions, is perceived by Connie to be an attempt to erase her female sensitivity and perspective. She senses that for the doctors, her uncontrollable female emotions are nothing but "a disease . . . to be cut out like a rotten appendix" (282). The comparison to a surgical intervention indicates that Connie associates both the loss of her womb and the medical manipulation of her brain with an attempt to deprive her of her womanhood. She strongly resents the male doctors for these attempts. She describes them as "cold, calculating, ambitious, believing themselves rational and superior, [chasing] the crouching female animal through the brain with a scalpel" (282). In this quotation it is evident that Connie is subconsciously aware of the harmfulness of binary thinking which categorizes the woman as "the other." Men are associated with reason and mental stability, while the woman is "a crouching female animal," unpredictable and wild. Connie is the hunted animal, not only "the other," but a fourfold "other" as Magali Michael defines her, taking into consideration not only her ethnicity, gender and poverty but also her advancing age (114). She perfectly fits Lucy Sargisson's definition of "the other"—she is "marked by difference . . . the stranger, the alien" (147). Being "the other," Connie is feared and detested, and consequently, she is abused by men who are unable to accept the difference.

Connie's distrust of white doctors and scientists is also evident when she recollects her sister's negative experience with such men. After having given birth to her sixth child, she went to a clinic to obtain contraceptive pills; however, she was given sugar pills instead. As a result, she became pregnant with another child, who was born mentally handicapped. Connie reflects that doctors and scientists "like to try out medicine on poor people. Especially brown people and black people. Inmates in prison too" (27). In fact, medical experiments and infection with hepatitis resulted in the death of one of the two men she truly loved, the black pickpocket, Claud. These examples prove the point that Tatiana Teslenko makes about Piercy disclosing "medical paternalism towards marginalized groups, such as all women, all people of colour, and especially poor women of colour" (66).

In Mattapoisett Connie discovers an alternative to the bleak existence in the world where "it [is] a crime to be born poor as it [is] a crime to be born brown" (Piercy 62). Here, all the problematic issues that affect Connie's situation are resolved. However, the text makes it clear that the utopian future is not a given—it is conditional on the conscious efforts of the

contemporary people, who are the only ones who can bring it into being. Piercy shows that "present actions create future probabilities" (Walker 19) and that utopia is a matter of a conscious choice—to fight against patriarchy (Booker and Thomas 243). Connie realizes that the only way to fight patriarchal oppression and to overcome her marginality is open resistance. In an act of ultimate rebellion and defiance she poisons the doctors who treat her. While numerous critics see it as an empowering deed and the final liberation (Jones 12), others are critical of the fact that violence is presented as a solution to the abuses of a system in which violence is a prevalent problem (Maciunas 257). Still, on the other hand, Connie is severely restricted in the choices of action available to her. Her decision to exact punishment upon those who mistreated her is the first moment in her life when she resolves not to be "pushed around" any more. She reflects that "at least once [she] fought and won" (370), and she considers her act a winning battle in an ongoing war against patriarchy that will eventually allow Mattapoisett to arise. Even if the ending is controversial, the overall message is clear: Piercy calls for radical political action to reform the society and cure it of its current ills.

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The conditional availability of the utopian alternative is also characteristic of *The Female Man* by Joanna Russ. It also features a future world—Whileaway—which is separated from the contemporary society by ten centuries. Even the name of the future utopia suggests temporal distance—it is a place that is a while away from here rather than remote spatially. Both Russ's and Piercy's texts emphasize the need to confront the patriarchal system and both constitute cautionary tales (Walker 179), due to their dystopian presentation of contemporary America and the critique of the direction in which it was progressing in the 1970s.

*The Female Man* features a "cluster protagonist" (Bartkowski 4), signified by the fact that all of the four characters bear names beginning with the letter "J." The four women depicted by Russ are all versions of the same woman and are identical genetically. What differentiates them is their socially-constructed gender and female subjectivity. Janet comes from an all-female world, hence she never faced the necessity of defining herself in relation to men and their expectations. She is thus confident and independent. Jael lives in a dystopian world in which gender separatism has been taken to an extreme—men and women inhabit separate spheres and are in a constant state of violent war with each other. She is fierce and unbending, especially in relation to men. Her strong misandric attitudes culminate in ruthless androcidal acts that she perpetrates on men. Jeannine's and Joanna's worlds are the closest to the world of the author. Yet while Jeannine is utterly subjugated to patriarchy and its demands, Joanna is ready to wage war on the system. In her anti-patriarchal sentiments she

can be identified with the author herself (Lefanu 191), especially when the name coincidence is taken into account.

It is in Joanna's and Jeannine's worlds that the reader can see a critical analysis of social inequality pertaining to contemporary America, and the marginalization of women in particular. Jeannine is a self-effacing woman in complete submission to patriarchy, which inculcated in her an acceptance of her marginalized status and the restrictions it places upon her. She firmly believes that finding the right man to marry is the ultimate goal in the life of every reasonable woman. This mindset stems from the patriarchal socialization to which she has been subjected since the day she was born. The continuous indoctrination is a life-long process. When she turns twenty-nine and is still unmarried, her brother warns her against the worst possible plight for a woman—becoming an old spinster with no one to take care of her. She is also advised that apart from marriage "there's no other life for a woman" (114). Consequently, she surmises that in male-female relations "his contribution is *Make me feel good*; her contribution is *Make me exist*" (120). Thus, she needs a man to give meaning to her life, as she herself is unable to make it meaningful. One of the narrators remarks that "there is some barrier between Jeannine and real life which can be removed only by a man or by marriage" (120). To put it differently, not until Jeannine assumes her proper social role can she feel fulfilled as a woman. If she does not, she will be seen to be merely "drifting" (Russ 114) in her life. Therefore, marriage is shown as the only means available to a woman willing to improve her marginalized status, however partial and illusory such an improvement might in fact be. Jeannine senses that something is wrong with her life, but she is too strongly conditioned to be able to perceive the source of her discontentment and to transform her life. This, according to Jeanne Cortiel, stems from her lack of agency and the unawareness of her oppressed situation (79).

Joanna, in turn, gains enough perspective to evaluate her life. She grows aware of the fact that "all she did was dress for The Man, smile for The Man, talk wittily to The Man, sympathize with The Man, flatter The Man, understand The Man, defer to The Man, entertain The Man, keep The Man, live for The Man" (Russ 29). The brief summary of the male-centred life reveals her frustration at the fact that men's needs are always prioritized in a patriarchal society and that the woman is nothing but a tool to satisfy them and to stabilize their "shaky egos" (Russ 202). She is able to reject the teachings of her mother who tried to explain to her why "being a girl is wonderful" (Russ 65), elucidating at the same time what it means to be a woman in this society. The female role is merely to be attractive for men and acquiescent. Only men are supposed to be active, with their women remaining forever passive and full of admiration for dar-

ing male exploits and various successes. The mother insisted that "instead of conquering Everest [Joanna] could conquer the conqueror of Everest, and while he had to go to climb the mountain, [she] could stay at home in lazy comfort" (65). However, Joanna would much prefer to climb Everest herself rather than let men do it on their own. She reflects that "you can't imbibe someone's success by fucking them" (65). She voices here one of the concerns of second-wave feminists—women no longer wish to be the shadows of their husbands, ornaments and mirrors in which men's self-love can be reflected. Like them, Joanna feels that the social organization of her country deprives her of the right and opportunity to do anything significant, other than pursuing "a mystical fulfilment in marriage" (Russ 6) that her mother endorses. For Joanna, the "mystical fulfilment" her mother talks about is equal to "washing floors" (Russ 6).

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The issue of fixed and rigid gender roles and the way that women are molded into them is one of Russ's primary concerns in the text. She questions the marital subservience of women and perceives marriage as institutionalized slavery. She tackles the problem of unpaid labour that women provide for their households as well as the husbands' unwillingness to support their wives in the decision to enter a profession. Both were key concerns of second-wave feminism, which informs much of the text. Russ mocks the men's alleged appreciation of women's work expressed in the glorification of the woman's noble calling in being Mother, spelled with a capital letter. One of the narratorial voices, Joanna, discloses the truth behind such lofty notions and denounces the task of being a mother and wife as nothing other than domestic service. She enumerates in the catalogue style that Russ often employs in *The Female Man* what it really means to be a mother: "to form the coming generation, to give birth to them, to nurse them, to mop floors for them, to love them, to cook for them. Clean for them, change their diapers, pick up after them, and mainly sacrifice themselves for them" (137). Such confinement to the domestic circle contributes to the women's sense of exclusion from social life. This, in turn, eventually propels them to confront their marginality and realize their potential outside the home.

However, when a woman wishes to enter the job market and prove that she can contribute both to the community and the household, she is frequently discouraged by her husband. Russ imagines a conversation that might take place between such spouses and incorporates in it the arguments that are usually cited by the opponents of women's paid work outside the home. The archetypal husband first tries to rationalize his dismissal of his wife's ambitions by saying that the cost of a baby-sitter and the tax on her income surpasses her earnings, which makes her employment pointless. When that fails he tries to coax her into accepting the view that

she is lucky to be provided for by a loving husband. When that too comes to no effect he bluntly informs his wife: "You can't make money. Only I can make money" (188). He then accuses her of irrationality, which, as Connie's example also shows, is a common strategy. A woman not conforming is a woman erring, a woman ailing. "I am a woman with a woman's brain. I am a woman with a woman's sickness" (137), Joanna remarks, referring to her inability to accept patriarchal standards and to the fact that such a stance is frequently tagged as a mental illness. Her femininity is what makes her "the other," especially when it oversteps the boundaries imposed by patriarchy, in which her rebellious mind can only be described as "very swampy . . . very rotten and badly off " (Russ 137).

In effect, Russ catalogues again, "Men succeed. Women get married. Men fail. Women get married. Men enter monasteries. Women get married. Men start wars. Women get married. Men stop them. Women get married. Dull, dull" (126). Thus, men are free to choose what they want to do with their lives, they are free to make mistakes and gain a full spectrum of human experience. Women, in turn, are denied this right and in all aspects of life they are dependent on men. Their only destiny being marriage, they live through their husbands' lives—through their successes and failures. Thus, marriage is exposed as one of the major sources of the marginalization of women. Despite its apparent role in increasing a woman's social status—unmarried women are low on the patriarchal scale—marriage ensures that women's social aspirations are kept in check.

Moreover, this finds reflection in the wider socio-political context. Women, as Joanna sarcastically comments, seem to constitute only one-tenth of the society. If one considers that nearly all the doctors, lawyers, bankers, managers, police officers, government officials, soldiers etc. are male, it follows that "it's a legend that half the population of the world is female" (Russ 204). In the same mocking tone, the narrator remarks that "there are more whooping cranes in America than there are women in Congress" (61). Russ is drawing attention to the fact that in her society women are still underrepresented in many spheres of social life, primarily in politics. They can be said to be occupying what Angelika Bammer calls "the muted zone" (66), that is the lowest position on the social scale, where their voices are subdued. Russ also notices that the privileges that men enjoy are inaccessible to women, whose position in the society is only connected with numerous disadvantages (Hollinger 16).

American women in the 1970s were gradually gaining an awareness of the discrimination to which they were subjected. Also, they yearned to assume positions which were restricted to men. Joanna even admits to being "a victim of penis envy" (6). However, the sense of incompleteness arises not from the actual physical lack, but from the deprivation experienced

in social and economic spheres. It is also not the result of the "Feminine Incompleteness" (12) that Russ enumerates as one of the desired features in a woman. Feminine Incompleteness is understood, in patriarchal terms, as the social and personal alienation that any woman yet unmarried experiences. Feminine Incompleteness must be accompanied by Maternal Instinct, which makes "forever wretched" (Russ 151) any woman not eager to have babies, and, finally, True Womanliness. The latter involves a woman's "liking male bodies" (Russ 152), always submitting her sexual needs to the male wants and preferences, never showing her intelligence and always flattering the male. Taking these standards into consideration, Joanna affirms that she is anything but a woman: "I am a telephone pole, a Martian, a rose-bed, a tree, a floor lamp, a camera, a scarecrow. I'm not a woman" (152). She denies her own womanhood as defined by the patriarchy and she decides to turn into the eponymous "female man." In order to do so, she has to reject all the roles imposed upon women—all the functions that a perfect woman ought to serve:

> a self-sacrificing mother, a hot-chick, a darling daughter, women to look at, women to laugh at, women to come to for comfort, women to wash your floors and buy your groceries and cook your food and keep your children out of your hair, to work when you need the money and stay home when you don't, women to be enemies when you want a good fight, women who are sexy when you want a good lay, women who don't complain, women who don't nag or push, women who don't hate you really, women who know their job, and above all—women who lose. (Russ 195–96)

The rejection of these standards is presented as the only means by which women can challenge their social insignificance and their confinement to the fringes of society. However, any attempt to do so is invariably punished with social ostracism and the attachment of labels the stigma of which is to be feared by any woman willing to survive under patriarchy. For instance a woman seeking to earn higher degrees at university is "frigid" (Russ 20), while women who are not passive are immediately labelled as "neurotic" (Russ 20). Such tags are denounced as patriarchal tools conveniently employed to keep women in their place.

Joanna's transformation into the "female man" begins when she realizes that as long as she is a woman, she remains merely a sexual object. This is especially true in the case of women trying to succeed in a male-dominated field, as Joanna did in the academic world. She remarks that if a woman does not renounce her femininity and try to be "One of the Boys," she will be eyed in the same manner as if she was "wearing a sandwich board that says: I HAVE TITS!" (133). The transformation also in-

volves the renunciation of such feminine features as delicacy, caring, and passivity. She becomes "a ball-breaker, a man-eater [who] crack[s] [men's] joints" (Russ 13). Tatiana Teslenko comments that the transformation is enabled by "enacting anger and exercising violence against men" (167). The assimilation with men and the adoption of their aggressive attitude equalizes Joanna with them, allowing her to gain access to spheres which have traditionally been man-only sections of a patriarchal society.

Becoming a man, a female man, is her tactic to combat the system's inequality: "there is one and only one way to possess that in which we are defective, therefore that which we need, therefore that which we want. Become it" (Russ 139). The traditional association of the word "man" with "mankind" logically entails the conclusion that, being a part of the human race, a woman is male as well. Joanna summarizes: "for years I have been saying *Let me in, Love me, Approve me, Define me, Regulate me, Validate me, Support me.* Now I say *Move over*. If we are all Mankind, it follows . . . that I too am a Man and not at all a Woman" (140). By becoming a "female man," Joanna escapes patriarchal bondage—this involves taking over men's duties and some of the male features. The female man has to, in Teslenko's words, appropriate "masculine virtues" (169), such as dominance and violence, which is the only way to channel their rage and to seize power from men. However, there exists a certain paradox in the advocacy of violence as a solution to patriarchal oppression, just as was present in *A Woman on the Edge of Time*. Russ castigates masculine dominance and brutality, while simultaneously endorsing them in her depiction of the female man, who needs to assume these qualities in order to be able to begin both personal and social transformation (Teslenko 171, Cortiel 77).

The embodiment of female rage can be found in Jael, an assassin from a dystopian future. According to Nancy Walker, Jael represents "the essence of women's anger at men for centuries of subjugation" (182) as she kills men without hesitation. Jael's world is a "dystopian antithesis" (Bammer 96) to Whileaway. The inclusion of such a negative counterpart constitutes another major point of convergence with *A Woman on the Edge of Time.* During one of Connie's mental journeys she is taken to a dystopian alternative, which exists in a world parallel to Mattapoisett. Like Jael's world it is located in the future and it represents the worst possible scenario of the earth's development. Bartkowski refers to these futures as "wrong" and "false" (61). Yet only the former seems to be accurate, as falsity is not intended by the authors as one of the characteristics of these worlds. They are very concrete and tangible, being both the possible outcomes of today's social tensions and the alternatives to the posited utopias. Their credibility and realness lie in the fact that they are shown as potential replacements for Whileaway and Mattapoisett, should such nega-

tive transformations be allowed. Thus, they are to encourage the reader to try to avert them by conscious political effort.

The inclusion of the dystopian counterparts in both texts enables the authors to criticize the hierarchical organization of Western society in a much more explicit manner. It might seem that the presentation of the utopian alternative is not their main intention. Teslenko quotes Joanna Russ herself, who comments on utopia that "it reflects what women lack in today's patriarchal world" (168). In a very similar vein, Kerstin Shands remarks that "Piercy's intention [is] not so much to create Eden as to mourn the lack of it" (72). Thus, both authors wish to bring attention to current problems and to propel readers to political action. This is achieved by introducing solutions which are meant to defy and transcend the standards of patriarchal society, thus deconstructing binarisms which marginalize women.

However, despite the fact that the texts are aimed at subversion, transgression and deconstruction of binary notions, especially those related to gender, they do make use of binary oppositions which go along the following division lines: dystopia/utopia, patriarchy/matriarchy, male/female, subjugation/freedom and injustice/equality. Thus, maleness is identified as the source of social ills which invariably situate the woman in the position of the victimized "other." Dystopia, in turn, is associated with patriarchy and the problems it poses both in the invented worlds and in the contemporary society. It might be argued that this is a highly simplified conception of social reality, which hardly lends itself to such clear-cut divisions. What is more, the juxtaposition with a dystopian patriarchal reality may be perceived as a precondition for the very existence of utopia. To put it differently, such novels set out to combat sexual binarism and yet they are constructed upon this very antagonism—instead of rejection of the status of "the other," they construct their whole utopian structure on opposition to maleness and patriarchal norms. As a result of contrasting the utopians with patriarchal males, both novels may be seen to be operating within the framework of oppositional structures, whose binarism is not transgressed. Instead, the patriarchal valuations attached to each sex are reversed, making the dichotomy favorable to women.

Another contradiction that stems from this revision of sexual dualism is gynocentric bias, which can be traced in both novels, as they discredit male rule and promote opposing, female values. Hence, a clear tendency to valorize women and female attributes is perceptible. Russ entirely eliminates men from her utopian Whileaway, considering them the source of women's oppression and marginalization. In Piercy's text an apparently degenderized society is established, however, it suppresses what is perceived as male patterns of behavior while reinforcing feminine features, such as

nurturance, gentleness and patience. As a result, the men of Mattapoisett are similar to women not only in mental, but also in physical terms—they are even able to breastfeed. Accordingly, the constructivist message of the texts clashes with their more or less overt essentialism. While on the one hand they denounce the patriarchal construction of gender and opt for its deconstruction, they simultaneously promote an essentialist understanding of femininity as a set of innate superior traits. Similarly, masculinity is defined in negative terms, inasmuch as men are generally shown to be prone to violence and domineering behavior. Thus, it can be posited that in the place of androcentrism and misogyny, these works sometimes display a shift, often barely perceptible, towards gynocentrism and misandry. This is especially evident in radically separatist Russ, but also, in a less explicit manner, in liberal Piercy.

Lastly, even though the novels are adamant in their critique of the marginalized status of women in America of the 1970s, no implementable solutions to this state of affairs are offered. Though both novels advocate action towards the achievement of the "not-yet" and they both present its benefits based on the examples of Mattapoisett or Whileaway, individual characters in the novels do not undertake any significant actions that might bring about social change or, at the very least, alter their own marginalized existence. Jael is a man-hater and a man-slayer; Joanna rejects her own womanhood in order to adapt to the system, rather than try to reform it from within. Jeannine is mostly unable to see beyond the reality in which her role is preestablished; and Connie resorts to murder. However liberating her androcidal act might seem, it remains highly questionable ethically. While to a large extent the women's lack of agency or their misguided attempts may be attributed to patriarchal conditioning, they cannot be completely absolved of the responsibility for their own existence.

Still, these contradictions do not detract from the novels' impact as literary voices indicative of women's dissatisfaction with their status in patriarchy. Monique Wittig calls *The Female Man* a "literary war machine" (qtd. in Ayres), insofar as it sets out to expose and combat the marginalizing character of patriarchal institutions. Doubtlessly, the same could be said of *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Connie is a woman on the edge in every possible sense of this word, as is Jeannine and even Joanna, at least until the moment of her transformation. The realism in the presentation of their peripheral role in society is successfully blended with the science fictional elements of the contrastive utopias and dystopias. In effect, this literary amalgam strengthens the novels' message regarding women's marginality and the necessity to confront it, even if the texts are deficient in actual models of individual action.

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# Travel and "Homing In"
# in Contemporary Ethnic American
# Short Stories

# A BSTRACT

In American ethnic literature of the last three decades of the 20th century, recurrent themes of mobility, travel, and "homing in" are emblematic of the search for identity. In this essay, which discusses three short stories, Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," Louise Erdrich's "The World's Greatest Fishermen," and Daniel Chacon's "The Biggest City in the World," I attempt to demonstrate that as a consequence of technological development, with travel becoming increasingly accessible to ethnic Americans, their search for identity assumes wider range, transcending national and cultural boundaries.

In our time of "endemic uncertainty," with human lives made up of "unending series of short-term projects and episodes that do not add up to 'career' or 'progress'" (Cummings), individual identities are no longer regarded as developing in a stable, linear progression. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has chosen the word "liquid" for describing the reality we live in. In the epoch of "liquid life" and "liquid fear," in "liquid times" of "liquid modernity"[1] nothing keeps its shape and social norms are changing at great speed. This instability and unpredictability, with its roots in

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[1]  These terms have been used by Zygmunt Bauman in his works and constitute significant elements of his theories.

a global economy which does not restrict the mobility of capital, becomes a source of anxiety. The overturning of traditions and freedom from social conventions result in a lack of guarantees of stability, creating a heightened awareness of the risks involved in human existence. With human lives becoming fragmented, people tend to be flexible, adaptable, and mobile. Instability, travel, and migration have become global phenomena. In technologically advanced multicultural nations such as the United States, these factors manifest themselves with full force and exert powerful influence on the formation of identities in all social groups.

Historically excluded from mainstream American society, "unhomed" in the United States, perceived as alien, and as such exposed to the experiences of racism and prejudice, ethnic Americans, traditionally dislocated to social margins, have been seeking new opportunities in the global conditions of mobility, flexibility, and change. For the past several decades, since the 1960s, displaced American ethnics have made attempts to leave behind their fixed, confining positions as social minorities and to become involved in a dynamic search for "home," a sense of belonging in the United States. The political climate created as a result of the Civil Rights Movement has been motivating them in their efforts. At the same time, unpredictable forces or events, such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11 or the current world economic crisis, have been posing obstacles on this route. Literary texts written by contemporary American ethnic authors frequently deploy the rhetoric of travel and movement, and become migration narratives. The migrants in these stories, "moving metaphorically and metaphysically, as well as physically" (Anderson 3), make the search for "home" their goal.

Since the publication of Werner Sollors' *The Invention of Ethnicity* (1991), ethnic groups, traditionally perceived as "natural, real, eternal, stable, and static units . . . always already in existence" (x), have come to be viewed by literary and cultural critics as unstable and culturally constructed. "Invention" itself, which Sollors foregrounds in the book's title, brings associations with change and the creation of something new. He points out that "invention" no longer refers to the technological domain. "[A] variety of voices now use the word in order to describe, analyze, or criticize such diverse phenomena as the invention of culture; of literary history; of narrative; . . . of the self, of America; of New England; of Billy the Kid and the West; of the Negro; of the Indian; of the Jew; of Jesus and Christianity; . . . of the vision of the outlaw in America; or the American way of death" (x). However, Sollors remarks, "invention" is not just a "buzzword." Rather, its frequent use is a sign of "the recognition of the general cultural constructedness of the modern world" (x). Thus, ethnicity has to be reinvented and reinterpreted by every generation and each individual. "Do not new ethnic groups continually emerge? Even where

they exist over long time spans, do not ethnic groups change and redefine themselves?" (xiv).

The key factor in the invention of ethnicity (as in the construction of reality in general) is language. "Rhetorical devices of literature" (Sollors xi) can be compared to a scaffolding which upholds ethnic texts—biographies, historiographies, fictions. Language and rhetoric, which have "become creative forces" (xi), are responsible for the construction of ethnicity's ideological framework, as well as for the emergence of ethnic identities themselves.

Of the numerous ethnic stories available on the literary market nowadays, Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" (1973), Louise Erdrich's "The World's Greatest Fishermen" (1981), and Daniel Chacon's "The Biggest City in the World" (2000), each representative of a different stage in the development of ethnic literatures, are among those addressing the theme of pursuit of home, return home ("homing in"), and travel. The recurrent motifs of journey and home, the journey's destination, can be read as metaphors of the search for identity. In his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), the anthropologist James Clifford sees "home" and "travel" as inherently connected rather than opposed to one another or mutually exclusive. He no longer associates home with stability, fixity or permanence, and says about the contemporary culture that it makes itself at home in motion. Clifford proposes "[a] moving picture of a world that does not stand still, that reveals itself en route." His concept of "dwelling-in-travel" emphasizes the idea that "everyone is on the move and has been for centuries" (*Routes* 6). Yet, in spite of being continually on the road, we at the same time remain deeply rooted. "[N]o one is permanently fixed by his or her 'identity'; but neither can one shed specific features of race and culture, class and caste, gender and sexuality, environment and history" (*Routes* 6). Clifford regards such "cross-cutting determinations" as "sites of worldly travel: difficult encounters and occasions for dialogue" (*Routes* 6).

In *American Indian Literature and the Southwest* (1999), Eric Gary Anderson argues that people migrate "creatively," "working toward a multicultural, multidirectional, multidisciplinary environment" and he urges "wariness in the face of . . . narratives that propose to secure all evidence inside a single, bounded thesis" (3). Anderson perceives migration as a resistance and survival strategy rather than an expansionist inevitability. The American Southwest, with its traditional historical multicultural mobility, can be seen as a regional laboratory in which the present global condition has already been tested for centuries. Emphasizing the Southwest's simultaneous physicality and textuality, Anderson says the following with reference to texts dealing with "the possibilities of personal as well as cultural movement":

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Along the way, characters, authors, texts, and readers variously enter or approach states of alienation, broadly defined, but these displacements typically preserve—and sometimes move toward—the idea, if not always the actuality of home. Like Silko, to reach—let alone to understand home, many southwestern peoples from a variety of cultures must travel. (3)

In the contemporary world, bound by technological development, travel becomes a quick and seemingly simple way of covering distances between cultures. Cars, buses, airplanes, telephones and cameras, accessible to growing numbers of Americans, appear in all of the stories under discussion here as inventions that make transcultural encounters a common aspect of life in the United States. Stories about intercultural travel bridge the gap between the margin and the mainstream, expanding the American literary canon. "Global culture is typified by travel, the complex entanglement of migratory routes and genealogical roots" (Anderson 3).

The three ethnic stories mentioned above are texts of both personal and cultural travel. Their protagonists, representing different ethnic groups, leave their native homes to escape the ethnic predicament. In the stories we see them returning, "homing in," and looking at their homes from the perspective of their intercultural experiences in the American mainstream. Troubled and confused by what they find at home, they reflect on the sense of belonging and exclusion. Their homes seem at once *heimlich* and *unheimlich.* They offer a sense of belonging to a community, with its unique spirituality, traditions, customs, rituals, and the native language; at the same time, ethnic family homes ridden with poverty, violence, abuse, gender and generational conflicts, are sites of humiliation.

The narrator of Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," a black middle-aged woman from the rural South of the 1960s or 70s, is the mother of two daughters—a homely one and a worldly one. Sitting in the neatly swept yard in front of her house "in the pasture," she is expecting the arrival of her well-educated, ambitious and well-dressed daughter from the city, while the other daughter is standing behind her chair, shy and withdrawn, "a lame animal" (Walker 2389). As she is waiting, the mother daydreams about appearing on a TV show as a parent of a child who has "made it" in America, a Johnny Carson kind of show. The successful daughter comes by car, accompanied by a man named Hakim-a-barber, who exclaims "Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!" The daughter also greets them with a foreign word: "Wa-su-zoTean-o!" Before she places a patronizing kiss on the mother's forehead, she gets out a Polaroid camera from the back seat of the car and, like a tourist visiting an exotic attraction, takes snapshots all around.

> She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house, with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard, she snaps it and me and Maggie *and* the house. (2390)

They are being scrutinized like objects of ethnographic interest. "[Hakim-a barber] just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head" (2391).

The visiting daughter tells her mother that she has changed her name from Dee to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo. "'I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me'" (2391), she explains, oblivious to her mother's remark that she was actually named after her aunt and grandmother, as well as some more distant relatives.

Living and going to college in the city, Dee/Wangero, like Alice Walker herself, became involved in the urban American blacks' search for new identities in the times following the Civil Rights Movement, associated with the charismatic Malcolm X and the idea of black people's return to Africa promoted by the Nation of Islam. Hakim-a-barber's futile effort to shake hands with Maggie might be a reference to the intricate way some Muslims in Indonesia shake hands as they greet people with the word "Asalamalakim."

> Meanwhile Asalamalakim is going through the motions with Maggie's hand. Maggie's hand is as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don't know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie. (2390)

Dee's new name, Wangero, has its source in Alice Walker's friendship with a woman from Uganda, named Constance, whom she met at Spellman College in Atlanta; this friendship began Walker's fascination with Africa.

Asalamalakim/Hakim-a-barber is very careful about what he eats for dinner, but Wangero thoroughly enjoys collards, pork, "chitlins and corn bread, the greens and everything else" (2391), typical Southern dishes, the food she must remember from childhood. "Everything delighted her" (2391). Nourished by the homely meal and preparing to leave, she asks her mother for several objects made by their relatives, which have been in the family for a long time, such as Grandma Dee's butter dish, the churn top and the dasher. "'I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table . . . and I'll think of something artistic to do with the dasher'" (2393).

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However, when she demands the quilts made of scraps of material from as far back as the Civil War, the mother, her TV reverie altogether forgotten, acts in a very decisive manner. "I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap" (2393). Wangero will not frame the quilts and put them on her "alcove" wall for decoration; they will continue to be used every day as bed covers when Maggie marries the local boy, John Thomas. By turning the quilts over to her awkward daughter scarred by a house fire, the mother signals that black Americans' search for new identities cannot eliminate their Southern rural black heritage going back to slavery. Wangero must return to the city, where she is in the course of setting up her own home, without the symbolic quilts. As she leaves, her vision obscured by "some sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and her chin" (2393), she shows little awareness that the Southern black identity cannot simply be encapsulated in a few objects made by slaves or slave descendants, such as the dasher or the churn top, useless in itself, and put on display in fashionable urban middle-class homes in the spirit of the Black Arts Movement. With her symbolic gesture, the mother makes sure that the rural black heritage will live on, as she sits in her yard with a "dip of snuff," "just enjoying" (2394), and singing church songs to herself. Nevertheless, her two daughters, representing the rural and the urban experiences of African Americans in mid-20th century, remain unreconciled; Wangero disappears behind the dust her car raises as she drives away from the country to the modern city.

Albertine Johnson, a "half-breed" with an Indian mother and a Swedish father, a nursing student and the narrator of Louise Erdrich's story "The World's Greatest Fishermen" from *Love Medicine*, is on her way home from school to the reservation. The road she is following is as dusty and unclear as the one along which Dee/Wangero from Walker's "Everyday Use" traveled. Albertine is driving the first car she has ever owned, "with rusted wheel wells, a stick shift, and a windshield wiper only on the passenger side" (Erdrich 5).[2] To get to the reservation, she has to leave the city, pass by "big farms" and "blowing fields," and go off the main road. "The highway narrowed off and tangled, then turned to gravel with ruts, holes, and blue alfalfa bunching in the ditches. Small hills reared up. Dogs leaped from nowhere and ran themselves out fiercely. The dust hung thick" (11). When she finally gets to the reservation, Albertine goes up to the "main house," "communal property for the Kashpaws," built on land al-

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[2]    Unless otherwise indicated, all the references to Erdrich's work are to "The World's Greatest Fishermen" from *Love Medicine*.

lotted over a century earlier to her great-grandmother, "old Rushes Bear." Having followed a road winding like an umbilical cord, Albertine "walk[s] into the dim, warm kitchen" (12), where her mother and aunt are cooking a big meal; the pies have already been baked and are cooling off. The family is getting together to mourn June Kashpaw, who died in a snowstorm on Easter Sunday, walking home from the city. June is a figure larger than life, and her death is in a sense her rebirth. Although absent, she holds together the Kashpaw family and the Chippewa community, as well as Erdrich's short story cycle *Love Medicine* because there are stories to tell about how she lived and died. However, Erdrich's is not an Indian tale celebrating spirituality, ritual, myth or the sanctity of nature in the tradition of the first writers of the Native American tradition, N. Scott Momaday or Leslie Marmon Silko. Erdrich refuses "to mythologize the reservation, which offers little in the way of spiritual nourishment" (Durczak 108). It is a site of crushing material poverty inhabited by "frustrated, jobless, alcoholic drifters" (Durczak 108). Remembered as strong and attractive, a one-time "Miss Indian America," "a long-legged Chippewa woman aged in every way except how she moved" (Erdrich 8), June is not a traditional Indian matriarch. An orphan raised by her uncle who lived in the woods, June kept looking for love and a successful career that would allow her to advance in life. "But everything she tried fell through" (9).

> When she was studying to be a beautician, I remember, word came that she had purposely burnt an unruly customer's hair stiff green with chemicals. Other secretaries did not like her. She reported drunk for work in dimestores and swaggered out of restaurants where she'd waitressed a week, at the first wisecrack. (9)

Not a good mother or a wife, she drank and smoked heavily. Albertine has a feeling that June might have chosen to die. "Even drunk, she'd have known a storm was coming. . . . She'd have gotten that animal sinking in her bones" (10).

In the story of the family reunion, June appears in connection with a red Firebird, "a brand new sportscar" (16), which her son King bought with the insurance money he got after his mother's death. The car is admired, envied and speculated about. In its front seat, King brings his white wife and son. Rather than strengthen a sense of a single identity, the meeting in the warm kitchen smelling of pies and potato salad becomes a site of confrontation between various Native American identities of the late 20th century. Grandma and Grandpa, "the two old ones," no longer live in the family home but have "moved into town where things were livelier and they didn't have to drive so far to church" (12); Grandpa, educated in

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a boarding school, who used to be a tribal activist, cannot remember what it was like. "Elusive, pregnant with history, his thoughts finned off and vanished" (19). His brother Eli, hidden by their mother in a root cellar and never sent to boarding school, has the reputation of being the best hunter around. "'Say, Albertine, did you know your Uncle Eli is the last man on the reservation that could snare himself a deer?'"(29); Gordie, June's ex-husband, who drives an old Chevy, is drunk all the time and cannot stand up straight. "It was true, Gordie's feet were giving him trouble" (27). King is a war veteran; to Eli's question about "the first thing [he] ever got," King replies: "'A gook. I was in the Marines'" (30). Lipsha, June's second son, whom she tried to drown when he was a baby, cannot come to terms with the memory of his mother and has a difficult relationship with his half-brother King. June's cousins Amelia and Zelda attempt to be career women; unlike their mother, Grandma, they are neither dedicated mothers nor wives. Confused about whether family or profession is more important for a woman, feeling inferior to men and insecure, they are often abusive to one another. "Between my mother and myself the abuse was slow and tedious, requiring long periods, living in the blood like hepatitis" (7). "[H]usbandless, childless, driving a fall-apart car" (5), Albertine feels uneasy about going home and confronting her mother.

The family reunion ends in an outburst of frustration and violence. During the night all the pies are smashed. Urging her husband to leave the reservation immediately, Lynette, King's "full-blooded Norwegian" (32) wife, expresses the ambiguity and the "liquid" character of identity in the American society: "'You always get so crazy when you're home. We'll get the baby. We'll go off. We'll go back to the Cities, go home'" (42).

The red Firebird will make it possible for King and Lynette to go back to the Cities, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, a large metropolitan area where they can mingle with the multicultural American mainstream of the mid-1980s. In an interview with Josephine Reeds, Louise Erdrich refers to cars as "vehicles of the spirit." It is not difficult to foresee that Lynette and her husband will be back to the reservation, as King has strong emotional attachment to his Uncle Eli whom he loves and his half-brother Lipsha whom he hates. King's lack of education will most likely prevent him from succeeding in the Cities, so he will keep bringing his frustrations to future family gatherings in the Kashpaws' house.

In Erdrich's story, the character most likely to advance in the city is Albertine Johnson, who is studying to be a nurse. She may not become a female version of the "Armani Indian," "a prosperous urban Indian professional of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries" (Durczak 107) since as a nurse, she will still be serving others rather than following an independent career. Nevertheless, unlike her aunt June, Albertine will not have

to depend on men for financial support, and in time she should be able to replace her "dull black hard-driven" (Erdrich 5) Mustang with a new car.

In "The Biggest City in the World" from Chacon's collection *Chicano Chicanery*, the range of travel is much wider than in the first two stories. The writer takes his protagonist on a transnational and transcultural journey. A graduate student of history from the United States lands at the airport in Mexico City and begins a trip he has long saved for and planned. The grandson of Mexican immigrants, Harvey Gomez, with an Anglo first name and Hispanic surname, like the writer Daniel Chacon, comes from a working class California Chicano family. His father, a postal worker, could never afford to travel, so Harvey is the first one in the family to go to Mexico City, a place revered by the Mexicans and regarded as the biggest city in the world. But the capital's cosmopolitan atmosphere makes Harvey uneasy because it undermines his sense of identity. He does not speak Spanish, as his parents, like so many Mexican Americans in the mid-20th century, believed that their son's opportunities in the United States would be greater if he spoke only English. In the tourist areas of Mexico City, Harvey is taken either for a rich gringo or a young Mexican out of place in expensive hotels or restaurants. He does not know how to handle beggars or use the public transportation. The traffic, the noise, the churches, museums, and national monuments, such as the castle in Chapultepec Park "where jumped los niños heroes" (Chacon 22) defending the city from the American invaders in 1847, all add to the protagonist's confusion. He wants to go back to his hotel room, where he contemplates jet lag. Helpless and childish in his uncertainty as to who he is, Harvey is confronted by his American professor of Mexican history, whom he runs into at the airport. "A foot taller" (21) than most Mexicans, with plenty of money, knowledgeable and rational, Professor David P. Rogstar has appropriated Mexico City; the professor knows his way around the museums and can deal with taxi drivers and beggars. The story also hints at "some intimate memory" (23) of his past romantic affair in Zona Rosa. Harvey, ignorant and clumsy, annoys Rogstar, who tries to avoid him. Distracted, Harvey loses all his money. Rather than further upset him, this incident motivates him to look for ways out of the awkward situation. His sudden mobility, as he desperately keeps looking for his wallet, becomes his strategy of resistance. The search for lost money turns into a search for a new identity, neither the identity of a poor Chicano, who, like his father, could never afford to visit Mexico City, nor that of a white tourist or academic, there to colonize Mexico with material wealth and historical knowledge of the city's past, enclosed in its museums and monuments. Once Harvey becomes penniless and wholly dependent on others, he learns how to interact with people, how to share, to receive and give alms and to live in the

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present moment. Thus he becomes prepared for a genuine transcultural experience. In the last scene of the story, riding in a taxi, not knowing exactly where he is going or how he will pay for the ride, Harvey at last feels free in Mexico City. He is no longer bound by the dilemma of who he is or who he is not, an American, a Mexican, a Mexican American or a Chicano, but becomes like a *flaneur*, open to what his journey to Mexico City will bring. The Mexican capital, which had frightened Harvey at first with its "large, wide avenues, the likes of which he had never seen except on postcards or in movies set in Paris" (21), becomes for Harvey Gomez a cosmopolitan metropolis of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, an urban macrocosm, a home to modern man of any race, class or gender, any ethnicity or nationality.

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Although the modern condition of liquidity, brought about by technological and economic developments, has been destabilizing tradition, upsetting conventions and becoming a source of anxiety in our time, ethnic Americans have been turning instability and mobility to their advantage. "Liquid times" have given them the opportunity to search for new "homes" in the American society. With modern means of transportation and communication at their disposal, black Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans are in the process of surmounting their limitations and overcoming marginalization. The language contemporary American ethnic writers use to speak about mobility, powerful in its simplicity and otherness, is meant to attract readers' attention.

The three stories, Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," Louise Erdrich's "The World's Greatest Fishermen," and Daniel Chacon's "The Biggest City in the World," reflect ethnic Americans' increasing mobility, "metaphorical, metaphysical, as well as physical" (Cummings), facilitated by technological progress in the sphere of transportation and communication in the second half of the 20th century. Such prospects were announced as early as in the opening lines of Ernest Gaines' 1968 story "The Sky Is Gray." The eight-year-old narrator from a small black town in Louisiana is waiting for a bus to take him to Baton Rouge: "Go'n be coming in a few minutes. Coming round that bend there full speed. And I'm go'n get out my handkerchief and wave it down, and we go'n get on it and go" (2594).

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# Beyond the Margins: Identity Fragmentation in Visual Representation in Michel Tournier's *La Goutte d'or*

## ABSTRACT

In the final scene of Michel Tournier's postcolonial novel *La Goutte d'or* (1986), the protagonist, Idriss, shatters the glass of a Cristobal & Co. storefront window while operating a jackhammer in the working-class Parisian neighbourhood on the Rue de la Goutte d'or. Glass fragments fly everywhere as the Parisian police arrive. In *La Goutte d'or*, Tournier explores the identity construction of Idriss through a discussion of the role that visual images play in the development of a twentieth-century consciousness of the "Other." At the beginning of the novel, a French tourist takes a photograph of Idriss during her visit to the Sahara. The boy's quest to reclaim his stolen image leads him from the Sahara to Marseille, and finally to the Rue de la Goutte d'or in Paris. The Rue de la Goutte d'or remains one the most cosmopolitan neighbourhoods of the city.

In Tournier's novel, the *goutte d'or* also corresponds to a symbolic object: a Berber jewel. It is the jewel that Idriss brings with him, but which he also subsequently loses upon his arrival in Marseille. From the very moment that the French tourist photographs him, a marginalization of Idriss's identity occurs. Marginality, quite literally, refers to the spatial property of a location in which something is situated. Figuratively speaking, marginality suggests something that is on the edges or at the outer limits of social acceptability. In this essay, I explore the construction of the marginalized postcolonial self (the "Other") through an examination of the function of visual representation in the development of a postcolonial identity in *La Goutte d'or*. In the end, I conclude that the construction of a postcolonial identity is based upon fragmentation and marginalization, which ultimately leads its subject to create an identity based upon false constructions.

*L'image est douée d'une force mauvaise*
—Michel Tournier

In the final scene of Michel Tournier's postcolonial novel *La Goutte d'or* (1986), the protagonist, Idriss, shatters the glass of a Cristobal & Co. storefront window while operating a jackhammer in the working-class Parisian neighbourhood on the Rue de la Goutte d'or.[1] Glass fragments scatter as the Parisian police arrive. As the novel comes to a close with the image of Idriss's pending arrest, the reader cannot help but reflect upon how the symbolism expressed by the shattered glass in this final scene underscores the very notion that the protagonist's identity, too, may be shattered or fragmented. In *La Goutte d'or*, Tournier explores the identity construction of Idriss, a Berber shepherd boy, through a discussion of the role that visual images play in the development of a twentieth-century consciousness of the "Other." At the beginning of the novel, a French tourist takes a photograph of Idriss during her visit to the Sahara. The boy's quest to reclaim his stolen image leads him from the Sahara to Marseille, and finally to the Rue de la Goutte d'or in Paris.[2] The Goutte d'Or ("golden droplet"), known throughout Paris for its open-air market, the marché Dejean, is located east of Butte Montmartre (18th arrondissement). The Rue de la Goutte d'or remains one the most cosmopolitan neighbourhoods of the city. For Parisians, the Rue de la Goutte d'or has a symbolic value as well, for it is the centre of the district where North African immigrant workers often live in squalor and work in menial, labour-intensive jobs, such as garbage collection and street sweeping (Bacque 1–18). In Tournier's novel, the *goutte d'or* also corresponds to a symbolic object: a Berber jewel. It is the jewel that Idriss brings with him, but which he also subsequently loses upon his arrival in Marseille. From the very moment that the French tourist photographs him, a marginalization of Idriss's identity occurs. Marginality, quite literally, refers to the spatial property of a location in which something is situated. Figuratively speaking, marginality suggests something that is on the edges or at the outer limits of social acceptability. In this essay, I explore the construction of the marginalized postcolonial self (the "Other") through an examination of the function

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[1] All English-language translations of Michel Tournier's *La Goutte d'or* and other scholars are those of the author of this essay. Any shortcomings in this essay are mine.

[2] In his article entitled "Photography at Odds with Reality in Michel Tournier's *La Goutte d'or*," Didier Bertrand maintains that "Idriss's quest of the photograph is narcissistic in nature and holds the key to a recovery of his lost oneness" (14). I disagree with Bertrand. Rather than narcissism, I would argue that Idriss experiences an identity crisis.

of visual representation in the development of a postcolonial identity in *La Goutte d'or*. In the end, I conclude that the construction of a postcolonial identity is based upon fragmentation and marginalization, which ultimately leads its subject to create an identity based upon false constructions.

Tournier's novel is a journey of self-discovery which ascribes itself to Joseph Campbell's notion of the monomyth (1–37). Campbell states that

> . . . a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (23)

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Thus, when Idriss ventures to Paris to find the tourist who still holds his photograph, he begins a voyage of discovery in which he encounters a world that has created the division Orient/Occident.[3] The Occidental world into which he enters is a world in which the visual image holds an unbelievable power. This world has the power to create the identity of its subject, to place its subject at the very centre or to relegate it to the margins (Petit 149–50). Idriss wanders in a maze of visual images created by Western civilization until the day that he ultimately finds his release through the discovery of calligraphy (the sign), the "Uncounterfeitable," which is the essence of Arab civilization. When Idriss arrives in Marseille and loses his golden droplet, this event which signifies a loss of his childhood innocence and his freedom ultimately foreshadows the difficulty that Idriss will have in creating his own identity as, throughout the novel, he will navigate through false visual images that extend from the Sahara to the streets of Paris which repeatedly serve to marginalize him. As Tournier illustrates, the golden droplet inherently represents nothing, for it is a pure sign symbolizing the abstract that ultimately resists fragmentation/marginalization.

Throughout *La Goutte d'or*, Tournier plays upon Jean Baudrillard's notion of a postmodern iconography. In his article "Simulacra, Symbolic Exchange and Technology in Michel Tournier's *La Goutte d'or*," David Price compares Idriss's journey of self-discovery to Baudrillard's four successive stages of the image. Price maintains that Tournier's novel presents "an exploration of an alternative to the sign economy" (350). Further, as Mary Vogl suggests,

> . . . perhaps part of the ambiguity of Tournier's novel is that on one hand, as a writer, he believes in the power of the word but on the other hand he subscribes to the strain in Baudrillard's cultural metaphysics that ques-

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[3]   Throughout this essay, I employ the terms Orient/East and Occident/West nearly interchangeably.

tions the role of the intellectual and his or her self-image as a privileged agent for social change. (20)

Thus, if we consider Tournier's novel as a discourse between "the civilization of the image," Europe, and "the civilization of the sign," North Africa—in the Structuralist sense of the term (Culler 197–200)—any contradictions between what we think Tournier is saying in his text and what he actually says become insignificant.

Tournier's analysis of the role of the image serves to deconstruct the historic and ethnographic stereotypes of colonized peoples created within Western society (Platten 153). According to Edward Said, father of the seminal postcolonial theoretical text entitled *Orientalism*, "modern thought and experience have taught us to be sensitive to what is involved in representation, in studying the Other, in racial thinking, in unthinking and uncritical acceptance of authority and authoritative ideas" (327).[4] Said maintains that the "Orient" is a fictional construct fashioned and forged under an external Occidental optic, which serves as an initially fragmented or marginalized identity. The "Orient" is a forgery created by Westerners in an effort to objectify peoples during the colonial enterprise. It is a forgery that continued to perpetuate itself in the neocolonial period and which continues to flourish in the 21st century as well (Ashcroft 193–200). As Idriss begins to more fully understand how the fragmented, marginalized identity continually works against the authentic identity,[5] he becomes progressively more capable of rejecting the stereotypes created by French society with the ultimate goal of forging his own identity by rejecting the concept of the "Other." Since the beginning of the French colonial experiment in the 19th century, a discourse emerged that endeavoured to better understand the dichotomy that exists between the East and the West. Westerners continue to think of the East as the "Other" of the West, an untamed, exotic landscape. Literature, art, film, and political writings have perpetuated and disseminated stereotypes of North Africans (Armes 3–20). Western culture has exploited these stereotypes and taken advantage of these forgeries both to increase its own political authority throughout the world as well as to keep its subjugated peoples under its continual cultural control. No medium has propagated stereotypes more frequently than the visual medium.

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[4]  Said's text provides what is the very core of the postcolonial perspective. Without a basic understanding of the "Other," the reader's attempt to understand the central themes of Tournier's novel becomes nearly impossible.

[5]  The notion of an authentic identity is one which poses its own philosophical questions. Is an authentic identity even a theoretical possibility? Do all human beings not, in some way, assume identities which others have created? How, then, can one forge an authentic identity? This essay, therefore, must acknowledge this potential paradox.

Since television went mainstream in the 1950s, the function of the visual image has increased immeasurably. Multimedia, best evidenced through television, film, video games, the World Wide Web and social networks continue to exert a powerful presence in our daily lives. Among the visual media, however, photography remains arguably the most powerful means of visual representation because it presents images that the spectator believes to be authentic. Photography has both the power to create an optical representation and the ability to falsify the same image that it had set out to create. The images that we see form our world(view). These representational images aid in the creation of our identities as well. Individuals in both traditional and in modern societies struggle to forge their own representational identities, while at the same time working both in concert with and in opposition to any identities that exist on a national level. In France, slogans such as "Vive la République" and "Nos ancêtres, les Gaulois" emerged at critical moments in France's history in order to define the essence of a people. Each citizen began to perceive himself not so much as an individual, but rather as an extension of the homeland, losing a bit of the individual identity each time that he began to identify to a greater extent with the nation. Slogans of national identity, in fact, often create false identities or stereotypes of individuals that live within what are often extremely diverse societies. To state that all French citizens share the Gaulois as ancestors, for example, would not only be blatantly incorrect, but it would also marginalize the true individual and collective identities of many *French* who are descendants of other tribes, those of Germanic descent, Sub-Saharan African or North African descent, Vietnamese, Eastern European, etc., which, in the current era, calls into question the very notion of *francité*.[6] In Tournier's novel, Berber identity itself is repeatedly misunderstood and misrepresented. As Jane Goodman explores in *Berber Culture on the World Stage: From Village to Video*, the Berber peoples themselves have multiple identities which are often inaccurately depicted by visual media throughout the world (49–68, 185–87). Instead of claiming such inaccurate and marginalized identities for themselves, Goodman advocates looking at Berber culture through an internal gaze. This internal gaze "is informed by neither the East nor the West but by indigenous modes of knowledge" (49). Such a perspective, therefore, becomes "a kind of bifocal vision, through which Berber culture [can be] brought into new focus by being set in relation to distant geopolitical events and entities" (50). It is this perspective which Idriss must adopt if he is ever able to cast aside the fragmented identity that is thrust upon him.

6    According to the *Robert* dictionary, the French Ministry of Culture created the word "francité" in 1965 to refer to "characteristics unique to French culture."

Further, the dialectic between the image and the sign as depicted in *La Goutte d'or* underscores fundamental differences that exist between the Christian culture of the former and the Muslim civilization of the latter vis-à-vis the construction of an identity. Represented by the young Berber shepherd Idriss, which Tournier employs to stereotypically embody the marginalized Berber identity, this Muslim culture refuses both external definition *and* self-identification through the image, preferring direct access to true essence via the sign (Petit 151). In Idriss's village, the oasis of Tabelbala, its inhabitants gravely fear the image, for they believe that the power to duplicate any image comes from the Devil himself. On that fateful day when the blonde French tourist photographed the fifteen-year-old shepherd boy, she created a schism in the identity of the subject; a fragmented identity was created. Though she promised him that she would send a copy of his snapshot to him, said copy never arrived. As readers, we understand that to place the photograph within the young boy's hands would ultimately give him both creative power and control of his own identity/destiny. Such a gesture would necessarily fracture the dialect that exists between the "colonizer" and the "colonized," this mutually dependent relationship of oppression that must be constantly repeated in order to eventually self-perpetuate. To place the photograph in Idriss's hands would, in one fell swoop, destroy the oppression initiated under the "mission civilisatrice" of France, which had continued in the neocolonial period.[7]

It is worth noting that photography and oppression bear a striking lexical relationship. In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag underscored the fact that through its terminology, photography is linked to oppression, for the medium employs a vocabulary associated with hunting: "load," "aim," "shoot" (14). Though this comparison is extreme, if considered exclusively within a metaphorical sense, the two are, in fact, analogous. Sontag adds: "There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera . . . . To photograph people is to violate them" (7). Photography "turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (14). More importantly, the photographer produces an image that can be manipulated *ad infinitum*. Copies of images can be copied as well, creating yet another abstraction. To photograph someone is to possess them metaphorically, to such an extent that the individual is deprived of any real human value. The objective lens of the camera figuratively "captures" the essence of the subject, thus robbing the latter of any *realness*. This notion is particularly true within the colonial context in which the conquest through the image mirrors the conquest of a people, as Nissan

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[7] "Mission civilisatrice" served as a rationale for colonization which resulted in the Westernization of indigenous peoples. This rationale became the governing principle of French colonial rule in Africa from the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th century.

Perez underscores: "The extensive photographic activity in the Orient was, indeed, an act of aggression—if not a physical occupation, a spiritual appropriation of those lands" (100).[8] To the Berber people, however, this is a fact that is very real. It is a fact of which the French photographer is completely unaware and something of which we, ourselves, are totally unaware when we take photographs of individuals without their permission. In contrast to the moving image, which trains us to look into "the depth of the shadows of history," Walter Benjamin theorizes that the photographic image encourages absorption (qtd. in Mitrano 4). Further, according to G.F. Mitrano, "photography inaugurates a new glance—one that sees the 'here and now' that sears the subject in the still image—that supersedes the narrative of the reciprocity of the gaze" (5).

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Thus, the French photographer's potentially manipulative gaze remains ubiquitous in *La Goutte d'or*: "Tu pourrais au moins lui demander son avis, grommela l'homme. Il y en a qui n'aiment pas ça" ("You might at least ask his opinion, the man muttered. Some of these people don't like it"; Tournier 13), as if her husband were conscious of his wife's domination over Idriss through the photograph. The French tourist immediately turns Idriss into a snapshot (cliché) that can be endlessly duplicated. Each copy further pushes Idriss to the margins of any possible authentic identity. For the tourist, this young shepherd boy is nothing more than part of the exotic North African landscape, a tree in the *pays de rêves* in which she has spent her vacation. Her photograph "très carte postale" corresponds precisely to the stereotypical representation of a North African boy, since she is not at all aware of the power that she holds over him by simply taking *his* photograph. This is the danger inherent within the neocolonial enterprise. It is the ignorance of the French tourist that risks compromising Idriss's "native identity."[9] As long as Idriss remains unable to retrieve his photograph, he will be deprived of his essence, his soul, his very being. Indeed, "of all the images in the world, our own photographic portrait is the most important, for it constitutes the core of our existence" (Lapidus 7).[10] In

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[8]    It is important to understand the term "Orient" within the French perspective, as it is commonly used to refer to both Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa. The terms "Maghreb," "Maghrébin," and "Maghrébine" are more commonly used within a North African context. See Nissan Perez's *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East (1839–1885)* (New York: Abrams, 1988): 100–02.

[9]    Like the term "authentic identity," which I have used throughout this essay, I would like to suggest that there still remains a unique identity into which the individual is born. In this essay, I do not intend to use the word "native" as a synonym of "indigenous."

[10]    Because within Berber culture the portrait represents the subject's soul, one can see why taking a photograph without permission "dispossesses" the subject. See "A Dispossessed Text: The Writings and Photography of Michel Tournier," Trans. Roxanne Lapidus, *Sub-Stance* 58 (1989): 27.

Idriss's oasis of Tabelbala, there has only ever been but one photograph; that of his Uncle Mogadem, photographed with two friends during World War II. Uncle Mogadem always carried a copy of the photograph with him, for he thought that it brought him good luck. He believed, however, that his two friends died because he had not yet given their copies of the photograph to them: "Non tu vois. Les photos, faut les garder. Faut pas les laisser courir!" ("Our Photographs, you see—you must hang on to them. Must not let them go gallivanting"; Tournier 56). When our photographs wander, they become commonplace, and thus lose their value, their essence. When this occurs, we risk the fragmentation and marginalization of our very being. Idriss's quest to regain possession of his photograph and consequently, his soul and identity, leads to a long series of events during which he falls into the trap of false images that have created the stereotypes that have dominated the Berber people for centuries.

Even before Idriss leaves for France in search of his photograph, he had already become aware of the artifices associated with the image. When he receives a postcard with the picture of a donkey on it, all the inhabitants of his village ridicule him. Is this donkey (ass) the photographic reproduction of Idriss that was taken by the French tourist? Is this photograph a reflection of his existence (51–52)? Later, upon his arrival in Oran, a woman proposes him a good life if he agrees to assume the identity of her dead son, whose photograph Idriss only vaguely resembles: "Lui ressemblait-il vraiment? Idriss était hors d'état d'en juger, n'ayant qu'une idée vague de son propre visage" ("Did he really resemble him? Idriss was in no position to judge, as he had but a vague idea of his own face"; 93). A simple paradox explains Idriss's situation: he will be unable to create his own identity when he is continually having a marginalized one created for him which he, in fact, is able to use successfully. The fragmentations continue when Idriss has his photograph taken for the papers that he needs to enter France. While waiting for his photograph to be ejected from the automatic machine, he is quite surprised to see the face of a bearded man appear rather than his own face. Idriss's confusion is underscored in the question that the narrator poses: "Après tout pourquoi n'aurait-il pas eu une barbe avant de quitter Tabelbala? Les barbus ont aussi droit à un passeport" ("After all, why would he not have had a beard before leaving Tabelbala? Bearded men also have the right to a passport"; 85). This fragmented, marginalized identity represents a great challenge for Idriss to reconcile since, once again, he is able to successfully assume the identity of a bearded man. In the Occidental world, it seems that the only way that Idriss will be able to effectively navigate is by yielding to the stereotypes placed before him. Each of Idriss's trials, therefore, is a metaphor for the forgeries to which he must constantly conform. In a sense, no one that he encounters during his

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travels cares who *he* is. This notion is part and parcel of Tournier's principal theme on identity fragmentation and marginalization. The essence of the individual is inconsequential. Society's perception of the individual is the only perception that truly matters.

Therefore, Idriss has little choice but to surrender to the power of the image by assuming the identity of the bearded man. As his identity is fragmented, he is implicated, as well; he is forced to marginalize himself in order to obtain what he wants. Further, he is convinced that his true existence is worth nothing, for he is able to obtain his papers even with a photograph that is not his own. Didier Bertrand concludes that "the representation of self offered by the photographic image generally works as a mirror. Yet, in the case of Idriss, a very problematic body-image is consistently produced and actually leads the youth to yield to the representation" (14). In the Lacanian sense, Idriss's subject formation is a process. The "mirror stage," to which Jacques Lacan often refers, functions as a dialectic in which the "I" is identified by an understanding of the "Not I" (Homer 24–25). As is the case with Idriss, in Lacan's mirror stage, there is a movement from unity to fragmentation, from collective to individual.[11] Eventually, there is an attempt to reintegrate to the collective, which we witness at the end of the novel, as Idriss will eventually be reintegrated within a North African district of Paris in the "Rue de la Goutte d'or." In short, the photograph of the bearded man, in particular, fragments Idriss's identity, representing the "Not I" of Idriss's existence. Although the photograph cannot make him *French* in any sense of the term, it functions to "normalize" Idriss by assuring that he both represents and perpetuates the stereotype that the French have created for a North African immigrant. In a sense, Idriss *becomes* North African—in the French sense of the term—at the very moment that he is profiled, photographed, and classified according to the Occidental definition of what constitutes a member of this particular ethnic group. According to Vincent Colapietro,

> . . . in addition to the external Other, there exists another one, the internal other "self " created by the passing of a sign into an interpretant, interpretant into sign, and the self of one moment into the self of another moment. The radical absence of the self from its other self, semiotically

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[11]  With regard to a Lacanian analysis of Tournier's novel, several interesting questions arise. Firstly, is it theoretically possible to actually lose an identity, to have it stolen, or even to regain it? Or does such a notion function purely metaphorically here? Further, is it theoretically possible to quantify or to qualify "identity"? If so, how would one describe it or measure it? If one can neither qualify nor quantify "identity," then does it really even exist at all?

evidenced by shifters, creates not a stable but a restless semiosis incessantly sliding along the slope of signification. (40)

For Jacques Derrida, in contrast, such marginalization is due to the loss of presence that is so intrinsic to the operation of the sign, and most evident within the written sign. Further, Derrida speaks of a transcendental signified, in which he appropriates Ferdinand de Saussure's term "signified." He suggests that it is the indefiniteness of reference that brings the tradition of metaphysics to desire the transcendental signified so intensely, while repressing its absence so vigorously (qtd. in Colapietro 367). A Derridean analysis certainly applies to Idriss's situation as the latter struggles to interpret the signs placed before him.

When Idriss finally arrives in Paris, still in search of his lost photograph, he meets a man named Milan who is a manufacturer of mannequins of young boys. Milan's business reflects a double-fragmentation of the image. Firstly, mannequins are nothing more than replicas of human beings. Secondly, Milan photographs his mannequins:

> Quant aux mannequins, étant eux-mêmes déjà les images, leur photo est une image d'image, ce qui a pour effet de doubler leur pouvoir dissolvent. Il en résulte une impression de rêve éveillé, d'hallucination vraie. C'est absolument la réalité sapée à sa base par l'image. (181)

> As for mannequins, since they themselves are already images, their photograph is an image of an image, and this has the effect of doubling their dissolving power. The result is an impression of a waking dream, a genuine hallucination. It is reality undermined at its very foundations by the image.

The fragmentation of the fragmented image does not represent the identity of its subject in any way. It lacks authenticity.

Ultimately, Idriss begins to work as a model for the fabrication of polyester mannequins for the store windows of Tati. When he goes to the gyptoplastic workshop to have a mould of his body created, Tournier underscores the highest evil of identity fragmentation. Recreated in alginate, the mould of Idriss's body becomes the ultimate means to perpetuate the stereotype of a young North African. Without even realizing it, Idriss has now completely lost his identity, for now his lifeless image will be duplicated and re-duplicated endlessly. As Pary Pezechkian explains: "Toutes les images qu'Idriss rencontre sur sa route essaient de le faire rentrer dans un moule préétabli, une image, un référant qu'ils reconnaissent et qui lui est totalement inconnu et étrange" ("All the images that Idriss meets on his

way attempt to make him fit into a prescribed mould, an image, a referent that they recognize and which is completely unknown and foreign to him"; 3). Finally, when Idriss goes to the zoo and enters a Hall of Mirrors, he

> . . . s'observe gonflé comme un ballon, ou au contraire filiforme, ou coupé en deux au niveau de la ceinture. Il tire la langue à ces images grotesques de lui-même qui viennent s'ajouter à tant d'autres. Un concert de rire frais lui répond. (159)

> . . . observes himself puffed up like a balloon, or on the contrary tall and skinny, or cut in half at the waist. He sticks out his tongue at these grotesque images of himself, the latest additions to so many others. A concert of youthful laughs answers him.

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The scene of the hall of mirrors is a metaphor for the tests that Western civilization makes Idriss endure (Pezechkian 6). In this Lacanian flashback, this mirror shows Idriss's image as constructed and perceived by Occidentals, stretched and pulled to fit a predetermined European definition. Each image of Idriss which surfaces represents yet another attempt to forge something new, but like the ebb and flow of the sea on a beach, what the sign creates the image erases at the same time. Working against all of these obstacles, how can Idriss succeed in constructing his own authentic identity? How will he not ultimately drown in this sea of false images?

The restoration of Idriss's Berber "native identity" begins at the moment that he meets a master calligrapher who teaches him to exchange the marginalizing power of the image for the liberating purity of the sign. Idriss finally understands that all of the images of himself that he had seen during his voyage from the Sahara to Paris were deceptions, the counterrealities of his true being. In calligraphy, where the liberating purity of the sign flourishes, Idriss finds the dimensions of his existence—his authentic identity—which he had never before seen, but which were always present in his Saharan oasis:

> Dès sa première calligraphie, Idriss se retrouva plongé dans le temps démesuré où il avait vécu sans le savoir à Tabelbala. Il comprenait maintenant que ces vastes plages de durée étaient un don de son enfance, et qu'il les retrouverait désormais par l'étude, l'exercice et le désintéressement. D'ailleurs la faculté offerte au calligraphe d'allonger horizontalement certaines lettres introduit dans la ligne des silences, des zones de calme et de repos, qui sont le désert même. (199)

> From his very first calligraphy, Idriss found himself plunged back into the time beyond measure when he had lived without knowing it in Tabelbala. He now understood that those vast stretches of duration were

a gift of his childhood, and that from now on he would regain them by study, practice, and disinterestedness. And besides, the faculty given to the calligrapher to lengthen certain letters horizontally introduces silences into the line, zones of calm and repose, which are the desert itself.

Calligraphy illustrates the importance of the sign as a means of release from visual representations, underscoring the contrast that exists between representation (image) and interpretation (sign). Thus, at the end of his novel, Tournier's message becomes clear. The only way to escape the evil power of the image is through writing. Illiterates like Idriss fall into the traps placed by images, for they do not have the wisdom that is needed to decipher them.[12] Their identities are fabricated because they are unable to release the liberating power that has dwelled within them all the while. The literate individual "reads" images. This individual has the ability to create and to reject the artificial nature of the image. Through the sign, the individual will find freedom, but through the image there is only imprisonment:

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> Ces adolescents musulmans plongés dans la grande cité occidentale subissaient toutes les agressions de l'effigie, de l'idole, et de la figure. Trois mots pour désigner la même asservissement. L'effigie est verrou, l'idole prison, la figure serrure. Une seule clef peut faire tomber ces chaînes: le signe. . . . en vérité l'image est bien l'opium de l'Occident. (201–02)

> These Moslem adolescents, submerged in the big occidental city, were subjected to all the assaults of the effigy, the idol, and the figure. . . . The effigy is a door bolt, the idol a prison, the figure a lock. Only one key can remove these chains: the sign. . . . The image is truly the opium of the Occident.

Therefore, the literate individual knows how to deconstruct and decode images in order to forge an authentic identity. In a sense, the image must be translated into a rhetorical figure. Tournier suggests that if Idriss had been literate, his knowledge and wisdom would have sheltered him from the evil power of the image. His mind would have been open and free. When he is finally able to escape the marginalizing power of the image at the end of the novel, Idriss embraces the liberating power of the sign and he is freed from the Occidental stereotypes associated with his North African existence. He is now able to forge both his own authentic identity and, as a result, his own destiny as well.

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[12]  Tournier's novel certainly suggests that education is the key to leading oppressed peoples to freedom.

As noted in the introductory paragraph of this essay, in the final scene of the novel, Idriss is operating a jackhammer, the symbol of the Maghrebine worker, another cliché of the North African living in the Rue de la Goutte d'or in Paris, in the Place Vendôme. He is very content to have mastered this tool, "sa partenaire de danse" ("his dance partner"; 220). In the window of a corner jewellery store, Idriss sees a golden droplet on a black velvet cushion. Is this *the* golden droplet that he had lost in Marseille? His jackhammer penetrates the window and the store alarm sounds. Idriss does not hear the alarm, the noise of the shattering glass aurally signifying his "breaking free" of the bonds of the image. Looking at the golden droplet, Idriss has found the pure sign, the absolute form, the symbol of freedom, the key that will permit him to leave this prison of false images and create his own authentic identity. Has he succeeded in rejecting the marginalized postcolonial self (the "Other") which is created through the power of visual representation? Although Tournier seems to leave the door open a bit, I would suggest that Idriss has, at minimum, begun an early step in rejecting a postcolonial identity based upon fragmentation and marginalization which had initially lead him to assume an identity based exclusively upon false constructions. If we believe Tournier's narrator who claims that "l'image est douée d'une force mauvaise" ("the image is endowed with evil power"; 100), then we might conclude that the only way that Idriss can escape its evil power is by making both a concerted and a conscious effort to continually reject the false identities cast upon him by the image. Then, and only then, might he succeed in truly wearing the "goutte d'or," the sign of a free existence.

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# Translation and Bilingualism in Monica Ali's and Jhumpa Lahiri's Marginalized Identities

# ABSTRACT

This study, drawing upon contemporary theories in the field of migration, postcolonialism, and translation, offers an analysis of literary works by Monica Ali (of Bangladeshi origins) and Jhumpa Lahiri (of Bengali Indian parents). Ali and Lahiri epitomize second-generation immigrant literature, play with the linguistic concept of translating and interpreting as forms of hybrid connections, and are significant examples of how a text may become a space where multi-faceted identities co-habit in a process of deconstructing and reconstructing their own sense of emplacement in non-native places.

Each immigrant text becomes a hybrid site, where second- and third generations of immigrant subjects move as mobile, fluctuating and impermanent identities, caught up in the act of transmitting their bicultural and bilingual experience through the use of the English language as their instrument of communication in a universe which tends to marginalize them.

This investigation seeks to demonstrate how Ali and Lahiri represent two different migrant experiences, Muslim and Indian, each of which functioning within a multicultural Anglo-American context. Each text is transformed into the *lieu* where identities become both identities-in-translation and translated identities and each text itself may be looked at as the site of preservation of native identities but also of the assimilation (or adaptation) of identity. Second-generation immigrant women writers become the interpreters of the old and new cultures, the translators of their own local cultures in a space of transition.

This reflection on immigrant subjects occurs when identity still occupies a strategic role not only in literary and cultural studies, but also in the field of linguistics and translation. A multicultural perspective suggests that a non-static and fluctuating existence does create richer identities and new systems of identification. This has compelled theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Iain Chambers, Michael Cronin, Gloria Anzaldua, and Edouard Glissant, to name but a few, to place a certain emphasis on concepts such as hybridity, borders, translation, and creolization, with a view to understanding those identities residing in interstitial and peripheral spaces. In this study a selection from a corpus of literary texts belonging to immigrant tradition intends to explicitly engage issues related to language and identity, and to the modality in which English and translation intervene in the definition of bilingual identities in a state of marginalization.

Language in identity representation is central to the experience of immigration, for the linguistic function is crucial in the shaping of a new identity. Immigration involves a move to a new context, where language proficiency is important, not simply if one considers its function for the integration of the immigrant subject, but also if one takes into account the way in which language competence affects the sense of belonging each immigrant identity might or might not develop. This underpins the intention of looking at the notion of identity with a view to exploring how, and to what extent, the construction of identities has to be scrutinized through the support of English and translation as effective potentials that mould identities existing in the interstice. The English language and the practice of translation are thus not considered from a mere linguistic or textual perspective but are seen to act as instruments of creativity. Translation becomes the metaphor for diasporic creativity, a creative means of political and cultural transformation of identities in adopted countries.

The question of the English language in immigrant contexts introduces the concept of bilingualism in English-diasporic populations which, in particular, refers to three principal factors:

> the way a diasporic subject copes with both their mother tongue and the language of the host country; the postcolonial situation and the use of English at the turn of the twenty-first century; the current status of English and its relationship with the future of national languages in transnational worlds. (Král 9)

Second-generation diasporic subjects are not necessarily linked to the experience of loss and nostalgia, they are rather interested in that of residence in the host country. Levi and Weingrod highlight this theory by

suggesting how "diasporas are no longer 'depicted' as melancholy places of exile and oppression . . . In sharp contrast . . . diasporas are enthusiastically embraced as arenas for the creative melding of cultures and the formation of new 'hybridic,' mixed identities" (45). The concepts of bilingualism, in-betweenness, hybridity, and doubleness, all of which refer to the construction of an immigrant identity in the host country, are here taken into account as a theoretical support to the scrutiny of second-generation immigrant literature, where marginalized identities make the effort to conquer new alien spaces.

In Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003), literary works from the south Asian immigrant tradition, the representation of translated Bangladeshi and Indian ways of life abroad is encapsulated within translating and linguistic practices which function in terms of creative tools in the diasporic aesthetics. Second-generation immigrants have dual identities, as their nature (in terms of language, culture and setting) is two-sided, and English and translation contribute to strengthening their sense of linguistic, cultural and geographical duality. Diasporic narrative is thus a textual model that testifies to the in-betweenness of immigrant characters who, even though condemned to a permanent condition of uprootedness and marginality, also possess a certain ability that permits the non-native self to explore new horizons through linguistic and translating strategies.

The redefinition of English not as an instrument of power and domination but as a "stepmother," to borrow John Skinner's expression, leads us to think about the new linguistic and cultural system in adopted countries. Both Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri seem to insist on the liberating role of the English language as a technical device for social reinvention and emancipation from patriarchal rule. The fact that the two languages, the mother tongue and English, assume distinct roles in the context of immigration, introduces a new hybridized view of the English language in the diasporic setting. English ceases to be an instrument of colonial domination and becomes a tool of redefinition, not a choice but "a fact, a constitutive element" (Král 127). This changes the notions of "mother" and "stepmother" tongues in immigrant contexts and makes English a "de-territorialized and redistributed language" between Anglophone and English-speaking populations, a language that appears to be spoken by four groups of people:

> native speakers; speakers of former British colonies; . . . a third group which includes diasporas in the English-speaking world, for whom English has become the language of everyday life; finally, the ever-increasing group of speakers outside the English-speaking world who use this language in the workplace. (129)

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The English language is today strictly connected with issues concerning culture and identity construction, and its linguistic, creolized form is allied to translation as a means of giving voice to subjects belonging simultaneously to nations, languages and cultures in a state of transition. However, hybridized subjectivities in immigrant settings possess a new artistic creativity, which inevitably produces "innovative types of identifications, re-visitations and complex processes of creolization which criss-cross several artistic expressions" (Balirano 87). Second- and third-generation immigrants acquire a new stability that is indeed enforced by a hybrid perspective which favours negotiation and interconnection among diverse identities by "means of different media and idioms" (87), and which engenders mechanisms of "self-identification with the homeland" (87). This linguistic practice, which, to a great extent, happens in one main language, relies on techniques such as "amplification" (88) and on linguistic devices such as the blending of "different accents, norm-deviant syntax, code-switching, code-mixing, double-voiced discourse or alternative forms of semantic collocations" (87), stylistic procedures that portray the lives of hybrid identities who, instead of speaking English, are intentionally represented as "'dubbed' or 'translated' into English" (88).

In *Translation and Identity,* Michael Cronin points out that the condition of an immigrant identity is that of a "translated being" who moves from

> a source language and culture to a target language and culture so that translation takes place both in the physical sense of movement or displacement and in the symbolic sense of the shift from one way of speaking, writing about and interpreting the world to another. (45)

Similarly, Anne Malena explains how immigrant identities are translated beings in countless ways. They "remove from the familiar source environment and move towards a target culture which can be totally unknown or more or less familiar;" they "most likely will have to learn or perfect their skills in another language in order to function in their new environment"; "their individual and collective identities will experience a series of transformations as they adjust to the loss of their place of birth and attempt to turn it into gain" (Malena 9). One can deduce that translation becomes a sociological strategy which describes dual or multiple identities, a kind of "cultural filter," where languages come "alive in transit, in interpretation," "re-membered, re-read and rewritten" (Chambers 3). The nomadic aspect of a migrant language makes these identities mutable, unfixed and uncertain entities, whose dual condition entails "a continual fabulation, an invention, a construction in which there is no fixed identity or final destination" (25).

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Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri testify to the way in which the migrant self is free to "flee the overlapping pressures exerted upon identity definition to explore new horizons in the spatial and metaphorical senses of the term" (Král 39). In their narratives, identities describe the two sides of their nomadic life and embody the concept of "doubleness," which Linda Hutcheon defines "the essence of migrant experience" (9). As Hutcheon points out, "caught between two worlds, the immigrant negotiates a new social space; caught between two cultures and often two languages, the writer negotiates a new literary space" (9). To put it in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, the hybrid subject becomes "not only double-voiced and double-accented . . . but also double-languaged" (360).

Monica Ali (1967–) was born in Dhaka to a Bangladeshi father and an English mother but was raised in England from the age of three. The plot in *Brick Lane*, a novel set between Bangladeshi villages and London, evolves around Nazneen, a Bangladeshi girl who was born in East Pakistan and who is obliged to migrate to London at the age of eighteen after marrying a Bangladeshi man. In England Nazneen is unable to socialize, as she cannot speak English, a language she would like to learn. The heroine has no feelings of doubt about the culture and language of the host country, which she considers a stepmother tongue that does not threaten her self-representation. She suddenly realizes how important learning English would be for a redefinition of her personality in a country where she has no pressure from the patriarchal society from which she comes. Nazneen gradually forms ties with the English language. The first stage of this relation is best embodied in the episode which describes her looking at signs in the streets, which inform her what not to do: "No Smoking, No Eating, No Drinking" (Ali 46). She begins fantasizing over the English language and envying the facility with which other immigrants have appropriated the language of the host country. Karim, the man who will become her lover, is proficient in English, wears European clothes and possesses European objects. He is an exemplary hybrid man, whose identity is the sum of two worlds, the Bangladeshi and the English one, and whose mastery of the English language gives him nothing but privileges. The language of the adopted country is romanticized and transformed into an instrument of self-representation, liberation and creation:

Nazneen, hobbling and halting, began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without destination. . . . But they were not aware of herself. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more than she could see God. They knew that she existed (just as she knew He existed) but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her. She enjoyed this thought. She

began to scrutinize. She stared at the long, thin faces, the pointy chins. . . . The woman looked up and saw Nazneen staring. She smiled, like she was smiling at someone who had tried and totally failed to grasp the situation. No longer invisible, Nazneen walked faster and looked only at what she had to see to walk without falling or colliding. (56–57)

Ice-skating is Nazneen's first approach towards various acts of translation through which she learns English and the English culture:

"What is this called?" said Nazneen.
Chanu glanced at the screen.
"Ice skating," he said, in English.
"Ice e-skating," said Nazneen.
"Ice-skating," said Chanu.
"Ice e-skating."
"No, no. No *e.* Ice skating. Try it again."
Nazneen hesitated.
"Go on!"
"Ice es-kating," she said, with deliberation.
Chanu smiled. "Don't worry about it. It's a common problem for Bengalis. Two consonants together causes a difficulty. I have conquered this issue after a long time. But you are unlikely to need these words in any case."
"I would like to learn some English," said Nazneen.
Chanu puffed his cheeks and spat the air out in a fuff.
"It will come. Don't worry about it. Where's the need anyway?" He looked at his book and Nazneen watched the screen. (36–37)

Practices of linguistic and metaphorical translation also occur between Nazneen and her family, where Bengali-English words and accents are mixed in a very confusing way. Shahana, Nazneen's daughter, speaks English at home though her father disagrees with her linguistic choice:

"Kadam," said Nazneen.
"Bor-*ing*," sang Shahana, in English.
Chanu remained calm. "Bangla2000 web site. Who wants to take a look?"
. . .
"What is the wrong with you?" shouted Chanu, speaking in English.
"Do you mean," said Shahana, "What is wrong with you?" She blew at her finger. "Not 'the wrong.'"
"Tell your sister," he screamed, reverting to Bengali, "that I am going to tie her up and cut out her tongue." (200–01)

Metaphorical translation in Monica Ali's immigrant writing does not seem to involve two languages. It is rather represented in terms of identity

transition, a process which regards an immigrant subject's attempt to escape from the rules of marginalization within a foreign/host country. In *Brick Lane* Nazneen skates in her sari, which symbolizes a hybrid confluence of the British and Bangladeshi culture, both making up her identity. Her Bangladeshi sari and her Western footwear affirm her sense of cultural freedom which is manifested through acts of non-linguistic and non-textual translation, a system of metaphorical translation in which Nazneen recognizes the host culture:

> There was no reason to wear it but she wore her red and gold silk sari. . . .
> She moved her legs beneath the table to make them dance in her lap. She
> pulled the free end of her sari over her face and moved her neck from
> side to side like a jatra girl. The next instant she was seized by panic and
> clawed the silk away as if it were strangling her. She could not breathe.
> The table trapped her legs. The sari, that seconds ago had felt light as air,
> became heavy chains. Gasping, she struggled from the chair and went to
> the kitchen. She drank water straight from the tap. It hurt her chest and
> the last mouthful made her cough. (277)

In the final passage of the novel, the art of ice-skating parallels the art of translating, both epitomizing the absence of linguistic and cultural barriers. The art of ice-skating and the technique of translation put Nazneen in a state of placement and displacement, where the crossing of physical and mental borders is permitted:

> "Go on. Open them."
> She opened her eyes.
> In front of her was a huge white circle, bounded by four-foot-high
> boards. Glinting, dazzling, enchanting ice. She looked at the ice and
> slowly it revealed itself. . . .
> "Here are your boots, Amma."
> Nazneen turned round. To get on the ice physically—it hardly seemed to
> matter. In her mind she was already there.
> She said, "But you can't skate in a sari."
> Razia was already lacing her boots. "This is England," she said. "You can
> do whatever you like." (492)

Doubleness and in-betweenness are also the tenets in the lives of Jhumpa Lahiri's fictional identities. The writer, in one of her essays, introduces herself as "an American author, an Indian-American author, a British-born author, an Anglo-Indian author, an NRI (non-resident Indian), an ABCD author (ABCD stands for American born confused desi—desi meaning Indian)" (Lahiri, "Intimate Alienation" 114). Lahiri looks at her subjectivity as a bilingual and bicultural identity who occupies an in-between space:

I have always lived under the pressure to be bilingual, bicultural, at ease on either side of the Lahiri family map. The first words I learned to utter and understand were my parents' native tongue, Bengali. Until I was old enough to go to school, and my linguistic world split in two, I spoke Bengali exclusively and fluently. Though I still speak Bengali, I have lost this extreme fluency. . . . While English was not technically my first language, it has become so. (114–15)

The American-Bengalese writer sustains that translation is essential to the construction of a migrant identity in a host country. Immigrants, she explains, are "translators, insofar as they must make sense of the foreign in order to survive" (119), insofar as they must prevent their lives from getting marginalized in the host country. In the short-story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri exploits metaphorical translation to represent her characters' identity, such as rendering certain native gestures, customs, anxieties and regrets in the language and culture of the adopted country, and also to show how her Indian characters can be transformed into American citizens as part of a process of natural assimilation.

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In the short story "Interpreter of Maladies," which is set in India, Mr Kapasi, a Bengali English speaking tourist guide, works for a second-generation family of Bengali descent living in New Jersey. The contrast between Kapasi and the young couple, whose Indian roots are soon revealed to the tourist guide, is clear both on a linguistic and cultural level. They do not seem to be proud of their native culture, which they probably look at as minor in their adopted country. The Indian emigrated identities behave as perfect foreigners in India: they take pictures and comment on the Indian landscape as Western tourists would do. The children, Tina, Bobby and Ronny, are American and have American names. The English language is the only instrument which makes the communication between the tourist guide and the American family possible. Kapasi's knowledge of several languages and dialects, as Palusci points out, is somehow a form of "allegory of a faceless nationality" (127). It is Kapasi's interest in languages that gives him the chance to have more than one job in his country. He is also an interpreter in a doctor's office:

"What a doctor need an interpreter for?"
"He has a number of Gujarati patients. My father was Gujarati, but many people do not speak Gujarati in this area, including the doctor. And so the doctor asked me to work in his office, interpreting what the patients say." (Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies" 50)

This revelation turns the genuine tourist guide into a subject finding himself in-between languages; his complex linguistic identity permits

him to scrutinize the Americanized family, who "looked Indian" but wore Westernized clothes and spoke a language whose accent was the one "[he] heard on American television programs" (49). The most conventional and stereotyped image of India is indeed recorded from the American-Indian Mr and Mrs Das' perspective as the consequence of a conventional process of assimilation into the host country.

The immigrant characters' adaptation to the language and culture of the host country is a topic that Lahiri also investigates in the short story "The Third and Final Continent," which is set in America. Whereas the second-generation immigrant Mrs Das in the "Interpreter of Maladies" can only speak English and is tied up with American culture, Mala, the first-generation immigrant female character in "The Third and Final Continent," marries a man from India living in the States but is strongly connected with Indian culture. However, she is soon asked to make an effort to become assimilated into the culture of the host country. The English language and American culture will become indispensable to Mala's new life, although the woman from India will never permit her native roots to be eroded. The point of view of Mala's husband, whose name is never mentioned by the novelist, testifies to the slow changes in his wife's attitude towards the language and culture of the host country. The heroine transforms her conservative attitude in resisting the new culture and necessarily turns into a radically diverse Indian subject who welcomes the benefits the host country can offer her. Mala's husband asserts:

> At the airport I recognized Mala immediately. The free end of her sari did not drag on the floor, but was draped in a sign of bridal modesty over her head, just as it had draped my mother until the day my father died. Her thin brown arms were stacked with gold bracelets, a small red circle was painted on her forehead, and the edges of her feet were tinted with a decorative red dye. I did not embrace her, or kiss her, or take her hand. Instead I asked her, speaking Bengali for the first time in America, if she was hungry. (Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent" 191)

The words pronounced by Mala's husband are but an attempt to "translate" the Indian female culture made up of "sari," "gold bracelets," a "small red circle" on the forehead and "feet . . . tinted with a decorative red dye." At the beginning Mala seems as distant from her husband as from the host country. She does not feel like betraying her Indian identity: "Mala rose to her feet, adjusting the end of her sari over her head and holding it to her chest. . . . Mala had traveled far from home, not knowing where she was going, or what she would find" (195). Later on, she will learn foreign rules as necessary instruments to make a success of her life abroad:

> We are American citizens now, so we can collect social security when it is time. Though we visit Calcutta every few years, and bring back more drawstring pajamas and Darjeeling tea, we have decided to grow older here. I work in a small college library. We have a son who attends Harvard University. Mala no longer drapes the end of her sari over her head, or weeps at night for her parents, but occasionally she sweeps for our son. So we drive to Cambridge to visit him, or bring him home for a weekend, so that he can eat rice with us with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die. (197)

The characters talk in Bengali, though Mala and her husband fear that their son might sooner or later forget his native origins. They do not look on their host country in terms of dispossession, foreignness and exile but as a place where they can live with dignity and find "pieces of the old culture in the simplest things like traditional Indian spices such as bay leaves and cloves" (Tan 234). Here, the English language is not a predominant linguistic tool in terms of communication among Indians and Americans. The Bengali dialect and culture are always constitutive elements in the lives of first-generation immigrants, whereas the English language is particularly associated with the immigrant's survival in a foreign land.

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In Lahiri's *The Namesake*, a novel whose setting shifts from Calcutta to American metropolises, the question of language becomes even more important, especially in relation to bilingualism as far as second- and third-generations of immigrants are concerned. Ashima's son, Gogol, soon realizes that his name is not "inscribed in the geography of the place" (Král 138). He will change his name from Gogol to Nikhil, a name which does not label him as a foreigner. One day Gogol is invited to attend a lecture on the question of identity in Asian-American minorities:

> One day he attends a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English. . . . Gogol is bored by the panelists, who keep referring to something called "marginality," as if it were some sort of medical condition. . . "Teleologically speaking, ABCDs are unable to answer the question 'Where are you from?'" the sociologist on the panel declares. Gogol has never heard the term ABCD. He eventually gathers that it stands for "American-born confused deshi." In other words, him. . . . all their friends always refer to India simply as desh. But Gogol never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India. (Lahiri, *The Namesake* 118)

This quotation is an implicit example of Gogol's newly-acquired Americanness and also represents a reflection on bilingualism as a limitation on

immigrant subjects, who often perceive their second newly-learned language as an inadequate linguistic tool that might otherwise provide them with a sense of total cultural fulfilment. This thought reminds us of Julia Kristeva's idea of the mother tongue as the exclusive linguistic resource, whose power is such as to fortify one's own identity. This also reinforces the theory according to which, as Jacques Derrida puts it, languages are intrinsically untranslatable, although the French philosopher does also believe that each language functions in specific contexts and historical epochs. Therefore, each language spoken by an immigrant subject is rooted and operates in the context of immigration in one specific moment in time. Here, Lahiri places an emphasis on a perfect juxtaposition of an assimilated American existence and a traditional Indian way of life, where duality characterizes the immigrants' lives, as in the cases of the American-born Gogol and his sister Sonia. Gogol's name recalls his hybrid condition whilst Lahiri "identifies the practice of naming people as a real linguistic problem" (Balirano 91), which she explains by making clear reference to the importance for Bengali subjects of having both a *bhalonam* and a *daknam*. The writer explicitly translates and clarifies what the Indian concepts represent:

> In Bengali the word for pet name is daknam, meaning, literally, the name by which one is called by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated. They are a reminder, too, that one is not all things to all people. They all have pet names. . . . Every pet name is paired with a good name, a *bhalonam*, for identification in the outside world. Consequently, good names appear on envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories and in all other public places. (Lahiri, *The Namesake* 25–26)

To conclude, hybrid identities in Ali's and Lahiri's immigrant writing are reinvented identities exploiting English, translation and bilingualism as techniques for survival and integration in a diasporic setting. They live in two cultures and languages through a process of renegotiation, which is not only an unequal mixing of languages and cultures. Languages and cultures are "accommodated in different capacities because each diasporic subject assigns each language to a specific task for the simple reason that he cannot relate to the two languages in the same way" (Král 136). The Anglo-American setting in second-generation diasporic fiction becomes the geographical context where identities acquire the language of the host country as a way out of predefined native models and as a means of recreating one's own self.

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## Changing Notes in the Voices beyond the Rooster Coop: A Neo-Capitalist Coup in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

# ABSTRACT

Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* encapsulates the complexities of identity formation in a milieu effected by neo-capitalism. The novel, for many, is about a new identity made available to the hitherto marginalized in the form of opportunities unveiled by market forces. It is also perceived as a registration of the frustration and anger of the deprived that has become conscious of the new possibilities. Understandably, interpreting the novel on these lines leads to the identification of the protagonist Balram as a champion of the marginalized, settling scores with the oppressive system. However, there are far subtler notes in the protagonist's attitude to these sweeping changes than the simple and one dimensional approach of an achiever who is able to break the "rooster coop" and revel at the reversal of fortune. Neither is it a representative voice of the suppressed class turning the table on its oppressor by using the opportunities offered by the global market. The "notes" of the voices that emerge as Balram, the boy from darkness, moves up the ladder to become Ashok Sharma, the entrepreneur hiding in light, not only lack symphony but also create a distinct dissonance. Clearly, the discord in the changing notes is brought about by the forces that changed the world he lives in—a neo-capitalist world. The whole process of Balram turning into Ashok Sharma is a neo-capitalist coup.

In India it always used to be that if you were poor and someone else was incredibly rich, that was just a fact of life. In fact, even though much of India has always been poor, there was very little crime. But now the old bonds of community, caste and family are fraying. The temptations before a poor person are greater. You are suddenly aware of shopping malls, there are advertisements everywhere, and you see your neighbours doing better than you. This leads to frustration and frustration to anger. (qtd. in Ceaser)

These words of Aravind Adiga, the author of *The White Tiger*, seemingly sum up the idea that the protagonist of the novel represents. The novel is about a changed world where liberal capitalism has brought about a change in the lives of the people who used to have a conservative life style. However, the anger takes a different dimension altogether in *The White Tiger* through the protagonist, Balram Halwai. Under the apparent guise of a struggle to move up against an oppressive system, "the white tiger" represents a complex attitude to life. Ironically, in trying to move up the ladder by taking advantage of new opportunities and openings, the protagonist fails to be a plain champion of the marginalized as encapsulated in the words of the author (as quoted above). In fact, Balram seems to be an agent of the new forces of neo-capitalism driven by veiled self-interest and executed with utter sophistication. The struggle of the protagonist is not the simple struggle of a poor man trying to move up the social ladder whilst fighting against the upper class, but it is the struggle of his real self coming to terms with his projected persona that finds a different place in the changed world.

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Adiga's novel is an apparent attempt to show the "frustration," "anger," and response of the marginalized to a globalized world that places in unprecedented proximity the rich and the poor, and the opportunities to transgress between these. Further, the autobiographical narration of the novel is so planned by the author that it places the protagonist Balram in the position of interpreter and analyst of all events and characters. This, in fact, convincingly corresponds to the author's statement quoted earlier. Balram is offered the role of a "deviant" element, forcing himself out of the rooster coop. He is also given a voice to present himself in the vanguard of the "oppressed" and "victimized section," and yet, to stand apart from that as "a thinking man" who is capable of intellectual manipulation typical to the other section. This interplay of voices between the narrator and the inner self runs through the novel, defying a simple one-dimensional reading of it as that of class struggle.

It is true that the novel offers an exposé of an India breaking out into the world of late capitalism—aggressive, brash, cynical, driven (Taras). It tells the story of Balram, an otherwise nondescript young villager of lower caste—his *jati* is of pastry makers—who arrives in Delhi and is soon hired to be a chauffeur who would capitalize on the opportunities offered by the transformed social set-up. In the economic pandemonium of present-day India with its call centres, high-tech areas, and sprawling shopping malls, Balram can aspire to even more upward social mobility. Picking up the cues he is exposed to from the business class and the government officials tied in with it, Balram decides that crime and dishonesty pay handsome rewards (Taras). The rags-to-riches trajectory takes him to Bangalore where he finds himself in a changed world that needs him to assume a different identity for the world.

Apparently, the story seems to suggest the idea that in a transformed world, a truly smart man can reach the top if he no longer limits himself to his low class or the "rooster coop" as the narrator refers to it. Balram does emerge as one of these smart men able to escape the rooster coop. Further, he seems to represent the idea of a suppressed class trying to settle its score with the oppressor using the changed circumstances. Balram's transformation from an uncouth, dirty but honest driver to a polished, shrewd and manipulating entrepreneur involves a reversal of the master-servant relationship. However, he represents more than plain smartness exhibited in the face of changed circumstances. In fact, he embodies a number of other traits that neo-capitalism brought to a conservative society.

Ideally, class struggle would expect itself to culminate in an egalitarian set-up. It is not about a mere inversion of power structure, but about attaining a justified distribution of resources. The seeming class struggle, culminating in Balram's emergence as its voice, does appear to realize such an egalitarian set-up. One could easily mistake that

> It is the India of Darkness which is focused by the novelist, articulating the voice of the silent majority, trying to dismantle the discrimination between the Big Bellies and the Small Bellies and create a society based on the principle of equality and justice. Balram Halwai, the protagonist is a typical voice of underclass . . . and struggling to set free from age old slavery and exploitation. (Singh 98)

In fact, Balram, the narrator, tries his best to retain this image of a class representative through his manipulative narration of his story. The assertion of Balram that white men will be finished soon and "in 20 years time it will just be us brown and yellow men at the top of the pyramid, and we'll rule the world" (Adiga 305) seemingly sounds like the voice of an excited emergent section. It does seem to represent the emergence of that much-

heralded economic powerhouse, the "new India" (Mattin). Thus, Balram's story is a quasi celebration of the merger of the margins with the centres—socially and economically, locally and globally. The difference, though, is that Balram's new India is made up of individuals fighting for their spaces rather than a class fighting for its space.

The most striking of all that Balram stands for is his self-interest in everything he does. From the very beginning he exhibits characteristic traits not typical to his "small-bellied" community. Driven by an entrepreneurial desire to be more than what he is and what his community expects him to be, Balram expresses his desire to be "a driver." Unlike a traditional society which would not only scorn but also suppress this preference, the changed society gives him an opportunity to learn the skill that "only a boy from warrior caste can manage" (Adiga 56). It takes three hundred rupees plus a bonus and "coal was taught to make ice"—a reference that indicates the fact that money can create opportunities. However, Balram can do this only at the mercy of his grandmother Kusum, who epitomizes the conservative society. Kusum's reluctant acceptance of Balram's unusual desire indicates a crack in the system and the crack is only going to widen. Yet, this fissure in the system is understandable and acceptable since it is indispensable for the voice of the peripheral communities to be heard—a status quo can only seal their marginality. However, here the force that is causing the crack is "self-interest"—a trait that is alien to the traditional society and that has no consideration for the values of the traditional society. The mismatch between Balram's ready acceptance to "swear by all the gods in heaven" (Adiga 56) that he would not forget his granny once he became rich, and the reality after is proof enough to note the all pervading presence of self-interest in the changing world. The same self-interest propels Balram to create a series of falsehoods and pretend to possess the very values he despises in order to get the job of a driver. His words "I have got four years experience. My Master recently died, so I—" (Adiga 60) hint at a lack of scruples in the name of "moving up the ladder." Again, his act of loyalty when he dives at the Stork's feet is totally orchestrated:

> You should have seen me that day—what a performance of wails and kisses and tears! You'd think I'd been born into a cast of performing actors! And all the time while clutching the Stork's feet I was staring at his huge, dirty, uncut toe nails, and thinking . . . why isn't he back home screwing poor fishermen of their money and humping their daughters? (Adiga 61)

These instances involving Balram, the one trying to escape the coop, have within them the seeds of shrewdness that is not expected among the "coop" but is fitting in the world of the entrepreneurs. It is the articulation of the

narrator Ashok Sharma that makes the acts of the narrator Balram convincing through the logic of a different world. Ironically, Ashok Sharma believes that his conscious acts of "meekness" and "submission" as Balram in the past are traits of smartness on the part of one of the marginalized.

Contrary to the overt idea of a suppressed class trying to retaliate using the powers bestowed by the new economic forces, the story of Balram strikes a rather complex note. It is not the story of a revolt against the oppressor with a concrete class consciousness but rather a story that makes use of class consciousness for an individual gain. Balram's projection that he is a boy from Laxmangarh and from darkness serves him well in the Stork's family. Ashok, his master whom Balram eventually murders on his path to liberation, retains him as the driver against the wishes of his wife and brother on the basis of his image as a boy from Laxmangarh: "We don't know who is who in Delhi. This fellow, we can trust him. He is from home" (Adiga 122). In fact, Balram maximizes this to his advantage when needed. For instance, in trying to get the job of a driver, Balram makes the most of his "boy from Laxmangarh" image. He even tries to placate Stork by flattering him: "Of course Sir—people say 'Our father is gone, Thakur Ramdev is gone, the best of the landlords is gone, who will protect us now?'" (Adiga 61). However, the same Balram does not care about what would happen to his "home" once his act of murder is known in Laxmangarh. His attempt at liberation is not the one that emancipates his people in the darkness; instead it is one that leaves the darkness behind. Balram knows exactly, long before he murders Ashok, what the consequences of his actions will be as he narrates the incident about Buffalo's son's kidnap: "Now who would want this to happen to his family sir? Which inhuman wretch of a monster would consign his own granny and brother and aunt and nephews and nieces to death? The Stork and his sons could count on my loyalty" (Adiga 67). Yet, he chooses to be the very same inhuman wretch of a monster in his final act of transgression.

At the same time, Balram tries to present the "anger" of his class against the master class as a justification for his acts with personal motives. His act of entering the shopping mall, driving the Honda City all for himself with A/C on, hooting the horn each time he saw a pretty girl, and spitting over the seats of the Honda City might be symbolic representations of a class giving vent to its frustration against the oppressor. Even the words of Balram, "The strangest thing was that each time, I looked at the cash I had made by cheating him, instead of guilt what did I feel? Rage. The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me" (Adiga 230), sound like a voice of the suppressed class. But the underlying fact is Balram, the narrator, uses class anger as a means to justify his personal acts. The drive to steal stems from a personal need (to be able

to "dip the beak" into a golden haired woman), and not from his realization of how much his master had stolen from him. However, he seems to convince himself of the fairness of the act on the pretext of his realization of the injustice meted out to him. The narrator's insistence on his lack of remorse at the murder of his master on the ground that it was his way of achieving liberation from oppression—"I will say it was all worthwhile to know just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute what it means not to be a servant" (Adiga 321)—lacks solidity as it ignores the fate of the darkness completely.

Whatever liberation Balram achieves is on an individualistic scale, and the class that he claims to represent remains marginal to his accomplishment. Of course, he succeeds in becoming the "Master" and takes care of his "servants," but he fails to move the people from darkness to light. In a changed environment he hides himself in the light and perpetuates a different kind of darkness around him. A successful Balram goes after things exactly the way his masters did: his obsession with chandeliers (he even fixed a chandelier in his toilet), luxury cars, hi-tech gadgets and getting whatever he wants by using whatever means required.

The individual who succeeds in breaking the rooster coop emerges with a set of traits alien to the coop he belonged to. This individual is not only a product of neo-capitalism but also a representative of it. He brings with him sophistication, dynamism, display, role play and a sense of extreme shrewdness. The sophistication which Balram Halwai exhibits all through his life in "moving up the ladder," and especially in writing to the Chinese Premier shows that he is not a naïve entrepreneur. In fact, he writes to the Chinese Premier not a mere success story, but a lesson of Smartness. Balram is so smug about his own smartness that he now considers it worth advertising that "lessons in life and entrepreneurship" are offered freely. Given the master-servant relationship at the "white tiger technology drivers," we notice that this advertisement of Balram is also a "display" which his new persona considers essential in the changed world. He is shrewd enough not to reveal any of his secrets to his servants. In fact, he regrets letting Asif know that he had paid off the family that lost a son in the accident. His lies, the manipulation of language, the eavesdropping, the alacrity with which he learnt to drive and the people management skills are in place in the new neo-capitalist system, which opens itself up for those who break the rooster coop. So much so that Balram now feels that the ploy of calling employees "family" is an insult. His changed value system can now see through the hollowness of the idea of "family" and he has no need to sustain it any longer. The Stork's continual reference to Balram being a member of the family and Balram's pretence of the same is essential for him to break the "coop." He needs to be an insider so that

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he can gain access to the desired information. It worked for him in his discussions with the Stork and his sons, in his relationship with Rampersad and finally in his dealings as Ashok. Balram uses this insider information to his advantage and emerges as an independent outsider with a different persona—Ashok Sharma. The new persona working in a new set-up has no need to call his servants "family" but they are his "employees" just like the employer is no longer a "master" but an "entrepreneur." This also removes the camouflage of kinship between the entrepreneur and his personnel that can shade any scheming against him.

Changes in social and institutional structures take place at a rapid speed in a neo-capitalist system. This brings about an alarming change in the very way of thinking. Subsequently, the old familial values are now replaced by individualistic and self-centred behavioural modes. The cities, the beacon of modern capitalism, germinate these changes which are not self-contained but spread to places like Laxmangarh and Dhanbad. Ashok, the landlord, changes his plans to return to America after two months' stay in India because he feels that "this place is going to be like America in ten years" (Adiga 89). Being a representative of the elite in the old world, he wants to have the best of both in the new India. He glibly expects the old values to continue in the new set-up:

> We've got people to take care of us here—our drivers, our watchman, our masseurs. Where in New York will you find someone to bring you tea and sweet biscuits while you are still lying in bed, the way Rambahadur does for us? You know, he's been in my family for thirty years—we call him a servant but he's a part of the family. (Adiga 89)

But along with the changed system, these familial values also change or if they remain, they remain as a sly pretence for personal gain.

However, it works on a different plane in the case of an individual who belonged to the other side of society in the old world. New opportunities certainly allow the individual to have access to all that is denied hitherto, but they also place him in a fix in terms of opting between making the most of the opportunity for the self and continuing to be loyal to the "family." Individualistic drive continually struggles with the old familial values, and ultimately it is one's ability to hold onto the call of the self in the face of the disintegration of "family values" that makes him smart. When "the long whistle blew and the train headed off towards Dhanbad," Balram knew that this "broad shouldered, handsome, foreign educated" master was "completely unprotected by the usual instincts that run in the blood of a land lord" (Adiga 142). Balram thinks that "if you were back in Laxmangarh, we would have called you the Lamb" (Adiga 142). Balram

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capitalizes on these weaknesses of his master and eventually eliminates this hurdle in moving up, using the very traits in the master brought about by the new system as a means to attain a new persona in the system. The two parallel instances of road accidents reveal the divide between the old familial values and the new individualistic values. When the Stork's family tries to fix Balram in Pinky madam's hit and run case, the Stork says that Kusum was "so proud of you for doing this. She's agreed to be a witness to the confession as well" (Adiga 169). This is how a victim is converted into a hero—"the Indian family is the reason we are trapped and tied to the coop" (Adiga 176). It would take a "white tiger"—one "who is prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten and burned alive by the masters"—to "break out of the coop" (Adiga 176–77). The landlords feel it is natural to make use of a servant, Balram, to save their skin, while at a later stage, the same servant, who has become an entrepreneur, feels it is natural to use "money" to save his skin. When Asif, Balram's driver rams his Qualis into a boy on a bike, Balram does not get panicky. The first thing he asks him to do is to "call the police at once" (Adiga 306) and "to get these women home, first of all." Ashok Sharma alias Balram knows very well that he is in a different place where money provides one with choices.

Neo-capitalism's substitutions of traditional values extend to the concept of morality too: the traditional concern for being scrupulous (seen more often among the people in the rooster coop) is forsaken to make space for opportunism and exploitation without sensitivity towards fellow beings. Balram's growth from belonging to the rooster coop to being an entrepreneur is quite antithetical to the progress of his moral degeneration—his entry into Delhi, "a city where civilization can appear and disappear within five minutes" (Adiga 281), materializes with his ditching of Ram Persad, a fellow driver who he knows to be a better driver with an acute need for the job. Though a part of him "wanted to get up and apologize to him right there and say, . . . *You never did anything to hurt me. Forgive me, brother*," the ambitious entrepreneur in him subdues this feeling as he "turned to the other side, farted and went back to sleep" (Adiga 110). This slightly sensitive entrepreneur is much colder when he forsakes his family members for his transformation achieved through the murder of his master. At a later stage, as a successful entrepreneur in the Light, the protagonist is devoid of any concern for any human beings, and is proud of this lack of sentiment: "I'd fix that assistant commissioner of police at once. I'd put him on a bicycle and have Asif knock him over with the Qualis" (Adiga 320). The materialistic rise of Balram thus contrasts with his moral descent, which is much in correspondence with the traits of neo-capitalism.

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The ultimate product of this interplay of "rise and fall" is an amoral, proud but successful entrepreneur. However, Balram's success is complete only for the outer world and not for Balram himself: he is little at ease with himself. His persona, Ashok Sharma, is confident in tone, proud of his possessions and sure of his effectiveness and manipulative skills—his "prophetic" words to the Chinese Premier about his own future are evidence enough for his hauteur: "I love my start-up—this chandelier, this silver laptop and these twenty six Toyota Qualises—but honestly, I'll get bored of it sooner or later. I'm a first-gear man . . . you see, I am always a man who sees 'tomorrow' when others see 'today'" (Adiga 319).

All the same, there are sufficient ruptures in the narration that allow for some glimpses of Balram the boy from Laxmangarh within Ashok Sharma, the entrepreneur—the intermittent suggestions of guilt, the fear of the Rooster Coop and his sympathies with the people in the Darkness. Though the intention of murdering Ashok was conceived much earlier, there were hesitations on the part of Balram on course to the execution, showing that he had not broken away from the values of his class. When Kusum sends Dharam to him to be trained in his lines, Balram, in a kind of relief, says, "this boy's arrival has saved me from murder." Suggesting another hint of guilt in him are his ponderings over the consequences of his murder of Ashok on his family members: "One day, I know, Dharam, this boy who is drinking my milk and eating my ice-cream in big bowls, will ask me, couldn't you have spared my mother? Couldn't you have written to her telling her to escape in time? And then I'll have to come up with an answer" (Adiga 316). Balram's promotions from being a cleaner to being a driver to becoming an entrepreneur are nothing but his constant efforts to escape the Coop. In fact, the narrator refers repeatedly to the binding Coop, indicating his fear of being trapped in it: "Here in India we have no dictatorship. No secret police. That's because we have the Coop" (Adiga 175). The protagonist cherishes a deep rooted aversion to the willing submission of the rooster to the unscrupulous ploys of the rich. His success lies, to a great extent in identifying and escaping the coop whenever the circumstances demanded it of him. Noticeably, on the threshold of his freedom, just before he boards a train to a new life, Balram was tested for a moment by a fortune telling machine's prophetic lines trying to hoodwink him—"Respect for the law is the first command of the gods." Evidently, Balram could see through the ploy as he says: "the sirens of the coop were ringing—its wheels turning—its red light flashing! A rooster was escaping from the coop!" (Adiga 248).

However, there is one act of Balram in his upward mobility that goes against the grain—his relationship with Dharam, the boy from his family. No matter how earnestly Balram strives to distance himself from

the "coop," he is unable to shed its link to him in the form of Dharam. Evidently, Balram is yet to get himself completely transformed inside the persona of Ashok Sharma. "He nurtures his only relative on earth, the young 'Dharam'" (Molly 78). Curiously, his attempt to escape the coop goes along with his covert sympathies for the people in the darkness as well. "These people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents . . . it was even worse than Laxmangarh" (Adiga 260). The very tone of narration in spite of all its deliberate "display," takes the side of poor India which the Chinese Premier would not get a chance to observe.

The ruptures in the narration do show the trails of Balram of the Coop in Ashok Sharma. In fact, this creates within him a sense of incompleteness, a sense of "half-bakedness." Nevertheless, the persona cannot afford to allow these traces of the Darkness to surface. Hence, the narrator, in addressing the Chinese Premier, assumes a personality of heightened importance and a shrewd smugness, which only help him to cover his own insufficiencies. Balram's justification for the act of murder for assuring himself of what it means not to be a servant—"just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute" (Adiga 321) is an attempt by the "free man" of the neo-capitalist world to overshadow the visitations of the darkness lurking within. His dismissive tone, his cynical attitude to Indian society, his obsession with the elite way of life symbolized by the chandeliers in his toilet, his preference to "buy girls . . . in five-star hotels," the Macintosh computer, his coming to terms with "this India" of choices, leaving out "that India" devoid of choice are all his attempts to find some solace in the midst of the chaos created by the neo-capitalist forces. In fact, the very act of choosing an upper caste name "Sharma" for "Halwai" is an attempt by the margin to merge with the centre. But it should be noted that the measures the protagonist resorts to, including the adoption of the name Sharma, are too feeble to fuse the fringe with the core. His desperate efforts to establish himself as part of the mainstream alienate him further away from the "centre" within the persona of Ashok Sharma as he retains in him the traces of Balram. The echoes of his roots never allow the protagonist to have a sole identity either of a "Sharma" or of a "Halwai" in the neo-capitalist world. Even at the height of his success "Ashok Sharma" shudders at the thought of being identified as "Balram Halwai." As he says:

> At such moments, I look up at this chandelier, and I just want to throw my hands up and holler, so loudly that my voice would carry over the phones in the call centre rooms all the way to the people in America: *I've made it! I've broken out of the coop!* But at other times someone in the street calls out, "Balram," and I turn my head and think, *I've given myself away.* (Adiga 320)

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The entire materialistic ascendancy of "Halwai" is at best a realization of his aspirations in the form of "Sharma." But in the process, he sacrifices the aspirations of the marginalized that anticipate a possible economic transformation in "the world of choices." The deep aversion of the protagonist to the rooster coop emerges from his ultimate recognition that what is required in the changed world is status quo rather than economic empowerment. Ironically, the narrative dominance of "Sharma" subjugates "Halwai" leaving him meek and marginalized. Had the protagonist retained the strains of marginality of "Halwai" shown through his roles as shrewd driver, disgruntled servant, and a voyeuristic observer of the seductive cosmopolitan world, he would have succeeded in creating a space for the representative individual voice of the marginalized.

Startling though it is, even "Sharma" is not as "free" and "potent" as he claims to be. Only, "Sharma" is unaware that he himself is prey in the cobweb of materialist allurement. The hauteur and the cynical strain of triumph in the narrative is a manifestation of "Sharma" being the neo-capitalist forces' naïve spokesperson, incapable of making "a conscientious choice" in "the world of choices." Through "Sharma," the whole idea of "marginalization" gets redefined in economic terms where one's ability to exploit the opportunities to one's favour is seen as the key to break away from the rooster coop. While perceiving himself as deprived, and continuing to climb the ladder, the protagonist sees only opportunities for the self and runs away from the realities of the marginalized. Thus, the neo-capitalist world insidiously sucks up the collective consciousness of the individual and reduces him to a mere self-absorbed entity. It is easily discernible that this entity is incapable of identifying the centres of the new forces. Instead, the protagonist seems to be under the illusion of being the centre and revels at the thought of reversing the power structure. In fact, the neo-capitalist forces are so clinical in the execution of their coup that the protagonist perceives "marginalization" as the natural fallout of the failure of the marginalized rather than as a systemic insufficiency. The execution of the neo-capitalist coup creates a new persona within the protagonist for whom the binaries of "the centre" and "the margin" cease to exist.

True though it is that the gulf between the margin and the centre becomes indistinguishable for "Sharma," he is engulfed in a world of myriad voices and make-believe. In fact, the changed world presents strains of discordant voices: there are echoes of Halwai and the scruples of his conventional society, there is the resonance of a transitional society confused by its value system and there is the voice of the new persona of the protagonist "Sharma" with its obsession with the "self," heard in the various junctures of the narration. Among these, the voice of the new persona seems

the most vociferous and self-assured as the persona fallaciously thinks that he lives in a symbiotic world of economic vortex where he needs to assert his position through a voice louder than that of the rest. However, in his attempt to make his voice heard in a world of cacophonic voices, the new persona lacks identity and peculiarity. It is certainly not a simple, one dimensional and triumphant voice of an achiever who is able to break the coop and revel at the reversal of fortune. Neither is it a representative voice of the suppressed class turning the table on its oppressor by using the opportunities offered by the global market. Clearly, the discord in the changing notes is brought about by the forces that changed the world he lives in—a neo-capitalist world. The whole process of Balram turning into Ashok Sharma is a neo-capitalist coup.

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# REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS
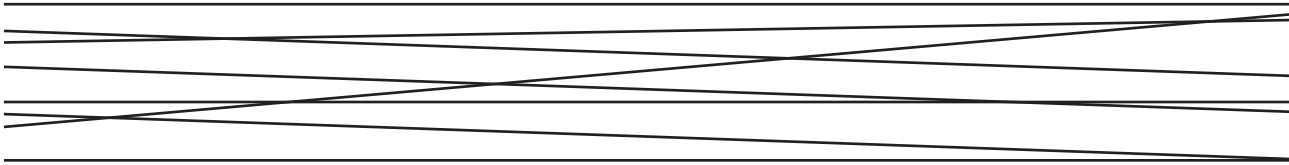
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# Capital Ellowen Deeowen: A Review of *The Making of London: London in Contemporary Literature* by Sebastian Groes (Houndsmills: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011)

"No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life," is probably the most often quoted saying of Dr Johnson. I am not sure whether a similar statement could be made about books dealing with London. There must be hundreds of them. Yet Groes's book stands out thanks to its treating not the town as such but London's facets reflected in contemporary British fiction. The list of writers analyzed here is shorter than a dozen: Maureen Duffy, Michael Moorcock, J.G. Ballard, Ian Sinclair, Peter Ackroyd, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith and Monica Ali. But the analyzes are put in the context of numerous other writings about London, starting with Joseph Conrad ("a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and greatest, town on earth" from *Heart of Darkness*; qtd. in Groes 279) and naturally including Dickens, T.S. Eliot, and many, many more.

The main body of the book consists of nine chapters devoted to particular writers (Rushdie and Kureishi share a chapter, as do Smith and Ali). With the exception of the section on Rushdie, where he analyzes only one novel, *The Satanic Verses*, Groes deals with several novels of a given author, so the number of texts discussed is considerable. This is further enriched by the critic's erudite references to books by other novelists who have or have not dealt with London. Surprisingly, the former category includes Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, thanks to Jim Dixon's complaint: "Why hadn't he himself had parents whose money so far exceeded their sense as to install their son in London? The very thought of it was torment" (qtd. in Groes 170). The latter includes even more famous names, such as Dostoevsky or Gide, but the most often-mentioned seems to be James Joyce, whose work appears to be the source of many influences traced by Groes.

Although the author's intention was not to focus on London in the 21$^{st}$ century, quite a few books analyzed here were published after 2000, including McEwan's *Solar*, published as late as 2009, so the volume is not only comprehensive but also very much up to date.

Groes observes that what "the fiction of contemporary London writers share is that they all capture the contemporary by reacting to often rapidly changing politico-economic and socio-cultural contexts" (9). For that reason matters connected with Thatcherism and New Labour are prominent and the names of Thatcher and Blair appear even more often than those of Derrida, Foucault or Homi Bhabha. The impact of 9/11 is another examined motif as in McEwan's *Saturday*, for example.

Still, politics is only one of many aspects discussed here. As Groes states, the "key postmodern tropes present the city as text, as narrative, as palimpsest, as a narrated labyrinthine space that can be circumnavigated with the eyes and mind" (14). He elaborates on this idea via Freud, who claimed that the city was not a good metaphor for understanding the human mind and that imagining various versions of Rome alongside one another was "unimaginable and even absurd" (qtd. in Groes 123). Groes opposes this view, saying that writers such as Duffy, Sinclair or Ackroyd do precisely that thing, that they "use the idea of the palimpsest—a surface of vellum or parchment used for writing on more than once—as a guiding principle because it shows that imaginative writing *is* able to contain many different versions of the city within the same space" (123; original emphasis). He analyzes how Ackroyd's *Plato Papers* approaches London through linguistic defamiliarization contained in attempts by Plato (living in AD 3705) at interpreting twentieth-century reality. For Plato, Harry Beck's London Underground map, drawn in 1935, is "a painting of great beauty. . . . Notice how the blue and red lines of light reach out in wonderful curves and ovals, while a great yellow circle completes the design" (qtd. in Groes 133). Defamiliarization plays an important role in a number of novels discussed here. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie spells out London as "Ellowen Deeowen." Zadie Smith's and Monica Ali's novels present a variety of Englishes spoken in multicultural London. In Maureen Duffy's *Capital*, a Neanderthal goes through an area that in time will become London; what is astonishing is Duffy's use of the names from the future London (as seen from the perspective of the Neanderthal): "Neanderthalensis stood shivering in Whitehall. . . . As he moved up towards Piccadilly he pulled handfuls of black crowberry fruits. . . . His slightly bent stance made it easier to lope along than to walk and he was soon at Hyde Park" (qtd. in Groes 27). Suddenly, what has seemed obvious needs reconsideration.

Groes meticulously follows intertextual hints included in the discussed novels, for example, providing Rushdie's "Ellowen Deeowen" with a gloss

that "both 'ellowen' and 'deeowen' contain the word 'wen,' the nickname of London's sprawl" (200).[1] And this is not always limited to some further meaning implied by a given phrase but can also involve structural comparisons. For example, McEwan's use of a quotation from Saul Bellow's *Herzog* as the epigraph in *Saturday* is for Groes a pretext for comparing the mode of narration in both novels—the comparison turns out to be fruitful.

But perhaps Groes sometimes pushes his insights just a little too far—as when he concludes that the surname of David Markham, a character from J.G. Ballard's *Millennium People*, by its sound, suggesting "mark them," must be a reference to William Blake's poem "London" in which the narrator walks through London to "mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe" (87).

*The Making of London* is another book in a series of Groes publications. In Continuum's *Contemporary Critical Perspectives* series he edited a volume of essays on Ian McEwan (2009) and co-edited two more, on Kazuo Ishiguro (2010) and Julian Barnes (2011). His monograph *British Fiction in the Sixties: The Making of the Swinging Decade* will be published in 2012.

Although the volume makes a valuable read one has to regret that gone are the days when a reputable publisher took care to publish a faultless book. About a dozen misprints, sometimes causing grammatical mistakes, are definitely too many.

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[1]  He probably means William Cobbett's words from his *Rural Rides*: "But, what is to be the fate of the great wen of all? The monster, called, by the silly coxcombs of the press, 'the metropolis of the empire?'" (vol. 1, 43). *Google Books*. Google. Web. 25 Oct. 2011.

# Wit Pietrzak

### University of Łódź

# Deconstruction and Liberation: A Review of Simon Glendinning's *Derrida* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011)

Any short introduction to one of the most elusive thinkers of the last several decades must face the formidable question of whether it is feasible to form a unified account of a philosophical endeavour that is inherently pitched against unity of any kind. Flying in the face of such criticism, Simon Glendinning's *Derrida* wins a balance between recounting "what Derrida had in mind"—an anathema to the philosopher's intellectual progeny, and engaging the texts in a creative discussion that does not shun loose threads and open-ended postulates.

The market has been suffused with introductions to Derrida, Nicholas Royle's (*Routledge Critical Thinkers* series) being perhaps the most reader-friendly, if rather alien to the task of deconstruction itself; yet Glendinning's differs in a significant way. It offers a seemingly light approach to the writings of the father of deconstruction, beginning with a discussion of a photograph of Derrida in lieu of a ponderous biographical litany of dates and events. However, what may strike one as a facetious gesture develops into a deconstructive re-reading (pre-reading) of what it meant for Jacques Derrida to be Jacques Derrida "the father of the philosophical movement of deconstruction." Glendinning keeps returning in a Shandyan manner to a basic detail of Derrida's life, the date of his birth, and never manages to present a full account of the philosopher's life story. Instead, the text weaves itself into a patchwork of insights into Derrida's past, in which he returns as a presence of the founding date just as Paul Celan did in *Shibboleth*.

Glendinning's musings over Derrida's biography set the tone for the rest of the book. If there is no finite biography but a perpetual return to the starting point, there is also no writing that may claim to have an origin or an end. This does not mean that nothing can be written without an infinity of contexts at hand to challenge the sense of the words. Derrida does not preach the end of philosophy; rather, "something like an interminable

task of thinking 'after philosophy' is brought into view in his work; a task that would open the philosophical heritage (which will have typically presented itself as heading towards an end) to its own 'beyond'" (Glendinning 14). It is at this point that Glendinning commences his reconstruction of Derrida's key postulates. The return to philosophy is explicated as a task of ceaseless exploration of ostensibly finished contexts in order to explode them and unravel their discontinuities; this in turn instigates writing as the actual background for the comprehension of language, as the play of dissemination inherent in written texts represents the intrinsic feature of all idioms. This endless play of signifiers in turn leads directly to the non-concept of *différance*: "The idea of a 'movement of *différance*' is . . . best understood as working to subvert and replace a tempting and deeply intuitive conception of *identity* and *difference*, a particular conception of *what makes something what it is and different to another thing*" (Glendinning 60, original emphasis). Nothing is ever the same or identical with itself, for all identity exists only insomuch as it is defined against the differences from other things as well as from itself and is indefinitely deferred. Therefore, what Derrida seeks to illustrate with his neologism is the fact that only in difference can identity be glimpsed. This notion derives from the ontological difference Heidegger put between Being and beings, but it serves Derrida as a means of jettisoning the Western metaphysics of presence.

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Glendinning aptly fuses the many various texts spawned by Derrida into a coherent picture of deconstruction; almost, it may seem, too coherent. For a newcomer to the Derrida corpus Glendinning makes the philosopher more accessible than Derrida himself would have liked. Glendinning professes that he wishes to "show up the rigour within a text that might otherwise seem wilfully obscure" (57). However, such violence may not be necessary in introducing Derrida, in that the variety, the frequently-irreconcilable threads of thought, could be said to retain a characteristically Derridean charm. What the book, *pace* its brevity, fails to appreciate is the disseminating potential within such "notion-like" words as *différance* or writing; yet in return it paves the way to the fortress of deconstruction and makes it clear that on this intellectual journey there are only entrances and hints at paths, which soon melt into thin air.

Glendinning's book comes into its own most notably with two vital points it derives from Derrida's writings. The first could roughly be taken to represent the earlier Derrida who has only just managed to remake his intuitions into a vision that hinges on a paradoxical quest for meaning which can never be attained; as there are constant deferral and difference between things, so these things can never substantialize fully. If there is such a thing as a "presence of meaning," it only functions as a horizon for which we perpetually strive. Indeed, no text can be realized as finitely to

hand; as a result, what we take to be an elucidatory text which constitutes a gloss on a particular problematic issue turns out to be just a promise of a prospective elucidation. Every text is thus "a kind of preface to what remains to come" (Glendinning 35). It is this idea that appears to be at the core of Glendinning's argument, even though that position granted to any of Derrida's conceptions must necessarily seem dubious because deconstructive reading thrives on undermining precisely such conceptual frameworks.

It is the other tenet of Glendinning's that distinguishes his book in that he sees in the later, more politicized Derrida a preacher of an open-ended notion of man:

> In our time, we need to shift decisively from thinking in (classical messianic) terms of an end of Man in which we *finally learn how to live* to (but holding on to something of that messianism) learning to endure interminably learning how to live, learning to live without the promise of *finally* learning how to live. (Glendinning 95, original emphasis)

This concluding postulate proffers a fresh insight into deconstruction perceived not as systematic eradication of all stability, which condemns man to an ineluctable death in a limbo, but as a disillusioned re-valuation of the nature of man's being. In the absence of the transcendental signified, man must become what Odo Marquard calls "*homo compensator*," one who makes up for the loss of finite meaning by ceaselessly creating contingent theories and sets of assumptions.

Glendinning thus amplifies an aspect of Derrida's work which so appealed to Richard Rorty, for whom the French philosopher was an exemplar of a Bloomian strong poet, capable of revising the vocabularies of contemporary humanities; according to Rorty, Derrida opens philosophy to the play of "accidental material features of words." As a result, deconstruction becomes a path of thinking that gives up on the hope of obtaining some final goals of thinking, for it is aware that all such goals will be mere contingent amalgams of prevalent vocabularies; instead, and Glendinning puts it in no uncertain terms towards the end of his book, Derrida posits a constant recontextualization of the *conditio humana*. It is this aspect of Glendinning's introduction to Derrida's writings that turns a simple introduction into a serious exercise in deconstructive thinking.

# Monika Kocot

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# Authenticity, Transdifference, Survivance: Native American Identity (Un)Masked: A Review of *Native Authenticity: Transnational Perspectives on Native American Literary Studies*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (Albany: State U of New York P, 2010)

Authenticity is one of the more controversial terms in the contemporary lexicon describing race and ethnicity, and one of the most often used concepts invoked in support of political claims to cultural autonomy made by Native American tribes in the United States today. The definition of "authentic" tribal identity, the criteria for judging the racial status of a person, seems to be historically contingent on an ongoing U.S. colonialism. The debate concerning Native American authenticity is, in the words of Jace Weaver, "a process rendered more dysfunctional by the fact that for many years, for its own colonialist reasons, the United States government intruded itself into the questions of definitions, an intrusion that still has a significant impact on Indian identity politics" (qtd. in Madsen 16). Today's Native America is a collectivity of people whose existence is simultaneously shaped by colonialism, neocolonialism, and postcolonialism. The high percentage of persons with mixed heritage makes the question of individual and cultural identity even more complicated.

*Native Authenticity: Transnational Perspectives on Native American Literary Studies* neatly inscribes itself in a theoretical debate on Native American authenticity and identity, and, even more importantly, it becomes a part of a transnational turn in Native American Studies, in terms of both the questions being asked and the resources deployed to answer them. Some of the foremost transatlantic scholars of Native Studies in North America and Europe share their insights on the concepts of "Indianness," indigenism, the hermeneutic basis for articulating Native tribal sovereignty, and the politics of appropriation as experienced in their lives and identities as well as in the writings they make and study, while offering

comparative perspectives upon Native Hawaiian, Chicano, and Canadian First Nation literatures, to "negotiate the discursive space opened by diverse reimaginings of indigenous identities" (vii).

Madsen's exhaustive introduction offers a methodological framework for the discussion on various faces of "Native Americanness," and right from the beginning one might notice that the editor foregrounds, as it were, or emphasizes the importance of political and social viewpoints on American Indian authenticity, while anthropological or philosophical aspects, equally significant to the discussion, are left out. Such a perspective will be further accentuated throughout the anthology. Obviously, this might be seen as a major methodological drawback—especially in comparison with the volume *Transatlantic Voices. Interpretations of Native North American Literatures*, whose range and depth of discussion outshines *Native Authenticity.* However, those in favour of postcolonial studies may interpret it as a way of narrowing down the perspective to what is currently being explored in the discourse of human sciences.

The notion of original ethnic culture and identity seems to be bound in complex ways to the equally fraught term "essentialism." Madsen expands upon the definitions of tribal identity and tribal membership which can be measured by blood quantum, by place of residence, or by cultural identification. She emphasizes the apparent conflict between pressure from neocolonial essentializing practices and a politics of cultural sovereignty, which demands a notion of "Indian" essence or "authenticity" as a foundation for community values, heritage, and social justice. Like the contributors to the volume, Madsen notices that the articulation of Native identity through the prism of Euro-American attempts to confine "Indian" groups to essentialized spaces is resisted by some Native writers, while others recognize a need for essentialist categories as a key strategy in the struggle for social justice and a sense of Native sovereignty.

In the words of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "how the Indian story is told, how it is nourished, who tells it, who nourishes it, and the consequences of its telling are among the most fascinating—and, at the same time, chilling—stories of our time" ("American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story." *American Indian Quarterly* 20.1 [1996]: 57). At the core of Madsen and all the contributors' reflections lie the questions of how to define a Native Indian or any other native writer/storyteller, who is legally entitled to do so, and how it may affect the story and its reception. Also, a great deal of attention is given to the scholarly terrain of Native American literary studies, in particular the differences between Native and non-Native readings of indigenous literatures.

It needs stressing that the arrangement of contributions to the volume makes it a precisely pre-thought, self-complementary whole. The reader is

guided from "the questions about the questions of 'authenticity,'" through "cycles of selfhood and nationhood," "the x-blood files," transdifference, "traces of others in our own other" to survivance. Thus, it is possible for the reader to see the change of the paradigm: from "Indianness" to "Postindianness"—as Vizenor's trickster hermeneutic discourse of survivance provides a powerful strategy for subverting monologic U.S. colonial structures of oppression.

Engaging the complex politics of Hawaiian authenticity versus Native indigeneity, Paul Lyons negotiates conflicting demands upon personal and tribal identities. The author also discusses the dynamic and unobvious nature of indigenous Pacific writing that simultaneously resists confinement to the past while exploring specifically Pacific forms of perception and, consequently, storytelling. David Moore's essay offers a historical overview of relations between authenticity, individual and community identity formation, and tribal sovereignty in Native American writings; the diachronic perspective he takes enables him to see what he calls cycles of selfhood and cycles of nationhood. The emphasis here is on the foundational role of tribal sovereignty in the politics and culture of authentic "Indianness." That issue is further developed in Lee Schweninger's "'Back when I used to be Indian': Native American Authenticity and Postcolonial Discourse," in which the author argues that borrowing from postcolonial studies in order to theorize issues of authenticity can help readers of Native American literature to understand and address the postcoloniality of the U.S. Analyzing the writings of Louis Owens, Mark Turcotte, and Gerald Vizenor, Schweninger identifies literary strategies by which authenticity can be resisted without reinstating it through essentialization. The problem of reading the rhetoric of "Indianness" is also taken up in Malea Powell's "The X-Blood Files: Whose Story? Whose Indian?" with special attention given to indigenous responses to imposed colonial measures of authenticity such as blood quantum and federal recognition. Powell explores the highly charged definitions of "real," "fake" and "Indian-like" Indians in the works of acknowledged Native American theorists and writers. In her "Modernism, Authenticity, and Indian Identity," Joy Porter offers a literary portrait of Frank "Toronto" Prewett, a Canadian (and allegedly Iroquois) war poet of World War I. The author discusses the nuances of the reception of Prewett's poetry in British modernist literary circles.

In "Transdifference in the Work of Gerald Vizenor," Helmbrecht Breinig develops his theory already introduced in *Transatlantic Voices*. Discussing Vizenor's poetry and fiction, he argues that where the negotiation of identities across cultural boundaries is concerned, transdifference refers to moments of contradiction, tension and undecidability that run counter to the logic of inclusion and exclusion. Transdifference does not

only apply to a synchronic co-presence of discordant affiliations but also to the diachronic process of identity formation in which one situation of transdifference is succeeded and, as it were, overwritten by the next, in a long palimpsestic chain. The next two chapters, Juan Bruce-Novoa's "Traces of Others in Our Own Other: Monocultural Ideals, Multicultural Resistance" and Richard J. Lane's "Sacred Community, Sacred Culture: Authenticity and Modernity in Contemporary Canadian Native Writings," offer another comparative perspective on authentic "Indianness" and this time attend to the issue of the formulation of Native identities in "border" communities: indigenous Mexicans and Canadian First Nations peoples. The volume concludes with an intellectually stimulating conversation between the acclaimed Anishinaabe writer, theorist and scholar Gerald Vizenor and A. Robert Lee. The interview develops the issues articulated in their collection *Postindian Conversations* (1999), with the focus on the subject of Native authenticity.

Given the range and depth of the analyzes, the volume should be seen as a significant addition to the field of Native American literary and cultural studies, offering a resource for students, and scholars on both sides of the Atlantic.

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# Literature, the Arab Diaspora, Gender and Politics

## Fadia Faqir Speaks with Maria Assif (University of Toronto)

**Maria Assif:** Fadia, thank you for finding time in your packed schedule to talk about your work, life, literature, mainly in the context of marginality and marginalia, the main theme of the second issue of *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture*. Edgar Allan Poe states: "In the marginalia, too, we talk only to ourselves; we therefore talk freshly, boldly, originally, with abandonment, without conceit." Would you agree? How do you think about the marginalia of your drafts, of your texts?

**Fadia Faqir:** I totally agree with that statement. The most unusual plants like creeping thyme and alpines grow in cracks and crevices. Unregulated, they flourish and create their own beautiful patterns. This applies to literature. If you are out of the metropolis or the centre then you are unaware of what is acceptable or fashionable and are not influenced by the opinions of critics and the chattering classes and therefore free to roam, create unrestricted. There are no critics or audiences in my study and I don't cater to anyone and pursue nothing,

except that elusive shape I am trying to unearth or sculpt in my art. Some authors become mainstream, and the pressures of that alter their expectations and their writing and even corrupt some of them. The centre, the metropolis, the middle and upper classes in the UK or the Arab world do not hold my attention. Only the outcasts, the marginalized, the misunderstood, the ostracized are interesting and are worth representing because they bring with them conflict, ambiguity, complex realities. Marginalia is a fertile land.

**MA:** A quick survey of some of your texts directs us to different characters who seem to live on the margins of society. In *Pillars of Salt* (1996), the main characters are Maha and Um Saad, both of whom are forced to share a room in the Amman mental hospital to which they have been confined before and after the British Mandate of 1921. The focus on mentally ill female characters is not new in world literature (Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* are prominent examples) but is quite original in

the Arab literary scene. What I find particularly fascinating is how you associate mental illness to gender politics in an Arab context and how you relate the two to the British colonization of Jordan in the twenties. Equally important is how you take characters who are doubly marginalized, such as Maha and Um Saad (because of their gender and because of their social class), to the centre of the narrative in a setting, a mental institution, which is often unspoken about and simply forgotten about in society.

**FF:** *The Bell Jar* is why I became a novelist. When I read it, it opened up so many possibilities for me at a content and form level. I have always been fascinated with madness, perhaps because I was close to losing my mind myself twice in my life. Since I read R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness,* representing it became easy. Laing's views on the causes and treatment of serious mental dysfunction, greatly influenced by existential philosophy, ran counter to the psychiatric orthodoxy of the day by taking the expressed feelings of the individual patient or client as valid descriptions of lived experience rather than simply as symptoms of some separate or underlying disorder. If you treat patients as if they are sane with their own unique modes of communication, then following closely the mind of Shadeed as he descended into

madness through a stream of unconscious is possible.

One of the tactics of an oppressive society is to brand those who challenge power as mad and confine them to asylums. In *Pillars of Salt*, whether you are living in an urban or rural environment, you end up on the wrong side of a patriarchy that banishes you for your transgression. The novel also argues that patriarchy colluded with colonialism and occupation, and they are both in the business of subjugation and repression of the subaltern. The late Angela Carter, who taught me at East Anglia, described *Pillars of Salt* as "a feminist vision of Orientalism." It portrays the vulnerability of women in an embattled traditional culture through the stories exchanged by two patients in a mental hospital: one has obediently surrendered to her husband's choice of a younger wife; the other has seen her marriage fall victim to political violence. The histories of Maha and Um Saad, which mirror the Jordanian experience during the British Mandate, are framed and echoed by the comments of "The Storyteller," who relates them to us in a flamboyant style. The narratives of the two native women, the core of the novel, are in direct conflict with the shabby accounts of the "foreign" storyteller.

What the novel does—it confines foreign occupation to the margins and challenges the master narrative by placing the story of women at the centre. The unreliable

storyteller, a representative of occupiers and patriarchs, is restricted to the margins. Describing what he calls "white mythology" Derrida wrote, "[it] has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains, active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest" (213). My task, as an author, is to recover what "nevertheless remains, active and stirring, inscribed in white ink" and tune my ear to the silences in grand narratives.

**MA:** How do you solve that paradox between the central position of women in your texts versus their second-class status in some Arab societies? Do you think that actually they are on the margins of Arab societies? How is that marginality, in this case, defined and explained?

**FF:** All citizens of the Arab world, whether male or female, have obligations towards the state, but they do not enjoy many political, civil and social rights. Female citizens are less equal than their male counterparts. The majority of Arab women are second-class citizens, dependent and subordinate. Similarly to many other Arab countries, women in Jordan cannot pass on their citizenship to their children or husbands; they are still discriminated against by the legal justice system and the judiciary; they need permission from their legal guardians to choose their place of residence or

join the labour market. Their right to divorce is still not included in the Personal Status Law, which is mostly based on selective interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith (the prophet Mohammad's sayings and deeds).

These are facts on the ground. I place them at the centre of my narrative to redress the balance and write in their role in our modern histories, where women's contribution to the society and the economy is totally erased. It is a drop in the ocean, but each Arab woman is the ocean within the drop, as Rumi wrote, and that ocean is still yet to be painted.

**MA:** Still in the context of marginality, some of my favourite characters in your novels are male! In *Nisanit* (1988), you paint the Israeli interrogator, David, in a human light, referring to his family history of pain and violence in the Holocaust, which you seem to suggest echoes the torture he inflicts on Shaheed, the Palestinian guerrilla fighter. The latter is also humanized, as he lives his love story with Eman, the main character of the novel, and he descends into madness, in one of the most atrocious and agonizing moments of torture.

**FF:** Hopefully what I write is not propaganda or reductionist. *Nisanit*, a socio-political novel, did not please anyone. It showed the Israeli point of view and is critical of their jails and of how they

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treated Palestinian prisoners; it also featured a tactical blunder by the Palestinians, so there is an implied criticism of the Palestinian leadership; and Eman's narrative, set in an Arab country, exposes violations of human rights there: random arrests, summary justice. Nobody, whether Arab, Palestinian or Israeli, is exempt from blame. In the novel, they are all equally humanized and equally blamed. All characters are anti-heroes and victims of history and geography.

I also believe the truth cannot be caught from a single perspective. You arrive at *a* truth, not *the* truth. If you create a multi-layered narrative and you have different points of view, then you are more likely to capture the complexity of the issues you're dealing with. I felt the constraints of being a journalist in the past and tried to move away from reportage to multi-layered, multi-perspectival, hopefully more sophisticated modes of representation.

**MA:** In your third novel, *My Name is Salma* (USA, *Cry of the Dove*), published in 2007, I see a shift in your writing topics. You are still interested in marginalized or silenced characters and themes, but this time, you cross the Atlantic and you focus on (dis)locality, in-betweenness, or what I may refer to as "the Trans-Arab outcast"—in the form of Salam/Sal/Sally. The novel is not only about dysfunctional characters, such as Salma, the woman who is struggling with who she is, with

the threat of honour killing, and the haunting memories of the child she left behind but also the drunkard, racist landlady. It is about a raw image of the UK and the challenges it faces in relation to immigrants and immigration. What was behind that shift, if you see it as such?

**FF:** No doubt that there is a shift in Salma. For a start, it is set in Britain as opposed to the Arab world and depicts the immigrant experience. It is also told in the first person. The discontinuous narrative of Salma's life is constructed as a mosaic in which each tile is self-contained but helps to create a whole. The reader is taken back and forth in time. The novel maintains a duality of identity and puts the past and present next to each other.

No linear narrative can tell Salma's story. She manages to escape from a prison in the Levant and sails away towards another type of prison, where she ends up an asylum seeker on the streets of Exeter. She arrives on the shores of Britain totally unequipped to face an alien society, which is suffering from post-empire depression, and learns its languages and subtle codes. On the way to her destiny, she meets people who are considerate, others who are exploitative, Christians who are either fundamentalists, applying the letter of the Bible, or imaginative and compassionate. Although this mirrors her own experience of religion, she is full of doubt and dissent.

I wanted to hold a mirror to British society and the way it treats immigrants, but I did not want to reduce or simplify; therefore, the English landlady is one of the most tragic figures in the novel. She fell in love with an Indian man and couldn't be with him. She tried to live normally in England but failed and became an alcoholic. Grief and its repercussions happen to all my characters and they try to cope, most of the time unsuccessfully.

I find in-betweenness, dislocality and displacement quite interesting and fertile grounds for fiction, because they intensify feelings. You are exposed to so many experiences in such a short time and that makes the terrain more unique. Initiation or rite of passage are universal themes, and at such junctures wonderful narratives blossom.

**MA:** Let's go beyond particular texts this time and try to reflect on the general picture. I am thinking about *In the House of Silence* (2008), which you edited. For readers who may be unfamiliar with the book, it is a collection of autobiographical writings by 13 leading Arab women authors. Through these testimonies, the women describe their experiences and expose the often difficult conditions under which their narratives were woven. Why do you think that listening to these experiences is important? What does it mean to you to give a voice to these women writers to speak about their writing processes—a topic that

tends to be on the margins of serious academic endeavours, even for male writers?

**FF:** In the Arab world the tradition of writing on writing is virtually non-existent unlike in the West. Personal testimonies shed light and sometimes contextualize the fiction. Also, the book attempts to document Arab women's struggle to become authors and be heard. They are role models for other women. Their success shows that no matter how hard your circumstances are, you can become an author and ultimately achieve your goal.

On a different level, describing the writing process might be useful for those who intend to write or just started writing. It does not demystify that magical process but contextualizes and illuminates it.

Finally, writing on writing is no longer on the margins of academic endeavours. If you look carefully, there is a plethora of works on the subject published in respectable houses. Some authors elevated it to higher aesthetic levels. Umberto Eco's *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, for example, is a gem of a book.

**MA:** All of your novels are in English. One may argue that this places you, and other Arab diasporic writers, on the margins of the Arab intellectual scene in particular and the Arab social setting in general. One may even add that you, along with

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other immigrant authors, are on the margins of the mainstream literary scene of the hosting countries. What do you think about that equation? Do you ever think about your status, place, and placement in the world?

**FF:** When writing, you never think about status, place or rank. If I carve a space in the English culture for what I call "Arabs Writing in English," then that would be great. The aim is to push the English language to the limit and give it some Arab hues, through selection of vocabulary, syntax and repetition, etc. Something similar to what Indian authors had done. It will take many generations of Arab writers writing in English to achieve that and I see myself part of that exciting process. Our writing is rooted in English literature, but the species of flower are different, more colourful hopefully. So you can see that I perceive my project as much larger than being on the margins of this or that society. Moreover, as a writer, whether at the bottom of the heap or at the top of the scale, you continue to write. It is an obsessive-compulsive disorder and you cannot stop regardless of the outcome.

**MA:** As it was discussed at the beginning of this conversation, you seem to be passionate and preoccupied with Arab gender politics. Some may see the recurrent coming back to these related topics as hurting the cause of Arab women and the body of Arab women literary texts overall. It is almost a validation of the prevailing conceptualization of Arab women as repressed by their male chauvinist counterparts, instead of emphasizing a message of hope and a more powerful self-representation.

**FF:** Self-representation is the aim, but until that is achieved, many speak on our behalf. There are so many books about Arab women that are not worth the ink they are written in, such as Miranda Miller's *One Thousand and One Coffee Mornings*. It is about Saudi women today, but even the title is orientalist.

It is important to diagnose the "women's question" in order to solve it, and because of that writing on discrimination, whether familial, legal or societal, against Arab women, is essential and a prerequisite for reform. What is perhaps paramount is the intention behind the writing. Is it criticism for criticism's sake or it is diagnostic with the eye on medication and cure? I write about Arab women and societies because I see myself part of them and I care deeply about them, but the challenge is to write in such a way that makes the task of those who want to prove that Arab women are victims and oppressed or to justify wars against Arab countries really difficult. It is a tightrope I walk everyday and a difficult balancing act.

I am not in the business of writing propaganda or fabricating messages of hope. Fact finding,

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complex reality description, aiming for a truthful representation will lead to ways out for us. Dressing up issues or fabricating messages of hope distorts and deforms and leads nowhere.

**MA:** In one of your interviews, you refer to the inevitability of politics in Arab literary production. Don't you think that such an obsession does not allow Arab writers to entertain an art for art's sake attitude, i.e. experiment, with a care-free attitude, with style and form without thinking about taboos and politics, in its general sense? Do you see it possible?

**FF:** Living under oppressive regimes, Arab writers have no option but to engage in politics. In the absence of serious opposition authors turn into dissidents to fill the gap. There is no art for art's sake in the Arab world yet and long may it continue. Much of the writing I see in Western Europe is simply navel-gazing and will consume itself. One day writers might stop being political activists in the Arab world, but that day is way down the line. The democratization process has just begun and it will take years for us to land safely. Moreover, writers and intellectuals will always challenge power by exposing its invisible and insidious tactics of repression. That will never change; only the rules of engagement will.

**MA:** I cannot finish this conversation without asking about the 2011

Arab Spring. The first images of some of these revolutions, such as in Tunisia and in Egypt, seemed to be male-dominated. Only weeks later did we see more female presence in the streets. How do you explain such an absence/presence?

**FF:** Although Arab women are active participants in the Arab uprisings, menfolk are not supporting them. Not one single slogan called for equality of Arab women or drew attention to their inferior position. Most Arab men and some women fail to see gender equality as part and parcel of the process of democratization. The "women's question" is key to unleashing liberal and modernist forces in the Arab world, but old practices and prejudices prevail. Therefore, Arab women face many challenges.

The state has tentacles in most women's organizations and NGOs. Usually, leaders of such organizations are stooges of the state. Like other civil organizations in the Arab world, women's organizations need to be "de-regimetized"—a painful, perhaps long, but necessary cleansing process.

Many Arab women are collaborators in their own demise. Women of the Arab world are divided along political and interest group lines, rather than united by common aspirations and objectives. Many believe that women's organizations are weak because they see themselves as rivals: bickering and manoeuvring for position. They need

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to unite instantly to fight for key positions in future governments.

One of the most important institutions in the Arab world is the family, where patterns of oppression are normally produced and reproduced. Normally, the Arab father (or the Arab ruler) aims to superimpose a consensus through "ritual and coercion." After demonstrating in Arab capitals, women went home to an archaic structure. Some were energized by the uprisings and decided to divorce their abusive husbands only to find that the whole system is tipped against them. Family Laws, mainly based on the Shari'a Islamic Law, give them few rights, economic or otherwise, and the legal justice system is male-biased.

Separation between mosque and state is a prerequisite for true liberal participatory democracy and gender-equality in the Arab world. Although the Muslim brotherhood was forced to disavow a long-held principle that neither a Coptic Christian nor a woman could run for president of Egypt, many of their members will oppose nominating, let alone electing, a woman. See also the position of Islamists in Tunisia or virginity tests conducted on arrested female demonstrators in Egypt.

A positive outcome of the "Arab Spring" is that women learnt a number of tactics and strategies of civil disobedience, and the skills are being used at every level: familial, local, national and even internation-

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al. Women in the Arab world today are fighting for labour rights, better schools, roads, clean water, etc. The road is long and the perils are many, but in the fullness of time, the outcome is guaranteed: Arab women, the last colony, will be liberated.

**MA:** Many Western journalists read these revolutions as the wrath of marginalized streets and youth. Would you agree?

**FF:** The Arab uprisings are about food, freedom and above all dignity. In Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, one finds resonance with the misery engulfing the Arab world, where the have-nots, or what Larbi Sadiki calls the khobzistes, struck back at the state and targeted its symbols. In Yemen, Tunisia and other Arab countries people are fighting back because they are hungry.

In Fanon, one reads about "the poor, underdeveloped countries, where the rule is that the greatest wealth is surrounded by the greatest poverty." There is also collision between big businesses and profiteers with the regime and corruption is rife. This led to the rise of a cartel culture where capital rules and where ordinary citizens are totally powerless. One of the slogans of Jordanian youth was, "I am not hungry! I am robbed!" Also the total monopoly in some Arab countries inflated prices of commodities and imposed extortionate profits. So the Arabs became servants

rather than stakeholders in their own countries.

Arabs are also hostages of their regimes and subject of their capricious violence. Both young and old were/are disenfranchized and regularly humiliated by the security apparatus. The uprisings and resistance are a bid to restore dignity and self-respect. Finally, the Arab world broke the barrier of fear enforced by marginalization and destinies were transformed. Protests in the streets of Arab capitals are not about dollars; they are mostly about dignity.

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# Absent Fathers, Outsider Perspectives and Yiddish Typewriters

## Norman Ravvin (Concordia University) Talks to Krzysztof Majer (University of Łódź)

**Krzysztof Majer:** What seems crucial to your novels and stories is the idea of the past, often uncertain and discovered only gradually by the characters, sometimes at least partly by chance. In *Lola by Night*, the eponymous Lola, who has become hugely successful as a writer under a pseudonym, notes in one of her books that "the past is like the manicured hand of a corpse, sinking its nails into the arms of the living." This is a very unsettling image, combining as it does the inevitability of remembering with a suggestion of unwholesomeness, perhaps even disease. To what extent does this image reflect the meaning of the past for your characters?

**Norman Ravvin:** It's true that my four books of fiction, as well as the travel collection *Hidden Canada*, are in part motivated by excavations of the past. In most cases this means a Jewish past, in some cases my own ancestral past in Poland, and then, in *Hidden Canada*, the Canadian past. I think overall this has been a work of recovery for me, and, as well, a work of examination and explanation. Since I feel these historical

tableaux are worth knowing, and inform the present, I've used them to underwrite my fiction. The darker image you suggest, as an unsettling presence of the past's influence, is likely a shadowy aspect of what I've tried to convey. But I think, overall, I view this kind of writing work as neutral, in the sense that recovery is a kind of compulsion, sometimes with negative or challenging repercussions, but more broadly a necessary effort. It's the old feeling that to know oneself one must know one's past, or the past that is crucial in leading to the situations you find yourself in.

**KM:** To continue exploring the issue of the past: a recurrent motif in your work is that of a quest, often connected with the character's origins. This becomes one of the premises of *Lola by Night*, but is also visible in your short stories: in "Sex, Skyscrapers, and Standard Yiddish," writer Norman Flax tries to find his missing muse Lola; the narrator of "Doomed Cinema" seeks out his cousin Mark, a link to his family's past; in "A Jew's House," Erenberg returns to Poland to find the place

where his family lived before the war. In your newest book, *The Joyful Child*, a journey to visit a European great-grandmother in the Canadian prairies becomes an important element of the plot, while Paul's life in general has "a tumbleweedy quality to it." Your characters seem unable to stay in one place; barely rooted in where they find themselves, they seem to thrive on movement, which is often—for a variety of reasons—directed towards their past. I know that the writers associated with the Beat Generation have been a huge influence for you: is the motif of movement in search of meaning, which seems so essential to your characters, in any way indebted to Kerouac?

**NR:** It's interesting to see you, correctly, pin down the importance of quests in my writing. I generally tell myself I'm not in any way a genre writer, and though I recognize the readerly pleasure generated by genre, I won't be guided by it. Obviously this is not the case, as quests recur and recur and recur, though they are often, I think, thwarted or end in some darkly comic existential trap or failure. For a long time I was also interested in male characters who could not move; by which I mean, they were over-thinkers, inhibited in their ability to accomplish their goals. To view this from another perspective, my own life has led me from city to city in Canada. So even though I lived in my native city till I was eighteen,

then in Vancouver for six years and Toronto for ten, and I've now lived in Montreal for eleven years, the focus in my own experience on movement has been strong. I also find travel inspiring in my search for ideas for fiction. You may be right that Kerouac's *On the Road* is a book that fed these different interests and inclinations in my own experience. Back and forth he goes across America, but with such verve and inspired observation. It's a kind of guidebook to keeping your eyes open.

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**KM:** Sometimes the object of the quest in your books is the missing or distant father, or the idea of a father. In *Lola by Night*, the main character tries to untangle the riddle of her father's death; in the short story titled "Expatriate," the protagonist traces a painting which used to belong to his father and then makes a pilgrimage to a certain Parisian square. Two fathers in the same family vanish into thin air in *The Joyful Child*, leading Paul to observe that "his inheritance consists of things that suddenly slip away." The father is certainly an obsession in Jewish writing, as we know from Kafka, Schulz or even Philip Roth, and the motif is often traced back to the stern God in Judaism. Do you see yourself in that respect as part of the Jewish tradition of writing?

**NR:** Finding fathers; losing fathers; missing fathers; loving fathers;

leaving fathers; all of these have been recurrent themes for me. Before I was a father myself I thought of these things from the son's perspective. Now that I am a father this has shifted, and I view things from both positions—that of father and son. There are writers who handle this theme in startling ways. Roth is one. I was struck by his notion of his father as a source of authority, of a kind of authority that he could not ever see himself commanding. I can relate to this in certain ways. I often think of the male line of inheritance on my father's side as a kind of totem, using the names, the faces, the types of men who run back beyond me, to try to envision a line of change and relationship in male types and roles. I certainly feel this line of inheritance in a way that I cannot in relation to my female ancestors. My notion of this totem is of one that is Jewish, in the way that the Canadian natives have their own kind of totems reflecting ancestry. So yes, this is an aspect of my work and thought that investigates Jewish ancestry alongside personal ancestry.

**KM:** To a large extent, Canadian literature still seems preoccupied with exploring its own (admittedly vast) geographical space and its own (admittedly complex and multicultural) identity. In this sense, however, your fiction is not typical. Your characters represent a variety of nationalities and inhabit a wide range of geographical spaces

outside Canada. Americans, Poles, Serbians and Spaniards, to name just a few examples, populate the pages of your books, traversing the expanses of North America as well as European cities such as Moscow, Paris, Warsaw or Barcelona. Canada is often seen through foreign eyes. For instance, in *Lola by Night*, the dominant perspective is that of Lola, the Barcelonian writer, who drifts through Vancouver; in the short story "Sex, Skyscrapers, and Standard Yiddish," Flax, an American, fantasizes about Canada, knowing very little about it except for the rumour that "in Canada . . . you could flush a toilet from here to doomsday and you wouldn't use all the water they had in their rivers and lakes." Together with the characters' distinctive uprootedness, this extraneous perspective seems to heighten the sense of not-belonging and detachment. Is that in any way indicative of your perception of Canadian (or perhaps North American) space?

**NR:** Your sense of my atypical strategies in the context of Canadian writing seems correct and convincing. I do tend to set up narrative point of view from the outside, to look in at either a Canadian theme or a Jewish one. I am more interested in viewing certain subjects from the outsider position, since I think this allows for fresh thinking and an avoidance of clichés. I mistrust confident canonical claims. I don't trust writers or critics who make

broad claims to speak for a national group or identity. So any way I can position myself outside such claims and look back at a character's experience is satisfying. So yes, my perception of Canadian space demands a critical distance. I guess this reflects some sort of distanced relationship that I myself maintain towards the mainstream culture. Still, it's strange to say this, since I don't have any wariness or doubts with relation to my Canadian identity. The strategy you notice in my fiction is more a narrative strategy than one that reflects personal doubt or discomfort.

**KM:** In addition to the extraneous perspective, there is also the question of how your non-Canadian characters view their own original environment and their history. Next to Spaniards (Lola) and Americans (Flax), you have also written, for example, about Serbians (Ifo Negic in "Everything but the Head") and Poles (Peter Klosowsky in "A Jew's House"). I understand that the novel on which you've been working for the last few years, *The Typewriter Girl*, is set entirely in Poland and involves Polish characters. I found "A Jew's House" particularly interesting on account of such decisions: you chose to tell the story of the appropriation of Jewish property from a Polish perspective, but also decided to maintain temporal distance from the actual events in making the character a descendant of those directly involved. These,

I believe, are courageous, but also risky gestures.

**NR:** You push me to think further on the above issues, by asking about my way of choosing points of view that are atypical in stories related to the Polish Jewish past. My approach to this material is, I think, entirely idiosyncratic. Though I teach Holocaust literature and am familiar with its strategies, its genres, its challenges, I'm not interested in writing it myself. And I'm not interested in parroting the conventional community line on Jewish identity, whether this has to do with the wartime, with Israel, or other issues. So I have ended up designing characters whose Jewishness is quirky, tentative, hidden, and then more recently, I've worked hard to look at Polish Jewish history from unlikely points of view. *The Typewriter Girl* is my most extensive effort on this front. I'm in the process of rewriting it for what is the third or fourth time, so there are obviously some challenges there I've not surmounted. The fact is these approaches may not ever prove to be an easy sell with audiences who have certain expectations regarding certain themes.

**KM:** We began by talking about the past and I would like to return to this issue. Running through your books is a strong sense of distrust of modern technology, coupled with a nostalgia for an earlier, simpler, idealized mode of life. In *Lola*

*by Night*, the Wired City project becomes a source of fear; your writer characters (e.g. Flax in "Sex, Skyscrapers, and Standard Yiddish," Herbert Rossman in *Lola*) never touch computers, and swear by typewriters instead. In fact, typewriters as artefacts, and especially the very rare Yiddish variety, recur in your fiction so often that they practically become emblems of nostalgia. Flax is a typewriter salesman; in my favourite portion of *Lola by Night*, Rossman tries to buy one of those ancient devices from the bizarre Yiddish Typewriter Cabal; in *The Joyful Child* a connection is made between printed books and typewriters as similarly endangered species. I'm guessing that *The Typewriter Girl* will contain more of those?

**NR:** I am not sure when the resistance to modern technology took hold for me. I used to be fairly normal on this front. I moved along with the crowd. But maybe it became such a crowd mentality phenomenon that it was inevitable I'd make a break. I think, too, the changes have come too quickly, often needlessly, and to the detriment of artisanal skills and the true pleasures associated with reading, listening to music, driving, and so on. I'm not entirely satisfied with the idea that the ease and speed and versatility that come with technology like the computer or the cell phone are paramount. I think they contribute to the death of things we ought

not to let die, whether this has to do with certain kinds of solitude, of physical labour, of creative acts. I still compose on paper with a pen. I drive a forty-year-old car and a twenty-five-year-old bike, and get great pleasure out of them. I don't want to be called by my colleagues as I walk down the street to buy a newspaper. And I do still want to read the news on a piece of paper. So, the objects you ask about—especially typewriters—are tokens of things lost, of ways of working that were good enough, even richer in certain ways than our new ways of working. And of course a Yiddish typewriter is all the more heartbreaking, since its linguistic culture is largely lost today, too, not just its technological flavour.

**KM:** I know that you happen to own a Yiddish typewriter and that you've considered using it to write a piece of fiction. Although you've described this idea in rather humorous terms, the admiration for the object seen in your other books suggests that there may be more to the idea, especially considering the rich history of Yiddish writing in Montreal. A nod to ghostly ancestors? I use this Gothic metaphor in the vein of your own comments on Yiddish literature becoming a "ghost story" for contemporary readers.

**NR:** A number of influences have directed me back, again and again, to Yiddish. The language operates,

for me, as a source of knowledge about pre-war life. It opens a great literature from that era and after, both in eastern Europe and North America. And it provides a link, for me, with my Polish Jewish forebears. Yiddish language and culture are also an alternative to more mainstream pillars of ethnic identity, to use a phrase from the work of Canadian Jewish historians. I have, to an extent, organized my own sense of Jewish identity around Yiddish. So the typewriter is really a bridge back to writers like Singer, who gives us Warsaw and New York, and I. L. Peretz. But you're right that the typewriter I happen to have been given is a link to an important Montreal writer and educator, Yaacov Zipper. The idea that I could close a circle and "be" a Yiddish writer (which of course is impossible), by way of using the typewriter is fanciful. But it presents a provocation, a challenge. In my story collection *Sex, Skyscrapers, and Standard Yiddish*, I play with the ethos of a Yiddish writing life in the title story. The joke is extended by the fact that the main character is a Yiddish typewriter salesman (how, I think now, did I come up with this?) but wants to be an English-language story writer. These motifs allow me to contend with ghosts, as you say, to re-imagine the writing life and contend with a tradition. I suppose the risk inherent in this is that stories centred on such themes retain a strange, ghostly quality themselves.

**KM:** In *The Joyful Child*, you have decided for the first time to combine the word with another medium—in this case the melancholy illustrations by Melanie Boyle. The packaging of the novel and the positioning of the illustrations—often between paragraphs—may suggest a book addressed to children or young adults; I was reminded especially of Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*. I wonder to what extent the new strategy is connected with the subject of the novel, that is a relationship between a father and a son. Until now, children as characters or subject seem to have been largely absent from your fiction, excepting the main characters' flashbacks. My question is twofold: firstly, how has working with illustrations changed your approach to the text? And secondly, is *The Joyful Child*—which seems fraught with similar concerns as your previous books of fiction—also intended for younger readers? If so, what modifications in the treatment of your subject has that required?

**NR:** *The Joyful Child* became an illustrated book late in its development. But all through final stages of writing and then of trying to sell it, I imagined it as an illustrated book. This might come in part from my focus in it on children, on the books that children read, and then on my own experience reading to my sons. Picture books are lovely things. In recent years, graphic novels have brought some of this pleasure to

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adult readers, too. The illustrations for *The Joyful Child* deepen the narrative, I think. They slow the reader down and give him or her something more to muse about. They offer little motifs and decorative suggestions. My choice of a publisher followed in part from my notion of the novel being an illustrated book. I thought this would both appeal to Gaspereau Press and that they would handle it well in making the book. This latter idea proved true. The novel's not intended for young readers, though a very precocious young person might find in it interesting things regarding parents and children, family life and the way these relationships change. My young son is reading it now. I do not know what aspect of it hits him or what part of the novel he can appreciate and understand. But he's working his way along.

**KM:** Finally, I want to ask about your dual position as scholar and writer. As an academic, you are primarily interested in Canadian Jewish writing; being a Canadian Jewish writer makes you part of that particular field of academic inquiry. I believe that to a certain degree these are, and perhaps must be, rival occupations, especially as far as time and other resources are concerned. What I'm interested in, however, is the extent to which these two activities feed into and enrich each other.

**NR:** It's a good challenge to try to consider how academic work feeds creative work and vice versa. Certainly the groundwork—reading, getting to know a tradition, a national culture and so on—is good for both. My academic focus, in recent years, on Jewish Canadian writing lives, helps me hold a mirror up to my own goals and to understand where I might stand in relation to established figures. Academic work, too, leaves, at times, spaces in which creative work can happen. Because an academic is in certain ways his own boss, he can find time to write. But then there are long periods when the demands of the two kinds of work provide distraction rather than focus. I believe it's hard for most writers who have "day jobs," as the saying goes. I am presently in a long period, though, when I've managed to keep the writing moving, regardless of academic demands. I think I decided about two years ago that I'd better fall into step in this way or I'd be very miserable. So, to paraphrase Allen Ginsberg, whenever I'm able, I put my shoulder to the wheel. Writing work is where the real pleasure is, and it's healthful too. I'm happiest when the writing is moving in its way forward.

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